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STATISTICAL ACCOUNT
OF THE
CONNECTION OF THE RELIGIOUS BODIES IN AMERICA
WITH SLAVERY;

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TOGETHER WITH A NOTICE OF VARIOUS ANTI-SLAVERY SECESSIONS.

PRESENTED BY THE REV. EDWARD MATHEWS, OF WISCONSIN,

(Delegate of the American Baptist Free Mission Society,)

TO THE

Committee of the Bristol and Clifton Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society.

MARCH, 1852.

To the Bristol and Clifton Ladies' Anti-Slavery Committee.

ESTEEMED FRIENDS,

KNOWING how earnestly you have laboured to array the moral power of the religious bodies against Slavery, and how encouraging and beneficial have been the results, I willingly comply with your invitation, and submit for your disposal, a brief statement of facts, showing the relation to the slave-power which various denominations in America are now sustaining.*

THE EPISCOPALIAN CHURCH.

Ministers, 1,504,—Members, 73,000,—Slaves, 88,000.

Slaveholders, equally with non-slaveholders, enjoy the privileges of church-fellowship. The former threaten to withdraw from the body if discussion on slavery is permitted. Hence, in common with other religious bodies which I shall cite, for the sake of "Union," connive at the sin of slaveholding—altogether forgetful of the principle, "First pure, then peaceable." The Episcopal press also enforces silence. The *New York Churchman* has assailed the abolitionists in bitter and contemptuous terms, and declared that "the legal prohibition of teaching colored people to read does not trench on the law of God."

Of the Bishops, some of the most popular declare slavery to be a Heaven-ordained institution. Bishop Mead, of Virginia, for instance, says, in his sermon to the slaves,—"Almighty God hath been pleased to make you slaves here, and to give you nothing but poverty and labour in this world; which you are obliged to submit to, as it is His will that it should be so."

On the other hand, worthy of note, are the efforts of Judge Jay, of New York, who has labored nobly, though almost alone, in the slave's behalf.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

Ministers, 4,578,—Members, 490,259,—Slaves, 77,000.

In its early history, this church declared slaveholding to be a "moral evil,"—"man stealing." Slaveholders, however, crept into the body, and raising objections to its testimony against slavery, first brought the members to declare it a "mournful," instead of a "moral" evil, and at length threatened to dissolve the union with northern members, if they should agitate the slavery question.

After one occasion when silence had been thus compelled, Dr Cox, of Brooklyn, triumphantly exclaimed,—"We have capped the volcano for three more years."

Dr Baird, who stands high in the estimation of slaveholders, says—referring to Dr Bacon and himself—"We gave cases [in the Council of the British Alliance, 1851,] in which the state of things is made such by the laws of the slaveholding states—laws which the Christians in those States, who are a small minority of the inhabitants, could not prevent being made,—that there are persons holding slaves there, whom Christianity itself would not allow them to liberate in the present circumstances."

At the last meeting of the New School General Assembly, the Rev. Mr Grosvenor, a member, moved a resolution condemning the Fugitive Slave Law; but the body could not be induced to condemn the iniquitous enactment.

THE CONGREGATIONALISTS

Have but few members in the slave States; they unite with the Presbyterians in sustaining the "Home and Foreign Missions," and other societies, which are controlled by the

* The facts and information following, are the same as those contained in the document which I prepared for the recent meeting of the Evangelical Alliance in Bristol, and which I earnestly desired might be read by the Chairman. The Alliance Committee, however, declined receiving it.

slave power. They send as delegates to the Presbyterian Assemblies, men who sustain the system of slavery, or temporisers, who make no earnest effort to bring them to see that the religion of Jesus announces "liberty to the captive."

In proof of this, it may be mentioned that last autumn, the Congregational Conference at Maine (the body of which Dr Chickering is a member) elected as delegate to the Old School General Assembly, the Rev. J. O. Fisk, of Bath, who preached a sermon in defence of the infamous Fugitive Slave Law. The committee of arrangements also *rejected* a resolution passed at Connecticut, affirming "the supreme rights of God, and of conscience, to human law," and brought forward in its stead, the subject of colonization, allowing the speaker twice the allotted time, in order to prevent discussion on other branches of the subject.

THE PRESBYTERIAN SECESSION.

This newly organized body is composed of those who have seceded on anti-slavery grounds from both the Old and New School Presbyterians. The form of government is the same, but their cardinal principle is, to admit no slaveholder to membership. They number probably not more than one thousand church-members, yet the leading men in this body are the tried friends of the slave, and suffer much persecution. They publish a weekly anti-slavery paper, *The Free Presbyterian*, of good size, ably edited, and which is doing excellent anti-slavery service. The "Reformed Tract Society," which will no doubt have an important influence over our anti-slavery literature, in a great degree owes its existence to this body. In the missionary cause they co-operate with the American Missionary Association, also an anti-slavery body.

THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

Ministers, 6,000.—Members, 1,250,000 —Slaves, 219,563.

At its commencement, this body exhibited an anti-slavery spirit; during the revolutionary war, however, slaveholders became members, and by a gradual process secured for themselves the posts of influence and authority; until in 1836, at the General Conference, they required that two ministers should be censured for attending an anti-slavery meeting, and the conference accordingly censured them. They then required that the ministers throughout the free states should be silent on the subject of slavery, "on pain of expulsion from that body." Thus the clasp was placed upon their lips, but some refusing to submit to it, passed through a fiery ecclesiastical ordeal, and were ultimately excluded. In 1844 it came to light that Bishop Andrew, one of their six principal leaders, who have absolute power in the appointing of the ministers to their fields of labor, was himself a slaveholder. This produced a discussion, which continued a fortnight, and ended in the conference mildly *requesting* the Bishop not to officiate, as Bishop, while he held slaves.

As even this was an indirect censure upon slaveholders, they became indignant, and rent the church in twain. The Northern Division of this body is not, however, free from the stain of slavery, for 4,000 slaveholders, and 27,000 slaves still remain members of it, consequently, (as might have been expected,) some of the leading men are urging upon it, "for the sake of the peace of the church, to be silent on slavery."

THE METHODIST SECESSION.

Some members of the popular body having labored to purify it from the evil of slavery, and finding their efforts defeated by the slaveholders, seceded, and formed another church, on the Methodist basis, taking the name of the *Wesleyan* Methodists.

They number about twenty thousand—the fundamental law of the church being, "No Fellowship with Slaveholders!"

Their organ, *The True Wesleyan*, a weekly newspaper of good size, is most ably edited by the Rev. Luther Lee. In North Carolina their missionaries have been recently treated with great cruelty, and driven from the state.

Their entire body is an efficient anti-slavery organization.

THE BAPTIST CHURCHES.

Ministers, 8,168.—Members, 948,867.—Slaves, 226,000.

Once the firm advocates of civil and religious liberty, they have gradually become subservient to the slaveholders. As each Baptist church governs itself, no ecclesiastical power existed by means of which slaveholders could strike down the abolitionists; they therefore turned to the Missionary Convention, resolving to use it as an engine of persecution,—for in that convention Baptists of the free and the slave states co-operate together.

When this convention was organized, in 1814, slaveholders were admitted members, on the plea that they did not justify the *principle* of holding slaves, but simply held them out of kindness!

They succeeded, however, in constantly electing a slaveholder as a president, for twenty-one years of the thirty during which the convention existed; and every church planted by its agents in slave territory, became a slaveholding church. In order to silence the anti-slavery remonstrances of the northern Baptists, they required that the *Baptist Missionary Magazine* should give a pledge to be silent on the subject. The pledge was given; and has been kept! They required of leading northern Baptists, that they should sign a pledge of continued fellowship with slaveholders.—Many did so! They required that no anti-slavery Baptist should be elected an officer in the missionary body.—Not one was elected! And not until all these requisitions were conceded to them, would the slaveholders pay in their contributions to the society. By such means do the slaveholders retain their unholy influence over the religious bodies of America.

The Baptist newspapers in the free states, with three honorable exceptions, discourage agitation on this subject,—while in the slave states they justify slavery by the Bible.

BAPTIST SECESSION.

The sacrifice of Christian principle made to slaveholding domination, led some members to refuse to co-operate with the Missionary Convention. They therefore organized in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1843, a society, named the Baptist Free Mission Society, which refuses to receive slaveholders to membership, or to admit their blood-stained offerings into its treasury. It publishes a large weekly paper—*The American Baptist*—which is edited with distinguished ability by the Rev. W. Walker. It is leavening the churches with anti-slavery principles. This society employs agents, who travel from church to church, lifting up their voices against slavery,

aiming to array the moral power of all religious societies in behalf of the down-trodden. It has established in Western New York, an anti-slavery College, one of the Professors of which—Mr W. G. Allen—is a colored gentleman; and among the hundred and fifty students, are many of African descent.

It has a mission and several schools among the refugee slaves in Canada, and has collected more than three thousand dollars for their benefit.

THE FRIENDS,

Congregations, 300.

This ancient and respectable association have yielded to the popular feeling, and lost their anti-slavery energy and character; not that a slaveholder would be received a member by them,—the rules forbid it. Their influential moral position, however, is neutralized by their unwillingness to “come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty.” The combined action of three or four yearly meetings, if weighed on the balance against the single efforts of one Friend—John G. Whittier—would rise to the beam. Many members voted for General Taylor to be President of the United States,—a man holding in slavery about three hundred of his fellow men, and a warrior for additional slave territory. From no place have more colored people been sent back to the unspeakable horrors of slavery, than from Philadelphia, the stronghold of the Friends.

Were they but to shake off their apathy, and be willing to forego commercial profits and political advantage,—were they but to bear the faithful testimony against slavery which formerly characterized them, the tone of feeling would be entirely changed;—not only in Philadelphia, but in all the region round about, and slaveholders in the farthest south would quail before their mighty influence.

THE SECESSION FROM FRIENDS.

The yearly meeting of Friends in Indiana (which is the largest in the world, numbering about 30,000 members), had forbidden their members to engage in active opposition to slavery, and deprived some who persisted in it, of their offices as overseers, ministers, elders, &c., and rendered the others ineligible. A considerable number, in consequence, seceded, forming a quarterly and yearly meeting of their own, similar in doctrine and discipline to that they had left, but where they had full liberty to plead for the slave. The London Yearly Epistles had repeatedly and earnestly recommended “Friends in America to co-operate with the advocates of freedom;” but as soon as the Indiana anti-slavery Friends obeyed these injunctions, influential members of the society in England undertook a mission to Indiana, for the purpose of inducing the seceders to acquiesce in the passive course imposed by the parent meeting. This mission was unsuccessful, and the anti-slavery Friends are still bearing noble testimony to the supremacy of Christ’s laws over those of their sect.

TRACT, MISSIONARY, AND BIBLE SOCIETIES, SUNDAY SCHOOL UNION, &c.

All these bodies have slaveholding members.

The Tract Society employs seven steam presses, but refuses to print any tract on the slavery question.

The Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, throughout its extensive operations, never treat slavery as a sin.

The Parent Sunday School Union, at the requirement of the slave power, suppressed one of its volumes, because it contained a paragraph descriptive of slavery.

The Home Mission Society, though sustained chiefly by the north, has been active in planting slaveholding churches in the south.

THE BAPTIST HOME MISSION SOCIETY has planted slaveholding churches in the south, and steadfastly refuses to treat slavery as a sin.

THE AMERICAN BAPTIST MISSIONARY UNION was organized for the purpose of fraternizing with slaveholders; they are members of the body, and of the mission churches in the Cherokee Territory. To the extent of its power, this “Union” crushes anti-slavery energy and sympathy.

The American Bible Society, and the American and Foreign Bible Society, make no appeal in behalf of the slaves’ destitution, and Bible-withholding despots are members of both bodies.

The American Bible Union is controlled by its slaveholding members, so are the societies to convert the Jews, the Indians, &c.

ANTI-SLAVERY.

After the heart-saddening details which I have given in the preceding pages, it is refreshing to turn for a moment to those who in spite of prejudices and persecution faithfully show that they “recognise the image of God and a human brother in every being, of whatever clime, colour, or condition of humanity.” I will therefore briefly recapitulate those religious bodies that are from principle, Anti-Slavery.

ANTI-SLAVERY TRACT, BIBLE, MISSIONARY SOCIETIES, &c.

The American Missionary Association has been already referred to. It is constitutionally separated from slaveholders, employs about ninety missionaries, and publishes a monthly, *The American Missionary*. The Rev. Geo Whipple, New York, is the secretary. Its collections during the past year were 34,664 dollars, 65 cents. The Baptist Free Mission Society has been described already. Its collections for the past year were about 10,000 dollars. The Reformed Tract Society is as yet in its infancy, but promises to be a great blessing.

The Free Will Baptists do not receive slaveholders to membership, and their missionary society is conducted on anti-slavery principles. Their organ, the *Morning Star*, has been very faithful to the slave.

There are also some smaller bodies, as the Covenanters, the Reformed Presbyterians, and others who are anti-slavery.

Such are the religious elements in America. A conflict is going on at this hour between the pro-slavery religionists and the anti-slavery followers of Christ, in which the British churches are neither unconcerned nor uninterested. The sanction given to ministers who remain in connection with slaveholding organizations, by their English brethren, adds to the difficulty and obstacles now in the way of the tried friends of the slave, and strengthens the position of the pro-slavery bodies. Every effort is put forth to intercept anti-slavery light in its progress to the English mind

THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

Is an instance of this. The pro-slavery ministers of America, who had begun to tremble in view of the anti-slavery influence of British churches, have succeeded to a considerable extent in neutralizing that influence through the medium of the Ecumenical Evangelical Alliance,—which by its manifest determination to suppress discussion on slavery, and its reception of slaveholding members, has proved a most formidable opponent to the anti-slavery secessionists of America. The British Branch, also, by its endeavors to suppress discussion, and by the facilities which it has furnished to Dr Baird to poison the British mind with his subtle defence of slaveholders, has become an antagonist to the friends of the slave, and to the cause which, amid so much persecution, they are advocating. Few are aware of the extent of this influence.

The following fact is illustrative. The American Baptist Free Mission Society having separated itself from slavery, collected the letters which had been sent to America by the English Baptist Union,—letters urging the Baptists to take this very step—published them, and sent them, by its agents, through all the churches. It might have been supposed that this good service would be recognized by the English Baptist Union. I learn, however, on the authority of the secretary, Rev. J. H. Hinton, that the Executive Committee are “not disposed” to do so: from which I infer that the Free Mission Society is to be ignored. How extensively this feeling exists,

I know not, nor why it is that the important facts I herewith present have not reached the public through the columns of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*.

In conclusion, permit me to say that the fate of the slave rests, in a great degree, with the British churches. They can, if they will, put American Slavery under the ban of evangelical Christendom. Let but the English churches make common cause with the anti-slavery secessionists of America,—let them reprove their persecutors, instead of uniting with them,—let them send *written* and *living* epistles to those pleaders for the slave—encouraging them in the severe conflict—whispering hope to their sorrowful hearts—aiding them in spreading anti-slavery light—in sustaining anti-slavery schools—in furnishing aid to the refugee slaves in Canada—and, above all, let them bring their mighty moral power to bear against the enormities of slavery. Let this but be done, and the cause will advance with renewed vigor, so that we may ere long hope to see the last slave stand free and unfettered.

With earnest prayers that your united labors may continue to bless the world,

I am, esteemed friends,

Yours in the cause of suffering humanity,

Bristol, March, 1852.

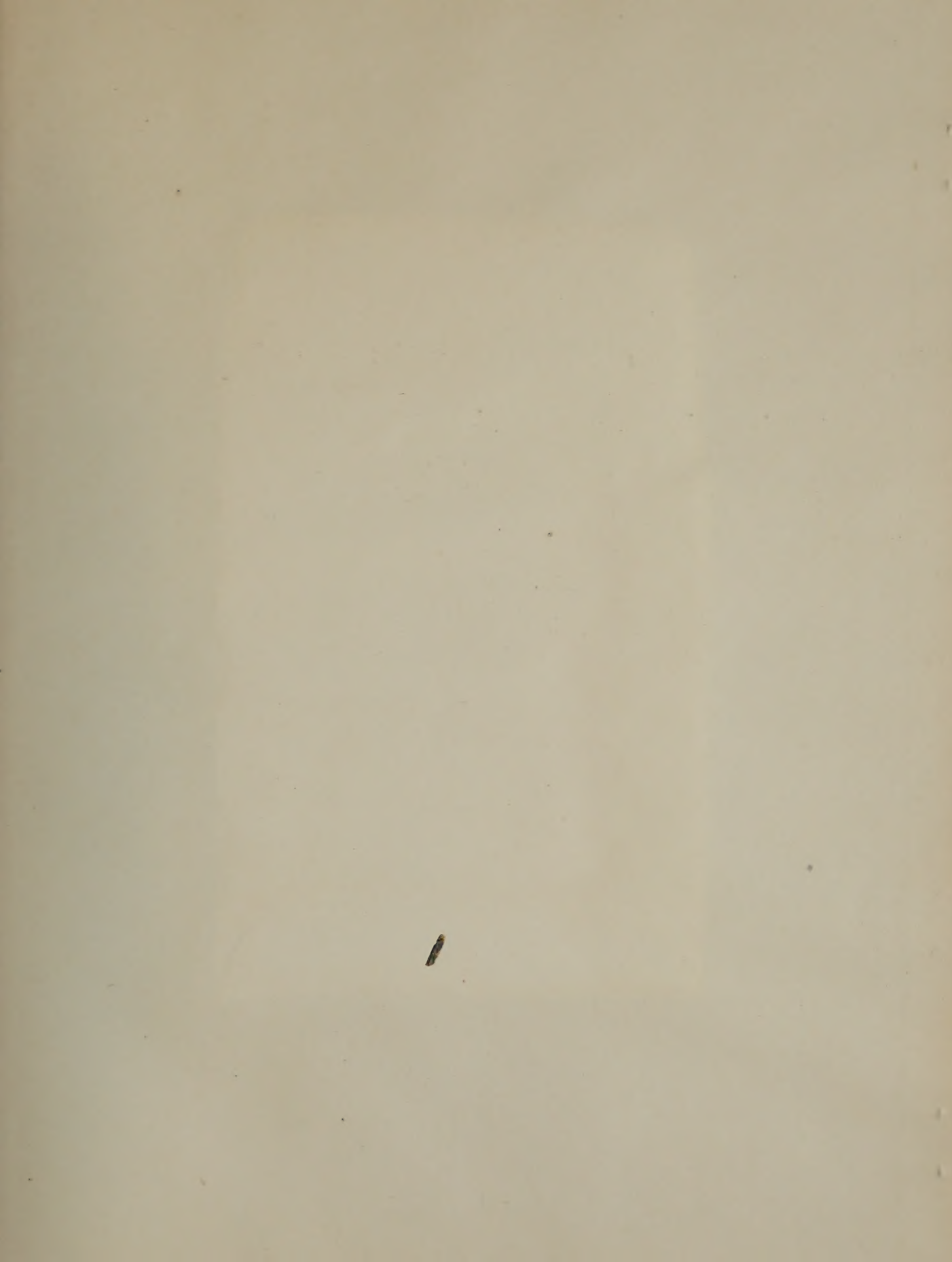
EDWARD MATHEWS.

MORAL MAP OF THE UNITED STATES.



Mathews West Hall, Bristol.

Slavery is a dark spot on the face of the Nation.—Lafayette



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