The revolutionary tradition was the native air of Wendell Phillips. When he was born in this city, seventy-three years ago last November, some of the chief revolutionary figures still lingered. John Adams was living at Quincy, and Thomas Jefferson at Monticello; Elbridge Gerry was governor of the State, James Madison was President, and the second war with England was at hand. Phillips was nine years old when, in 1820, the most important debate after the adoption of the constitution, the debate of whose tumultuous culmination and triumphant close he was to be the great orator, began, and the second heroic epoch of our history, in which he was a master figure, opened in the long and threatening contest over the admission of Missouri. Unheeding the transactions which were shaking the land and setting the scene of his career, the young boy, of the best New England lineage and prospects, played upon Beacon Hill, and at the age of sixteen entered Harvard College. His classmates recall his manly pride and reserve, with the charming manner, the delightful conversation, and the affluence of kindly humor, which was never lost. He sauntered and gently studied; not a devoted student, not in the bent of his mind, nor in the special direction of sympathy, forecasting the reformer, but already the orator and the easy master of the college platform; and still, in the memory of his old companions, he walks those college paths in unfading youth, a figure of patrician port, of sovereign grace — a prince coming to his kingdom.

The tranquil years at the university ended, and he graduated in 1831, the year of Nat. Turner's insurrection in Virginia; the year, also, in which Mr. Garrison issued the "Liberator," and, for unequivocally proclaiming the principle of the Declaration of Independence was denounced as

a public enemy. Like other gently nurtured Boston boys, Phillips began the study of law, and, as it proceeded, doubtless the sirens sang to him, as to the noble youth of every country and time.

If, musing over Coke and Blackstone, in the full consciousness of ample powers and of fortunate opportunities, he sometimes forecast the future, he doubtless saw himself succeeding Fisher Ames, and Harrison Gray Otis, and Daniel Webster, rising from the bar to the legislature, from the legislature to the senate, from the senate — who knew whither? — the idol of society, the applauded orator, the brilliant champion of the elegant repose and the cultivated conservatism of Massachusetts.

The delight of social ease, the refined enjoyment of taste in letters and art, opulent leisure, professional distinction, gratified ambition — all these came and whispered to the young student. And it is the force that can tranquilly put aside such blandishments with a smile, and accept alienation, outlawry, ignominy, and apparent defeat, if need be, no less than the courage which grapples with poverty and outward hardship, and climbs over them to worldly prosperity, which is the test of the finest manhood. Only he who fully knows the worth of what he renounces gains the true blessing of renunciation.

The time during which Phillips was studying law was the hour of the profoundest moral apathy in the history of this country. The fervor of revolutionary feeling was long since spent, and that of the final anti-slavery contest was but just kindled. The question of slavery, indeed, had never been quite forgotten. There was always an anti-slavery sentiment in the country, but there was also a slavery interest, and the invention of the cotton-gin in 1789 gave slavery the most

powerful and insidious impulse that it had ever received. At once commercial greed was allied with political advantage and social power, and the active anti-slavery sentiment rapidly declined.

Ten years after the invention of the cotton-gin, the General Convention of the Abolition Societies deplored the decay of public interest in emancipation. Forty years later, in 1833, while Phillips was still studying law, the veteran Pennsylvania Society lamented that since 1794 it had seen one after another of those societies disband, until it was left almost alone to mourn the universal apathy.

When Wendell Phillips was admitted to the bar in 1834, the slave interest in the United States, entrenched in the constitution, in trade, in the church, in society, in historic tradition, and in the prejudice of race, had already become, although unconsciously to the country, one of the most powerful forces in the world. The English throne in 1625, the old French monarchy in 1780, the English aristocracy at the beginning of the century, were not so strong as slavery, in this country fifty years ago. The grasp of England upon the American colonies before the Revolution was not so sure, and was never so menacing to liberty upon this continent, as the grasp of slavery upon the Union in the pleasant days when the young lawyer sat in his office careless of the anti-slavery agitation, and jesting with his old college comrades over the clients who did not come.

But on an October afternoon in 1835, while he was still sitting expectant in his office, the long-awaited client came, but in what an amazing form! The young lawyer was especially a Boston boy. He loved his native city with that lofty pride and intensity of local affection which are peculiar to her citizens. "I was born in Boston," he said long afterward, "and the good name of the old town is bound up with every fibre of my heart." In the mild afternoon his windows were open and the sound of unusual disturbance drew him from his office. He hastened along the street, and suddenly, a stone's throw from the scene of the Boston massacre, in the very shadow of the old State House, he beheld in Boston a spectacle which Boston cannot now conceive. He saw American women insulted for befriending their innocent sisters, whose children were sold from their arms. He saw an American citizen assailed by a furious mob in the city of James Otis for saying with James Otis that a man's right to liberty is inherent and inalienable.

Himself a citizen-soldier, he looked to see the majesty of the people maintaining the authority of law; but, to his own startled surprise, he saw that the rightful defenders of law against the mob were themselves the mob. The city whose dauntless free speech had taught a country how to be independent he saw raising a parricidal hand against its parent—Liberty.

It was enough. As the jail doors closed upon Garrison to save his life, Garrison and his cause had won their most powerful and renowned ally. With the setting of that October sun vanished forever the career of prosperous ease, the gratification of ordinary ambition, which the genius and the accomplishment of Wendell Phillips had seemed to foretell. Yes, the long-awaited client had come at last. Scarred, scorned, and forsaken, that cowering and friendless client was wronged and degraded humanity. The great soul saw and understood.

> "So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
> So near is God to man,
> When duty whispers low, Thou must,
> The youth replies, I can."

Already the Boston boy felt what he afterward said: "I love inexpressibly these streets of Boston over which my mother led my baby feet, and if God grants me time enough I will make them too pure for the footsteps of a slave."

And we, fellow citizens, who recall the life and the man, the untiring sacrifice, the complete surrender, do we not hear in the soft air of that long-vanished October day, far above the riot of the stormy street, the benediction that he could not hear, but whose influence breathed always from the ineffable sweetness of his smile and the gracious courtesy of his manner, "Inasmuch as thou hast done it to the least of these my brethren, thou hast done it unto me."

The scene of that day is an illustration of the time. As we look back upon it it is incredible. But it was not until Lovejoy fell, while defending his press at Alton, in November, 1837, that an American citizen was killed by a raging mob for declaring in a free State the right of innocent men and women to their personal liberty. This tragedy, like the deadly blow at Charles Summer in the Senate chamber, twenty years afterward, awed the whole country with a sense of vast and momentous peril.

The country has just been startled by the terrible riot at Cincinnati, which sprang from the public consciousness that by crafty legal quibbling crime had become secure. But the outbreak was at once and universally condemned because, in this country, whatever the wrong may be, reform by riot is always worse than the wrong. The Alton riot, however, had no redeeming impulse. It was the very frenzy of lawlessness, a sudden and ghastly glimpse of the unquenchable fires of passion that were burning under the seeming peace and prosperity of the Union. How fierce and far-reaching

those passions were was seen not only in the riot itself, but in the refusal of Faneuil Hall for a public meeting to denounce the appalling wrong to American liberty which had been done in Illinois, lest the patriotic protest of the meeting should be interpreted by the country as the voice of Boston.

But the refusal was reconsidered, and never since the people of Boston thronged Faneuil Hall on the day after the massacre in State street had that ancient hall seen a more solemn and significant assembly. It was the more solemn, the more significant, because the excited multitude was no longer, as in the revolutionary day, inspired by one unanimous and overwhelming purpose to assert and maintain liberty of speech as the bulwark of all other liberty. It was an unwonted and foreboding scene. An evil spirit was in the air.

When the seemly protest against the monstrous crime had been spoken, and the proper duty of the day was done, a voice was heard, the voice of the high officer solemnly sworn to prosecute in the name of Massachusetts every violation of law, declaring, in Faneuil Hall, sixty years after the battle of Bunker Hill, and amid a howling storm of applause, that an American citizen who was put to death by a mad crowd of his fellow citizens for defending his right of free speech, died as the fool dieth.

Boston has seen dark days, but never a moment so dark as that. Seven years before Webster had said, in the famous words that Massachusetts binds as frontlets between her eyes, "There are Boston and Concord, and Lexington and Bunker Hill, and there they will remain forever." Had they already vanished? Was the spirit of the Revolution quite extinct? In the very cradle of liberty did no son survive to awake its

slumbering echoes? By the grace of God such a son there was. He had come with the multitude, and he had heard with sympathy and approval the speeches that condemned the wrong; but when the cruel voice justified the murderers of Lovejoy the heart of the young man burned within him. This speech, he said to himself, must be answered. As the malign strain proceeded the Boston boy, all on fire, with Concord and Lexington tugging at his heart, unconsciously murmured, "Such a speech in Faneuil Hall must be answered in Faneuil Hall."

"Why not answer it yourself?" whispered a neighbor who overheard him.

"Help me to the platform and I will"—and pushing and struggling through the dense and threatening crowd the young man reached the platform, was lifted upon it, and, advancing to speak, was greeted with a roar of hostile cries. But riding the whirlwind undismayed, as for many a year afterward he directed the same wild storm, he stood upon the platform in all the beauty and grace of imperial youth — the Greeks would have said a god descended—and in words that touched the mind and heart and conscience of that vast multitude, as with fire from heaven, recalling Boston to herself, he saved his native city and her cradle of liberty from the damning disgrace of stoning the first martyr in the great struggle for personal freedom.

"Mr. Chairman," he said, "when I heard the gentleman lay down principles which placed the rioters, incendiaries, and murderers of Alton side by side with Otis and Hancock, and Quincy and Adams, I thought those pictured lips would have broken into voice to rebuke the recreant American—the slanderer of the dead."

And even as he spoke the vision was fulfilled. Once more its native music rang through Faneuil Hall. In the orator's own burning words those pictured lips did break into immortal rebuke. In Wendell Phillips, glowing with holy indignation at the insult to America and to man, John Adams and James Otis, Josiah Quincy and Samuel Adams, though dead, yet spake.

In the annals of American speech there had been no such scene since Patrick Henry's electrical warning to George III. It was that greatest of oratorical triumphs when a supreme emotion, a sentiment which is to mold a people anew, lifted the orator to adequate expression.

Three such scenes are illustrious in our history. That of the speech of Patrick Henry at Williamsburg, of Wendell Phillips in Faneuil Hall, of Abraham Lincoln in Gettysburg—three, and there is no fourth. They transmit, unextinguished, the torch of an eloquence which has aroused nations and changed the course of history, and which Webster called "noble, sublime, God-like action." The tremendous controversy indeed inspired universal eloquence. As the cause passed from the moral appeal of the Abolitionists to the political action of the Liberty party, of the Conscience Whigs and Free-Soil Democrats, and finally of the Republican party, the sound of speech, which in its variety and excellence had never been heard upon the continent, filled the air.

But supreme over it all was the eloquence of Phillips, as over the harmonious tumult of a great orchestra, one clear voice, like a lark high-poised in heaven, steadily carries the melody. As Demosthenes was the orator of Greece against Philip, and Cicero of Rome against Catiline, and John Pym of England against the Stuart despotism, Wendell Phillips was distinctively the orator, as others were the statesmen, of the anti-slavery cause.