

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

We have assembled to-night to commemorate one of the most memorable events in the history of our times. Some remote finger, passing over the historic page, will pause and linger round this spot, as its possessor, in the ecstasy of his joy, exclaims, "Lo! see, here was a people born in a day!" But a few days ago, our ears were greeted with the roar of cannon, and our eyes beheld the vast heavens red with the light of patriotic fires, and the hills and vales were vocal with the voice of the orator. And why these demonstrations of patriotism? The answer comes to us from the same warm gush of feeling that everywhere pervaded that day: "It is the return of the day on which our national independence had its birth. Just eighty-three years had rolled away since that event. Just twenty-five years this day, 800,000 bondmen lifted up their hands to the [G]od of Heaven, and exclaimed, "We are free!" If, as American citizens, we found cause of rejoicing because of emancipation from oppressive laws, shall we not as such find far greater because of the restoration to freedom of 800,000 fellow[-]beings, our brethren—not restored to free[-]dom merely, but to citizenship, to manhood? If the disenthralment from a foreign power was so great an achievement, and is hailed with so much joy, is not the unloosening of thousands of hard pressed bondmen

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an achievement still greater? And can it ever be forgotten by us? I trust not.

A dark cloud once hung over those beautiful islands of the sea. No single ray of light penetrated the gloom. Go back with me to the time before even a Wilberforce or a Clarkson appeared, when the dusky inhabitants of these West India Islands might be seen with uplifted hands—shackled though they were—pleading for deliverance. Follow till we perceive their cry has reached the ear of a modest and unpretending, though talented youth, who, through the simple medium of his own college essay, receives the essence of that cry into his very soul. Watch him now in his silent but arduous labors. Behold him insulted, assaulted, maltreated, yet bearing all with fortitude and patience—rising at every stage infinitely superior to all, and laboring with a singleness of purpose and a purity of motive without a parallel in history, and you have before you the philanthropic and inimitable Clarkson, in the very zenith of his glory, and that glory the cause of humanity.

Listen now to the mild, but earnest and resistless, pleadings of a Wilberforce; the manly, the pathetic, and splendid appeals of a Burke; the powerful and tremendous thunderings of a Fox, in the stern, deaf ear of *oppression*; and nerved though its strong arm was with its own gradual atten-

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uation, at length it fell paralyzed and powerless beside its already decayed and shattered body. What a moment was that! and what an epoch will it ever form in the history of mankind! Then stood 800,000 bondmen erect—FREE! and after a lapse of 21 years they this day rejoice in the happiest results of that freedom and in the blessings of a glorious prosperity, of which neither the machinations of demagogues nor the efforts of tyrants can rob them. The British West Indies are this day free, and are not only free, but prosperous and happy. I am aware that slave-holders and their abettors, the servile press, and paid menials, have endeavored to distort this truth so as to show an adverse condition of these islands since emancipation, for these reasons: If slaves could be emancipated in the British West Indies without the shedding of blood, and support themselves thereafter without dependance upon some other than their own arm, and the islands were still profitable in a commercial sense, why, then, the whole argument, or rather the whole tirade as to either the propriety, necessity, or rightfulness of slavery, must fall to the pit of oblivion. If the emancipated could sustain these positions, then the patriarchal institution of the *South* must be shorn of its entire support. The first howl set up by these infamous dogs, long before the Act of Emancipation pass-

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ed, was that blood would be shed. The bill passed, the day for emancipation arrived, and in spite of their fears, and tremblings, and howlings, no *butcherings* occurred, no blood flowed down the hill-side and through the ravines of those beautiful islands. All was peace and ecstasies of joy. Then came the old and flimsy resort, that negroes could not, and these would not, (unaided,) take care of themselves. But the emancipated obtained, by purchase or otherwise, lands, and commenced labor for themselves—for their own wives and little ones. Homes were formed, wants supplied, and comforts produced. The plantation and the master began to sink into neglect. The once haughty, insolent, indolent master, became reduced to his proper level, while the once trembling slave, by his own efforts, raises himself to the dignity of a man—an humble man, if you will, yet a MAN.

Then, forsooth, we had, by these infamous menial and paid abettors of slavery, this third and last howl set up, viz: That these West India Islands were, since emancipation, non-productive. Now suppose we grant this—is it any proof of a lack of internal prosperity? The real question here at issue is: Are these islands and their dusky inhabitants in a prosperous condition at this day? Suppose I own a farm, and the merchants of the distant

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metropolis so hamper me as to *compel* me to export from my farm 10,000 bushels of grain—aye, all that I can muster; and because I so furnish it, is that any evidence of my own prosperity? Assuredly not. My workmen have been half fed, half clothed, and over-worked, to produce this 10,000 bushels— nay, lashed to extort that amount, while my farm has been impoverished and I beggared. But suppose, on the other hand, these half-fed, half-clothed, over-worked, badly abused laborers, get freed from my grasp, and get my farm, into the bargain, in their possession, by some process or other, and cultivate it for themselves, would not this be an evidence of internal prosperity? Precisely so stands the case in the British West Indies to-day. They are peaceable and content; they are industrious and frugal. They consume on the spot what was forced therefrom to a foreign country to satisfy an exorbitant demand to the entire detriment of the islands. Hence the charge that because less is exported from these islands than previous to emancipation, they are less prosperous, is as weak as it is infamous. By every rule or test of political economy, they are in a far more prosperous condition now than formerly. Such are the facts, and I challenge any man of respectable information to successfully contradict them.

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West Indies from the first symptoms of Liberty's apparent struggles, its subsequent growth, strength, and final disencumbrment, to its triumphal march through these sunny islands; and while we would meed high praise to a Clarkson, a Wilberforce, a Buxton, a Fox, a Burke, and others, for their noble efforts, still we cannot omit the just conclusion that a force far superior to these—an agency far higher than these—mainly impelled the result. These noble men were but the sign-posts and way-marks to this powerful but unseen agency which is implanted in every man's breast. That agency is *Liberty*. We throw up bombs and rockets, fire cannon, and send forth our hurrahs on 4th of July day, and we say it is for Liberty. If that achievement—our country's independence—was really any advance in favor of real liberty, it dates no further back than eighty-three years, while the nation, in some form, had been in existence nearly three hundred years. But I can point you, fellow citizens, back to an effort—a noble effort—in behalf of real liberty dating far behind this, and from which this received its impulse; and though it now stands a stigma to the page of written history, under the misnomer of the NEGRO PLOT, still history will yet be true to herself—vindicate her claims, and record the noble attempt. It was the first symptoms, the first throb-

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blings, the first breathings, of liberty ever germinated upon the American soil. It was the first revolution. A beautiful incident connected with the Danish West India emancipation, of recent date, (1848,) illustrative of this truth, may not be out of place to briefly relate here. In the island of St. Croix, under the guidance of one of God's noblemen, one Moses Bourd, the germ of liberty was nurtured in all its purity and simple grandeur. This wonderful man, like Moses in the history of the past, seems to have been raised up, in the Providence of God for the express medium through which deliverance was to come to this people. He digested well his plans, arranged them, and then went from estate to estate, laying down, among the oppressed, regulations and rules for their guidance, enforcing commands, giving council and encouragement. Under his skillful hand the trembling slave was taught to know himself, and each rose from his posture as a slave and stood erect, and, in the strength of their united manhood, demanded their liberty. Their shackles they had thrown aside, and arming themselves as best they could, they repaired to the town where the authorities were. These fled. These stalwart men, with liberty in their breasts and determination in their faces, marched forth. A lady stepped out upon the balcony, and begged and

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besought that there should be no violence—no slaughter. Now mark the grand but simple reply of these men: “*Madam, we want to hurt no one; we want and will have liberty!*” The noble and sublime response rang throughout the lines of this bronzed army back even to the estates. The *authorities* heard and granted the demand, and *St. Croix was free*.

I cannot conclude these remarks without expressing my confidence that, under the guidance of judicious but able and fearless leaders, the time is coming—yea, nigh at hand—when all our brethren held in the unlawful bo[n]ds of our country, shall also be able to exclaim, “*We want and will have liberty!*” and by a judicious and energetic use of our time, talents, and opportunities, shall be able with our own unaided but strong arms to obtain it.

Fellow-citizens, know this: Achilles was the greatest warrior of Greece not because he had the largest bow, but because he knew best how to use that which he had. Wield rightly and well what strength you have, and each successive stride towards the goal of our ambition will, by its own action, give new and increased accessions of strength, till, on and on, we at length reach the high object of our pursuit. Up, up, then, fellow-citizens, and be doing! Linger not nor tarry. Let us leave noth-

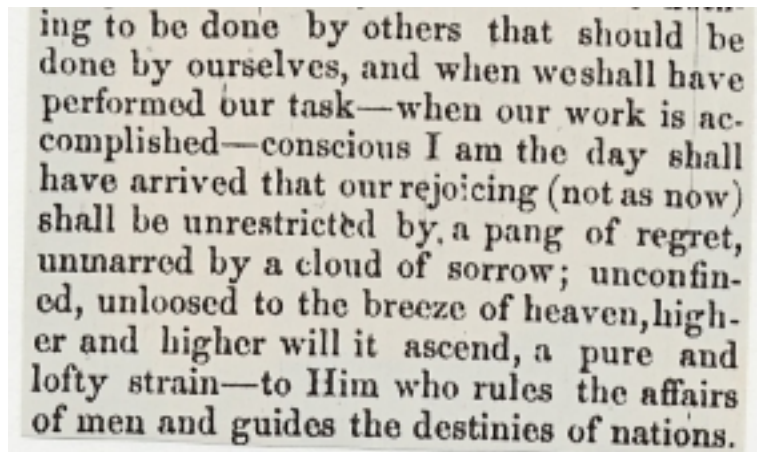
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ing to be done by others that should be done by ourselves, and when we shall have performed our task—when our work is accomplished—conscious I am the day shall have arrived that our rejoicing (not as now) shall be unrestricted by a pang of regret, unmarred by a cloud of sorrow; unconfined, unloosed to the breeze of heaven, higher and higher will it ascend, a pure and lofty strain—to Him who rules the affairs of men and guides the destinies of nations.



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