

Memorial from

The undersigned have long been the friends and patrons of your Board. The cause of missions among the heathen lies near our hearts. In the promotion of this cause, we have rejoiced in the general confidence reposed in your Board, and in the extensively and ardent zeal with which its efforts have been sustained by the prayers and benefactions of the churches. At the same time we have some griefs in respect to the course of your body on the subject of slavery, which we deem it our duty and our privilege respectfully to submit to your consideration.

That American slavery is a system of enormous wickedness, and pregnant with immense evils to master and slave, to the nation, the church, and mankind; that it is hence the solemn duty of American Christians to reprobate both the system and the practice in plain terms, decidedly and in all suitable ways, and to have no fellowship with it; and that, consequently, when the churches or their great official organs, give this system either their silent, or their implied, or avowed sanction, they wrong humanity, dishonor the gospel, paralyze its saving power, and sin against its great Head;—these we hold to be established and solemn, if not self-evident truths.

What the exact position and action of your body in respect to this subject has been and now is, we find it somewhat difficult to ascertain. It has been said, that some years since, when a certain widow at the South, offered a legacy of a fourth part of certain negro slaves," the Board took no steps as legatees in regard to the matter—thus practically declining the legacy. We learn also from a published correspondence of one of your secretaries, that a few years since, when some of the missionaries among the southwestern Indians had entered into contracts respecting certain slaves, which were regarded by some of your patrons as a sanction of slavery, your Prudential Committee, on a representation of the case being made to them, directed said missionaries to enter into no more contracts of the kind, and to immediately cancel such of those already made as had not then expired—which action has since received your sanction. We farther learn, from the action of your body at its last annual meeting, that the Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions can sustain no relation to slavery which implies approbation; and as a board, can have no connection or sympathy with it." With this declaration of your body, we have been greatly gratified. In connection with it, we would respectfully ask whether the facts stated above were as stated; and whether the action of your committee in the case was the result, among other reasons, of a wish to avoid all real and even seeming sanction of the slave system?

The undersigned receive the declaration just quoted as a distinct and specific pledge, that the Board do not intend and will not knowingly consent to lend, in any way, any sympathy or sanction to the practice of slavery. As such, we rejoice in it, and commend the Board for it. At the same time we feel constrained to call your attention to what is now a well known fact, viz: that *Rev. J. S. Wilson, one of your missionaries, is an acknowledged slaveholder; and, if his statement is correct, that you have some other missionaries who are also slaveholders.* This is not the place to argue this case at length. We can say, however, a distinct expression of our opinion in respect to it. We are willing to believe that in commissioning and sustaining Mr. Wilson as a missionary, you have not intended to lend your sympathy or sanction to the slave system; but that you have done so, and are still doing so in fact, we are perfectly certain. We know it is said that Mr. Wilson's is a peculiar case—an exception to the general rule. We differ entirely. We do not believe that the circumstances of the case constitute any justification of the relationship whatever, or any valid reason for its continuance. But waiving this, you will not deny that the relationship of master and slave in his case is at least of doubtful propriety. The simple fact that the Christian mind of the country is so divided in respect to it is proof of its doubtfulness. On this ground, then, if on no higher, we think that he should manumit his slaves, or you should cease to employ him as your missionary. It is, we believe, clearly, a case to which the inspired injunctions and maxims, "Let not your good be evil spoken of;" "Avoid the appearance of evil;" "I will eat no meat while the world stands, if it cause my brother to offend," and "He that doubteth is damned if he eat," apply in their full force. And accordingly, under your sanction and direction, ought to represent the case to Mr. Wilson, and earnestly entreat him, for the sake of saving himself and the cause of missions from reproach, or the appearance of evil, or the guilt of wounding the hearts of Christian brethren, or the condemnation of a doubtful matter, to proceed at once to the manumission of his slaves. And if he refuse, or from any circumstances is unable so to do, then we are equally clear that, for the same reasons, you should cease to retain him as your missionary. Should he be strictly and truly unable to terminate the relationship in question, (which we do not for a moment believe), then, it is true, the continuance of it would be his *misfortune* not his *fault*. Nevertheless, for the reasons just stated, the relation would still be a disqualification for the missionary work. Fault or no fault, such is the doubtfulness of the case, that Mr. Wilson cannot retain his slaves and yet prosecute his labors as your missionary in Africa ~~or~~ elsewhere without involving himself and you, and, through you, the cause of missions, in reproach, or the appearance of evil, or the guilt of wounding the hearts of Christian brethren, or the condemnation of a doubtful

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We therefore respectfully ask whether any such representation of the case has been or is intended to be made to Mr. Wilson; and whether, in the event of his continuing his present relation to his slaves after a reasonable time for effecting their emancipation, the Board will deem it advisable to continue his services as their missionary? We would also respectfully inquire whether the Board are aware that any other of their missionaries are, as Mr. Wilson supposes, slaveholders; and if so, how many, and who are they?

The undersigned would add a word in respect to the subject of the solicitation and reception of funds from slaveholders. We do not ask the Board to turn aside at will from its appropriate and constitutional object—the giving of the gospel to the heathen. We only ask, first, that it seek that object truly; that it therefore, in the teachings and the lives of its missionaries, give the heathen the real gospel—a gospel sound in the faith and blameless in the life, and therefore not a slaveholding or a slavery-justifying one. We ask, second, that it seek its object by Christian and only Christian methods; and therefore that it do not solicit or knowingly receive the gains of oppression or of any iniquity at home, as a means of sending the gospel abroad.

In wishing you to seek your object by such methods, we do not desire or ask you to "pass resolutions or adopt measures, we form the system of slavery, any more than against other specific forms of evil existing in the community." We only ask that your position and action should be the same in one case as in the other. Let there be, whenever and wherever the prosecution of your great object brings you in contact with slavery, the same practical antagonism and condemnation of it which you have maintained and manifested in respect to Sabbath breaking, intemperance, Indian oppression, and the like, and we ask no more. Let your position and principles of action be clearly defined in respect to slavery as in respect to intemperance; let them be the same, and the principles of practical condemnation and opposition of the one as of the other; let the readiness of your exposure be as prompt, and the tone of your rebuke as firm and unambiguous, in respect to the one as the other, wherever they come in your way, and not only will your general position be all that any friend of the enslaved can rightfully desire, but the great difficulty in respect to the solicitation and reception of funds will have been met. You will then stand in the same relation to slaveholders that you now do to spirit makers and spirit vendors. You will not need to inquire into the motives of individual donors or their mode of obtaining their funds. This we have always known to be impossible, and have therefore never asked. But your character and position once as well defined and as positively opposed to this iniquity as to that of intemperance or Sabbath breaking, you and your agents may go forward soliciting and receiving funds of the whole community indiscriminately, "asking no question for conscience' sake," but presuming, in view of your known character and position in the case, as well as your general object, "that the funds contributed are obtained in a proper manner and given from the proper motives," and are not the gains of the iniquity you reprobate and condemn—your known general character, position, and object, being an advertisement and a pledge beforehand, that you do not solicit and will not receive the gains of said iniquity into the treasury of the Lord, *knowing them to be such*: so that, while, as your general rule, you receive whatever is contributed, "asking no question for conscience' sake," at the same time, "if any man say unto you," or it be otherwise made plain to you, that this is the gain of oppression or the price of blood, you will not touch it, "for his sake that shewed it and for conscience' sake."

We would then respectfully ask whether it has been or is the purpose of the Board to maintain the same practical position and condemnation of slavery, wherever it comes in its way in the prosecution of its great object, as of intemperance, Sabbath breaking, Indian oppression, and "other specific forms of evil existing in the community?" Also, whether it has been the practice or is the purpose of the Board to decline the solicitation and reception of funds known to be the gains of oppression or the price of men? The Board will perceive that the undersigned have been as explicit as possible in this communication. It is in no captious spirit, nor with any desire to involve the Board in embarrassment, with the Board, by the friends of the enslaved, we have thought that great evil has resulted from the want of such explicitness. We have wished to avoid such evil. That we might do it, and that there might be no room for misconception or misunderstanding in respect to the views and position of the Board on this important and momentous subject, we have placed the points, on which we desire specific information, in the form of distinct questions. These we doubt not, will receive the candid and careful consideration of the Board.

With sincere desire and fervent prayer for the prosperity of our common cause and of the Board, we are

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The Board will perceive that the undersigned have been as explicit as possible in this communication. It is in no captious spirit, nor with any desire to involve the Board in embarrassment that we have been so, but the reverse. In former communications with the Board, by the friends of the enslaved, we have thought that great evil has resulted from the want of such explicitness. We have wished to avoid such evil. That we might do it, and that there might be no room for misconception or misunderstanding in respect to the views and position of the Board on this important and momentous subject, we have placed the points, on which we desire specific information, in the form of distinct questions. These, we doubt not, will receive the candid and careful consideration of the Board.

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Memorial to A.B.C.

F. M.

1842

Memorial to A.M.A.
17. 11.

DIRECTION.

The person receiving this Memorial, is requested to see that it is immediately circulated among such as have been or are "the friends and patrons of the Board;" and that it be returned *by the 7th of September next*, with such signatures as may be obtained, and, as far as possible, free of expense, to J. W. ALDEN, 32 Washington Street, Boston, Mass.; or Rev. ALANSON ST. CLAIR, Concord, N. H.; or Rev. J. BREWER, Hartford, Ct. Should the memorialists prefer sending direct to the Board, it will be the better way, *provided the memorial be sent free of expense*. In this case, direct to one of the Secretaries of the Board—Rev. R. ANDERSON or Rev. DAVID GREENE, Boston.

Memorial to the
American Board
in respect to Slavery.
prepared by A.A.D.
1842.