

DR. OSGOOD'S LETTERS.—No. 5.

TO THE REV. RALPH EMERSON, D. D.

*Professor in the Theological Seminary at  
Andover.*

Dear Brother.—In my last letter I offered some remarks, expressing my regret at the course which some of the clergy of New England have felt it their duty to pursue in reference to measures of the abolitionists. I would by no means speak harshly of their conduct; neither do I question the purity of their motives. To their own Master they stand or fall, in this matter. That their conduct should meet the censure of zealous men among their opponents was to be expected. But Sir, I must say that I think they hurled the first gauntlet that was publicly thrown in this warfare. I now refer to the resolutions passed by the General Association of Connecticut in June, 1836, and which drew forth such strong animadversions from the directors of the American Anti-Slavery Society in their report the year following. The resolutions were artfully drafted by a distinguished champion of the Colonization Society, as I was afterwards informed, in a manner well calculated to deceive unsuspecting persons as to the main object. I have not these resolutions by me, and therefore, I cannot repeat the clause which was designed to bear hard on the measures of the abolitionists. I was present at the General Association of Massachusetts, the week following, when these resolutions were presented by a delegate from Connecticut, with a request that they might be adopted. It was after 12 o'clock, and the Association were on the moment of adjournment, when the resolutions were read and adopted without a single remark from one of the members. The cloven foot was not seen, and no one suspected that they had any special bearing

upon the anti-slavery measures, until the minutes of the Association were printed and leisurely examined. The offensive sentiments were at once discovered, and many of the clergy regretted that they were passed. Thus, Sir, was the fire kindled by a colonizationist, which has burnt so furiously in the bosoms of many abolitionists against the clergy until the present time. I hope it is nearly, if not thoroughly, extinguished. I refer to the history of these resolutions, to set before you the origin of the controversy between the zealous abolitionists and the clergy of these two States. I am certain that most of the members of one of those Associations acted in the dark, and that many of the members would not have voted for them if they had seen the obvious design of them. Though they might not have been abolitionists, still they would not have sanctioned such an attack upon the character and measures of the Anti-Slavery Society as was made in those resolutions. I do not say these things to palliate the conduct of these writers in the anti-slavery papers who have poured such torrents of abuse upon the *non-conformists* among the clergy. I have ever spoken freely about many of these communications, both to friends and opposers. I think there has been a bad spirit manifested on the side of the abolitionists toward the opposing clergy; or if you please, those who stand aloof and do nothing. I do most sincerely hope that my brethren who, like you, hate slavery, but still remain neuter, will calmly review the whole ground, and sacrifice all minor considerations, and work with us in this cause. I see no insuperable objections. I desire this the more ardently because the character of the ministry suffers, in the estimation of many good men by the course they pursue, while the enemies of all righteousness take occasion to thrust a sword into the vitals of religion itself, through the clergy. Mr. Garrison, Sir, is not the prin-

principal offender in this matter; he is made answerable, as a public editor, for the conduct of others. But our brethren can easily take the sword out of the hand of these violent and prejudiced men.

And I trust they will soon do it effectually by some course of action. The cause would be greatly promoted by their co-operations. They wield a mighty power either for benefit or injury. They will carry with them the bone and sinew of piety in the churches, and when all good men at the north shall unite with those who are now laboring in the cause, they will form an invincible phalanx which will soon destroy "this monstrous offspring and curse of sin." But if these brethren "shall altogether hold their peace at this time," the work will not cease; "enlargement and deliverance shall arise" to the slaves, "from other places," and their names will not be held in grateful remembrance, as the active friends of the oppressed. If, however, they are not yet prepared to take the course which I recommend, i. e. to come forward and join our organization, it would gladden my heart to know that they shall have adopted "the mode" which you consider proper, viz. "in the sanctuary and at the family altar, with tears of mingled commiseration for the slave and for their master and for their children, pour forth the united prayer of melting hearts for the removal of this sin." I am sure that this course is perfectly safe; if our abolition friends who profess to feel their dependance on God have not adopted this course, I hope they will lose no time in carrying your recommendation into practice. I fully agree in the suggestion that there is not prayer enough among the friends of the slave; perhaps a majority of abolitionists are not praying men; but even those who do pray, will readily acknowledge their defects in this duty. If we ever succeed in our efforts to abolish slavery in this land, it will be through the help of the Lord of hosts. To him, and not to us shall be all the glory. In view of what he

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has already done for the cause, we are ready, I trust, to pour forth our praises into the ear that heareth the cry of the prisoner, and who is ready to "give power to the faint," while laboring for their release. Animated by his declaration, "that the captive exile hastens to be loosed," we will continue our exertions "in season and out of season, always and every where from the cradle to the grave," without langour or remissness; and ever and anon as we pursue our labor, we will cheer each others hearts with the language of the exulting prophet, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." But I ask you, my brother, if you really believe that such fervent and habitual prayer as you recommend, is offered for the removal of slavery, by Christians at the north, clergymen and laymen? Is it presented by "every minister in the sanctuary, and every patriarch at the family altar?" I wish not to be suspicious, but I confess I

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cannot believe that such is the fact, and I would now respectfully inquire of such of my brethren as may condescend to read this letter, "if such is their practice?" I seldom hear the cause of the slave mentioned in the prayers of the sanctuary at the meetings of clerical associations. I have never heard any but an abolitionist, mention his condition, among those who occasionally preach in my own pulpit. I do not suppose that the omission is intentional; but does it not show that there is not such an habitual feeling against the sin of slavery as you suppose. I hope our brethren will reflect upon this subject, if they are guilty of it. I should expect to see a different state of things in reference to measures, if the course you recommend was universally adopted. If we all, clergy and laity, prayed for the slave, we should *feel* more for him; we should be led to inquire, with more anxiety about the best mode of action in his behalf. Matthew Henry says, "Praying will make men leave off sinning, or sinning will make them leave off praying." One word in the close of the letter upon a paragraph in yours in which you say, "The influence we are to exert on the south, must be wholly *persuasive*, wholly by the presentation of opinion, of argument and of kind wishes." In this I fully agree; but persuasion may consist in telling men of their sins. The apostle says, "knowing the terrors of the Lord, we *persuade* men." If we would induce the *Christian* slaveholder to renounce the system, we must convince him of the sin of his conduct.— We may be as kind and gentle in our intercourse with him as we can; but still we must not by our kind and gentle terms lead him to believe that he can retain his relation to his slaves and not offend God. We must show him the guilt of holding men as chattels. We must "beseech him by the mercies of God," to put away the evil of his doings, and learn to do well; to seek

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judgement and deliver the oppressed." It is necessary sometimes to set the iniquity of men before their eyes in the strongest light, that they may give their attention to it. The cords by which God draws his children, are cords of love; but these cords often cut to the quick before men will be drawn by them. I do not plead for the harsh and violent language in which some abolitionists clothe their addresses. I think it is better to avoid it, but we must take care not to "sow pillows to the arm holes" of slaveholders, that they may continue at ease, and hold fast their iniquity. Enough of this has already been done, and the system of slavery has increased from year to year. I hope I have none but kind feelings for the slaveholder; I think I would not abuse or injure him in any way. If I should be thrown into his society and the subject of slavery should be introduced, I would declare it to be what you have termed it, "the monstrous offspring and curse of sin."

Very respectfully, yours,

S. OSGOOD.

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