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THE LIBERIAN EXODUS OF 1878*

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South Carolina in 1878 was the scene of the only mass movement ever undertaken by Negroes to organize and effectuate migration from the United States to Africa.¹ In the midst of the confusion attendant upon the overthrow of the Radical Republican government in 1876-1877, large numbers of disquieted Negroes in the state became involved in agitation for migration, and eventually in the organization of the Liberian Exodus Joint Stock Steamship Company which, before its collapse, had purchased and sent on one voyage of emigration to Africa the bark *Azor*. Despite the wealth of information available,² this picturesque and dramatic incident has been almost entirely overlooked by the state's historians.

The violent political campaign of 1876 and its aftermath brought widespread uncertainty among Negroes, and an interest in emigration which was not confined to South Carolina. A Southwide phenomenon, this interest had as its causes not only the political weakness of the Negroes and the widespread restriction of civil rights, but also their economic subordination and the difficulty of getting ahead in agriculture, their chief source of livelihood. It culminated in 1879 in the wholesale removal of great numbers of Negroes from the lower Mississippi Valley to the West, particularly Kansas.³ In

* To the Institute for Research in Social Science, for financial aid which made possible the research for this article; to Eastern Kentucky State College and to Miss Barbara Turner for help in typing the manuscript, I extend my thanks.

¹ Numbers of Negroes had been transported to Africa by the American Colonization Society since its organization in 1816 and continued to be until its demise, but in genesis and leadership it was an organization of whites. The year before its organization, Paul Cuffee, a Negro merchant of Massachusetts, had transported to Africa 38 Negroes at an expense of three or four thousand dollars to himself. John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: a History of American Negroes* (New York: 1948), 158.

² A. B. Williams, a young reporter on the first voyage of the *Azor*, sent back to the *Charleston News and Courier* a series of vivid dispatches later re-published in pamphlet form, as *The Liberian Exodus* (Charleston: 1878). Copies are preserved in the Yates Snowden Negro Pamphlets, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, and in the Dawson Pamphlets, University of North Carolina Library. The Williams pamphlet, clippings, broadsides, and other materials, are in the Edward Willis Pamphlets, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston. Other valuable sources are American Colonization Society Papers, Library of Congress, (cited as Am. Col. Soc. Papers); the *African Repository*, quarterly of that Society; and the contemporary S. C. press.

³ C. G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (Washington: 1918), 134-143; V. L. Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi, 1865-1890* (Chapel Hill: 1947), 106-117.

South Carolina, interest was at first centered almost altogether on Liberia, both because of its greater accessibility from the east coast and because of the work already undertaken by the American Colonization Society in transporting small numbers of Negroes to Africa.

Congressman Richard H. Cain, Negro minister and newspaper publisher of Charleston, noted in January 1877, a "deep and growing interest taken by the Colored people . . . in the subject of Emigration," and wrote to the secretary of the Colonization Society for information on arrangements for passage to Liberia. "The Colored people of the South," he said, "are tired of the constant struggle for life and liberty with such results as the 'Missippi (sic) Plan' and prefer going where no such obstacles are in their way of enjoying their Liberty."⁴ During the first four months of 1877, while the rival Chamberlain and Hampton governments were struggling for ascendancy, Cain reported interest in the possibility of emigration to be spreading daily.⁵ In his *Missionary Record* he reported "communications from various persons and from all sections of the country on the subject of emigration to Africa. Thousands of colored people in South Carolina would leave if the means of transportation were furnished them." Movements to organize for removal to Liberia were reported in the counties of Abbeville, Laurens, Oconee, Pickens, Newberry, Lexington, Marlboro, Georgetown, Colleton, Barnwell, Aiken, Edgefield, Beaufort, and Charleston.⁶

Negroes were particularly eager to leave Edgefield County, center of the "Straightout" white-supremacy Democrats. H. N. Bouey, Republican probate judge in the county, retired by the election of 1876, said that if a ship could be started for Liberia from Charleston or Beaufort in January, it would not be able to carry the fifth man who was ready to go. "Of course, this upheaval is caused by their political and general mistreatment in this County—But I advise them to take it all quietly and christianly, for I believe God is in the move."⁷ Bouey himself, ready to return to school teaching, "and in Liberia at that," expressed sincere hope that some way would be made available to carry "the best men and women of this county" who wished to go in January after their crops had been gathered.⁸

Bouey was to be an important figure in the organization of the effort to carry out a mass exodus. In the spring of 1877 as a juror in the United States District Court in Charleston, he met George Curtis, another juror, native of British Guiana and resident of Beaufort, who also had the spirit of emigration. The two men sought out the Reverend B. F. Porter, pastor

⁴ R. H. Cain to William Coppinger, Jan. 25, 1877. Am. Col. Soc. Papers, Vol. 196.

⁵ Cain to Coppinger, Feb. 12, 1877, *ibid.*

⁶ *African Repository*, LIII (April, 1877), 39, quoting Charleston *Missionary Record*.

⁷ H. N. Bouey to Coppinger, May 23, 1877, Am. Col. Soc. Papers, Vol. 197.

⁸ Bouey to Coppinger, May 31, 1877, *ibid.*

of Morris Brown A. M. E. Church, another enthusiast. Professor J. C. Hazeley, a native African, was in Charleston at the same time to deliver lectures on the advantages of emigration. On the fourth of July at the Morris Brown Church a number of addresses were delivered on behalf of emigration.⁹ On July 26 a mass meeting to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Liberian Declaration of Independence culminated in a parade at the Mall, where 4,000 Negroes gathered to hear George Curtis read the Liberian Declaration and the Reverend B. F. Porter deliver a twenty minute address in favor of the exodus. A proposition made by Porter for the formation of a stock company with 30,000 shares of stock at \$10 a share, met with favor, and the Liberian Exodus Joint Stock Steamship Company, with B. F. Porter as president and H. N. Bouey as secretary, was soon thereafter organized.¹⁰

Obvious enthusiasm for the project all over the state caused immediate white reaction against the prospect of losing cheap colored labor. A rumor went about that J. C. Hazeley was being paid \$200 a month by the American Colonization Society to get the Negroes to leave, and that Senators Blaine, Conkling, and Morton were getting up subscriptions of \$2,000,000 in the North to send Negroes to Liberia "in order to ruin . . . the whites in South." Prominent white lawyers and business men in Charleston were suspected of trying to bribe Hazeley to lecture against the emigration scheme. In Edgefield the whites charged the leaders of the emigration movement "with seeking revenge against them on account of their political ascension in this state and county," and sought to dissuade colored laborers by paying them only in drafts on merchants, which would be good only in Edgefield, and would therefore keep them from leaving. In addition, John Mardenborough, a Negro attorney of Edgefield, wrote to William Coppinger, "Sir, you cannot imagine the deplorable condition of the colored people here," and reported that the white planters were spreading a rumor that the emigration scheme was really an effort to entice the Negroes away to Cuba, where they would be sold into slavery.¹¹

But white opposition and efforts at obstruction served only to fan the flames. R. H. Cain kept in his *Missionary Record* a standing editorial headed "Ho for Africa! One million men wanted for Africa."¹² Martin R. Delany, recently appointed trial justice in Charleston, was quickly brought into

⁹ Hazeley to Coppinger, July 4, 10, 14, 1877, *ibid.*, Vol. 198; *News and Courier*, April 16, 1878.

¹⁰ *News and Courier*, July 27, 1877; Bouey to Coppinger, Nov. 27, 1877, Am. Col. Soc. Papers, Vol. 199.

¹¹ Hazeley to Coppinger, July 10, 14, 1877; Bouey to Coppinger, July 10, 1877, *ibid.*, Vol. 198; John Mardenborough to Coppinger, June 6, 1877, *ibid.*, Vol. 197.

¹² *News and Courier*, Apr. 16, 1878.

the movement. He had travelled extensively in Africa before the Civil War, and in the 1850's had been active on behalf of a scheme to colonize the Niger Valley with Negroes from the United States.¹³ B. F. Porter appeared in Columbia in August to speak on behalf of the colonization scheme,¹⁴ and in the northern tier of counties June Mobley, a colored citizen of Union County, travelled about making speeches in favor of Liberian emigration to all who would listen. He argued that it would be impossible for whites and blacks to live together in South Carolina as citizens. The black man would always "take his place in the kitchen," to use the speaker's words. He saw no way in which the colored could prosper, for in order to prosper they must become landowners. That would be extremely difficult, he argued, because of the repeal of the lien law. Mobley, however, warned against precipitate action, and asked for contributions so that he could make a trip to Africa and bring back a report on conditions.¹⁵

Rumors of the fertility of the Liberian soil and the salubrity of the Liberian climate reached fantastic proportions in the state. One laborer told a reporter he had been informed that potatoes grew to such proportions in Liberia that a single potato could more than supply the want of a large family for a whole day; that it was necessary when one wanted sugar or syrup only to bore a gimlet hole in a tree; that certain trees produced bacon; and that fires were almost unknown, the heat of the sun being enough for cooking purposes.¹⁶ Jasper Smith of Union, having heard that Congress had appropriated \$100,000 for emigration, sent a petition for aid signed by a number of his neighbors, to be presented to the Congress.¹⁷

The Negro churches were at first opposed to the movement for fear of losing some of their best members, but as time went by they fell in line, applying their zeal to "their appointed work" of carrying the religion of Christ into the jungles of Africa. In addition, colored ministers advanced the argument that the discontented should be encouraged to emigrate because their presence would be a general detriment to the communities in which they lived if they were unable to get away.¹⁸

The responsive chord that emigration propaganda struck among Negroes is indicated by the volume of mail that was received from various points in the state by William Coppinger, Secretary of the American Colonization Society. Although Coppinger's group was not organically connected with

¹³ Frank A. Rollin, *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany* (Boston: 1883), 84-85, 96; *News and Courier*, Apr. 16, 1878.

¹⁴ *Columbia Daily Register*, Aug. 21, 1877.

¹⁵ *Yorkville Enquirer*, Sept. 27, Oct. 1, 1877.

¹⁶ *News and Courier*, Aug. 21, 1877.

¹⁷ Jasper Smith to Coppinger, Jan. 3, 1878, Am. Col. Soc. Papers, Vol. 200.

¹⁸ *News and Courier*, April 16, 1878.

the company formed in Charleston during 1877, it was to him that many including the officers of the Charleston group, turned for information. William G. White of Claflin University wrote to get information because, he said, "Many are desirous of emigrating. . . ."¹⁹ William Martin of Columbia reported that he had received more than fifty requests for information from different parts of the state.²⁰ I. H. Rivers reported from Blackville that Negroes in his neighborhood were making up clubs to aid the emigration movement and that his club wanted five hundred copies of the latest issue of the *African Repository*. Samuel J. Lee wrote from Aiken that he had had numerous inquiries about conditions in Liberia and wanted reliable information.²¹ James G. G. A. Talley of Mount Jory, Union County, planned to make up a company in his neighborhood, and E. J. Furby of Society Hill estimated that two hundred families from Marlboro County would go, one hundred having already signed to go if they could get help. From a farm near Guthriesville in York County, George Black wrote that he had heard much talk among the colored people of his neighborhood about Liberia, and had heard June Mobley say "the colonization society out nort have send sum of our peeples to liberia." He wrote for "sum of papers that would give me a better understanding about going to liberia as I am won among the menny that am in favor of going." He had a wife and three children and was willing to sacrifice everything he had "to give them there liberty which I consider very sacraid."²² Nelson Davies of Yorkville, however, reported in February, 1878, that a party he had collected to emigrate had been dissuaded by people who had been to Liberia and returned, having become dissatisfied.²³ There was a large group of these in York County, apparently some of those sent by the Colonization Society during Reconstruction.

In Chester the Negroes of the county were reported during August, 1877, to be "afflicted with the Liberia fever." "Their feelings have been so wrought upon . . . that there is no doubt that a large number of them, if not a majority, would take their departure with little or no preparation. . . . At some places in the county the desire to shake off the dust of their feet against this Democratic State is so great, that they are talking of selling out their crops and their personal effects, save what they would need in their new home."²⁴ But the reporter who made this observation concluded that the

¹⁹ G. White to Coppinger, March 14, 1877, Am. Col. Soc. Papers, Vol. 196.

²⁰ Martin to Coppinger, May 3, 1877, *ibid.*, Vol. 197.

²¹ Rivers to Coppinger, Aug. 8, 1877; Lee to Coppinger, Sept. 19, 1877, *ibid.*, Vol. 198.

²² Talley to Coppinger, Oct. 1, 1877; George Black to Coppinger, Oct. 16, 1877, *ibid.*, Vol. 199.

²³ Davies to Coppinger, Feb. 5, 12, *ibid.*, Vol. 200.

²⁴ Yorkville *Enquirer*, Aug. 30, 1877.

emigration excitement would end in talk, for the very simple reason that those who wanted to go were destitute of the means. The white press attempted to dissuade those who wanted to emigrate by warning that the entire scheme was fraudulent. The *Columbia Daily Register* headed its account of a meeting addressed by B. F. Porter, "The Liberian Fraud," and warned the Negroes that the "whole scheme is gotten up by a few sharpers of your own race and a lot of white rascals, who would delude you by first robbing you of your little hard earnings and then leave you to die in the jungles of the native wilds of your ancestors. . . ." ²⁵ From Ellenton it was reported that the Negroes took no stock whatever in the "Liberian humbug," although numbers of them were migrating from Barnwell to Beaufort, "a sort of negro paradise." The Orangeburg *Taxpayer* expressed fear "that many an honest darkey has been deluded into this trap by designing and dishonest men." ²⁶ In January, 1878, when parties of Negroes began to arrive in Charleston, having heard that a ship was available to take them to Liberia, they found none available, and the officers of the exodus association offered to get them jobs in the nearby phosphate works. The *News and Courier* bemoaned the fact that whipping had been abolished as a punishment in South Carolina, but suggested that "if the deluded colored people, from Georgia and South Carolina, were to vigorously apply forty lashes save one, to the fat backs of the sharpers who have swindled them, public opinion would not condemn the deed very severely!" ²⁷

Meanwhile, however, the exodus association had acquired a fund of \$6,000 from the sale of stock; and its president, B. F. Porter, under pressure from the emigrants who had arrived prematurely in Charleston, left in January to select a ship. ²⁸ On March 18 the bark *Azor* arrived in the port of Charleston, "gaily decorated with flags which fluttered in the brisk breeze." It was of clipper build, of 411.97 tons burden, with "a rakish look, indicative of fast sailing." Having come from Boston in fourteen days, the captain estimated that he could make Monrovia in twenty-five. The vessel had 19 berths for cabin passengers, and 140 berths for steerage. ²⁹ On March 21, the bark was consecrated at a special religious service at White Point Garden, in the presence of 5,000 Negroes. The ladies of St. Joseph's Union presented to Martin R. Delany the flag of Liberia, and several addresses were made, all breathing missionary zeal. B. F. Porter remarked that the consecration of a ship was a little unusual, "but the colored race was one

²⁵ *Daily Register*, Aug. 19, 21, 1877.

²⁶ *News and Courier*, Jan. 22; March 26, 1878, quoting Orangeburg *Taxpayer*.

²⁷ *News and Courier*, Jan. 3, 1878.

²⁸ *Ibid.*; *For Africa! Special Voyage to Monrovia, Liberia*, Broadside dated Jan. 16, 1879, in Am. Col. Soc. Papers, Vol. 204.

²⁹ *News and Courier*, March 19, 1878.

that eminently believed in God, and was learning to believe in the evangelization of the millions of their people who now sat in darkness." The Reverend Henry M. Turner told the crowd that the vessel "was not only to bear a load of humanity, but to take back the culture, education, and religion acquired here. The work inaugurated then would never stop until the blaze of Gospel truth should glitter over the whole broad African continent."³⁰

During the following month, arrangements were made for departure, and exactly one month after consecration, the *Azor* sailed out of Charleston with 206 emigrants aboard, 175 having been left ashore when it was discovered that the emigrants, in their enthusiasm, had overloaded the ship. The association purchased a plantation on Wando River for them to occupy until it returned.³¹ Two churches were organized among the emigrants, the African Methodist Episcopal Church under the Reverend S. Flegler, and the Shiloh Baptist Church, with a clerk and seven deacons.³² The *News and Courier*, still doubtful of the wisdom of the emigration, said the friends of the race wished the emigrants, "most sincerely, complete success in their undertaking, and bid them with one voice, God-speed!"³³

A. B. Williams, then a young reporter for the *News and Courier*, accompanied the emigrants on their voyage to Monrovia and wrote a comprehensive account of the trip. On the way over he found that various causes had motivated them. Some were going because they thought they would have a better chance to "rise in the world" with easily procured land, and social equality with their neighbors; while others were tired of renting or working out, and wanted to be their own masters. An emigrant from Georgia said that farm laborers had no security for their earnings and therefore no reason to work. Other persons "ground the 'Outrage Mill' " freely, and complained of "Ku-Klux," "Night Hawks," and "political persecutions." "By constant repetition of and additions to these tales of horror, they get to put implicit confidence in them, and such groundless fears have probably really something to do with this movement. It seems though that, in the main, various and widely differing opinions and views brought the emigrants to Charleston. Once there, they were soon rallied under the general watch-words of 'Political persecution' and 'Social equality.' "³⁴

The management of the association was guilty of several serious blunders which caused a frightful mortality from fever; 23 of the 206 emigrants died before reaching Africa.³⁵ The water supply was insufficient and gave out

³⁰ *Ibid.*, March 22, 1878; see also *African Repository*, LIV (July, 1878), 77-78.

³¹ *News and Courier*, April 23, 1878.

³² *African Repository*, LIV (July, 1878), 78.

³³ April 18, 1878.

³⁴ A. B. Williams, *The Liberian Exodus*, 11.

³⁵ *News and Courier*, June 17, 1878.

shortly before the arrival of the vessel. The flour was coarse and black, the meal poor, being stigmatized as "kiln-dried stuff, only fit for hogs to eat," the rice was broken and dirty, and the meat was only enough to last when carefully doled out, although all except five barrels belonged to the "six months' stores," intended for the support of the emigrants after their arrival in Liberia. All of it was used on the voyage.³⁶ In addition, despite the law, there was no doctor on the vessel. Arrangements had been made by B. F. Porter for Dr. J. W. Watts of Washington to accompany the *Azor*, but when he failed to arrive, George Curtis volunteered to be the physician and was so presented to the Custom-House officials. Although he had never practiced, he claimed to have a knowledge of medicine, and, since his wife was a regular nurse, it was thought that the passengers could get along.³⁷ Williams reported that Curtis knew about as much of medicine "as a street car mule." During the voyage he prowled about the decks with a small book called *The Mariner's Medical Guide* in one hand and compounds extracted from the medicine chest in the other. "It is horrible," said Williams, "to think of a blundering ignoramus like this man having charge of the health of some three hundred people, a large majority of whom were women and children. It is only Heaven's mercy that there are not even more deaths to record."³⁸

The vessel arrived at Sierra Leone on May 19, where additional debts were incurred by the captain for supplies, pilotage, and, when the vessel became becalmed, for towage. The passengers were finally delivered in

³⁶ A. B. Williams, *The Liberian Exodus*, 2.

³⁷ Report of interview with B. F. Porter in Baltimore, July 9, 1878, in dispatch to New York *Herald*, n.d. See unidentified clipping in volume titled *Azor* in Edward Willis Pamphlets, S. C. Historical Society.

³⁸ A. B. Williams, *The Liberian Exodus*, 6. The ebullient and irresponsible George Curtis was a constant source of difficulty to the movement. When the Liberian Exodus Company was barely under way he had had illusions of getting the Charleston Chamber of Commerce to join with the Liberian government in raising a loan of \$2,000,000 with which to establish a line of steamers between the two countries "on a grand scale." Later, an appeal through the *News and Courier* for help for the emigrants had to be disavowed by Delany, who wrote: "Mr. Curtis of his own volition has not attended, except casually, the meetings of the board of directors for several months, and consequently could know but little of what was going on. His article and call for help was gratuitous, entirely unauthorized, and no such aid . . . is needed." Meanwhile it was disclosed that when he removed to Charleston, he had deserted his wife, two of his own children, and three of hers by a previous marriage. His only defense was, that "If every *liaison* is to be deemed a marriage, then we have a sufficient number of Utahs without going to the particular Territory of that name." It was later reported by a returning emigrant that he had deserted in Liberia the wife who had migrated there with him, and had "a sweetheart" in Liberia. *News and Courier*, Aug. 6, 17, 1877; April 5, 6, 17, 1878; May 13, 1879; Curtis to Coppinger, July 27, 1877, Am. Col. Soc. Papers, Vol. 198.

Monrovia on June 3.³⁹ After a forty-two days' journey, with the replenishing of supplies at Sierra Leone, there were still barely three weeks' supplies for the emigrants, including the ship's stores, which were turned over to them by the captain. Mitchell Williams, an emigrant who died on the voyage, had receipts for \$558.20 for provisions, a share in a grist mill, dry goods, a due bill, and stock. His widow found in Monrovia that she had only the stock, dry goods, about fifteen dollars' worth of provisions and the papers. There was no sign of any grist mill.⁴⁰

The additional expenses incurred at Sierra Leone proved to be the burden that broke the back of the Liberian Exodus Joint Stock Steamship Company. Late in May, 1878, bills for \$1,680 reached the company, \$1,050 of which was for towage charged by the British steamer, *Senegal*. Appeals for help were sent out to the American Colonization Society, and offers were made to transport its emigrants on the *Azor* more cheaply than Yates and Porterfield, the company with which the society had been dealing.⁴¹ Captain Holmes, who had been trying to buy the *Azor* at the time it was purchased by Porter for the Company, was hired on the understanding that he was familiar with the coast of Africa and would open a profitable trade to the profit of the company and himself. Holmes, however, returned to Charleston without any freight, "but breathing death and slaughter to all concerned." He then obtained a full freight for London, worth \$3,000 or more, but the income was all squandered on expenses. From London he wrote that he would sail to Africa for a home freight, but was next heard from late in 1878 off the Charleston bar, without freight or revenue. He was naturally suspected of engineering a swindle in order to get possession of the vessel.⁴²

In January, 1879, the Company announced another trip to Liberia, with the object of clearing the vessel of the heavy debt against her. This time the voyage was not for the stockholders of the company, but a regular fare of \$40 for steerage passengers and \$65 for cabin passengers was charged. The officers of the company admitted that they had bought the vessel when they had but \$6,000 on hand, because emigrants were already pouring into Charleston, and that more than three hundred had been left in the city who were unable to make the trip; but they promised that "No such blunders will be permitted to occur again."⁴³ The departure date was set at February 20, but the voyage was never made.

³⁹ *News and Courier*, June 17, 24, 1878.

⁴⁰ A. B. Williams, *The Liberian Exodus*, 33.

⁴¹ Martin R. Delany to Eli K. Price, July 12, 1878, Am. Col. Soc. Papers, Vol. 202; H. N. Bouey to Coppinger, Jan. 16, 1879, *ibid.*, Vol. 204.

⁴² Unidentified clipping from a Negro paper, *Azor*, Edward Willis Pamphlets, S. C. Historical Society.

⁴³ *For Africa! Voyage to Monrovia, Liberia*, in *Azor*, Edward Willis Pamphlets.

Meanwhile, a libel against the *Azor* had been filed in the United States Admiralty Court in Charleston by Captain W. E. Holmes and Mate Sidney E. Horne for back wages and money loaned to the company, by the firm of Fuller and Chase for the cost of the anchor, and by Anna M. Gaillard, wife of a former state senator from Charleston who had gone on the first trip of the *Azor*, for \$1,021 advanced for the purpose of fitting out the bark.⁴⁴ Late in March the company announced a mass meeting at Gibbs Farm near Charleston to raise not less than \$5,000, "which must be raised at once or our property will go into the hands of Northern sharpers. . . ."⁴⁵ It was apparently unsuccessful, however, for Major Edward Willis, a white legal representative of the company, wrote to John H. B. Latrobe of the American Colonization Society in October that the company would require a loan to save the *Azor*.⁴⁶

In November the vessel was sold at auction by order of the court, and was purchased for \$2,950 by Edward Willis, representative of the company, acting for F. S. Rodgers, a wealthy white merchant.⁴⁷ This transaction was undertaken on the understanding that the Liberian Exodus Joint Stock Steamship Company would repurchase the vessel from Rodgers. At the time of Rodgers' purchase the company furnished \$450 of the purchase price and made a contract authorizing it to repurchase the vessel for the remainder of the price Rodgers had paid plus \$175, or a total of \$2,675, provided the amount was in Rodgers's hands by November 11, 1880.⁴⁸

Rodgers, however, violated the contract by selling the vessel to parties in Boston five months before the expiration of the contract, and when the company presented him the \$2,675 on the due date, the vessel had long since been out of his hands. "The transaction has surprised everybody," wrote Martin R. Delany, "as this merchant is very wealthy, was commended as being very reliable, and generally reputed to be a gentleman of unswerving integrity."⁴⁹

A suit entered by the company to recover \$7,325 on the contract from Rodgers, dragged on through the courts until 1884. A circuit court ruled in 1883 that the company was not a legal corporation because it was incorporated under a law that gave no authority to incorporate navigation companies. This was reversed in 1884 by the state Supreme Court, which

⁴⁴ *News and Courier*, Feb. 1, March 12, July 7, 1879; Edward Willis to John H. B. Latrobe, October 2, 1879, Am. Col. Soc. Papers, Vol. 207.

⁴⁵ *Save Our Ship the Azor!* Broadside dated March 31, 1879, in *Azor*, Edward Willis Pamphlets.

⁴⁶ Willis to Latrobe, Oct. 2, 1879, Am. Col. Soc. Papers, Vol. 207.

⁴⁷ *News and Courier*, Nov. 9, 1879.

⁴⁸ *Liberian Exodus Joint-Stock Steamship Company v. Rodgers*, 21 S. C. Reports, 27-35.

⁴⁹ Delany to Coppinger, Dec. 18, 1880, Am. Col. Soc. Papers, Vol. 211.

ruled that the defendant had contracted with the Liberian Exodus Company, and therefore had no right to question its legal existence later; the Court also ruled that the charter could be taken away from the company only by suit commenced by the attorney-general of the state. It then remanded the case to the lower court.⁵⁰ There is, however, no evidence that the company was ever able to recover, since Rodgers had ample resources and the company had few to continue the litigation.

Liberia was not made more attractive by the reports, which were spread far and wide, of mismanagement and fatalities on the first *Azor* voyage, nor by the subsequent reports of emigrants who returned to the United States. In May, 1879, Spencer Reeves of Milledgeville, Georgia, an *Azor* emigrant, returned to his home, complaining that Liberia had been misrepresented to him. He had lost his wife and youngest child. But the *Monrovia*, on which Reeves had returned to New York, was reported to be preparing a return voyage to Liberia with about eighty Negroes, many of them from the northern counties of South Carolina.⁵¹ In December, 1879, the *Monrovia* brought back to New York eighteen more *Azor* emigrants who reported that not one in the *Azor* party would remain if he had the means to return. Most of them, because of their poverty and the dissipation of their supplies during the voyage, were said to have been thrown on the charity of the Liberians.⁵²

It was from the returnees and from newspaper stories about their miserable condition that Negroes generally learned to be wary of Liberian exodus schemes. The apparently complete failure of the *Azor* project caused potential emigrants to turn their attention elsewhere, and after 1879 the Negro emigration movement in South Carolina was a part of the general Southwide movement of emigration to the West.⁵³

Success in Liberia being more slowly achieved than failure, the reports of successful emigrants did not arrive until years after the assumption of

⁵⁰ *Liberian Exodus Joint-Stock Steamship Company v. Rodgers*, 21 S. C. 27-35.

⁵¹ *News and Courier*, May 9, 13, 1879.

⁵² *Yorkville Enquirer*, Dec. 11, 1879, quoting New York *Herald*. A comical aspect of difficulties experienced in Liberia was presented when the *News and Courier*, Aug. 18, 1879, reported that the U. S. minister in Liberia had sent the State Department an account of the secession of a number of native tribes in the interior, in which he attributed the secession fever to the *Azor* emigrants who had brought to Liberia the heresy of state rights. In a later dispatch it was indicated that the trouble was apparently engineered by British imperialists looking toward a seizure of Liberia. *Ibid.*, Aug. 26.

⁵³ As late as 1886 a "Rev. J. C. Davidson," an alleged Baptist minister, swindled a number of Negroes in the area of Fort Mill by promising to furnish them a train to New York, whence they would be taken to Liberia. A number of would-be emigrants paid for their passage, but neither the train nor "Davidson" appeared at time for departure. *Columbia Daily Register*, December 24, 1886.

general failure had been widely accepted. One emigrant wrote in 1880: "Almost every week I see some of the *Azor* people living at Poor Bar, and they report themselves as doing well. Those at Bonnevillie are greatly elated at their success. I don't think that there is one of them that could be induced to return to America on any account—things remaining in that country as they are now." The same correspondent reported 173 of the *Azor* emigrants, to his own knowledge, to be still in Liberia, and others perhaps in the interior, contrary to stories that the majority had died or returned to America.⁵⁴

Saul Hill, a native of York, reported four years later that he had established a successful coffee farm of 700 acres, the entire crop of which he sold to a Philadelphia firm, and was planning to send for his father. His success, however, was attributed by the *Columbia Daily Register* to the fact that he had been in good financial circumstances when he left. "A number of other colored men went to Liberia at the same time, but some of them returned in a year or so afterward as poor as church mice and thoroughly disgusted with the new country."⁵⁵

In 1890 it was reported that Charleston had furnished to Liberia some of its most prominent citizens. C. L. Parsons, Chief Justice of the Liberian Supreme Court, was a native of Charleston. Clement Irons, another native of Charleston, had built the first steamship constructed in Liberia. It had been launched on the St. Paul's River in December, 1888.⁵⁶ In 1891 the Reverend David Frazier, an emigrant from South Carolina, was elected to the Liberian Senate. He had opened a coffee farm with 20,000 trees and was hoping to have 30,000 the following year.⁵⁷

Despite the success of these individuals, the Liberian Exodus Joint Stock Steamship Company must be put down as a failure. The causes of failure are numerous, but all cannot be attributed to the officers of the company. The difficulties experienced on the first voyage from want of supplies were the natural error of inexperienced persons. Porter claimed that the depletion of the water supply had resulted from extravagant waste.⁵⁸ The additional heavy expenses incurred at Sierra Leone were entirely unforeseen, but the company could be blamed for operating on such a close margin that unforeseen expenses could not be handled. The officers of the company sought to explain this away as having resulted from the en-

⁵⁴ D. B. Warner to Coppinger, Jan. 5, 1880, in *Philadelphia Christian Recorder*, quoted in *News and Courier*, March 13, 1880.

⁵⁵ *Daily Register*, Dec. 17, 1884.

⁵⁶ *African Repository*, LXVI (Jan. 1890), 28-29.

⁵⁷ *Daily Register*, July 24, 1891, quoting *Winnsboro News*.

⁵⁸ Interview with B. F. Porter in Baltimore, July 9, 1878, in *N. Y. Herald*, n.d. See unidentified clipping in *Azor*, Willis Pamphlets.

thusiasm of the emigrants who had gathered in Charleston in great numbers early in 1878 and had practically forced the company to purchase the *Azor* before sufficient funds were on hand.⁵⁹ The plan of B. F. Porter to organize a regular trade between Charleston and Monrovia was not altogether impractical, but was undone by either the swindling, or the incompetency, of the white captain of the vessel. The final loss of the *Azor* was an obvious swindle by a man who took advantage of the financial stringency of the company to make a contract which he later violated despite its clear provisions, and then sought to justify his action through sheer legal chicanery.

At the time of the sale of the *Azor* in November 1878, there had been in Charleston about fifty families, gathered by George W. West, who were eager to get transportation to Africa. Their leader wrote that, if they could not get away, "the poor people Will Die with grief from the treatments they have to incout [*sic*] with. We have to keep our mouths shut for Everything they say to us. We are no more than dogs here in S. C. and i am going to Lookout a place for them on the St. Paul's River and try through the Lords help to get them out."⁶⁰

The whole project was destroyed by the accumulation of unforeseen debts, the remorseless pressure of creditors, the pitiless propaganda by the white press that "Curtis & Co. are humbugs,"⁶¹ and, finally, by lengthy and devious litigation. Although the idea of emigration to Africa was an unrealistic solution for the problems of Southern Negroes, there was sufficient interest among the Negroes in South Carolina to have made the Liberian Exodus Company a minor success had it not been destroyed by the concatenation of unfortunate circumstances.

⁵⁹ *For Africa! Voyage to Monrovia, Liberia*, in *Azor*, Edward Willis Pamphlets.

⁶⁰ West to Coppinger, Nov. 19, 1878, *ibid.*, Vol. 203.

⁶¹ *News and Courier*, June 19, 1878.