March 2, 1859
Blyden, Edward W[ilmot]
A Eulogy Pronounced on the Reverend Day
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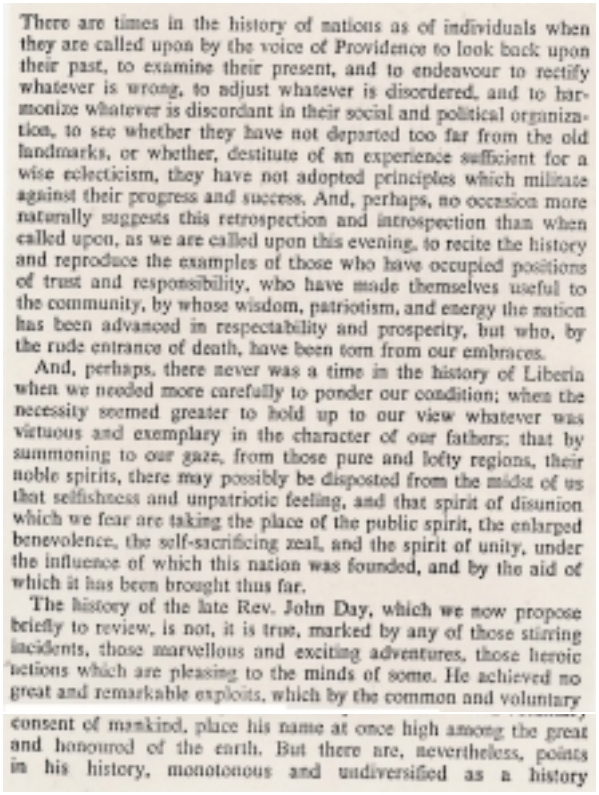
There are times in the history of nations as of individuals when they are called upon by the voice of Providence to look back upon their past, to examine their present, and to endeavor to rectify whatever is wrong, to adjust whatever is disordered, and to harmonize whatever is discordant in their social and political organization, to see whether they have not departed too far from the old landmarks, or whether, destitute of an experience sufficient for a wise eclecticism, they have not adopted principles which militate against their progress and success. And, perhaps, no occasion more naturally suggests this retrospection and introspection than when called upon, as we are called upon this evening, to recite the history and reproduce the examples of whose who have occupied positions of trust and responsibility, who have made themselves useful to the community, by whose wisdom, patriotism, and energy the nation has been advanced in respectability and prosperity, but who, by the rude entrance of death, have been torn from our embraces.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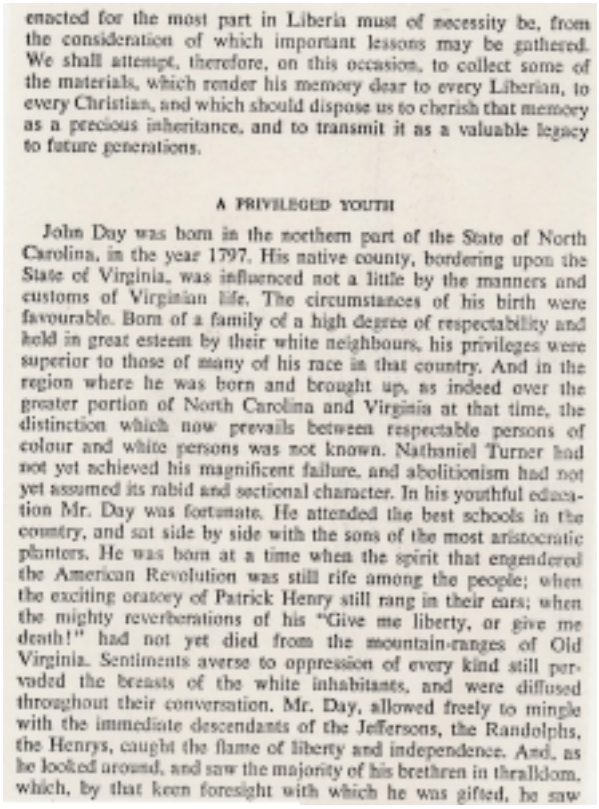
And, perhaps, there never was a time in the history of Liberia when we needed more carefully to ponder our condition; when the necessity seemed greater to hold up to our view whatever was virtuous and exemplary in the character of our fathers; that by summoning to our gaze, from those pure and lofty regions, their noble spirits, there may possibly be disposted from the midst of us that selfishness and unpatriotic feeling, and that spirit of disunion which we fear are taking the place of the public spirit, the enlarged benevolence, the self-sacrificing zeal, and the spirit of unity, under the influence of which this nation was founded, and by the aid of which it has been brought thus far.

The history of the late Rev. John Day, which we now propose briefly to review, is not, it is true, marked by any of those stirring incidents, those marvellous and exciting adventures, those heroic actions which are pleasing to the minds of some. He achieved no great and remarkable exploits, which by the common and voluntary consent of mankind, place his name at once high among the great and honoured of the earth. But there are, nevertheless, points in his history, monotonous and undiversified as a history

enacted for the most part in Liberia must of necessity be, from the consideration of which important lessons may be gathered. We shall attempt, therefore, on this occasion, to collect some of the materials, which render his memory dear to every Liberian, to every Christian, and which should dispose us to cherish that memory as a precious inheritance, and to transmit it as a valuable legacy to future generations.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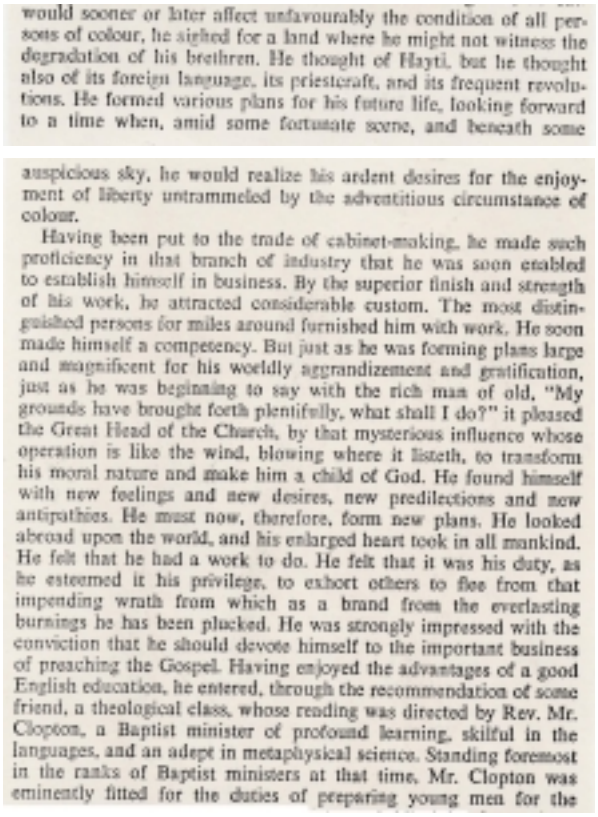
A PRIVILEGED YOUTH

John Day was born in the northern part of the State of North Carolina, in the year 1797. His native country, bordering upon the State of Virginia, was influenced not a little by the manners and customs of Virginian life. The circumstances of his birth were favourable. Born of a family of a high degree of respectability and held in great esteem by their white neighbours, his privileges were superior to those of many of his race in that country. And in the region where he was born and brought up, as indeed over the greater portion of North Carolina and Virginia at that time, the distinction which now prevails between respectable persons of colour and white persons was not known. Nathaniel Turner had not yet achieved his magnificent failure, and abolitionism had not yet assumed its rabid and sectional character. In his youthful education Mr. Day was fortunate. He attended the best schools in the country, and sat side by side with the sons of the most aristocratic planters. He was born at a time when the spirit that engendered the American Revolution was still rife among the people; when the exciting oratory of Patrick Henry still rang in their ears; when the mighty reverberations of his "Give me liberty, or give me death!" had not yet died from the mountain-ranges of Old Virginia. Sentiments averse to oppression of every kind still pervaded the breasts of the white inhabitants, and were diffused throughout their conversation. Mr. Day, allowed freely to mingle with the immediate descendants of the Jeffersons, the Randolphs, the Henrys, caught the flame of liberty and independence. And, as he looked around, and saw the majority of his brethren in thralldom, which, by that keen foresight with which he was gifted, he saw

would sooner or later affect unfavourably the condition of all persons of colour, he sighed for a land where he might not witness the degradation of his brethren. He thought of Hayti, but he thought also of its foreign language, its priestcraft, and its frequent revolutions. He formed various plans for his future life, looking forward to a time when, amid some fortunate scene, and beneath some auspicious sky, he would realize his ardent desires for the enjoyment of liberty untrammeled by the adventitious circumstance of colour.

Having been put to the trade of cabinet-making, he made such proficiency in that branch of industry that he was soon enabled to establish himself in business. By the superior finish and strength of his work, he attracted considerable custom. The most distinguished persons for miles around furnished him with work. He soon made himself a competency. But just as he was forming plans large and magnificent for his worldly aggrandizement and gratification, just as he was beginning to say with the rich man of old, "My grounds have brought forth plentifully, what shall I do?" it pleased the Great Head of the Church, by that mysterious influence whose operation is like the wind, blowing where it listeth, to transform his moral nature and make him a child of God. He found himself with new feelings and new desires, new predilections and new antipathies. He must now, therefore, form new plans. He looked abroad upon the world, and his enlarged heart took in all mankind. He felt that he had a work to do. He felt that it was his duty, as he esteemed it his privilege, to exhort others to flee from that impending wrath which was a brand from the everlasting burnings he has been plucked. He was strongly impressed with the conviction that he should devote himself to the important business of preaching the Gospel. Having enjoyed the advantages of a good English education, he entered, through the recommendation of some friend, a theological class, whose reading was directed by Rev. Mr. Clopton, a Baptist minister of profound learning, skillful in the languages, and an adept in metaphysical science. Standing foremost in the ranks of Baptist ministers at that time, Mr. Clopton was eminently fitted for the duties of preparing young men for the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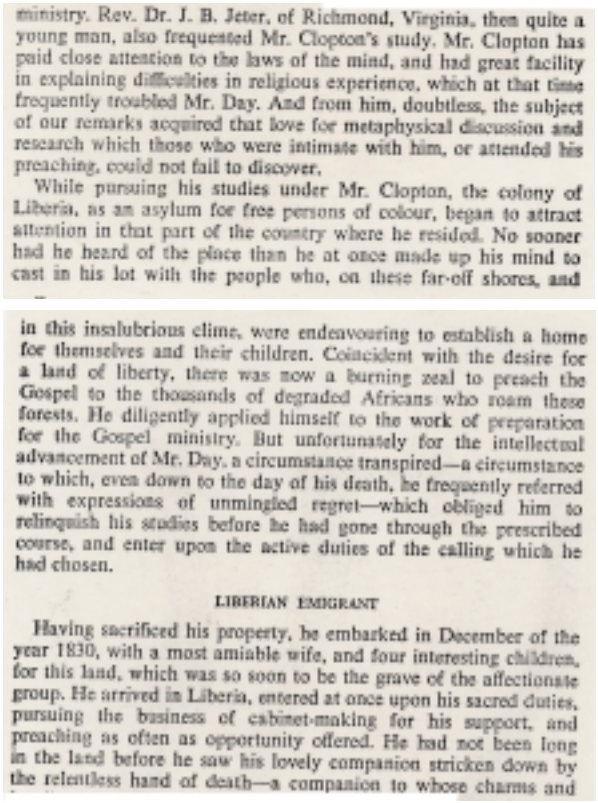
ministry. Rev. Dr. J. B. Jeter, of Richmond, Virginia, then quite a young man, also frequented Mr. Clopton's study. Mr. Clopton has paid close attention to the laws of the mind, and had great facility in explaining difficulties in religious experience, which at that time frequently troubled Mr. Day. And from him, doubtless, the subject of our remarks acquired that love for metaphysical discussion and research which those who were intimate with him, or attended his preaching, could not fail to discover.

While pursuing his studies under Mr. Clopton, the colony of Liberia, as an asylum for free persons of colour, began to attract attention in that part of the country where he resided. No sooner had he heard of the place than he at once made up his mind to cast in his lot with the people who, on these far-off shores, and in this insalubrious clime, were endeavouring to establish a home for themselves and their children. Coincident with the desire for a land of liberty, there was now a burning zeal to preach the Gospel to the thousands of degraded Africans who roam these forests. He diligently applied himself to the work of preparation for the Gospel ministry. But unfortunately for the intellectual advancement of Mr. Day, a circumstance transpired–a circumstance to which, even down to the day of his death, he frequently referred with expressions of unmingled regret–which obliged him to relinquish his studies before he had gone through the prescribed course, and enter upon the active duties of the calling which he had chosen.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LIBERIAN EMIGRANT

Having sacrificed his property, he embarked in December of the year 1830, with a most amiable wife, and four interesting children, for this land, which was so soon to be the grave of the affectionate group. He arrived in Liberia, entered at once upon his sacred duties, pursuing the business of cabinet-making for his support, and preaching as often as opportunity offered. He had not been long in the land before he saw his lovely companion stricken down by the relentless hand of death—a companion to whose charms and

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loveliness he was most keenly alive, and around whom the most ardent affections of his soul were so firmly entwined, that the great depths of his heart seemed upheaved by severance. Then, one after another, he saw his beloved offspring wrapped in the chilling embraces of the grim monster, and conveyed to the house appointed for all living, until his whole family melted away from him, and none was left to remind him of the scenes and associations of the past. There he stood alone in a new country, amid new scenes and associations; there he stood, like some solitary oak in the dead of winter, stripped of its foliage, and exposed, dry and defenceless, to all the beatings of the northern storms. Finding himself in this grievous solitude, and entirely at a loss how to dispose of the sad and weary hours that hung so oppressively upon him, he abandoned himself to gloomy abstractions and melancholy reveries. This led to the supposition that there was some unhingement of his mental organization. But notwithstanding his deep afflictions he never murmured; was never disposed to abandon the field which he had chosen for the labours of his life. He had numerous inducements to return to the land of his birth. His relatives, in comfortable and respectable circumstances, urged him again and again to return. Several wealthy friends anxiously waited to welcome him. But he had put his hand to the plough, and he would not look back. His ardent and cherished desire was to labour for the evangelization of his heathen brethren in this land, and he would not, notwithstanding his deep bereavements, and the imminent danger in which his own life often stood, swerve from his noble purpose. Here we have an instance of the triumph of grace in the soul. Here we see true Christian benevolence, the constraining love of Christ, the new, living, and all-controlling principle implanted in every regenerate heart, rising superior to all earthly interests, forsaking father and mother, and hazarding life itself for the cause of Christ…

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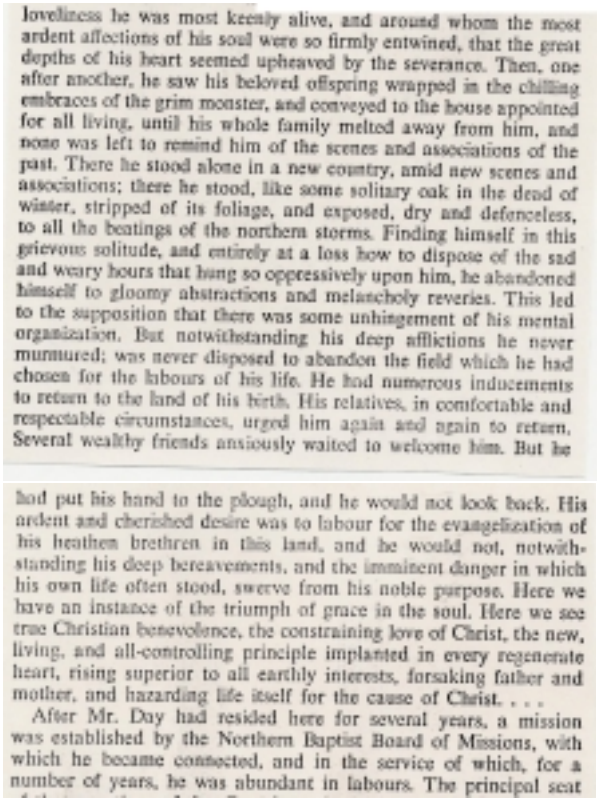
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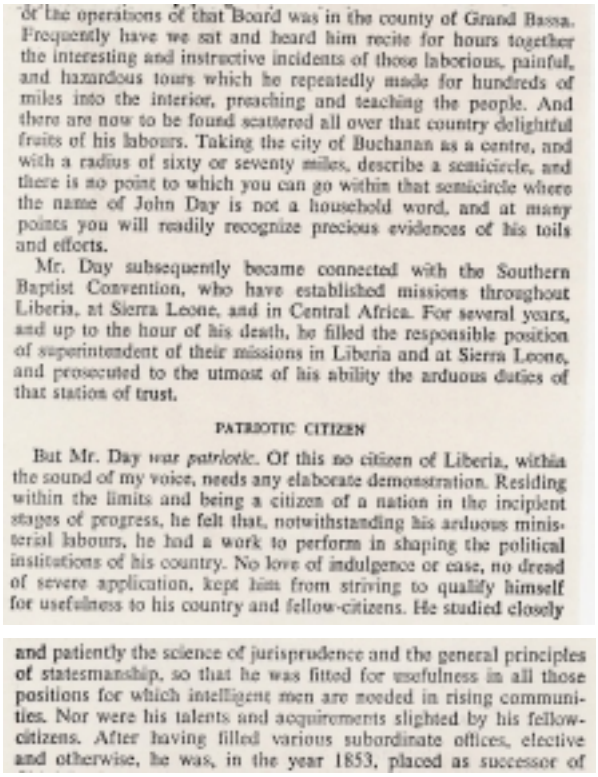
Mr. Day subsequently became connected with the Southern Baptist Convention, who have established missions throughout Liberia, at Sierra Leone, and in Central Africa. For several years, and up to the hour of his death, he filled the responsible position of superintendent of their missions in Liberia and at Sierra Leone, and prosecuted to the utmost of his ability the arduous duties of that station of trust.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But Mr. Day *was patriotic*. Of this no citizen of Liberia, within the sound of my voice, needs any elaborate demonstration. Residing within the limits and being a citizen of a nation in the incipient stages of progress, he felt that, notwithstanding his arduous ministerial labours, he had a work to perform in shaping the political institutions of his country. No love of indulgence or ease, no dread of severe application, kept him from striving to qualify himself for usefulness to his country and fellow-citizens. He studied closely

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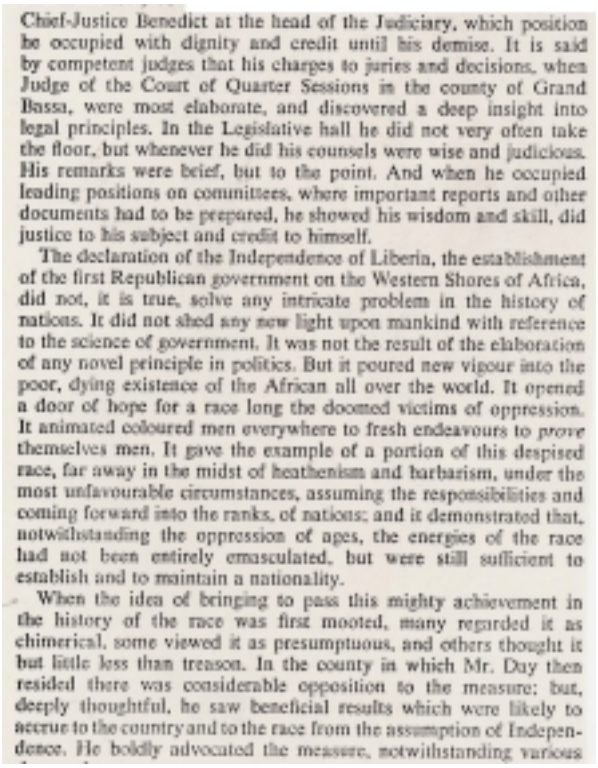
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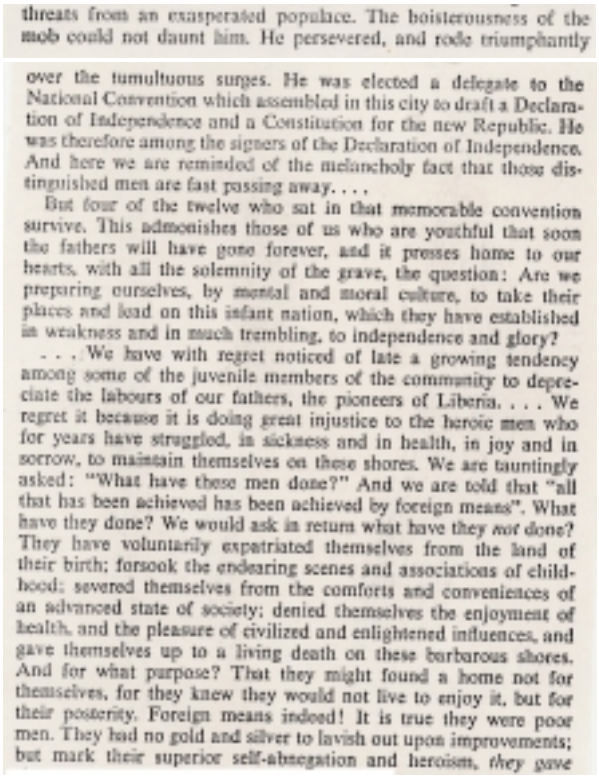
The declaration of the Independence of Liberia, the establishment of the first Republican government on the Western Shores of Africa, did not, it is true, solve any intricate problem in the history of nations. It did not shed any new light upon mankind with reference to the science of government. It was not the result of the elaboration of any novel principle in politics. But it poured new vigour into the poor, dying existence of the African all over the world. It opened a door of hope for a race long the doomed victims of oppression. It animated coloured men everywhere to fresh endeavours to *prove* themselves men. It gave the example of a portion of this despised race, far away in the midst of heathenism and barbarism, under the most unfavourable circumstances, assuming the responsibilities and coming forward into the ranks, of nations: and it demonstrated that, notwithstanding the oppression of ages, the energies of the race had not been entirely emasculated, but were still sufficient to establish and to maintain a nationality.

When the idea of bringing to pass this mighty achievement in the history of the race was first mooted, many regarded it as chimerical, some viewed it as presumptuous, and others thought it but little less than treason. In the county in which Mr. Day then resided there was considerable opposition to the measure; but, deeply thoughtful, he saw beneficial results which were likely to accrue to the country and to the race from the assumption of Indepen-dence. He boldly advocated the measure, notwithstanding various

threats from an exasperated populace. The boisterousness of the mob could not daunt him. He persevered, and rode triumphantly over the tumultuous surges. He was elected a delegate to the National Convention which assembled in this city to draft a Declaration of Independence and a Constitution for the new Republic. He was therefore among the signers of the Declaration of Independence. And here we are reminded of the melancholy fact that those distinguished men are fast passing away…

But four of the twelve who sat in the memorable convention survive. This admonishes those of us who are youthful that soon the fathers will have gone forever, and it presses home to our hearts, with all the solemnity of the grave, the question: Are we preparing ourselves, by mental and moral culture, to take their places and lead on this infant nation, which they have established in weakness and in much trembling, to independence and glory?

…We have with regret noticed of late a growing tendency among some of the juvenille members of the community to depreciate the labours of our fathers, the pioneers of Liberia…We regret it because it is doing great injustice to the heroic men who for years have struggled, in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, to maintain themselves on these shores. We are tauntingly asked: "What have these men done?" And we are told that "all that has been achieved has been achieved by foreign means". What have they done? We would ask in return what have they *not* done? They have voluntarily expatriated themselves from the land of their birth; forsook the endearing scenes and associations of childhood; severed themselves from the comforts and conveniences of an advanced state of society; denied themselves the enjoyment of health, and the pleasure of civilized and enlightened influences, and gave themselves up to a living death on these barbarous shores. And for what purpose? That they might found a home not for themselves, for they knew they would not live to enjoy it, but for their posterity. Foreign means indeed! It is true they were poor men. They had no gold and silver to lavish out upon improvements; but mark their superior self-abnegation and heroism, *they gave*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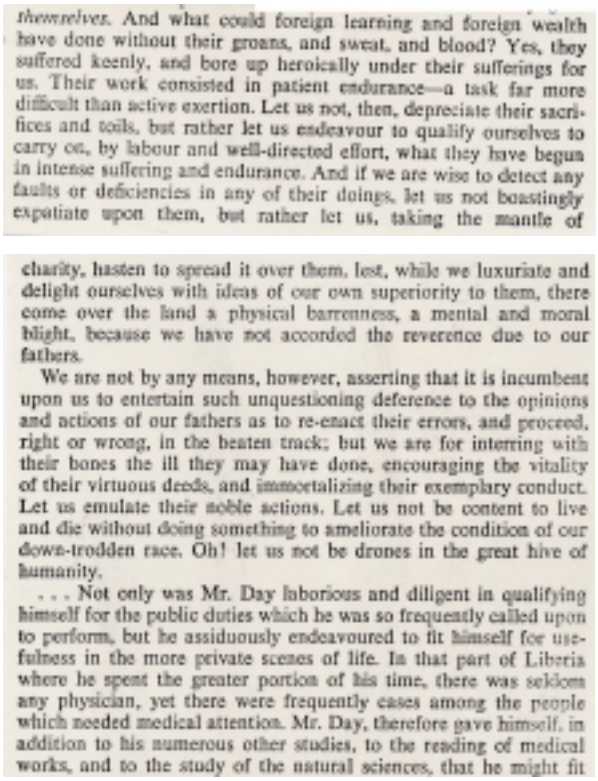
themselves. And what could foreign learning and foreign wealth have done without their groans, and sweat, and blood? Yes, they suffered keenly, and bore up heroically under their sufferings for us. Their work consisted in patient endurance–a task far more difficult than active exertion. Let us not, then, depreciate their sacrifices and toils, but rather let us endeavour to qualify ourselves to carry on, by labour and well-directed effort, what they have begun in intense suffering and endurance. And if we are wise to detect any faults or deficiencies in any of their doings, let us not boastingly expatiate upon them, but rather let us, taking the mantle of charity, hasten to spread it over them, lest, while we luxuriate and delight ourselves with ideas of our own superiority to them, there come over the land a physical barrenness, a mental and moral blight, because we have not accorded the reverence due to our fathers.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himself for ordinary practice. He soon acquired a sufficient knowledge of pathological principles and of therapeutics to enable him to be a very useful practitioner among the poor of his neighbourhood. He willingly went from house, administering relief to the sick, healing the diseases of the body, and endeavoring to bind up the wounds of the spirit. Not a little of his earning was expended in unwearied services among the poor and afflicted. By his well-bred gentility, the cordiality of his manners, and his sympathy with their griefs, he won the esteem and love of all around him. The sick and the afflicted, the poor and needy, were satisfied that he was their friend; and in the very humblest of their tenements he was met with exhibitions of their warmest welcome. In these private and retired acts, we have the most complete demonstration of the greatness of spirit.

We make a great mistake when we confine deeds of eminence to public scenes and magnificent occasion. It is often in the loneliness of a limited social or domestic circle, and in the discharge of the most common-place duty, that the greatest self-denial has to be exercised. Men in obscure stations, of whom the world never hears, may have the hardest tasks to perform, and the greatest sacrifices to make in the cause of God and religion. We should not lavish all our applause and admiration on such as stand foremost in the ranks of philanthropists, and whose names stand prominently forth as having done and suffered much to alleviate human suffering. We should not confine the honours of a true philanthropy to those who, in the sight and amid the applause of thousands, pour out of their abundance in the cause of charity. We conceive that he who, sequestered from the gaze of the multitude, "little and unknown", distributes daily and habitually of his earning to satisfy the needs of an indigent neighbourhood, is to the full as deserving as he whose thousands, abstracted from a large and constantly increasing heap, are bestowed in the vicinity of a newspaper-office.

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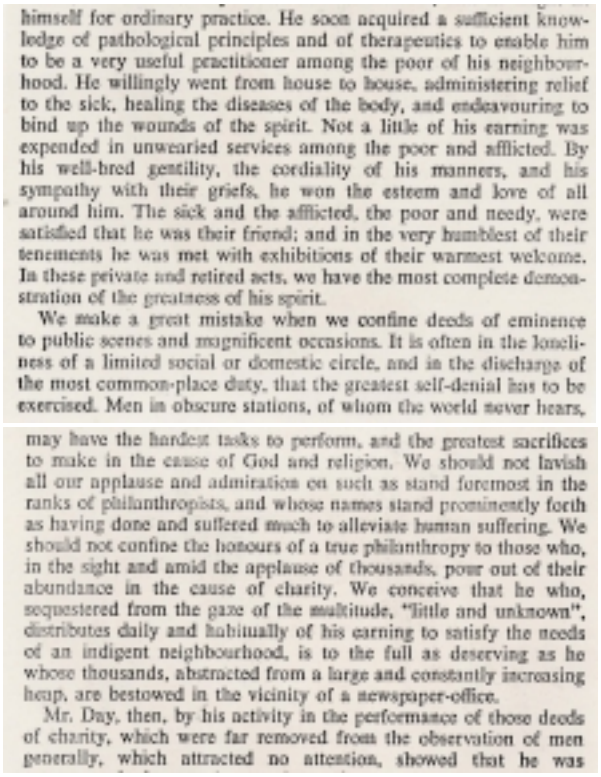
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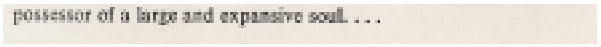
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