

WILLIAM L. GARRISON

WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON, an early zealous American Abolitionist, was born at Newburyport, Mass., Dec. 12, 1805, and died at New York, May 24, 1879. Beginning his career as a printer in the "Herald" office of his native town, he also wrote political articles to that and other journals, and in 1829 joined with Benjamin Lundy, a philanthropic Quaker, in editing at Baltimore "The Genius of Universal Emancipation." Here his bold speaking in regard to slavery resulted in his being imprisoned for libel, but after a few months his fine was paid by Mr. Tappan, a New York merchant, and Garrison was set free. In 1831, he issued at Boston the "Liberator," a journal he continued to edit for thirty-five years, until the close of the Civil War. It at once aroused much opposition, and the Georgia legislature in December of that year offered a large sum (\$5,000) to any one who should arrest and prosecute its editor or publisher, according to the laws of Georgia. The New England Anti-Slavery Society was founded in January, 1832, as a result of the "Liberator's" unwearied efforts and influence, and in 1843 Garrison founded the American Anti-Slavery Society, and was its president until 1865. In 1832, he published "Thoughts on African Colonization," in which he characterized the colonization scheme "an ally of slavery." In October, 1835, the "Liberator" office was broken into by a mob and its editor was dragged through the streets with a rope about his neck. His life was saved only by timely police protection. Garrison visited England several times in the interests of the abolition movement, and received a warm welcome from the English anti-slavery leaders. In 1863, his assiduous labors, in the face of much and violent opposition, were rewarded by a gift of \$30,000 from friends of the cause in which he had spent a life of toil and sacrifice. His "Sonnets and Poems" were issued in 1843, and selections from his "Writings and Speeches" in 1852. The "Story of His Life," as told by his children, appeared in 1885.

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE OPPRESSED

I NEVER rise to address a colored audience without feeling ashamed of my own color; ashamed of being identified with a race of men who have done you so much injustice and who yet retain so large a portion of your brethren in servile chains. To make atonement in part for this conduct I have solemnly dedicated my health and strength and life to your service. I love to plan and to work for your social, intellectual, and spiritual advancement. My happi-

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ness is augmented with yours; in your sufferings I participate.

Henceforth I am ready, on all days, on all convenient occasions, in all suitable places, before any sect or party, at whatever peril to my person, character or interest, to plead the cause of my colored countrymen in particular, or of human rights in general. For this purpose, there is no day too holy, no place improper, no body of men too inconsiderable to address. For this purpose I ask no church to grant me authority to speak—I require no ordination—I am not careful to consult Martin Luther, or John Calvin, or His Holiness the Pope. It is a duty which, as a lover of justice, I am bound to discharge; as a lover of my fellow men I ought not to shun; as a lover of Jesus Christ, and of his equalizing, republican and benevolent precepts, I rejoice to perform.

Your condition, as a people, has long attracted my attention, secured my efforts, and awakened in my breast a flame of sympathy which neither the winds nor waves of opposition can ever extinguish. It is the lowness of your estate, in the estimation of the world, which exalts you in my eyes. It is the distance that separates you from the blessings and privileges of society which brings you so closely to my affections. It is the unmerited scorn, reproach, and persecution of your persons by those whose complexion is colored like my own which command for you my sympathy and respect. It is the fewness of your friends—the multitude of your enemies—that induces me to stand forth in your defence.

Countrymen and friends! I wish to gladden your hearts and to invigorate your hopes. Be assured your cause is going onward, right onward. The signs of the times do indeed show forth great and glorious and sudden changes in the condition of the oppressed. The whole firmament is

tremulous with an excess of light; the earth is moved out of its place; the wave of revolution is dashing in pieces ancient and mighty empires; the hearts of tyrants are beginning to fail them for fear, and for looking forward to those things which are to come upon the earth. There is—

“ A voice on every wave,
A sound on every sea!
The watchword of the brave,
The anthem of the free!
Where'er a wind is rushing,
Where'er a stream is gushing,
The swelling sounds are heard,
Of man to freeman calling,
Of broken fetters falling—
And, like the carol of a cageless bird,
The bursting shout of freedom's rallying word!”

Let this be an occasion of joy. Why should it not be so? Is not the heaven over your heads, which has so long been clothed in sackcloth, beginning to disclose its starry principalities and illumine your pathway? Do you not see the pitiless storm which has so long been pouring its rage upon you breaking away, and a bow of promise as glorious as that which succeeded the ancient deluge spanning the sky,—a token that to the end of time the billows of prejudice and oppression shall no more cover the earth to the destruction of your race; but seedtime and harvest shall never fail, and the laborer shall eat the fruit of his hands? Is not your cause developing like the spring? Yours has been a long and rigorous winter. The chill of contempt, the frost of adversity, the blast of persecution, the storm of oppression—all have been yours. There was no substance to be found—no prospect to delight the eye or inspire the drooping heart—no golden ray to dissipate the gloom. The waves of derision were stayed by no barrier, but made a clear breach over you. But now—thanks be to God! that dreary winter is rapidly hastening away. The sun of humanity is going steadily up

from the horizon to its zenith, growing larger and brighter, and melting the frozen earth beneath its powerful rays. The genial showers of repentance are softly falling upon the barren plain; the wilderness is budding like the rose; the voice of joy succeeds the notes of woe; and hope, like the lark, is soaring upwards and warbling hymns at the gate of heaven.

And this is but the outbursting of spring. What, think you, shall be the summer and autumn?

“ Then shall the trembling mourner come,
And bind his sheaves, and bear them home;
The voice, long broke with sighs, shall sing,
And heaven with hallelujahs ring!”

This is but “the twilight, the dim dawn” of day. What, then, shall be the brightness of the day itself? These are but a few drops of mercy. What shall be the full shower, the rolling tide? These are but crumbs of comfort to prevent you wholly from perishing. What shall be the bountiful table?

Why should this not be an occasion of joy instead of sorrow? Listen to those trumpet tones which come swelling on the winds of the Atlantic, and which shall bring an echo from every harp in heaven! If there is joy in that blissful abode over one sinner that repenteth, how mighty and thrilling must it be over a repentant nation! And Great Britain is that nation. Her people are humbling themselves before God, and before those whom they have so long held in bondage. Their voices are breaking in peals of thunder upon the ear of Parliament, demanding the immediate and utter overthrow of slavery in all the colonies; and in obedience to their will the mandate is about being issued by Parliament which shall sever at a blow the chains of eight hundred thousand slaves.

What heart can conceive, what pen or tongue describe, the

happiness which must flow from the consummation of this act? That cruel lash which has torn so many tender bodies and is dripping with innocent blood; that lash which has driven so many human victims, like beasts, to their unrequited toil; that lash whose sounds are heard from the rising of the sun to its decline, mingled with the shrieks of bleeding sufferers; that lash is soon to be cast away, never again to wound the flesh or degrade those who are made in the image of God.

And those fetters of iron which have bound so many in ignominious servitude, and wasted their bodies, and borne them down to an untimely grave, shall be shivered in pieces, as the lightning rends the pine, and the victims of tyranny leap forth, "redeemed, regenerated, and disenthralled by the irresistible genius of universal emancipation." And that darkness, which has for so many generations shrouded the minds of the slaves—making them like the brutes that perish—shall give way to the light of freedom and religion. O, how transforming the change! In contemplating it, my imagination overpowers the serenity of my soul and makes language seem poor and despicable.

Cheers for Great Britain! cheers for her noble men and women! cheers for the bright example which they are setting to the world! cheers for their generous sympathy in the cause of the oppressed in our own country!

Why should we not rejoice this evening, brethren? Find we nothing at home to raise our drooping spirits, to invigorate our hopes, and to engage our efforts? Have we made no progress, either in self-improvement, or in the cause of bleeding humanity? Are there no cheering signs of the times, in our moral sky, upon which we may fix our joyful gaze?

Look, in the first place, at the abolition-standard—more

gorgeous and spirit-stirring than the star-spangled banner—floating high in the air! Fresh is the breeze that meets it! bright are the sunny rays which adorn it! Around it thousands are gathering, with high and holy courage, to contend, not with carnal but spiritual weapons, against the powers of darkness. Oh, the loftiness of that spirit which animates them! It towers above the Alps; it pierces beyond the clouds.

Oh, the intensity of that flame of brotherly love which burns within their breasts! It never can burn out—nor can many waters extinguish it.

Oh, the stability of that faith which sustains them under all their toils and trials! It is firmer than the foundations of the earth—it is strong as the throne of God.

Oh, the generous daring of that moral principle which inspires their hearts and governs their actions! Neither reproach nor persecution, neither wealth nor power, neither bolts nor bars, neither the gibbet nor the stake, shall be able to subdue it.

Yes, my colored countrymen, these are the men—ay, and the women, too, who have espoused your cause. And they will stand by it until life be extinct. They will not fail in strength, or faith, or courage, or zeal, or action. Loud as the tempest of oppression may rage around them, above it shall their rallying cry be heard in the thunder-tone of heaven. Dark as their pathway may be, it shall blaze with the light of truth in their possession. Numberless as may be the enemies who surround them, they will not retreat from the field; for he who is mightier than legions of men and devils is the captain of their salvation and will give them the victory.

I know your advocates well—I know the spirit which actuates them. Whether they reside in the east or west or north,

they have but one object—their hearts are stirred with the same pulsation; their eye is single, their motives are pure. Tell me not of the bravery and devotedness of those whose life-blood reddened the plains of Marathon, poured out in defence of liberty. Tell me not of the Spartan band, with Leonidas at their head, who defended the pass of Thermopylæ against a Persian host. I award to them the meed of animal courage; but the heroism of blood and carnage is as much below the patient endurance of wrong and the cheerful forgiveness of injury as the earth is below the sky—it is as often displayed by brute animals as by men.

With infinitely higher satisfaction, with a warmer glow of emulation, with more intense admiration, do I contemplate the Abolition phalanx in the United States who are maintaining your cause unflinchingly through evil report—for the good report is yet to come—and at the imminent peril of their lives; and, what is dearer than life, the sacrifice of their reputation.

If ever there was a cause which established the disinterestedness and integrity of its supporters yours is that cause. They who are contending for the immediate abolition of slavery, the destruction of its ally, the American Colonization Society, and the bestowal of equal rights and privileges upon the whole colored population, well knew what would be the consequences of their advocacy to themselves. They knew that slander would blacken their characters with infamy; that their pleadings would be received with ridicule and reproach; that persecution would assail them on the right hand and on the left; that the dungeon would yawn for their bodies; that the dagger of the assassin would gleam behind them; that the arm of power would be raised to crush them to the earth; that they would be branded as disturbers of the

peace; as fanatics, madmen, and incendiaries; that the heel of friendship would be lifted against them and love be turned into hatred and confidence into suspicion and respect into derision; that their worldly interests would be jeopardized and the honor and emoluments of office would be withheld from their enjoyment.

Knowing all this, still they dare all things in order to save their country by seeking its purification from blood. Will the base and the servile accuse them of being actuated by a hope of reward? Reward! It is the reward which calumny gives to virtue—the reward which selfishness bestows upon benevolence; but nothing of worldly applause or fame or promotion. Yet they have a reward—and who will blame them for coveting it? It is the gratitude of the suffering and the oppressed—the approbation of a good conscience—the blessing of the Most High.

"Tempt them with bribes, you tempt in vain;
Try them with fire, you'll find them true."

To deter such souls from their purposes or vanquish them in combat is as impossible as to stop the rush of the ocean when the spirit of the storm rides upon its mountain billows. They are hourly increasing in number and strength and going on from conquering to conquer. Convert after convert, press after press, pulpit after pulpit, is subdued and enlisted on the side of justice and freedom.

A grave charge is brought against me, that I am exciting your rage against the whites and filling your minds with revengeful feelings. Is this true? Have not all my addresses and appeals to you had just the contrary effect upon your minds? Have they not been calculated to make you bear all your trials and difficulties in the spirit of Christian resignation and to induce you to return good for evil? Where

is the calumniator who dares to affirm that you have been turbulent and quarrelsome since I began my labors in your behalf? Where is the man who is so ignorant as not to know or perceive that, as a people, you are constantly improving in knowledge and virtue? No, brethren; you will bear me a unanimous testimony that I have not implanted in your minds any malice toward your persecutors but on the contrary forgiveness of injuries. And I can as truly aver that in all my intercourse with you as a people I have not seen or heard anything of a malignant or revengeful spirit. No, yours has been eminently a spirit of resignation and faith under the most aggravating circumstances.

I will notice but one other charge which the enemies of our cause have brought against me. It is that I am unduly exciting your hopes and holding out to your view prospects of future happiness and respectability which can never be realized in this country. Pitiful complaint! Because I have planted a solitary rose, as it were, in the wilderness of suffering in which your race has so long wandered, to cheer your drooping hearts, I am sharply reprov'd for giving even this little token of good things to come—by those too who make loud professions of friendship for you, that is if you will go to Liberia, but who are constantly strewing in your path briars and thorns and digging pits into which you may stumble to rise no more. These querulous complainants who begrudge every drop of comfort which falls upon your thirsty lips as a miser mourns the loss of a penny seem to forget or discard the promise of Jehovah, that "the wilderness shall bud and blossom like the rose." I have faith to believe that this promise will ultimately be fulfilled even in this land of republicanism and Christianity. Surely I may

be pardoned when so many are endeavoring to break down all your rising hopes and noble aspirations if I urge you not to despair, for the day of redemption will assuredly come. Nay, I may still be forgiven if I transcend the limits of probability and suffer my imagination to paint in too glowing colors the recompense which is to be yours; since, strive as I may, I can scarcely hope to equalize the heart-crushing discouragements and assaults made by your enemies.

All things considered, you have certainly done well as a body. There are many colored men whom I am proud to rank among my friends; whose native vigor of mind is remarkable; whose morals are unexceptionable; whose homes are the abode of contentment, plenty, and refinement. For my own part, when I reflect upon the peculiarities of your situation; what indignities have been heaped upon your heads; in what utter dislike you are generally held even by those who profess to be the ministers and disciples of Christ; and how difficult has been your chance to arrive at respectability and affluence, I marvel greatly, not that you are no more enlightened and virtuous, but that you are not like wild beasts of the forests. I fully coincide with the sentiment of Mr. Jefferson, that the men must be prodigies who can retain their manners and morals under such circumstances. Surely you have a right to demand an equal position among mankind.

Oh, if those whose prejudices against color are deeply rooted—if the asserters of the natural inferiority of the people of color would but even casually associate with the victims of their injustice and be candid enough to give merit its due, they could not long feel and act as they now do. Their prejudices would melt like frost-work before the blazing sun; their unbelief would vanish away, their con-

tempt be turned into admiration, their indifference be roused to benevolent activity, and their dislike give place to friendship. Keeping aloof from your society, ignorant of the progress which you are making in virtue, knowledge, and competence, and believing all the aspersions of malice which are cast upon your character, they at length persuade themselves that you are utterly worthless and nearly akin to the brute creation. Cruel men! cruel women! thus hastily and blindly to pass condemnation upon those who deserve your compassion and are worthy of your respect!

Be this your encouragement in view of our separation. Although absent from you in body I shall still be with you in spirit. I go away, not to escape from toil, but to labor more abundantly in your cause. If I may do something for your good at home I hope to do more abroad. In the meantime, I beseech you fail not, on your part, to lead quiet and orderly lives. Let there be no ground whatever for the charge which is brought against you by your enemies, that you are turbulent and rude. Let all quarrelling, all dram-drinking, all profanity, all violence, all division, be confined to the white people. Imitate them in nothing but what is clearly good and carefully shun even the appearance of evil. Let them, if they will, follow the devices and perform the drudgery of the devil; but be ye perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect. Conquer their aversion by moral excellence; their proud spirit by love; their evil acts by acts of goodness; their animosity by forgiveness. Keep in your hearts the fear of God and rejoice even in tribulation; for the promise is sure that all things shall work together for good to those who love his name.

As for myself, whatever may be my fate—whether I fall in the springtime of manhood by the hand of the assassin, or

be immured in a Georgia cell, or be permitted to live to a ripe old age—I know that the success of your cause is not dependent upon my existence. I am but as a drop in the ocean, which if it be separated cannot be missed.

My own faith is strong—my vision clear—my consolation great. “Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubabel thou shalt become a plain; and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.” Let us confidently hope that the day is at hand when we shall be enabled to celebrate not merely the abolition of the slave trade by law but in fact, and the liberation of every descendant of Africa, wherever one exists in bondage under the whole heavens.