May 10, 1864
Catto, Octavius V.
Our Alma Mater – An Address
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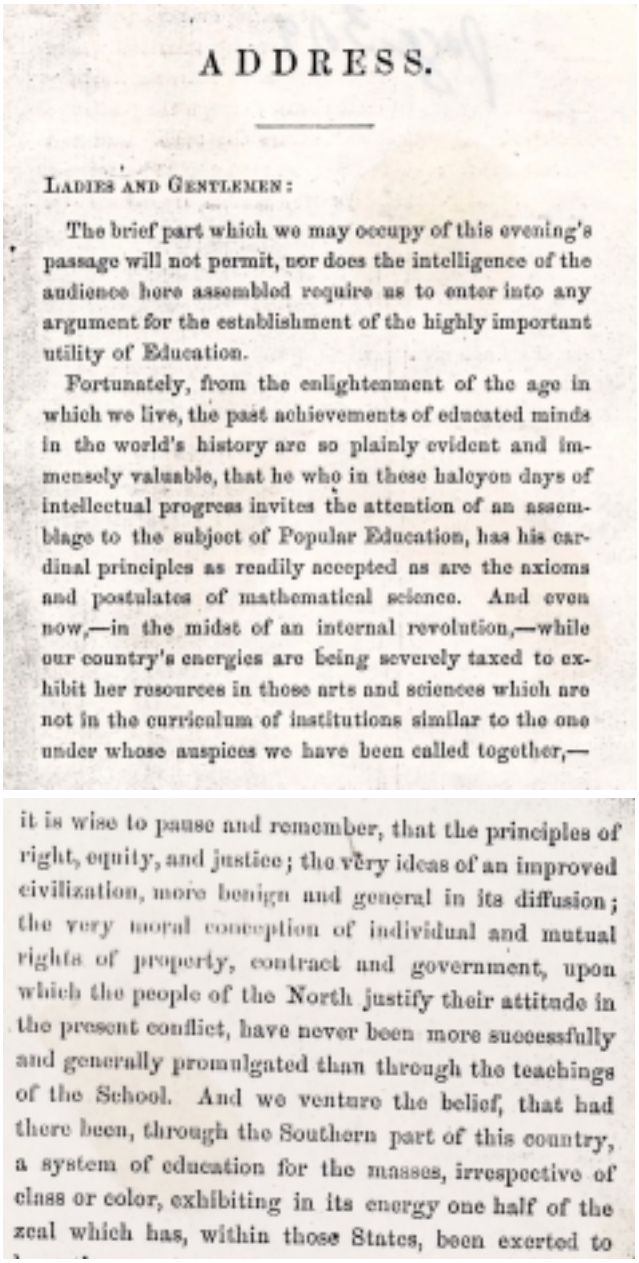
LADIES AND GENTELMEN:

The brief part which we may occupy of this evening's passage will not permit, nor does the intelligence of the audience here assembled require us to enter into any argument for the establishment of the highly important utility of Education.

Fortunately, from the enlightenment of the age in which we live, the past achievements of educated minds in the world's history are so plainly evident and immensely valuable, that he who in these halcyon days of intellectual progress invites the attention of an assemblage to the subject of Popular Education, has his cardinal principles of mathematical science. And even now,—in the midst of an internal revolution,— while our country's energies are being severely taxed to exhibit her resources in those arts and sciences which are not in the curriculum of institutions similar to the one under whose auspices we have been called together,— it is wise to pause and remember, that the principles of right, equality, and justice; the very ideas of an improved civilization, more benign and general in its diffusion; the very moral conception of individual and mutual rights of property, contract and government, upon which the people of the North justify their attitude n the present conflict, have never been more successfully and generally promulgated than through the teachings of the School. And we venture the belief, that had there been, through the Southern part of this country, a system of education for the masses, irrespective of class or color, exhibiting in its energy one half of the zeal which has, within those States, been exerted to



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keep the conscience unenlightened and the understanding uninstructed,—we to-night would not be found at the crisis of a civil war.

It was a true estimate of the potent influence which education would wield in the politics of the State and in the councils of the Church, that created, as schools began to be multiplied in Europe, a lively interest in those respective bodies for the establishment and perpetuity of educational institutions.

Aristotle, in the spirit of a true philosopher and wise statesman, held, that “the most effective way of preserving a State, is to bring up the citizens in the spirit of the Government; to fashion, and, as it were, cast them in the mould of the Constitution.”

Martin Luther, pausing in the midst of the clashing blades of the Reformation,—with the spirit of a zealous churchman,—urged, that “it is a grave and serious thing, affecting the interest of the Kingdom of Christ, and of all the world, that we apply ourselves to the work of aiding and instructing the young.”

The wisdom and value of these opinions are evidenced in the immense debt which those Churches and States that lead the civilized world, owe to their educated men, and by the honorable rivalry which has subsequently existed between the political economist and the religious seer for the direction of the educational systems of their countries.

In Prussia, the State gained the advantage; and, consequently, there is no country in Europe in which educated men join so numerously in the intelligent administration of the Government.

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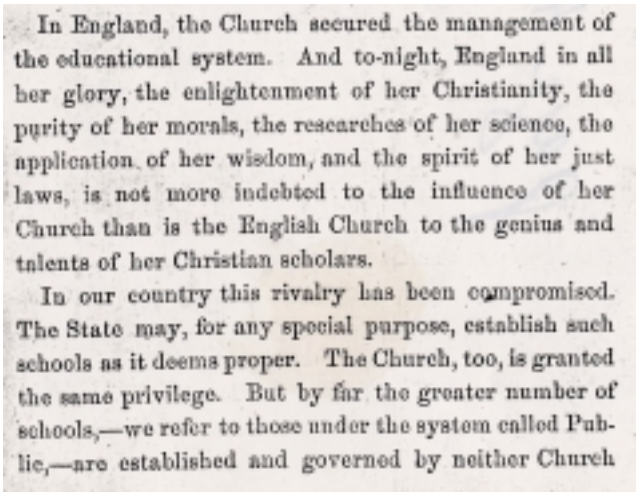
In England, the Church secured the management of the educational system. And to-night, England in all her glory, the enlightenment of her Christianity, the purity of her morals, the researches of her science, the application of her wisdom, and the spirit of her just laws, is not more indebted to the influence of her Church than is the English Church to the genius and talents of her Christian scholars.

In our country this rivalry has been compromised. The State may, for any special purpose, establish such schools as it deems proper. The Church, too, is granted the same privilege. But by far the greater number of schools,—we refer to those under the system called Public,—are established and governed by neither Church nor State, being left entirely to the control of the people. This system, though liable to many abuses, is probably the best yet devised. Besides these public institutions, supported by direct taxation, there is a numerous class founded and cherished by benevolent and philanthropic individuals. Such is the institution which convenes us now, and of which we purpose to give a synoptical history.

The original fund upon which the Institute was founded, came like many other goodly gifts for the amelioration of the colored man's unfortunate condition in this country, from a member of the Society of Friends: a people whose proverbial sympathy and charity for the oppressed, whose consistent opposition to ignorance, intemperance, war, and slavery, have rendered their name inseparable from our heartfelt gratitude and respect. The honor of first conceiving the feasibility and utility of such an institution belongs to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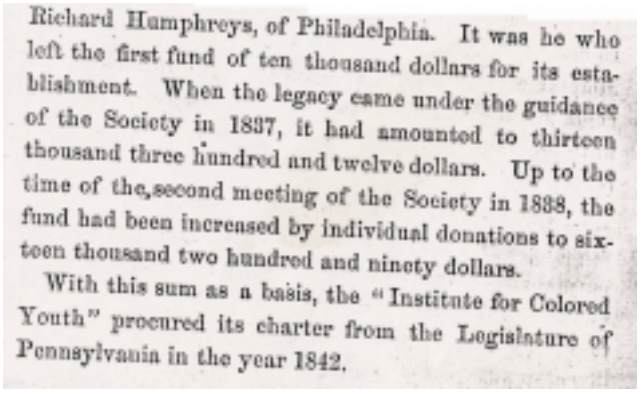
With this sum as a basis, the "Institute for Colored Youth" procured its charter from the Legislature of Pennsylvania in the year 1842.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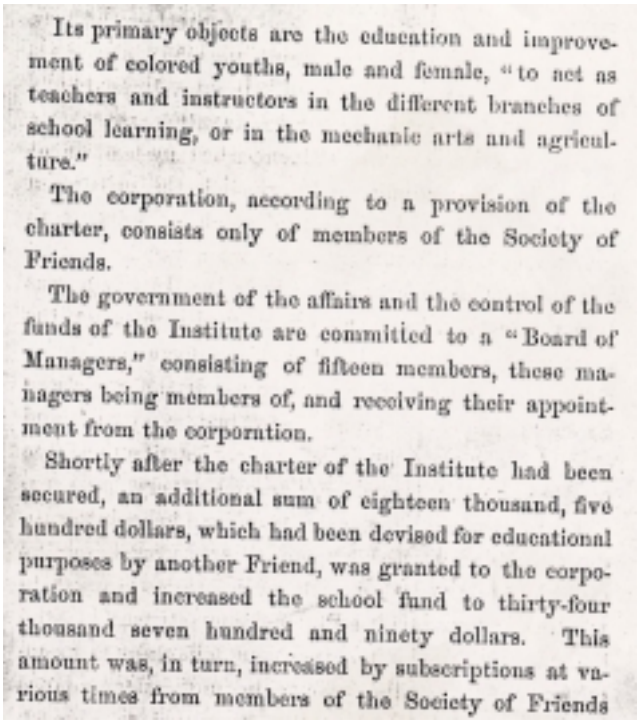
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The corporation, according to a provision of the charter, consists only of members of the Society of Friends.

The government of the affairs and the control of the funds of the Institute are committed to a "Board of Managers," consisting of fifteen members, these managers being members of, and receiving their appointment from the corporation.

Shortly after the charter of the Institute had been secured, an additional sum of eighteen thousand, five hundred dollars, which had been devised for educational purposes by another Friend, was granted to the corporation and increased the school fund to thirty-four thousand seven hundred and ninety dollars. This amount was, in turn, increased by subscriptions at various times from members of the Society of Friends

until the aggregate school fund reached sixty-four thousand dollars.

At this stage in the history of the fund, the Board of Managers considered it wise to erect buildings for the permanent establishment and location of the Institute: and those on Lombard Street, in which the school is now taught, were erected in 1851.

There are now in the school four departments. One High, and one Preparatory School for each sex. There are six teachers, all colored, employed within the Institute.

Three of the teachers are graduates of the Institution.

The course of study is similar to that pursued in high schools, including an acquaintance with Latin, Greek, Geometry, and the Trigonometries.

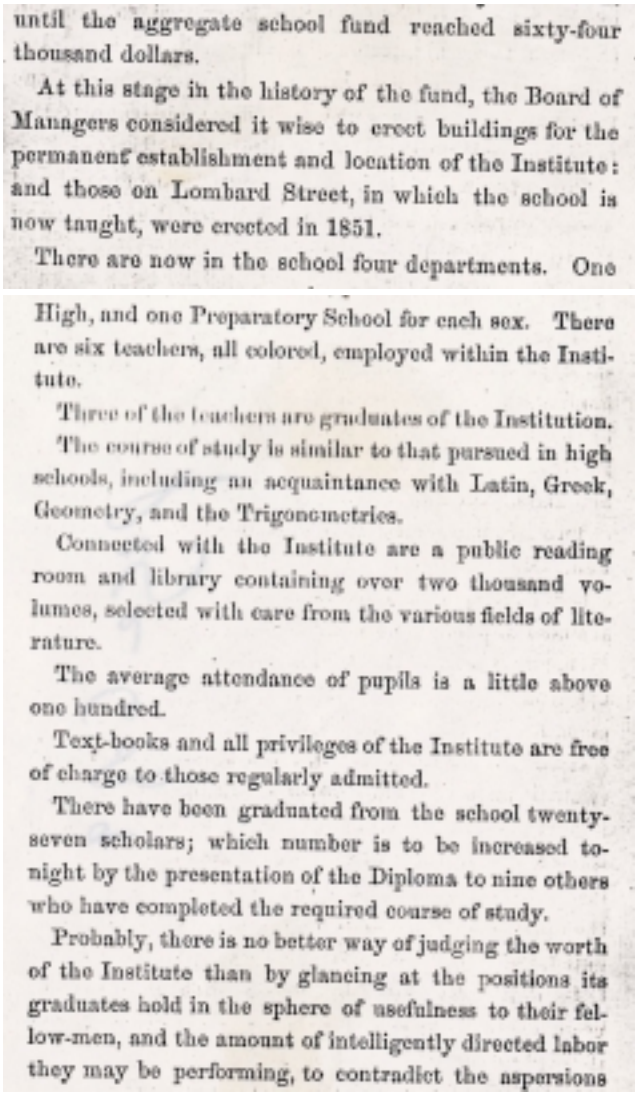
Connected with the Institute are a public reading room and library containing over two thousand volumes, selected with care from the various fields of literature.

The average attendance of pupils is a little above one hundred.

Text-books and all privileges of the Institute are free of charge to those regularly admitted.

There have been graduated from the school twenty-seven scholars; which number is to be increased to-night by the presentation of the Diploma to nine others who have completed the required courses of study.

Probably, there is no better way of judging the worth of the Institute than by glancing at the positions its graduates hold in the sphere of usefulness to their fellow-men, and the amount of intelligently directed labor they may be performing, to contradict the aspersions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which have been cast upon the people with whom they are identified..

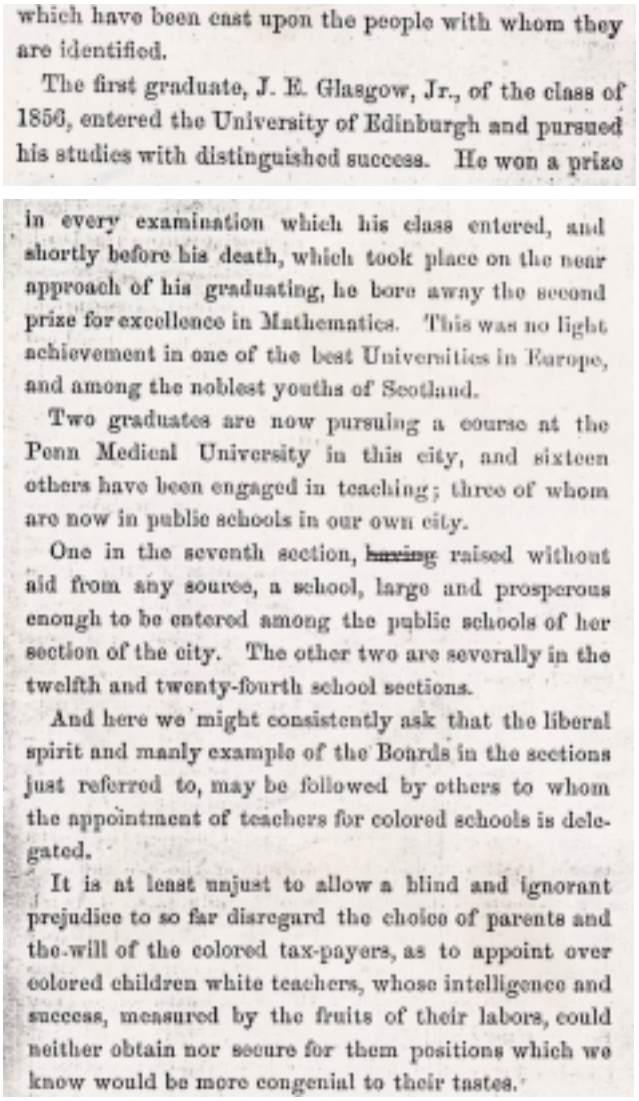
The first graduate, J. E. Glasgow, Jr., of the class of 1856, entered the University of Edinburgh and pursued his studies with distinguished success. He won a prize in every examination which his class entered, and shortly before his death, which took place on the near approach of his graduating, he bore away the second prize for excellence in Mathematics. This was no light achievement in one of the best Universities in Europe, and among the noblest youths of Scotland.

Two graduates are now pursuing a course at the Penn Medical University in this city, and sixteen others have been engaged in teaching; three of whom are now in public schools in our own city.

One of the seventh section, ~~having~~ raised without aid from any source, a school, large and prosperous enough to be entered among the public schools of her section of the city. The other two are severally in the twelfth and twenty-fourth school sections.

And here we might consistently ask that the liberal spirit and manly example of the Boards in the sections just referred to, may be followed by others to whom the appointment of teachers for colored schools is delegated.

It is at least unjust to allow a blind and ignorant prejudice to so far disregard the choice of parents and the will of the colored tax-payers, as to appoint over colored children white teachers, whose intelligence and success, measured by the fruits of their labors, could neither obtain nor secure for them positions which we know would be more congenial to their tastes.



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Besides these graduates thus employed in teaching, three are now performing the duties of office clerks in this city; and one other, the pioneer from our ranks, is engaged in the commendable task of instructing the Freed children at Norfolk in Virginia.

Thus have we enumerated those who are contributing by their positions to establish the good which was primarily hoped in the beginning of the Institute.

About two years ago, the Managers, constantly regrading the interest and welfare of the school, called the attention of its friends to the advantages which would result from more ample and convenient accommodations, in a location less noisy and surrounded by influences of a more moral tendency.

Two members of the Society of Friends at once offered the Board of Managers five thousand dollars apiece, if twenty thousand additional could be raised by the Board.

The executors of the late Josiah Dawson, having previously given five thousand dollars to the Institute, promised five thousand more, on condition that the Managers would collect the remaining ten thousand. Both of these generous proposals were accepted, and very shortly after, by private contributions from Friends, the total sum of thirty thousand dollars was secured. This amount, with six thousand for a similar purpose already in the hands of the treasurer, gave the Board a new building fund of thirty-six thousand dollars. Thus we have been brought to the present epoch in our Institute's history.

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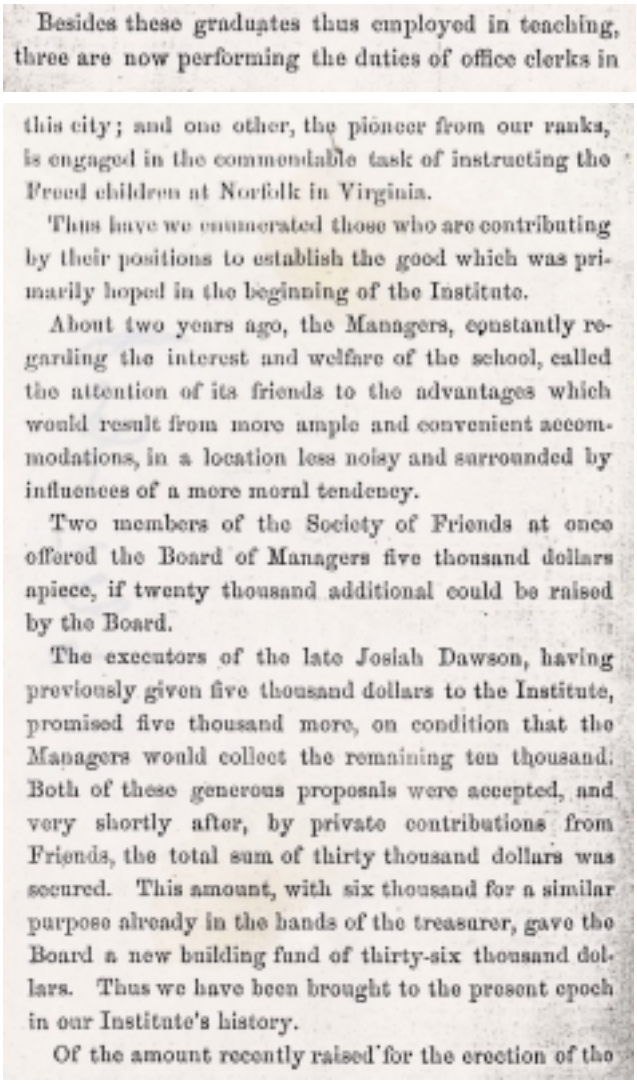
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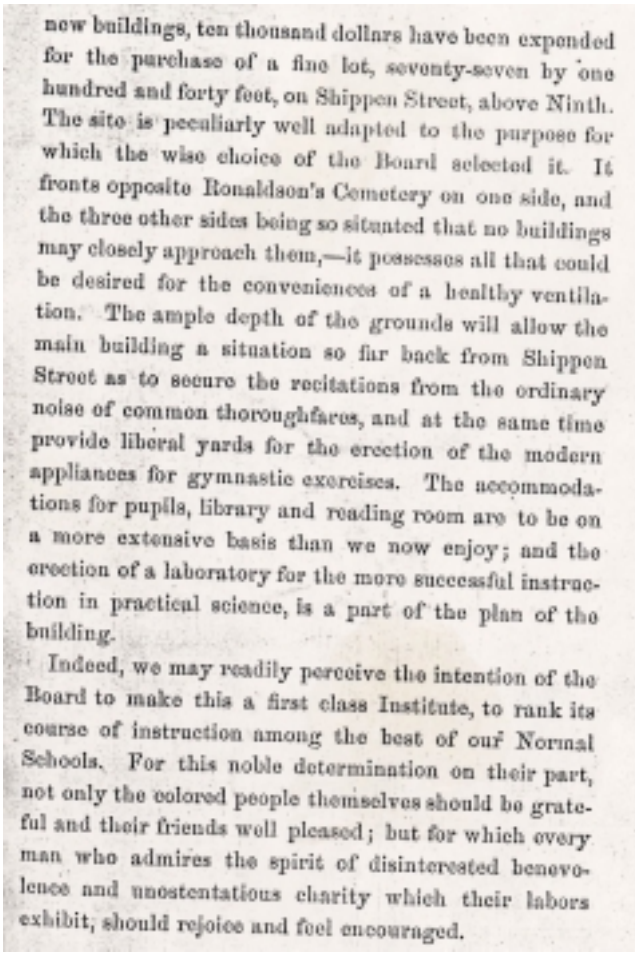
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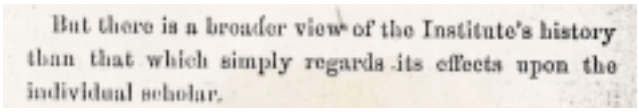
Indeed, we may readily perceive the intention of the Board to make this a first class Institute, to rank its course of instruction among the best of our Normal Schools. For this noble determination on their part, not only the colored people themselves should be grateful and their friends well pleased; but for which every man who admires the spirit of disinterested benevolence and unostentatious charity which their labors exhibit, should rejoice and feel encouraged.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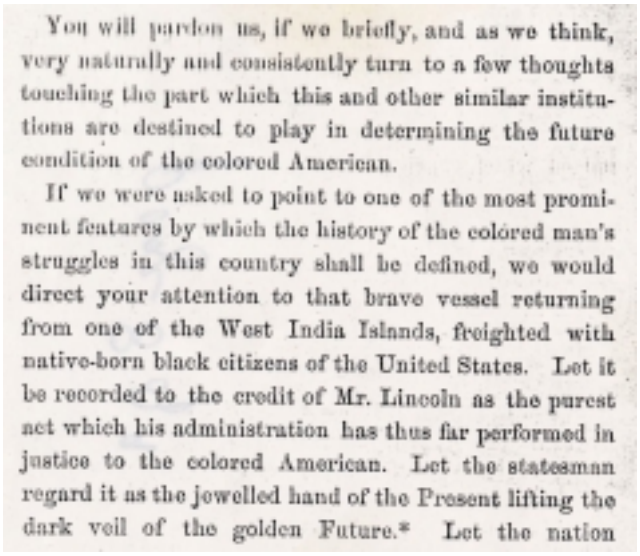
You will pardon us, if we briefly, and as we think, very naturally and consistently turn to a few thoughts touching the part which this and other similar institutions are destined to play in determining the future condition of the colored American.

If we were asked to pint to one of the most prominent features by which the history of the colored man's struggles in this country shall be defined, we would direct your attention to that brave vessel returning from one of the West India Islands, freighted with native-born black citizens of the United States. Let it be recorded to the credit of Mr. Lincoln as the purest act which his administration has thus far performed in justice to the colored American. Let the statesman regard it as the jewelled hand of the Present lifting the dark veil of the golden Future.* Let the nation accept it as the voice of God, declaring that He has made of one blood all nations to dwell upon the face of this country.

How much of the course of this terrible revolution remains yet to be run, or how many political evolutions our Government may yet be forced to make, no man can foresee. But it must be the most superficial view, indeed, which concludes that any other condition than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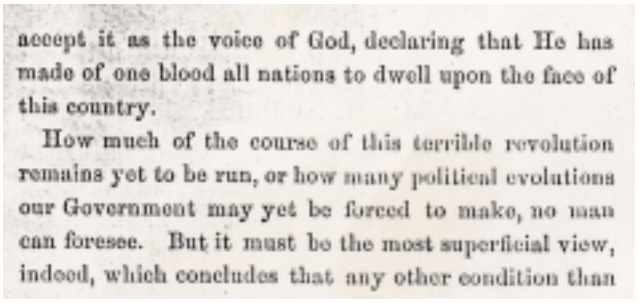
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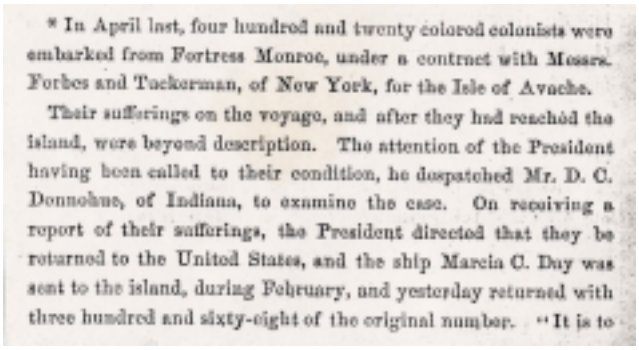
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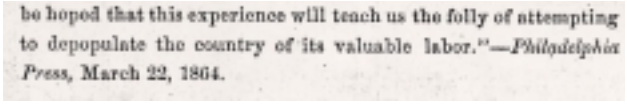
Their sufferings on the voyage, and after they had reached the island, were beyond description. The attention of the President having been called to their condition, he despatched Mr. D. C. Donnohue, of Indiana, to examine the case. On receiving a report of their sufferings, the President directed that they be returned to the United States, and the ship Marcia C. Day was sent to the island, during February, and yesterday returned with three hundred and sixty-eight of the original number. "It is to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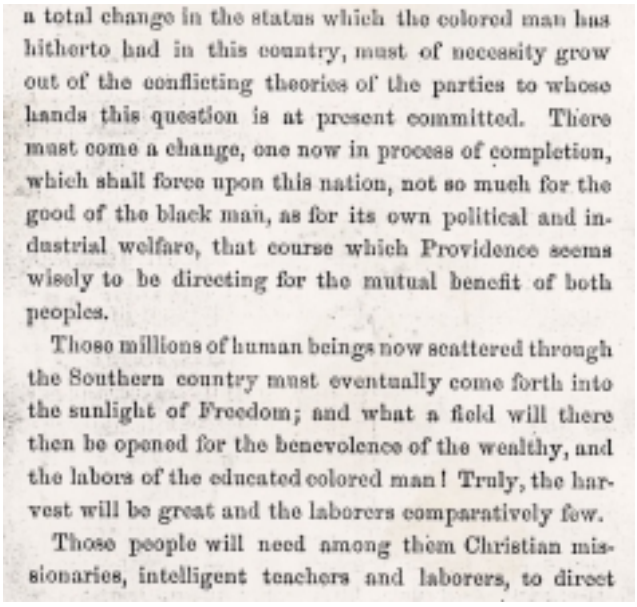
a total change in the status which the colored man has hitherto had in this country, must of necessity grow out of the conflicting theories of the parties to whose hands this question is at present committed. There must come a change, one now in process of completion, which shall force upon this nation, not so much for the good of the black man, as for its own political and industrial welfare, that course which Providence seems wisely to be directing for the mutual benefit of both peoples.

Those millions of human beings now scattered through the Southern country must eventually come forth into the sunlight of Freedom; and what a field will there then be opened for the benevolence of the wealthy, and the labors of the educated colored man! Truly, the harvest will be great and the labors comparatively few.

Those people will need among them Christian missionaries, intelligent teachers and laborers, to direct them to that course of life and in those modes of industry which have always in the world's history contributed so much for peoples similarly situated. It is for the purpose of promoting, as far as possible, the preparation of the colored man for the assumption of these new relations with intelligence and with the knowledge which promises success, that the Institute feels called upon at this time to act with more energy and on a broader scale than has heretofore been required. It is just here that claims are worthiest of consideration.

It is the duty of every man, to the extent of his interest and means, to provide for the immediate improvement of the four or five millions of ignorant and previously dependent laborers who will be thrown upon society in the reorganization of the Union.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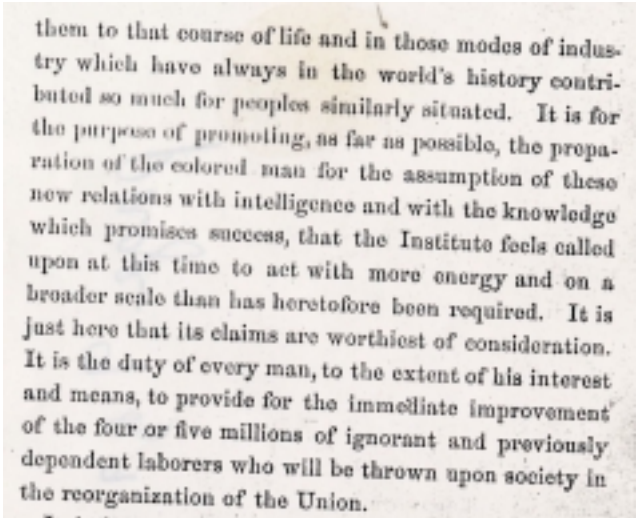
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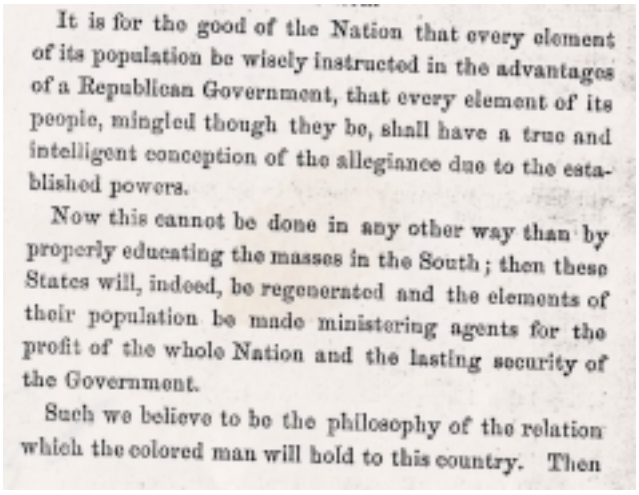
It is the duty of every man, to the extent of his interest and means, to provide for the immediate improvement of the four or five millions of ignorant and previously dependent laborers who will be thrown upon society in the reorganization of the Union.

It is for the good of the Nation that every element of its population be wisely instructed in the advantages of a Republican Government, that every element of its people, mingled though they be, shall have a true and intelligent conception of the allegiance due to the established powers.

Now this cannot be done in any other way than by properly educating the masses in the South; then these States will, indeed, be regenerated and the elements of their population be made ministering agents for the profit of the whole Nation and the lasting security of the Government.

Such we believe to be the philosophy of the relation which the colored man will hold to this country. Then will he be enjoying intelligently the franchises of the citizen, understanding the system and spirit of the laws that govern his country, entering knowingly into the development of her physical resources and the cultivation of his own moral and intellectual gifts. For though born in ignorance and liable to fall in a competition with the intelligent foreigner and migrating Northerner as they go southward,—yet he has within him an aspiration and a capability to rise by faith, labor, and perseverance to a respectable place among his competitors. All that he asks is, that there shall be no unmanly quibbles about intrusting to him any position of honor or profit for which his attainments may fit him. And that which is committed to him as a *man*, he will perform as no other than a *man* could perform.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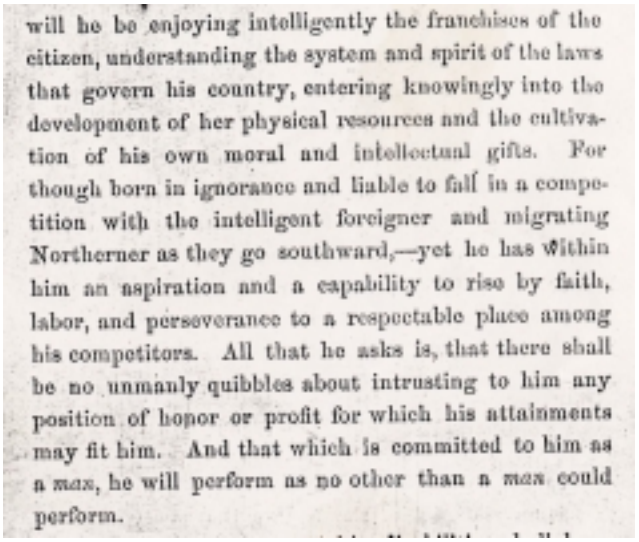
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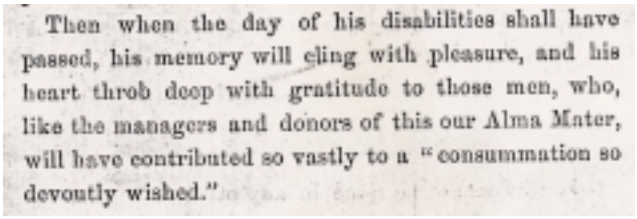
Then when the day of his disabilities shall have passed, his memory will cling with pleasure, and his heart throb deep with gratitude to those men, who, like the managers and donors of this our Alma Mater, will have contributed so vastly to a “consummation so devoutly wished.”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