

When he first spoke at Faneuil Hall some of the most renowned American orators were still in their prime. Webster and Clay were in the Senate, Choate at the bar, Edward Everett upon the academic platform. From all these orators Phillips differed more than they differed from each other. Behind Webster and Everett and Clay there was always a great organized party or an entrenched conservatism of feeling and opinion.

They spoke accepted views. They moved with masses of men, and were sure of the applause of party spirit, of political tradition, and of established institutions. Phillips stood alone. He was not a Whig nor a Democrat, nor the graceful panegyrist of an undisputed situation. Both parties denounced him. He must recruit a new party. Public opinion condemned him. He must win public opinion to achieve his purpose. The tone, the method of the new orator, announced a new spirit. It was not a heroic story of the last century, nor the contention of contemporary politics; it was the unsuspected heroism of a mightier controversy that breathed and burned in his words. With no party behind him, and denouncing established order and acknowledged tradition, his speech was necessarily a popular appeal for a strange and unwelcome cause, and the condition of its success was that it should both charm and rouse the hearer, while, under cover of the fascination, the orator unfolded his argument and urged his plea. This condition the genius of the orator instinctively perceived, and it determined the character of his discourse.

He faced his audience with a tranquil mien and a beaming aspect that was never dimmed. He spoke, and in the measured cadence of his quiet voice there was intense feeling, but no declamation, no passionate appeal, no superficial and

feigned emotion. It was simple colloquy—a gentleman conversing. Unconsciously and surely the ear and heart were charmed. How was it done?—Ah! how did Mozart do it, how Raphael?

The secret of the rose's sweetness, of the bird's ecstasy, of the sunset's glory—that is the secret of genius and of eloquence. What was heard, what was seen, was the form of noble manhood, the courteous and self-possessed tone, the flow of modulated speech, sparkling with matchless richness of illustration, with apt allusion, and happy anecdote and historic parallel, with wit and pitiless invective, with melodious pathos, with stinging satire, with crackling epigram and limpid humor, the bright ripples that play around the sure and steady prow of the resistless ship. Like an illuminated vase of odors he glowed with concentrated and perfumed fire. The divine energy of his conviction utterly possessed him, and his

"Pure and eloquent blood  
Spoke in his cheek, and so distinctly wrought,  
That one might almost say his body thought."

Was it Pericles swaying the Athenian multitude? Was it Apollo breathing the music of the morning from his lips?—No, no! It was an American patriot, a modern son of liberty, with a soul as firm and as true as was ever consecrated to unselfish duty, pleading with the American conscience for the chained and speechless victims of American inhumanity.

How terribly earnest was the anti-slavery contest this generation little knows. But to understand Phillips we must recall the situation of the country. When he joined the Abolitionists, and for more than twenty years afterward, slavery sat supreme in the White House and made laws in the capitol. Courts of justice were its ministers and legislatures its lackeys.

It silenced the preacher in the pulpit, it muzzled the editor at his desk, and the professor in his lecture-room. It set a price upon the head of peaceful citizens, robbed the mails, and denounced the vital principle of the Declaration of Independence as treason. In States whose laws did not tolerate slavery, slavery ruled the club and the drawing-room, the factory and the office, swaggered at the dinner table, and scourged, with scorn, a cowardly society.

It tore the golden rule from school books, and from the prayer book the pictured benignity of Christ. It prohibited in the free States schools for the hated race, and hunted women who taught children to read. It forbade a free people to communicate with their representatives, seized territory to extend its area and confirm its sovereignty, and plotted to steal more to make its empire impregnable and the free Republic of the United States impossible. Scholars, divines, men and women in every church, in every party, raised individual voices in earnest protest. They sighed against a hurricane. There had been such protest in the country for two centuries—colonial provisions and restrictions—the fiery voice of Whitfield in the south—the calm persuasion of Woolman in the middle colonies—the heroism of Hopkins in Rhode Island—the eloquence of Rush in Pennsylvania. There had been emancipation societies at the North and at the South, arguments and appeals and threats in the congress of the confederation, in the constitutional convention, in the Congress of the Union; there had been the words and the will of Washington, the warning of Jefferson, the consenting testimony of the revered fathers of the government; always the national conscience somewhere silently pleading, always the finger of the world steadily pointing in scorn.

But here, after all the protest and the rebuke and the

endeavor, was the malign power, which, when the constitution was formed, had been but the shrinking Afrite bound in the casket, now towering and resistless. He had kicked his casket into the sea, and, haughtily defying the conscience of the country and the moral sentiment of mankind, demanded absolute control of the Republic as the price of union—the Republic, anxious only to submit and to call submission statesmanship.

If, then, the work of the Revolution was to be saved, and independent America was to become free America, the first and paramount necessity was to arouse the country. Agitation was the duty of the hour. Garrison was certainly not the first Abolitionist; no, nor was Luther the first Protestant. But Luther brought all the wandering and separate rays of protest to a focus, and kindled the contest for religious freedom. So, when Garrison flung full in the face of slavery the defiance of immediate and complete abolition, slavery, instinctively foreseeing its doom, sprang to its feet and joined with the heroism of despair in the death-grapple with liberty, from which, after a generation, liberty arose unbruised and victorious.

It is hard for the survivors of a generation to which Abolitionist was a word suggesting the most odious fanaticism—a furious declamation at once nonsensical and dangerous, a grotesque and sanctimonious playing with fire in a powder-magazine—to believe that the names of the representative Abolitionists will be written with a sunbeam, as Phillips says of Toussaint, high over many an honored name. But history, looking before and after, readjusts contemporary judgments of men and events. In all the essential qualities of heroic action Luther, nailing his challenge to the church upon the church's own door, when the church was supreme in

Europe, William Tell, in the romantic legend, serenely scorn-  
ing to bow to the cap of Gesler, when Gesler's troops held  
all the market-place, are not nobler figures than Garrison and  
Phillips, in the hour of the complete possession of the country  
by the power of slavery, demanding immediate and uncon-  
ditional emancipation.

A tone of apology, of deprecation or regret, no more be-  
comes an American in speaking of the Abolitionists than  
in speaking of the Sons of Liberty in the Revolution, and  
every tribute of honor and respect which we gladly pay to  
the illustrious fathers of American independence is paid as  
worthily to their sons, the pioneers of American freedom.

That freedom was secured, indeed, by the union of many  
forces. The Abolition movement was moral agitation. It  
was a voice crying in the wilderness. As an American move-  
ment it was reproached for holding aloof from the American  
political method. But in the order of time the moral awaken-  
ing precedes political action. Politics are founded in com-  
promise and expediency, and had the Abolition leaders paused  
to parley with prejudice and interest and personal ambition,  
in order to smooth and conciliate and persuade, their duty  
would have been undone. When the alarm-bell at night has  
brought the aroused citizens to the street they will organize  
their action.

But the ringer of the bell betrays his trust when he ceases  
to startle. To vote was to acknowledge the constitution.  
To acknowledge the constitution was to offer a premium upon  
slavery by granting more political power for every slave.  
It was to own an obligation to return innocent men to un-  
speakable degradation and to shoot them down if, with a  
thousandfold greater reason than our fathers, they resisted  
oppression. Could Americans do this? Could honest men do

this? Could a great country do this and not learn, sooner or  
later, by ghastly experience, the truth which George Mason  
proclaimed—that Providence punishes national sins by na-  
tional calamities? The Union, said Wendell Phillips, with  
a calmness that enchanted while it appalled—the Union is  
called the very ark of the American covenant; but has not  
idolatry of the Union been the chief bulwark of slavery,  
and in the words and deeds and spirit of the most vehement  
“Union saviours” who denounce agitation, can any hope of  
emancipation be described?

If, then, under the sacred charter of the Union, slavery  
has grown to this stupendous height, throwing the shadow  
of death over the land, is not the Union as it exists the foe of  
liberty, and can we honestly affirm that it is the sole surviv-  
ing hope of freedom in the world? Long ago the great  
leaders of our parties hushed their voices and whispered that  
even to speak of slavery was to endanger the Union. Is not  
this enough? Sons of Otis and of Adams, of Franklin and of  
Jay, are we ready for union upon the ruins of freedom?  
*Delenda Carthago! Delenda Carthago!*

Even while he spoke there sprang up around him the mar-  
shalled host of an organized political party which, raising the  
constitution as a banner of freedom, marched to the polls to  
make the Union the citadel of liberty. He, indeed, had re-  
jected the constitution and the Union as the bulwark of  
slavery. But he and the political host, widely differing, had  
yet a common purpose, and were confounded in a common  
condemnation. And who shall count the voters in that po-  
litical army, and who the generous heroes of the actual war,  
in whose young hearts his relentless denunciation of the  
Union had bred the high resolve that, under the protection  
of the constitution and by its own lawful power, the slave

Union which he denounced should be dissolved in the fervid glory of a new Union of freedom?

His plea, indeed, did not persuade his friends, and was furiously spurned by his foes. "Hang Phillips and Yancey together, hang the Abolitionist and the fire-eater and we shall have peace," cried mingled wrath and terror as the absorbing debate deepened toward civil war. But still, through the startling flash and over the thunder-peal with which the tempest burst, that cry rang out undismayed, *Delenda Carthago!*—The awful storm has rolled away. The warning voice is stilled forever. But the slave Union whose destruction he sought to dissolve, and the glorious Union of freedom and equal rights which his soul desired, is the blessed Union of to-day. . . .

When the war ended, and the specific purpose of his relentless agitation was accomplished, Phillips was still in the prime of his life. Had his mind recurred to the dreams of earlier years, had he desired, in the fulness of his fame and the maturity of his powers, to turn to the political career which the hopes of the friends of his youth had forecast, I do not doubt that the Massachusetts of Sumner and of Andrew, proud of his genius and owning his immense service to the triumphant cause, although a service beyond the party line, and often apparently directed against the party itself, would have gladly summoned him to duty. It would, indeed, have been a kind of peerage for this great Commoner. But not to repose and peaceful honor did this earnest soul incline. "Now that the field is won," he said gayly to a friend, "do you sit by the camp-fire, but I will put out into the underbrush." The slave, indeed, was free, but emancipation did not free the agitator from his task. The client that suddenly appeared before him on that memorable October day, was

not an oppressed race alone; it was wronged humanity; it was the victim of unjust systems and unequal laws; it was the poor man, the weak man, the unfortunate man, whoever and whatever he might be. This was the cause that he would still plead in the forum of public opinion. "Let it not be said," he wrote to a meeting of his old Abolition friends, two months before his death, "that the old Abolitionist stopped with the negro, and was never able to see that the same principles claimed his utmost effort to protect all labor, white and black, and to further the discussion of every claim of humanity."

Was this the habit of mere agitation, the restless discontent that followed great achievement? There were those who thought so. But they were critics of a temperament which did not note that with Phillips agitation was a principle, and a deliberately chosen method to definite ends. There were still vast questions springing from the same root of selfishness and injustice as the question of slavery. They must force a hearing in the same way. He would not adopt in middle life the career of politics, which he had renounced in youth, however seductive that career might be, whatever its opportunities and rewards, because the purpose had grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength, to form public opinion rather than to represent it, in making or in executing the laws. To form public opinion upon vital public questions by public discussion, but by public discussion absolutely fearless and sincere, and conducted with honest faith in the people to whom the argument was addressed—this was the service which he had long performed, and this he would still perform, and in the familiar way.

His comprehensive philanthropy had made him, even

during the anti-slavery contest, the untiring advocate of other great reforms. His powerful presentation of the justice and reason of the political equality of women, at Worcester, in 1857, more than any other single impulse launched that question upon the sea of popular controversy. In the general statement of principle, nothing has been added to that discourse. In vivid and effective eloquence of advocacy it has never been surpassed. All the arguments for independence echoed John Adams in the Continental Congress; all the pleas for applying the American principle of representation to the wives and mothers of American citizens echo the eloquence of Wendell Phillips at Worcester. His, also, was the voice that summoned the temperance voters of the Commonwealth to stand up and be counted; the voice which resolutely and definitely exposed the crime to which the busy American mind and conscience are at last turning—the American crime against the Indians. Through him the sorrow of Crete, the tragedy of Ireland, pleaded with America. In the terrible experience of the early anti-slavery debate, when the church and refined society seemed to be the rampart of slavery, he had learned profound distrust of that conservatism of prosperity which chills human sympathy and narrows the conscience. So the vast combinations of capital, in these later days, with their immense monopolies and imperial power, seemed to him sure to corrupt the government and to obstruct and threaten the real welfare of the people. He felt, therefore, that what is called the respectable class is often really, but unconsciously and with a generous purpose, not justly estimating its own tendency, the dangerous class. He was not a party politician; he cared little for party or for party leaders. But any political party which in his judgment represented the dangerous tendency was a

party to be defeated in the interest of the peace and progress of all the people.

But his judgment, always profoundly sincere, was it not sometimes profoundly mistaken? No nobler friend of freedom and of man than Wendell Phillips ever breathed upon this continent, and no man's service to freedom surpasses his. But before the war he demanded peaceful disunion—yet it was the Union in arms that saved liberty. During the war he would have superseded Lincoln—but it was Lincoln who freed the slaves. He pleaded for Ireland, tortured by centuries of misrule, and while every generous heart followed with sympathy the pathos and the power of his appeal, the just mind recoiled from the sharp arraignment of the truest friends in England that Ireland ever had. I know it all; but I know also, and history will remember, that the slave Union which he denounced is dissolved; that it was the heart and conscience of the nation, exalted by his moral appeal of agitation, as well as by the enthusiasm of patriotic war, which held up the hands of Lincoln, and upon which Lincoln leaned in emancipating the slaves, and that only by indignant and aggressive appeals like his has the heart of England ever opened to Irish wrong.

No man, I say, can take a pre-eminent and effective part in contentions that shake nations, or in the discussion of great national policies, of foreign relations, of domestic economy and finance, without keen reproach and fierce misconception. "But death," says Bacon, "bringeth good fame." Then, if moral integrity remain unsoiled, the purpose pure, blameless the life, and patriotism as shining as the sun, conflicting views and differing counsels disappear, and, firmly fixed upon character and actual achievement, good fame rests secure. Eighty years ago, in this city, how un-

sparing was the denunciation of John Adams for betraying and ruining his party, for his dogmatism, his vanity, and ambition, for his exasperating impracticability—he, the Colossus of the Revolution! And Thomas Jefferson? I may truly say what the historian says of the Saracen mothers and Richard Cœur de Lion, that the mothers of Boston hushed their children with fear of the political devil incarnate of Virginia. But, when the drapery of mourning shrouded the columns and overhung the arches of Faneuil Hall, Daniel Webster did not remember that sometimes John Adams was imprudent and Thomas Jefferson sometimes unwise. He remembered only that John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were two of the greatest American patriots—and their fellow citizens of every party bowed their heads and said, Amen. I am not here to declare that the judgment of Wendell Phillips was always sound, nor his estimate of men always just, nor his policy always approved by the event. He would have scorned such praise. I am not here to eulogize the mortal, but the immortal. He, too, was a great American patriot; and no American life—no, not one—offers to future generations of his countrymen a more priceless example of inflexible fidelity to conscience and to public duty; and no American more truly than he purged the national name of its shame, and made the American flag the flag of hope for mankind.

Among her noblest children his native city will cherish him, and gratefully recall the unbending Puritan soul that dwelt in a form so gracious and urbane. The plain house in which he lived—severely plain, because the welfare of the suffering and the slave were preferred to books and pictures and every fair device of art; the house to which the North Star led the trembling fugitive, and which the unfortu-

nate and the friendless knew; the radiant figure passing swiftly through these streets, plain as the house from which it came, regal with a royalty beyond that of kings; the ceaseless charity untold; the strong sustaining heart of private friendship; the sacred domestic affections that must not here be named; the eloquence which, like the song of Orpheus, will fade from living memory into a doubtful tale; that great scene of his youth in Faneuil Hall; the surrender of ambition; the mighty agitation and the mighty triumph with which his name is forever blended; the consecration of a life hidden with God in sympathy with man—these, all these, will live among your immortal traditions, heroic even in your heroic story. But not yours alone! As years go by, and only the large outlines of lofty American characters and careers remain, the wide Republic will confess the benediction of a life like this, and gladly own that if with perfect faith and hope assured America would still stand and “bid the distant generations hail,” the inspiration of her national life must be the sublime moral courage, the all-embracing humanity, the spotless integrity, the absolutely unselfish devotion of great powers to great public ends, which were the glory of Wendell Phillips.