

**COTTON CULTIVATION IN
AFRICA: SUGGESTIONS ON THE
IMPORTANCE OF THE
CULTIVATION
OF COTTON IN AFRICA. PP. 3 - 49**

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BENJAMIN COATES

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Cotton Cultivation in Africa.

SUGGESTIONS

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE

CULTIVATION OF COTTON IN AFRICA,

IN REFERENCE TO THE

ABOLITION OF SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES,

THROUGH THE ORGANIZATION OF AN

African Civilization Society.

BY

BENJAMIN COATES.

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PREFACE.

THE suggestions on the importance of the cultivation of cotton in Africa, as a measure calculated to effect the abolition of slavery in America, were presented originally to those more immediately interested in the success of the proposed measure. The practicability of the scheme was then supposed to have been clearly demonstrated. But that which a few years since might have been considered rather speculative, and, perhaps, by some even visionary, with the information then obtained, is now placed beyond all doubt; and the fact is established to the entire satisfaction of those who have labored so zealously for the accomplishment of the object—that cotton of superior quality, fully equal to the best grown in America, can be raised in Africa by free labor, in an unlimited quantity, and much cheaper than it can be produced by the expensive slave labor of the United States. In confirmation of this, we have the testimony of the celebrated African travellers, Barth, Livingstone, and Bowen, whose explorations have revealed the fact that nearly the whole continent of Africa is admirably adapted to the cultivation of cotton. That in many places it grows spontaneously, and that several kinds bloom all through the year, requiring only the labor of picking. They establish another fact scarcely less important, both to Africa and to the world, viz., that

most of the interior tribes are a very *industrious people*, not only willing, but glad to work for the smallest compensation. And that many of these natives are very intelligent, far superior in capacity, in morals, and industry to those on the coast, who have become demoralized in all respects by their intercourse with slave-traders.

In corroboration of this testimony, Thomas Clegg, of Manchester, England, a practical cotton spinner and large manufacturer, to whose indefatigable exertions the whole civilized world is much indebted for valuable information and experiments of the greatest importance to the cause of philanthropy and civilization, and the "Cotton Supply Association of Manchester," of which it is believed Mr. Clegg is a leading and active member, both give assurance of the value of this most important staple, and the cheapness at which it may be produced. Thus proving, beyond any doubt, that Africa possesses within herself all the means, not only for her own elevation and regeneration, but also for severing the bonds of slavery, to which her children are subjected in foreign lands.

It cannot be that any number of intelligent black men can be found who will shut out the claims of Africa to their sympathies; but with increased knowledge of the capabilities of the African continent, the great advantages it presents in many respects to enterprising colored emigrants from the United States, who can take with them the means for developing the resources of the country, and thus introduce in every successive year an improved civilization, must the interest in Africa increase.

The writer presents these remarks solely on his own responsibility; feeling a strong interest in the civilization and christianization of Africa, as well as in the welfare of the whole African race in the United States.

CULTIVATION OF COTTON IN AFRICA.

By the true philanthropist of the present day, whose sympathies are enlisted for the oppressed of all countries and of every race, any suggestion that may lead to even a partial improvement of their condition will be received with favor. And on the people of the United States chiefly rests the responsibility of discovering the best mode of emancipating four millions of bondmen in their midst; and of providing for their future welfare, when emancipated. This has been deemed so difficult a subject—so complex in its political, social, and economical bearings, that many well-disposed persons have been willing to pass it by, as a question to be solved by time, or by the superior wisdom of a future age; although aware that every successive year increases and strengthens the evil.

But there are some who believe that *the present* is the proper time for action, and that *they* have a duty to perform in this great work, that should not be neglected. To such it is desired to make a few suggestions, under a belief that, with proper effort, much may be done now to effect the desired result, and that measures may be commenced immediately, which will eventually, at no distant period, in a general emancipation, without violence of any kind, and without any collision with the laws of the land.

As slavery originated in the spirit of gain, by which alone it is still sustained, it is proposed to make use of the same agency to accomplish its overthrow. It is generally conceded that the profit derived from the culture of Cotton is the chief support of slavery in America, and this being the most vulnerable point, is that towards which the attack on the institution should be directed; for whatever shall prove available in making slave labor unprofitable, must of course cause the demand for that labor to cease. It is proposed to accomplish this result by means of the cultivation of cotton in Africa, with the use of free labor. As the soil of Africa is much more fertile than that of the United States, and is particularly adapted to the growth of cotton, the advantages in its favor must be apparent to the most superficial observer; for not only can all the best varieties at present cultivated in the United States, be more cheaply raised in Western or Central Africa, but there are several kinds indigenous to that continent, of superior quality, that have been highly approved in the English market. When it is remembered that this plant is perennial in Africa, and produces very much more than it does in America, where it must be planted annually, the superiority of the former over the latter will be very obvious; but in comparing the cost of labor in the two countries, the difference is still greater in favor of the free labor of Africa, over the slave labor of America.

To make this apparent to the most skeptical, it is only necessary to compare the value of slaves in Africa, with the market price of the same class of laborers in the United States. The foreign slave-traders usually pay from twenty to fifty dollars for each slave, in trade-goods, at an enormous profit; so that the *cash* value of a good field-hand may be safely estimated at from fifteen to twenty-five dollars; while the same laborer in America would cost from five hundred to one thousand

dollars. This comparison shows the real difference in the value of labor to be estimated in calculating the relative cost of the production of this important staple, the variation in the price of which so seriously affects our commercial prosperity as to make the information respecting it, of the first importance on every arrival from Europe. As this comparison, however, is only between slave labor in the two countries, and as the object of encouraging the increased production of cotton in Africa is to liberate the bondman there as well as here, some may be inclined to doubt whether the native African, in a state of freedom, can be so stimulated by the love of gain, and the hope of improving his condition, as to compete successfully with the compulsory labor used here. But it must be remembered how vast is the population of Africa, and that the employment of even a very small part of it, for a few hours each day, would give a greater amount of labor than that obtained by compulsion from the smaller number in the United States. And when we take into view, the difference in the cost of living, the exceeding productiveness of the soil, and that much less clothing is required in that tropical climate than with us, may we not reasonably calculate from these facts, that cotton, more than equal to the whole product of the United States, can be obtained from the free sons of Africa in their native land, at less than one-half of its present cost, while amply compensating the laborer, and, at the same time, greatly improving his condition in other respects? This plan is, then, simply to make the immense profits at present derived by the slave-trader from his iniquitous business, together with the great emolument accruing to the planter in the United States, from the unrequited labor of his slaves, both available to the African himself. And the same process that thus benefits the free laborer, as a necessary consequence, liberates the bondman in America, and emancipates the