

ORATION —

TERMINATION OF SLAVERY

“The age in which we live is characterized in no ordinary degree by a certain boldness and rapidity in the march of intellectual and political improvements. Inventions the most surprising; revolutions the most extraordinary, are springing forth, and passing in quick succession before us,—all tending most clearly to the advancement of mankind towards that state of earthly perfection and happiness, from which they are yet so far distant, but of which their nature and that of the world they inhabit, are most certainly capable. It is at all times pleasing and instructive to look backward by the light of history, and forward by the light of analogical reasoning, to behold the gradual advancement of man from barbarism to civilization, from civilization toward the higher perfections of his nature; and to hope—nay, confidently believe, that the time is not far distant when liberty and equal rights being everywhere established, morality and religion of the gospel everywhere diffused,—man shall no longer lift his hand for the oppression of his fellow man; but all, mutually assisting and assisted, shall move onward throughout the journey of human life, like the peaceful caravan across the burning

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sands of Arabia. And never, on this glorious anniversary, so often and so deservedly celebrated by millions of free men, but to celebrate—never before has the eye been able to survey the past with so much satisfaction, or the future with hopes and expectations so brilliant and so flattering; it is to us a day of two-fold joy. We are men, though the strong hand of prejudice and oppression is upon us; we can, and we will rejoice in the advancement of the rapidly increasing happiness of mankind, and especially of our own race. We can, and we will rejoice in the growing power and glory of the country we inhabit. Although Almighty God has not permitted us to remain in the land of our forefathers and our own, the glories of national independence, and the sweets of civil and religious liberty, to their full extent; but the strong hand of the spoiler has borne us into a strange land, yet has He of His great goodness given us to behold those best and noblest gifts to man, in their fairest and loveliest forms; and not only have we beheld them, but we have already felt much of their benignant influence. Most of us have hitherto enjoyed many, very many of the dearest rights of freemen. Our lives and personal liberties have been held sacred and inviolable; the rights of property have been extended to us, in this land of freedom; our industry has been, and still is, liberally rewarded;

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and so long as we live under a free and happy government which denies us not the protection of its laws, why should we fret and vex ourselves because we have had no part in framing them, nor anything to do with their administration. When the fruits of the earth are fully afforded us, we do not wantonly refuse them, nor ungratefully repine because we have done nothing towards the cultivation of the tree which produces them. No, we accept them with lively gratitude; and their sweetness is not embittered by reflecting upon the manner in which they were obtained. It is the dictate of sound wisdom, then, to enjoy without repining, the freedom, privileges, and immunities which wise and equal laws have awarded us—nay, proudly to rejoice and glory in their production, and stand ready at all times to defend them at the hazard of our lives, and of all that is most dear to us.

But are we alone shut out and excluded from any share in the administration of government— Are not the clergy, a class of men equally ineligible to office? A class of men almost idolized by their countrymen, ineligible to office! And are we alone excluded from what the world chooses to denominate polite society? And are not a vast majority of the polar race excluded? I know not why, but mankind of every

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age, nation, and complexion have had lower classes; and, as a distinction, they have chosen to arrange themselves in the grand spectacle of human life, like seats in a theatre—rank above rank, with intervals between them. But if any suppose that happiness or contentment is confined to any single class, or that the high or more splendid order possesses any substantial advantage in those respects over their more lowly brethren, they must be wholly ignorant of all rational enjoyment. For what though the most humble orders cannot mingle with the higher on terms of equality. This, if rightly considered, is not a curse but a blessing. Look around you, my friends: what rational enjoyment is not within your reach? Your homes are in the noblest country in the world, and all of that country which your real happiness requires, may at any time be yours. Your industry can purchase it; and its righteous laws will secure you in its possession. But, to what, my friends, do you owe all these blessings? Let not the truth be concealed. You owe them to that curse, that bitter scourge of Africa, whose partial abolishment you are this day convened to celebrate. Slavery has been your curse, but it shall become your rejoicing. Like the people of God in Egypt, you have been afflicted; but like them too,

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you have been redeemed. You are henceforth free as the mountain winds. Why should we, in this day of congratulation and joy, turn our view upon the origin of African slavery? Why should we harrow up our minds by dwelling on the deceit, the forcible fraud and treachery that have been so long practiced on your hospitable and unsuspecting countrymen? Why speak of fathers torn from the bosom of their families, wives from the embraces of their husbands, children from the protection of their parents; in fine, of all the tender and endearing relations of life dissolved and trampled under foot, by the accursed traffic in human flesh? Why should we remember, in joy and exultation, the thousands of our countrymen who are today, in this land of gospel light, this boasted land of civil and religious liberty, writhing under the lash and groaning beneath the grinding weight of slavery's chain? I ask, Almighty God, are they who do such things thy chosen and favorite people? But, away with such thoughts as these; we will rejoice, though sobs interrupt the songs of our rejoicing, and tears mingle in the cup we pledge to Freedom; our harps though they have long hung neglected upon the willows, shall this day be strung full high to the notes of gladness. On this day, in one member at least of this mighty Republic, the Slavery of our races has ceased forever! No more

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shall the insolent voice of a master be the main-spring of our actions, the sole guide of our conduct; no more shall these hands labor in degrading and profitless servitude. It should be shunned as a most deadly and greatest, most terrible of all possible evils. Their toils will henceforth be voluntary, and be crowned with the never-failing reward of industry. Honors and dignities may perhaps never be ours; but wealth, virtue, and happiness are all within the compass of our moderate exertions. And how shall we enjoy a few moments better than in reflecting upon the means by which these are to be obtained. For what can be more proper and more profitable to one who has just gained an invaluable treasure, than to consider how he may use it to the best possible advantage? And here I need not tell you that a strict observance of all these precepts of the gospel ought to be your first and highest aim; for small will be the value of all that the present world can bestow, if the interests of the world to come are neglected and despised. None of you can be ignorant of what the gospel teaches. Bibles may easily be obtained; nor can there be a greater disgrace, or a more shameful neglect of duty than for a person of mature age, and much more, for any

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father of a family to be without the most precious of all books—the Bible. If, therefore, any of you are destitute of a Bible, hasten to procure one. Will any of you say that it can be of no use to you, or that you cannot read it? Look then to that noblest of all remedies for this evil, the Sunday School—that most useful of all institutions. There you may learn without loss of time or money, that of which none should be ignorant—to read.

Let me exhort you with earnestness to give your most sincere attention to this matter. It is of the utmost importance to every one of you. Let your next object be to obtain as soon as may be, a competency of the good things in this world; immense wealth is not necessary for you, and would but diminish your real happiness. Abject poverty is and ought to be regarded as the damning sin. What then are the means by which so dreadful a calamity may be avoided? I will tell you, my friends, in these simple words—hear and ponder on them: write them upon the tablets of your memory; they are worthy to be inscribed in letters of gold upon every door post—“industry, prudence and economy.” Oh! they are words of power to guide you to respectability and happiness. Attend, then, to some of the laws which industry imposes while you have health and strength. Let

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not the rising sun behold you sleeping or indolently lying upon your beds. Rise ever with the morning light; and, till sunset, give not an hour to idleness. Say not human nature cannot endure it. It can—it almost requires it. Sober, diligent, and moderate labor does not diminish it, but on the contrary, greatly adds to the health, vigor, and duration of the human frame. Thousands of the human race have died prematurely of disease engendered by indolence and inactivity. Few, very few indeed, have suffered by the too long continuance of bodily exertion. As you give the day to labor, so devote the night to rest; for who that has drunk and reveled all night at a tippling shop, or wandered about in search of impious and stolen pleasures, has not by so doing not only committed a most heinous and damning sin in the sight of Heaven, but rendered himself wholly unfit for the proper discharge of the duties of the coming day. Nor think that industry or true happiness do not go hand in hand; and to him who is engaged in some useful avocation, time flies delightfully and rapidly away. He does not, like the idle and indolent man, number the slow hours with sighs—cursing both himself and them for the tardiness of their flight. Ah, my friends, it is utterly impossible for him who

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wastes time in idleness, ever to know anything of true happiness. Indolence, poverty and wretchedness are inseparable companions—fly them, shun idleness, as from eminent and inevitable destruction. In vain will you labor unless prudence and economy preside over and direct all your exertions. Remember at all times that money even in your own hands, is power; with it you may direct as you will the actions of your pale, proud brethren. Seek after and amass it by just and honorable means; and once in your hand never part with it but for a full and fair equivalent; nor let that equivalent be something which you do not want, and for which you cannot obtain more than it cost you. Be watchful and diligent and let your mind be fruitful in devices for the honest advancement of your wordily interests. So shall you continually rise in respectability, in rank and standing in this, so late and so long the land of your captivity.

Above all things refrain from the excessive use of ardent spirits. There is no evil whose progress is so imperceptible, and at the same time so sure and deadly, as that of intemperance; and by slow degrees it undermines health, wealth, and happiness, till all at length tumble into one dreadful mass of ruin. If God has given you children, he has in so doing imposed upon you a most fearful responsibility; believe me,

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friends, you will answer to God for every misfortune suffered, and every crime committed by them which right education and example could have taught them to avoid. Teach them reverence and obedience to the laws, both of God and man. Teach them sobriety, temperance, justice and truth. Let their minds be rightly instructed—imbued with kindness and brotherly love, charity, and benevolence. Let them possess at least so much learning as is to be acquired in the common schools of the country. In short, let their welfare be dearer to you than any earthly enjoyment; so shall they be the richest of earthly blessings.

My countrymen, let us henceforth remember that we are men. Let us as one man, on this day resolve that henceforth, by continual endeavors to do good to all mankind. We will claim for ourselves the attention and respect which as men we should possess. So shall every good that can be the portion of man, be ours—this life shall be happy, and the life to come, glorious.”

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