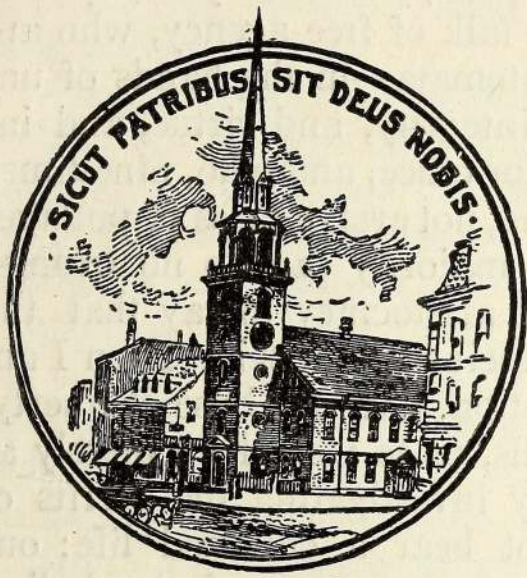




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Old South Leaflets.

No. 180.

Garrison's First Anti-slavery Address in Boston.

ADDRESS AT PARK STREET CHURCH, BOSTON, JULY 4, 1829.

It is natural that the return of a day which established the liberties of a brave people should be hailed by them with more than ordinary joy; and it is their duty as Christians and patriots to celebrate it with signal tokens of thanksgiving.

Fifty-three years ago the Fourth of July was a proud day for our country. It clearly and accurately defined the rights of man; it made no vulgar alterations in the established usages of society; it presented a revelation adapted to the common sense of mankind; it vindicated the omnipotence of public opinion over the machinery of kingly government; it shook, as with the voice of a great earthquake, thrones which were seemingly propped up with Atlantean pillars; it gave an impulse to the heart of the world, which yet thrills to its extremities.

[The orator then proceeded to speak of the degeneracy of the national jubilee, from an occasion distinguished for rationality of feeling and purity of purpose to a day marked by reckless and profligate behavior, vain boasting, and the foolish assumption that no dangers could ever assail or threaten the republic. To him the prevalence of infidelity, the compulsory desecration of the "holy Sabbath," the ravages of intemperance, the profligacy of the press, the corruptness of party politics, were all sources of danger and causes for alarm; and he briefly considered them before he took up slavery, the main theme of his discourse.]

I speak not as a partisan or an opponent of any man or measures, when I say that our politics are rotten to the core. *We* boast of

our freedom, who go shackled to the polls, year after year, by tens and hundreds and thousands! *We* talk of free agency, who are the veriest machines—the merest automata—in the hands of unprincipled jugglers! *We* prate of integrity, and virtue, and independence, who sell our birthright for office, and who, nine times in ten, do not get Esau's bargain,—no, not even a mess of pottage! Is it republicanism to say that the majority can do no wrong? Then I am not a republican. Is it aristocracy to say that the people sometimes shamefully abuse their high trust? Then I am an aristocrat. It is not the appreciation, but the abuse of liberty, to withdraw altogether from the polls, or to visit them merely as a matter of form, without carefully investigating the merits of candidates. The republic does not bear a charmed life: our prescriptions administered through the medium of the ballot-box—the mouth of the political body—may kill or cure, according to the nature of the disease and our wisdom in applying the remedy. It is possible that a people may bear the title of freemen who execute the work of slaves. To the dullest observers of the signs of the times it must be apparent that we are rapidly approximating to this condition. . . .

But there is another evil, which, if we had to contend against nothing else, should make us quake for the issue. It is a gangrene preying upon our vitals, an earthquake rumbling under our feet, a mine accumulating materials for a national catastrophe. It should make this a day of fasting and prayer, not of boisterous merriment and idle pageantry, a day of great lamentation, not of congratulatory joy. It should spike every cannon, and haul down every banner. Our garb should be sackcloth, our heads bowed in the dust, our supplications for the pardon and assistance of Heaven.

Last week this city was made breathless by a trial of considerable magnitude. The court chamber was inundated for hours, day after day, with a dense and living tide which swept along like the rush of a mountain torrent. Tiers of human bodies were piled up to the walls, with almost miraculous condensation and ingenuity. It seemed as if men abhorred a vacuum equally with Nature: they would suspend themselves, as it were, by a nail, and stand upon air with the aid of a peg. Although it was a barren, ineloquent subject, and the crowd immense, there was no perceptible want of interest, no evidence of impatience. The cause was important, involving the reputation of a distinguished citizen. There was a struggle for mastery between two giants,

a test of strength in tossing mountains of law. The excitement was natural. *

I stand up here in a more solemn court, to assist in a far greater cause; not to impeach the character of one man, but of a whole people; not to recover the sum of a hundred thousand dollars, but to obtain the liberation of two millions of wretched, degraded beings, who are pining in hopeless bondage, over whose sufferings scarcely an eye weeps, or a heart melts, or a tongue pleads either to God or man. I regret that a better advocate had not been found, to enchain your attention and to warm your blood. Whatever fallacy, however, may appear in the argument, there is no flaw in the indictment; what the speaker lacks, the cause will supply.

Sirs, I am not come to tell you that slavery is a curse, debasing in its effect, cruel in its operation, fatal in its continuance. The day and the occasion require no such revelation. I do not claim the discovery as my own, that "all men are born equal," and that among their inalienable rights are "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Were I addressing any other than a free and Christian assembly, the enforcement of this truth might be pertinent. Neither do I intend to analyze the horrors of slavery for your inspection, nor to freeze your blood with authentic recitals of savage cruelty. Nor will time allow me to explore even a furlong of that immense wilderness of suffering which remains unsubdued in our land. I take it for granted that the existence of these evils is acknowledged, if not rightly understood. My object is to define and enforce our duty, as Christians and Philanthropists.

On a subject so exhaustless it will be impossible, in the moiety of an address, to unfold all the facts which are necessary to its full development. In view of it my heart swells up like a living fountain, which time cannot exhaust, for it is perpetual. Let this be considered as the preface of a noble work, which your inventive sympathies must elaborate and complete.

I assume as distinct and defensible propositions:—

I. That the slaves of this country, whether we consider their moral, intellectual, or social condition, are pre-eminently entitled to the prayers and sympathies and charities of the American people; and their claims for redress are as strong as those of any Americans could be in a similar condition.

II. That, as the free States—by which I mean non-slavehold-

* The case was that of Farnum, Executor of Tuttle Hubbard, *vs.* Brooks, and was heard in the Massachusetts Supreme Court. The "two giants" in opposition were William Wirt, ex-Attorney-General of the United States, and Daniel Webster. Wirt's eloquence made a great impression. (*Boston Traveller*, June 23, 30, 1829; *Columbian Centinel*, June 27.)

ing States—are constitutionally involved in the guilt of slavery by adhering to a national compact that sanctions it, and in the danger by liability to be called upon for aid in case of insurrection, they have the right to remonstrate against its continuance, and it is their duty to assist in its overthrow.

III. That no justificative plea for the perpetuity of slavery can be found in the condition of its victims; and no barrier against our righteous interference, in the laws which authorize the buying, selling, and possessing of slaves, nor in the hazard of a collision with slaveholders.

IV. That education and freedom will elevate our colored population to a rank with the white, making them useful, intelligent, and peaceable citizens.

In the first place, it will be readily admitted that it is the duty of every nation primarily to administer relief to its own necessities, to cure its own maladies, to instruct its own children, and to watch over its own interests. He is “worse than an infidel” who neglects his own household, and squanders his earnings upon strangers; and the policy of that nation is unwise which seeks to proselyte other portions of the globe at the expense of its safety and happiness. Let me not be misunderstood. My benevolence is neither contracted nor selfish. I pity that man whose heart is not larger than a whole continent. I despise the littleness of that patriotism which blusters only for its own rights, and, stretched to its utmost dimensions, scarcely covers its native territory; which adopts as its creed the right to act independently, even to the verge of licentiousness, without restraint, and to tyrannize wherever it can with impunity. This sort of patriotism is common. I suspect the reality, and deny the productiveness, of that piety which confines its operations to a particular spot—if that spot be less than the whole earth; nor scoops out, in every direction, new channels for the waters of life. Christian charity, while it “begins at home,” goes abroad in search of misery. It is as copious as the sun in heaven. It does not, like the Nile, make a partial inundation, and then withdraw; but it perpetually overflows, and fertilizes every barren spot. It is restricted only by the exact number of God’s suffering creatures. But I mean to say that, while we are aiding and instructing foreigners, we ought not to forget our own degraded countrymen; that neither duty nor honesty requires us to defraud ourselves, that we may enrich others.

The condition of the slaves, in a religious point of view, is deplorable, entitling them to a higher consideration, on our part,

than any other race; higher than the Turks or Chinese, for they have the privileges of instruction; higher than the Pagans, for they are not dwellers in a gospel land; higher than our red men of the forest, for we do not bind them with gyves nor treat them as chattels.

And here let me ask, What has Christianity done, by direct effort, for our slave population? Comparatively nothing. She has explored the isles of the ocean for objects of commiseration; but, amazing stupidity, she can gaze without emotion on a multitude of miserable beings at home, large enough to constitute a nation of freemen, whom tyranny has heathenized by law. In her public services they are seldom remembered, and in her private donations they are forgotten. From one end of the country to the other her charitable societies form golden links of benevolence, and scatter their contributions like raindrops over a parched heath; but they bring no sustenance to the perishing slave. The blood of souls is upon her garments, yet she heeds not the stain. The clankings of the prisoner's chains strike upon her ear, but they cannot penetrate her heart.

I have said that the claims of the slaves for redress are as strong as those of any Americans could be, in a similar condition. Does any man deny the position? The proof, then, is found in the fact that a very large proportion of our colored population were born on our soil, and are therefore entitled to all the privileges of American citizens. This is their country by birth, not by adoption. Their children possess the same inherent and unalienable rights as ours, and it is a crime of the blackest dye to load them with fetters.

Every Fourth of July our Declaration of Independence is produced, with a sublime indignation, to set forth the tyranny of the mother country and to challenge the admiration of the world. But what a pitiful detail of grievances does this document present in comparison with the wrongs which our slaves endure! In the one case, it is hardly the plucking of a hair from the head; in the other, it is the crushing of a live body on the wheel,—the stings of the wasp contrasted with the tortures of the Inquisition. Before God, I must say that such a glaring contradiction as exists between our creed and practice the annals of six thousand years cannot parallel. In view of it I am ashamed of my country. I am sick of our unmeaning declamation in praise of liberty and equality, of our hypocritical cant about the unalienable rights of man. I could not, for my right hand, stand up before a Euro-

pean assembly, and exult that I am an American citizen, and denounce the usurpations of a kingly government as wicked and unjust; or, should I make the attempt, the recollection of my country's barbarity and despotism would blister my lips, and cover my cheeks with burning blushes of shame.

Will this be termed a rhetorical flourish? Will any man coldly accuse me of intemperate zeal? I will borrow, then, a ray of humanity from one of the brightest stars in our American galaxy, whose light will gather new effulgence to the end of time. "This, sirs, is a cause that would be dishonored and betrayed if I contented myself with appealing only to the understanding. It is too cold, and its processes are too slow for the occasion. I desire to thank God that, since he has given me an intellect so fallible, he has impressed upon me an instinct that is sure. On a question of shame and honor—liberty and oppression—reasoning is sometimes useless, and worse. I feel the decision in my pulse: if it throws no light upon the brain, it kindles a fire at the heart." . . .

I come to my second proposition,—the right of the free States to remonstrate against the continuance, and to assist in the overthrow of slavery.

This, I am aware, is a delicate subject, surrounded with many formidable difficulties. But if delay only adds to its intricacy, wherefore shun an immediate investigation? I know that we of the North affectedly believe that we have no local interest in the removal of this great evil; that the slave States can take care of themselves, and that any proffered assistance, on our part, would be rejected as impertinent, dictatorial, or meddlesome; and that we have no right to lift up even a note of remonstrance. But I believe that these opinions are crude, preposterous, dishonorable, unjust. Sirs, this is a business in which, as members of one great family, we have a common interest; but we take no responsibility, either individually or collectively. Our hearts are cold, our blood stagnates in our veins. We act, in relation to the slaves, as if they were something lower than the brutes that perish.

On this question, I ask no support from the injunction of Holy Writ, which says, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." I throw aside the common dictates of humanity. I assert the right of the free States to demand a gradual abolition of slavery, because, by its continuance, they participate in the guilt thereof, and are threatened with ultimate destruction;

because they are bound to watch over the interests of the whole country, without reference to territorial divisions; because their white population is nearly double that of the slave States, and the voice of this overwhelming majority should be potential; because they are now deprived of their just influence in the councils of the nation; because it is absurd and anti-republican to suffer property to be represented as men, and *vice versa*;* because it gives the South an unjust ascendancy over other portions of territory, and a power which may be perverted on every occasion. . . .

Now I say that, on the broad system of equal rights, this monstrous inequality should no longer be tolerated. If it cannot be speedily put down—not by force, but by fair persuasion; if we are always to remain shackled by unjust Constitutional provisions, when the emergency that imposed them has long since passed away; if we must share in the guilt and danger of destroying the bodies and souls of men, *as the price of our Union*; if the slave States will haughtily spurn our assistance, and refuse to consult the general welfare,—then the fault is not ours if a separation eventually take place. . . .

It may be objected that the laws of the slave States form insurmountable barriers to any interference on our part.

Answer. I grant that we have not the right, and I trust not the disposition, to use coercive measures. But do these laws hinder our prayers, or obstruct the flow of our sympathies? Cannot our charities alleviate the condition of the slave, and perhaps break his fetters? Can we not operate upon public sentiment (the lever that can move the moral world) by way of remonstrance, advice, or entreaty? Is Christianity so powerful that she can tame the red men of our forests, and abolish the Burman caste, and overthrow the gods of Paganism, and liberate lands over which the darkness of Superstition has lain for ages, and yet so weak, in her own dwelling-place, that she can make no impression upon her civil code? Can she contend successfully with cannibals, and yet be conquered by her own children?

Suppose that, by a miracle, the slaves should suddenly become white. Would you shut your eyes upon their sufferings, and calmly talk of Constitutional limitations? No, your voice would peal in the ears of the taskmasters like deep thunder; you would carry the Constitution by force, if it could not be taken by treaty; patriotic assemblies would congregate at the corners of every

*By the three-fifths representation clause of the Federal Constitution, Art. I., Sect. ii., 3.

street; the old Cradle of Liberty would rock to a deeper tone than ever echoed therein at British aggression; the pulpit would acquire new and unusual eloquence from our holy religion. The argument, that these white slaves are degraded, would not then obtain. You would say, It is enough that they are white and in bondage, and they ought immediately to be set free. You would multiply your schools of instruction and your temples of worship, and rely on them for security. . . .

But the plea is prevalent that any interference by the free States, however benevolent or cautious it might be, would only irritate and inflame the jealousies of the South, and retard the cause of emancipation. If any man believes that slavery can be abolished without a struggle with the worst passions of human nature, quietly, harmoniously, he cherishes a delusion. It can never be done unless the age of miracles return. No; we must expect a collision, full of sharp asperities and bitterness. We shall have to contend with the insolence and pride and selfishness of many a heartless being. But these can be easily conquered by meekness and perseverance and prayer.

Sirs, the prejudices of the North are stronger than those of the South; they bristle, like so many bayonets, around the slaves; they forge and rivet the chains of the nation. Conquer them, and the victory is won. The enemies of emancipation take courage from our criminal timidity. They have justly stigmatized us, even on the floor of Congress, with the most contemptuous epithets. We are (they say) their "white slaves,"† afraid of our own shadows, who have been driven back to the wall again and again; who stand trembling under their whips; who turn pale, retreat, and surrender, at a talismanic threat to dissolve the Union. . . .

It is often despondingly said that the evil of slavery is beyond our control. Dreadful conclusion, that puts the seal of death upon our country's existence! If we cannot conquer the monster in his infancy, while his cartilages are tender and his limbs powerless, how shall we escape his wrath when he goes forth a gigantic cannibal, seeking whom he may devour? If we cannot safely unloose two millions of slaves now, how shall we bind upwards of TWENTY MILLIONS at the close of the present century? But there is no cause for despair. We have seen how readily, and with what

† In Henry Adams's *Life of John Randolph* we read (p. 281), "On another occasion, he [Randolph] is reported as saying of the people of the North, 'We do not govern them by our black slaves, but by their own white slaves.'"

ease, that horrid gorgon, Intemperance, has been checked in his ravages. Let us take courage. Moral influence, when in vigorous exercise, is irresistible. It has an immortal essence. It can no more be trod out of existence by the iron foot of time, or by the ponderous march of iniquity, than matter can be annihilated. It may disappear for a time; but it lives in some shape or other, in some place or other, and will rise with renovated strength. Let us, then, be up and doing. In the simple and stirring language of the stout-hearted Lundy, "all the friends of the cause must go to work, keep to work, hold on, and never give up."

If it be still objected that it would be dangerous to liberate the present race of blacks,

I answer, the emancipation of all the slaves of this generation is most assuredly out of the question. The fabric, which now towers above the Alps, must be taken away brick by brick, and foot by foot, till it is reduced so low that it may be overturned without burying the nation in its ruins. Years may elapse before the completion of the achievement; generations of blacks may go down to the grave, manacled and lacerated, without a hope for their children; the philanthropists who are now pleading in behalf of the oppressed may not live to witness the dawn which will precede the glorious day of universal emancipation; but the work will go on, laborers in the cause will multiply, new resources will be discovered, the victory will be obtained, worth the desperate struggle of a thousand years. Or, if defeat follow, woe to the safety of this people! The nation will be shaken as if by a mighty earthquake. A cry of horror, a cry of revenge, will go up to heaven in the darkness of midnight, and re-echo from every cloud. Blood will flow like water,—the blood of guilty men and of innocent women and children. Then will be heard lamentations and weeping, such as will blot out the remembrance of the horrors of St. Domingo. The terrible judgments of an incensed God will complete the catastrophe of republican America.

And since so much is to be done for our country; since so many prejudices are to be dispelled, obstacles vanquished, interests secured, blessings obtained; since the cause of emancipation must progress heavily, and meet with much unhallowed opposition,—why delay the work? There must be a beginning, and now is a propitious time,—perhaps the last opportunity that will be granted us by a long-suffering God. No temporizing, lukewarm measures will avail aught. We must put our shoulders to the wheel, and

heave with our united strength. Let us not look coldly on and see our Southern brethren * contending single-handed against an all-powerful foe,—faint, weary, borne down to the earth. We are all alike guilty. Slavery is strictly a national sin. New England money has been expended in buying human flesh; New England ships have been freighted with sable victims; New England men have assisted in forging the fetters of those who groan in bondage.

I call upon the ambassadors of Christ everywhere to make known this proclamation: "Thus saith the Lord God of the Africans, Let this people go, that they may serve me." I ask them to "proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound,"—to light up a flame of philanthropy that shall burn till all Africa be redeemed from the night of moral death and the song of deliverance be heard throughout her borders.

I call upon the churches of the living God to lead in this great enterprise. † If the soul be immortal, priceless, save it from remediless woe. Let them combine their energies, and systematize their plans, for the rescue of suffering humanity. Let them pour out their supplications to Heaven in behalf of the slave. Prayer is omnipotent: its breath can melt adamantine rocks, its touch can break the stoutest chains. Let anti-slavery charity-boxes stand uppermost among those for missionary, tract, and educational purposes. On this subject Christians have been asleep: let them shake off their slumbers, and arm for the holy contest.

I call upon our New England women to form charitable associations to relieve the degraded of their sex. As yet an appeal to their sympathies was never made in vain. They outstrip us in every benevolent race. Females are doing much for the cause at the South: let their example be imitated, and their exertions surpassed, at the North.

I call upon our citizens to assist in establishing auxiliary colonization societies in every State, county, and town. I implore their direct and liberal patronage to the parent society.

I call upon the great body of newspaper editors to keep this subject constantly before their readers; to sound the trumpet of alarm, and to plead eloquently for the rights of man. They

* An allusion to the few anti-slavery societies among the Friends in some of the Southern States.

† So Daniel Webster, in his Plymouth oration, Dec. 22, 1820, of the African slave-trade and of New England complicity with it: "I invoke the ministers of our religion, that they proclaim its denunciation of these crimes, and add its solemn sanctions to the authority of human laws. If the pulpit be silent whenever or wherever there may be a sinner bloody with this guilt within the hearing of its voice, the pulpit is false to its trust" (Works, i, 46).

must give the tone to public sentiment. One press may ignite twenty; a city may warm a State; a State may impart a generous heat to a whole country.

I call upon the American people to enfranchise a spot over which they hold complete sovereignty; to cleanse that worse than Augean stable, the District of Columbia, from its foul impurities. I ask them to sustain Congress in any future efforts to colonize the colored population of the States. I conjure them to select those as Representatives who are not too ignorant to know, too blind to see, nor too timid to perform their duty.

I will say, finally, that I despair of the Republic while slavery exists therein. If I look up to God for success, no smile of mercy or forgiveness dispels the gloom of futurity; if to our own resources, they are daily diminishing; if to all history, our destruction is not only possible, but almost certain. Why should we slumber at this momentous crisis? If our hearts were dead to every throb of humanity, if it were lawful to oppress, where power is ample, still, if we had any regard for our safety and happiness, we should strive to crush the Vampire which is feeding upon our life-blood. All the selfishness of our nature cries aloud for a better security. Our own vices are too strong for us, and keep us in perpetual alarm: how, in addition to these, shall we be able to contend successfully with millions of armed and desperate men, as we must eventually, if slavery do not cease?

William Lloyd Garrison was born in Newburyport, Mass., in 1805. After editing a newspaper in Newburyport for some time, he came to Boston in 1826, presently becoming editor of a temperance paper here. Benjamin Lundy came to Boston from Baltimore about this time, and Garrison became acquainted with him and deeply interested in the anti-slavery cause, in behalf of which Lundy held his first public meeting in Boston on the evening of August 7, 1828, in the vestry of the Federal Street Baptist Church. A report of this meeting was sent to the *Courier* by Mr. Garrison, who after the meeting joined in forming an anti-slavery committee of twenty members. Later in the same year he became the editor of a paper in Bennington, Vt.; but he returned to Boston the next year, and accepted an invitation from the Congregational societies of the city to deliver a Fourth of July address in Park Street Church in the interest of the Colonization Society, announcing as his theme "Dangers to the Nation." The address was printed in full in the *National Philanthropist and Investigator*, July 22 and 29, 1829. The important portions of it are printed in the *Life of William Lloyd Garrison* by his sons, vol. i. p. 127, and reprinted here. Among those who heard Mr. Garrison at the Park Street Church on this afternoon of July 4, 1829, were Whittier and John Pierpont, who wrote

a special hymn for the occasion, which was sung under the direction of Lowell Mason, and was used afterwards at many anti-slavery meetings. Immediately afterwards Garrison left for Baltimore, to join Lundy in publishing the "Genius of Universal Emancipation." Returning to Boston after severe hardships and imprisonment in Baltimore, he issued the first number of the *Liberator* on January 1, 1831. This number of the *Liberator* has been reprinted as one of the Old South Leaflets, No. 78. See also Wendell Phillips's eulogy of Garrison (No. 79) and other leaflets illustrating the anti-slavery movement.

It is worthy of remembrance that this first anti-slavery address of William Lloyd Garrison in Boston was given in Park Street Church,—

"The Giant, standing by the elm-clad green,
His white lance lifted o'er the silent scene."

Park Street Church has had a great history, even if we forget that "America" was there first sung, with Edward Everett Hale as one of the boys in the Fourth of July audience, and that there Garrison gave his address on July 4, 1829. The first rendering of "America" took place in Park Street church just three years later, July 4, 1832, and fortunately we have an account of it from Dr. Smith's own hand. Lowell Mason was the musical director on this historical occasion also. Much of his great work for our church music was associated with Park Street Church; and this identification of the composer of our strongest and dearest old native church tunes with this finest of our old New England churches is grateful. Park Street church helped to organize the first Sunday-school in Boston, and it is interesting that in its own Sunday-school room "America" should have been first sung. The early Park Street Singing Society was most influential in the musical history of Boston. The place of the church in missionary history has been conspicuous. In 1849 the American Peace Society began to hold its annual conventions here, and this remained the place of its meetings for a dozen years. At the first meeting here Charles Sumner was the speaker, giving his great address on "The War System of Nations," perhaps the greatest single address on Peace and War ever given in America or in the world.

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