

**RIGHT AND  
WRONG  
IN  
MASSACHUSETTS**

**BY MARIA WESTON CHAPMAN**

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# RIGHT AND WRONG

There is a history in all men's lives,  
Figuring the nature of the time deceased;  
The which observed, a man may prophesy,  
With a clear aim at the main chance of things  
As not yet come to life. *Shakespeare.*

# CHAPTER I.

## RETROSPECTION.

Before bringing forward upon the stage the characters who figure in the drama, I have endeavored to make the reader acquainted with the ground on which the different scenes were to be acted.

THIERRY.

The position of New England in 1829, was a most cheerless one for Freedom. All the great interests of the country were nearly or remotely involved in slaveholding, through all their various arrangements, civil, ecclesiastical, mercantile and matrimonial; yet all disclaimed its alliance. Every body was, in some way or other, actively or passively, sustaining slavery; yet every body disclaimed all responsibility for its existence, opposed all efforts for its extinction, and was 'as much anti-slavery as any body else.' Even the natural and kindly tide of human sympathy for suffering, was turned away from the service of Freedom by the Colonization Society. The moving principles of Northern and Southern life, had become inseparably mingled below the surface of events, like the roots of giant trees beneath the soil.

In the midst of this utter ignorance, iron indifference and base hypocrisy respecting that groundwork of the human soul,—its

Freedom—rose up one to vindicate the grandeur and paramount importance of its universal claim. He was young—unknown—poor:—“lord of his presence, and no wealth beside.” But he had that best of all educations, self-education, and that best of all qualifications for his work, an entire devotedness to the principles of liberty which he had espoused. Every step he took, was characteristic. He was enabled by his ability as a writer, his skill as a practical mechanic, and his laborious self-denial, to issue the first number of a periodical, without having obtained a single subscriber. To him and to the principles he advocated, the important thing was to find readers; which the power evinced in his little sheet enabled him to do. Its name was characteristic. It was neither a “journal,” nor an “observer,” nor a “register,” nor a “recorder,” nor an “examiner.” He called it THE LIBERATOR. Any other name would have but feebly expressed the depth and affirmative nature of its principles. Those sacred and fundamental principles found a response in the land, though the hearts from which it came, were few and far between. The New England Anti-Slavery Society was formed; and as man after man planted himself by the side of Garrison and Knapp, a sense of duty seemed to pervade the soul of each—the duty of *promulgating* the truth of whose beauty and necessity his soul was then made sensible. The Liberator was not their organ, in an official sense,—but how could they conscientiously do otherwise than sustain the instrumentality which their own experience had proved so effectual?

They lectured on the subject of slavery as they found opportunity; and by circulation of the Liberator and such publications as their means could furnish, and by diligence in

conversation and argument, they succeeded in arousing a portion of the community to its consideration.

Though the idea of united, concentrated moral effort, was familiar to their minds,—though the land was in fact permeated by education and missionary Societies,—though this was emphatically the age of benevolence and of voluntary association, yet a mighty preparation of heart was needed in every individual who listened to this call of Liberty, before he could resolve to avail himself of similar means for the promulgation of her great principles: principles, which, lying deeper than the shallow foundations of the popular benevolent enterprises of the day, were identical with those of Christianity herself.

Christianity, in every age, has ever presented herself as the antagonist of its crying abomination. The same in spirit, her visible appearance is modified by the giant obstacle she meets in each successive generation. Sometimes, in conflict with idolatry, she stands with her face of triumphant brightness opposed to the refined, the intellectual, and the powerful; and every step is over a crumbling altar and a prostrate priest. Sometimes, as in the days immediately preceding those of which we write, her advanced guard are casting out the unclean spirit of intemperance. In the close-succeeding years, she comes, like LIBERTY, to inhabit the dwelling from which intemperance has been banished to make room for her beatific presence.

By this call of the age for a manifestation of Christianity against slavery, were hundreds drawn together during the first two years of the existence of the N. E. Anti-Slavery Association.

They came from every sect, and class, and party—of every age and sex and color: and often might the feeling with which the differing sectaries beheld, each, the anxious labors of the other for the same object, and to their astonishment found how much they possessed in common, have been well expressed by the colloquy of the high caste German protestant and the despised Jew.

“This conduct, Jew, doth verily seem Christian.”  
“God bless you! what makes me to you a Christian  
Makes you to me a Jew.”

To establish their association on this broad and enduring foundation of sympathy and earnest union in the exercise of every means sanctioned by each member’s idea of law, humanity and religion, was the early labor of New England abolitionists. At their second annual gathering, Charles Follen offered the following resolution:—

“Resolved, that this society has for its *sole object* the abolition of slavery in the United States, without any reference to local interests, political parties, or religious sects.”

This resolution, says the report of that year, “was sustained in a truly admirable manner, and unanimously adopted.”

The enthusiasm for liberty was sufficiently strong to overcome not only bigotry but selfishness. Indeed those who had sacrificed lucrative or honorable situations, or labored gratuitously, receiving nothing in guerdon but the misrepresentation of the oppressor, were hardly likely to yield to the temptation incident to other associated operations,—

that of making them subserve the love of power or praise. Sectarianism and selfishness having been overcome, it was without any emotion but that of joyful anticipation, that the New England Society labored to carry out the following resolution, introduced by Mr. Garrison in 1833:—

“Resolved, that the formation of a national society is essential to the complete regeneration of public sentiment on the subject of slavery; and that the Board of Managers of the New England Society be authorized to call a national meeting of the friends of abolition, for the purpose of organizing such a society.”

Their success was thus announced in the annual report of 1835:—

“In consequence of the formation of the American Society, and of the design contemplated to form State Societies in the New England States, which has been already accomplished in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, the operations of the New England Society during the past year have been very much confined to Massachusetts, and hereafter it will be *only* a State Society.”

These enlarged souls thought it no humiliation to take a lower seat. Their object was Liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof, and not the establishment of a powerful institution, of which *they* should have the control. They go on to say,—

“Though the comparative importance of this association has, owing to the causes just mentioned, been in some measure



diminished, yet its zeal, activity and numbers are unimpaired, while its principles are spreading with unexampled rapidity.”

We find them abjuring every thought of control, jurisdiction, centralization and monopoly of means and power. Voluntarily taking what in the apprehension of many would be a lower seat, they assumed the name of the Massachusetts, instead of the New England Anti-Slavery Society. The plan of a national organization, with its various component parts, from state and county to town and parish societies, was skilfully planned, and its execution commenced with great spirit. There was no difficulty in obtaining funds for the use of the Executive Committee of this national association, as *all* the abolitionists were its members, and their confidence in the men they had selected to form this Committee, was very great. Unlike the parent and pioneer Committee, it numbered among its members men of wealth; and their liberality enabled them to send into the field numbers of able financial and lecturing agents.

At the State gatherings and New England Conventions, these agents were wont to take donations and pledges, which Massachusetts abolitionists, with their characteristic disinterestedness, were anxious to make, that the central committee might be supplied, even though it drained the State Society of its resources.

A practical difficulty soon became obvious. Some, meaning to pledge money to the State Society, found their pledge received as to the National Society—others, meaning to sustain the National, found their pledge recorded as to the State; and great confusion, both in the accounts of the agents, and in the minds

of abolitionists, was the consequence. Notwithstanding this, the work went most encouragingly forward;—all being delighted with the efficiency of the National Society, however inconvenient and depressing, in a business sense, its mode of operation might be, and however the action of the State Society was paralyzed by the labors of its financial agents. Still it was thought that some arrangement might be devised by which to obviate the uncertainty and inconvenience which the double draft of funds occasioned; and at the last quarterly meeting of the Massachusetts Society in 1835, a committee was appointed to consider the subject. They reported that the then existing arrangements were very embarrassing to the Massachusetts Society; but no plan was adopted for more convenient ones.

This was the situation and bearing of the fiscal arrangements at the beginning of 1836.

Meanwhile the grand battle had been going powerfully on, and the energies of all were severely tasked. The enthusiasm for the cause had overleaped not only sectarian divisions, but the “graceful feebleness,” which the age cherished as an ornament in the female character. The women of the cause, in the difficult times of 1835, were peculiarly active. They devoted themselves to the work of obtaining signatures to petitions with commendable energy. A history of their progress from door to door, with the obstacles they encountered, would be at once touching, ludicrous, and edifying. Young women, whose labors depended on public opinion, laid the claims of the enslaved to freedom before those whose simple word might grant or deny their own means of subsistence. Benevolent-looking elderly gentlemen, individuals of the highest respectability and

influence in the community, were wont to witness the appeal kindly, favoring the applicant with good advice as to her future course.

“My dear young lady, it gives me pain to see your efforts so entirely wasted. You only injure the cause you espouse by thus leaving your sphere. You actually prevent those who are capable of understanding this question, and whom their sex points out as the only proper persons to consider it, from entering upon its consideration. You make the whole matter seem little, and below the attention of men.” But the women judged for themselves, and very rationally too, that the women whose efforts for the cause could not be hindered by men, were more valuable auxiliaries than the men whose dignity forbade them to be fellow-laborers with women.

The individual and collective energy of the community, both moral and physical, was that year employed to keep women from leaving what was termed “their appropriate sphere,” by petitioning and holding the meetings of their respective Societies; but in vain.

Their sole reply to the restrictive efforts of the public, was conveyed in such resolutions as the following:—“Resolved, that, in a conflict of principles, we believe Scripture to teach that there is neither bond or free, male or female, foreigner or native; but all are one in Christ Jesus; and therefore feel ourselves called in common with man, to toil and suffer, as all must, who effectually defend the truth.” Manifold were the pretences under which men disguised their hatred to freedom. From the beginning, those who professed to be thoroughly opposed to Slavery in the abstract, (such was the cant phrase

of that time,) had concealed their hatred to liberty under the guise of dislike to the measures of abolitionists. As those measures were entirely unexceptionable in reality, the pretence settled down into a stereotyped aversion to *harsh language*. Under this term, were comprehended that faithfulness to principle, accuracy of moral classification, appropriateness of style to subject, and strict impartiality which the effects of Mr. Garrison's example had been to make general in the cause. It was this example of fidelity which made an expression of confidence in him, or an expression of approbation of his course, equivalent to a test-act. There are so many persons who will assent to an abstractly righteous proposition, though they start back in alarm from righteousness personified, that it was fortunate for the cause, if such were prevented by his faithfulness from clogging it with their useless numbers.

The most delightful and at the same time the most surprising feature of the Anti-Slavery cause was the harmonious co-operation of all engaged in its advancement. Delightful, because rare in any circumstances,—surprising, because the materials of which the Society was formed, were, to human eye, so discordant. But each member, in virtue of a clear perception of the truth that the whole is greater than a part, when sect came in collision with the universal cause of freedom, made the less give way to the greater, and each was zealously and kindly watchful, not to enforce his distinctive opinions, in religion or politics, on his brother. Seeing that his brother had religious and political principles of his own, he contented himself with urging their constant application to the case of the enslaved. This watchfulness was perhaps more careful in Massachusetts,

than in any other state. Abolition *there* had been a growth and not a manufacture; and it was observable that the more devoted was the zeal of the abolitionists, the more enlarged was their toleration. It was neither natural nor desirable that differences of opinion should not occasionally appear in Abolition meetings, but their appearance was never the signal of wrath and clamor.

The great hope of the association was that the church might be roused by its instrumentality to put forth her moral power against slavery; and at the New England convention of 1836, a resolution was proposed declaring that a church using its influence to delay and prevent the fulfilment of the will of Christ, has no claim to be considered his; and that only those churches who employed their associated influence *for* reform, should be considered the true and real church of God. Elizur Wright objected to any resolution which would divide the church;—our object was to purify. Rev. Mr. Peckham followed him, declaring that this Convention, not being an ecclesiastical body, was not qualified to sit in judgment on the churches. Many of the members of the Convention were not, he said, even church members, and therefore it was improper for them to sit in judgment on the conduct of church members. Should we say to this man, who is an abolitionist, Stand thou here, and to another, who is opposed to abolition, Stand thou there? Were there no spots upon our own garments, which those we undertake to sever from the church might point out? On the question of abolition he was ready to go as far as any Anti-Slavery man he ever saw; but when a measure was proposed that must divide the churches, he must oppose it. The Rev. Geo. Allen, of Shrewsbury, thought the passage of a resolution

dangerous which might be followed by denunciation, vituperation and division of the churches. The resolution was recommitted. Subsequently one was offered by Rev. J. T. Woodbury, enforcing discipline and excommunication of slaveholders. The strong words of truth he uttered on that occasion sank deep into the hearts of hundreds who heard them, and influence their conduct to this day.

“What is the Church doing?” he said. “Selling indulgences for sin—the worst of sins—the sin of *man-stealing*—yea, the sin of stealing and selling *a brother in the Church*! What do they do? The hammer is lifted over the head of the Christian—yes, the Christian, the child of God—and the cry is, who bids? Brother sells his brother, and the Church says, *it is all right*, while the watchmen, on the walls of Zion, pass the word, *all’s well!* Though the auctioneer is a church member, the seller, and buyer, and the poor slave, all members of the same Church, yet the Church does not censure the deed. *It is all right.* \* \* \* The Church that does not pronounce slavery a sin, and deal with its members, who refuse to confess and forsake it, in effect, licenses slavery. It stands as the virtual endorser of the crime. If men are robbed of the Bible, and of all knowledge of letters; if parents are punished, as felons, for teaching their own children the alphabet, and the Church does nothing, then the Church, by its silence, endorses it, and declares it is all right. If parents are robbed of their children, forced to see them dragged to the market, and knocked off to the negro speculator—the Church stands by, and says, “*It’s all right.*” The Church allows this, not only in its members, but in its elders, and deacons, and pastors, and bishops; and hence it stands justly responsible for selling indulgences to license the sin of

slavery. \* \* \* What! shall the American churches form Bible societies, and pledge themselves before God, that they will give the Bible to the whole world, and then withhold it from twenty-five hundred thousand souls in their very midst? What have we seen here? A Virginia Christian slaveholder comes here, and appeals to us about the Virginia State Bible Society, to send the Bible to the extreme ends of the earth. \* \* \* Why don't he give the Bible to his own slaves then, and teach them to read it, before he asks for our money to help him send Bibles to the slaves in sin in distant lands? How does he look; the agent of the Virginia Bible Society, begging for money, to give the Bible to Chinese men and Hindoo pariahs, and refusing to give it, or let us give it, to *six hundred thousand immortal beings in his own State*? Why, what a hypocrite! Is there a being on earth, the most degraded even of the miserable slaves, whose souls are left to perish, who cannot see the inconsistency, the absurdity, the hypocrisy of this? Is God a fool, to be thus mocked? Sir, I will raise my voice against such hypocrisy as long as I live. It shall ring in the ears of every slaveholder who asks us to help him give Bibles to the heathen, thousands of miles off, while he withholds them from the slaves at his own door. Why, his very Bibles, which he sends to the Hindoo, are bought with the blood and souls of his slaves. It is dividing the gains of hell with God. \* \* \* If this is Christianity, well might the heathen say, God defend us from Christianity."

A graphic picture, distinct as just, and yet there sat a few in this very convention "ready to go as far as any Anti-Slavery man they ever saw," who deprecated division on *Anti-Slavery* ground, though their *general* principle was, to hold no fellowship with immorality. The resolution of Mr. Woodbury

passed, with but one dissenting voice. Mr. Sewall, who voted in the negative, and Mr. May, who declined voting on the question, explained their conduct by stating that they "entertained doubts whether any body of Christians had a right to exclude a man from the communion table at all." At the same time they heartily agreed with the Abolition spirit of the resolution, and thought it the duty of Christians who believe in the propriety of this discipline in the church to vote for it. In the course of the Convention, a resolution was presented, involving a personal pledge from each member, of life and fortune and honor to the cause; and well-remembered words of fervent solemnity yet sound in the ears of those who were then adjured to stand firm, "come what might." Women were earnestly entreated to assist the passage of this resolution, and almost all present united in it.

The ecclesiastical opposition to the cause could not fail to be brought out in bold relief by the proceedings of this Convention. During the whole year, its workings were manifest, and at the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Society in 1837, its efforts were successfully exerted in reducing the Abolitionists to the necessity of meeting in a stable. Though the church cast its whole weight in their way, the State was less obstinate in its opposition, and the use of the State House was permitted for one session of the Society. Mr. Stanton wished that this yielding on the part of the State might be considered as a keen rebuke to those churches which had refused their houses of worship, that we might plead in them the cause of 2,000,000 of American heathen. Mr. Fitch deprecated this "turning aside" to remark upon the obstacles cast in our way. He feared there was danger of losing sight of the end of our



organization as an Anti-Slavery Society. "We should not let these efforts for free discussion so absorb our minds. Let us think of the infinitely more oppressive wrongs of the poor slave." There was an indefinable something in these remarks, which revealed an entire want of comprehension of the hearts of abolitionists in general. Was it for themselves, then, that they made these efforts, and administered these rebukes? Were not their thoughts riveted on the Slave? and was not this fixedness of determination the very cause of their rebukes, and of their efforts for free discussion? Free discussion of what? Why, of the Slaves' wrongs and the means of righting them! and yet this incomprehensible jargon about turning aside!

During the succeeding meetings, the Anti-Slavery spirit swelled high and strong. The Liberator was warmly sustained by all the friends present, among whom were Messrs. Chaplin, Walker, May, and Stanton. "The inquiry is often made of me," said Mr. Stanton, "why does not the American Society sustain it? The answer is, Let Massachusetts sustain it, as she ought." Mr. St. Clair, in particular, expressed the warmest eulogy on the Liberator. Mr. Garrison spoke as one knowing the folly of being elevated by human applause, or depressed by human censure; he remarked that it was neither his aim nor expectation, to please every subscriber. "It must suffice that free discussion is my motto, and those who are opposed to me in sentiment are always invited to occupy a place." Political action, as one of the modes contemplated by the Society, was adverted to. Mr. Stanton introduced a resolution, affirming that the people of Massachusetts ought *not* to vote for an upholder of slavery. Mr. Garrison warmly seconded the resolution.

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