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THIS BOOK PRESENTED BY
Friends'
Historical Society of
Swarthmore College

At a Meeting of the Representative Committee, or Meeting for Sufferings, held
1st mo. 31, 1851—

The Committee on the subject of Slavery produced an Address to our members, which was deliberately read and united with; and this Meeting concludes to direct a sufficient number thereof to be printed, for the supply of all the families and parts of families within our limits, and for distribution as way may open.

Extracted from the Minutes.

JOHN J. WHITE, Clerk.

THE Representative Committee, or Meeting for Sufferings, of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends, having for some time had their attention turned towards the late Act of Congress, relating to Fugitives from bondage, and being deeply impressed with the wrongs of human Slavery, are desirous of holding up to view some of the testimonies of our religious society on this important subject, and of extending such counsel as may be consistent with the provisions of its Discipline.

We are sensible that very little can be done by us towards strengthening the minds of others in the performance of christian duties, unless we are found walking harmoniously together, and striving to uphold those pure principles which give evidence that we are the disciples of the Lord and Master we profess to follow; and we would therefore earnestly entreat all of our members to abstain from discussions which tend to distract rather than to convince the mind, and patiently to labour for

the promotion of that confidence among ourselves, which will enable us to go forth before the world as a united body.

"It appears to have been the concern" of the Yearly Meeting, "revived from time to time with increasing weight, to testify their entire disunity with the practice of enslaving mankind;" and our members are "exhorted to be no way accessory to this enormous national evil, but to discourage it by all the justifiable means in their power;" they are also "earnestly desired to use the influence they have with those who hold Slaves by inheritance or otherwise, to have them treated with moderation and kindness, and instructed as objects of the common salvation, in the principles of the christian religion."

It is looked upon as a violation of our principles for Friends to hire Slaves, *"when the price of their services is intended for the benefit of those who claim the right of ownership;"* and they are cautioned against *"doing any thing by which their bondage may be prolonged."*

It is evident that the Yearly Meeting does not recognize the institution of Slavery as one that can be upheld where christian feelings predominate; and that under this conviction its members cannot assist in carrying out such laws as may be enacted to perpetuate its existence, without violating our testimonies.

We do not know of any civil government where the religious feelings of its members are more properly regarded than the one under which we live. It professes to be founded on a recognition of equal rights between man and man, and to allow each of its citizens the privilege of worshipping the Supreme Author of his existence in the manner which he believes most conducive to his own happiness.

Whilst we do not feel at liberty to oppose the laws of the land by any demonstration of violence whatever, or to speak evil of those who enacted them, we have the right of calmly and firmly maintaining our ground against wrong and injustice, and of giving living evidence of our faith, by suffering, if necessary, for a cause which we believe to be founded in Truth.

As followers of a meek and lowly Pattern, we are called upon to meet the spirit of oppression with humility, and should endeavour to convince the world of the efficacy of that power which ought to influence our actions, by patiently maintaining our testimonies with loving kindness under the most trying circumstances.

It still remains to be our duty to testify to the universality of the gospel dispensation, and to prove by our lives that the injunction to "do unto others as we would that they should do unto us," is held in remembrance by us as a people.

We are therefore solicitous that the freedom of the Slave should be advocated in that spirit which bears a faithful testimony against evil, while it breathes kindness and good will towards those who hold them in bondage. To attempt to coerce our southern brethren to give up that which they conceive to be their legal property, instead of convincing them of the wrong they are doing by holding their fellow men as Slaves, will almost necessarily lead to excited and exasperated feelings, in which the still small voice of truth is seldom heard. We are apprehensive that such a course would be more likely to close up the way of those who might be rightly qualified to labour among them, than it would be to mitigate the evils of Slavery.

The cause appears to us to require such faithful labourers as may be qualified to go among our southern brethren, to sit in feeling with them, and, as way opens, endeavour to convince them of the iniquities that are inseparably connected with the system of Slavery.

We are ready to believe that many minds would acknowledge the witness for truth within them, if awakened in that spirit of Love which should clothe a christian messenger, and that more who now scarcely comprehend the nature or tendency of the evils which surround them, would rejoice in the freedom of the Slave, if they were convinced that it could be rightly accomplished.

If our members will bring their minds to reflect upon those means which would be most likely to operate on themselves if in error, they will see the necessity of a

spirit of charity and forbearance, and will seek to be endowed with power from on High, to enable them to go forth in gospel love and humility. Under such circumstances, we believe that their labours would be abundantly blest; and although they might not perceive any immediate effect produced from their efforts, yet we may reasonably hope that the seed thus sown would eventually ripen into good fruit, and all have cause to rejoice together.

We would recommend our members firmly to adhere to the principle of acting conscientiously and uprightly according to the light received, and to decline on such grounds to be made the instruments of a law that requires them to assist in returning a human being into a bondage which we believe is not sanctioned by divine authority; but which, on the contrary, appears to us to have been established in violation of those christian principles which we profess.

And we also recommend them in their intercourse with the colored people, to imbue them, as far as lies in their power, with that christian spirit of meekness and suffering which becomes the followers of the Lamb; and to counsel them that they offer no resistance, by carnal weapons, to whatever injustice or oppression may fall to their lot in consequence of the state of things now existing in our land.

Some of you may be called into suffering on this account; if such should be the case, we would encourage you to place your whole reliance on that power which can relieve your minds from all oppression, in the assurance that "every one that hath forsaken houses or brethren, or sisters, or father or mother, or wife or children, or lands," for Christ's sake, "shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life."







