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AN ADDRESS

TO

THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,

ON THE SUBJECT OF

**AMERICAN SLAVERY,**

BY

“THE ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS FOR PROMOTING  
“ THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY,” &c.



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## ADDRESS.

DEAR FRIENDS :

It is with the deepest interest, that we feel called upon to address you on the subject of American Slavery. Intimately connected with the happiness of nearly three millions of our fellow-men, it is entitled, at all times, to our serious consideration :—while the increased attention with which it is now regarded by the greater portion of the community, and the high importance which it has assumed in connection with the religious feeling of the country, render it, at the present moment, a subject of peculiar importance. The spirit of freedom and the spirit of oppression are aroused in our land—and as the contest which they are waging for the mastery is constantly growing more determined, it becomes the duty of each one to consider, whether he is not bound to raise his voice “for the law and the testimony,” and, like the ancient prophet, to plead with the oppressor for the emancipation of his brethren.

Of the sinfulness of slaveholding we do not deem it necessary to speak in this communication. That every man has the right to enjoy personal freedom—and that it is wrong to deprive him of the free exercise of that right;—these are propositions which are already too fully settled in the public mind to need that we should here attempt to sustain them. The dictates of our reason—the feelings of our nature—and the law of God written on our conscience—all condemn the enslaving of our brother, and demand his unconditional liberation. Of the duty of striving for the attainment of this object—and of the means we should adopt for the success of our efforts;—these are subjects which are presented to the thoughtful mind, and to which we would now invite your serious consideration,

We urge the duty of laboring for the abolition of slavery from the unchangeable character of the system. It is the constant destruction of the happiness of the slave. It is the violation of his natural and inalienable rights. It is the continual robbery of the fruits of his toil. It is the unceasing degradation of his immortal mind. It is the making merchandize of a being created in the Divine image, and crowned with glory and honor. To endeavor to promote its overthrow, therefore, we are called upon, by the love which we bear to our brother, and by the regard which we entertain for the law of our common

Father. Convinced of the sinfulness of slaveholding, we are under the highest obligations of enlightened duty to labor for its abolition. There is a law written on every heart which commands us to love whatever we believe to be right, and calculated to add to the amount of human happiness—and to condemn that which we conceive to be wrong, and inconsistent with the rational enjoyment of our fellow-men;—which leads us to lend our support to every movement which is intended to promote the welfare of the world—and to strive for the overthrow of every institution which has a tendency to increase the sufferings of her unhappy children.

Wherever the captive is pining in his chain—wherever the sorrowing is mourning for a comforter—wherever the widow is weeping for the departed, or the fatherless is sighing in the depths of his affliction;—there are we led by “the still, small voice” within us—by the law of the Highest written on the soul, to devote our energies, and exert every power to give freedom to the oppressed—to offer consolation to the unhappy—to manifest sympathy for the widow, and show protection to the friendless orphan. The right and the duty of laboring for the welfare of our fellow-men commence with our own creation. We were born to do good to the world—to love our neighbor—to increase his happiness, and guard him from trial and danger. The desire to promote his welfare is written in the feelings and sympathies which constitute a portion of our nature, and we are false to those feelings and sympathies when we inquire, as did one of old, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” We have with him a common hope and a common inheritance, and our earthly pilgrimage should be one of mutual support and mutual dependence.

Nor is this merely the dictate of our natural feeling. It is an obligation imposed upon us by the precepts of our religion. To feed the hungry—to clothe the naked—to visit the sick—to comfort the distressed—to remember those in bonds as bound with them;—these are duties enjoined upon us by the teachings of the blessed Redeemer. Their faithful performance is essential to the perfection of the Christian character, and the promised reward of faithfulness is an entrance with him into the kingdom of Heaven. His own life was the fulfilling of the law of love to his brethren. His was an errand to save the souls of men. For this purpose, came he into the world. Yet would he pause by the wayside to heal the sick—to give sight to the blind—and to administer relief and consolation to the poor and desolate. Let us learn by his teaching and by his example, that love to our fellow-men, and love to our Heavenly Father go hand in hand together; that a continual regard for their happiness, and a constant

endeavor to promote their welfare, are in accordance with our reverence for His Name, and our desire to fulfil His law ; and that our lives, to be acceptable before Him, should be devoted as well to the relief of His suffering poor as to the preaching of His most glorious Word.

Nor should we be unmindful of the character of our religious profession. We claim to have taken higher and better ground than other denominations. Our Society arose amid the oppressions which were tolerated by the church, and its distinguishing feature has been in the efforts which it has made for the promotion of reform in the views and practices of the world. Many of its members, with more or less faithfulness, have ever maintained a testimony against those evils which have arrested the prosperity, blighted the happiness, and destroyed the peace of the human family. When they have beheld war passing over the earth with giant strides, striking down the form of vigorous manhood, and ruining the hopes of the dependant parent, the sorrowing wife and the helpless children—when they have beheld oppression extending its power over millions of their fellow-men, degrading the mind of the slave, robbing him of the produce of his labor, and violating, in his person, those rights which belong to humanity, and may not be destroyed—when they have beheld intemperance exerting its influence in the community, searing the intellect, and sowing the seeds of disease, decay, and premature death ;—they have borne their testimony against them, in the light of Christian truth, as contrary to the interests of the human race and the Divine law written on the heart. They have labored, in the manner which they believed appointed, for their overthrow, and to the faithfulness which they have manifested in thus obeying the requirements of duty, are we chiefly indebted, under Providence, for the efforts which many in the community are now making for the abolition of those systems of unmeasured evil.

But with those faithful laborers have not passed away the duties which they performed. The evils which they endeavored to abolish are still exercising their influence in society ; and that to which your attention has been directed, has day by day increased in strength and multiplied its power. Its character is still the same, and the necessity and obligation of striving for its abolition has not been diminished.—The reverence which we owe to Him who created of one blood all the nations of men, and regards with equal favor the freeman and the slave ;—the love which we bear to Him, who took upon himself the despised form of a servant, and, in the name of the Father, preached deliverance to the captive, and the opening of the prison to those that

were bound ;—the respect which we owe to the memories and the bright example of those early Friends who breasted the storm of popular odium, and, in opposition to their own personal interests, faithfully maintained their testimony against slaveholding ;—the sympathy which we feel for nearly three millions of our fellow men, who are oppressed in body and degraded in mind, who know no friend, and hear no comforter, who have no joy in the present, and entertain no hope for the future ;—every feeling and every inducement which would lead us to the performance of our duty ;—all these impel us to labor with unceasing diligence, with unfading determination, with devoted sincerity, for the overthrow of American slavery.

The measures we should adopt for the attainment of this object, will readily be conceived by those who reflect upon the influences which uphold the system. Pride, prejudice, and the love of power—these may help to sustain it ;—but the chief inducement to its continuance, is the pecuniary gain resulting from the uncompensated labor of the bondman. Our first effort, therefore, should be to withdraw all support from slaveholding, as far as possible, by refusing to consume its productions. Such a course is demanded, not only by our desire to have no connection with the evil, but also by our regard for the consistency of our action, as members of the Society of Friends—for no trade is more fraudulent than that of slavery, and no goods are more unjustly obtained than those wrung from the unwilling bondman ;—and by the influence which it will have upon the community, in manifesting, through the frequent sacrifice of our own convenience and enjoyment, the sincerity of our opinions, and affording, to a great degree, the evidence of the justice of the views which we entertain. It will be constantly showing to the world that we are conscientiously opposed to slavery, and enforcing our sentiment by the most effectual of all means—the consistency and purity of our own action. Wherever we go—in every situation in which we may be placed—the opportunity will be afforded us, to maintain our righteous testimony, and to endeavor to convince those with whom we have connection, of its justice and its truth. And in thus laboring for the conversion of the public mind, we would be pursuing the most effectual means in our power for the promotion of our object. Self interest is the influence which induces the enslaving of our fellow men ; but the oppression could not long continue, if public opinion should be directed against it, and in favor of its immediate abolition. The slaveholder would be moved by the popular sentiment. His mind would be acted upon by the mind of the community. He would be convinced by the influences around him, of the sinfulness and of

the inexpediency of slaveholding, and would be compelled by his sense of duty, by his regard for his own interests, and by his desire for the respect of his fellow-men, to consent to emancipation.

To the changing and purifying of public opinion, therefore, we would chiefly devote our attention, and the means we would adopt for this purpose are such as have hitherto been pursued for the advancement of moral reform in the world. By upholding our principles at the domestic fireside, in the social circle, and in the more extended gathering—by maintaining our testimony in our ordinary pursuits, in our every day intercourse, and in our moral and religious connections—by embracing every proper opportunity to sustain the truth of the doctrines which we profess, and to show that their tendency will be to promote the interest of every portion of society, we should, with the Divine blessing, be enabled to convince those with whom we have connection, of the justice of our enterprise, and to lead them to labor, in the same manner, for the accomplishment of our purpose. Mind would be influenced by mind—and the effect of our labors would be witnessed in the continual advancement of public opinion to a more just and perfect standard—and in the exertion of that public opinion to induce the slaveholder to renounce his claim to all right of property in human flesh and blood.

If we needed any other evidence than our reason and sense of duty, to convince us of the expediency and propriety of these measures, we would refer to the progress which has been made, through their influence, in the advancement of this cause during the past ten years. At the commencement of that period, the anti-slavery question was regarded with but little interest by the community. The great mass of the people were too deeply insensible of its high importance, or too much devoted to their own personal interests, to inquire into its character, or to give it their consideration; while, at the same time they gave the weight of their countenance and sanction to slavery, by showing the highest personal friendship and regard to those who were its willing and unblushing supporters, and admitting them, with willing cheerfulness, to the privileges of their religious communion: And the Society of Friends, from various influences, had ceased to maintain an active testimony against the system, apparently regarding it as an evil to be deplored, rather than to be abolished through the aid of their influence or exertion. Any open hostility to slavery, was regarded with but little attention, and when the movement in favor of its immediate abolition was commenced, it was considered in the popular estimation, to be of but little practical moment.—But, it soon came to be regarded with feelings of deeper interest. The cha-

acter of slavery was fully opened to the view of the public mind, and, with each succeeding year, those who have labored for its abolition have been strengthened by the increase of their numbers, and by the extension of their influence in society. They have been supported by the inward consciousness, that truth and righteousness have been on their side—and through all their labor, they have been sustained in the assurance that they have been favored with the Divine blessing.

Thus supported and thus sustained, they have pursued the work to which they believed themselves called in the beginning. They have engaged in unceasing exertion. They have consented to repeated personal sacrifice. They have endured bitter persecution, even from their fellow-laborers in the Christian vineyard.—And the influence of their efforts is now acknowledged throughout every part of our country. They are no longer a despised and powerless band. They are regarded with respect by every portion of the community, and their power is feared by those who are interested in the continuance of slavery. The progress which they have made in their work has been unequalled by the advancement of any other similar branch of reform, and should strengthen us to pursue the same means, as far as may be consistent with our convictions of duty, for the attainment of the same end—in the confidence, that they who labor in the name of the Highest, and in the cause of His oppressed and suffering children, shall labor not in vain.

On behalf of a meeting of “The Association of Friends for promoting the abolition of slavery, and improving the condition of the free people of color,” held at Green Street Meeting House, Philadelphia, the tenth of Fifth Month, 1842.

CALEB CLOTHIER, }  
SARAH M. PALMER, } *Clerks.*







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