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ANTI-SLAVERY BEFORE GARRISON

AN ADDRESS BEFORE THE CONNECTICUT
SOCIETY OF THE ORDER OF THE FOUNDERS
AND PATRIOTS OF AMERICA, NEW HAVEN,
SEPTEMBER 19, 1902

BEING A CONTRIBUTION TOWARD THE HITHERTO
UNWRITTEN LIFE OF

THE TRUE WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON

By LEONARD WOOLSEY BACON

PASTOR AT ASSONET, MASS.

NEW HAVEN:
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ANTI-SLAVERY BEFORE GARRISON.

Among the most grateful duties of the Order of the Founders and Patriots of America must, of course, be reckoned that of commemorating the virtues and honorable deeds of leaders whose worth is universally known and acknowledged.

An even higher duty is to rescue from neglect and oblivion the record of unknown or forgotten patriots. It is a duty which this Connecticut Society of the Order has fulfilled, by the graceful pen of its Governor, with distinguished fidelity and success.

A duty still more imperative sometimes emerges—that of defending the memory of the fathers from systematic defamation and detraction. Sectarian animosity, partisan rancor, and even the ignoble ambition to extol the memory of some favorite by disparaging worthier names, have again and again incited to the shameful business of covering some of the fairest pages of American history with ugly and malicious blots. It is this third task, that of defending the Founders and Patriots from defamation, which I have prescribed to myself to-day.

There is no point on which our Founders and Patriots have been more studiously traduced than in the misrepresentation, or the non-representation, of their record concerning slavery.

That record is eminently noble and honorable. Among the first and most important entries in it is

that Act of the General Court of Massachusetts, as early as 1641, declaring that with the exception of lawful captives taken in just wars, no slavery should ever be in the colony. Five years later, it took measures for returning to Africa the captives of a slave ship. If, thirty years later still, slavery had nevertheless gotten some foothold in the colony, it was in face of an impassioned protest, in the name of the Lord, from the apostolic John Eliot. From that first generation down, the succession of anti-slavery agitators has never once been interrupted, nor failed to include some of the noblest names among the Founders and Patriots. It is no disparagement to other sections to claim that in this the Founders and Patriots of New England took the lead. The popular impression that some precedence is to be conceded to the Quakers is a mistaken one. The voice of the "Pennsylvania Pilgrim" was not lifted up until nearly a half-century after the act of the General Court of Massachusetts, which was the voice of the church as well as of the state. The Quakers of Rhode Island learned their anti-slavery principles from the Connecticut deacon who declared to "College Tom" Hazard, in 1742, that the Quakers were no Christians because they held their fellow-men in slavery;* and afterward from the two Connecticut pastors at Newport, Samuel Hopkins and Ezra Stiles. These names bring us near home, and bring us down to the Revolutionary period when generous men, contending for their own inalienable rights, were not unmindful of the rights of others. It was in 1774 that Levi Hart, of

*See the "Life of College Tom," by his grandson's granddaughter, Caroline Hazard.

Preston, was invited to his native town of Farmington to preach his anti-slavery sermon to "the corporation of freemen;" and the next year that Aaron Cleveland, of Norwich, hatter, poet, legislator, minister of the gospel and tribune of the people, published his anti-slavery poem. It was distinctly in the line of this succession that Jonathan Edwards the Second, friend of Hopkins, preached at New Haven, before the Connecticut Abolition Society of which Ezra Stiles was president, his powerful and widely influential discourse against the slave trade and the whole system of slavery.

This was in 1791, and brings us near to the opening of the nineteenth century. For brevity's sake I must cut short this account of the earlier days of anti-slavery effort, although there are noble pages of history still unwritten here, and although the first two decades of the century include the history of the first great national controversy over the slavery question. But although the story has never been adequately written, there really is not much that is doubtful about it. It is only when we come to the decade from 1820 to 1830, a period hardly beyond the memory of some of us, that we find ourselves in the presence of most contradictory and confusing statements. I propose to compare and examine these in the interest of the truth of history.

On the one hand, it is declared, with impressive iteration and reiteration, that this period was one of general apathy and indifference on the subject of slavery and the wrongs and needs of the colored race. Mr. Garrison, speaking of the time when he began his agitation (which was about 1830), says:

"There was scarcely a man in all the land who dared to peep or mutter on the subject of slavery; the pulpit and the press were dumb; no anti-slavery organizations were made; no public addresses were delivered; no reproofs, no warnings, no entreaties were uttered in the ears of the people; silence, almost unbroken silence, prevailed universally. * * * It was necessary to wake up a nation then slumbering in the lap of moral death." (Life, I, 458.)

Mrs. Lydia Maria Child, publishing in 1833 her "Appeal in favor of the Africans," claims for Mr. Garrison "the merit of having first called public attention to a neglected and very important subject," and says:

"In this country we have not, until very recently, dared to publish anything upon the subject (of slavery). Our books, our reviews, our newspapers, our almanacs, have all been silent, or exerted their influence on the wrong side. The negro's crimes are repeated, but his sufferings are never told. Even in our geographies it is taught that the colored race must always be degraded." (Quoted in Qu. Chr. Spectator, VI, 454, 452.)

Mr. Oliver Johnson, who had ample means of informing himself, if he had been disposed to use them, says of the period from 1821 to 1829:

"There was hardly a ripple of excitement about slavery in any part of the nation. * * * The anti-slavery sentiment of the country had become too feeble to utter even a whisper. From one year's end to another there was scarcely a newspaper in all the land that made the slightest allusion to the subject. * * * Pulpit and press were generally silent. If they spoke at all, it was only to say that slavery was too dangerous a subject to be discussed. * * * The

state was morally paralyzed; the pulpit was dumb; the church heeded not the cry of the slave." (Garrison and His Times, 21-23.)

In like manner Mr. Wendell Phillips (among whose unquestionably brilliant endowments the faculty of exact statement was not included), at Mr. Garrison's funeral, glorifying his hero's exceptional and solitary keenness of conscience on this subject, at a time when "Christianity and statesmanship, the experience, the genius of the land, were aghast, amazed and confounded," speaks of "the miracle of that insight" amid "the blackness of the darkness of ignorance and indifference which then brooded over what was called the moral and religious element of the American people." (Eulogy, 2.)

I might add page after page of quotations on this side of the question, but let one more suffice. This time it shall be from Mr. Elizur Wright. Referring to this same period, he declares:

"It is no exaggeration to say, this nation, in church and state, from President to bootblack—I mean the white bootblack—was thoroughly pro-slavery. In the Sodom there might have been a Lot or two here and there, some profound thinker who wished justice to be done though the heavens fall, but he was despondent. It seemed as though nearly the whole business of the press, the pulpit and the theological seminary was to reconcile the people to the permanent degradation and slavery of the negro race." (In Life of Garrison, I, 298.)

So much for this side. Now let us compare some other statements as to the state of public opinion on

this same subject in the same community during this identical period.

No man lived at that time who was more competent to testify concerning "the moral and religious element of the American people" in all parts of the country than Jeremiah Evarts. A young New Haven lawyer, son-in-law to Roger Sherman, he laid down his practice in this city and removed to Boston, where he became editor of a religious magazine and Secretary of the American Board for Foreign Missions. He was father of William M. Evarts and uncle to the "old man eloquent," the senior Senator from Massachusetts, and was in some measurements a greater man than even his illustrious kinsmen. Never in his lifetime was there a struggle between public righteousness and public wrong in which he was not felt and feared as a champion of the right. At the end of his brave fight against the extension of slavery into Missouri, he rallied the anti-slavery forces from the momentary depression of their defeat, in a series of powerful and widely influential articles, in which he speaks of the compensations of that great failure. Says he:

"A powerful and united testimony has been borne, throughout a large part of our nation, against the extension of slavery; reasons have been urged, founded in the eternal principles of justice and commending themselves to the dispassionate judgment not less than to the feeling heart; *the country is awake to the dangers of slavery*; * * * and a *great and general sympathy* is felt for the blacks, and a deep interest in all plans for the improvement of their condition." (Panoplist, XVI, 72.)

and he proceeds to enforce the importance, without losing a day, of general, sustained, systematic effort for the abolition of slavery. (*Ibid.*, 241-5, 481-494.)

This was in 1820. Three years later we have a striking and highly trustworthy indication of the precise shade of "the blackness of the darkness of ignorance and indifference which then brooded over what was called the moral and religious element of the American people." (I quote again Mr. Phillips's rhetorical phraseology.) The "Society of Inquiry Concerning Missions" of Andover Seminary included within the scope of its studies whatever concerned the progress of "the kingdom of God and his righteousness." In the MS. volume of its Transactions for about 1823, out of six elaborate dissertations, not less than four (a very fair percentage) are devoted to the abolition of slavery and the elevation of the colored people. One of these discusses the question, "What is the duty of the Government, and the duty of Christians, with regard to slavery in the United States?" The writer, Royal Washburn, began with a statement which would have been met with a chorus of contradictions from his fellow students if they had not known it to be true:

"Perhaps there is not a more marked feature in the history of modern benevolent operations than the efforts made in favor of the unfortunate Africans. Forty years ago, there were few to weep over the wrongs and wretchedness of slavery; now thousands call the sons of Africa brethren, thousands are willing to devote their money and their efforts to redeem them from their long captivity, and thousands offer the daily prayer to him who 'hath made of one blood all nations

to dwell on the face of the earth,' that he would shorten the days of darkness and crime, and hasten that day of light and glory when oppressions shall cease, and a universal jubilee be proclaimed for all the enslaved of the human family."

Coming down two years later, to 1825, we come to a testimony in some respects more impressive and more unmistakable still. In that year was published at Charleston, S. C., the second edition of a pamphlet entitled, "A concise view of the critical situation and future prospects of the slave-holding States, in relation to their colored population; by Whitemarsh B. Seabrook." The "critical situation" therein depicted is occasioned by the widespread agitation of the slavery question at the North and at the South, and in the national Congress. The writer says :

"Under the specious plea of aiding the cause of the free colored population and of effecting a reformation in the condition of this portion of the community, the pulpit and the bar, the press and the legislative hall, have vied in the delineation of a picture around which, like the cross of olden time, the modern crusaders will be invited to rally. From these sources it has been asserted that slavery contradicts the primary principles of our government; that our slaves are wretched, and their wretchedness ought to be alleviated; that they are dangerous to the community, and this danger ought to be removed; and that, if the evils attendant on the circumstances of our colored population are not speedily eradicated, God in his righteous judgment will raise up a Touissaint or a Spartacus, or an African Tecumseh, to demand by what authority we hold them in subjection."

Then, referring to certain legislative proceedings and

proposals and memorials in Congress, he puts some indignant questions about these agitators :

“ Why have they said to Congress, ‘ lend us your aid to strike the fetters from the slave and to spread the enjoyment of unfettered freedom over the whole of our favored and happy land ? ’ Why have they declared that our slaves cannot long be kept in ignorance ; that they are surrounded with the memorials of freedom ; that the land which they watered with their tears is a land of liberty ; that they are never slow in learning that they are fettered ; and that freedom is the birthright of humanity ? ”

And he makes this bitter complaint of the northern press :

“ In the newspapers of the North and East, the question of emancipation is as calmly and soberly discussed as if it were a subject in the decision of which the interests of a few individuals alone were concerned. There are but few numbers of their numerous periodical works that have not an article on this copious topic ; scarcely a book whose pages are not sullied by the most distorted representations of the state of domestic servitude at the South. Whatever may be the nature of the subject ; whatever the design of the publication, whether to sketch the character of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, or to instruct the youthful mind in the first rudiments of knowledge ; slavery, slavery, slavery is there. Against the constitutional privileges of the slave-holder, to use the horrible and savage language of the Edinburgh Review, it would seem as if they had ‘ declared interminable war—war for themselves and for their children and for their grandchildren—war without peace—war without truce—war without quarter. ’ ”

Coming down to particulars, the writer adds that he

has "read several books for youth, manufactured at Boston and New York, with a page or two devoted to the description of the horrors and sin of negro slavery," and refers to many newspapers by name as eminently obnoxious, and particularly to the Boston Recorder.* All this, you will remember, is an account of the facts as they were in that "period of the blackness of the darkness of ignorance and indifference," when "the pulpit and the press were dumb" and "silence prevailed universally," when "it was necessary" for Mr. Garrison "to wake up a nation then slumbering in the lap of moral death."

Now the inevitable question arises, How are these two different representations to be reconciled? And the answer is equally inevitable: they cannot be reconciled. They are not merely different, they ~~are~~ mutually contradictory. One of them is true; the other is false—I do not say mendacious, but flatly, squarely, absolutely false. The years immediately preceding the advent of Mr. Garrison as an anti-slavery reformer were not a period of apathy, ignorance, and inactivity on the subject of slavery. That period was one of deep, earnest, intelligent and religious anti-slavery conviction, and of earnest, systematic, wise and *effective* anti-slavery effort. The contrary representation, as I have quoted it from Wendell Phillips and Oliver Johnson and Mrs. Child, and Mr. Garrison himself, is a mere fiction which there is a persistent attempt to force upon history by dint of sturdy reiteration.

*See quotations in Qu. Chr. Spectator, VI, 453-4. A copy of the pamphlet may be found in the Yale Library.

The anti-slavery sentiment and activity of the country during the agitation of the Missouri question had not been confined to any section. The solemn deliverance of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1818, condemning slavery as "a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature; as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, which requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves; and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ," was the *unanimous* act of that body which, as much as any other, represented the intelligent moral and religious sentiment of the South as well as of the North. It was pronounced in view of the Missouri question. And the resistance to that prohibition of slavery in Missouri, which was demanded thus by the moral sense of the nation, was based not on the defense of slavery, for slavery then had no defenders, but on points of constitutional law. Henry Clay, who led the effort for the admission of Missouri as a slave State, did so declaring his detestation of slavery, that "foul blot," as he afterwards called it, "that deepest stain on the character of our country."* Whether or not he was sincere in these protestations is an unimportant question. If sincere, they are a striking proof of the state of public opinion as exemplified in this most representative man; if insincere, they are a still stronger proof of the state of public opinion as estimated by this most accomplished politician.

The anti-slavery revival, when once the people had

*Life and Speeches of Clay, N. Y., 1843, I, 128, 281.

drawn breath after the Missouri question was settled, prevailed with great vigor in the more northern slave States. In Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky, there were more than a hundred abolition societies. In Maryland, the anti-slavery citizens were organized as a political party, running their candidates, sometimes successfully, on a distinctly anti-slavery platform. In Virginia, that discussion of the slavery question was going forward which was to culminate in 1831 in a vote for abolition, in the State convention, which narrowly fell short of being a majority. In North Carolina and Tennessee the anti-slavery sentiment was growing beyond all precedent, intrenching itself in the deepest moral and religious principle, and organizing itself for legislative action.

Crossing now to Illinois, we find ourselves in the midst of one of the most strenuous anti-slavery struggles in our history, and one of the most triumphant. The new State had been peopled chiefly from the South, and the plan was laid, by asserting the same claims that had prevailed in Missouri, to establish slavery here on free soil. The State was plowed and cross-plowed with the agitation, which awakened the interest of the whole nation. It continued for eighteen months under intense excitement, and ended with the complete defeat of the slavery project. The opposition to it was led by the Baptist and Methodist clergy, most of them Southern men. The vote took place in August, 1824. It does not appear that the "apathy, indifference and paralysis," by which pulpit, platform and press had, as we are told, been "stricken dumb,"

really extended to Illinois, nor to Indiana* and Ohio, which were involved in the same controversy and delivered by the same victory.

But perhaps we are too severe in insisting on a strict construction of this language; perhaps it was used in a loose and inexact way, as if applying to the country at large, when it was only meant to apply to New England, and especially to the region about Newburyport and Boston. We may freely admit that a loose and inexact use of language was habitual with the class of writers with whom we are dealing; and making every concession of this kind that may be claimed, we may proceed to examine the evidences and symptoms of that apathy, indifference and paralysis, that dumbness and deadness on the subject of slavery, that is charged against New England, and especially against Boston and Essex County, and more especially still against the church, the pulpit and the press.

If we turn back to trace to their sources the quotations made in the year 1825 by Mr. Whitmarsh B. Seabrook of South Carolina, as proving the existence of a purpose of implacable, interminable war against slavery—"war without peace, war without truce, war without quarter,"—we find some of them in certain strong anti-slavery speeches, memorials, legislative

*"Those who owned slaves in the primitive community assumed superiority to those who had none; but questionings about the peculiar institution were in the air, the contest in favor of excluding slavery having been settled only about the time the Lincolns moved to Indiana, so that its echoes must have resounded in the Gentryville grocery. In 1822, when Lincoln was thirteen, an abolition newspaper was started about one hundred miles from the village; and during his whole boyhood and youth there was plenty to lead his mind, at least occasionally, to the topic." *Hapgood's Life of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 16.

resolutions, etc., by friends of the Colonization Society ; but the strongest of the expressions which, circulated widely at the South, excited the indignation and alarm of Mr. Seabrook of South Carolina, are traceable, singularly enough, to this very region of "the blackness and darkness of ignorance and indifference," which was about to be irradiated by the sudden effulgence of Mr. Garrison. They were contained in the report of a committee of the Andover "Society of Inquiry concerning Missions," "On the Black Population of the United States." The report contained such passages as these :

"We have heard of slavery as it existed in the nations of antiquity—we have heard of slavery as it exists in Asia and Africa and Turkey—we have heard of the feudal slavery under which the peasantry of Europe have groaned from the days of Alaric until now ; but, excepting only the horrible system of the West India Islands, we have never heard of slavery in any country, ancient or modern, pagan, Mohammedan or Christian, so terrible in its character, so pernicious in its tendency, so remediless in its anticipated results, as the slavery which exists in these United States. * * * When we use the strong language which we feel ourselves compelled to use in relation to this subject, we do not mean to speak of animal suffering, but of an immense moral and political evil." And the report goes on to denounce it as "a system so utterly repugnant to the feelings of unsophisticated humanity—a system which permits all the atrocities of the domestic slave trade—which permits the father to sell his children as he would his cattle—a system which consigns one-half of the community to hopeless and utter degradation, and which threatens in its final catastrophe to bring down the same ruin on the master and the slave." Chr. Spectator, 1823, 493, 494, 341.

Really, if we were not told that this was a period of universal apathy and indifference on the subject of slavery, we might be tempted to think that Mr. Seabrook was more than half right in suspecting that there was a tincture of anti-slavery sentiment in this report. The paper was recast in the form of a review article, and published at New Haven in two successive numbers of *The Christian Spectator*, in 1823. By the agency of the Andover theological students, a pamphlet edition of it was widely distributed in New England, awakening increased attention among pastors and churches to the question what shall be done "to relieve and save the African race, so degraded in Africa, so wronged and oppressed in America?"*

That same year, 1823, was held the first of those religious celebrations of the Fourth of July, which were continued in Park Street Church, Boston, for several successive years, by a union of Congregationalist and Baptist churches. They were anti-slavery celebrations. The appeal made on this occasion in the *Boston Recorder* exhorted Christian citizens at such times to "remember those unhappy fellow beings in the midst of us, who, in opposition alike to the principles of Christianity and of the charter of our independence, are held in slavery." This year the orator was the well-known philanthropist, Louis Dwight. The next year, it was the young man from Andover Seminary, hardly out of his boyhood, whose Report to the Society of Inquiry on the State of our Black Population had made so great an impression throughout

*"The Earlier Anti-Slavery Days," four articles in *The Christian Union* for December 9 and 16, 1874, and January 6 and 13, 1875.

New England, and also at the South. It may easily be believed that he was full of his subject; and his subject was a great one, being nothing less than the needs of the African race, whether in their native continent or elsewhere. On both sides of the sea, both in bondage and in freedom, their condition was wretched and degraded. He reminded his hearers of the two millions of them in our own country, and the two millions more in the West India islands, and bids them compute the amount of the wretchedness of these four millions, as a measure of their "claim on the sympathies and efforts of those who have been taught to love their neighbor as themselves." Then he proceeds:

"And yet such a computation would fall far short of the actual amount of that wretchedness which, if I could, I would set before you. Of these four millions, the vast majority are *slaves*. And what is it to be a slave? We know what it is to be free. * * * But we know not what it is to be a slave. We can conceive indeed of stripes, and corporal endurance, and long days of burning toil; but how can we conceive of that bondage of the heart, that captivity of the soul, which makes the slave a wretch indeed? His intellect is a blank, and we may perhaps form some conception of his ignorance. The capabilities of his moral nature are a blank, and we may perhaps imagine that blindness. But even when we have conceived of this intellectual ignorance and this moral blindness, we know not all the degradation of the slave. We sometimes find an individual whose spirit has been broken and blasted. Some affection which engrossed his soul, and with which all his other affections were entwined, has been withered, and his heart is desolate. The hope on which all his other hopes were centered has

been destroyed, and his being is a wreck. If you have ever seen such a man, and noticed how he seemed to lose his high attributes of manhood, how his soul died within him, and he sunk down, as it were, from the elevation of his former existence—you may conjecture, perhaps, how much of the dignity and happiness of our nature, even in minds purified by moral cultivation and enlarged by intellectual improvement, depends on the love of social enjoyment and the softening influence of affection; and you may thus be able faintly to imagine the degradation of the slave, whose mind has scarcely been enlightened by one ray of knowledge, whose soul has never been expanded by one adequate conception of his moral dignity and moral relations, and in whose heart hardly one of those affections that soften our character, or of those hopes that animate and bless our being, has been allowed to germinate."

Then he urges the importance of a large and comprehensive system of practical operations aiming at the abolition of slavery, the elevation of the colored population at home, and the civilization and Christianization of Africa. And he claims that the elements of such a comprehensive system are already in operation in America.

"The means of elementary instruction and the apparatus of moral and religious culture which are employed on our colored population lie at the foundation of all African improvement. The societies for the abolition of slavery are continually urging the claims of these unfortunates with a zeal which scorns to be weary and which gathers impulse from discouragement. The scheme of an African seminary for liberal education, which has been as yet only slightly discussed, will not be forgotten; for there are men engaged in its behalf who will never rest, while God

spares them to the world, till the chasm which they now lament shall have been filled up, and the school which they have projected shall be sending forth its pupils to become throughout the earth the noblest and most efficient benefactors of Africa."

Finally, as completing the system of agencies for the redemption of the whole African race, was the promotion of a free colony which should offer at once a career of honorable prosperity to the free emigrant, a base for the advancement of civilization in Africa, and an influence tending to the abolition of slavery and the ennobling of the depressed and disheartened colored people in America.

These annual anti-slavery speeches on the Fourth of July were not only continued at Park Street Church; the fashion was imitated elsewhere. As the Fourth approached in 1825, John Todd, appointed orator for Park Street Church, wrote from Boston to his predecessor, Leonard Bacon, who was now pastor at New Haven, about their enthusiastic plans for the benefit of the colored people, especially about the African college. And he adds:

"The subject of Africa is beginning to excite no small attention in this region. I suppose Bouton will speechify to his people [the people of Concord, N. H.] on the Fourth of July next; Homes, of my class, will do the same at Andover; I suppose, also, some one from Andover will go to Salem, and some one to Newburyport on the same errand. * * * The questions I wish you would be so good as to give me your mind upon are briefly these:

“ 1. Had we Andoverians who speak on this occasion (for all are expected to take up the subject of Africa) better unite our heads and take a similar track—have a similar point in view at which to aim ?

“ 2. What point or points ? Shall the subject of an *African college* be the theme upon which we shall harangue ?

“ 3. Will it do for us to take up the subject of slavery in its *political* aspect upon our country ? i. e., shall the feelings of patriotism be addressed, or those of the Christian ?

“ 4. Shall we plead the cause of Africa in general, or confine the attention to the blacks of our own country ?

“ 5. How directly and fully shall we take up the subject of colonizing the negroes by the American Colonization Society ? ”

Somebody, it appears, was going to *Newburyport* that Fourth of July, 1825, to make an anti-slavery address. The subject was very much in the air, “exciting no small attention in that region.” I wonder who made the speech at Newburyport ; and I wonder who went to hear it. There was a bright, wide-awake, enterprising young fellow of twenty in a Newburyport newspaper office at the time, by the name of Garrison. The subject was “exciting no small attention,” but it did not excite *his* attention, and he does not seem to have felt the slightest interest in it. But these Andover men were stirred to their hearts’ depths in opposition to slavery. John Todd, at Park Street, gave his reasons for thinking that “Slavery must and will soon be removed from off

the earth," and declared that "the voice of our nation was praying for the abolition of the curse of slavery."*

That same Fourth of July, 1825, young Mr. Bacon repeated, in his New Haven pulpit, the "Plea for Africa" which he had delivered twelve months before at Boston. It was printed in a pamphlet, and in this form, and in large extracts in newspapers and magazines, was circulated alike through the North and through the South. In concluding his argument, he said to his people: "I have not spoken of the awful curse of slavery on our land, or of the measures which must speedily be adopted for its complete and eternal abolition. These things, if God shall give me strength and opportunity, I will bring more distinctly to your notice at some future period." And both the opportunity and the strength were given him that day twelve months, July 4th, 1826.

Meanwhile some interesting incidents had occurred. Two days after the "Plea for Africa" had been delivered, there was a meeting of five young men at Mr. Bacon's study, at which (I quote from the record made at the time) it was "*Voted*, that we, the Rev. Leonard Bacon, Mr. Luther Wright, Mr. Alexander C. Twining, Mr. Edward Beecher, and Mr. Theodore D. Woolsey do form ourselves into a club to be entitled The Anti-Slavery Association. You will recognize some of these names. One of them stood for many illustrious years at the head of Yale College. Another is traced to-day in the name of Arthur Twining Hadley, written in the same honorable eminence. Another is the name of the man who stood by the side of Lovejoy when he

*Report in Boston Recorder of the time.

fell pierced with five bullets, a martyr to the freedom of the press. By and by they added two or three more to their number, one of whom was Josiah Brewer, afterward missionary, father of Justice Brewer of the Supreme Court. Without advertising itself to the public, The Anti-Slavery Association set itself to work along three different lines at once to promote the abolition of slavery.

The second incident which I will mention introduces to you another of these early anti-slavery men—the Rev. Ralph Randolph Gurley, secretary of the American Colonization Society. One of his services to the anti-slavery cause had been the printing of an edition of the sermon of the second Jonathan Edwards against the Slave-trade and Slavery, for circulation at the South. Among the papers of Leonard Bacon is a letter to him from Mr. Gurley, which illustrates two things at once :

OFFICE OF THE COLONIZATION SOCIETY, }
WASHINGTON, March 13, 1826. }

MY DEAR SIR : Mr. Everett's speech in the House of Representatives last Thursday was an exhibition of talent and eloquence which I have never known equaled in that place. It has crowned him with the glory of the highest genius. But will you believe that he gave us his creed, uncalled for, unnecessary to his argument, on the subject of slavery, and such a one as would have branded the advocate of the allied despotisms of Europe ? If he dares to publish these sentiments, which go to sustain a most iniquitous system, our friends at the North must not be silent. There is a great battle to be fought, not in Turkey only, or in the old, kingly establishments of the East, but in our republic, in the cause of justice and for the defense of what are in the city of Washington much ridiculed, inprescriptible rights. Have you read John Randolph's great

speech? and if so, did you ever find such a medley of wit, absurdity, genius and wickedness bound up together, before? * * * But I have more apprehension of the consequences of Everett's influence. You and all the faithful at the North will, I hope, be prepared to counteract it.

The apology for slavery which roused the Colonization Secretary to such towering indignation, and (as we shall see) drew forth a fit response from the young pastor at New Haven, did not give like offense in all quarters. A copy of it came to the editor of *The Newburyport Free Press*; and he did not see any harm in it. He thought it was a good speech, and copied it into his newspaper, without one syllable of protest or objection. The editor's name was Garrison.

I have no doubt that it was a sense of the peril of public demoralization threatened by this novel apparition of an apology for slavery, which helped to rouse the preacher's eloquence as he ascended the high pulpit for his Fourth of July sermon of 1826. But there was enough beside to move him. That was the fiftieth anniversary of American independence, and while the cannon and the shouting were glorifying the half-century of liberty, a sorrowful and shameful contrast was in the minds of thoughtful men everywhere. In the evening of that day of jubilee, he announced for his text the words of Isaiah :

CRY ALOUD; SPARE NOT; LIFT THY VOICE LIKE A TRUMPET, AND SHOW MY PEOPLE THEIR TRANSGRESSIONS.

“When (said he) I hear of the jubilee of American freedom; when I hear of the twelve millions of happy

citizens who hail this jubilee with the loudest demonstrations of rejoicing; I cannot forget that of these twelve millions, two millions are slaves—aye, slaves in the bitterest meaning of that bitter word. The thought is enough to pour darkness over the exulting spirit of the patriot. It is enough to make the Christian tremble for the wrath of Him who said of old, ‘Ye have not hearkened unto me in proclaiming liberty every one to his brother and every man to his neighbor; Behold, I proclaim a liberty for you to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine.’”

I wish there were time for me to read you the whole of this Fourth of July sermon. You would not find it dull; you would find it full of the spirit of universal justice and liberty. The thesis of it is this: that the duty of promoting the abolition of slavery is a duty binding on every citizen of the United States. The reason of this duty is that the evil of slavery is a *national* evil. 1. It diminishes the national strength. 2. It diminishes the national wealth. 3. That it is a national evil is apparent from the indirect acknowledgments of the Southern people. Therefore the duty of promoting the abolition of it is the duty of every citizen.

“In this great community to which you belong, there is a deadly evil—an evil at war with all the principles of our national happiness, at war with the very essence of our political institutions, at war with the spirit and influence of the gospel, at war with purity, and industry, and intelligence, and whatever gives human society order, or peace, or security, or moral beauty—an evil threatening by its moral turpitude to bring down upon our nation from above the wrath of heaven—an evil which continually gives warning that

by its own inherent influences it will ere long explode beneath us, scattering in fragments the fabric of our institutions, and sending over the wide land the fiery waves of a volcanic flood. And is it for you * * * to look coolly on an evil which is advancing with rapid strides to ruin this inheritance? * * *

“ But what can I do? I am only an individual citizen. I have no slaves to liberate or provide for. I am remote from those districts of our country in which slavery exists, and in which, of course, it is to be checked and abolished. What can I do?”

“ In answering this question * * * let me first point out some of the ways in which slavery cannot be abolished or remedied. 1. It cannot be abolished by any legislation by the free States. Nor, 2, by any act of the national legislature. Nor, 3, by any immediate legislation of the slave States; first, because the people of those States do not want such legislation, and then, because, even if it could be enacted against their will, it could not be enforced.

“ We come then to this result: In order to the abolition of slavery, there must be a change of public opinion in the slave States. To this end, first, the subject must be better understood, and existing difficulties must be obviated, and misconceptions must be rectified. The people of the South must be made to understand that the system of slavery which they maintain is absurd in principle and pernicious in all its tendencies. * * * They must be made to understand also that though they of the present generation do not sustain the guilt of having originated that state of society in which they now find themselves, yet if they do nothing to alleviate these evils, if they make no beginning which may terminate in the entire removal of the curse, they will sustain the guilt of having perpetuated to their children, and of having fastened upon unborn generations, a system of which

the foundation is injustice and all the tendencies are misery and crime. In order to this, there must not only be discussion, but the discussion must be so conducted as to show that those who are bent on the removal of the evil, while they are determined in principle and immovable in resolution, are neither unkind in spirit nor rash in effort. It must be seen and known that while the principle of slavery is regarded with abhorrence and relentless opposition, there can be and is a spirit of liberal kindness towards those who have been born and whose opinions and feeling have been formed under the malignant influence of a system so pernicious. In other words, public opinion throughout the free States must hold a different course on the subject of slavery from that which it now holds. Instead of exhausting itself fruitlessly and worse than fruitlessly upon the *operation* of the system, it must be directed towards the *principle* on which the system rests. It must become such that on the one hand the man who indulges his malignity or his thoughtlessness in so exaggerating the evils attendant on the operation of the system as to implicate the body of the slaveholders in the charge of cruelty and tyranny, shall find himself rebuked and shamed by the nobler spirit that pervades his fellow citizens; and such that, on the other hand, the man who dares to stand up in Congress and, presuming on the forbearance of those who sent him, attempts to purchase popularity by defending the principle of slavery, shall find himself greeted, on his return to his constituents, with one loud burst of indignation and reproof."

It has seemed necessary to give this large abstract of a specimen sermon of that period of "the blackness of darkness of ignorance and indifference," of which Mr. Phillips says that it is so difficult for us to have any conception—that period when, according to Mr.

Garrison and his biographers generally, "there was scarcely a man who dared to peep or mutter on the subject of slavery; when the pulpit and the press were dumb; when no public addresses were delivered, no reproofs, no warnings, no entreaties were uttered in the ears of the people; when silence, almost unbroken silence, prevailed universally."

Now I am sure that certain questions will rise in your minds in view of the contrast between these representations and this fact. You are asking yourselves, whether this was not an exceptional man, breaking the "universal silence" with his solitary voice; whether this was not an exceptional sermon, a youthful indiscretion which experience taught the young man not to repeat; whether that notably conservative community of New Haven did not give the young zealot to understand that he must use more caution in speaking of this delicate subject. Know then that the preacher was that Leonard Bacon who is vilipended to this day as one of the most flagrant examples of guilty silence or connivance concerning slavery; and for the rest, he shall speak for himself. Forty years later, as he was unbuckling the harness at the end of his long and victorious fight, he gave, from the same pulpit, his testimony about the beginning of it:

"At that time, the religious feeling of the country was strongly and, I may say, unanimously pronounced against the institution of slavery. * * * Certainly there was in Connecticut no party, religious or political, that dared to speak for slavery as if it were a just or beneficent arrangement, or as if the institution was capable of any defense, either on grounds of natural

justice or in the light of the Christian religion. * * * From the beginning of my official ministry, I spoke without reserve, from the pulpit and elsewhere, against slavery as a wrong and a curse, threatening disaster and ruin to the nation. Many years I did this without being blamed, except as I was blamed for not going far enough. Not a dog dared to wag his tongue at me for speaking against slavery. I have always held and always asserted the same principles on that subject which I held and asserted at the beginning."

At this point I might rest, as having reached the end of my theme, which is Anti-Slavery before Garrison. For about this time occurs the first awakening of Mr. Garrison's conscience from its unaccountable protracted torpor concerning slavery. His boyhood, up to the age of fifteen, had been passed in the midst of an anti-slavery agitation that convulsed the continent. As a boy of ten, and afterwards as a young man of eighteen, he had passed considerable time at Baltimore, where the presence of slavery and the shocking scenes of the slave trade were a continual public horror. Returning to the North, he found himself again in an atmosphere all reeking with anti-slavery sentiment. The pulpits were resounding with anti-slavery appeals. The press was teeming with anti-slavery books, pamphlets and articles. In the words of Mr. Whitemarsh B. Seabrook of South Carolina, "slavery, slavery, slavery was everywhere." The zealous young abolitionists from Andover came down to Mr. Garrison's own village, preaching their crusade against slavery. But nothing of all this seems to have come to Mr. Garrison's ears. A brisk young newspaper man, interested in pretty much every other public

question, he, according to his own confession, remained till the year 1827 sunken in ignorance and indifference regarding that slavery question in which every one except himself was interested. He says of himself, in a public speech :

“ In 1827 I went to Boston and edited a paper called *The National Philanthropist*. It was devoted to the cause of temperance. Up to that hour I had known little or nothing of slavery, as to the number of slaves held, or as to where they were held. So completely had the whole question been put out of sight that I was almost wholly ignorant in respect to it.”*

“ The question put out of sight !” It does not appear that it was out of the sight of any man in New England except Mr. Garrison himself.

Two facts in Mr. Garrison's career have received no adequate attention from his biographers and eulogists : first, the long asphyxia of his conscience on the subject of slavery ; and secondly, when his moral sense was at last aroused from its torpor, his apparently sincere impression that nobody but himself had any moral sense on the subject at all ; so that at last, standing in the Park Street pulpit, the seventh in a series of annual anti-slavery orators, as if he were a lone voice crying in the wilderness, he could repeat the familiar commonplaces of his six predecessors as if they were startling novelties, and speak of the slaves, the subjects of more thought, sympathy, prayer and self-denying effort than any other class of people in the country, as those “ over whose sufferings scarcely an

* Proceedings of the Am. Anti-Slavery Society at its third Decade. Speech of W. L. Garrison, p. 120.

eye weeps, or a heart melts, or a tongue pleads either to God or man," for whom "Christianity has done by direct effort comparatively nothing." He is a psychological puzzle, to be turned over to the Society for Psychical Research.

From the tardy entrance of Mr. Garrison into the anti-slavery movement, we may date a growing change in the methods and results of that movement. Up to this time, it had been earnest, unremitting, unsparing, in denouncing slavery, while temperate and considerate in dealing with those involved in relations with slavery. It had been urgent in demanding an immediate beginning of the work of abolition, while recognizing that it would take time to complete the work. It had never degenerated into a sectional controversy;—even in the intense excitement over the Missouri question, says Jeremiah Evarts, "there was less of what could be called party spirit, or local jealousy, or sectional prejudice, than we ever knew in any great national question."* The North was solid against slavery, and if there was division at the South, the sober intelligence and the moral and religious principle of that section were unanimous on the same side, and there was hearty co-operation with Southern abolitionists.

And the sober, conscientious, reasonable anti-slavery of that time had been nobly successful. Its earliest triumph had been the Ordinance of 1787, drawn by the hand of Thomas Jefferson. It had secured the abolition of slavery, or measures ultimating in the abolition of it, in every State north of Maryland. It was carry-

*Panoplist, XVI, 487.

ing forward efforts that gave good promise of like results in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky. It had failed indeed in excluding slavery from Missouri, but had secured the vast residue of the Missouri Territory, by the pledge of the public honor, against the entrance of it. By the strenuous labors of such fearless abolitionists as Robert Breckinridge, and John D. Paxton, and President Young, and John Rankin, and especially of Benjamin Lundy, it had covered a great part of the slaveholding country with a network of abolition societies, represented by anti-slavery newspapers. Free discussion was in the air. Manumissions were taking place by hundreds and thousands in a year. The hearts of good men were glowing with the hope that that which had been secured in more than half the original States might everywhere be achieved—the lawful, peaceful abolition of slavery.

At this point, *Enter* William Lloyd Garrison, and presto, change! Within a strangely short time, instead of a solid North and a divided South, the North became divided and the South at one. At the North, the leaders of anti-slavery effort, who for long years had been bearing the burden and heat of the conflict, were repelled with foul vituperation by shamefully tardy recruits who through the long struggle had not lifted one finger on the side of freedom; and by schism within schism the force of anti-slavery effort was dissipated. Meanwhile under an incessant storm of menaces and maledictions pelting indiscriminately upon friend and foe at the South, the terror of the Southern people was awakened; the Southern aboli-

tion societies were extinguished and their platforms and presses were silenced; manumissions ceased; a spirit of suspicion and vindictive hatred toward the North was engendered; the hope of a peaceful and bloodless abolition of slavery was at an end.

The descriptions of prevailing demoralization on the subject of slavery which Mr. Garrison and his eulogists delight in, so far as there is any truth in them (and really they are not entirely mendacious) are misdated. This demoralization was not the antecedent of Mr. Garrison's work; it was the sequel of it. But it would be unjust to his memory to infer that he was the sole cause of that calamitous revolution in public opinion which arrested the progress of emancipation and abolition and finally plunged the nation into civil war. He was by no means the sole author of this enormous mischief; he only wrought towards it in more or less unconscious combination with other diabolic agencies.



