

A

SEMI-CENTENARY DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN

THE FIRST AFRICAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA,

ON THE FOURTH SABBATH OF MAY, 1857:

WITH

A HISTORY

OF THE CHURCH FROM ITS FIRST ORGANIZATION:

INCLUDING

A BRIEF NOTICE OF REV. JOHN GLOUCESTER, ITS FIRST PASTOR.

BY REV. WILLIAM T. CATTO,
PASTOR.

ALSO,

AN APPENDIX,

Containing sketches of all the Colored Churches in Philadelphia.

PHILADELPHIA:
JOSEPH M. WILSON,
No. 111 SOUTH TENTH STREET, BELOW CHESTNUT.

1857.

2609

NOTICE.

On motion of REV. DR. BOARDMAN, it was

Resolved, "That the Presbytery have learned, with satisfaction, that the Rev. Wm. T. Catto has prepared for publication an account of the FIRST AFRICAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, and cordially recommend his historical sketch to the patronage of all who feel interested in the religious welfare of the colored population of our country."

A true extract from the *Minutes of the Presbytery of Philadelphia*, at their session in West Spruce Street Church, Philadelphia, July 6, 1857.

Attest: DANIEL GASTON,
Stated Clerk.

that it was found necessary to make a strong effort to secure a building. Consequently, on July 31, 1809, the congregation appointed a committee to wait upon the Evangelical Society, and confer upon some plan whereby a house of worship could be secured. This committee met the society, and made their business known. With a promptness truly Christian the society at once appointed a similar committee to meet the committee from the colored people on the subject. After due consideration was had upon the matter, the committee from the Evangelical Society made to that body so favorable a report that the society ordered the following address to be signed by the President and published, and which I now insert not only because it may be regarded as a relic of that early day of Presbyterianism in Philadelphia, but of the excellent and Christ-like spirit that it contains.

At a meeting of "The Evangelical Society of Philadelphia," held July 31st, 1809, the committee appointed to confer with a committee from the people of color on the subject of erecting a house of worship for their use, made a report which was approved, and the following address ordered to be signed by the President and published.

TO THE PIOUS AND BENEVOLENT.

The attention of the pious and benevolent is now called to a consideration of the condition of the people of color, in this city, as it relates to the means of religious instruction. The population of this description of people has of late become very numerous amongst us, and is daily rapidly increasing. The education of most of them has been extremely defective; and many have come here with habits very little compatible with the peace and good order of civil society. Your officers of police, your guardians of the poor, your justices of the peace, your criminal courts, your prisons and work-houses, can

all attest, how much need there is of a reformation among the blacks of this place. This degraded state of manners cannot justly be attributed to any national inferiority, but must be entirely ascribed to the circumstance of a great part of them having so lately emerged from a state of abject slavery calculated to paralyze every noble faculty of the mind, and extinguish every moral sentiment; but every day furnishes us with increasing evidence, that the African race is not inferior to the inhabitants of the other quarters of the world, either in the natural endowments of the understanding or the heart.

It cannot be denied that there are many exceptions to the general remarks which have been made, respecting the degraded state of the people of color in this place. It is well known and must afford pleasure to every benevolent person, that there are some of them, who, in respect to intellect and moral improvement, rank high among their fellow citizens: but these are among the first to acknowledge and deplore the wretched situation of a large porportion of the people of color. And it deserves to be mentioned to their praise, that they have lately instituted a society, the express object of which, is to ameliorate the condition of their brethren *according to the flesh*, by the suppression of vice and the communication of moral and religious instruction among them. And will not every friend of virtue and good order among the whites, lend his aid in promoting this good work? Are we not bound by every consideration, of justice, of charity, of humanity, and of self-interest, to give our best assistance towards civilizing and reforming this numerous and increasing class of inhabitants? And what means so effectual for this purpose as the faithful preaching of the Gospel? The restraints of civil law are acknowledged to be salutary and necessary, and the influence of public opinion on the conduct of men is not to be despised; but after exhausting all our ingenuity in planning schemes of reformation, *the preaching of the Gospel* will maintain its importance, as the most successful and only effectual means of producing radical reformation among men. But in speaking of the good effects of the Christian religion, it would be unpardonable to confine our views to the present world. Its chief praise, is, that it is "able to make men wise unto salvation." Shall we, then, who profess a religion whose very essence is benevolence, be indifferent to the eternal salvation of our fellow men? Shall we suffer them to perish through "lack of knowledge," when it is so much in our power to supply them with the means of instruction? And that too when we have been accessary, as a people, in bringing them into their present wretched situa-

tion. The injury which has been done to this race of people by tearing them away from their friends and native country, and subjecting them and their posterity to a heavy yoke of bondage, cannot now be fully repaired ; but that which was originally a crime of the most crying injustice and oppression, may, under the direction of a gracious Providence, prove eventually to be a blessing of the first magnitude, by bringing them in reach of the Gospel of Christ. But let us as far as it can be done, by acts of benevolence and charity to these people, wipe away the stain of our injustice ; or at least obliterate the remembrance of it.

There are already, it is true, several African churches occupied by different denominations ; but these are by no means sufficient for the accommodation of the thousands of people of color who now inhabit this city. It is believed, after some examination of the subject, that more than one-half of them are in no connection with any religious society, and seldom attend any place of public worship.

Besides, there are many, who, from education or principle, are attached to the Presbyterian Church. These find it to be inconvenient and unpleasant, for reasons which need not now be stated, to attend the houses of worship frequented by the white people. They are anxious to form a Presbyterian congregation among themselves, and they ought to be assisted and encouraged (*particularly by those who are connected with that denomination*), to carry their wishes into effect. And now a most favorable opportunity for accomplishing this object has occurred, which if suffered to pass without improvement, may not soon return. There is at this time in Philadelphia, a man of color, who is a licensed preacher of the Presbyterian Church, and has been employed by the committee of missions, to labor for some time among the blacks of this place. This man appears to be eminently qualified for extensive usefulness among the people of his own color. He has already attracted their attention and affections in a high degree. And if a place of worship sufficiently large, and conveniently situated, could be obtained, there can be very little doubt but what, in a short time, he would be able, by the divine blessing, to collect and organize a large society.

This object is so important, and the opportunity of carrying it into effect so favorable, that it is deemed unnecessary to add anything more by way of recommendation. There are many, it is believed, who need no stimulus to excite them to step forward with their aid : and it is confidently expected, that very few to whom application shall be made, will refuse their contribution ; and although it be but

a *mite*, yet it will not be overlooked by Him who appreciates a gift not so much by the amount bestowed, as by the willingness of the giver.

It is contemplated, as soon as sufficient funds can be collected, to purchase a convenient lot in the southwest part of Philadelphia, and to erect on it a house of worship, either slight and temporary, or substantial and permanent, accordingly as circumstances may dictate.

The public are therefore informed that within a few days, some persons duly authorized by the people of color, and others interested in their behalf, will begin to solicit the aid of the pious and benevolent to carry the object above stated into effect.

Resolved, That the money to be subscribed for the foregoing purpose shall be made payable to Messrs. ROBERT RALSTON, JOHN M'MULLIN, and FRANCIS MARKOE, who will stand pledged to the contributors for the faithful application of the funds to their destined object.

ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER,

President.

The subscribers, Pastors of Presbyterian churches in the city of Philadelphia, cheerfully and cordially concur with the president and their fellow members of the Evangelical Society, in earnestly recommending to the pious and liberal, the patronage of the design set forth in the preceding address, of erecting another church in this city for the accommodation and spiritual advantage of the people of color.

ASHBEL GREEN,
JACOB J. JANEWAY,
JAMES P. WILSON,
GEORGE C. POTTS.

In view of the circular being published, permit me to remark that this congregation was not a wealthy one, there were but few persons in it who were able to contribute any very considerable amount of money. The larger part by far could do but little in a monetary point of view; they wanted a house of worship, and they felt the necessity of it; they were willing, it is true, to do what they could, but willingness, however commendable, is not ability. All were ardent to have