

From the Boston Recorder.

Courtesy of the Museum of Springfield History, Springfield, MA
DR. OSGOOD'S LETTERS.—No. 7.

TO THE REV. RALPH EMERSON, D. D.
Professor in the Theological Seminary at
Andover.

Dear Brother—In my last letter I endeavored to show that a real pro-slavery party had existed at the north. I might have produced much more copious evidence to establish such a sentiment, if it had been necessary. I also endeavored to show that it was from the acts and writings of this party and not from the accusations of the abolitionists alone, or even mainly, that the southern politicians draw their conclusions, "that every sensible man at the north agrees with them" on the subject of slavery. In your 7th letter, you acknowledge the correctness of this opinion; for speaking of the charges which the abolitionists have preferred against their opponents you say, "these charges have rolled on wave after wave, to the south. And there they have found men with hearts willing enough to believe them—not indeed as charges, but as joyful proofs of what before they could not have hoped, proofs that they had not only real friends at the north, but friends who were becoming prepared to support their principles. All this could not at once be believed. But hearing it continually repeated, and that by men whose strongest interest it was to maintain the contrary, and no formal refutation following it; and finding our publications teeming with opposition to the abolitionists; and finding us, too, as they met with individuals, spending most of our ardor against what we suppose *improper measures* for the removal of slavery, and but little of it against slavery itself, (a sad fault of ours, I confess, and one which I deem myself happy in now incidentally attempting to cure,) witnessing all this I say, we ought not to be surprised at finding such assertions believed extensively by such men." This is an ingenuous confession, and shows that your real object in writing on this subject was to elicit truth, and not to put the abolitionists in the back ground. I thank you sincerely for your candor, and will endeavor to imitate it as far as my warmer temperament will permit. Yes Sir, it is the contemptuous language which has been used towards the abolitionists, by re-

spectable men at the north which has so greatly misled the people of the south.—
While I do not justify the bold and uncourteous expressions with which abolitionists have treated the *pro-slavery party*, in their turn, I cannot agree with you that it has injured our cause to bring out the real state of the case. “*Fiat Justitia.*” We have fully believed that there existed a strong *pro-slavery* spirit at the north, among many of the most respectable men in every department of society; or (if you like the term better,) a spirit which is averse to have any thing done, which will disturb the slaveholders in the quiet enjoyment of their “domestic institutions.” I fully believe that all this mutual *crimination and recrimination*, which is certainly wrong on both sides, has brought the whole subject of slavery before the public in such a light, that men will thoroughly understand it, and will never be lulled to sleep again until “every bond is broken.” In the charges which have been preferred by the abolitionists against the whole body of the “non-conformists,” (as you call them,) injustice has doubtless been done to many worthy men, who like yourself sincerely hate slavery, but cannot go with the organized anti-slavery party. These charges have been too sweeping, and have rested often on too slender foundations. This has certainly been the fact in reference to many of the clergy. And it was from this conviction that I attempted their viindication at the convention. Hence my remark that they were “bound to strike out some new plan.” I wished to see these brethren, with as many of the members of their churches as they could persuade to go with them, *do something* towards emancipation. So far as my individual influence has extended, I have *discouraged* any separate organization; but still I would not oppose one, if formed. I wish to see the friends of universal emancipation embodied, and to see them putting forth united efforts. This *angry* discussion which has been carried on by the abolitionists and their opposers, has not been without beneficial results, both at the north and at the south. It has led multitudes at the north to examine the merits of the controversy, and to take sides with the abolitionists. This has especially been the case extensively in reference to what is called the middle class in society; a class which may properly be called the “bone and sinew” of New England, embracing our most intelligent, sober, and pious farmers, and mechanics. It is very common for the *pro-slavery* journals to speak of abolitionists as

an ignorant, enthusiastic, narrow-minded, contemptible and factious set of men, who wish to bring themselves into notice by disturbing the harmony of society. I shall not attempt a refutation of these charges, but leave all those who are willing to be duped by these hirelings of slaveholders, to their own delusions. I am very certain that they will ere long find out their mistake. Nor has this discussion been without some benefits to the south.

Many slaveholders have been led to examine the system anew, and to inquire into the justice of holding their fellow men as *property*, and they have been convinced of the sinfulness of their course and are prepared to act with us, whenever their political shackles can be shaken off. I venture the prediction, that as soon as slavery and the slave trade are abolished in the District of Columbia, abolition societies will spring up in most of the slave States, and that universal emancipation will soon follow. Besides; many of the profoundest politicians of the south have been led to inquire into the real state of things at the north. For several months past they have suspected that they have been deceived as to the real designs of abolitionists, and as to their ability to accomplish their design. The correspondence between Mr. Elmore and Mr. Birney shows that the southern men do not fully credit the assertions of their pro-slavery friends about the abolitionists. Mr. Rhett's letter to his constituents is to the same effect. They are calling for anti-slavery publications, and introducing the controversy in their own papers. They have heretofore wished to put a stop to this discussion at the north. They were aware that slavery would not bear examination; that the abstract injustice of the system would strike every candid and virtuous mind as soon as it became a matter for comment, and that the atrocities connected with the practice would fill every human bosom with horror the moment they were dragged

into view. For a considerable period their wishes were seconded by the most influential men at the north. I will not impeach the motives of these men. I can believe that many of these men honestly thought that the discussion would be attended with unhappy consequences, and having imbibed such an idea, it was natural enough that they should endeavor to prevent it. But it has been found a vain thing to attempt to drive men from maintaining their inalienable rights. The discussion has proceeded, not always in the best temper, we admit, but truth has been brought out and principles have been thoroughly examined, and I have no doubt on which side victory will ultimately settle. And since the discussion of the subject cannot be prevented, southern men begin to manifest a desire to know what is going forward in the anti-slavery ranks. It would be agreeable to my feelings if all who speak in public or who write for the public journals would use less offensive language than we sometimes see. But this is scarcely to be expected when we consider what human nature is. The subject itself is exciting, and many suffer their feelings to carry them beyond the bounds of courtesy and kindness in the warmth of controversy. But we ought not to use "hoied expressions" when treating of the abominations of slavery itself, and if men will persist in the practice, they ought not to be offended when spoken of in the terms which the word of God uses when describing their conduct. In several of your letters you assert that a moral influence is all which we can hope to bring to bear upon the south, to induce them to abolish slavery. This point you urge particularly in your 7th letter; and your arguments based upon this assertion, are cogent, and are designed to point out the error of the abolitionists in taking measures which are calculated to destroy the "kind feelings" of slaveholders towards them, and to prejudice their minds against all sober arguments which they i. e. the abolitionists, might otherwise present, with a fair prospect of doing them good.

If you mean that the abolitionists do not expect that slavery will ever be abolished by physical force, you are certainly correct. But I do not know that they have ever conceded the point that "the south is the real focus where all moral influence must ultimately centre, in order to do any good at all in the removal of slavery from this coun-

try." We wish indeed to have all our movements exert a moral influence over the slaveholders. We think that they have already exerted such an influence over many minds at the south. But, Sir, we cannot admit that the slave States are the only field where our moral warfare is to be prosecuted with success. Mr. Preston regarded the District of Columbia as the "citadel" which guarded their institutions, and therefore he would prevent the abolitionists from "crossing the float" which surrounded it. He is a shrewd and keen sighted politician, and he knows that whenever slavery and the slave trade shall be abolished, then it will be impossible for the States to hold on long upon their "domestic institutions." Now, Sir, the abolitionists have all long felt that the moral influence of their principles must first be exerted upon the non-slaveholding States. "It is for this purpose," to use your own language, "that the abolitionists are now spending their \$40,000 a year to melt down and recast the material of northern influence," to act not directly upon the south, but upon Congress. You say, "the focus of influence for British abolitionists was the British Parliament, a place in the midst of them, and thus forming a perfect contrast to our case as to most of the measures to be pursued." How is this a perfect contrast? May not our Congress form "a focus of influence" for American abolitionists, so far as the District of Columbia, and the territories are concerned? Give us a law of Congress abolishing slavery thus far, and it is all the political action we will ask for. The abolitionists generally concede that Congress has no power to act upon the subject within the States. "In England," you say, "the ballot box was of great avail, both in showing the state of sentiment and in the exertion of direct power." And why cannot the ballot box be of as good avail with us? I believe that the abolitionists are determined to try it, and if their opponents of the different political parties complain that they make it a political question, let them see to it; let them select candidates for office who possess the genuine spirit of their Pilgrim fathers, and who will engage to "undo the heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free." When a genuine moral influence upon this subject shall pervade "every son of freedom at the north," our representatives in Congress will not consent that a gag shall be put in their mouths by the slaveholders, so that they cannot speak upon this "exciting subject." You may

expect to hear from me once more, for I do not wish to be outdone in courtesy by you, however I may be in argument. After, if you have ought to say by way of rejoinder, I will listen with profound respect and with deep interest; and if I have either misapprehended or mis-stated any thing you have written, I will readily correct or retract it. And if you think that a continuation of the discussion will be of any service to the community, I am willing to devote such portions of my time to it as I may be able to spare from other important duties.

Yours sincerely,

S. OSGOOD.