

[SPEECH OF HEZEKIAH F. DOUGLASS.

*At the Sixteenth Anniversary of West India
Emancipation, at Cleveland, Aug. 1st, 1850.*
Communicated for The Bugle.]

FELLOW CITIZENS: There seems to have been handed down through successive ages the emblems of ancestral grandeur, the records of the daring deeds of warriors upon the crimson field of hateful strife, where men created little lower than angels are converted into fiends, and where all the finer feelings of our nature are trampled in the dust of humiliation beneath the chariot wheels of some ambitious conquerer, commissioned of hell to desolate the hearths and homes of countless myriads of human beings. Inscriptions commemorative of their deeds of blood have been inscribed on the frowning Pyramid, whose granite peak has towered sublime forty centuries, emblematic of Egyptian grandeur, designed to impress on our minds the achievements of those who preceded us. We find that "*Eureka*," the cry of the immortal Euclid in the streets of Alexandria, is rendered immortal in the conceptions of men. It seems to be a principle inherent in our nature to review the past results of national and individual action, to cherish and commemorate with gratitude the beneficent results of such action. In unison with these natural instincts we have met in remembrance of an act of national benignity and disinterested benevolence unequalled in the world, one that will be the

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glory of England and the admiration of posterity when the Naval achievements of Nelson, and the glory of Waterloo shall have faded from the recollections of mankind.

But while we are now assembled in this open temple of the air, beneath a smiling sky, to pay our homage to that day on which the joyous Bell of British Liberty sounded a funeral dirge over the grave of West India Slavery, and while every pulsation of the inner man beats high in the cause of civil and political liberty, let us not forget to remember the wrongs and outrages perpetrated upon the millions of our own countrymen that clank their chains beneath a tyrant's lash in the dark asylum of Southern oppression. But let words of commiseration go up to-day from this altar consecrated to that event whose commemoration we now celebrate; and would to God that our words could be borne on every northern gale that sweeps amid the everglades of Florida and the glens of Louisiana, until they should become the appropriate anthem of hope and joy to the crushed and bleeding slave, who is robbed of his manhood and converted into a thing. This, be it said, is the everlasting disgrace of the American nation, in a land boastful of its love of liberty and Free institutions, its Colleges and Academies, its Seminaries of learning, its monuments of modern art and refinement, who appropriates her domain for the benefit of the refugees of

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unfortunate Hungary, who sympathizes with starving Ireland, with bleeding Rome, with agonizing Poland, with struggling Greece, and sighing Italy, who exhaust the vocabulary of denunciation against despotic Austria and slaveholding Russia, and yet cling with filial affections to a system of despotism the worst that ever cursed the world, a system that blots out the intellect, crushes every many aspiration, stifles the sensibilities, dries up the warm gushing and passionate emotions of the human soul, and applies the damning title of Chattle to the God-like form of humanity, dethrones the workings of his youthful intellect, alienates his energy and ambition, and drags man down from the sublime and dignified position of humanity and herds him with the beast of burthen.

Such are the effects and tendencies of that hell-deserving and God-defying institution now sought to be extended over the free soil of New Mexico and California, to blight and to curse it through all coming time. Northern statesmen, led on by the mighty Webster, whose speech on Plymouth rock is among the best productions of American literature, who reared a monument of intellectual greatness over the hallowed tombs of Adams and Jefferson, that no catastrophe shall ever demolish, and the sentiments given utterance there by that great man, will yet be adopted by his countrymen, and tell with irresistible force on the strong-holds of

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American Slavery. There his heart was inspired with a coal from the altar of human freedom; but now, how fallen! the mighty thunderbolts he hurled at Plymouth in 1820 against the accursed slave trade, his solemn and impassioned appeal to his countrymen every where to discountenance and abolish it, seems to retain no hold on his memory; but now in the winter of his life his voice can be heard in the dome of the American Senate, not in favor of freedom, as then, but in favor of Slavery. Seeking indirectly by his influence to rebuild the rude temples of heathenism long since prostrated by the Herculean nerve of Mexican Barbarism, to re-enact those scenes of sorrow, that fill the mind with unutterable anguish, irrepressible grief and commiseration, making the air resound with the cries of the bondman, until his wail is lost in the solemn murmers of the Pacific seas. And yet in the face of these facts they dare cry "liberty!" and over the graves of its fallen champions rear the storied urn, the animated bust, those solemn and impressive emblems of the mighty dead, while the shrine of their devotions is like the fabled Utopia, which has only an imaginary existence.

It is true that in 1776 they solemnly declared to the world, certain self-evident truths in the support of which, in the trying hour of mortal conflict, they appealed to the God of battle for the rectitude of their intentions,

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with a firm reliance on the Supreme Ruler of the universe, they endured the hardships and privations of the Revolutionary struggle that separated the colonies from the mother country. The watchword of Virginia's gallant son, "give us liberty or give us death," inspired every heart and nerved every arm. It was inscribed on the banners borne by marching columns amid the storms of battle, and floated as an emblem of victory on the classic heights of Bunker. There was heard the gigantic energy of Patrick Henry, the fervid earnestness and potent persuasion of Lee, the Herculean nerve of Norris, speaking in thunder tones the sentiments of undying truth. Then were Virginia's noble sons the advocates of liberty, but now, alas! how recreant to every sentiment of virtue, how false to him who slumbered amid the sequestered shades of Montecello, as a monument of national greatness, whose mind was filled with gloomy forebodings, when he contemplated the dark and dismal future that awaited this guilty nation if she did not repent of the great wrongs inflicted on the unoffending sons and daughters of Africa.— Thomas Jefferson while contemplating the mighty conflict that had ever been carried on between liberty and slavery, the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor that every where marks the pages of ancient History, from the time of Nimrod, the founder

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of Babylon, to the close of our own memorable struggle for Constitutional Freedom; and yielding to the warning admonitions that came to him from the prostrate thrones of conquerers; from the green graves of sleeping nations whose requiem has been sung by the heastern poet in mournful and melancholy strains; from God-defying Babylon; from the crumbling ruins of Pompeii; the broken columns of Thebes; the dilapidated temples of Rome, the course of whose downfall is directly traceable to civil war and domestic strife, the legitimate results of Slavery. In view of the awful and terrible dessolation that has forever marked the progress of slavery, we hear him exclaim in great agony, "I tremble for my country, when I reflect that God is just." He anticipated that unless the slaveholder did relinquish his hellish system of slavery, that the day would come, a day that has invariably come upon all nations, a day of retribution for sins unrepented. He believed that the time would come when the Spirit of Liberty and surviving manhood would lead the American Slave to imitate the example of the fathers of '76, a contest in which he declared the Almighty had no attribute that would take sides with the oppressor, a day that will inevitably come unless slavery is limited. You must either free the slaves, or the slaves will free themselves. All history confirms the fact; sacred as well as profane. We read of the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt, and in the metaphysical

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language of historians unheard of plagues came upon the Egyptians which terminated only in the entire destruction of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea. Slaveholding Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews led captive by Nebuchadnezzar, and held in bondage in the Assyrian Empire. What to her in turn was the result? glory, dominion and safety? No. These slaves were the cause of the destruction of Babylon, and the utter ruin of the empire, and Daniel the Hebrew, and the slave was made the Regent under Cyrus, over all the shattered provinces of a once glorious nation. Thus passed away, without a struggle, most impotently and forever, leaving no vestige behind, the most splendid city the world has ever seen. The insurrection at Sparta, and the bloody siege of Ithom, the cruelty and perfidity at Keiptia, where two thousand slaves were massacred in a single night, fill the mind with horror when we contemplate the desolation that has ever followed in the wake of slavery. The Roman Eagle that had never quailed before a foreign foe was struck down by the slaves of Italy.

Slavery certainly formed no element of strength in the white massacre at St. Domingo; and the insurrection at South Hampton tells of its blessings. No, liberty and slavery are antagonistic principles, and can not exist together in unison; the lilly and the

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bramble may grow in social proximity together, but liberty and slavery delight in separation. Yet the Union is stoutly threatened unless the North will become the willing tools and abetors in the propagation and extension of human bondage. No, Mr. President, I am no disunionist, long may its noble and well proportioned column stand, stand as doubtless it will if the original design of the Constitution is carried out. But if its preservation and prosperity depend on the extension of human slavery, if it is cemented by the blood and tears of the victims of an oppression more cruel and relentless than is to be found any where in the records of the benighted nations of antiquity, the sooner it is dissolved, the better. If this is the only expediency, I would invoke the darkening thunderbolts from the eternal world to rend this degrading and humiliating compact. For if a government becomes so ambitious of advancing a compact that it fails to protect the rights of man, it ought to be erased from the catagory of nations, and be numbered with the sleeping despotisms that have long sunk beneath the proud and majestic march of advancing civilization.

It has often been said and repeated that this country is not responsible for the existence of slavery, that it was entailed on us by the mother country, for which, I have only one word to say, that if you followed Great Britain in the bad example of sustaining and upholding human bondage, now fol-

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low her in the good and glorious example of emancipation. But this is not the only argument urged in justification of the enslavement of the African race, in America, a people whose ancestry from the very commencement of your first struggle for national independence in 1776, to the close of the war of 1812, the second revolution, which, had it not been successfully achieved, would have left you shorn of the fruits of the Revolution of '76.

Their blood has sprinkled every battle field, and commingled with the blood of the white soldier as a solemn memento of equal rights, and impartial liberty. Yet with these examples of noble heroism and devotion to country, the cry of national inferiority is raised to justify the unnumbered wrongs that have been inflicted upon that unfortunate people.

History informs us that the Ethiopian race held the balance of power some 25 centuries ago, and that Egypt is the source from which Greece derived her letters and laws and politics. The most illustrious men of Greece, such men as Homer, the father of Poetry, Pythagoras, and even her great law-givers Lycurgus, and Solon, and many other celebrated characters of antiquity went to Egypt to complete their studies; a monument of their genius has already been erected by omnipotent word. God when praising Moses, says "he was learned in all

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the wisdom of the Egyptians." Herodotus informs us that the sceptre of the world passed from the colored to the white race at the taking of Babylon by the Persians.

In three thousand four hundred and four of the history of the world, in the reign of Apries the last Egyptian King, the pyramids, those solid columns that still excite the admiration of the world, were reared by wooly headed negroes, ere they had condescended to have intercourse with the rest of mankind. Sesostris, one of the greatest conquerors of whom antiquity boasts, was a colored man. The most reliable and accurate ancient Historian was Herodotus, who was of Ethiopian descent. We read of a Carthaginian Hannibal crossing the snow-clad Alps, and planting the victorious standard of his country on the broken thrones and despoiled grandeur of the mistress of the world, and holding the Eagle of Rome in subjection for seventeen years. If we come to a more modern date, we see colored men under the most extraordinary circumstances elevating themselves to the highest point of moral and intellectual greatness, Alexander Dumas, the historian and moralist, is one of the most sought after aristocrats of Paris.— If we come to the United States, itself distinguished beyond all others for its prejudice and hatred to the colored race, noted for its cruel and oppressive laws, inferior in point of civilization and refinement to the

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most remote heathen despotism that ever cursed the world, for even among the oriental nations surrounding the Jews, the slaves were allowed many privileges and entitled to post of honor, and the Eastern temples afforded an asylum to the fleeing fugitive, and the man that does deliver him up when once seen in the temple was considered a felon beyond the ordinary degree of human depravity and his crime was punished with death. But is it so in this country, in a land where shouts for liberty have been born on the sighing breeze along her Southern valleys, until its echoes have been lost amid the tempests and storms far up the proclivities of her Northern hills? There is not a single spot of earth from Maine to Texas, from the sand banks of the Atlantic to the broad and tranquil Pacific, where the scourged and bleeding victim of oppression can stand erect and claim the protection of your Constitution and laws, as they are construed by the narrow hearted judiciaries of this country. Yet even with these almost insurmountable obstacles we have colored men, fugitives though they are, whose intellectual acquirements would do credit to any age or nation. Few such men, sir, as *Frederick Douglass*, once numbered with the beasts of burthen, but now pleading his country's cause with an earnestness as potent and persuasive as a Clay or Webster. Few

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such men as *Henry Bibb*. Though a hunted fugitive he has acquired no mean reputation. Shall I speak of the young and eloquent advocate of our cause *Wm. H. Day*, who may be truly classified with the best orators of our age, and the other great lights that now encircle the horizon of Ethiopian greatness? Our *Langstons*, our *Wards*, our *Garnets*, our *Gaines*, who fully demonstrate the genius and intellectual greatness of the colored race.

With these lights, these unyielding defenders of our rights, let us take courage, renewing the contest for elevation no nobly begun, and carried on with such signal success. Planting ourselves upon the principles of Freedom, stand firm as the Pillars of Sesostrus, presenting our unbroken front; let our battle cry be that sentiment that has immortalized the name of Henry, hoping for that bright day yet to dawn upon the destinies of our race, when the shout of our redeemed and emancipated countrymen shall go up to the temple of the living God, unmingled with the sighs and groans of the victims of oppression.

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