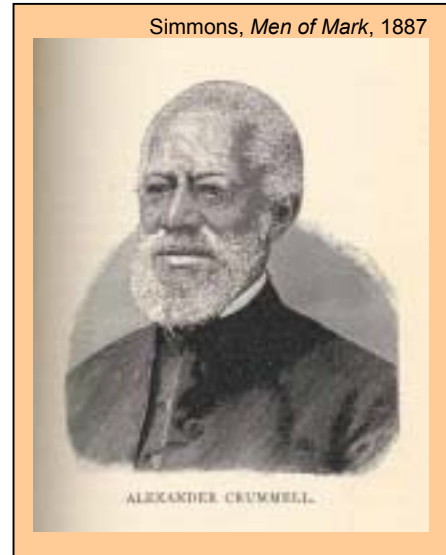


\_\_\_ Rev. Alexander Crummell \_\_\_

## The Social Principle among a People and Its Bearing on Their Progress and Development

Thanksgiving Day sermon, Washington, D.C., 1875, excerpts

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ISAIAH XLI, 6,7

They helped every one his neighbor, and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage. So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the soldering; and he fastened it with nails that it should not be moved.

More than a month has passed away since we received the proclamation of our Chief Magistrate, appointing the 25th of November a day of public thanksgiving to Almighty God. . . . Grateful as is this theme of gratitude, and inviting as it is for thought and further expression, it is not my purpose to pursue it to-day. I feel that we should turn the occasion into an opportunity for improvement and progress.

Especially is this the duty of a people situated as we are in this country; cut loose, blessed be GOD, for evermore, from the dark moorings of servitude and oppression; but not fully arrived at — only drifting towards, the deep, quiet waters of fullest freedom and equality. . . . It is peculiarly a duty at this time when there is evidently an ebb-tide of indifference in the country, with regard to our race; and when the anxiety for union neutralizes the interest in the black man. . . .

. . . The world acts on many a principle which Christians would do well to lay to heart. Our Saviour tells us that “the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.”<sup>1</sup> So here, this principle of united effort, and of generous concord, is worthy of the imitation of the colored people of this country, if they would fain rise to superiority of both character and achievement. I shall speak, therefore, of the “*Social principle among a people; and its bearing on their progress and development.*”

What I mean by the social principle, is the disposition which leads men to associate and join together for specific purposes; the principle which makes families and societies, and which binds men in unity and brotherhood, in races and churches and nations. . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Luke, 16:8. [Footnote in Oldfield]

The application of this truth to the interests and the destiny of the colored race of America is manifest. We are living in this country, a part of its population, and yet, in divers respects, we are as foreign to its inhabitants as though we were living in the Sandwich Islands. It is this our actual separation from the real life of the nation, which constitutes us “a nation within a nation:” thrown very considerably upon ourselves for many of the largest interests of life, and for nearly all our social and religious advantages. As a consequence on [*sic*] this state of things, all the stimulants of ambition and self-love should lead this people to united effort for personal superiority and the uplifting of the race; but, instead thereof, 30 overshadowed by a more powerful race of people; wanting in the cohesion which comes from racial enthusiasm; lacking in the confidence which is the root of a people’s stability; disintegration, doubt, and distrust almost universally prevail, and distract all their business and policies.

Among a people, as in a nation, we find farmers, mechanics, sailors, servants, business men, trades. For life, energy, and progress in a people, it is necessary that all these various departments of activity should be carried on with spirit, skill, and unity. It is the cooperative principle, working in trades, business, and manufacturing, which is the great lever that is lifting up the million masses in great nations, and giving those nations themselves a more masterly superiority than they have ever known, in all their past histories. No people can discard this principle, and achieve greatness. . . .

40 The great general laws of growth and superiority are unchangeable. The Almighty neither relaxes nor alters them for the convenience of any people. Conformity, then, to this demand for combination of forces is a necessity which we, as a people, cannot resist without loss and ruin. We cannot pay heed to it too soon; for if there has been anything for which the colored people of this country have been and now are noted, it is for disseverance, the segregation of their forces, the lack of the co-operative spirit. . . . The people, as a body, seem delivered over to the same humble, servile occupations of life in which their fathers trod, because, from a lack of co-operation they are unable to step into the higher callings of business; and hence penury, poverty, inferiority, dependence, and even servility is their one general characteristic throughout the country, along with a dreadful state of mortality.

50 And the cause of this inferiority of purpose and of action is two-fold, and both the fault, to some extent, of unwise and unphilosophic leaders. For, since, especially emancipation, *two* special heresies have influenced and governed the minds of colored men in this nation: (1) The one is the dogma which I have heard frequently from the lips of leaders, personal and dear, but mistaken, friends, *that the colored people of this country should forget, as soon as possible, that they ARE colored people:* — a fact, in the first place, which is an impossibility. Forget it, forsooth, when you enter a saloon and are repulsed on account of your color! Forget it when you enter a car, South or West, and are denied a decent seat! Forget it when you enter the Church of God, and are driven to a hole in the gallery! Forget it when every child of

yours would be driven ignominiously from four-fifths of the common schools of the country! Forget it, when thousands of mechanics in the large cities would make a “strike” rather than work at the same bench, in the same yard, with a black carpenter or brick-maker! Forget it, when the boyhood of our race is almost universally deprived of the opportunity of learning trades, through prejudice! Forget it, when, in one single State, twenty thousand men dare not go to the polls on election-day, through the tyranny of caste! . . . Forget that you are colored, in these United States! Turn madman, and go into a lunatic asylum, and then, perchance, you may forget it! But, if you have any sense or sensibility, how is it possible for you, or me, or any other colored man, to live oblivious of a fact of so much significance in a land like this! The only place I know of in this land where you can “forget you are colored” is the grave! . . .

. . . 2. The other dogma is the demand *that colored men should give up all distinctive effort, as colored men, in schools, churches, associations, and friendly societies*. But this, you will observe, is equivalent to a demand to the race to give up all civilization in this land and to submit to barbarism. The cry is: “Give up your special organization.” “Mix in with your white fellow-citizens. . . .”

. . . I wonder that the men who talk in the style I have referred to, forget that nine-tenths of the American people have become so poisoned and stimulated by the noxious influence of caste, that, in the present day, they would resist to the utmost before they would allow the affiliations, however remote, that implied the social or domestic principle. . . .

. . . I see nought in the future but that we shall be scattered like chaff before the wind before the organized labor of the land, the great power of capital, and the tremendous tide of emigration, unless, as a people, we fall back upon the might and mastery which come from the combination of forces and the principle of industrial co-operation. Most of your political agitation is but wind and vanity. *What this race needs in this country is POWER — the forces that may be felt*. And that comes from character, and character is the product of religion, intelligence, virtue, family order, superiority, wealth, and the show of industrial forces. THESE ARE FORCES WHICH WE DO NOT POSSESS. *We are the only class which, as a class, IN THIS COUNTRY, IS WANTING IN THESE GRAND ELEMENTS*. The very first effort of the colored people should be to lay hold of them; and then they will take such root in this American soil that only the convulsive upheaving of the judgement-day can throw them out! And therefore I close, as I began, with the admonitory tones of the text. God grant they may be heeded at least by YOU who form this congregation, in your sacred work *here*, and in all your other relations: “They helped every one his neighbor, and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage. So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the soldering; and he fastened it with nails, that it SHOULD NOT BE MOVED!”