

March 7, 1835
Forten, Robert B[ridges]
Liberator

[AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE LADIES' ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY, OF PHILADELPHIA, BY ROBERT B. FOREEN, * NOV. 7, 1834.]

LADIES:—

Nothing short of the deep interest I feel, for the advancement of the Anti-Slavery cause, could have brought me in this capacity before you. My inability alone would have prevented me, did I not believe it to be a duty devolving upon all those who have had even the least advantages of an education to employ the same, to the well-being of their fellow mortals. I deem this cause worthy the mass of talent and intellect employed in its behalf—one as sacred as the liberty it so nobly defends.

It is the main part of religion to rejoice, and to give thanks for blessings; and where is to be found the record of greater blessings than those which at this time we meet to extend? There are some who look with displeasure upon meetings of this kind; but to my mind, such persons err—their objection arises from false and imperfect views of human nature, and involves the fallacy of reasoning from individual and occasional abuses, against general and vitally important practices.

Love to God, and love to man, are the two great commandments, upon which hang all the law and the prophets. Surely one way of clearly manifesting love to the Deity, is to cherish and express those emotions of

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Love to God, and love to man, are the two great commandments, upon which hang all the law and the prophets. Surely one way of clearly manifesting love to the Deity, is to cherish and express those emotions of

gratitude, which are undoubtedly due him for his goodness to us. And how can love to man be more plainly exhibited, than by supporting such plans as aim to secure to him his rights and privileges, without which he would be a slave?

This cause, though in its infancy, has all the vigor necessary to insure its future stability and success; and to the real philanthropist, it is a source of unspeakable gratification to know, that in almost every city and town throughout the free or non-slaveholding States, Anti-Slavery Societies are seen rearing their heads above the prejudices, that so meanly debase the character of the American people. This spirit has no fixed boundary, but demands the universal attention of the civilized world. It stands unrivalled for its philanthropy, morality, and direct bearing upon that system which sinks it victim on a level with the brute creation.

Why should not this anti-slavery spirit, this spirit of universal and immediate emancipation, exert itself? Is there no exciting cause—none, calculated to call me into action the energies of philanthropist? Yes, there is. Those sounds we hear breaking upon our ears, are the chains of millions vibrating to the shouts of liberty and independence.

Will not this touch the feelings of our common nature? I hope it will, at least of that part of creation, who stand pre-eminent for all good works—*the females*. Their acts

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spring instinctively from the heart, by nature ardent, by inheritance generous. Their efforts, like Hercules' power in the time of war, are dispensable. Their smiles will check the iron rod of the tyrant, and melt the savage despot into mercy.

This is not a question which involves itself into political bustle of the day, but one of religious and moral worth.

You, then, are called upon to unite your strength in this struggle. I need not say you ought, for here I have an emblem of your worth; it is here, we find woman in all her intellectual power, taking an active part in the general melioration of mankind [.]

This cause is co-extensive with truth and justice: in its support, therefore, no slavish fear should be indulged, but that zealous spirit, which should ever mark the christian, is necessary to be put into operation, in order to give success to the great, the original design of the Anti-Slavery Society—viz. to remove from our country that moral stain which slavery has almost indelibly stamped upon her brow, and to elevate the people of color to that station in life, to which they have an unquestionable claim.

No one does, and, I may venture to say, can appreciate more highly the benefits which are to be derived from this cause, than myself; because I am recognized as being one of that oppressed class, for the elevation of which the Anti-Slavery Society pledges

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itself. I am a man of color—I am ‘a man more sinned against than sinning.’ My color alone stands a partition-wall between me and my elevation—color, the effect of a cause known only to the great Giver of all gifts.

This is a point to which I wish to draw your serious attention. I desire all, who hear me at this time, to understand clearly, that anti-slavery principles acknowledge not the least difference, between the man of color and the white man. Are we not men? Are we not endowed with the same rational feelings, and swayed by the same sort of motives, as our white brethren? For any person to say, we are not, at this day, would only prove how obstinately a man may shut his eyes against the full moonlight of experience. And there are innumerable living instances, upon which to build a judgement, and proofs beyond the reach of doubt, that the color of the skin affects not the elements of human nature, nor the principles upon which men move on from ignorance to knowledge and refinement.

You all, no doubt, are acquainted with, or at least have heard of the horrors of slavery. I will not, therefore, claim much of your attention upon this point. No—I do not intend to expose to your view, the monster in all its horrid deformity, but merely to glance at it, in order to bring your minds to a sense of the propriety, the absolute necessity, of lending your aid to its immediate destruction.

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Slavery was introduced into America by the first emigrants from the mother country; and, unfortunately, for the character of fair Columbia, it has found its way almost uninterrupted to the present age. This, however, furnishes no excuses for continuation of the system; no justification for the present generation to make the *natural rights of man* a mere article of sale and public commerce. The long and continued enjoyment of its profitable, yet dangerous fruits, and its present existence of slavery in our land, bring upon all christians the imperative duty of making a reparation for the wrongs and sufferings connected with it. It bears a hateful aspect, and perils the anticipated grandeur of our country's future glory. It impoverishes the land, rendering the territory in which it exists a desert, when compared to the splendid and extensive fields of the north, which are cultivated by the hands of freemen; and it presents to the view of the real patriot, a picture of the most glaring hypocrisy.

Shall we allow this heaven-daring system of cruelty to live on? Shall we, in despite of the terrors of an hereafter, remain dumb when all that is revolting to humanity, morality and religion, stands staring us in the face? Shall the cries of the helpless millions in the southern section of our country, fall languidly on our ears? Or shall the delusive and deadly spell of servitude, that has

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been thrown upon the spirit of our free institutions, be broken?

Does not every pulse, that beats in any bosom where patriotism has a shelter, an abiding place, promptly respond—Yes!!

Then break the chain—the yoke remove,
And smite to earth Oppression's rod.
With those mild arms of TRUTH and LOVE,
Made mighty through the living GOD.

You, my friends, can do much towards the extinction of slavery. You can furnish a support upon which the lever of justice may rest, and by which one cause for national redemption and honor may be put in motion. You, together with the efforts of your brethren, are able to control the destinies of the colored people, free and bond, of this country. Try the experiment. Dispel the dark night of gloomy apprehension, and let the glorious sun of knowledge beam upon us. Give us but an opportunity of becoming enlightened, and we will prove ourselves capable of appreciating the inestimable value, the imperishable wealth, contained in an early and right education. It is a companion which no misfortune can delude, no enemy can deface, no tyranny (no matter how severe) can enslave. Try the experiment.

Let nothing deter you—let not the sneers of your enemies throw you off the course you have already taken. But, like the character you have ever borne, ‘let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good

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Let nothing deter you—let not the sneers of your enemies throw you off the course you have already taken. But, like the character you have ever borne, ‘let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good

works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' With immediate emancipation for your chart and helm, you cannot fail to reach the desired haven. It ennobles—it exalts. Resting upon such eternal principles, your society, while it fixes an undeviating eye upon its name, delights no less in the practice than in the profession of its faith. In a word, it opens to two millions of human beings that liberty which is by nature, their inalienable right.

Let this subject be uppermost in and out of your society. Fearlessly advocate the principles of immediate abolition, for they are too active to be lulled by the calms of this world—too powerful to be shaken by its storms. An abolitionist should never be afraid to espouse the cause—he should never shrink from a conflict with prejudice; though it assume the most hideous front, he should, with the armor of righteousness, strive to overcome it.

I have thought it expedient to bring this subject before you, for your impartial consideration. It bears its own unqualified testimony. It requires no polish to produce a recommendation. No. Its light grows brighter as opposition darkens. Analyze it, and you will find, that it is composed of the most substantial materials. As opposition is arrayed against this cause, it will produce inquiry, and induce persons to examine for themselves; and by examination, they will discover where the merit lies—whether in

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forging chains upon the restless limbs of our fellow-man lies the pearl of our nation's salvation, or whether in bursting their fetters, and administering the balm of liberty to our sickly republican institutions.

The very establishment of our country's independence,—the irrefragable testimony of the glorious declaration, *That all men are created equal*,—shows the spirit of our heroic forefathers, and the imperative duty of their posterity.

Now, since it is impossible to roll back the wheels of time, and summon into life the millions that have died in bondage, *to bless them with their natural rights*; give to the existing mass of slaves, an anticipation of future prosperity and happiness. Hang up some ensign, upon which they may see inscribed a hope of being hereafter as successful, as they have been hereafter unfortunate. This can be done by your exertions. This can be done by the irresistible influence of your Society. This can be done by a vigorous moral action upon the community at large. This can be done by the force of your example and persuasion.

It cannot be denied, that it is by example and habit, the conduct of men is in a great measure influenced; and when a moral power, like that which the Anti-Slavery Society sets forth, is brought forth to bear upon the conscience, that ever ready monitor which God has implanted in the breast of man, it never

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fails to produce the right effect; whereas, a contrary practice will beget the evil habit of indulging too much in every thing which propensity desires.

Prejudice in color must be admitted, by every candid person, to be one of the greatest evils that can take possession of the human breast. Its ruinous effects are already too glaring to escape the observation of reflecting minds. I call upon you, as one who feels deeply for the present and future welfare of my colored brethren, to resist the monster, with that stern and inflexible determination which should ever adorn the character of a christian, when actuated by motives of benevolence, to destroy a deadly sin, by setting the example, and persuading others to do likewise.

(To be concluded.)

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(Concluded.)

LADIES—It is for you thus to act; it is for you to give life and constant vigor to this great work. Female influence has been, and ever will be, necessary for the advancement of any good cause; and there is no subject that has ever presented itself for your consideration, that requires so much of your valuable assistance.

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If you possess feelings for your country, which vibrate in unison with those of the individual now addressing you, not a hand will be idle, not a heart indifferent to the voice of free[d]om. Yes, the freedom of man —of country—of future ages, will command attention with a sovereign call. '*This is the time*,' for the welfare of the world and its increasing millions, for the glory of America, that you should erect altars of liberty to her honor. Tarry not. Let the *genius of universal emancipation* be your polar star. And, to crown th[i]s object with suc[c]ess, nothing should be esteemed completely done, till the infant, who is yet to lisp the name of his country, may glory as [h]e learns to speak, that not one child can be found to pollute the shores of republican America, with the footstepts of prejudice.

You have, greatly to your credit, formed a society upon the broad and true foundation of immediate emancipation. A foundation, which, in the opinion of all those whose hearts are not steeled against the cries of the oppressed; is fully capable of supporting the grand, the immense superstructure—a foundation bearing the incurruptible monuments of truth, justice, humanity, and benevolence. Are you prepared to act up to the doctrine which your society inculcates? Are all, within the compass of my voice, prepared to make that sacrifice, which will be necessary, if you abandon your prejudices and enrol your names

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on the list of immediate abolitionists? If so, a channel is now open, and millions yet unborn will send forth their prayers to heaven for your exert[i]ons in their behalf.

Parents! remember this; engrave it upon the tablets of your children's memories.— Strive by every means to teach them how to act in reference to this cause which involves the destinies of millions of your fellow creatures. Tell them to crush that oppression, which bears to earth beings like themselves, differing only in color. Oh! it is by this method, my honored friends, that this holy, this just cause shall stand unrivalled for its benevolence.

Look to the mother country—Great Britain. Behold her! She has set an example for America to follow. She has severed the iron chains, in all her provinces. Her Isles are free from the curse of slavery. Her slaves are slaves no more. She has rolled away the stone from the sepulchre of their long buried freedom; and they have arisen, and now stand forth among the freemen of the world. This is an event which justice sanctions, and which we, together with all sincere philanthropists, hail as a jubilee—a noble advance for the abolition cause.

Whose influence powerfully aided in carrying this doctrine into practice, and claimed for monarchical Britain a supremacy over republican America? *T[h]e females.* Their eloquence, their wisdom, which is not a wis-

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Here, then, is a pa[t]tern for the WOMEN OF our country—an example of unsol[...].jied phi[-]lanthropy. Is it not sufficient to stir you t[o] a similar action? Can you—O! will you, hold back—

'When every flap of England's flag Proclaims that all around are free.'

No. You have already entered the great arena of universal freedom. You have enlisted under that standard which is far more spirit-stirring than—

'The fustian banner which proudly waves In splendid mockery o'er a land of slaves.'

Laboring, as we the people of color are, under difficulties too grievous to be borne; surrounded, as we are, by the deluge of oppression: your aid is a mountain-top upon which our ark can safely rest. No one will dare refuse to listen to your arguments.

dom borrowed from the dead, but that which nature has inspired them; an acute observance of the passing scene, and a deep insight into the motives of its glorious agent. Their influence was a powerful remedy for the evil. They left no effort untried, no av enue, by which an appeal could be made in behalf of their oppressed brethren, was to be found u-occupied. They crowded the houses of Parliament with their pathetic and soul-stirring appeals. They diffused the spirit of justice so freely, that none could fail to feel its truth and power. And bless- sed be the hands that did it, and thrice blessed be the God that gave them power; their appeals were not in vain—for the broken chains echoed liberty to the call.

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Children will claim the attention of their parents, who might have slumbered upon this question. Fathers, by the influence of their daughters, may forever destroy their bitter prejudices. There are no side-way paths for philanthropy to exert itself; but straight and unerring, it aims, by moral power and persuasive tongue, to 'break every yoke, to let the oppressed go free,' and to claim for them privileges which you all enjoy. Nothing short of this spirit can ever place you on an eminence with your sisters of Great Britain. They have driven the aristocracy of the skin forever from them, and supplanted it with the unwavering principles of justice and humanity.

Who can inquire into the practical philanthropy, which displayed itself in the character of these women, without being fired by their worth, and made emulous by their example? Who can delineate their character, without naturally enforcing principles, alike endeared to the moralist, patriot, and philanthropist?

In imitation of their philanthropy, you must apply a portion of your time and property to an extension of the benefits of universal freedom.

I pray you consider what your own interest and love of country prescribe to you. I ask no more of you than to follow the dictates of your own consciences. You are not now forced to explore your way through any

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untrodden region of fancy or of speculation. You have abundant facts of recent record, and examples strong, to prove that the people of color, as responsible beings, demand at once, immediately, their rights and privileges.

In the British colonies, eight hundred thousand human beings, who once groaned under the weight of slavery, now stand erect, and breathe the fresh air of freedom. Where is the mind to conceive, the pen or tongue to describe the happiness that must be derived from this act? The lash is broken—the lash, whose sounds were once heard from the rising to the setting of the sun, mingling with the cries of the distressed sufferers, is thrown away, never again to rend and lacerate the flesh of these whom God has made in his own image:

'The eye of age grown dim with toil of years
So [fired] with joy, and eloquent with tears.'

What now remains here? What trophy shall we [erect] to America for her deeds? Bones and sinews still! Shall this ever be the case, to the utter disgrace of our country? Shall a want of action on the part of the females—on your part—retard or stay the star of emancipation in its course? Shall that gloom, which has for years shrouded the minds of the slave, grow darker and darker? Look to this—look to it, you that have such a controlling influence over your countrymen, and save your country. 'For destruc-

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tion cowers to mark what deeds are done.' This is your duty; it imperatively demands your instantaneous aid and support. When surrounding your fire-sides, let this subject engage your attention. Let it be a nourishment for the youthful mind, so that when it begins to exert itself, prejudice may not mingle with an spoil its operations. Instil the principles of abolition in youth, so that when in age, nothing can eradicate them.

The men, too, have their Anti-Slavery Societies; and I should be as unjust to my own feelings as to them, if I did not unite in cheering them onward in their high career. But it is female influence that holds sway over this nation, and to their efforts, I look earnestly and without fear, for a universal change in the present aspect of society. Young and aged, unite in the consummation of this great work! Let your children be foremost with the wiser heads, to direct them to the right road. Be not like sign-posts that point out the way, but stir not a single inch themselves. Urge them on—point them to the glorious example of Great Britain, and it will excite them to a determination to uphold the system of immediate emancipation. I appeal to your honest feelings, not to allow the present and eventful time to pass over without making a strenuous effort in behalf of suffering humanity. I beseech you to elude the cunning of the slaveholders and their apologists and hold forth that doctrine

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which is of God—‘As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.’ This is a doctrine, of which all christians must approve, and which unhesitatingly finds its way to the heart. It is a doctrine of the holy Bible: who but the profligate mind can spurn it?

Tell me, History, thou reverend chronicler of the grave! whether thy pages record greater barbarities than those which characterize American slavery? It annihilates the rights of man—it subverts the whole fabric of religion, and the brightest rays of truth and justice in vain shine upon our minds when slavery has shut our eyes against them.

Too much cannot be said in praise of your Society—it will, it must command respect; for it sets forth the living truths of the gospel—it is built upon the rock of truth—it holds prejudice mute—it sets at naught the wicked devices of men, and fastens its hopes to the very portals of heaven. Still it requires its members to act in unison with its principles. You must all understand its meaning ere you join it. It promulgates the do[c]trine of life and liberty, and grants to the freeman all the benefits necessary to render him truly free. Be not deceived. I think not that there is the least toleration of the gradual system in it, for it believes slavery to be an enormous sin, and requires it therefore to be immediately repented of. It appeals to the nation to pause, and rend the

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