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AFRICAN ZION CHURCH,

ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY, 1827,

COMMEMORATION OF THE ABOLITION OF DOMESTIC SLAVERY IN
THIS STATE.

BY WILLIAM HAMILTON.

NEW-YORK :

PRINTED BY GRAY & BUNCE, 224 CHERRY-STREET.

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Checked
May 1913.

New-York, July 19th, 1827.

TO MR. WM. HAMILTON,

SIR—The Committee beg leave to present their thanks for the great exertion on your part, and the very able and eloquent address delivered by you on the 4th instant, in the African Zion Church, which has given us the greatest satisfaction, and the public in general: In consequence of which, we solicit the favour, that you will permit us to have the Address printed.

Your's, respectfully,

JOHN MARANDER, Sen.
Chairman.

THOMAS L. JENNINGS, Secretary.

New-York, July 19, 1827.

GENTLEMEN of the Committee, you do me much honour in the commendation you have been pleased to bestow on my efforts, on the 4th instant, for which you have my sincere thanks, and a compliance with your wish to publish the same.

WM. HAMILTON.

ORATION, &c.



LIBERTY! kind goddess! brightest of the heavenly deities that guide the affairs of men.

Oh Liberty! where thou art resisted and irritated, thou art terrible as the raging sea, and dreadful as a tornado. But where thou art listened to, and obeyed, thou art gentle as the purling stream that meanders through the mead; as soft and as cheerful as the zephyrs that dance upon the summer's breeze, and as bounteous as autumn's harvest.

To thee, the sons of Afric, in this once dark, gloomy, hopeless, but now fairest, brightest, and most cheerful of thy domain, do owe a double oblation of gratitude. Thou hast entwined and bound fast the cruel hand of oppression—thou hast by the powerful charm of reason, deprived the monster of his strength—he dies, he sinks to rise no more.

Thou hast loosened the hard bound fetters by which we were held; and by a voice sweet as the music of heaven, yet strong and powerful, reaching to the extreme boundaries of the state of New-York, hath declared that we the people of colour, the sons of Afric, are **FREE!**

My brethren and fellow-citizens, I hail you all. This day we stand redeemed from a bitter thralldom. Of us it may be truly said, "the last agony is o'er," **THE AFRICANS ARE RESTORED!** No more shall the accursed name of slave be attached to us—no more shall *negro* and *slave* be synonymous.

Fellow-citizens, I come to felicitate you on the

victory obtained—not by a sanguinary conflict with the foe—there are left no fields teeming with blood; not a victory obtained by fierce-flaming, death-dealing ordnance, vomiting forth fire and horrible destruction—no thousands made to lick the dust—no groans of the wounded and the dying. But I come to felicitate you on the victory obtained by the principles of liberty, such as are broadly and indelibly laid down by the glorious sons of '76; and are contained in the ever memorable words prefixed to the Declaration of Independence of these United States: viz. “ We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” A victory obtained by these principles over prejudice, injustice, and foul oppression.

This day has the state of **NEW-YORK** regenerated herself—this day has she been cleansed of a most foul, poisonous and damnable stain. I stand amazed at the quiet, yet rapid progress the principles of liberty have made. A semi-century ago, the people of colour, with scarcely an exception, were *all slaves*. It is true, that many in the city, who remained here in the time of the revolution, (when their masters left at the approach of the **British**) and many too from the country, who became a kind of refugee, obtained their liberty, by leaving the country at the close of the war, or a few years respite from slavery: for such as were found remaining after the revolution, were again claimed by their masters. Yes, we were in the most abject state of slavery that can be conceived, except *that* of our brethren at the South, whose miseries are a little more enhanced. Without going back to the times of **Negro plot**, when a kind of fanaticism seized the people of **New-York**, something similar in its bearing and effect to the

sad circumstance that took place among the people of *New-England*, in their more puritanic times, and about a half century before the fancied plot, when they put to death the good people for being witches.

Yes, my brethren, in this state we have been *advertised, and bought, and sold like any commodity*. In this state we have suffered cruelly; suffered by imprisonment, by whipping, and by scourging.

I have seen men chained with iron collars to their necks. I have seen —— but hold! Let me proceed no farther. Why enter into the blood chilling detail of our miseries? It would only dampen those joys that ought to glow and sparkle on every countenance: it would only give vent to feelings that would not be reconcileable with the object of our assembling.

The cause of emancipation has ever had its votaries, but they stood single and alone. After the revolution, they drew nearer together.

That venerable body of religionists, called **FRIENDS**, ought ever to be held in grateful remembrance by us. Their public speakers were the first to enter their protest against the deadly sin of slave-holding; and so zealous did its members become, that the church, or more technically, the meeting, passed laws; first forbidding its members from holding slaves for life, next forbidding the use of slaves altogether. But the most powerful lever, or propelling cause, was the **MANUMISSION SOCIETY**. Although many of its members belonged to the just-named society, yet very many were members of other religious societies, and some did not belong to any, but who were, philanthropists indeed. *How sweet it is to speak of good men!* Nature hath not made us calumniators—calumny yields us no pleasure: if it does, it is satanic pleasure: but to *speak of good men*, yields a pleasure, such as the young feel, when talking of

their lovers, or the parent feels, when telling of the prattle of their infants.

In speaking of the Manumission Society, we are naturally drawn to its first founders. These *must* have been good men: the prejudice of the times forbade any other, but men of good and virtuous minds, from having any lot or part in the matter. Any other must have shrunk from the undertaking. I am, therefore, about to name men, who ought to be deeply inscribed on your memories, and in your hearts: The names of WASHINGTON and JEFFERSON should not be pronounced *in the hearing of your children*, until they could clearly and distinctly pronounce the names I am about to give. First, that *great* and *good* statesman, the right honourable JOHN JAY, the first President of the Manumission Society. Blessed God! how good it is, he has lived to see, as a reward, the finishing of a work he helped to begin.

Next, the *good* JOHN MURRAY, peace attends his memory, he was a man that calumny never did approach, but what she *bit her tongue*: he was the first Treasurer: next, the not only *harmless*, but *good* SAMUEL FRANKLIN, the first-Vice-President; next the *zealous*, the *virtuous*, the *industrious* JOHN KEESE; the first Secretary; next, general ALEXANDER HAMILTON, that *excellent soldier, and most able civilian and financier, and first of his profession* at the bar. Next, that man of *more than sterling worth*, ROBERT BOWNE.

The other names which I shall give, are of *equal worth* with those already mentioned, and are as follows:

Alexander M'Dougal, Colonel Robert Troup, John Lawrence, Peter Yates, Melancton Smith, William Goforth, Ebenezer S. Burling, Laurence Embree, Zebulon Bartow, Elijah Cock, William Shotwell,

Joseph Laurence, James Cogswell, Matthew Vicker, William Backhouse, William Cartman, Thomas Burling, Thomas Bowne, Leonard M. Cutting.

These are the men that formed the Manumission Society, and stamped it with those best of principles, found in the preamble to the constitution, framed by them. It is too excellent to pass over, and is as follows: "The benevolent Creator, and Father of all men; having given to them all an equal right to life, liberty and property, no sovereign power on earth can justly deprive them of either but in conformity to impartial laws, to which they have expressly or tacitly consented; it is our duty both as *free citizens and Christians*, not only to regard with compassion the injustice done to those among us, who are held as slaves, but to endeavour by all lawful ways and means, to enable them to share *equally* with us, that civil and religious liberty, with which an indulgent Providence has blessed these states; and to which these our brethren are as much entitled as ourselves."

It was on the 25th January, 1785, these gentlemen held their first meeting, and on the fourth of the following month, they adopted a constitution, headed by the just mentioned most *liberal and excellent* preamble.

To enter into a detail of the services rendered us by this society, would be out of my power. Even those that have come within my knowledge would occupy more time (though pleasing to relate) by far than we have on hand. Suffice it to say, that through the efforts of this society, our situation has been much meliorated, and very many of our brethren have been liberated from slavery. The society between the time of its formation and 1813, obtained many salutary laws, relative to our emancipation and well usage. But by a revision of the laws of the state

about this time, some had been changed in their intent, while others had become nugatory.

Being alarmed, the Society made strong efforts to regain the lost ground. The years between 1813 and 1817, were spent by the society in vigorous efforts, by which, however, they gained little more than an accession of strength. But prior to the session that brought forth the law that gave rise to this rejoicing, three gentlemen, whom I shall name with pride and much glorying, viz. Mr. JOSEPH CURTIS, Mr. JOHN MURRAY, and Mr. THOMAS ADDIS EMMET, waited on the then governor Mr. DANIEL D. TOMPKINS. He was a man, who, if he had faults, his virtues overwhelmed them, angels vied with each other the privilege of conveying him to a better state. From the governor, who always was our friend, these gentlemen obtained a ready promise that he would introduce the subject of emancipation in his message to the legislature, and recommend to them the fixing on a time for its accomplishment, which promise he faithfully performed.

I have named *some* of the men to whom our gratitude is due. Did I name them as they rise on the altar of my heart, I should name *many equally worthy, and equally noted*; and some, although not of so public a character, who have yet rendered equal services. The Manumission Society have laboured hard and incessantly, in order to bring us from our degraded situation, and restore us to the rights of men. It has stood, a phalanx, *firm and undaunted*, amid the flames of prejudice, and the shafts of calumny. How pleasing it is, they have a reward. Our Heavenly Father hath fixed the highest sensations of pleasure to good and virtuous actions.

My brethren, our enemies have assumed various attitudes: sometimes they have worn a daring front,

and blasphemously have said, the *negroes have no souls, they are not men*, they are a species of the *ourang outang*. Sometimes, in more mild form, they say, they are a *species inferior to white men*. Then again they turn to blasphemy, and say, *God hath made them to be slaves*.

Let us look at them, and we shall see, with all their pomp, and pride, and hauteur, they are more the objects of pity and commiseration, than of anger and hate. Well may it be said, "the wicked are like the troubled sea." *It is hard breathing in their atmosphere*. Are not deeds of injustice the harrowers up of fears of revenge, in proportion to their turpitude. We have a fair portrait in the Southern states. In order to see it more clearly, contrast the Southern and Northern sections of the union. Would the people of the North exchange situations for *the slaves of the South, ten times told?* Reverse the question, and what must be the answer? Do the people of the North, need nightly patrols to save them from insurrections? How sweet is the sleep of the virtuous! The hoverings around their nocturnal rest, are soothing angels—the wicked, dream of being pursued by furies. In the South, a poor, single, solitary man of colour, cannot enter their country, but through their dread of soul, they seize him and imprison him. They are *like him that has murdered his neighbour*, who starts at every one that looks him in the face.

It would be foolishness in me, my brethren, to tell you that by all the rules laid down by naturalists, for determining the species of a creature, that we have souls, and are men. We too *irresistibly feel that we have, and are such*. We can more easily doubt that we *exist*, than doubt that we are *men*. To the second proposition, and my soul for it, if there is

any difference in the species, that difference is in *favour* of the people of colour.

Man is a moral being, and ought to be governed by his reason. The lessons of reason are the lessons of morality. If we measure souls at all, we ought to measure them by the scale of morality. What does *he* gain that can enter into the most abstruse reasoning about matter and its properties; that is acquainted with the anatomy of every creature; or can tell you of all the heavenly bodies, of planets, and their satellites, of their diameters, and their distances, their diurnal rotations, their revolutions around their primaries, and degrees of their inclination to their orbits, and times of their revolution around the sun, if *when he is done*, he sits down to the intoxicating draught, until he is deprived of his *reason*, and becomes like a *stupid beast*? How *much* does such an abstruse reasoner gain, by the *proper rule* over him, who only reasons himself into *sober and virtuous habits*?

I know that I ought to speak with caution; but an ambidexter philosopher, who can reason contrary-wise, first tells you "*that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed with the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,*" next proves that *one class of men are not equal to another*, which by the bye, does not agree with axioms in geometry, that deny that things can be *equal*, and at the same time *unequal* to one another—suppose that such philosopher, should keep around him a number of slaves, and at the *same time* should tell you, that God hath no attribute to favour the cause of the master in case of an insurrection of the slaves. Would not such a reasoner only show a heterogeneous mind? although he should be called an abstruse reasoner, what kind of superiority does he discover?

Does he not reason, and act like one that battles with the elements? Does he reason like a man of true moral principles? Does he set a good example? Does he act in conformity to true philosophy? True philosophy teaches, that man should act in conformity to his reason, and *reason*, and the *law* of God and nature, declare that all men are equal, and that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, are their unalienable rights.

It is a maxim among civilians, that the principles of government, and acts of the legislator, should be in unison. What ought to be considered the most vital principles of our general government, are contained in the words already mentioned, as standing in **FRONT** of the Declaration of Independence; and in that article of the constitution, that declares that *no person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due course of law*. What a jargon does that law of the United States form with the principles here laid down, that gives to *one class of men* the right to arrest, wherever they may find them within its jurisdiction, *another class of men*, and retain them as their lawful property? This, no doubt, is *superior* legislation, and bespeaks *superior* minds.

In these United States, among white men, there is an almost universal prejudice against the amalgamation of the blood of the white and black population, which goes so far as to create in them the supercilious fear, or rather the horrible sensation, that the pretty white, will be changed thereby to the dingy mulatto. Yes, true it is, and true though it is *white men masters*, do amalgamate the blood, and the *children of such amalgamation*, they hold as slaves: and worse, they sell as slaves. It is said by a Frenchman of high note, that the American will sell his dog for money; I do not know, that the Frenchman

will not do the same. *But this I do know*, that white men sell the children of their own begetting, for sordid gold.

Authority and gold are their gods, their household gods, their sanctuary gods, and the highest gods of their sanctum sanctorum. What titillation of soul they receive from these gods! How bold! how venturesome! how stubborn! how pliant! how wise! how simple! how every thing *but virtuous* they are!

I am sorry to break from this unravelling so soon, for I did mean, to unravel this *mystery* of superiority. But it is necessary that we devote a few moments to a subject of vital interest to us. And here let me particularly address the youth. With you rests the high responsibility of redeeming the character of our people. White men say, you are not capable of the study of what may be called abstruse literature, and that you are deficient in moral character. I feel, I know, that these assertions are as false as hell. Yet I do know, you are sunk into the deepest frivolity and lethargy, that any people can be sunk. Oh Heavens! that I could rouse you. Has this frivolity taken from you all shame? Has this lethargy taken from you all ambition? **YOUTH OF MY PEOPLE**, I look to you. Shall this degrading charge stand unrepelled by contrary facts? Oh! that I could enflame you with proper ambition. Your honour, your character, your happiness, your well-being, all, all are at stake, and involved in the question at issue. And it is for you to retrieve or acknowledge that your fathers have been slaves deservedly.

First, my young friends, let me invite you to *the path of virtue*. It is a straight, open path, strewed with the sweetest aromatics: it is the path of pleasure, the path of honour, the path of respectability. Vice, from which I would call you, is its opposite;

it is a crooked, thorny way, full of stinking weeds, the path of trouble, debasement, misery, and destruction.

Next, I would invite you to the *study of the sciences*. Here lies an open field of pleasure, that is increased at every step you take therein. If you have labour, be assured that your compensation is infinite. It has been the policy of white men, to give you a high opinion of your advancement, when you have made but smattering attainments. They know that a little education is necessary, for the better accomplishing the menial services you are in the habit of performing for them. They do not wish you to be equal with them—much less superior. Therefore, in all advancements they assist in (I speak of them generally) they will take care that you do not rise above mediocrity.

My young friends, it is a laudable ambition that prompts us to the highest standing in literature. Is there any thing noble or praiseworthy obtained by sneaking conduct? Why look up to others, when we may obtain the highest standing ourselves? There is a height of knowledge which you may easily attain to, that when arrived at, you will look down with amazement, at the depth of ignorance you have risen from. I am sorry to say it; but I speak with the intention to quicken you, that *properly speaking*, there is none learned among us. If there is, now is the time to show themselves; it is worse than felony to keep back. It is too true, that men of prime genius among us, that have possessed high talents for improvement, have suffered improper considerations to keep them down. Therefore, my young friends, I look to you, and pray you, by all that *proper pride* you feel in being men, that you show yourselves such, by performing acts of worth equal with other men. Why not form yourselves into literary companies,

for the study of the sciences? The expense would not be as great as you incur for useless gratifications, beside the advantage of receiving pleasure, infinitely beyond what those gratifications afford.

I would now turn to the female part of this assembly, particularly the young. *It is for you to form the manners of the men.* My female friends, it is for you, not by proud, but modest conduct, to lead them in the true line of decorum and gentle manners. First, I would have you discountenance that loud vocability of gabble, that too much characterizes us in the street: I would look upon him, or her, that hailed me with too loud, or vulgar accents, as one who had forgot what is due to female modesty. Next, and most of consequence, I would have you prefer his affections and company most, who endeavours most to improve his mind. If you give preference to men of understanding, depend on it, they will endeavour to make themselves suitable to your wishes. But above all, endeavour *to improve your own minds.* I know that in the ability to improve, you are more than a match for white females, in all proper female education. Here, let me close, with our best thanks and wishes to the State of New-YORK.