

GOD'S DEALING WITH THE AFRICAN RACE.

"God's Dealing with Nations and Peoples, and the Lessons it Teaches," is the title of a valuable sermon, founded on Isaiah, lxi: 7, preached in the Methodist Church, Monrovia, Liberia, at the Anniversary of the Liberian Missionary Society, January 21, 1867, by the Rev. Alexander Crummell, B. A.

The doctrine maintained is that while there are peoples whom God destroys, there are races whom He chastises, but at the same time preserves. Among the former may be cited the ancient Canaanites and Egyptians, and the Indians of America and the New Zealanders of the present day. The more gracious dealings with the nations is exemplified with the children of Israel for four hundred years in Egypt and during the Babylonish captivity, and the sons of Africa in the land of their servitude for nigh three centuries, to mould them for the creation of character and fitting them for duty.

We publish the gifted author's conclusions concerning the future of the race with which he and his auditors are connected, and its bearing upon missionary efforts in that race, certain that their own merit and the reputation of the speaker will procure general perusal.

SERMON BY REV. ALEXANDER CRUMMELL.

I wish now to seize upon some of the clear teachings which come from the train of thought thus presented, which may be made to tell more or less powerfully upon the work before us in this country.

And here two or three questions at once arise:

Is the *Negro race a race doomed to destruction?* Or is this one of the races in the possession of those qualities, and subjected to that sort of moral discipline, which augurs a vital destiny, and high moral uses for God and man, in the future?

To the first of these questions I reply that there is not a fact which is pertinent to this subject, but what gives a most distinct and decisive negative.

It is now nigh four hundred years from the days of Columbus, since the breath of the civilized world touched powerfully, and in some cases for the first time, the mighty masses of the pagan world in America, Africa, and the Isles of the sea.

And almost everywhere, the weak heathen tribes of earth have gone down before the civilized European. Nation after nation has departed before his presence and his power; tribe after tribe! In America the catalogue of these disastrous eclipses overruns, not only dozens, but even scores of cases. Gone, never again to take rank among the tribes of men, are the Iriquois, the Mohogans and Pequods, the Manhattans and Algonquins, the brave Mohawks, the gentle Caribs, and the once refined Atzees!

In the Pacific seas, islands are scattered abroad as stars bestrew the heavens; but the sad fact maintains, that from some of them, the population has departed like the morning mist; and in others, as in the Sandwich Islands, they have long since begun their

“Funeral marches to the grave!”

But how is it with the Negro? Wave after wave of a destructive and malignant tempest has passed over his head, without impairing aught of his vitality. Nay, in some respects, the Negro, in certain localities, is a superior man to day, to what he was three hundred years ago. With an elasticity which has but one parallel in all human history, he has risen superior to the dread infliction of a prolonged servitude, and stands this day, in all the lands of his painful thralldom, taller, more erect, more intelligent, more aspiring than any of his ancestors for more than two thousand years of a previous era. And while, in other lands, even in cultivated India, the native has been subjected to a foreign yoke, and foreign rule sways a many-millioned population, the Negro races of Africa still retain their birthright; their soil has not passed into the possession of foreign people; many of the native kingdoms stand this day upon the same basis of power which they held centuries ago; and the adventurous traveller, as he presses further and further into the interior, sends us the report of populous cities, superior people, and vast kingdoms, subject to law and government, given to enterprise, and engaged in manufactures, agriculture, and commerce!

Nay, even this falls short of the full and encouraging reality; for civilization has displaced ancestral heathenism, at numerous spots, as well in the interior, as on the West Coast of Africa; and the standard of the Cross uplifted on the banks of its rivers at important native cities, and at the great seats of commercial activity, shows that the ambassadors of Christ have commenced the conquest of the continent for their glorious King.

Vital power, then, is a property of the Negro, and thus forecasts a future for him.

But has the Negro any of those other qualities, and, such a *number* of them, as warrants expectation of superiority in the future? Are plasticity, or receptivity, or imitation, prime elements of his nature? Of all human beings the Negro is by far the most plastic. He has a nature more easily moulded than

any other of the races of men. Unlike the stolid Indian, he yields to circumstance and flows with the current of events. Impassible, nay, sensitive, even to a fault, he allows every occurrence more or less to tell upon both his inner and outer nature. Hence the fact that the most terrible afflictions are unable to crush him. His facile nature wards them off, or else through the inspirations of hope, neutralizes their influences. Hence also the pliancy with which, and without losing his own peculiar traits, he runs into the character of other people; thus bending adverse circumstances to his own convenience; and thus also, in a measurable degree, linking the fortunes of his superior to his own fate and destiny.

What I have just said implies another of the prime qualities of a hopeful nationality, I mean *imitation*. This trait is universally conceded to the negro; conceded, however, with the imputation of it as an evidence of inferiority. But Burke tells us that "Imitation" is the second passion belonging to society. "This passion" he says, "arises from much the same cause as sympathy. This forms our manners, our opinions, our lives. It is one of the strongest links of society."* This may be seen in the fact that all civilization is carried down from generation to generation, or handed over from the superior to the inferior, by the means of the principle of imitation, based on sympathy. A people devoid of this passion are incapable of improvement, and not only must stand still, unprogressive, but by another law of nature, which makes progress a condition of vitality, *must* go down and perish; for stagnation necessitates decay and ruin. Thus through his stolidity and rigid self-consciousness, has followed the inevitable failure of the American Indian. On the other hand the Negro, with his pliable and plastic nature, with a greed of absorption, which in fact is the principle of RECEPTIVITY; seizes upon, and makes over to himself, by imitation, the qualities of others. First of all observe, that by a spontaneous, native assimilation, he reduplicates himself by becoming the like of the people to whom he is subject. He is always characteristically the negro; but among Frenchmen, he becomes the lively and sardonic Frenchman; among Americans, the keen, enterprising, progressive American; among Spaniards, the stately, solemn Spaniard; among Englishmen, the phlegmatic, and solid Englishman.

This quality of transmutation has preserved the Negro in all the lands of his thralldom from the deadly strokes of adverse destiny. Its wonderful bearing upon his destiny, with respect, especially to the Negro's future distinction in art, is not germane to the subject before us; but we can clearly see from the train of remark I have presented, that this quality of imitation, with that of receptivity, to which it is somewhat akin, give promise of great fitness for civilization, and the process of evangelization in the faith of Jesus. But you will observe, second, that not only does the Negro easily imitate, but in imitating he takes in the greatest. Placed as a vassal, in juxtaposition with both the Indian and Caucasian, his nature rejects despair, draws him off from the downward tendencies of the Indian, and prompts him to reach up to the

* Burke, on "The Sublime and Beautiful."—Lect. xvi.

superiority of the progressive race. Thus everywhere, where the Negro has been in a servile position, however severe, however aggravated their position, yet always their capacity and talent have

—“Glinted forth
Amid the storm;”

preserving the exiles of Africa, wherever carried as captives, from utter annihilation; and in every case producing men who have shown respectable talent as mechanics and artizans, as soldiers in armies, as citizens in the state, not unfrequently as artists, not seldom as scholars, repeatedly as ministers of the Gospel, and at times, as scientific men and men of letters.

Only one more question is needed to test the fact whether the case of the Negro answers the conditions I laid down, as arguing the providential preservation of a people for future moral uses.

Has the Negro been placed in a state of special probation, signifying the purposes of correction and improvement, and thereby disciplining him for his special mission; and in such cases, has he discovered any of the *moral* qualities to which I have already referred?

What else, I ask, can be the significance of the African slave-trade and Negro slavery since the year 1620? Surely terrible as it has been, it has not been the deadly hurricane portending death. *Such* providences are quick, short, decisive. But this has been long continued and protracted. During this period, although wide-spread death, great cruelty, and awful suffering have been large features in the history of the Negro; nevertheless they have been overshadowed by the merciful facts of great natural increase, much intellectual progress, the gravitation to them of an unexampled and world-wide philanthropy, singular religious susceptibility and progress; and generous, wholesale emancipation, inclusive of millions of men, women, and children!

This history, then, does not signify retribution. It is most plainly disciplinary and preparative. It is the rod of chastisement; the education which comes from trial and endurance; for with it has been connected more or less the greater moral education of the native religious tendencies of the Negro, and of those strong family feelings which all travellers accord to him.

Here, then, are the several conditions, the characteristic peculiarities, which have ever indicated the continuance and the progress of peoples. In all other histories it has always been assumed that they forecasted greatness. I see no reason why, in this case, we should reject their teachings, and refuse their encouragements, and inspirations. I feel fortified moreover in the principles I have set forth to day, by the opinion of great scrutinizing thinkers. In his Treatise on Emancipation, written in 1834, Dr. Channing says, “The Negro is one of the best races of the human family. The Negro is among the mildest and gentlest of men. He is singularly susceptible of improvement from abroad.”* Alexander Kinmont declares that “the sweeter graces of the Christian religion appear almost too tropical and tender plants to grow in the soil of the Caucasian mind; they require a character of human nature,

* “Emancipation,” a Tract, by Wm. Ellery Channing, D.D.

of which you can see the rude lineaments in the Ethiopian, to be implanted in, and grow naturally and beautifully withal." * Adanson, the traveller, who visited Senegal in 1754, said, "The Negroes are sociable, humane, obliging, and hospitable; and they have generally preserved an estimable simplicity of domestic manners. They are distinguished by their tenderness for their parents, and great respect for the aged; a patriarchal virtue, which in our day, is too little known." The following is the opinion of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Esq.: "In the great anthem, which we call history, a piece of many parts and vast compass, after playing a long time a very low and subdued accompaniment, they (the Negro) perceive the time arrived when they can strike in with effect and take a master's part in the music. The civilization of the world has reached that pitch, that their moral genius is becoming indispensable, and the quality of the race is to be honored for itself. For this, they have been preserved in sandy deserts, in rice-swamps, in kitchens, and shoe shops, so long. Now let them emerge, clothed, and in their own form." †

Says, Rev. Dr. Raleigh, at a recent meeting in London: "There is in these people a hitherto undiscovered mine of love, the development of which will be for the amazing welfare of the world. Avenues are opening in Africa through these people! In helping them we touch the gates of a continent—the spring of an entire race! Greece gave us beauty; Rome gave us power; the Anglo-Saxon race unites and mingles these; but in the African people there is the great, gushing wealth of love, which will develop wonders for the world." ‡

Dr. Livingstone, the lamented traveller, and Speke, who have both penetrated the interior of Africa, give precisely the same testimony concerning the inner tribes of the continent, with respect to their amiable qualities, and the existence of simple primitive morals and manners.

I. We have seen to day the great truth, that when God does not destroy a people, but on the contrary, trains, chastizes, and disciplines them, it is a sign that He intends to make something of them, and to do something by them. God is interested in such people. In a sense, not equal indeed, but parallel, in a lower degree, to the case of the Jews, such a people, are a "chosen people" of God. There is, so to speak, a covenant relation which God has established between himself and them; dim and partial, at first, in its manifestations; but which, in the times to come, is sure to come out to the sight of men and angels, clear, distinct, and luminous. You may take it as a most sure and undoubted fact, that God will preside with sovereign care over such a people, and will surely preserve, educate, and build them up.

II. The discussion of this morning teaches us that this Negro race, of which we are a part, and which, as yet in great simplicity, in large numbers, and in numerous tribes surrounds us, discovers most exactly in its history, this very

* "Lectures on Man," by Alexander Kinmont.

† "The Emancipation of the Negroes in the British West Indies, an Address delivered at Concord, Mass., August 1, 1841, by R. W. Emerson."

‡ The American Missionary, for December, 1836.

principle. I have stated, and we have in this fact, the assurance that God is interested in all the great problems of civilization and of grace which are carrying on in this race in every quarter. All this is verity, and, indeed, God's work. You need not entertain the shadow of a doubt, that the work we are doing here, and which is carried on elsewhere among black men, is for the elevation and the success of the Negro. This is the significance, and the worth of all effort, and all achievements here; or otherwise all the labor of men is vanity. Nothing, believe me, on earth, nothing brought from hell, can keep back this destined superiority of the Negro. No conspiracies of men or devils can prevent it. The slave-trade could not crush it out. Slavery, dread, direful, and malignant could only stay it for a time. But now it is coming. The Negro, black, curly-headed, despised, repulsed, sneered at, is a vital being, and irrepressible. Everywhere on earth he shows reviving power; everywhere has been given him by the Almighty, self-assertion and influence. The rise of two Negro States within a century, has a bearing upon this subject which each one of you can judge of for himself. Thus, also the numerous emancipations, which now leave scarcely more than a chain or two behind to be unfastened! Thus, too the rise in the world of the illustrious Negroes, as Toussaint l'Ouverture, Henry Christophe Eustace, the philanthropist, Stephen Allen Benson, and Bishop Crowther!

III. I remark that Africa, the home of the Negro, seems most certainly the grand field on which God intends to tender the Negro the fullest recompenses of favor and of honor, for all the past of his suffering and reproach. In the distant lands of his past thralldom, he shall indeed emerge from darkness and degradation, and come forth into the full sunlight of manhood, citizenship, and noble position. But Africa is the grand theatre of his future civilization and glory; and *here* he shall receive the noblest marks of the divine favor; and be led to work out the grandest achievement of genius and of grace. There is a literalness in the prophecy which singularly tallies with the manifest course of providence with respect to Africa and the Negro race:—"In their land they shall possess the double." In foreign lands the Negro is indeed rapidly, nay, marvellously receiving recompense for centuries of wrong; freedom and education and citizenship, the loving regards of repentant oppressors, and the signal favors of God; but with all their franchises they are only *collateral* populations abroad—whether in Brazil, or the West Indies, or the United States. On the continent of Africa they are *AT HOME*; and here all the streams of beneficence are emphatically for themselves. Chiefly is this the case with respect to the propagation of the Gospel. In this God manifests His purpose that His word shall, ere long, flood the land. There is a holy eagerness among the churches of the earth for the possession of Africa, which is only equalled by apostolic fervor. They act as though the words of the prophet were specially addressed to them; and perhaps they are, "Go ye swift messengers to a nation scattered and peeled, to people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled!"* And they come. They come from every quarter

* Isaiah, xviii. 2.

and to every point of the continent, seeking entrance; up the Nile on the East, and at Zanzibar; through Egypt, seeking the Lake regions, the Abyssinians, and the Gallus from the Cape, endeavoring to reach the crowded populations of the South; on the West, Bishop Crowther has already ascended the Niger with his goodly company of priests, and deacons, and catechists, already gained the ear and heart of great chieftains and powerful kings, for the evangelization of their people; while the Germans in Accra, and the English at Sierra Leone, are advancing interiorward from their several stations.

We see then somewhat the work of God, at no distant future. Christ evidently intends, ere long, to possess the natives of this continent. The day of Satan's rule has well nigh come to an end; and the false prophet too will soon have to yield his grasp upon the powerful tribes which he has conquered. Neither morass, nor malignant fever, nor pestilential swamps, nor malignant slave-trader, can longer keep back the entrance of the Cross of Christ. Ere many years, perchance ere many months, it will be planted on the heights of the Kong Mountains, or on the summits of the Cammeroons, or the Killimandjero. There the adventurous missionaries with their divers gifts—Americans, Englishmen, and Germans, with Negroes of America, the West Indies, and African born, will trench themselves; and from their lofty stations in cool regions—from their schools and seminaries, send out their scores and hundreds of priests and teachers, to enlighten states and kingdoms, now sitting in darkness, in the lowlands and in the valleys.

To this august work, the people of Liberia are specially called by the instincts of race, the promptings of religious zeal, and the providence of God; and most gracious and peculiar is your privilege; and I pray God the Holy Spirit for this Society, that the members thereof may see most clearly the noble vocation to which they are called; see that in this vocation, they are co-workers with God; and may zealously go forward to hasten "the day of the Lord" in this, the land of our forefathers!