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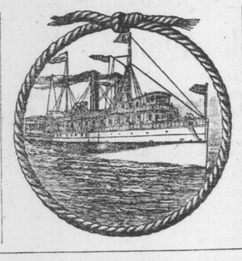

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A Reminiscence of Early Washington.

BY MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH.

(Concluded.)

I could not sleep. I did not even close my eyes. I lay staring at the strange, weird scene around me—the rough floor with the red fire-light coming up from the room below and shining through the gaps between the shrunken planks and striking here and there upon the bunches of coppery onions, red peppers and green or gray herbs hanging from the rough roof. The dried herbs were aromatic and filled the air of the loft with an agreeable odor. Presently another odor not altogether unpleasant mingled with it. Our bed stood immediately over the front of the fireplace below and with its head against the chimney. Through the cracks of the floor now came up the fumes of the good Maryland tobacco. By this I knew the old man was sitting by the fire smoking his pipe.

The hut was very still. I could hear the slightest sound below, as when the old man moved his feet, knocked the ashes out of his pipe or cleared his throat. I thought the woman must have retired, but I was mistaken, for presently I heard the man growl forth:

'Why the devil don't you go to bed, Peggy? What are you sittin' up and waitin' fur? This ain't no work for you, no how! Go to bed!'

'Oh, Luke, I couldn't compose myself, no how! I feel sort o' roused up! And I'm that uneasy 'bout the boys! They'll come to harm some night! Now mind, I tell you! No, I couldn't go to sleep now! answered the woman in a penetrating whisper.

'Couldn't, eh? Well, we'll see 'bout that!' muttered the man, as he got up and shuffled across the floor, made a rattling noise on the shelves and shuffled back, muttering:

'Here! drink this! This will put you to sleep sound enough, I bet you!'

'Oh, ain't it too much arter what I have took?' she murmured doubtfully.

'No! That's gone off! Drink this!'

Apparently the woman obeyed, for I heard her slight sigh; muffled movements and the creak of the bed as she dropped wearily upon it, moaning and muttering something inaudible about 'This here business.'

I heard the old man sink upon his chair, which also creaked, and then all was dead silence for some minutes that seemed hours to me. What was the old villain waiting for? What heinous, murderous crime was he contemplating? Was he expecting his confederates in crime? Jim Fice's band of desperadoes? What did he mean to do with us? If it was only robbery! But it might be murder! Oh, how I wished we had stayed out in the carry-all on the road and braved the storm! We might only have caught cold, but now we are caught like poor rabbits in a trap! Oh! it was fate! It was fate! And who can withstand fate! 'Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad,' said the wise man. Surely we were mad to come under any circumstances to such a place as this! A lonely hut in the thick woods far from any traveled road! And with the air alive with rumors of robberies, murders and violence of the most atrocious description! Oh! what had become of Aunt Sukey's prudence and Cousin Tommy's common sense? Here was Aunt Sukey sleeping as soundly as if there was not a Fice's band, or a murdered peddler, or a burned house heard off in the world! There was Tommy Sparks who had allowed himself to be sent out of the house to sleep in the shed with the horse, without a word of objection, and as if there were no women to protect! And where was the blunderbuss? In the possession of that old demon below, no doubt! If I could only get to Tommy Sparks and wake him! But I felt that if I attempted to do so I should never get past that old murderer alive! If I only dared to wake Aunt Sukey! But again in this instance I felt sure that if I should make any demonstration I should only precipitate a catastrophe! How soundly she slept! How awfully still the place was! I could have screamed in my nervousness! It would have relieved me to do so! But it would have been the signal for my death, and I forbore.

The old wretch below cleared his throat in a half suppressed way, yet it startled me like a war whoop! It sharpened all my terrors to acute agony. Oh! what was he waiting for? It was after midnight. It was already Christmas eve. What horrid thing was he waiting for? Jim Fice and his bloody band to help him to murder us and make away with our bodies before they should divide the booty! Yes! That was what he was waiting for! What ought I to do? Ah! what indeed could I do? Wake up Aunt Drake and make a dash down the ladder towards the door for dear life? Worse than useless, for that would only hasten our doom! We should be met at the foot of the laddor with a gun or an axe and be shot down or cloven down at once! There was nothing else to be done then except to wait, tremble and pray. And oh! did I not pray! Yes! as I never prayed before in my life.

Hark! what was that?

My worst fears realized. The deep stillness broken by the sound of many footsteps craunching through the dry brush and frozen snow, and approaching the hut. Toe time had come. My heart seemed to die within me. Before the new comers could reach the house, the old assassin rose slowly, shuffled over the floor and opened the door.

I held my breath to listen. My ears became as the ears of rabbits. My sense of hearing preternaturally acute as that of 'Fine Ear' of the fairy tale, I heard the old criminal whisper in that penetrating key which goes much farther than it is meant to go:

'Hish, sh-sh-sh! Don't make a bit of noise.'

'Wot's up now?' growled a deep voice as the crowd entered the room.

'Hish-sh-sh-sh-sh! Travelers from Washington! Quality! Rich! Rich! Oh, I toll you!'

'Who are they? Men or women? queried a third voice.

'Hish-ah-sh-sh! Ole 'oman, young gal, and boy!'

'Umph-humph!'

'Hish-sh-sh! Now set right down and pull off them heavy boots 'fore you come to the fire. Don't want to 'sturb 'em.'

I heard every work, every movement. I seemed to know everything that passed as if I had been in the room with them. The men dropped on the floor and drew off their boots, conversing in whispers.

'Where've you put 'em?'

'Ole 'oman and gal in the loft, young youth in the shed.'

The crowd, having got rid of their boots, shuffled over the earthen floor and drew stools around the fireplace, where they seated themselves. There was a slight motion among them as of filling pipes, and then clouds of tobacco smoke rose through the cracked floor, in the midst of which the old cut-throat inquired:

'Any luck to-night, Jim?

'Jim!' My hair bristled up from my scalp. My skin turned to goose flesh. Marrow curdled. Blood froze. 'Jim!' Then it was the terrible outlaw's band of murderers among whom we had fallen, helpless.

But the evil council was going on below. A low, muttered ebulition of profanity escaped Jim Fice in reply to the question.

'Tain't no use to curse and swar, Jim. Cussin' and swarin' never clothed the back nor filled the belly as ever I heerd tell.' said the old bandit.

'Such infernal luck! The most cussed luck of the whole winter,' growled the outlaw with the fierceness of a wild beast balked of its prey.

'Well, never mind, Jim. This here windfall will make up for it all. Ah! yes, they're awful rich, I reckon.' said the old wretch.

And then they fell to smoking so assiduously as to suspend their conversation.

Presently I heard the men muttering again, and the first distinct words I heard instantly sharpened all my faculties to the keenest sense of terror in the vision of impending death. It was the old head demon who was speaking.

'No, Jim. No. You may be good enough outdoors, but for a cute job like this you're too rough. I'll go and do it myself, soon as ever I feel sure they're fast asleep. But it is jist as well to be all ready for the job. Where's that butcher's knife? Go look for it under the shelf, and that little bit of grindstone. I must put a sharp edge onter it.

Don't ask me how I felt as I heard the stealthy steps cross the floor, and hands rummage among the ironware, and then the return of the messenger and the old murderer's grunt of satisfaction as he took the stone and the knife and began to sharpen the blade. I had thought I had suffered the last extremity of terror, horror. But when I heard the the sharpening of that blade meant for cutting our throats, I learned that the passion of fear, the capacity of anguish had infinite possibilities.

On and on it went, back and forth with a rasping sound that I seemed to feel upon my flesh. Sometimes he would submit the blade to one of his companions to feel if it was sharp enough, and then recommence the sharpening. Ah! how that sound grated through nerves and heart and brain. I lay there, no longer listening, but, through extreme nervous tension, hearing and seeing all that passed below; but with a sickening, sinking, expiring feeling like death.

'That'll do!' growled the old tiger, ceasing to rasp the knife.

'Better let Jim go and do it, ole man,' muttered one of the outlaws.

'No. I tell you. You'd raise too much noise. Don't want no 'sturbance; I'll go my own self,' growled the wild beast, getting up and moving towards the trap-door.

I was dying, I felt sure. Dying already. No need to cut my throat. I heard as if in a death dream, the cautious, shuffling feet of the fiend as he came to the foot of the ladder and began to climb up slowly, panting, and stopping and listening.

Strange brain of human. In that deadly cataleptic horror that bound me, some gleams of reason penetrated. The grim thought came that it was best to lie still and die quietly, since there was no earthly help for us. Queer! I even thought of the hangman's advice to his 'patient,' 'If you'll be quiet, you'll not suffer. You'll not even know when you die.' All this passed through my expiring brain while the old demon was coming up the ladder. My eyes were wide open—staring. There came a red glow of light. The trap-door was lifted. One gaunt red arm, bared to the elbow, appeared, holding it up. Then the bald red head, with the evil inflamed face, the mangy beard and the blood-shot eyes staring around as if half frightened at the crime he was about to commit. Lastly appeared the other arm, with its bony hand grasping in one clutch an iron candlestick with a lighted tallow dip and the handle of a huge butcher's knife with its blade flashing keenly in the flame. That picture will never leave me while I live. He carefully laid back the trap-door, slowly came out, glared around the loft, set his candlestick on the floor, shifted his butcher's knife more conveniently in his hand and then crept, crouching and panting like some wild beast, on toward the bed on which I lay—yes, dying—beside my aunt. That was the last I saw. Human nature could bear no more. I died and the 'bitterness of death' was past. It is said that 'nature has her own anæsthetics.' The timely swoon is one of them. In that deep syncope I died, to all intents and purposes, for the time being and lay dead to all that passed around me.

* * * * * * *

When at length I woke to life it was scarcely to consciousness. I did not know where I was, how I came there or scarcely who or what I was. The past chaotic, the present was blank, the future vague. Streams of pale silvery light glanced through the rifts in the rough gable end opposite my bed. Yes! I was lying on a bed, and some one was lying beside me. I was as weak as a new-born babe and almost as ignorant of my surroundings. I was in a rude loft with a rough plank roof rising from the eaves and meeting at a long beam overhead that was decorated with bunches of dried roots and herbs that filled the air with an aromatic odor.

The chord of association was there struck, and memory awakened. I was Dolly Phippard and this was Aunt Sukey Drake sleeping beside me. We were in that lonely hut in the woods where we had sought shelter from the snow storm only to fall into the lair of the most murderous gang that ever terrorized a neighborhood. We had been within an inch of having our throats cut when I fainted. What had happened after that? How had we been saved? What had become of Jim Fice and his gang of assassin? Had the constables and a posse been dogging them and tracked them to their lair, and fallen upon them just in time to save us? And was there no one left in the house but ourselves?

The place was very still, and very dark, except for the moonbeams shining through the broken gable. No more red light came up through the cracks in the floor. Evidently the fire was out below. While wondering over the situation I heard movements in the room under us, but they only raised my curiosity, not my fears. I listened. Perhaps it was the woman, but no; the sounds were those of the waking, yawning and tumbling up of men from the floor in front of the fireplece. The muffled and confused sounds were followed by a gruff, sleepy voice muttering:

'It's cleared off cold, as I knowed it would. Bill, pull on your coat and go fetch a bucket of water from the spring, while I make up the fire.'

Then I heard one go out, and another raking the chunks and coals together in the chimney place. While this was going on I perceived that day was dawning. The pale white moonbeams were fading before the faint red sun's rays.

But what did all this mean? Had my fright been a mere nightmare dream? No! I was sure that I had not slept nor felt it possible to sleep for one instant that night.

Before I could speculate further another sound came from below. The old couple were waking up on the bed and yawuing, grunting and mumbling. Then I heard them them get up just as the man who went to the spring for water returned. And now all the various preparations for the breakfast began. And, thank Heaven! my aunt awoke at last, and I could question her.

She awakened as clear headed as if she had not slept like death in a strange loft in the woods. She sat up in the bed, yawned, gaped and asked me how I had slept.

'Not very well,' I answered. 'But you, Aunt Sukey, slept like a top. Did you hear nothing to disturb you?'

'No! Yes! That old man came up here to cut some of those provisions down and about half woke me, but I was so dead for sleep that I went off again before he got through,' she answered, as she got out of bed and began to dress very quickly, for the loft was very cold.

Well!!!! But it would take a whole line of exclamation points to express my amazement! Had I been an idiot after all! Had I allowed my imagination to deceive me? To distort everything I had seen and heard? I did not linger long over my toilet, I can tell you! As soon as we were dressed we went down stairs.

In the light of day and of reason how different all things looked from what they appeared on the night before! That rude hut with its walls of mossy logs; its floor of beaten earth; its broad chimney place with the biggest wood fire I had ever seen in my life; its little clear window and its open door, showing the bright morning sky and the snow-covered ground, had a picturesque, wild wood charm of its own.

The room had been 'fixed up for company,' too. The bed in one corner was covered with a nice clean patch-work quilt of red and white. The shelves in the opposite corner, with their ve sels of copper and tin, shone as with silver and gold. The earthen floor was as clean as a steamer's deck. In the midst of it stood the table covered with a clean crash cloth and adorned with white stone crockeryware. The breakfast was ready, being kept hot over the fire or on the earthen hearth before it.

There was no one in the room but our host and hostess, both dressed up for company—he in a home-made suit of dark brown cloth and a clean white shirt, she in a nice dark blue calico gown, white apron, and a white handkerchief pinned around her neck.

What scurvy tricks had imagination, inspired by suspicion and terror, played me? The old man's face was deeply sunburned and his eyes were weak. But where were the dark, wicked, sinister looks of last night?

Our host and hostess greeted us cheerfully.

'I hope as I didn't 'sturb you when I went up in the loft arter them things?' inquired the old man politely.

'Well,' said truthful Aunt Sukey, reluctantly, 'you did half wake me, but I went to sleep again while you were cutting them down.'

'Sorry,' said the old man, 'but you see, marm, I had to go and get suthin' down for the boy's supper, let alone your own breakfast, but I did try to be as quiet as I could. Come! Draw up,' he added, as his wife placed the last dish on the table.

We sat down accordingly to an excellent breakfast of coffee, cream, hot rolls, buckwheat cakes, fresh butter, honey, fried ham and eggs.

'Where is Mr. Sparks? I haven't seen him this morning?' anxiously inquired Aunt Sukey.

'Which? Oh, you mean the young youth as come 'long o' you? Bless you! He were up bright and early this morning to 'tend to the creetur. And now he's gone 'long 'o the boys to the blacksmith shop to get her rough shod for the slippery roads 'fore they harness of her up. They'll be along soon. Come, try to make out a breakfast! Do. So sorry we haint got nuthin' better for sich quality as you, but the boys hadn't no luck last night, or else you'd a had a coon or 'possum or suthin o' fresh meat.'

Aunt Sukey assured our host that the breakfast was most satisfactory, but forbore to add that we would as soon have feasted on rats and mice as on raccoons or opossums.

Tommy Sparks came in at this moment and explained that Mr. Jim, Mr. Bill, Mr. Jack and Mr. Sam (Tommy was the soul of politeness) were busy out doors, but would be in after a while.

'Them's my boys!' exclaimed the old man, laughing. 'They are that shy of the ladies. Draw up, young gentleman.'

Thus bidden, Tommy Sparks sat down to the table, and soon demolished all that was left on the board. Then he wiped his mouth, rose and said:

'Now, Aunt Drake, the mare is put to the carry-all and the trunk is put on behind, and all is ready. Mr. Jack and Mr. Sam helped me to back the carry-all down the thicket until we got to where we could turn it round. The road is good, too. The snow is frozen hard, and there is no wind. We shall have a spanking drive to Spring Hill.'

'Are we far from the New Cut road? Mr. ———, I really don't know your name,' said Aunt Sukey.

'Ed'ards, marm. Luke Ed'ards. And you must 'a took the wrong turn at the fork, 'bout three mile up the road from where we found your carry-all. I'll go 'long o' you and put you in the right road. I've got an airrant up that way and had as lief go as not.'

'You are very kind, Mr. Edwards, and we thank you very much. Now let us have a settlement,' said Aunt Sukey, taking out her pocket book. 'What have we to pay you?'

The old man hesitated, rubbed his red crown until it was redder than ever, and said:

'Why, marm, it goes to my heart to charge ladies. 'Specially such ladies. It do, indeed. But you know you come in the dead o' night and made me rouse up my po' ole 'oman to git supper for you and she gone to bed with a dose o' laudamy for her toothache.'

'I am very sorry,' began my aunt.

'Oh, don't mention on it! It had to be done. And then I had to turn out in the snow storm to help the young youth to tote in the trunk and lead the creetur and 'tend to her and rub her down and all.'

'I am very sorry you had so much trouble,' said aunt.

'Oh, thar warnt no help for that. And then three on you had supper, let alone the creetur what had a warm mash. And then you two ladies had the boys' own loft, and that the onliest room they had. And you all had breakfast this morning and feeding o' the creetur. And Jim, he's the blacksmith, rough shod the creetur, and the——'

'Never mind the items, Mr. Edwards!' impatiently exclaimed aunt, naturally suspecting our host of 'piling up the agonies' in the accommodations we had received for the sake of raising the bill. We are greatly indebted to you, but pray let us know to what extent?'

He looked at her deprecatingly, rubbed his head and said:

'You see, it's because I have to charge ladies. Let me see. Well—now really—would you think as how—well—say ten 'leven penny bits was too much?'

Aunt Sukey gasped. She thought that the man might reasonably charge $3. But ten 'leven penny bits—$1.25 of the old currency! It shamed her into generosity.

'Tommy Sparks!' she cried sharply, handing him her pocket book, 'here, pay Mr. Edwards a $5 bill? Our entertainment was worth every dollar of it!'

It was now old Edwards' turn to gasp.

'No! no!' he cried with feeble demur.

But when Tommy Sparks forced the note upon him, he took it with a child's frank, broad grin of delight and turning to his old wife said in triumph:

'There, didn't I tell the boys so? As how these ladies 'ould make it up to them fer all their bad luck last night, eh? I knowed the quality.'

We took leave of our hostess and, accompanied by the old man, left the hut and entered the thicket by a narrow path which had escaped our sight in the darkness of the previous night. A short walk brought us to the road and a few hundred yards farther to our carry-all. When we reached it we found Kitty with her head in a nose-bag and a tall, stalwart, red haired, freckled-faced young man watching her. He immediately ducked his head and left.

'That's Jim! Don't mind him! Never did see a young feller so shy o' ladies, marm,' giggled the old man.

Aunt Sukey and myself were hoisted to our places on the back seat. Tommy Sparks and Mr. Edwards mounted on the front, and we started.

'Has anything been heard of Jim Fice and his gang lately?' inquired our aunt of Mr. Edwards.

'Lots, marm! But I won't scare you ladies by telling on um. Why, when you knocked at the door last night I thought as you war that doggoned hang-gallows cuss. And I wouldn't let on as I heerd you 'till I peeped through the crack and saw it was ladies.'

No more was said on the subject. We drove on for about half an hour, when Tommy Sparks pulled up the mare, and the old man got out and said:

'Well, ladies, here we are at the fork. And if you ever travel this way again I shill be mighty proud for you to stop 'long o' us. Good bye, marm! Good bye, miss! Good bye, sir!' And, having shaken hands all around, he left.

Cousin Tommy started the mare, took a sharp turn at the point of the fork and got into the New Cut road, along which we spun merrily.

We reached Spring Hill in time to dine with our friends and resumed our journey in the afternoon and arrived at Greenwood, our old homestead, where, around the tea table and the winter fire on that Christmas eve night, our adventures formed the sole subject of conversation, as they did on many subsequent occasions.—*Washington Star.*

A Curious Nineteenth Century Sermon.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MONITOR:—

RICHMOND, VA., Jan. 13.——One cannot be in this city for any length of time without having his attention attracted to Rev. John Jasper, a colored divine, so many allusions being made to him and to a certain famous sermon of his, entitled 'The Sun Do Move.' In fact, the writer had his curiosity so aroused to hear the sermon that, being told Mr. Jasper would preach it whenever requested, he made the request and received a reply that it would be delivered the next Sunday morning.

Accordingly on that day the writer, with other friends from the North, found himself proceeding in search of the reverend gentleman's church, which is situated in the district known as 'Africa,' called so on account of being almost wholly occupied by colored people.

On arriving at the church, which proved to be a very creditable structure, we were very politely received, and shown to a seat. About three hundred colored people were present, many of them being dressed in the height of fashion, and all neat and clean. After some excellent singing and a prayer, Mr. Jasper rose and said that by request he would deliver his sermon, 'The Sun Do Move,' adding that he had already delivered it 175 times.

JOHN JASPER'S LIFE.

But before giving any detail of this truly wonderful exposition of the Bible doctrine, it may be well to give a brief account of the life of the preacher. John Jasper was born in 1812, in Fluvanna county, Virginia, of slave parents. As a boy he was noted for his brightness, and was allowed to work in his master's house as waiter, etc. When he was 13 years old he was sent to Richmond to work in the tobacco factories, where he labored until the close of the war, though changing masters once or twice.

In 1839 he became converted, and soon after claimed that he had been chosen by God to preach. In 1840 he began his ministry, although at that time he had only learned how to spell the simplest words. Such was the power of his discourses that his fame extended all over Virginia, and he was often away on preaching tours lasting two or three weeks, his master receiving from those wishing his services the sum of one dollar a day, except Sundays. During the civil war he preached to the sick and wounded soldiers in the confederate hospitals.

When Richmond surrendered and Mr. Jasper became a free man, he had only seventy-three cents in his pockets, and was in debt for house rent to the amount of $42. It may be said here that he is now worth some thousands of dollars. Until 1867 he did general missionary work, both in the city and county, during which time he had a great many calls to different colored churches, but accepted none. On the first Sunday in September, 1867, Mr. Jasper organized his present church, with nine members, on an island in the James river, just opposite the city, in a little wooden shanty which had been used by the government for a stable. The church grew and prospered, was moved from the shanty to a carpenter's shop and then to its present quarters, and now has a membership of over 2,000. Mr. Jasper at one time baptized three hundred candidates in two hours.

THE SERMON.

A member of Mr. Jasper's church and a white man a few years ago got into a controversy about the rotation of the sun, and finally decided to ask Mr. Jasper to preach a sermon on the subject. He did so, and took for his text, Exodus, xv: 3: 'The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his name.' This is the sermon he has since delivered so many times, and which is briefly outlined below:

He began by giving a graphic sketch of the Israelites, beginning with Abraham, and continuing until the persecution of them by the Pharoahs. He described the plagues that were sent as a means of deliverance, and gave a thrilling description of the passage of the Red Sea, where he said God fought the first battle for His people. 'God does not fight like other people,' he said. 'When we fight we can see each other, but when God fights He is invisible. He does not need to throw up breastworks like men.' He then spoke briefly of the sufferings of the children of Israel in the desert, and then came to the time when Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, which it accordingly did.

'Now,' said the preacher, 'philosophers say the sun does not move. I want to make a fire of those philosopher's books today. The Bible said the sun stood still. Is anybody going to say that the sun was standing still before Joshua told it to stand still? Do you think Joshua would have asked God to stop the sun if she had not been moving? And yet the philosophers say the sun stands still and the world revolves around it. Where in the name of God he gets his authority from I don't know. It is nonsense to say that the sun does not move. David in the 55th Psalm says, 'The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.' Is it possible that this means that the sun does not move? That man who says the sun does not move, he does not read his Bible.'

The preacher went on to express his surprise that people should believe anything so absurd and contrary to the teachings of the Bible, and then returned to his attack on the philosophers. 'Some of them tell us,' he said, 'that the sun is 95,000,000 of miles from the earth, others say 130,000,000, and others 65,000,000. This is conclusive proof of their ignorance on the subject. How can the distance of the sun from the earth be measured? It is said that a cannon ball traveling at the rate of four miles a second would take 351 years to reach the sun. Now he would take the same time to come back, and who is there that can live 702 years to see if it really does take that long? And who can go on the cannon ball and take the tape line to measure the distance?'

He now left the sun, and attacked the philosophers on their argument that the earth is round. He read Revelations vii: 1: 'And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.' 'If the earth is round,' he exclaimed, 'how could angels stand on the four corners?' 'They tell us,' he continued, 'that people are living directly under us. How in the name of common sense can they walk, unless they move like flies on a wall with their feet upward.'

After strengthening his arguments with some more Bible references, he brought his discourse to a close. He had been listened to throughout with the most marked attention by his colored hearers, who several times expressed their approval of his opinions by encouraging exclamations, and at the close crowded around him with many endearing attentions.—*W. H. Saucton.*

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