

Liberia as She is; and the Present Duty of her  
Citizens

[An Independence Day address given at Monrovia, July 27, 1857  
*African Repository*, November 1857, pp. 328-32.]

What then...are the moral causes of the present evils in  
Liberia? ...

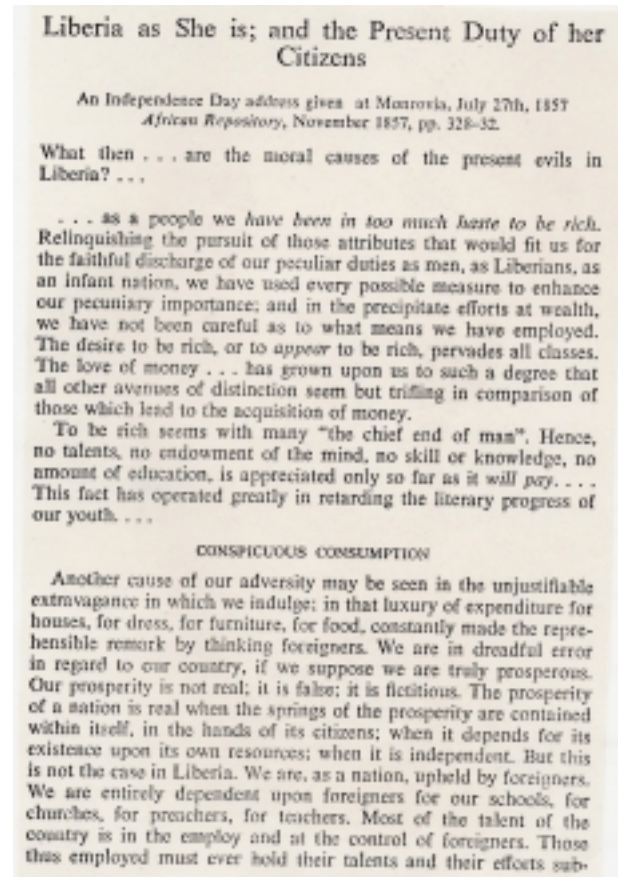
... as a people we *have been in too much haste to be rich.*

Relinquishing the pursuit of those attributes that would fit us for  
the faithful discharge of our peculiar duties as men, as Liberians, as  
an infant nation, we have used every possible measure to enhance  
our pecuniary importance; and in the precipitate efforts at wealth,  
we have not been careful as to what means we have employed.  
The desire to be rich, or to *appear* to be rich, pervades all classes.  
The love of money...has grown upon us to such a degree that  
all other avenues of distinction seem but trifling in comparison of  
those which lead to the acquisition of money.

To be rich seems with many "the chief end of man". Hence,  
no talents, no endowment of the mind, no skill or knowledge, no  
amount of education, is appreciated only so far as it *will pay*....  
This fact has operated greatly in retarding the literary progress of  
our youth....

CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

Another cause of our adversity may be seen in the unjustifiable  
extravagance in which we indulge; in that luxury of expenditure for  
houses, for dress, for furniture, for food, constantly made the repre-  
hensible remark by thinking foreigners. We are in dreadful error  
in regard to our country, if we suppose we are truly prosperous.  
Our prosperity is not real; it is false; it is fictitious. The prosperity  
of a nation is real when the springs of the prosperity are contained  
within itself, in the hands of its citizens; when it depends for its  
existence upon its own resources; when it is independent. But this  
is not the case in Liberia. We are, as a nation, upheld by foreigners.  
We are entirely dependent upon foreigners for our schools, for  
churches, for preachers, for teachers. Most of the talent of the  
country is in the employ and at the control of foreigners. Those  
thus employed must ever hold their talents and their efforts sub-



servient, not to what they conceive to be the interests of their country, but to the desires and direction of foreign employers.... What we wish to bring before our minds today is the humiliating fact, that nearly all the talent of Liberia—talent not in ordinary men, but in our principal men—is supported by foreign means and controlled by foreign influence. And yet, in the face of these humbling realities, we boast of our civilization, of our prosperity, of our independence, and indulge in unjustifiable extravagance...

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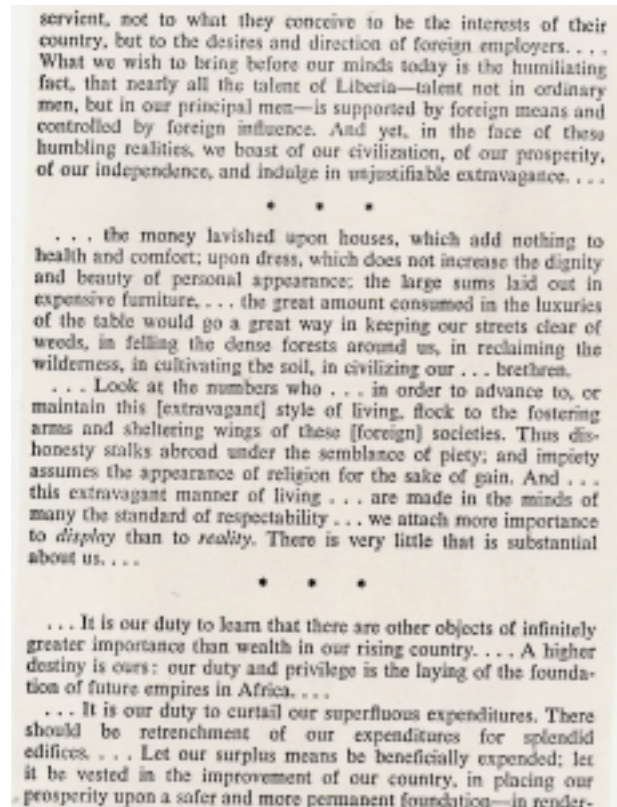
... the money lavished upon houses, which add nothing to health and comfort; upon dress, which does not increase the dignity and beauty of personal appearance; the large sums laid out in expensive furniture, ... the great amount consumed in the luxuries of the table would go a great way in keeping our streets clear of weeds, in felling the dense forests around us, in reclaiming the wilderness, in cultivating the soil, in civilizing our ... brethren.

... Look at the numbers who ... in order to advance to, or maintain this [extravagant] style of living, flock to the fostering arms and sheltering wings of these [foreign] societies. Thus dishonesty stalks abroad under the semblance of piety; and impiety assumes the appearance of religion for the sake of gain. And ... this extravagant manner of living...are made in the minds of many the standard of respectability...we attach more importance to *display* than to *reality*. There is very little that is substantial about us...

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...It is our duty to learn that there are other objects of infinitely greater importance than wealth in our rising country...A higher destiny is ours; our duty and privilege is the laying of the foundation of future empires in Africa...

... It is our duty to curtail our superfluous expenditures. There should be retrenchment of our expenditures for splendid edifices....Let our surplus means be beneficially expended; let it be vested in the improvement of our country, in placing our prosperity upon a safer and more permanent foundation—in render-



ing ourselves independent...

... It is our duty to *labor*. We dwell in a country rich in resources, which with little exertion can be called forth in sufficient variety and abundance to render us comfortable and independent. But there is a fatal lack of productive industry among us.... The commerce of the country has always been in such articles as our citizens have had no part in producing; hence we acquire wealth from this source without helping to create it. We purchase the palm oil and camwood and ivory from the natives giving them in exchange articles of foreign production .... The prosperity arising from our commerce is almost as evanescent as that based on missionary appropriations. Foreigners on the one hand, and the natives on the other, are our supporters.

\* \* \*

... we must either abandon our state of utter dependency upon foreigners, by creating the means of supplying our own wants, or relinquish our profession of liberty as a nation. A state of dependency is entirely incongruous with a state of liberty....

...The...rich and fertile soil...invites us to its cultivation. Nothing should be allowed to interfere between us and the soil...

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