

“‘And There Shall Be No More Sea.’ William Lloyd Garrison and the Transatlantic Abolitionist Movement.”

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When in early 1865 the Stars and Stripes were once again raised over Fort Sumter William Lloyd Garrison and George Thompson were there to witness the symbolic reuniting of the country at the end of a brutal civil war. It seemed a fitting culmination to the work of the two men who together had struggled for over thirty years to keep the transatlantic abolitionist movement together and who were considered by their peers to be the two pivotal figures in the struggle to win freedom for slaves in the United States. Between them they had crisscrossed the Atlantic half a dozen times in a quest to rally public opinion in favor of abolition inspired in part by Garrison’s bold internationalist declaration: “Our Country is the World—Our Countrymen Are Mankind.” Their efforts did not always pay immediate dividends, but standing at the site where the first shots in the war were fired, both men could take some comfort in the fact that their persistence and commitment to the cause of emancipation had finally borne fruit. The movement had wobbled at times and on occasion had even cracked, but the frequent exchange of visits that they and others made had managed to maintain a semblance of unity in an otherwise fractious alliance. The exchange of letters, books and pamphlets were crucial means of contact, but the glue that held the movement together was the exchange of visits during which friendships were forged and renewed, money raised and attempts made to influence public opinion in favor of emancipation.

These international contacts were particularly important to the movement in the United States in the years following West Indian emancipation in 1834. The success of British abolitionists set a standard to which all Americans, eager to see the abolition of slavery at home, could aspire. For the next thirty years American abolitionists made frequent tours of Britain convinced, as Frederick Douglass said, that British public support could wall off and so isolate America that it would be left no other option but to free its slaves. But forging this transatlantic alliance proved more difficult than anyone could have anticipated. National jealousies were ever present and at times affected the alliance's ability to function. Down through the antebellum years supporters of slavery took every effort to exploit these tensions by raising the specter of British interference in American domestic affairs. When Thompson made his first trip to the United States a year after West Indian emancipation he was hailed as a foreign incendiary and greeted by violent mobs pledged to expel him if not take his life. Harriet Beecher Stowe was ridiculed for consorting with effete aristocracies during her tour of Britain in the 1850s. In spite of their best efforts there were times when the alliance stumbled over these national jealousies. That they kept their feet and continued to promote the cause, however, says a great deal about the movement's resilience. Understanding these tensions and difficulties is vital to an appreciation of the movement's accomplishments.

The fact that it took a bloody civil war to finally bring about emancipation does not in any way diminish the significance of this transatlantic movement which had its beginnings in the months leading up to West Indian emancipation and the effort of American colonizationists to win British support for their plans to settle free blacks and freed slaves in Liberia. Established in 1816, the American Colonization Society (ACS)

had by 1830 become a major force in the debate over emancipation. Its solution was simple. Given the level of prejudice against blacks in America, it was in the interest of all concerned to find a home for African Americans away from the United States. In the decade since the establishment of Liberia the ACS had attracted support from both those who saw it as a means to ensure emancipation and those who were convinced that the removal of the free black population would guarantee the continuation of slavery. By 1830 the inevitable tension created by these conflicting objectives had resulted in the departure of many, such as Garrison, who questioned the degree to which the Society was committed to emancipation. Those who left threw in their lot with African Americans, who, by and large, had been opposed to the Society from its inception viewing it as nothing more than a poorly-disguised apologist for slavery. Confronted by continued black opposition to its plans and the loss of members to the abolitionist movement, the Society found itself in dire financial straits by 1830. In an effort to address these problems the Society sent the Philadelphia Quaker, Elliot Cresson, on a tour of Britain. Cresson's visit to Britain and his initial success in winning support for the Society's efforts in Liberia set the stage for the emergence of the transatlantic movement. By diverting attention away from the principle of equality colonizationists insisted, as Aileen Kraditor has argued, that "Negro inferiority rather than white racism" was the source of the problem. This is why abolitionists of every stripe, black and white, were able to ignore other differences and rally against the Society so effectively and why its plans became the first issue to garner the attention of the movement on both the national and international scene.¹ Soon after his arrival Cresson held a series of private meetings throughout the country in which he emphasized the antislavery thrust of the ACS and

Liberia's potential to impede the slave trade and introduce Christianity to West Africa. In a public circular Cresson declared: "The great objects of the Society were the final and entire abolition of slavery providing for the best interest of the blacks, by establishing them in independence upon the coast of Africa, thus constituting them the protectors of the unfortunate natives against the inhuman ravages of the slaver seeking, through them, to spread the lights of civilization and Christianity among fifty millions who inhabited the dark regions."² This appeal to what can be called the "civilizationist principle," long part and parcel of British antislavery efforts in both the West Indies and Africa, was guaranteed to win Cresson support. Victorians assumed that Africans, like all backward peoples, were woefully lacking in civilization something that had to be acquired if they were to avoid extinction. It was the responsibility of caring people to lend a helping hand to lift them out of barbarism. Cresson's appeal resonated with those who had long held to the principle that legitimate trade and the guiding hand of Christianity carried, in this case, by the descendants of those who had suffered most from slavery, but in the process had been exposed to Christianity, would ensure both the spread of civilization in Africa and the freedom of slaves in the United States. Many were impressed by Cresson's portrayal of the Society's efforts. William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, the grand old men of British abolitionism, publicly endorsed the Society as did George Thompson who wrote his wife that Cresson had shown "a spirit of the purest friendship," a view he would later come to regret.³

But Cresson did not have things all his own way. James Cropper, the Liverpool merchant, rejected Cresson's claims for the Society. And Captain Charles Stuart, the eccentric Englishman, who had lived and worked in Canada and the United States in the 1820s,

published a series of anti-colonization pamphlets, and dogged Cresson wherever he went challenging him to public debates about the Society and its work. Stuart's indictment chastised the Society for insisting there could be no emancipation without emigration; for acknowledging the slaveholders right to continue holding slaves; for rejecting the notion of the unity of the races, a rejection which violated Christian teachings of the unity of man; and for ignoring the impossibility of removing the black population "without even the pretence of a crime against them, to a foreign and barbarous land," an act of "criminal absurdity." Let us, he warned, "cede to the American Colonization Society the principle that the negroes of the United States must not be emancipated in their native country, and that whether enslaved or free, they must be transported, and we cede our principle."⁴

No one interested in promoting antislavery, Stuart believed, should support an organization which substituted "banishment for slavery." Nor should they support a policy that was almost universally despised by those it was supposed to benefit. Instead, if they were genuinely interested in supporting a settlement which provided a refuge for the oppressed then they should look to Wilberforce a recently-established black colony in what was then Upper Canada. The colony had been founded by African Americans who had fled Cincinnati, Ohio following a series of attacks on their community in 1829. In early 1832, the fledgling colony sent the Rev. Nathaniel Paul, a Baptist minister from Albany, New York on a fund-raising tour of Britain. Paul promptly joined forces with Stuart. As a representative of the black-led colony his opposition to the ACS lent legitimacy to the campaign against Cresson. If African Americans, the potential beneficiaries of the Society's plans, were adamantly opposed to its emigrationist scheme

then men of good will had to think twice about their support of plans to remove the black population from their native land.

Paul's arrival and involvement in the public debate tipped the balance against Cresson. A look at newspapers in towns where meetings were held tells the story. After every lecture by Cresson supporters of colonization would flood their local newspapers with letters extolling the virtues of Liberia and the work of the ACS. As was customary, these letters of support generated a stream of letters with opposing views. Stuart and Paul were quick to use this public debate to make their views known. Cresson expressed surprise that, by mid 1832, he had begun to run into opposition even in private meetings and suspected that Stuart and Paul were providing these closely controlled meetings with information. In Derby, for instance, he was forced to address Paul's claim that the Society had been formed with the expressed purpose of removing the free black population from America. Cresson's response was to blame the opposition on Garrison and a handful of free blacks. Ever since the start of his mission Cresson had been concerned that the Society's publications and the speeches of its leaders provided the opposition with ample ammunition with which to undermine the cause. In letters home he even seemed to be calling on the Society to promote the sort of gradualist emancipation schemes that had been adopted in the West Indies including allowing religious instruction and the institution of legal marriages. When in early 1832 the Birmingham Anti Slavery Society refused to meet with him and Wilberforce and Clarkson declined to sign a memorial from Cirencester supporters, Cresson thought he saw signs the tide had turned. His worst fears were confirmed once Paul had joined the fray and was vigorously promoting Wilberforce as an alternative. "I think it deserves consideration," he wrote home, "whether the awful

consequences which may spring from the Canadian Colony if patronized to any extent, and which Paul...is now urging upon the Government ought not to be pointed out by you.” The “lying mulatto preacher,” as he derisively dismissed Paul, nonetheless drove Cresson to distraction and he called on the Society to challenge Paul’s legitimacy by commissioning a black American to tour Britain in support of Liberia. Nothing came of the suggestion. Cresson’s sense of isolation was palpable by the summer of 1832: “If, in my zeal to serve the cause, I had written or spoken...ought amiss...why not frankly tell me so? Why not as a brother, set me right?” But Cresson’s pleas fell on deaf ears and he hinted at plans to return home soon.⁵

Garrison’s arrival in the summer of 1833 only added to Cresson’s sense of profound isolation from both the Society’s leaders and British abolitionists. Anthony Barker argues that Cresson had been “brought to the brink of defeat by the time of Garrison’s arrival.” Although he underestimates the contributions of Paul to the result he is right in his assessment of Stuart’s impact namely, that Cresson had been confronted by “two years of sustained harassment by a determined lobbyist.”⁶ Cresson had also to face the pointed criticism of the Society by Garrison’s widely-distributed screed, Thoughts on African Colonization, which arrived in Britain several months before Garrison did. Paul wrote of the wide-spread public approval of the book’s arguments and regretted that it had not arrived sooner.⁷

Within days of his arrival Garrison, following the line of attack used by Stuart and Paul, challenged Cresson to a public debate on the merits of the ACS. Cresson found himself in a quandary: he could either accept a challenge that he stood little chance of winning, inasmuch as public sentiment had already grown hostile to colonization or decline and

leave the stage completely free to his opponents. When Cresson refused to accept the challenge, Garrison, with the assistance of Cropper, Stuart, Paul and Thompson, organized a series of high-profile meetings in which they accused their opponent among other things of raising money under false pretenses. Cresson's refusal to confront his opponents in a public forum eroded his support even further. "We are reluctant to give up our good opinion of Mr. Cresson's motives," one editor declared, "but his proceedings are fast alienating from him those who have given him the most substantial proofs of being friends to Liberia, but who are enemies of injustice and deception." Another editor simply dismissed him as a charlatan.⁸

Cresson's problems were made worse when in August 1833, Cropper, Buxton, Zachary Macaulay, William Smith, George Stephens, William Allen, Wilberforce, and other leading lights in British abolitionism, signed a "Protest" against the ACS. It said little new, but it drove home the point that to many in the antislavery movement, the Society had become anathema. The "Protest" was, as Garrison declared, "a millstone around the neck of the American Colonization Society, sufficiently weighty to drown it in an ocean of public indignation." The fact that Wilberforce died soon after signing it made it, in the words of Betty Fladeland, "a document worthy of veneration by abolitionists everywhere."⁹ One name, however, was conspicuously absent from the "Protest": Thomas Clarkson. Garrison and Paul made a trip to Norwich to try to persuade Clarkson to add his name to the "Protest." Although they were unsuccessful, Clarkson made it quite clear that his initial support for the Society had been extorted by Cresson's statement that "one hundred thousand slaves had been offered to the Society gratuitously, to be sent to Liberia."¹⁰

Rather than face the opposition on the grounds they chose, Cresson countered with the formation of the British American Colonization Society (BACS) whose founding meeting was attended by a disappointingly small number of supporters. In contrast, his opponents' public meeting at Exeter Hall attracted a crowd in excess of 2,000 among them Daniel O'Connell, the leader of the Irish Repeal movement, who roundly condemned the Society and all supporters of slavery. The BACS was a society in name only, although its major supporter, Dr. Thomas Hodgkin, would remain the voice of colonization in Britain for much of the nineteenth century. Cresson returned home deeply affected by his experiences in Britain. Not only had he lost much of the support he had worked so hard to garner, but he also felt betrayed and abandoned by officers of the Society especially its secretary Ralph Gurley. He did manage to raise over 2,000 pounds and enough support in Scotland to finance the establishment of a settlement in Liberia later named Edina in honor of the city which had contributed so much to the cause. But by the end of his 2 ½ year stay in Britain he was a spent force. At the end of it all, he lamented, he "very often felt, when thus surrounded by enemies of the fiercest stamp that unless I had been supported by the consciousness of performing an imperative and holy duty for the good of man, and the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, that I must have been utterly overwhelmed."¹¹

Garrison returned home with a copy of the "Protest," in many ways a statement of how pivotal anti-colonization was to the forging of the transatlantic movement. Opposition to the ACS would continue to be one of the few issues around which abolitionists of different persuasions could coalesce in the antebellum period. Not until the late 1850s would British abolitionists again show a keen interest in schemes to settle black

Americans in Africa and then only because of a growing concern about Britain's almost total reliance on the South for its supply of cotton. But this was the exception. Even in the midst of the deep divisions on display at the 1840 World Antislavery Convention, American abolitionists in London for the meeting continued to speak with one voice against colonization. By presenting a united front on this issue, American visitors, including James G. Birney, James B. Stanton, Charles Lenox Remond, and Garrison, were able to paper over differences that otherwise could have paralyzed the international movement. Remond told a Glasgow audience, for instance, that the Society was founded with the expressed purpose of removing the free black population from America. America, the land of boasted democracy and freedom, had never allowed blacks the liberty of choosing. The ACS was designed and organized to protect the interests of slaveholders. It afforded a place for "those who were ashamed to say, on the one hand, they were in favor of slavery, and who were equally ashamed to say they were abolitionists; these people were glad to call themselves colonization man, and thus they cut both ways."¹²

Their efforts were made easier by the unfortunately timed arrival of Ralph R. Gurley in July 1840. Gurley and supporters of his mission were anxious to exploit an apparent upsurge of interest in African colonization represented by the formation of the African Civilization Society (AFCS) led by Buxton to regain ground lost by Cresson seven years earlier. The AFCS proposed to establish a string of settlements along the coast of West Africa headed by small groups of trained West Indians who would provide the native peoples of the region a legitimate commercial alternative to the slave trade as well as introduce them to Christianity. Gurley could be forgiven if he saw no differences between

the two societies. But anti-colonizationist sentiment had put down deep roots since Cresson's visit. As a result, Buxton thought it best to stay clear of any association with the ACS. Although following a meeting with Buxton Gurley was optimistic that the societies could work together, his hopes were soon dashed when Buxton issued a public statement denouncing the work of the ACS in Liberia. Buxton insisted that unlike the ACS the AFCS did not aim to colonize but to civilize Africa. It did not intend to become master of "the resources of that continent, but to teach its natives their use and value, not to procure an outlet for any portion of our surplus population, but to show to Africa the folly as well as the crime of exporting her own children." The settlements were meant to provide a secure space for the introduction of schools, agriculture and commerce. The society had no intention of expatriating a large number of people to Africa, only a select few who would act as a "leaven amongst her people."¹³ Gurley could be forgiven for thinking that the distinction did not add up to much of a difference.

Gurley also hoped to persuade British abolitionists that their earlier rejection of the ACS had been precipitous and based largely on inaccurate information. The British and Foreign Antislavery Society agreed to his request for a meeting and appointed a sub-committee to meet with Gurley then promptly undermined any chance for reconciliation by inviting Birney and Stanton to attend. Not surprisingly, the committee recommended against support for the ACS.¹⁴ Gurley returned home with nothing to show for his efforts. Ten years later Cresson would again visit Britain but on this occasion he eschewed any public debate and made few attempts to contact British abolitionists.

Garrison was understandably proud of his contributions to the defeat of colonization both on his first and second visits to Britain even if, in retrospect, he tended to overlook the

contribution of others. Defeating Cresson, after all, had been one of the declared purposes for his first visit. But his brief tour of Britain in 1833 had even greater significance for the wider transatlantic abolitionist movement. Even before leaving home he could sense that the visit had the potential to establish contacts that would benefit the fledgling movement in the US. But he also realized that such contacts would lend international legitimacy to his position as the preeminent figure in the American movement. It was, as Duncan Rice has argued, the first attempt to “organize British sympathizers in explicit support of the American campaign.” There I shall breath freely, Garrison wrote his wife just before leaving, “there, my sentiments and language on the subject of slavery will receive the acclamation of the people---there, my spirit will be elevated and strengthened in the presence of Clarkson, and Wilberforce, and Brougham, and Buxton, and O’Connell.” That it did. During the visit he was introduced to most of the major figures in the British movement, shared platforms with the likes of O’Connell, sat in the gallery of the House of Commons during the debate over passage of the West Indian emancipation act, made a trip to meet Clarkson, met with an ailing Wilberforce and when, soon after their meeting, Wilberforce died, attended his funeral. He never tired of telling the story that at their first meeting Buxton was surprised to find that Garrison was not a black man. It seemed a fitting tribute to the passion and commitment Garrison brought to the fight against slavery. ¹⁵

Here is how Garrison assessed the value of his trip for the campaign in America: he had awakened interest in the cause and secured support for it; he had put to rest the efforts of the ACS to distract the attention of British philanthropists; he had enlisted a committed group of advocates; he had fixed the gaze of British editors on American slavery; he had

persuaded female anti-slavery societies to give attention and support to the plight of the American slave; and he had brought back with him a considerable collection of pamphlets, tracts and other antislavery documents that will be of considerable use.¹⁶

Modesty was not one of Garrison's weaknesses. Yet one cannot ignore the significance of the connections he and others forged, connections that would be strengthened further by the separate visits of Stuart and Thompson to the US in 1834. Stuart brought with him \$1,000 collected to support a proposed manual labor school for African Americans.

Unfortunately, local resistance to the school stymied plans for its establishment in Connecticut. Thompson brought with him books and expressions of support for Prudence Crandall whose efforts to integrate her school for girls had met stiff resistance from opponents of the plan. Thompson's visit was the more significant of the two. He spent the next few months crisscrossing the Northeast and Midwest, holding meetings promoting the cause. His visit ran into stiff opposition almost from the beginning. There was no middle ground. To opponents he was the "mad missionary" bent on destroying the compact that held the country together; to supporters he was a force for the expansion of abolitionist sentiment. By the time of his departure Thompson had won almost universal acclaim from abolitionists and stinging condemnation from anti-abolitionists.¹⁷ In the view of the opposition Thompson's tour raised the specter of a foreign plot to destroy the country a theme that would dog efforts of British abolitionists to promote the cause in the US in the future.

By the time of his second visit to attend the World Anti Slavery Convention in 1840 Garrison was a household name among British abolitionists. But there were also some troubling signs that all was not well with the movement. Disputes over such contentious

issues as the role of women had produced deep divisions among American abolitionists. Just weeks before the start of the Convention those opposed to granting leadership roles to women had walked out of the annual meeting of the AASS in New York and formed the American and Foreign Anti Slavery Society (AFASS). These divisions had also begun to stir passions in Britain. Charles Stuart, for one, had all but broken rank with Garrison over the ways women should participate in the movement. Others in the British and Foreign Anti Slavery Society (BFASS) seemed to have taken a similar position on the issue. Joseph Sturge, the inspiration behind the formation of the BFASS, had made the Society's position abundantly clear in a letter made public in May. "It is reported that several of our female friends to the cause, are likely to be appointed from America....I fear such a step would be any thing rather than a help to our cause....In all our labors in this country, they held their meetings and committees perfectly distinct from ours, and the idea of appointing any female delegates to the coming Convention, will never, I believe, occur to one of the Committee in this country."¹⁸ The point could not have been made more explicit.

Formed a year earlier and dedicated to the struggle against slavery wherever it existed, the BFASS was the driving force behind the convention. Its call for associations to send delegates to the convention generated strong interests among both factions of the American movement. Among delegates associated with the AFASS were James G. Birney, Henry B. Stanton and Elizabeth Cady Stanton; James and Lucretia Mott and Wendell Phillips had remained with the AASS. Garrison, Remond, William Adam and N. P. Rogers arrived days after the opening session of the convention. By the time of their arrival the issue of women's participation had already been resolved. At the opening

session, Wendell Phillips had called for the establishment of a committee to prepare a list of all participants with credentials well aware that the organizers had amended the call limiting participation to “gentlemen.” Phillip’s motion produced a spirited debate on whether women should be recognized as delegates. Stuart in opposing the motion said that he was acquainted with many of the leading abolitionists in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts and all of them were against the “reception of lady delegates.” George Thompson tried unsuccessfully to mediate the dispute. In the end the convention voted not to seat the women delegates from the US. In protest they retreated to the gallery of the hall, to what Duncan Rice nicely calls their “philanthropic purdah.” In spite of efforts by the organizers to have him join the meeting on the floor, Garrison opted to join the American women delegates in the galleries.¹⁹

Assessing the impact of the Convention Garrison wrote his wife: “On the score of respectability, talent, and numbers, it deserves much consideration; but it was sadly deficient in freedom of thought, speech, and action, having been under the exclusive management of the London Committee, whose dominion was recognized as absolute.” Phillips who earlier had optimistically declared that the appeals of British Christians were the “sheet anchors of our cause,” was now, in the wake of the Convention, slightly more pessimistic. Of one thing he was now sure: British abolitionists would in the future have to take sides in the American dispute.²⁰

At the close of the Convention three groups of American abolitionists set off on tours of the country: one consisted of the Motts, Sarah Pugh and Abbey Kember; another, Birney and the Stantons; and the third, Garrison, Rogers, Remond and Adam. The itinerary of Garrison and his group took them to cities such as Edinburgh, Glasgow, Sheffield and

Dublin where they lectured on antislavery and temperance. In London Garrison shared the platform at a temperance meeting with O'Connell. He also spoke at an India Reform meeting insisting that, in the long run, the promotion of the cultivation of free-labor cotton in India would aid the cause of emancipation in the US. It is not that Garrison was in favor of the free-labor movement. In fact, he had always been skeptical of the movement's ability to undermine slavery. But he was also deeply committed to the proposition that the wider the call for freedom throughout the world, the greater the chances of winning freedom for the slaves at home. As he told the India Reform meeting: "We should, as nations, reciprocate rebukes."²¹

In Glasgow Garrison and the others were challenged by a group supporting workers' rights who accused the organizers of the meeting of paying attention to the needs of slaves on far away plantations while ignoring those of workers in nearby mills. Like so many of his peers, Garrison had always rejected the notion that the experiences of slaves and workers were in any way identical. Yet, surprisingly, he responded to the workers' protest by criticizing those "who were so ready to denounce American slavery, [but who] refused to give any countenance to measures at home for the relief and elevation of the laboring classes." Local Chartists thought his response which called on working men and women to improve themselves and avoid the consumption of alcohol fell far short of the mark. Long after Garrison had returned home, others in his group continued to face challenges from British workers. James Mott reported that Chartists took over an India Reform meeting in Glasgow at which Thompson was to speak. Lucretia Mott tried to address the meeting but was refused by the chair. Remond, however, was allowed to speak showing, James Mott concluded, that "while they have a strong prejudice against

listening to the expostulations or exhortations of women, they have not the unholy prejudice against color.”²²

Garrison’s assessment of the results of his second visit was radically different from that of his first and in many ways shows the extent to which differences in the movement had hardened. Gone was the optimism that he displayed at the end of his first trip. Now, he reported to Henry C. Wright, his colleague in the Non-Resistance Society, “We `sifted into’ the minds of those with whom we came in contact, all sorts of `heresies’ and `extraneous topics,’ in relation to Temperance, Non-Resistance, Moral Reform, Human Rights, Holiness, etc. etc.”²³ Such heresies were only likely to widen the divisions. The unanimity apparent in the wake of Cresson’s defeat in 1833 had, by the time of Garrison’s return home in 1840, been replaced by a narrowing and splintering of the international alliance.

Yet Garrison’s departure provided a respite from the conflict. Remond remained behind on an extended tour although in the weeks immediately after Garrison’s departure he had spent time in Scotland recovering from a bout of illness. During the next eighteen months, until his return to the US in December 1841, Remond committed himself to an exhaustive lecture tour. In early 1841, for instance, he spoke twenty three out of a possible thirty nights on slavery, temperance, prejudice and colonization. Only the loss of his voice forced him to suspend the tour temporarily. His work in Ireland was particularly impressive. His lectures in Belfast were attended by crowds in excess of 3,000. The growth of interest in the movement in Cork was attributed almost entirely to the work he did in that city. Years later when Frederick Douglass visited Cork he reported home that Remond’s efforts “were abundant and very effective. He is spoken of here in terms of

high approbation; and his name is held in affectionate remembrance by many whose hearts were warmed into life on this question by his soul-searching eloquence.”²⁴

But all was not smooth sailing. On his return home Garrison discovered that the split in the movement which had occurred just before he sailed for London had left the AASS almost penniless. The dire financial conditions were made worse by the loss of the Emancipator, the Society’s newspaper which was taken over, some say illegally, by those who had bolted. Money had to be found to keep the Society afloat. As a result, the decision was made to send John A. Collins, a Vermont abolitionist, on a mission to raise funds from supporters in Britain. His arrival reignited tensions that, since the Convention, had been relatively muted. Collins was not noted for subtleness or finesse. He chose to present the difficulty over the Emancipator as a matter of theft and tried to force the BFASS to take sides on the matter. The Society initially ignored him and refused to have any communication with him. The isolation irritated Collins who dismissed British abolitionists as “laced up in sectarian jackets, and screwed up like the bride in the ballroom, unable to dance to the music.” Charles Stuart insisted, and the Society agreed, that support for the agent of the “women-intruding” party would do nothing to aid the cause of anti-slavery in the US. If Collins made no headway with the Society in London he had better luck in Glasgow and Dublin where his efforts led to the decision of the Glasgow Emancipation Society and the Hibernian Anti slavery Society to throw in their lot with the Garrisonians.²⁵

Remond did what he could to avoid becoming embroiled in these squabbles and initially refused to join Collins. But he was limited in what he could do. He was, after all, a prominent member of the AASS, one who had made his allegiances unmistakably clear.

Some such as Birney thought this limited his effectiveness in Britain. But Remond insisted that he could remain an ally of Garrison and still be able to work with the BFASS. He did criticize the London Society for adopting what he thought was an unnecessarily narrow view of the AASS. Non-resistance, he pointed out, was not the majority view of the members of the AASS. The two can and should be separated. He, for instance, had never attended a non-resistance meeting yet he remained a strong support of the Society. He cautioned Collins to avoid “open warfare” with the BFASS reserving explanations of his position only when asked directly. Thompson reported that Remond had adopted a “line of conduct” that was free of partisanship, but one which allowed him “the opportunity of vindicating his friends whenever unjustly treated.” He worked closely with the Belfast Anti Slavery Society well aware that it had thrown its support to those opposed to Garrison. “I have with simplicity of manner,” he wrote Elizabeth Pease, “enjoyed visiting and dinning and teaing with a number of families doubly interesting from their high new organization position.”²⁶

Collins returned home in July 1841 with nothing to show for his efforts. He even had to borrow money to pay for his return ticket from Wendell Phillips. He had little good to say about British abolitionists. “They can talk about slavery,” he told Garrison, “because they have never been corrupted by its presence upon their own soil. The English can never condemn our prejudice against color, our negro seats and negro cars, while they are exercising the same prejudice against poverty, that we do against color. It is unphilosophical to think that the British people as a nation should be in favor of genuine freedom.”²⁷ If nothing else, Collins’ experiences in Britain had set him on a course towards socialism.

All was not totally lost however. Before leaving for home, Collins and Remond had begun discussions in Dublin with the Hibernian Anti Slavery Society (HASS) about the possibility of drawing up an address from Ireland to Irish immigrants in the United States calling on them to join the fight against slavery. It was left to Remond to promote the idea in the fall of 1841. Wherever he went on his extensive lecture tour of Ireland he found support for the proposed address. This was no mean accomplishment given that the attention of the people had been almost totally consumed by the movement for Irish repeal from the British Union. The collection of names to what became known as the Irish Address was administered by the HASS led by Richard Webb, Richard Allen and James Haughton. By the time of Remond's return home 60,000 had affixed their name to the Address which called on Irish immigrants to join forces with the abolitionists to destroy slavery and to work for the elimination of discrimination against blacks. "Irishmen and Irishwomen!" it declared, "Treat the colored people as your equal, as brethren." Among its signatories were Daniel O'Connell, the leader of the repeal movement and an abolitionist of long standing, and Father Theobald Mathew, the leader of the Irish temperance movement.²⁸

Unlike the "Protest" which Garrison brought back in 1833, the Irish Address had the potential to generate considerable support for those fighting against slavery. But given the experiences of Thompson in 1834 it also carried increased risks for a movement that had always been suspected of doing the work of foreigners. Within weeks of Remond's return the Address was unveiled at a meeting at Faneuil Hall, Boston attended by 5,000 including a fair number of Irishmen although it is not clear exactly how many were in attendance. The organizers of the meeting estimated that the number was substantial,

opponents thought otherwise. But whatever the case, the Address met with instant and sustained opposition. There were those who questioned its authenticity, and others who doubted that O'Connell would have signed such a call. The two Boston newspapers that catered to Irish immigrants sneered at the Address. In New York City Bishop John Hughes questioned its authenticity and called on Irishmen to repudiate what he saw as foreign interference in the domestic affairs of the country. Others rejected the attempt to appeal to them as a group distinct from all others in the country. They were, they insisted, Americans devoted to the maintenance of the Union and opposed to any effort that could disrupt that compact. Moreover, there were those who were stunned by the call to treat the colored people as equals. That, they insisted, smacked of amalgamation.²⁹

That anyone who knew the history of O'Connell's position on slavery would doubt his support of the Address stunned Garrison and other American abolitionists. To them the alliance between abolition and repeal seemed natural. Irish American Repealers begged to differ. They should avoid, at all cost, attaching themselves to any other cause, especially one promoted from abroad. Their attachment to the American Constitution was so deep and controlling that they could not be expected to do anything that would imperil "the only free government in the world." Faced with such widespread opposition Wendell Phillips called on Irish supporters to persuade O'Connell to send "us a startling scorching bitter unsparing, pointed rebuke." But friends in Dublin were not optimistic. Besides the level of opposition that the Address had generated, Webb worried that O'Connell was not up to the task and warned that he should not be trusted. O'Connell had to confront two difficult questions from American supporters. Why, they asked, should they give their support to a movement that wished to destroy the Union by sowing

rebellion among slaves? And why should they support those who promoted such radical ideas as the questioning of the Sabbath? O'Connell's response was to restate his commitment to abolition and at the same time condemn Garrison who on matters of religion, he said, was "something of a maniac." To Webb O'Connell was "either a great bigot or a rank hypocrite....In his last abolition speech...he meanly throws a sop to Cerberus by denouncing Garrison as 'a Mr. Lloyd Garrison with who he could have no intercourse' on account of his religious or rather irreligious opinions." Webb dismissed O'Connell's speeches as full of "excitement, inflammatory eloquence, and mere swagger."³⁰

Garrison was understandably hurt by O'Connell's accusation and public dismissal. But the Irish leader was under considerable pressure from both American supporters to distance himself from the abolitionists and from forces at home who totally rejected his insistence on coupling repeal and abolition. Some in America threatened to withhold funds, others talked of disbanding Repeal societies in protest. In response to these competing pressures, O'Connell adopted an approach that allowed him to continue to call for the abolition of slavery, to criticize those who opposed the movement, and yet accept support from America. He recognized, too, that Repealers were under enormous pressure from opponents who charged them with all sorts of plots from attempts to influence the outcome of elections to colluding with the Catholic Church and abolitionists to destroy the country. O'Connell's approach gave him the flexibility to continue issuing blistering condemnations of American slavery and those who supported it as he did in response to the declarations of a Cincinnati repeal meeting in May 1843. In doing so he kept alive the debate over slavery among Irish Americans. And Garrisonians may have continued to

express outrage at O'Connell's barbs but his unwavering stand against slavery made him an asset in the effort to win Irish Americans to the cause. In the two years after the arrival of the Address the issue would flair anew every time O'Connell issued a statement against slavery. While the hoped-for alliance that the Address promised never materialized, O'Connell remained a vital force in the transatlantic movement until his death in 1847. "Despite his disavowal of them," Riach has argued, Garrisonians "issued pamphlets of his speeches, and, after his death, made appeals to his memory."³¹

The failure of the World Antislavery Convention and its organizers the BFASS to bring under the umbrella of antislavery all who were opposed to slavery regardless of the views they may espouse on other subjects frustrated Garrison. Collins' inability to make much headway confirmed his worse fears. By the end of 1841 Garrison's British support was limited to a network of relatively small societies in Glasgow, Dublin, and Edinburgh.

These will later be joined by associations in Bristol and Leeds. Soon after the Convention a small group of Boston non-resisters floated the idea of a "World's Convention for the discussion of all wrongs," to be held somewhere in Britain. Given that Britain was in a "singularly plastic and reformatory state," as Garrison put it, a mission to rally support for the meeting seemed logical. The commission fell to Henry C. Wright. Some dismissed the idea as preposterous and the choice of the person to appeal for support even stranger. Lydia Maria Child wondered why Wright of all people was selected: "He appears to me as little calculated to do good as almost any person they could select."

Given the "heresies" that he and Garrison were so fond of promoting, it would have been a surprise had Wright been any more successful than Collins. In spite of his commission Wright spent most of his time lecturing on slavery. The idea of a new and radically

different convention never did get off the ground. Wherever he went controversy followed. “No one orchestrated religious hatred more zealously than Wright,” Lewis Perry has argued, “no one leveled more dramatically phrased charges, no one occasioned more fury.”³²

If the 1840 Convention had frustrated Garrisonians its call to British churches to refuse fellowship with slaveholders and American churches that condoned slavery, was the sort of declaration around which both wings of the movement could rally. They were handed an issue when a commission from the recently-established Free Church of Scotland returned from a tour of the United States with money some of which, it was suspected, was raised in the South. The Church had been established in the wake of the Scottish Disruption of 1843. Funds were desperately needed to build churches and pay ministers. Soon after the return of the commission, Wright, the Glasgow Emancipation Society (GES), a supporter of Garrison, and the Belfast Anti Slavery Society (BASS), an affiliate of the BFASS, launched a public campaign that aimed to force the Church to “Send Back the Money.” Wright was joined by Frederick Douglass and James Buffum in the fall of 1845. The campaign against the Church would consume their energies for almost one year. First they attempted to pressure the Presbyterian Church in Belfast to sever its connections with the Free Church until the money was returned. When that approach failed to have the desired effect they took their message to Scotland. What followed was a vitriolic public debate which caused deep divisions in the new church and almost bankrupted the GES. In Paisley Douglass accused the Church of lining its pockets with the money that should have been used for his education. He called on his audiences to raise their voices against the Church. Let the issue, he pleaded, be “the talk around the

fireside, in the streets, and at the market-place.” This call for public agitation struck some as particularly dangerous to social order and indirectly may have won the Church support. In the end the Church held its ground and defied the call to return the money. Even in failure Buffum took comfort in the prediction that the agitation would lead to a greater understanding about the nature of American slavery.³³

Garrison arrived in July 1846 and for the next three months would add his voice to the campaign to isolate American churches. But before joining Douglass, Thompson and the others on a lecture tour, Garrison turned his attention to the formation of the Anti Slavery League. It was meant to be a counterweight to the BFASS, an organization that could give national voice to the provincial societies that had kept faith with Garrison. The founding meeting at the Crown & Anchor on August 10, 1846 attracted many of the leading British Garrisonians as well as a number of radicals such as the Chartist Henry Vincent. The success of the meeting lifted Garrison’s spirits. The League, he predicted, would make a “deep impression on the public mind, on both sides of the Atlantic.”

Others were not so optimistic. In fact there were those such as John B. Estlin, the Bristol ophthalmologist, who thought Garrison had undermined his chances of winning support by associating with political fringe elements, those willing to divide the country by promoting a series of impractical movements such as universal suffrage, and the unsavory characters such as Vincent who promoted them. “Were the middle and lower classes of this country the parties likely to do much for the American Abolitionist cause,” he warned Garrison, “there might be some use in courting their favour, even at the risk of offending higher circles.”³⁴

In the weeks after the League's formation, Garrison, Douglass, Thompson, Wright and Buffum, continued the effort to isolate American churches. Although they kept up the demand for the Free Church to return the money it had raised in the South, much of their attention was devoted to the proposed Evangelical Alliance which many of its proponents hoped would cement contacts between British and American evangelicals. From the outset questions were raised about the exact nature, function and composition of the alliance. Sectarian differences and national jealousies only complicated what was already a difficult situation. In the end, the organizers opted for breath and flexibility hopeful that the founding meeting could unravel the many problems created by its rules of association. A preliminary meeting of British Evangelicals in Birmingham had voted not to extend an invitation to those in America who "whether by their own fault or otherwise, may be in the unhappy position of holding their fellowmen as slaves." The resolution arrived too late to affect the composition of the American delegation. The issue of whether slaveholders could be members consumed the energies of the meeting and in the end destroyed the hopes of a united alliance. They opted instead for the formation of national organizations "in accordance with their peculiar circumstances, without involving the responsibility of one part of the Alliance for another."³⁵

Given the passions unleashed by the debate over the Free Church's acceptance of money from the South, the Alliance stood little chance of success. British delegates were committed to the cause of abolition even if, like the Rev. J. Howard Hinton, they had rejected Garrison's approach. It is this antislavery tradition that Garrison, Douglass, and Thompson called upon in their public meetings in the days after the formation of the League. Judging by the audiences they attracted and the support they were given

wherever they went, their call for the isolation of American churches seemed to resonate with large sections of the British public. They also took the message to the World Temperance Convention which met in London not long after the Alliance meeting. Many of the Americans in London for the Alliance meeting stayed on for the Convention and, not surprisingly, were incensed by the attempt to raise the issue at the meeting. While Garrison's intervention was summarily rejected by the chair, Douglass, who attended as an accredited delegate from Newcastle, was allowed to address the meeting. Besides pointing to the fact that no American association would have considered electing him as their representative, Douglass devoted much of his address to the ways discrimination undermined the attempts of free blacks to elevate themselves. By the end of the summer, many Americans at the meetings were convinced that there existed a coalition of American and British abolitionists the purpose of which, one of them observed, was meant to fan the flames of "national exasperation and war."³⁶

As he had done at the end of his two previous visits to Britain, Garrison declared this visit a rousing success. "Nothing could have been more timely," he told a co-worker, "[n]o three months of my life were ever spent more profitably to the cause of religious and personal freedom."³⁷ But as much as their agitation excited public interest it could not insure the survival of the League which languished in the months after Garrison's departure. It was not for a want of trying. For the rest of his stay in Britain Douglass continued to promote the cause, but in Garrison's absence what Douglass did raised his own stock rather than the League's. Not only did he become the center of attraction, but like Remond before him Douglass saw no reason why he should forgo contacts with the BFASS and its supporters if those contacts would strengthen the movement. Such

independence caused Webb to question Douglass's allegiances. "I have not found him as agreeable as I would wish," Webb wrote Wright. "I don't at all feel confident that his head will be strong enough for the attention he receives." When Douglass accepted an invitation to meet with the BFASS Webb was beside himself. He wrote Maria W. Chapman in Boston: "I don't wonder at Douglass' having met with the British and Foreign as he has done. It must be difficult for him to enter into your feelings in this matter, and he is not a man to enter into what he don't comprehend." The leader of the BFASS, Joseph Sturge, Webb observed, is "shuffling, secretive, bigoted and destitute of magnanimity but he is benevolent and munificent, and it is only in these latter phases of his character that Douglass has seen him."³⁸

Douglass was not the problem; Webb had difficulty with anyone who ignored his advice. Other Garrisonians took a different view of the meeting. Thompson supported the idea and from America the Rev. Samuel May thought that the offer to meet with Douglass showed a willingness on the part of the BFASS to "let a friend" of the AASS have "free speech on their platform." He also thought that Douglass might take the opportunity to correct some errors.³⁹ Webb's reaction is all the more surprising given that, like Remond, Douglass took every opportunity to publicly declare his allegiance to Garrison. At a meeting in Leeds in December, for instance, he made his position clear: "I like Joseph Sturge of Birmingham I revere the Anti- Slavery Committee. I love the abolitionists of England; but they ask of me too much when they desire me to step down from the side of Garrison. Sacrifice the man from whom I have received more than from any man breathing---my first, my last, my most steadfast friend---the friend of liberty, the great parent of freedom. Impossible!"⁴⁰

The problem for the Garrisonian movement in Britain was not the insistence of African Americans such as Remond and Douglass that they had a right to meet with anyone who supported the cause, but with the choice of agents the AASS chose to send to Britain. After each of their visits, Garrison's supporters in Britain seem to go further into their shell, convinced that others were undermining the cause. It took some persuasion to get Remond to agree to work with Collins. Douglass was equally reluctant to join forces with Wright. "Friend Wright," he wrote Webb, "is identified with doctrines for which I do not wish to be responsible. He is truly a reformer in general; I only claim to be a man of one idea."⁴¹ Douglass was being uncharacteristically coy, but his point was well made: the heresies that Wright and Garrison were so fond of seem to work against the declared aim of winning British support for abolition. Remond and Douglass were not naïve. They were aware that the BFASS, particularly its secretary, John Scoble, was committed to a policy of isolating the Garrisonians. In spite of their willingness to keep the door of communication ajar, such public declarations of support for Garrison as Douglass's should have eased Webb's concerns and discomforted Scoble.

Like something out of a Monty Python skit, British Garrisonians had developed a tendency to pull up the drawbridge, retreat into the safety of their sectarian castle and shout abuse at potential intruders from the parapets. But this siege mentality was not totally misplaced. Webb could see, as others could not, that Douglass might replace Garrison in the hearts of British supporters of the movement. Within a few years, his worse fears were confirmed. Douglass had broken with Garrison, had established his own newspaper, and continued to attract financial support from a growing number of people who found Garrison much too radical for their abolitionist tastes. By 1850 many in

Garrisonian strongholds were drifting away. In Glasgow, for instance, a new ladies society called on the public to transfer its support from Boston to those who were aiding slaves escape to Canada because they had grown weary of people such as Wright who set aside, one wrote, the authenticity of the Old Testament in order “to controvert the arguments of proslavery Professors of Christianity.”⁴² Many believed the new societies in Scotland was the work of the African American Rev. J. W. C. Pennington. The period also witnessed the revitalization of the apparently anti-Garrisonian Free Produce Movement which called for a boycott of slave-grown produce. Finally, the success of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s tour in 1853 deepened the Garrisonians’ sense of isolation. African American Garrisonians, such as William Wells Brown, and William and Ellen Craft, who visited Britain in the 1850s met with similar criticism when they accepted invitations from the BFASS. But the problem for British Garrisonians was not the flexibility that African American insisted on, but the intractability of their white American visitors. No one raised the levels of bile like Parker Pillsbury, the New Hampshire abolitionist, did. Some could forgive Wright’s oddities, but Pillsbury was simply too cantankerous. In the two and one-half years he spent in Britain Pillsbury managed to cross swords with anyone who deviated from what he considered the only legitimate approach to abolition. He was particularly incensed by the activities of a group of African American ministers including Pennington, Henry Highland Garnet, Samuel Ward and Josiah Henson, who he accused of “picking the people’s pockets.” That fry, as he dismissed them, were “an outrage on all decency and a scandal to the name of anti-slavery.” They were the Garrisonian’s major competitors as far as Pillsbury was concerned. Pennington’s success at getting supporters to raise money to purchase his

freedom, “prevents or perverts the gifts that would be cheerfully laid on the altar of humanity, by representing things to be antislavery which are not, and runs away with the sympathies of a generous people, who really wish well of the cause of the slave.” Later Pillsbury would become involved in the whispered campaign which raised questions of an illicit sexual relationship between Douglass and his co-worker, the English woman, Julia Griffiths who had returned home in 1855 to raise support for Douglass’s work in Rochester.⁴³

These difficulties are all the more unfortunate given that Pillsbury’s arrival coincided with a change of leadership in the BFASS. Its old secretary, John Scoble, the Garrisonians’ nemesis, had been replaced by Louis Chamerovzow, a courtly Polish immigrant, who on assuming the position made efforts to heal the rift by inviting Pillsbury, Thompson and William Wells Brown to the Society’s annual meeting. The gesture proved a disaster. After some reluctance, Pillsbury agreed to attend the meeting but he had no intention of allowing the Society to make public noises about reconciliation without first declaring the AASS the true abolitionists. The invitation raised suspicions among friends at home. Samuel May Jr. insisted that the idea of “obtaining strength from an alliance with those who have been seeking our ruin, and in every mean and covert way, for fifteen years, is to me simply preposterous.” As was the case when other African Americans were invited to participate in BFASS activities, Brown was partial to accepting the invitation without setting preconditions. Pillsbury was not. And when Chamerovzow refused to allow his motion Pillsbury responded: “We [must] not let the enemy get advantage by another act of pretended friendliness.” There can be no

reconciliation, he declared, until “their repentance is far less equivocal than any we have seen yet.”⁴⁴

This was the last meaningful attempt to reconcile the two groups. The small group of Garrisonians continued to function largely isolated from what remained of antislavery activity in Britain. Webb would write almost plaintively during Pillsbury’s visit that the activities of Douglass’s supporters had limited his effectiveness and his ability to raise money for the Boston bazaar. By 1858 the sale of British goods for the bazaar which annually raised money for the work of the AASS had all but dried up. The competition, particularly Douglass in Rochester, and those in New York City and Syracuse working to help runaways escape slavery, continued, however, to attract support from Britain. When in 1858 Samuel Joseph May, a leading figure in the American movement, visited Britain he made few public appearances. He limited his activities almost exclusively to private meetings with the shrinking group of British Garrisonians. This lack of public agitation contracted starkly with the activities of Sarah Parker Remond, Charles Lennox Remond’s sister, who traveled to Britain with May. Remond undertook an active public campaign that almost single handedly revived Garrisonian activity in places like Leeds where it had laid dormant for years. At the end of a visit which lasted less than one year May believed that divisions among American abolitionists had turned many against leaders of the movement.⁴⁵

The small group of British Garrisonians may have lost much of their ability to affect public views of the movement in America but their relative isolation did breed solidarity, a solidarity that was sorely tested by the outbreak of war in America which surprisingly caused deep rifts in the alliance. The small, tightly-knit group which had largely

weathered the scorn of opponents for being extremists and cantankerous now showed signs of fraying in the months after the outbreak of hostilities. For over twenty years its members had preached, some would say to the converted, that the peaceful secession of the non-slaveholding states from the Union was the best guarantor of emancipation. Wright promoted the idea unstintingly during his stay in Britain echoing Garrison's declaration in the midst of the furor over the Irish Address, that he, and by extension the AASS, was both an "Irish Repealer and an American Repealer." The firing of Fort Sumter turned belief into promise. British members of the alliance, therefore, were caught off guard by the ease with which American colleagues shelved the commitment to come out from in favor of supporting and staying in the Union. American friends, in turn, took umbrage at the insistence of British co-workers that the principle still held sway. From Dublin James Haughton insisted that the South be allowed to leave otherwise the conflict will lead to "extermination, or a fierce and horrible encounter of long duration." Were the South allowed to go quietly, the North would be finally freed of its complicity with slavery. Haughton drove home his argument with the pointed reminder of the movement's slogan: "No Union with Slaveholders." Friends in America defended themselves. They had never abandoned principle for they had never rejected the concept of union, only one that was built on slavery, Wendell Phillips declared, "a union whose cement was the blood of the slave." Now that the North seemed determined to take seriously the unchallenged views which drove the declaration of Independence and the spirit of the Revolution, it should be supported. If this were so, many in Britain, both in and out of the movement, wanted to know, why had Abraham Lincoln not made emancipation and the search for justice the cornerstone of the war, questions American

colleagues could not easily answer until the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation was issued in September 1862.⁴⁶

The squabble unleashed nationalist passions as the internationalist principles that had sustained the movement for thirty years gave way in the face of war. Harriet Martineau, one of the stalwarts of the alliance, who knew America from her first visit in the 1830s and to whose home in Ambleside every American Garrisonian who visited Britain made the obligatory pilgrimage, for a while parted company with her American friends in the movement for what she thought was their abandonment of free trade and internationalist principles. Webb, on the other hand, stayed involved, but in his usual fashion did not hold his tongue in the face of what he saw as a disturbing sign of rising American nationalism. In response, some who had always been candid and open with colleagues chose to wrap themselves in the flag. One in particular reminded friends that Britain's hands were stained in blood of 100,000 Sepoys victims of the war in India. "Great as is the sin of this country, culpable as is its government, and unworthy as are its leaders, America is the peer of all other nations; and, in her recent sacrifices for liberty, without a peer among the nations of the earth. It is in comparison with our own ideal that we condemn our country as the 'chief of sinners'; but in comparison with other nations, we have no reason to be ashamed."⁴⁷

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation went a long way to seal the fissures that had appeared in the transatlantic Garrisonian movement. But by that time the movement was a mere shadow of itself. Many of the stalwarts such as J. B. Estlin, had passed from the scene, others such as the members of the Glasgow Emancipation Society, had become relatively inactive, while some younger voices, such as Mary Estlin, daughter of John,

and members of the Leeds Young Men's Anti Slavery Society, had only joined the ranks in the last decade before the war. These new voices, however, were never loud enough to replace those silenced by retirement or death. What cohesion existed was a tribute to Garrison's stature and influence. After his visit to Dublin in 1840 Webb's wife Hannah summed it up best. Garrison was working for a "world in which there would be no slavery, no king, no beggars, no lawyers, no doctors, no soldiers, no palaces, no prisons, no creeds, no sects, no weary and grinding labor, no luxurious idleness, no particular Sabbath or temple... no restraint but moral restraint, no containing power but love. Shall we judge such a man because he may go a little further than we are prepared to follow? Let us first consult our consciences and our testaments."⁴⁸

Hannah Webb may have allowed her enthusiasm for Garrison to get the better of her judgment, but no one would have challenged her declaration that Garrison was the glue that held the movement together. But if Hannah was willing to accept Garrison's unorthodoxy, the extremism of Wright and Pillsbury sometimes grated on the sensibilities of their closest friends. There were occasions when, compared to Wright, Garrison was the paragon of moderation. While Wright, for instance, condemned the plan to raise money to buy Douglass's freedom and tried to persuade Douglass to reject the offer, Garrison saw merit in the plan. Were he a runaway slave, he observed, under constant threat of being retaken, he too would have accepted the offer. That flexibility and Garrison's visits in 1840 and 1846 were largely responsible for holding together his small transatlantic alliance. But one should not underestimate the contributions visiting African Americans made to the wider movement. More than any others they consistently tried to bridge the divide by working with those Garrisonians considered the opposition. The fact

that during his three brief visits he toured with Paul in 1833, Remond in 1840, and Douglass in 1846, all of whom stayed behind to carry on the appeal for public support, points to the contributions they made to the international movement. After the split of the movement in the US took hold in Britain toward the end of 1841, there was little that Garrison could have done to stop further erosion. In the 1850s many in Britain thought that Douglass was by far the most important leader of the American movement and the one to whom most support should be given. That development may help to explain the rather clumsy attempt to discredit Douglass by Pillsbury and others, an effort that Garrison admittedly did nothing to quell. Yet among those who knew its history Garrison was the initiator and remained the preeminent figure in the transatlantic movement.

Two years after the surrender of Confederate forces at Appomattox Garrison made his final visit to Britain. Thompson traveled with him returning home after almost three years in America. It seemed fitting that the two who had cemented the alliance with Garrison's visit to Britain in 1833 and Thompson's to the United States the following year, made the journey together. The visit gave Garrison an opportunity to reestablish old abolitionist friendships as well as meet many of the politicians and intellectuals that had played prominent roles in the debate over Britain's reactions to the Civil War. A breakfast in Garrison's honor in London was attended by many of the leading lights of British public life including John Bright, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Hughes, Peter A. Taylor, and William Ashurst at whose home Garrison had earlier met many of Europe's prominent radical figures. Also in attendance were African Americans Sarah Parker Remond, J. Sella Martin, the Boston minister in Britain to raise money for the support of freedmen in the South, William and Ellen Craft, and Bishop Daniel Payne, of the African Methodist

Episcopalian Church. The mix of participants was a tribute to the search for justice and equality that drove Garrison and the movement that bore his name. But of all the prominent names attached to the list of participants none was more curious than that of the wartime Foreign Minister, Lord John Russell, who had asked to be invited and be allowed to speak. Russell's speech was the public confession of a person who had been so critical of the Union's efforts to subdue the Confederacy. He used the occasion to admit that he, and by extension the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, was wrong not to have recognized the difficulties Lincoln faced in reestablishing the authority of the Union and in freeing the slaves. But he took comfort in the fact that both the US and Britain were now treating "the race of Africa as a free community, free to enter into the paths of industry, free to distinguish themselves in intellectual progress as much as any race of our own color." It was a remarkable declaration one that hewed closely to 19th century Anglo-Saxon notions about ways to uplift backward peoples, ignoring all that had gone on in the West Indies since the end of slavery and the terrible crises that had been unleashed in the wake of the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in October 1865 to say nothing of the Indian Mutiny in 1857.

Garrison was gracious in his reply. While he recognized there was a time when supporters of the Union marveled at "some sentiments which had fallen" from Russell's lips he attributed them in part to "misconceptions and misapprehensions" caused by distance. There was also understandable confusion given the early policies of the Lincoln administration, but once emancipation was declared, he concluded, "the pulse of England beat to the music of the jubilee bell." Like a true confessor, Garrison absolved Russell of his sins against the cause of freedom by recognizing first, his public disavowal of his

earlier position, and second, by calling on him to complete the work of freedom by giving the vote to the working people of Britain. The call for the extension of the franchise was Garrison's way of thanking those who had been the backbone of the Union cause in Britain during the war. But in many ways it was also an acknowledgment that the movement's objectives had been realized. Struggles for freedom in one place, Charles Lennox Remond was fond of saying, drew inspiration and strength from the fight for freedom by others elsewhere. Other cities joined in the tribute to Garrison. Similar events were held in Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

The tribute recognized Garrison's contributions to the founding of the transatlantic alliance and confirmed his rightful place, participants agreed, as the preeminent figure in the movement. It was a movement forged in a period of high optimism as Britain worked towards emancipation in its West Indian colonies. It coalesced initially around opposition to the American Colonization Society and the mission of its emissary Elliot Cresson but quickly splintered in the wake of rising sectarian differences. By the end of Garrison's second visit the movement had divided into two mainly irreconcilable camps whose energies were devoted to either the promotion or resistance to what both sides considered were Garrisonian heresies. In spite of the efforts of Charles Lennox Remond these struggles over conflicting ideologies resulted in the narrowing of support for the Garrison wing of the American movement. Other visiting African Americans tried to heal the rift and to reach across the divide with some success. By the end of his third visit and the struggle over the Free Church's acceptance of support from the South, much of Garrison's support was clustered in the provinces in such places as Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dublin. By then he had lost the support of the BFASS, the one truly national

organization. It is very likely that those who sided with Garrison after the 1840 convention were motivated in part by a deep desire to demonstrate their independence from both London and the BFASS. But if Hannah Webb spoke for others then they were also driven by a passionate commitment to Garrison himself a commitment that drew sustenance from their relative isolation from the main center of abolitionist activity. This growing isolation may help to explain why they were so critical of any one who consorted with the opposition. In doing so, Richard Webb and others failed to realize that the determination of African Americans to bridge the divide was doing much to keep the movement alive and vibrant. Some Garrisonians were more aware of the importance of African Americans to the movement than was Webb. In fact, the decision of first the Bristol society and later the Young Men's society in Leeds to throw in their lot with Garrison was largely due to the efforts of William Wells Brown and the Crafts in the case of Bristol and Sarah Parker Remond in Leeds. If partisan differences divided the transatlantic movement in 1840 it was, ironically, nationalism that threatened the Garrisonian alliance in the early months of the Civil War. But in spite of these differences and divisions Garrison retained his position as the preeminent figure in the international movement a stature that was challenged but never undermined by the prominence of Frederick Douglass.

Notes

¹ Aileen Kraditor, Means and Ends in American Abolitionism. Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), pp. 27-28

² Eclectic Review, January 1832

³ For a discussion of the “civilizationist principle” see Wilson J. Moses, “Civilizing Missionary: A Study of Alexander Crummell,” Journal of Negro History, Vol. LX, No. 2, April 1975, pp. 229-232; Wilberforce to Clarkson, Bath, October 10, 1831, Clarkson Papers, Vol. VIII, British Museum; Thompson to Jenny, Hastings, November 1, 1831, Robert English Deposit, John Rylands Library, Manchester University.

⁴ The Christian Advocate, February 6, 1832; Patriot, August 1, July 18, 1832; for an example of Stuart’s pamphlets see Charles Stuart, Remarks on the Colony of Liberia and the American Colonization Society: With Some Account of the Settlement of Coloured People, at Wilberforce, Upper Canada (London: J. Messeder, 1832); Anthony J. Barker, Captain Charles Stuart Anglo-American Abolitionist (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983)

⁵ Derby Mercury, September 19, 1832; Cresson to Ralph R. Gurley, London, September 6, 1831, Reel 12, Cresson to Gurley, Birmingham, February 20, 1832, Reel 13, Cresson to Gurley, Liverpool, April 16, 1832, Cresson to Gurley, London July 6, 1832, June 9, 1832, June 16, 1832, Reel 14, American Colonization Society (ACS) Papers; R. J. M. Blackett, Building an Anti Slavery Wall. Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), p. 59.

⁶ Barker, Captain Charles Stuart, p.75.

⁷ Betty Fladeland, Men and Brothers. Anglo-American Antislavery Cooperation (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), p. 212; Liberator, June 22, 1833.

⁸ Patriot, July 10, 1833; Sheffield Iris, July 3, 1833.

⁹ Christian Advocate, n. d., in Liberator, October 12, 1833; Fladeland, Men and Brothers, 217.

¹⁰ Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879. The Story of His Life Told by His Children (4 vols.; New York: Arno Press, 1969), I, 364.

¹¹ Liberator, September 21, 1833; The American Antislavery Reporter, January 1834 dismissed the BACS as “a grand castle of moonshine.”

¹² Anti Slavery Reporter, October 21, November 4, 1840; Liberator, November 27, 1840; Ipswich Express, January 5, 1841.

¹³ Irish Friend, April 1, 1841; the AFCS’s expedition to the Niger River in 1841 was a total failure. See Howard Temperley, White Dreams, Black Africa: The Antislavery Expedition to the Niger River 1841-1842 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

¹⁴ Dwight L. Dumond, Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857, 2. vols. (New York: Appleton-Century, 1938), II, p.97-98.

¹⁵ Clare Taylor, ed., British and American Abolitionists an Episode in Transatlantic Understanding (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press,1974), p.22; Rice, Scots Abolitionists, p.15.

¹⁶ Liberator, September 9, 1833.

¹⁷ Rice, Scots Abolitionists, pp. 68-71; Garrison and Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, I, 434; Taylor, British and American Abolitionists, p.33

¹⁸ Quoted in Walter McIntosh Merrill, Against Wind and Tide. A Biography of Wm. Lloyd Garrison (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963) p.161.

¹⁹ Garrison and Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, II, pp. 367-71; Rice, Scots Abolitionists, pp. 88-89.

²⁰ Taylor, British and American Abolitionists, pp. 74, 91-2.

²¹ Garrison and Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, II, p. 408.

²² Garrison and Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, II, p. 400-01; Liberator, October 2, 1840; James Mott, Three Months in Great Britain (Philadelphia: J. Miller M'Kim, 1841), p. 64; It should be pointed out that throughout his remaining time in Britain Remond was forced to address the issue my working men in his audience. On some occasions his approach seemed to have won their endorsement, on others they continued to raise questions from the floor. See, for example, Ipswich Express, January 15, 1841, Gateshead Observer, February 6, 1841.

²³ Quoted in Rice, Scots Abolitionists, p. 96.

²⁴ Liberator, May 21, 1841, November 28, 1845; Remond to William Smeal, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, February 15, 1841, Cork Ladies Anti Slavery Society to the Secretary Boston Female Anti Slavery Society, Cork, November 15, 1841, both in Anti Slavery Papers; Irish Friend, March 1, 1841.

²⁵ On Collins' visit see Rice, Scots Abolitionists, pp. 97-101; Douglas C. Riach, "Richard Davis Webb and Antislavery in Ireland," in Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman, eds. Antislavery Reconsidered. New Perspectives on the Abolitionists. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 158; Charles John A. Collins, Right and Wrong Among the Abolitionists of the United States Glasgow: G. Gallie,1841) p.70.

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- ²⁶ Dumond, Letters of James Gillespie Birney, II, p. 584; Remond to Richard Allen, London, January 7, 1841, BFASS Papers, Rhodes House Library, Oxford University; Thompson to Elizabeth Pease, Edinburgh, October 27, 1840, Robert English Deposit; Remond to Elizabeth Pease, Belfast, October 14, 1841, Anti Slavery Papers.
- ²⁷ Taylor, British and American Abolitionists, pp. 133-4.
- ²⁸ Belfast News-Letter, October 15, 1841; Gilbert Osofsky, "Abolitionists, Irish Immigrants, and the Dilemma of Romantic Nationalism," American Historical Review, Vol. 80, No. 4, 1975, pp. 394-98.
- ²⁹ Garrison and Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, III, pp. 44-5; James Brewer Stewart, Wendell Phillips. Liberty's Hero (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), p. 111.
- ³⁰ Liberator, September 8, 1843; Taylor, British and American Abolitionists, pp. 172, 194.
- ³¹ Riach, "Richard Davis Webb," p. 165. For the most recent discussion of the relationship between O'Connell, American abolitionists and Repealers see Angela Murphy, "Abolition, Irish Freedom, and Immigrant Citizenship: American Slavery and the Rise and Fall of the American Associations for Irish Repeal," (Ph. D., University of Houston, 2006)
- ³² Child to Ellis Gray Loring, New York, April 6, 1842, Child Papers, New York Public Library; Lewis Perry, Childhood, Marriage and Reform. Henry Clarke Wright 1797-1870 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 46.
- ³³ For a discussion of the Free Church controversy see Rice, Scots Abolitionists, pp. 119-40; Blackett, Building an Antislavery Wall, 83-87; Liberator, May 15, 1846.
- ³⁴ Taylor, British and American Abolitionists, pp.278, 290.
- ³⁵ Evangelical Alliance, Report of the Proceedings of the Conference Held at Freemasons' Hall, London, from August 19th to September 2nd Inclusive, 1846 (London: Patridge and Oakey, 1847), pp. 436-58; Liberator, September 25, 1846.
- ³⁶ Liberator, September 11, November 20, 1846.
- ³⁷ Taylor, British and American Abolitionists, p. 304.
- ³⁸ Webb to Wright, Dublin, February 22, 1846. English, Irish, Scottish Letters Addressed to Henry C. Wright, 1843-47, Houghton Library, Harvard University; Webb to Chapman, Dublin, July 16, 1846, Anti Slavery Papers.

³⁹ May to J. B. Estlin, Boston, September 26, 1846. Lucretia Mott also called on the leaders of the Society to lower the level of their criticism of the BFASS's intentions. See Mott to Chapman, Philadelphia, July 23, 1846. Both in Anti Slavery Papers.

⁴⁰ Leeds Times, n. d. in Liberator, February 5, 1847.

⁴¹ Taylor, British and American Abolitionists, p. 241.

⁴² Henry Wigham to Garrison, Edinburgh, July 16, 1850. Anti Slavery Papers.

⁴³ Taylor, British and American Abolitionists, p.412. His statement on Pennington is quoted in Stacey M. Robertson, Parker Pillsbury. Radical Abolitionist, Male Feminist (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 107.

⁴⁴ Robertson, Parker Pillsbury, pp. 99-100.

⁴⁵ Webb to Chapman, Dublin, May 3, 1855, Anti Slavery Papers. Donald Yacavone, Samuel Joseph May and the Dilemmas of the Liberal Persuasion, 1797-1871 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p. 166.

⁴⁶ Liberator, June 21, 1861, January 17, 1862; National Anti Slavery Standard, September 14, 1861; Samuel May Jr., to Webb, Leicester, February 10, 1863, Webb to Anne Weston, Dublin, December 31, 1861 both in Anti Slavery Papers.

⁴⁷ Liberator, February 7, 1862, April 4, 1862; National Anti Slavery Standard, January 25, 1862.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Riach, "Richard Davis Webb," pp. 156-57.