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THIRD DECADE OF THE AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.

[Phonographically Reported by HENRY M. PARKHURST.]

SPEECH OF J. MILLER MCKIM.

I comply cheerfully with your request, Mr. Chairman, though the task it assigns me is not in all respects an easy one. To look back upon the origin of this Society, and run the eye down its course to the present time, and then submit the reminiscences suggested; and to do it all in the space of a single short speech, is a task requiring powers of condensation beyond my pretensions.

There is another difficulty about it. To give an account of a movement with which one's own personal history—at least in his own mind—is inseparably identified, without violating one of the first rules of good taste in a speaker, demands a degree of phrasological skill which but few possess. The word *I* is perhaps the ugliest as well as the shortest in the English language. It is a word which careful parents teach their children never to use—either in the nominative, possessive or objective case—except on compulsion. And yet it is a word without which *I* cannot possibly get on in the duty you have assigned me.

But having accepted my part, I accept also its conditions. And this I do all the more readily from certain advantages likely to accrue from it. "From one learn all," the adage says. The history of one Abolitionist, howsoever humble, even though it be for a day, is the history, to that extent, of every other Abolitionist—and of the cause. There are people here, doubtless, who are ignorant of the character of Abolitionism and Abolitionists. Let us for once, Mr. Chairman, give them an inside view. Let us lay aside reserve, and speak with a freedom which in other circumstances would hardly be justifiable.

Thirty-one years ago, this witness was a student at Andover Theological Seminary. While there, a desire, which, for more than a year, had consumed him, culminated into a purpose. In the depths of his soul and before God he consecrated himself to the work of a missionary among the heathen. What his precise motives were, it is not necessary here to inquire. That they were of a mixed character, partaking not a little of the ardor and romance of youth, subsequent reflection has left no room to doubt.

There was another student at the Seminary, whose views and feelings were in harmony with my own, and who joined in this vow of self-consecration. His name was Daniel E. Jewett. I mention him for reasons which will presently be obvious.

I had been at Andover but a short time—less than two months—when a severe domestic affliction—the death of my eldest brother—called me away; and I returned to my home in Carlisle, in this State, where I had been born and bred.

For two or three years previous to the period now referred to, the country—a very considerable portion of it—had been in a state of high religious excitement. Every where people's attention was directed with unusual earnestness to the subject of personal religion. Since the days of Whitfield, it was said, there had been no excitement equal to it in depth and intensity, but toward the latter part of 1833 this excitement began to subside. The "revivals," as they were called, which followed this period, and which were got up by the machinery of "protracted meetings" and other appliances, were, for the most part, mere imitations—simulations without depth and without earnestness.

With the subsidence of this religious excitement in the country, the feelings of the sincere and enlightened who had shared in it began to take a new turn. Their attention was called away from themselves to the condition of others. They had made sufficient progress in the divine life to understand that cardinal injunction: "Let no man seek his own, but every one his neighbor's weal."

About this time I happened one day, in a barbershop, to pick up a newspaper, the columns of which I found filled with discussions of the subject of slavery. It was a question to which my attention had never before been directed. The paper interested me exceedingly. Its vigor of style and the boldness of its argument were striking. It was *The Liberator*. I took it home with me, read it carefully, and came back the next day to talk about it. An argument arose between me and the barber, in which that gentleman had greatly the advantage. He gave me a book to take home with me; it was a thick pamphlet, of about the size and appearance of *The Atlantic Monthly*, and was entitled "Thoughts on Colonization." Its author was Wm. Lloyd Garrison. I read it at one sitting. The scales fell from my eyes. The whole truth was revealed to me. The evil of slavery, the vulgar cruelty of prejudice against color, the duty of the country and of everyman in it toward the black man, were as plain as if they had been written out before me in letters of fire. From that time to this, I have been an Abolitionist. From that time to this, I have regarded my friend John Peck, the colored barber, as one of my best benefactors.

In the latter part of 1833, I learned that there was to be a Convention in Philadelphia, for the purpose of forming a National Anti-Slavery Society. This information I

derived from my Andover friend, Daniel E. Jewett. He wrote to me, begging that I would come to the meeting. He dwelt feelingly upon the condition of the two and a quarter million (that was the figure then) of our unoffending fellow-men held in bondage, and urged me not to be insensible to their claims. "How do you know, my brother," he said, "that this may not be the work to which you have, unconsciously, dedicated yourself? How do you know that this is not the very field which your yearnings have been foreshadowing.

I laid what he said to heart, and determined to attend the Convention. The little band of pronounced Abolitionists in Carlisle—all of whom were black, except myself—appointed me a delegate, and I set off for the city. It was in the day of stage-coaches, before the new era of railroads, and I was two days incoming. I stopped at the "Indian Queen," in 4th street, then considered one of our best hotels. The style of caravans are known as the "first class hotel" was not then known—out of Boston. Your "Tremont House," I believe, was at that time in the full tide of successful experiment. I lost no time the next morning after my arrival in presenting myself, according to directions, at the house of Friend Evan Lewis in 5th street, above Cherry. Mr. Lewis was editor of a Quaker anti-slavery journal called *The "Advocate of Truth*. He was a faithful friend of the cause, as well as one of the most prominent at that time in Philadelphia. With friend Lewis I went to the Convention. It met at the Adelphic Building in 6th street, below Walnut. Its proceedings were not secret, though they were, nevertheless, not thrown open by advertisement to the public. There were some sixty or seventy delegates present, and a few spectators, who had been especially invited. A small number, it will be said, for a National Convention. But at that time it must be remembered the movement was in its incipiency. The cloud of abolitionism was not even so big as a man's hand. Now it covers the heavens!

When I entered the hall—which was on the morning of the second day—the proceedings had begun; though, as I soon learned, there was no specific business before the meeting. A Committee had been appointed the day before, consisting of Wm. Lloyd Garrison, Samuel J. May, Edwin P. Atlee and others, to draw up a Declaration of Sentiments; and the Convention was now expecting their report. While waiting Dr. Abraham L. Cox read a poem addressed to Garrison, written by John G. Whittler, at that time a young author, comparatively unknown to fame. You remember the piece:

"Champion of those who groan beneath
Oppression's iron hand,
In view of penury, hate and death,
I see thee fearless stand.

* * *

"I love thee with a brother's love;
I feel my pulses thrill
To mark thy spirit soar above
The cloud of human ill."

After the poem, Lewis Tappan arose and delivered a glowing eulogy upon Mr. Garrison. He related two very striking anecdotes, which, though I remember them distinctly, I shall not, in this presence, repeat. He concluded by saying that it had not been his purpose to eulogize Mr. Garrison; that what he said was said in no spirit of panegyric, but as a matter of fidelity to truth and to the cause. Mr. Garrison had been struck at as a representative of the cause. It was our duty, he said, to repel these assaults; to vindicate our faithful pioneer from the calumnies and misrepresentations of the enemy, and to stand by him "through evil report and through good report."

This was the first specimen I had had of what has since been called "mutual admiration." And here let me say that the charge implied in the use made of this phrase is without just foundation. When Abolitionists praise their representative men, it is for the reason suggested by Mr. Tappan. It is to defend them against the shafts of pro-slavery malice and calumny. It is from a sacred regard to truth and the interests and honor of the cause; and in no spirit of adulation, "mutual" or otherwise.

And—if you will allow me still further to digress—I will add that the charge against us of using needlessly hard and denunciatory language is equally without foundation. Why, sir, last night, while Mr. Garrison was speaking, several gentlemen—new converts to the cause—left the house because the speaker was too tame! Their hate of slavery and slaveholders, and all that belongs to the system, is so intense, that Mr. Garrison's terms of condemnation were not strong enough to relieve their minds. They are of a class whom the speaker sometimes meets, one of whom on a certain occasion represented himself as belonging to the "Five Nations." He was a gentlemanly, mild looking person—anything but a savage in appearance—and being asked what he meant by so styling himself, he explained by saying, he was for giving the rebel slaveholders "confiscation, emancipation, ruination, extirpation and *damnation*."

Parson Brownlow, also a new convert to the cause—the same that once persecuted the saints—is of this class. He is represented as saying that he is "for giving the slaveholding rebels 'Greek fire' in this world, and *hell fire* in the next."

Now, Mr. Chairman, this is not the language nor is it the spirit of the old Abolitionists. The charge of using hard and acrimonious language lies not properly at our door.

But to return from my digression: Mr. Tappan's speech was interrupted by the announcement that Mr. Garrison and the rest of the Committee were coming in with

their report. They had prepared a draft of a Declaration, and it devolved upon Dr. Edwin P. Atlee to read it. After the reading, followed criticism of its contents; or rather criticism of some of its phrases; for, as a whole, the paper commended itself at once to all who heard it. Thomas Shipley, that good man and faithful friend of the slave, objected to the word "man stealer" as applied indiscriminately to the slaveholders. To this it was replied that the term was an eminently proper one; that it described the exact relation between the master and the slave. It was urged that things should be called by their right names; that Luther had said he would "call a hoe a hoe, and a spade a spade." Besides, it was added, it was a scriptural phrase, and the chapter and verse were quoted in which it was used. This mollified friend Shipley, though it did not set his mind entirely at rest. At length some one suggested that the term should be retained, but that it should be preceded by the words, "according to Scripture." This met the difficulty, and the paper was amended so as to read: "Every American citizen who holds a human being in involuntary bondage as his property, is, *according to Scripture*, b(Exodus 21: 16,) a man-stealer."

Among the speakers, while the Declaration was under discussion, were two who interested me particularly. One was a countryman dressed in the plainest garb, and in appearance otherwise not particularly calculated to excite expectation. His manner was angular, and his rhetoric not what would be called graceful. But his matter was solid, and as clear as a bell. It had the ring of the genuine metal, and was, moreover, patto the point in question. When he sat down—which he did after a very brief speech—the question was asked: "Who is that?" and the answer came: "Thomas Whitson of Lancaster Country, in this State."

The other speaker was a woman. I had never before heard a woman speak at a public meeting. She said but a few words, but these were spoken so modestly, in such sweet tones, and yet withal so decisively, that no one could fail to be pleased. And no one did fail to be pleased. She apologized for what might here regarded as an intrusion; but she was assured by the Chairman and others that what she had said was very acceptable. The Chairman added his hope that "the lady" would not hesitate to give expression to anything that might occur to her during the course of the proceedings.

This debate on the Declaration took place in Committee of the Whole. After one or two slight verbal changes, the Committee arose and reported the document to the Convention. It was adopted unanimously, and ordered to be engrossed. The next morning, being the last session of the Convention, it was brought in engrossed and ready for signature. Before the work of signing began, it was agreed that it should be read once more. The task was assigned to our friend, Samuel J. May, who performed it with much feeling. At times his emotion was such as to prevent him for awhile from proceeding. The same feeling pervaded the audience. Then followed informally the

ceremony of signing. Each one, as he came up to put his name to the instrument, showed by his manner, and, in some instances, by his words, that he was doing a very solemn thing.

By this time I had come to be tolerably well acquainted with the Convention, both as a whole and in its individual members. My part in the proceedings had been, and was to the end, a silent one. The only distinction I enjoyed was that of being the youngest member of the body.

Looking back upon this interesting occasion, the whole thing comes up before me with the distinctness of a picture. I see the Convention just as it sat in that little hall of the Adelphi Building. I see the President, Beriah Green, of Oneida Institute, sitting on an eminence in the west end of the hall; at either side of him the two Secretaries, Lewis Tappan and John G. Whittier.

Mr. Green, though as it proved one of the best men that could have been had for the office, was not the person originally contemplated for Chairman. The Abolitionists at that time, like other people, had an idea that a Convention would not be a Convention without a man with a great name to serve as Chairman. Therefore when the delegates came to Philadelphia, the first thing they did was to cast about for some man of distinction to preside. They called on Thomas Wister, a venerable and wealthy member of the Society of Friends; but he declined. They then waited upon Mr. Roberts Vaux, an aged and highly respected citizen, whose social position and reputation as a philanthropist indicated him as a proper person to preside over the meeting. He received the Committee politely, and listened to them courteously. He sympathized with them in their general object; he was opposed to slavery, and would be glad to see it abolished; but—and then followed the usual objections; and in short, while grateful for the honor rendered him, Mr. Vaux begged leave respectfully to decline.

Discouraged in their attempts to find a great man for Chairman, the delegation concluded to select for this purpose one of their own number; and the choice fell upon Beriah Green. A better man could not have been selected. Though of plain exterior and unimposing presence, Mr. Green was a man of learning and superior ability; in every way above the average of so called men of eminence.

Mr. Tappan, who sat at his right, was a jaunty, man-of-the-world looking person; well dressed and handsome; with a fine voice and taking appearance. Whittier, who at his left, was quite as fine looking, though in a different way. He wore a dark frock coat with standing collar, which, with his thin hair, dark and sometimes flashing eyes, and black whiskers—not large, but noticeable in those unhirsute days—gave him, to my then unpractised eye, quite as much of a military as a Quaker aspect. His broad,

square forehead, and well cut features, aided by his incipient reputation as a poet, made him quite a noticeable feature in the Convention.

These were the officers of the meeting; the rest were all upon a dead level of equality. There were no distinctions tolerated among the members. At an early stage of the proceedings, it was determined that no titles should be given or received; no Honorables, Doctors, or Esquires. Men were to be recognized as men, and all factitious distinctions discarded. It was a *levelling* Convention, in the best sense of that word.

It is impossible, Mr. Chairman, to look back upon those days without noticing that Time, with his remorseless scythe, has been at his inevitable work. Death has thinned our numbers. Some of the best members of that Convention have gone to their rest. Among these was good Thomas Shipley, whose departure Whittier has so beautifully commemorated:

"Gone to thy Heavenly Father's rest,
The flowers of Eden round thee blowing,
And on thine ear the murmurs blest
Of Siloa's waters gently flowing. "O, loved of thousand! to thy grave,
Sorrowing of heart, thy brethren bore thee;
The poor man and the rescued slave
Wept as the broken earth closed o'er thee."

Evan Lewis, another of the Philadelphia delegates, took his departure soon after the holding of the Convention. He was an able and faithful friend of the cause, and performed his part well. Though dead, he yet speaketh. She who was the partner of his toils while he lived, remains to finish the task which they had jointly undertaken; and the mantle of the father has in a good measure fallen upon the shoulders of his children.

Dr. Edwin Atlee, the younger, another Philadelphia, member of the Convention, passed early from the scene of conflict. Faithful and true to the cause while he lived, he left, in his good name, an inheritance of which his children may well be proud, and which should ever be a stimulus to them in works of well-doing.

Of the members of the Convention who remain, I shall not speak. Quite a number are here to speak for themselves. Among them I may be excused for mentioning the three who are respectively the President and Vice-Presidents of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society; James Mott, Robert Purvis, and Thomas Whitson.

Mr. Mott, when I saw him at the Adelphi building thirty years ago, was in the prime of manhood. He was tall, and as straight as an arrow; his sandy hair untouched by the

frosts of time. Thomas Whitson was also in the prime of life; tall, hearty and progressive. His full shock of stubborn brown hair showed that he had not yet reached the climax of his vigor. He was stalwart in body and robust in mind, and ready for a tussle with any opponent. Mr. Purvis was in the full bloom of opening manhood; ardent, impetuous, and overflowing with enthusiasm. You will remember the speech he made, Mr. Chairman—so exactly like himself. Impassioned, full of invective, bristling with epithets, denouncing "that diabolical and fiendish system of atrocity, Americans slavery, and that equally rapacious, and, if possible, still more detestable scheme, the infamous Colonization Society."

At that Convention there were no adjournments for dinner. We sat daily from ten o'clock A.M. till dark, without recess. We had meat to eat which those who have never been "caught up into the third heaven of first principles" wot not of. The last hours of the Convention were especially impressive. I had never before, nor have I ever since, witnessed anything fully equal to it. The deep religious spirit which had pervaded the meeting from the beginning became still deeper. The evidence of the Divine presence and the Divine approval were palpable. Had we heard a voice saying, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the ground whereon thou standest is holy ground," our convictions could scarcely have been clearer.

Those who were there will never forget the address with which President Green closed the Convention. The concluding part of that address was somewhat as follows:

"Brethren, it has been good to be here. In this hallowed atmosphere, I have been revived and refreshed. This brief interview has more than repaid me for all that I have ever suffered. I have here met congenial minds; I have rejoiced in sympathies delightful to the soul. Heart has best responsive to heart, and the holy work of seeking to benefit the outraged and despised has proved the most blessed employment.

"But now we must retire from these balmy influences, and breathe another atmosphere. The chill hour frost will be upon us. The storm and tempest will rise, and the waves of persecution will dash against our souls. Let us be prepared for the worst. Let us fasten ourselves to the throne of God as with hooks of steel. If we cling not to Him, our names to that document will be but as dust.

"Let us court no applause; indulge in no spirit of vain boasting. Let us be assured that our only hope in grappling with the bony monster is in an Arm that is stronger than ours. Let us fix our gaze on God, and walk in the light of His countenance. If our cause be just—and we know it is—His omnipotence is pledged to its triumph. Let this cause be entwined around the very fibres of our hearts. Let our hearts grow to it, so that nothing but death can sunder the bond."

As Mr. Green finished, he lifted up his voice in prayer; and such a prayer is rarely heard Its fervency and faith seemed to illustrate what the speaker had said about "taking hold of the throne as with hooks of steel, "gazing upon the very face of God."

But, Mr. Chairman, I have been speaking for threequarters of an hour, and have as yet scarcely touched the threshold of my subject. Reminiscences! They come upon me so thick and fast that the whole time of this Convention would not suffice to give them expression. Here I have been lingering over a few of the incidents of the first three days of the great anti-slavery epoch; what shall I say of the whole thirty years which have followed, every day of which has been freighted with an event; every hour with some striking incident!

I must now stop, and give place to others. I have already consumed more than my fair share of the time. We have more than a score of able speakers here, every one of whom has a prescriptive right to be heard. So, without further words, I abruptly close.

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