

DR. OSGOOD'S LETTERS.—No. 4.

TO THE REV. RALPH EMERSON, D. D.

*Professor in the Theological Seminary at
Andover.*

Dear Brother,—In the close of my last letter I promised to offer some remarks upon your “beau ideal,” as you call it, “in respect to the mode in which we may exert the best and strongest influence in favor of emancipation.” Before we can hope to have any influence, you think that all our organizations must be “disbanded and forgotten.” “Then, instead of wranglings about men and measures, and our continual criminations about pro-slavery and fanaticism and ambition, there would come forth the more pure and genuine sentiment that lies at the bottom of every New-Englander’s heart. Every author in his book, every editor in his magazine, every orator in his harangue, every householder amid his guests, nay, every passenger in the steamboat, the car, the stage coach, would bemoan the existence of slavery, and kindly wish success to the wise and good at the south in their efforts to abolish it. Every minister in the sanctuary, and every patriarch at the family altar, with tears of mingled commiseration for the slave and for the master and for their children, would pour forth the united prayer of melting hearts for the removal of this monstrous offspring and curse of sin.—God would hear such prayer and answer it. Our children would hear it; and not be left, as now, in danger of growing up pro-slavery men. Our southern guests, not

banished from our communion, but welcomed to our altars and our hearts, would hear this. It would be something which they could willingly and profitably hear.— And seeing us thus “lifting up holy hands without wrath,” they would be constrained to say that of a truth God was with us. The good among them would join such prayer most heartily, and would return home more courageously devoted to the one exalted labor to which Providence has called them by their location.”

Now, my dear sir, do you not plainly intimate in this same letter, that all this or that which is equivalent, has been done “by every son of freedom at the north for half a century.” “Instant in season and out of season, always and every where, from the cradle to the grave, the sons of the Puritans have testified their aversion to slavery and their desire of universal emancipation.” If such unwearied and unobjectionable efforts have been put forth without producing any diminution of the evils of slavery; if under these efforts, ‘the stakes’ of the system, ‘have been strengthening and its cords lengthening,” it seems to me that it is time to make some addition to the measures.— I like that part of your ‘bean ideal’ quoted above, but I question whether you will find it *realized* without the aid of societies; certain I am that the friends of the slave will not consent to ‘disband’ in order to try the experiment. It may have been your happy lot to have lived in a section of our country where ‘every minister in the sanctuary, and every patriarch at the family altar, with tears of mingled commiseration for the

slave and for their master and for their children, poured forth the united prayer of melting hearts for the removal of this monstrous offspring and curse of sin.' But I have not been so highly favored. I have heard a multitude of preaching from every section of our country, both in 'the sanctuary and at the family altar,' I have attended conventions of ministers for thirty years in our own state, and in some of the adjoining States; and twice have I been as a delegate from the General Association of this State to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church, and I do not recollect to have heard the cause of the slave mentioned in any devotional exercise, until the subject of slavery began to be agitated in its present form, a few years ago. I cannot think as you do about the feeling of opposition to slavery among the sons of the Puritans. Alas! the sons of the puritans have greatly degenerated, if their fathers had such hatred of slavery as they ought to have possessed. If this opposition to slavery is inherent in the bosoms of the sons of New England, whence does it happen that so many of them become so easily reconciled to the system, when they emigrate to the slave states? Whence is it that so many ministers become slaveholders, and openly defend the practice? I think you greatly mistake the *general* state of feeling at the north against slavery. You will not, indeed, find many persons who stand forth in defence of it; this would be unpopular; they had much rather cloak their indifference or their attachment to it, under expressions of malevolence towards the abolition-

ists. You may think me fanatical or uncharitable, or any thing else, but I say that I believe the *spirit of slavery* exists as strongly at the north as at the south. I suppose that a vast multitude as yet do not feel at all on the subject. It does not occupy their minds; they are perfectly willing that the south should continue it or abolish it, as they please. Many others, and most of them men of influence, in the various departments of society, sympathize with the slaveholders, and would gladly aid them, in any respectable way, to perpetuate the system. I do not put forth this opinion without reason. I could bring up an array of facts which would fill a dozen letters, to show that I am not rash in forming the opinion. The '*auri sacra fames*' pervades the bosoms of men at the north as well as at the south. It is this which sustains slavery at the south, and the same thing operates to prejudice many at the north against the action of the abolitionists to root it out. The slaveholder either directly or indirectly, appeals to the avarice of northern men; he calls for their sympathy and he receives it. Many of the public Journals, especially in New York, are as strong in their feelings and their expressions against every measure to abolish slavery as the papers in the slave states. Witness the streams of wrath recently poured

forth by one of the Journals of that city against David Ruggles, for his successful zeal in ferretting out a kidnapper who sold two free colored citizens into bondage; witness also the scurrilous abuse against abolitionists with which the Journal of Commerce is constantly teeming. Take the following as a specimen of courteous, delicate and gentlemanly language which the editor used when treating of the 'wane' of the interest at the north; 'soon there will not be a single grease spot to mark the place where an abolitionist has set.' If such scurrility had come from the Liberator, it would have received the execration of multitudes; but from this editor, who is said to be a son of one of the most holy ministers that ever lived, it is all well. To what purpose are the assertions of men that they hate slavery, in view of such facts? Who will give credit to them? If you had poured forth the feelings of an embittered and pro slavery soul against all the measures of honest, discreet and respectable abolitionists on every occasion; nay, if you had sought occasions to do this, I would not have believed your assertions of opposition to the system; I now believe them, as I do also the declarations of many other brethren in the ministry, who have been unjustly assailed, as I think, by warm and zealous abolitionists, with the appellation of pro-slavery. In some places the feeling of opposition to anti-slavery measures is so strong, in the minds of some men of respectability, that the minister, if he is known to be an abolitionist, cannot mention the slave in his prayer without exciting emotions that are any thing but 'kind.' I know of a minister who was asked by a parishoner friendly to the cause of abolition, if he could not give his notice of the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Concert*, without mentioning the word anti-slavery; and he gave as a reason, that the notice called forth such an expression of wrathful feeling in some few of the congregation, as to occasion him distress in witnessing it. This does not look

as if every man at the north is an enemy of slavery. I have recently found professors of religion at the north who justify slavery; they have been carried away by the arguments of ministers and others at the south who have endeavored to sustain the tottering fabric.

The principal object which you aim at in your letters is to disabuse the clergy from the charges of pro-slavery, insincerity and self-deception, which are preferred against them by abolitionists. This is an object worthy of your efforts. I have always maintained both in public and private that such charges rested on too feeble a foundation; that the fact that these men did not unite with our society was not sufficient evidence of a pro-slavery feeling in them. I believe that my brethren, who have known my feelings, will acquit me of any charges against them. I have often plead their cause against these charges when preferred by men who could not, or would not, appreciate the difficulties with which many of the clergy were surrounded. Many ministers were peculiarly situated when the anti-slavery campaign was first opened. Some of them had men in their congregations, of great respectability, who early imbibed strong prejudices against all the measures which were devised. These prejudices so blinded their minds, that they could not see the force of any arguments brought by the friends of emancipation. The minister might not have been inclined strongly to the cause of abolition, and therefore he cautiously avoided the 'exciting subject,' for fear of offending some of his parishoners, for whose character he entertained a great respect.— And because of his caution, he was probably denounced by some indiscreet lecturer,

as a pro-slavey man. This denunciation served to inflame the public mind, and the consequence was that the abolitionists were denounced in their turn, in no measured terms of abuse. But whilst I make these apologies for my brethren in general, who do not join our ranks, you will allow me to say in kindness, that I think they may have contributed in some instances, to bring about the feelings of rebuke with which they have been assailed in the anti-slavery speeches and reports. In some places the clergyman has given all his influence against the progress of abolition sentiments; he has refused to read notices of meetings; has poured contempt upon their measures; has endeavored to prevent the people from reading anti-slavery publications, or hearing the lectures; and many other things which it is unnecessary to mention. Such a course was calculated to wound and irritate the friends of the slave, and to lead them to say severe and harsh things in their turn. But, my dear sir, I hope this mutual crimination will now subside, and that the ministers, after calmly viewing the subject in every point, will come forward and lend their aid to the cause of the oppressed. If they do not, they will certainly be left in the background. The progress of anti-slavery sentiments in this country, will be henceforth more rapid than it has been. Slavery *must* be abolished, and when the finishing stroke is given to it, those persons who have opposed the measures which shall have led to its destruction will be filled with regret. A venerable father in the ministry, residing in Worcester county, said to me a year since, 'I want you to come and address my people on this subject; I wish them to have some light upon it; I have hitherto been opposed to the discussion, but I begin to feel that I have been in the wrong; I have had strong prejudices against Garrison, but I am not certain that Garrison has not done good; he has waked up a spirit of inquiry through the land which must lead to im-

portant results; I fully believe that slavery will be abolished, and I cannot endure the idea that my grand children shall say that their grandfather was opposed to its termination.' This minister was present at the Clerical Convention, which met at Worcester a few weeks afterwards, and took an active part in the discussions. He is now, I learn, an active and zealous abolitionist, and is exerting a happy influence in his own church and congregation, as well as in the country. I hope that many of my brethren will 'go and do likewise.' If they cannot approve of *all* the measures of the anti-slavery societies, let them go as far as they can. The errors which may now exist are not irretrievable. The abolitionists are not bound to any particular course, to such a degree that they cannot change, if they shall find themselves in the wrong. If there are indiscreet and rash men in our ranks, there are also wise and prudent ones who will serve as a check upon them. There never was a good cause which has not been impeded in some part of its history by imprudent zeal. Come up, then, my brother, to our help, and let us have the benefit of your wise councils and excellent spirit, and we

will permit you to rebuked us for any thing
we do or propose to do that is wrong. You
may expect to hear from me once more,
and then, if you have any thing more to say,
I will listen with profound respect.

Yours truly,

S. OSGOOD.

Courtesy of the Museum of Springfield History, Springfield, MA