

**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**

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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 William T. Catto

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**WILLIAM T. CATTO**

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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.

*100. 2. 215.*

## NOTICE.

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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.*



## DISCOURSE.

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Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.—*Ex.* xiv. 15.

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I HAVE chosen this subject for the occasion on account of its scope. What to the children of Abraham under their peculiar situation, may to the people of God, in this day, be as important.

Go forward, as a command from the mouth of God, is worthy of our deepest consideration, and should be regarded as worthy of all acceptance by a nation, a community, a sect, or a church, and should by the individual man, in his life, practice, example, faith, grace, knowledge, wisdom, truth, and holiness.

What I purpose upon this occasion is—

I. To notice the circumstance that gave rise to the text—that briefly.

II. The command as it affects the individual.

III. The command as it touches a church, and the history of this church.

I. It is known to you all that the children of Israel were in captivity in Egypt, and remained in that condition upwards of 220 years. The sequel of their bondage shows that their condition was one of affliction and distress: their repeated cries and supplications to God make this assertion as clear as a sunbeam. To such an extent did their oppressors torment them by exacting

the severest labor and most cruel demands, that their cries ascended to God, and he determined to deliver them.

To this end Moses was raised up as a leader and deliverer of this people. Now the circumstance of Moses being raised up is as singular as it is interesting: a brief sketch of it in this discourse may not be out of place, as there seemingly are some points of it analogous to the life of Mr. Gloucester, the founder of this church.

Moses was of a family of the oppressed, and as far as human estimate considers it, was of humble origin: still he was chosen by the Almighty as the future instrument to bring about a deliverance for these bondmen. The miraculous manner of his preservation from the cruel and heartless order of Pharaoh is a peculiarity worthy of notice: his being placed in an ark of bulrushes—a very fragile vessel—and then set upon the margin of the river among the flags, and there found by Pharaoh's daughter. His preservation and education by the princess is also worthy of thought, and will show that God chooses instruments, ways and means to bring about his purposes which to human speculation is the most improbable: yet is it true, simple and improbable as it may appear; but they are sure in their results, and fail not.

So it appears in the case under consideration. Israel was to be delivered from bondage; a leader was wanting; that leader was, and must be a man possessing peculiar traits of character—a peculiar man, necessary and fitted for the work—every feature of character was to stamp him as the man for the occasion and the business.

And how well did God produce in Moses these peculiar traits; how completely did he regulate, direct, and control every event in order to accomplish the end;—brought up in Pharaoh's house, under the parental



watchings of his own mother, wittingly introduced as a nurse, his education perfected, through the king's daughter, and that education a liberal and finished one, are surely very remarkable. Then consider his meekness, the softness of manners, the inflexible integrity of his heart, his great firmness, his courage and boldness, his deep love for his people, and his faith in God, are so many proofs by which we conclude the man was fitted for the work. It does not require much insight into human affairs to determine that the above traits of character must exist in a man who would lead in a measure of importance. The rise of empires, kingdoms, and republics are proofs in point. It requires a stout heart, strong arms, and much firmness to grasp the helm of affairs and steer forward amid dangers and liabilities until success shall crown the effort.

Arrived at the age of manhood, God informs Moses that he is chosen as a leader of his people. The subsequent message to King Pharaoh; the wonderful things done by God to bring the king to his senses in order to restore the people their liberty, to undo their heavy burdens, &c., you are informed of, and how faithfully their leader performed his duty. You have knowledge of their final departure from Egypt to a land of freedom, the land of Canaan, where they could worship God under their own vine and fig-tree, none to molest or make them afraid, and we can well imagine what their hopes and anticipations were when they found their journey toward the promised land really begun, as in their tribes and families they take up the line of march.

During their journey Moses, at the command of God, caused the people to turn in before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, &c., and there encamp themselves. It was during this encampment that Pharaoh regretted

having liberated the Israelites, and he determined to pursue them and drive them back to Egypt, which he accordingly attempted: his horsemen and chariots and his army were soon gathered, and he went in pursuit of the Israelites. Seeing the Egyptians pursuing, they began to murmur and complain against Moses; they became very uneasy at the sight of their enemies, and regretted having left Egypt.

Now it is true God commanded them to encamp, and it was during that very time that the enemy appeared; hence it may be inferred that their dilemma was not brought about by any act of theirs; so that they being found resting when they should have been journeying was not their fault. To this, in view of the text, we find no objection; the only exception is their mistrust of God, and want of confidence in their leader, by complaining and reproaching Moses for the danger in which they were placed. Moses too, though not mistrustful of God, sought in the first place to allay their fears, and so check their murmurs and reproaches—an evident delay that might have been better employed, for it is plain that it was a time for action, a time that should have been employed in fleeing from the pursuer, and extricating themselves from their trouble. This will appear still more evident by tracing further the course taken by Moses, and the order he received from God. After first trying to quiet the fears of the people, he next addresses himself to God. Whereupon the Lord said unto him, "Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." As though it were said, Lose no time, improve every moment, cry as you go forward, the enemy is behind you, your course is before you, though it be through the sea go forward, and lose no time, and look to me for deliverance and

success. The sequel of this incident in the history of this people you all know: they did go forward, their difficulties were removed, for the sea was made to part at the lifting up of Moses' rod over it, and the people went through safely; which their pursuers essaying to do, were overwhelmed and destroyed.

II. I call your attention to these words as they affect the individual man. I adopt this course as you can plainly see that a community or an army, a nation or a church, are comprised of individuals, each man making up the aggregate, and therefore upon the life, conduct, and action of each man depend, in a greater or lesser degree, the power and influence of the whole, whether it be a nation, an army, or a church.

Now as it regards individuals, we assume that no man in the great world of life and action can be idle and indifferent to the callings and claims of government; regarding men as citizens, members of society, heads of families, or in the relation of friends, it cannot with any show of truth be said upon him there are no claims. Every man, more or less, has some part to perform in the drama of life; there can be no stand, no rest, no indifference on this active, busy, working stage; the world is ever moving, and everything around shows life, activity, energy, commotion; the world goes forward in numerous almost countless operations; its motto is forward. As individuals we must go forward upon the broad bosom of this ocean life and contribute our something towards the press of interests that impels forward: who moves not will be pushed aside, or irresistibly borne forward, uncared for and unhonored: we all must struggle in this race of active life, and add our quota to the universal use. The command is a good one, Go forward, and wise is the man who obeys it. Observation with its