CLAIMS OF AFRICA
ON THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

The condition of the Africans, both those imported into the United States, and those who are born here, demand the kind attention of our citizens and nation. Whatever may be said, on the one hand, of their animal comfort, contentment and social attachments, by way of extenuation; or whatever details of sufferings, real and imaginary, may be suggested on the other hand, by way of aggravation, on this subject, they are wronged, they are suffering privations and wrongs continually in this land of boasted and unequaled freedom. Every where, throughout our country, they are in a state of degradation and disability. Not only in the slaveholding states, where they are in bondage perpetual, from generation to generation, but in the free states, even in those which have placed them on perfect equality in civil privileges with the whites, they are in duress as to the exercise of the noblest powers of our nature: they are debarred from the improvement of their civil and social rights, on account of associations connecting their character and rank with slavery, the base purpose for which they were introduced among us. Not only this, but worse than whites in the same circumstances, who might be liberated
and imperceptibly mingle with the community, these are prevented from virtuous intercourse of this sort, on account of the degrading associations we have named, which are unavoidably perpetuated by national and physical marks, distinguishing the African from all other branches of the human family. They can never rise in this nation to a perfect equality with the whites, while the laws of God, regulating our preceptive and intellectual powers, continue to form our taste and character. The experiment has been in operation above a half century, and in numberless results, during that time, has confirmed the opinion, that here they can not rise. Should their warmest professed friends agree to unite with them and cast their lot in every social tie among them: were they willing to use such a privilege, it would not only prove an enormous sacrifice of comfort; but it would turn to no good account in their day, nor in that of their children for many generations after them. However the ambitious colored man may be deceived and deluded by suggestions of his equality with all the members of the human family, as it regards our natural and unalienable rights, he has every evidence which can be had in the case, that his elevation to the enjoyment of such equality in this nation is hopeless. Whatever talents he may have received from God his Maker; whatever attainments he may have made by the culture of these talents, however great his qualification for eminent usefulness; all must be worse than wasted, if he wait, or attempt to improve them in conjunction with a people by whom his race is viewed with unavoidable associations of degradation. The ambition, or the feeling, by whatever softer appellation it may be called, which confines
a man to such a hopeless sphere of effort, while another of higher, yea of highest usefulness and comfort might be improved, will receive its own reward. I would not speak of the colored people among us by way of disparagement. No man, possessing the sympathies of our common nature, can view their condition without emotions very different from those which prompt the language of reproach. We are called by every consideration that awakens the kindest feelings, to attend to their estate in the spirit of Him Who descended from heaven to earth and went about doing good. We are under the highest obligations to do so.

Let us cast our eyes over the length and breadth of our land—behold the colored man everywhere degraded and oppressed. Occasionally one and another, by industry, temperance, economy and talents, far above the rank of multitudes who have arrived at great eminence, have succeeded in mercantile, naval, mechanical and other occupations open to all men; have become respectable, as far as skill and means of living secure respect; yet for the want of that relief and liberty which alone can ensure to them a continuous ascent and which they can not have in this country, their course is arrested, their career is prematurely terminated, and rarely, if ever, is there a successor of their own family to stand in their place. Instances of such emergence, we acknowledge, are rare in comparison with the census of this population. Perhaps they occur as frequently in their case as they would in any other branch of the human race in the same circumstances. They do occur, they arrest the attention of the observing; by the struggles and disappearance of many individuals of them under the rolling waves of the
adverse element around them, they awake the sympathies of those of us who are yet capable of feeling. They occur with sufficient frequency to teach us what this people might do, how much good they would effect, if they were placed in circumstances like our own. The great mass of their population going down in fruitless toils, in poverty, in vice and misery, the invariable lot of human nature in their condition, present to our view a race in dreadful desolation.

Their condition demands our serious attention. They are sufferers, who, in their native land, have fallen into the hands of thieves that have plundered, robbed, wounded and nearly destroyed them. They are in our midst, and plead everywhere, by their sufferings, for relief at our hands. God demands their relief from us, not only on that plain, golden, heavenly principle, Love thy neighbor as thyself; and, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: but on the principle of righteous restitution for injuries ourselves have inflicted, for sorest privations which we have effected.

True, indeed, the plan of robbing Africa of her children and making them bondmen and bondwomen to the covetous and the lazy on the newly discovered continent, was formed and carried into effect, long before our nation existed. It had been practised for ages before the embryo thought of a new nation and empire had entered the mind of the American people. The merchandize in human beings stolen and torn from their homes and from the bosoms of afflicted parents; and carried away into the remotest parts of the earth, to be in merciless bondage from generation to generation; had been encouraged by nations; sanctioned by civil law;
approved by ecclesiastical counsels and by the opinion of those who in their day had been esteemed wise and good, for ages in succession: Yea, it had been practised by many who were called the excellent of the earth, for many generations before our nation and people understood, asserted, and by a seven years' war, established their right as men, and their independence as freemen. In all that course of abuse and cruelty towards the Africans we had no part, we contracted no guilt, and so far as our sufferings flow solely from those transactions, we can truly say, *The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.* But the puritanic principles of rights and liberty had entered our land, had enlightened and pervaded the people of this country generally, before we became a nation. They had furnished subjects of discussion, for debate, for correspondence, and had been investigated with great diligence. They were so well understood in relation to slavery and the slave trade, that for the hostility of the whole system to our natural and unalienable rights, as well as for the injury it inflicts on a slave holding people, efforts were used in the colonies by remonstrances and other communications with the mother country to have her desist from allowing, and forbid the further introduction of slaves among them.

Such was the light received on this subject, such too was the character of public opinion and conscience about it, that the continuance of the slave trade and slavery in the New Nation was deprecated, was boldly and earnestly resisted. But the southern colonies, which had grown up under the influence of this system, saw it had so interwoven itself with all their domestic, social and civil relations, and even with
their calculations of economy and their personal habits, that it seemed they could not exist without it. According to their honest opinions, their avowed principles, and their views of man's natural and unalienable rights, adopted, published and assumed as the true and only basis of civil government, they pronounced the institution of slavery radically and wholly wrong. Yet as they supposed the abolition of it would prove to themselves a suicide, they would remain separate and independent states, rather than consent to abolish it. The discerning even in the slave states were aware that the system had the virus of a cancer, and if continued must eat out all that is sound and healthful in the body politic. But the mass of the community, who are affected more by present inconvenience and danger than by any thing remote, could not be brought to see or to apprehend the evil, and therefore could not be influenced to give their consent to the measure. In such circumstances there are not wanting men who will see and understand only as the people do, and those too who have talents for great achievements in public councils. The alternative was, a dismembered, unconfederated body of states with slavery beyond remedy, or a confederated nation of states with a limited allowance of slavery and the slave trade, and the hope well understood and expressed, that the whole system should be done away when the views and feelings of the nation had become more enlightened and uniform, more correct and elevated, by the influence of their republican institutions. They were constrained to choose the latter and allow the limited continuance of slavery.

The prevailing, unprejudiced views of the people gene-
rally were so opposed to the system, and the incongruity of its allowance was so palpable, when compared with their public declaration of rights and with the genius of their proposed republic, that the framers of the federal compact could not embody it in that instrument with the hope of its acceptance and adoption by the states, without concealment and disguise. It was therefore artfully introduced into the constitution in places of unsuspected association, and was expressed in terms ambiguous. And this was so thoroughly done, that unless a man were aware of the existence of such an evil, he would not suppose, in the reading of that compact, that in it any attention at all had been particularly paid to the subject of slavery. It is introduced in connection with the principle of taxation and the right of suffrage, and the immigration of foreigners into our national domain, and all in the first article of the constitution. In Sec. II. 3d Clause, it is in the following words, viz. "Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states which may be included within this union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three-fifths of all other persons." In the IX Sec. 1st Clause, the subject is embraced in the following words, viz., "The immigration or importation of such persons as any of the states now existing, shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the congress prior to the year eighteen hundred and eight; but a tax or duty may be imposed on such importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each person." On these parts of
the constitution, and on the necessity and manner of their admission into it, no comments will be made. The discussions and debates on the subject in congress, which were then necessarily private, have since been printed, and the views of those who framed that instrument have also been published by these men in various ways. They teach us what appalling difficulties were to be encountered in those times; what sacrifices were indispensable to encourage the hope of success; and what calmness and forbearance were necessary to the success of their wisest measures. After the detection of all the imperfections that can be found by minds most excited and scrutinizing in our valuable federal compact, the authors of it abundantly merit the gratitude and veneration which our nation pays to their memory on the anniversary of our independence, and in other ways of expressing their high estimation of it. Would to God! we had more of their wisdom in this age!

The parts of our national constitution which have been quoted above, whether intentionally put in the peculiar form and spirit they possess, or whether so ordered without their intention by Him in whose hand are the hearts of all men, constitute the basis of the obligation of the United States to make restitution to the imported Africans, with their descendants in this country, and of the righteous claim which, in the sight of God and of all nations, they have on our citizens and nation, for indemnity. Our constitution has sanctioned, to the fullest extent, the slave trade and slavery amongst us. The people have formally as independent states, by their individual votes as citizens, by their municipal or state legislations, and unitedly by the enactments of
their national legislature, applied their seal of approbation to it in all its spirit, its parts and provisions. We have cast the shield of the nation over the whole system, including not only, as limited by the significant terms of our federal compact, the states then existing, but others afterwards admitted; and for the purpose of traffic till the year 1808, including both Africa and the Ocean. And for the price of ten dollars tax on every imported African, we have till that date pledged protection to every slave dealer and vender, and to every slave holder, for ever, unless unitedly we consent to amend the constitution.

The obligation rests, therefore, on the people and nation—the claim is against them. Their public and national acts have sanctioned the system, have given value to the lure of gain connected with it, and by their pledge have enlisted and elicited the enterprize of millions in the business. However wrong and abominable the whole may be and truly is, the individuals who have traded till 1808, and those who at present hold them in states which authorize the practice, are under no responsibility, by the laws of men. Before God the nation and slave dealers are responsible, and by his laws they are verily guilty, whatever human laws may allow or even sanction to the contrary. Though it be a sin of ignorance, they are not innocent. As part of the nation they must meet the retributions of time, and as individuals, if impenitent, they shall meet the retributions of eternity from the Sovereign of the universe. The individuals are left to answer for themselves at the bar of conscience, and at the bar of our final Judge. The considerate among them no doubt now feel, and more and more will feel, under the influence
of our common humanity as well as of conscience, their duty to attend to their servants as fellow men. As intellectual, social, moral and immortal beings, masters are bound to allow them instruction, the domestic state, the protection of their persons from every abuse, and the mutual influence of Christian intercourse and example. Although they have been involved in perplexing calamities unawares, they are not, on account of their ignorance, exempted from sufferings, nor will they escape other evils that are yet consequent. Their duty to deliver themselves and their children after them from impending calamities, and by every measure in their power to provide for the due improvement and happiness of their fellow members of the human family and for their own welfare, is obvious. They can not fail to feel themselves called by His authority who made all men equal, to use all their endeavors to put an end to the continuance of this wrong. But for that which has been done to the scattered and oppressed Africans, with their descendants, in effecting and continuing their degradation, they have a claim on the people and nation. Under the sanction of national law, they have a right to demand that the unrighteous revenue received by us in the slave trade, with the interest thereon, together with the amount of expense that may be incurred by the transmigration of as many of their number as shall be willing to move to the land of their fathers, or to any other country where they may enjoy the rights of man, be paid by our nation. When the offer of such restitution shall have been made and continued for the space of one generation, the claim will be answered, the debt will be cancelled. Those of the colored people who
have declared their preference to continue here, with all the consequences taught by their past experience, in full view; by refusing the offer, have themselves assumed the responsibility and have exonerated the nation for themselves and their posterity for ever.

The national compact in the beginning, when first we were formed into an independent sovereignty among the nations, and the national legislature, professedly founded on that compact, have toled the citizens of these states into their present condition as it regards the institution of slavery. And this has been effected by the most powerful of temptations—the hope of gain. Those who have been ensnared in this way are entitled to our sympathy instead of reproach and obloquy. Yea, it is unkind and unchristian to deal out against them indiscriminately reproach and railery. As members of the same body, all the citizens and states share in the sufferings which spring from this evil, and we ought in kindness and amity to seek the happiest and speediest relief.

Should an individual who had himself been guilty of man-stealing, in robbing Africa of one or more of her children, be convicted, by his own conscience of his guilt, and with strongest expressions of regret and repentance acknowledge the criminality and baseness of his conduct: Should he address himself in such language to the individuals whom he had so grievously wronged, and state to them the impossibility of their due elevation in this land; and should he offer them a conveyance to the land of their fathers, not in heathenism, but in Christian civilization equal to that of his own land, where they might enjoy privileges on perfect
equality with their neighbors, and of highest character; were this offer continually held out for their acceptance during their lives; who would hesitate to assert the integrity of such man stealer's regret and penitence? and in view of his conduct in this offer, who would not exonerate him from all further claim? Shall it be said, he ought to adopt them as children; amalgamate them in every respect with his kindred, though it should require a process of many generations to do away the marks of national character with its present associations? Let such, if they are capable of tracing all the sad consequences of the plan, consider and judge.—The return of this people to Africa and the distinguishing privileges afforded in Liberia, is an object of highest value for their attainment, and of noblest character for accomplishment by their best friends in behalf of all who desire to the return. A nation occupied with her swift ships in aiding transmigration of these strangers to a most desirable home, would furnish an expression of philanthropy full of kindest and of severest rebuke to all the world for what the nations have severally done towards each other—a spectacle of the highest sublimity. It would prove a course of labors and offerings acceptable to the Lord of the universe, and like all other acts of homage to Him, would be continuously profitable to the whole population by its moral influence. *He that watereth shall be watered also himself.*