

## **Liberia**

LIBERIA: Its Origin, Rise, Progress and Results.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE American Colonization Society *January 20th, 1880*, BY Hon. JOHN H. B. LATROBE.

*PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.*

WASHINGTON CITY: Colonization Building, 450 Pennsylvania Avenue.

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## **ADDRESS.**

*Members of the American Colonization Society, Ladies and Gentlemen: —*

One who has spoken as often as I have done on the subject of African Colonization can hardly hope to say anything that he has not said before. My audiences, however, have not always been the same, and in the belief that some of my present hearers now listen to me for the first time, I propose to give a brief account of the origin and formation of the American Colonization Society, its condition now and the aspect generally of the cause to which, for more than half a century, it has been devoted. I wish for your sakes that there was more of romance in what I am about to state. Still, even in this aspect, African Colonization and its offspring, Liberia, are not wholly without their interest.

Success is never without claimants to its paternity, and our cause has had many supposed fathers. The existence, however, in our midst, of a race that was to remain forever a distinct one, must, at an

early day, have suggested to many the idea of separation; and taking into view all the circumstances, with the idea of separation, Africa naturally presented itself. In 1773 the Reverend Doctor Hopkins of Rhode Island proposed to educate two colored youths and send them there as missionaries, when his friend, Dr. Stiles, suggested that some thirty or forty suitable persons of the same color should accompany them and make a settlement on the Gold coast under the general direction of a society in America. The settlers were to be employed in agricultural, mechanical and commercial pursuits. This certainly was the germ of African colonization. Nothing came of it, however. The muttering thunder of the coming Revolution drowned all thought save that of Independence. Neither did anything come of Dr. Thornton's idea of taking a company of free blacks to Africa in 1787 and founding a colony; nor was anything more heard of African colonization until 1798, when Dr. Hopkins, elaborating the plan of Dr. Stiles, published a sermon that he had preached before the Connecticut Emancipation Society, 4 with an appendix, that advocated just such a plan as has since been adopted by the American Colonization Society. Neither did anything come of this. The fulness of time had not arrived; nor was it until 1815, forty-two years after Doctors Hopkins and Stiles had originated the idea, that it assumed a practical shape. In this year, Paul Cuffee, a colored man of Massachusetts, who probably had heard of it, carried in his own vessel, commanded by himself, at a cost of \$4,000 paid by himself, forty of his people from Boston to the English settlement of Sierra Leone, placed them in charge of a society that he had been instrumental in forming on a previous voyage, and returning to the United States died in the following year. Born in New Bedford, in 1759, in poverty and obscurity, he had won wealth and respectability by industry, intelligence and integrity, and "moved," as he said, "by a desire to raise his brethren in the United States to civil and religious liberty in the land of their forefathers," had thus taken the initiative in practical colonization. In the rushing currents of events, the humbler individuals who have added to the volume or influenced the direction of the stream are often overwhelmed and lost sight of. So it has been with Paul Cuffee. But his name should never be omitted in even the briefest history of African colonization.

It must not be supposed, however, that Africa was the only place thought of along with the idea of a separation of the two races. "The Spanish and Portuguese settlements in South America," "a suitable territory in Louisiana," and "the vast territory," as it was then called, "between the Ohio river and the great lakes," were successively discussed, as places to which the Negro race in America, as it became free, might advantageously emigrate. At a meeting at which the last named found advocates, a person present is reported to have said, "Whether any of us will live to see it or not, the time will come when white men will want all that region, will have it, and our colony will be overwhelmed by them." It would seem, just now, that we are about to test the truth of this utterance of seventy years ago. Notwithstanding all this difference of opinion, however, the public mind crystallized at last upon Africa as the best location for the proposed colony.

Paul Cuffee died in 1816, and in December of the same year the American Colonization Society was organized. Foremost among its founders was Robert Finley of New Jersey. In season and out of season he toiled in its behalf. He declared that he knew the scheme was from God; and with this conviction to sustain him he imbued numbers with an equal enthusiasm. Finley, however, soon found that it was one thing to applaud his zeal and admit the expediency of his plans, and a very different thing to take active measures to promote them; and there is no telling whether Finley himself might not have become discouraged, had not Charles Marsh, a member of Congress from Vermont, come to his assistance. The plan, Marsh said, was too good and noble to be permitted to fail; and it is owing to what has been called his "inexhaustible adroitness and persistency" that a preliminary meeting was held, with Henry Clay as chairman. Elias B. Caldwell, Finley's brother-in-law, and clerk of the Supreme Court, was the chief speaker; Robert Wright, of Maryland, submitted a constitution, which was adopted; and at the first meeting under it, Mr. Justice Bushrod Washington was elected President. In this way the American Colonization Society came into existence, forty-three years after Dr. Hopkins and his friend, Dr. Stiles, had suggested the idea. They, it is true, had regarded it as a missionary enterprise only. There were others, however, who hoped that it would lead to a separation of the Negroes from what the masters said was an injurious contact with their slaves. Others, like Paul Cuffee, who believed that it would tend to raise the Negroes in the United States to civil and religious liberty in the land of their forefathers. Others again supported it as likely to promote emancipation. Others, who looked forward to the commerce that would follow the establishment of a colony on the borders of a vast continent, which would be a virgin market for the products of manufacturing civilization; and others again who fancied that, in some undefined way, African colonization would afford a solution of the negro question in this country. And it was well that all this was so. Co-operation, regardless of motive, was the necessity of the occasion. However varied the views of the friends of the Society respectively, all were agreed upon the establishment of a colony to which the free people of color might emigrate, when they believed they would better their condition by seeking a new home beyond the sea; and Liberia stands to the credit of them all.

The Society having been organized, a site for the settlement was to be selected; and for this purpose Mills and Burgess were sent to Africa in 1818, and fixed upon Sherbro Island, not far from Sierra Leone. To this place the Reverend Samuel Bacon, an Episcopal clergyman, led the first expedition in the ship *Elizabeth*, in 1820. The vessel had been chartered by the United States under the following circumstances. Congress had made it penal to import slaves after the year 1807, and in 1818 had increased the penalty. A law as then passed, Oct. 3, 1819, of which Charles Fenton Mercer, of Virginia, was the author, which provided that slaves illegally imported, or taken at sea, should be held in the custody of the United States until removed from the country; and the President was authorized to appoint an agent to take care of them. Mr. Monroe, then President, saw at once, that by co-operating with the American Colonization Society, the design of the law might be carried out,

both equitably and economically; and he appointed Mr. Bacon, along with Mr. John P. Baukson, of Philadelphia, as agents of the Government, placing in the hands of Mr. Bacon sufficient funds out of monies appropriated by Congress under the act of 1819. The *Elizabeth* took out eighty-six emigrants from the United States, who in consideration of their passage and other aid, were to prepare suitable accommodations for such Africans as might be rescued from the slave-ships by American cruisers. In this way, strange as it seems, it was to the slave-trade, which it was to aid in extirpating, that the American Colonization Society became indebted, through the wise course of President Monroe, for its first feeble foothold on the continent of Africa.

The undertaking had, notwithstanding the aid derived from the United States, a most unfortunate beginning. Mills had died on his way back to America, and Bacon, dying in Africa, was among the first martyrs to the cause buried there under its palms. Of four agents sent out in 1821, two died on the coast, and two returned sick to the United States. Sherbro Island was found to be unhealthy and was abandoned; and the survivors of the *Elizabeth's* emigrants returned disheartened to Sierra Leone.

In November, 1820, the President dispatched the armed schooner, *Alligator*, Captain R. F. Stockton, of New Jersey, on a voyage of exploration to the coast. Here, in the following year, 1821, he fell in with Dr. Eli Ayres, an agent of the Society, and taking him on board, proceeded southerly, and after passing Sherbro Island, selected, in conjunction with Dr. Ayres, a suitable territory 250 miles from Sierra Leone, including Cape Mesurado. This was a bold promontory on the east side of a river of the same name. To this new site Dr. Ayres now removed the remnant of the *Elizabeth's* emigrants, landing them on an island separated from the main land by a narrow creek that extended from near the mouth of the Mesurado river to the St. Paul's. Very soon after the arrival of the emigrants, the native chiefs opened their eyes to the probability of their interference with the slave trade which had long prevailed in the neighborhood, and, regardless of the treaty, determined to destroy the settlement if they could. The temporary dwellings, that had been slightly and hastily put up, were consumed by fire. On the heel of this came African fever: and so untoward were circumstances, that Dr. Ayres, almost in despair, returned with some of the colonists to Sierra Leone. Wiltberger, another of the Society's agents, remained however; battled with the natives, and abandoning the island, crossed the Mesurado river to the adjacent cape; cleared away the forest to make room for new huts in a healthier location; completed and occupied them, and in this way, in June 1822, laid the cornerstone of the Republic of Liberia on the spot where its capital now stands. Dr. Ayers and Wiltberger then returned home, and the settlement was left in charge of Elijah Johnson, an emigrant, who had refused to follow Dr. Ayres to the British colony. "No," he said; "I have been two years searching for a home, and I have found it, and I shall stay here:" and when he was afterwards surrounded by hostile and threatening bodies of natives, and was offered the protection of a guard of marines from a passing British vessel of war if he would cede a few feet of ground on which to plant a flagstaff

for a British flag, he refused the proffered aid, saying, "We want no flagstaff put up here that will cost more to get it down than it will cost to whip the natives." Johnson was another man of the Paul Cuffee stamp, whose name cannot be omitted from a notice of Liberia, however brief. Slender was the hold which colonization and religion had upon this portion of the Dark Continent; and save for the construction that Mr. Monroe had given to the law of 1819, even this hold might never have been obtained, or have been indefinitely delayed.

The first arrival at Cape Mesurado after the departure of Wiltberger was a vessel from Baltimore with fifty-one emigrants, a part of whom were recaptured Africans, in August, 1822. It was in charge of Jehudi Ashmun, Priest, Soldier and Statesman. He had intended to return to the United States by the same vessel; but Africa needed him more than America, and he remained. Ashmun's mission was one of peace, and he exhausted every effort in striving to preserve it; but in vain. Boatswain, a powerful native chief from the interior, and a friend of the colonists from the beginning, had left the coast, where his presence had restrained their enemies, and hostilities commenced at once. All supplies of provisions were cut off, and theft and depredation were the order of the day. The native chiefs, the very ones who had sold the land, would listen to no terms of accommodation. With Ashmun it was now battle or famine unto death, with the greatest doubts as to the result. Then, the Christian minister became a military leader. He planned fortifications; he mounted cannon; he distributed ammunition; he posted picket guards; and, above all, he inspired his twenty-seven Americans and thirteen African youths with his own intrepid spirit. On the 24th of August twelve of his men were stricken down by fever, at a time when it was necessary to have twenty sentinels on guard, day and night. At the end of three weeks of constant watchfulness, Ashmun himself was prostrated by disease. His wife, too, who had accompanied him from America, was dangerously ill. On the 10th of September, only two of the late arrivals were fit for duty. And yet, there could be no relaxation of vigilance, the alternative of which was death. After a night of fever and delirium, morning would find the agent superintending the stockades, or clearing away the forest in front of his few pieces of artillery. In this way, sometimes better, sometimes worse in health, Ashmun lived until the 11th of November, when eight hundred natives made a concentrated attack on his most outlying stockade, 8 carried it, and had they not stopped to plunder some adjacent huts, could have swept the settlement by one determined rush into the sea. Danger so imminent was a tonic that not even African fever could withstand. Ashmun rallied the men retreating from the stockade, brought a canon to bear upon the plunderers, headed a charge as they hesitated, panic stricken by the fire—re-took the stockade—drove the natives to the cover of the forest, and the colony was saved.

On the 30th of November there was another attack, thrice renewed and as often repulsed, during which Ashmun had three bullets through his clothes, but escaped unhurt. This terminated the war. It was the first and last that ever threatened the existence of Liberia. An English schooner, passing

Cape Mesurado, had been attracted by the firing. Laing, the African traveler, happened to be on board; and through his intervention a treaty of peace was made with the native chiefs, which, in the main, has not been disturbed. Each succeeding year, however, strengthened the colony with emigrants from the United States. The first arrival was accompanied by Dr. Ayres, who, displacing Ashmun, had the town of Monrovia laid out, and the land adjacent surveyed and distributed among the colonists. He was then, again, seized with African fever, and returned to the United States. His departure left the colony in confusion; when Ashman, overcoming his mortification at having been superseded by Dr. Ayres, assumed the charge of affairs, restored order by his firm and decided measures, and remained until prostrated by disease, when, with but the faintest hope of saving his life he sailed for the Cape de Verde, leaving the colony in the charge of Elijah Johnson, who has been already mentioned. At the Cape de Verde Ashmun found the Rev. R. R. Garley on his way to Monrovia, with full power from the United States Government and the Society to examine into the condition of affairs, and to establish some form of government. As soon as Ashmun's health permitted, he returned with Mr. Gurley to the colony; when the two prepared a constitution, republican in form, which was submitted to the people in the first rude house of worship erected in Liberia. Here it was adopted; and all present pledged themselves solemnly before God to support it: and this was the beginning of law and order in the colony. Mr. Gurley now returned to the United States, in August, 1824, leaving the government in the hands of Mr. Ashmun.

At this time the slave trade was active within sight of Monrovia. Fifteen vessels were engaged in it under the guns almost of the colony, and there was a contract between a slave-trader and a native chief by which 800 slaves were to be furnished within four months at a place only eight miles from the Cape. Mr. Ashmun, in 1822, had been on the defensive. He now assumed the offensive in the cause of humanity. A Spanish slaver had committed a flagrant act of piracy on an English 9 brig lying off Monrovia; and the agent determined to punish it. The brig was placed at his disposal, and embarking with fifty-four men, then his entire military force, he landed at the slave factory, released the slaves he found there, and, with the *prestige* thus obtained, succeeded in making a treaty with the native chief, which broke up the slave trade at that place forever. The destruction of the slave factories at Tradetown followed. Here he was assisted by two Colombian vessels of war which happened to be on the coast. These exploits of the agent of the American Colonization Society did more towards the suppression of the slave trade north of the Bight of Benin, than the presence of English and American cruisers for years had been able to accomplish. A fast sailing vessel filled with slaves might run with safety a blockading fleet; but when the barracoons that supplied the cargo were destroyed, the trade at that factory was at an end.

For five years Mr. Ashmun continued to be the agent of the Society in Liberia, ever battling with disease, and until the 25th of March, 1828; when, accompanied to the beach by the inhabitants of

Monrovia, in tears, he left Africa never to return. On the 10th of August, after a brief delay in the West Indies, he landed in New Haven, and died there on the 25th, a victim to his labors in the cause of African colonization,—its Hero and its Martyr.

Since 1828, the Society has been so prominent, and the press has kept the public so well informed of events in Liberia, that it is enough to say now, that the expectations of the founders have been realized in the establishment of a Republic, where the slave trade once reigned supreme; with institutions modelled after our own; with a government well administered and recognized by the civilized nations of the world; with a commerce steadily increasing; with a coast line extending from the English colony of Sierra Leone to the Cavalla river east of Cape Palmas, and offering to intelligence and industry a home, where, in the land of their forefathers, the colored men of America may strive for and obtain all the rewards of honorable ambition. That Liberia will, one day, count its population by millions instead, as now, by thousands, we believe to be as certain as Destiny.

The eyes of the world may be said to be fixed upon Africa to-day. England, at the south, is extending her many arms northward from the Cape of Good Hope. England and France take charge of the Khedive on the north. The King of Belgium sends exploring expeditions from Zanzibar on the east, and English, Portuguese and Dutch traders, on the west, cluster around the mouth of the Livingstone at Embomma. All are striving for the trade of Africa, and value its civilization only as a means of improving the markets that this continent affords for the surplus products of the forge and loom. Far nobler than all that has been effected by king or trader is the work of this Society, which, apart 10 from its effect upon our colored population, and regarding it only in its missionary aspect, has furnished a nation for the task that no other human agency is competent to accomplish—the task of civilizing as well as Christianizing a mighty continent,—a nation, which, increasing in numbers by immigration, just as Plymouth and Jamestown increased of old, will do for Africa what the Pilgrims north and south have done for us, and until the Dark Continent shall be dark no longer.

So much for the past history of the Society and Liberia; a few words now in regard to their relations to the future.

Colonizationists, as a rule, have believed that two distinct races, that cannot or will not amalgamate by intermarriage, can live in the same land in but one of two relations—master and slave, or oppressor and oppressed. The first is out of the question, for slavery is at an end, here, forever. How stands it then with the latter alternative? Can there be any oppression now when the two races occupy the same level, before the law? There could be none, if Constitutional amendments and Acts of Congress sufficed to overcome the prejudices and the influences of Caste. To this extent they are absolutely powerless. The oppression of law which made the Negro a slave no longer exists. He may be, as he has been, a Senator or a Representative; but the oppression of circumstances is as potent

to-day as it was an hundred years ago. The slave question has been settled, but the Negro question is still an open one.

During the late war, few emigrants went to Liberia; and when it closed many supposed that the American Colonization Society must die; and there were those, among its friends even, who stood ready to inter it, with a laudatory epitaph upon its tomb. And yet the emigration that followed the war was greater than had ever taken place in the same number of years before: and now there are applications representing 200,000 begging the Society for transportation to Africa; and this, too, where for years the Society has had no agent in the field whence the applications come. Circumstances are doing their work. To understand them in detail, it is only necessary to read the publications explaining the motives of those who led in the late exodus movement in South Carolina, or in the later exodus from the southern States to Kansas. All are connected more or less directly with the distinctions of Caste that operate oppression. Colonizationists believe that the more education refines the Negro and increases his sensibilities, the more irksome will become his position where the distinctions of race exclude him socially from what cannot but be the aim of his ambition. When it is found, as the generations pass, that neither wealth nor scholarship nor accomplishments, however varied, overcome the prejudices that cause social exclusion, these very incidents may prompt the emigration of the educated and ambitious to seek a land where the white man will be to 11 them what they are to the white man here. This is looking forward through a vista of many a generation, perhaps,—but that it will come to pass, became, as we fully believe, assured when Wiltberger transferred the *Elizabeth* emigrants from Bushrod Island to the main, and when Ashmun with a handful of sick and toil-worn men, made a host by a blessing from on High, repulsed the barbarians who would have extinguished the feeble light which has gone on increasing in brightness ever since, and which will one day pervade the land now in the shadow of death.

If these views are looked upon as visionary, it should be remembered how small were our own beginnings: and although it may be admitted that the Pilgrims by the *Mayflower* were socially and intellectually superior to those who landed from the *Elizabeth*, yet the capacity for improvement and self-government that has been developed in Liberia and illustrated in America in a thousand instances of learning, intelligence and refinement, fully justify the anticipations of colonizationists. And when a prosperous and happy people shall have made Liberia as attractive to the colored man as America is to the European emigrant; when commerce shall have bridged the Atlantic for an eastward, as it has for a westward march of thousands and tens of thousands; when gold, already within reach from Monrovia, will do for Liberia what gold did for California in attracting emigration; when ambition shall find across the sea, away from the influences of caste, the widest field for its exercise,—then will the Negro question be settled; not as was the question of slavery, by war and its attendant misery, but by the peaceful operation of causes that are inevitable; and then it will

be seen that even so great a wrong as slavery may have had, in the order of God's providence, its accompanying good in the education of a missionary nation, with a continent for the field of its operation. And when that time comes, the historian of then regenerated Africa will find among the sources of her light and liberty the labors of the American Colonization Society.

On the return of Dr. Ayres to the United States, a map of the territory acquired by Commander Stockton and himself was made from his description, and Gen. Robert Goodloe Harper, one of the warmest and ablest among the friends of colonization, with the co-operation of the map maker, wrote on the engraver's proof-sheet the names that have since been adopted. The Latin word *Liber*, a free man, suggested the name of the territory; Mr. Monroe's invaluable aid was recognized in that of the then very humble capital. Bushrod Island, where the first settlers landed, was called after the President of the Society, and Stockton creek and Ayres creek completed a nomenclature that has since become familiar. The rivers St. Paul's and Mesurado, and the cape of that name on which Monrovia stands, were permitted to retain the names by which they were already designated on the maps of Africa. The map maker of Liberia, here referred to, is the present President of the Society.