

Slavery

MAY HUNGARY BE FREE

By George T. Downing

Louis Kossuth, leader of the unsuccessful 1848 rebellion in Hungary, had been forced to flee to Turkey. In 1851 he was brought from his exile to the United States, where he began a nationwide tour to raise funds for renewal of the revolutionary struggle against the Hapsburgs. On December 9, 1851, five days after reaching New York, he was addressed by George T. Downing, a wealthy black restaurant owner in Rhode Island and an active figure in the antislavery movement. Downing spoke on behalf of a reception committee of the Negro people, including John J. Zuille, James McCune Smith and Philip A. Bell.

The same issue of The Liberator which carried the text of Downing's address also featured a poem by William E. Channing, the "Apostle of Unitarianism," entitled "The American Slave to Kossuth" which went in part:

O Kossuth! Magyar! Man, at last!
Betray us not, nor let there be
Our curses lingering on thy past,
Our hate a household thing for thee.

5

But Kossuth disappointed the Negro people by refusing to take a position on American slavery, and on February 26, 1852, Frederick Douglass published an open letter to the Hungarian patriot reminding him that on the issue of slavery "there is no neutral ground here for any man."

Downing's remarks at the reception for Kossuth follow. They are taken from The Liberator, December 19, 1851.

WE APPEAR before you to pay homage to a great principle, which you announce with so much distinctness and uphold with so much power, the principle that a man has a right to the full exercise of his faculties and powers in the land which gave him birth; and that it is his first duty to devote all the energies of his being to maintain that right for himself and his compatriots. Around this principle you have thrown a radiance which almost clothes it with the sacredness of a new Evangelist, and from your world's platform have called upon peoples and nations, however weak, to stand up and maintain it against whatever odds oppression and tyranny may have arrayed against it.

Spencer
p. 134

or 7/2/12?

ekobn...

In the face of the distinguished example of the Pilgrim Fathers and the many eminent men who have made this their *exile* home, we have steadily maintained this birth-home right during the last third of a century in this our native land, and will continue to maintain it until its ultimate triumph, "for the first love of man is in his home."

We feel that this great principle is surely gaining ground, and we hail in your person its living Apostle, who has given it voice and expression. We would express the deep sympathy we feel in you, because of the relation you sustain to Liberty. We feel that your mission is a most happy and propitious one. We see in it a part of the special ordering of Providence. The landing of the Pilgrim Fathers; our Declaration of Independence; the Revolutionary struggle, led by Washington; and the later developments of the principles of Liberty, as seen in the struggles now going on in our own country for its further advancement and application to all men, are kindred efforts.

God speed you in your mission! May Hungary be free! And we earnestly pray that when the resurrection of your country shall indeed take place, she will clothe herself in the true vestment of democracy, fitly prepared for her when you abolished caste, so that pure republicanism will in her be vindicated and every man stand an equal in the eyes of the law. Yes! illustrious patriot, may Hungary be free! May the world rejoice in her speedy disenthralment. May the joy be twofold in that Hungary shall be redeemed—and not Hungary alone, but with her the world, mankind.

The attention of nations is fixed upon you! At the mention of your name, tyrants tremble, the oppressed rejoice! There is not a principle advocated by you, not a word that escapes your lips, but that is caught up and wafted to every civilized nation. And deep and widespread is the joy felt through Europe, when you proclaim the fulfilling and trumpet-toned annunciation, "Ye oppressed nations of Europe, be of good cheer and courage."

God moves in mysterious ways. The result of the late Hungarian struggle will be propitious to the general growth of freedom. But for your imprisonment, the world would not now be so electrified by your eloquence—by the spirit of freedom. Hungary suffers in the ordering of Providence, for the good of the whole, but her destiny is to be free.

Respected sir, your mission is too high to be allied with party or sect; it is the common cause of crushed, outraged humanity.

May you, when you leave our shores in furtherance of your heaven-high mission, carry with you the sympathy of *all*, the active countenance of *all*.

Be assured, that as you have now our prayers, so when the time comes, we shall give our own "liberty offering," though it may be but the "widow's mite."

