GEORGE BARRELL CHEEVER PROTAGONIST OF ABOLITION

Religious Emotionalism the Underlying Factor in the Causes of the Civil War

BY GEORGE I. ROCKWOOD[1]

THE extirpation of African slavery from our Continent through agencies incited thereto, primarily, by moral factors was not only a monumental but almost a unique achievement in the history of civilization. Economic considerations, to be sure, were advanced by Richard Henry Lee as early as the year 1759, when he warned his fellow Virginians not only of the moral but of the economic danger of any longer permitting the African trade, thus anticipating by a hundred years the identical but much elaborated argument of Hinton Rowan Helper, of North Carolina, to the same effect; but neither of these warnings, based on economic dangers, had anything to do with causing the Civil War.

The Virginian leaders, Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Patrick Henry, George Mason and others left written records evincing their detestation of the evil of slavery as barbarous and unchristian, and reinforced their admonitory words by their consistency in actually manumitting their slaves. This attitude of these great leaders was often alluded to and played its part in the moral crusade carried on during the so-called "sentimental years" immediately preceding the war.

Certain distinct types of leaders co-operated, more or less unconsciously, in the work of stimulating these moral forces to the point at which they caused the final explosion. Of primary importance was the

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religious type, exemplified by the subject of these notes. To gain any realization of the force and effect of George Barrell Cheever's personality and of the impact of his moral leadership on the religious and, ultimately, on the political leaders of the period requires a glance not only at his biography but at the ideas which guided those leaders and resulted, on the one hand, in the election of Lincoln and, on the other, in the firing on Sumpter.

Historians have dealt sufficiently with such as were anti-slavery politicians. We have complete enough impressions of the parts played by the outstanding men, such as Webster, John Quincy Adams, Benton, Sumner, Stevens and others. Some of these men were, in their hearts, pure abolitionists; they lived and labored but to see slavery abolished—the sooner, the better. To them it was "the sum of all villainies" and they devoted their political energies to fighting it. Others were only theoretically anti-slavery. They desired to "wait and see," not being personally involved, not owning any Africans, not themselves suffering. They held the mistaken belief that, if they could oppose successfully the political efforts of the "wild men" of the South, who were seeking to maintain a balance of power with the anti-slavery North by introducing slavery into new states and territories, time would be on the side of the North in the fight to limit slavery to the territory it then occupied, because the free states were rapidly increasing in population and political power, while the South necessarily remained stationary, no white man wishing to settle there to compete with slaves. Either attitude led straight to the war, although each was by intention purely pacifistic.

The question arises, who, of all the leaders in the North, during the nineteenth century anti-war years, really contributed to develop the vote to the proportions not only necessary to elect Lincoln but, afterwards, in a welter of inefficiently-made war, ruinous

expense and national tragedy, to enable him to hold out against the enemy and against foreign intervention through emancipation, to final victory? Some of the politicians helped, but the backbone of the country was stiffened and the issue made by men who were not politicians.

Webster put in the sub-foundations supporting Lincoln's position when, in his reply to Hayne, he convinced the people that they were indeed a nation. Nullification was revolution. In this speech Webster appears as the great creative statesman, lawyer and orator, supporting in 1830, with an air of finality, the doctrine of the indivisibility of the Union as it had then come to be. "By forbidding secession he put *weapons* into the hands of every friend of the Union!"[1] Some seven years later his political prescience had cut much deeper. In his Niblo's Garden speech, in 1837, twenty-four years before its prophecy became fact, he solemnly warned the South of the spiritual dynamite lurking in its insolent and unlawful treatment of all conscientious objectors to the institution of slavery. Said he: "On the general question of Slavery, a great portion of the community is already strongly excited. The subject has not only attracted attention as a question of politics, but it *has struck a far deeper chord.* It has arrested the religious feeling of the country; it has taken strong hold on the consciences of men. He is a rash man indeed, and little conversant with human nature, and especially has he a very erroneous estimate of the character of the people of this country, who supposes that a feeling of this kind is to be trifled with or despised. It will assuredly cause itself to be respected. It may be reasoned with; it may be made willing—I believe it is entirely willing—to fulfill all existing engagements and all existing duties—to uphold and defend the Constitution as it is established, with whatever regrets about some provisions which it does actually contain. But to coerce it into

[1]Henry Cabot Lodge.

silence, to endeavor to restrain its free expression, to seek to compress and confine it, warm as it is, and more heated as such measures would inevitably make it—should this be attempted, I know nothing, *even in the Constitution or the Union itself*, which would not be endangered by the explosion which might follow." There spoke Webster the political seer; but the lawyers and business men of Lincoln's time underestimated the political—not to mention the military—potentiality of "the religious feeling of the country," especially in the South.

The foundations of the political anti-slavery movement proper, as also of its pro-slavery counterpoise, were laid by the Puritan, John Quincy Adams—a great statesman, even greater parliamentarian; as courageous and insistent, however, as any abolitionist in baiting his Southern colleagues in the House, where, single-handed, he crystallized them into a continuous unity of opposition. Significant of his real mental attitude was his deliberate statement, made openly in the House, of his opinion that a civil war would afford a constitutional basis for freeing the slaves—as a war measure. What type of leader was Adams? In his great championship of the right of petition and of free debate in the House, as well as in his speeches and letters, he appears not merely as a politician; he was a pure abolitionist. Those historians who deny this seem to be at fault. No "fanatic" ever produced, in his wildest flights of oratory, any condemnation of slavery, any more fervent prophecy of its final overthrow, excelling in inclusiveness and virulence of denunciation that contained in a letter written by him in 1838 to abolitionists of the "fanatical" variety in Boston; a letter which has been in the possession of the writer for the last forty-five years, and is as follows:

Edmund Quincy, Esq. of Boston

DEAR SIR Quincy, 28 July, 1838.

I have received your kind invitation in behalf of the Committee of Arrangements of the Massachusetts State Anti-

Slavery Society to attend their celebration of the Anniversary of the day upon which Slavery was abolished in the Colonial Possessions of Great Britain.

It would give me pleasure to comply with this invitation, but my health is not very firm; my voice has been affected by the intense heat of the Season, and a multiplicity of applications from Societies political and literary to attend and address their meetings have imposed upon me the necessity of pleading the privilege of my years and declining them all.

I rejoice that the defence of the cause of human Freedom is falling into younger and more vigorous hands—That in three score years from the day of the Declaration of Independence its self-evident truths should be yet struggling for existence against the degeneracy of an age pampered with prosperity and languishing into servitude, is a melancholy truth, from which I should in vain attempt to shut my eyes—But the summons has gone forth. The youthful Champions of the rights of human nature, have buckled on their armour, and the scurging overseer, and the Lynching Lawyer, and the Servile Sophist, and the faithless Scribe, and the priestly parasite will vanish before them like Satan, touched by the Spear of Ithurel—I live in the Faith and Hope of the progressive advancement of Christian Liberty, and expect to abide by the same in death—You have a glorious though arduous career before you, and it is among the consolations of my last days, that I am able to cheer you in the pursuit and exhort you to be stadfast and immovable in it. So shall you not fail whatever may betide, to reap a rich reward, in the blessing of him that is ready to perish upon your Soul.

I am, Dear Sir, faithfully your friend and servt

J. Q. Adams

The "youthful champions of human rights" had indeed buckled on their armor and were off in full cry. Henceforth the fight against slavery was continuously waged, by "fanatics," editors, pulpiteers and politicians, until its victorious end.

Of course, many other forces affected the antislavery issue besides those having to do with morals, justice and the Constitution. Webster said that the *opposition* to abolition was based on just one thing—cotton. The cotton and other kinds of north-south trade undoubtedly were back of the recalcitrance of the North as well as of the South. The new transcontinental railroads carried immigrants in astonishing

numbers to people the West with voters opposed almost to a man to slavery; northern industrial voters' fear of being degraded by slave labor contributed to the Republican cause; the tariff bill had already developed the idea of secession in the Southern head; and so on. But underlying and permeating all these matters was that fundamental force, that continual disturber of the conscience of every decent intelligent voter, North or South; that spiritual idea launched thirty-one years before the war, seven years before Webster's Niblo's Garden speech, by William Lloyd Garrison in his *Liberator*—the idea which through that paper first became a definite factor in politics—the purely religious idea that the maintenance of slavery was a *sin,* which followed from the fact that slave-holders were sinners, being men-stealers and kid-nappers; and that therefore all law, constitutional or otherwise, based on any agreement to continue slavery was wrong; hence emancipation became the first duty of the country, at whatever cost.

Most historians, although keeping in mind the fact that this issue, thus raised, dominated the political and social life of the nation during those thirty-one years, really pay grudging and contemptuous attention to either the man or the idea. Garrison seems to them to be merely an historical irritant, and is given scant credit as the man who made the issue and pushed the idea which cemented together the elements of the Republican party and elected Lincoln; but that is what he was. During all of that controversy there were those who, holding what the infamous Dr. Ross, pro-slavery Southern clergyman, classified as the "toleration" theory of slavery, tried to quiet Garrison's agitation by stigmatizing him and the members of his organization as a set of impractical reformers, Don Quixotes tilting at windmills. Their example seems to have carried over into our times and to have infected modern historians. For instance, James Ford Rhodes blandly says: "The work of Garrison and his disciples

between 1831 and 1840, in arousing the conscience of the nation had borne good fruit; but"—that is, by 1840—"that work was done." His own subsequent words refute this statement. He had but just said that at the time Lincoln was nominated, Garrison and Phillips were still "far in the vanguard of public opinion" and goes on to say: "Yet it was better for the cause that Garrison and Phillips wrought outside of the Republican party." Also "it was a frequent charge of Southerners that Garrison and Phillips were apostles whom Republicans delighted to honor" (although in the Republican literature) "we see long explanations and emphatic denials that Republicans are abolitionists." Rhodes further said "It would be historical dogmatism to say that if Garrison had not lived, the Republicans would not have succeeded in 1860." In the next breath he says: "It was due to Garrison and his associates that slavery became a topic of discussion at every Northern fireside. Those who had heard the new doctrine gladly tried to convince their family and friends; those who were but half convinced wished to vanquish their doubts or have put to rest the rising suspicion that they were partners in a great wrong; those who stubbornly refused to listen could not fail to feel that a new force had made its appearance with which a reckoning must be made. Slavery could not bear examination. To describe it was to condemn it. There was a certain fitness, therefore, in the demand of the Southerners that the discussion of slavery in any shape should be no longer permitted in the North."

"But," he continues, "in what a state of turpitude the North would have been if it had not bred abolitionists. If the abolitionists had not prepared the way, *how would the political rising of 1854-60 against the slave power have been possible?* . . . By stirring the national conscience they made possible the formation of a political party whose cardinal principle was opposition to the extension of slavery, *and whose*

reason for existence lay in the belief that slavery was wrong." So we do come out after all, on the fundamental necessity to the Republican party of Garrison's agitation, based on the Law of God!

Religious emotionalism was the "leaven which leavened the lump" of political activity in America in the years before the war; the one universal factor common to all the voters, rich and poor. Although a secret, uncontrollable and imponderable force, it was the mightiest which could be evoked to control social action, either in America or in England. Webster did not magnify its overshadowing political importance when aroused, as compared with that of economics, the Constitution, preservation of the Union, or any other force whatever. No one can read much of the private correspondence between persons who wrote during the first half of the nineteenth century without realizing its weight. Evangelical Christianity—and some Unitarianism—were diffused all over this country and among the common people of the manufacturing districts of England as well. He who could profoundly influence that religious emotionalism in dealing with the sinfulness of such a political matter as slavery and in such a country as the United States, which had grown from a Puritan beginning and was founded upon the ideas of personal, political and religious freedom, must necessarily have weilded an enormous political power. Probably he could do much the same thing today under a sufficient stimulus.

Many Southerners of the finest type felt the pressure of religious and moral objections to their "peculiar institution." It must not be overlooked that the Army of Northern Virginia—which did most of the successful fighting on the part of the South—was a very religious army, being permeated with the spirit of its commander, General Robert E. Lee. Lee was himself a hater of slavery because it threatened the integrity of the Union. He left the United States army to go to the aid of Virginia, his native soil. In religion he was

an ardent "fundamentalist," as also was "Stonewall" Jackson. As much, however, can hardly be said of any of the prominent Southern politicians who maintained the struggle for the ascendency of the Slave States in the government at Washington and then maneuvered the South into war. Of them John Quincy Adams wrote in his diary—Sept. 1, 1837—"It is also to be considered that at this time the most dangerous of all subjects for public contention is the slavery question. In the South it is a perfect agony of conscious guilt and terror, attempting to disguise itself under sophistical argumentation and braggart menaces."

The following quotation from an article in the *Savannah Georgian*, 1835, shows the realization of the slave-holders that they were condemned by the best element in the North: "Find a community in the Free States remarkable for quiet, decorous, industrious habits, and religious devotion and the probability is that there will be found, not perhaps anti-slavery clamor, but anti-slavery feeling in its deepest intensity—these are the men who hate slavery because they believe it to be sinful." Again, "Were the votaries of abolition (we mean not politicians who trade in fanaticism) base and unprincipled, low and degraded men, we should have little to fear from their hostility. But this is not the fact. The strongholds of abolitionism are not the cities, with their vices, but the rural districts with their sober, serious, moral and religious population. It is among this class that anti-slavery is running wild and rampant. And sad to say, the conservatism which remains in the North is found in her commercial marts and is kept alive by the profits of the Southern Trade."

In 1850, Calhoun expressed his conviction that a political separation of the free from the slave states was imminent, basing his expectation principally on the fact that three great churches had each already split into two sections—Northern and Southern.

The clearest and fairest statement to be found in the Southern press of the anxiety of Southerners to be morally justified in their support of slavery is, perhaps, the editorial in the *Richmond Enquirer*, re-printed in the *Anti-Slavery Advocate* (London, pg. 402, Oct. 1, 1856) parts of which are as follows:

"The Democrats of the South in the present canvass cannot rely on the old grounds of defense and excuse for slavery; for they seek not merely to retain it where it is but to extend it into regions where it is unknown. Much less can they rely on the mere constitutional guarantee of slavery, for such reliance is pregnant with the admission that slavery is wrong, and but for the Constitution should be abolished. This constitutional argument for slavery standing alone, fully justifies the abolitionists. They are clearly right if slavery be morally wrong; for to get rid of it under the Constitution or by amending the Constitution is confessedly impractical.

"In truth the Constitution cannot help slavery if it be a violation of the laws of God and of morality. In that case the Constitution should be changed, or, the free states should secede, rather than continue to guarantee what they consider immoral and profane.... For if slavery be not a legitimate, useful, moral and expedient institution, we cannot, without reproof of conscience and the blush of shame, seek to extend it, or assert our equality with those states having no such institution."

Does not the foregoing admission by the editor of one of the principal Southern newspapers fully justify the position of Garrison, relative to the legal necessity of separating the North politically from the South?

In the North, a prominent clergyman, the Rev. Albert Barnes, speaking before the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1857, asserted the power of religious emotionalism in the United States when he said "There was no power outside of the churches which could sustain slavery for a day if it were not

sustained within them." In corroboration of his assertion, there is the striking case of the Rev. Samuel May, of Syracuse, a prominent abolitionist preacher, who stated that in 1859 "every individual elected to office, in his district, to the municipality of Syracuse, the legislature at Albany and the Congress at Washington belonged to his own congregation and had been influenced in their views by him—a proof of what might be done by a faithful minister."

It goes without saying that the enormous influence of Horace Greeley and the *Tribune* was based on his personal conviction that slavery was a sin. "We believe it to be a sin to hold men in bondage, and we, therefore, believe it to be a sin to bring them from Africa for the purpose of enslaving them," he said, in an editorial in the *Tribune*, Dec. 16, 1857.

Charles Sumner's attitude was based frankly on the Bible. He "preached"—the report says—before the Anti-Slavery Society, in the New York Metropolitan Theatre, with a capacity house of four thousand, repeated his sermon in Beecher's Church and again in Nibloe's Theatre.

Henry Ward Beecher stood firmly on anti-slavery ground. Indeed, he went to Brooklyn from the West and formed his church for that very purpose, campaigning for Fremont until his voice gave out. He bought slaves sitting beside him on the pulpit platform, raising the necessary money by dramatic and emotional appeals to his congregation, and he occasionally wrote on the subject for the *Independent*, to which he and Cheever were for several years contributing editors. His speeches and personality constituted a tremendous influence furthering the cause of anti-slavery. In 1863 he undoubtedly saved this country from a war with England by his speeches—almost purely sociological—delivered in London, Liverpool, and other English and Scottish cities, although in 1860 Cheever preached anti-slavery sermons in London, Edinburgh and the midland cities, and thereby did

heavy service in preparing the ground for Beecher's subsequent visit.

Lincoln must have known all about the Garrison agitation. The beliefs of both men as to the sinfulness of slavery were identical. Each had their eyes fixed on "the frontier which eternally separates right from wrong." Although not, by acknowledgment, an idealist, but a practical—a very practical—politician, Lincoln's entire political life nevertheless revolved around his idealistic inner attitude towards slavery. His soul revolted at his experience of it in his early rafting trips down the Mississippi. He said in his Peoria speech, "Slavery is founded on the selfishness of man's nature—opposition to it on his love of justice." He was nominated and elected on the ground of his speeches in the Douglas debate and in Cooper Union, in which from beginning to end he talked solely about slavery. Was it a *right* thing or a *wrong* thing? That is, was it or was it not a *sin?*

In his Cooper Union speech, Lincoln pointed out that no act, whatever its nature, on the part of the North would satisfy the South except "this, and this only: cease to call Slavery *wrong* and join them in calling it *right.*" . . . "Douglass' new sedition law must be enacted and enforced, suppressing all declarations that slavery is wrong, whether made in politics, in presses, in pulpits, or in private" . . . "If one's sense of duty forbids this, then let us stand by our duty, fearlessly and effectively. Let us be diverted by none of these sophistical contrivances such as groping for some middle ground between right and wrong, vain as the search for a man who should be neither a living man nor a dead man—such as a policy of 'don't care'—such as Union appeals beseeching true Union men to yield to Disunion, reversing the divine rule, and calling not sinners but the righteous to repentance." It may be said here that, holding such clear-cut ethical and scriptural views as to the sinfulness of slavery, Lincoln's subsequent official attitude as President for nearly two

years after his election, towards emancipation, must have seemed, up to the very moment of its proclamation, as truly astonishing to his contemporaries as the abolitionists thought it. Garrison himself, in spite of having preached disunion, was arrested by these words, and four years later—when the war had commenced—thought it worth while to be quiet and see what Lincoln would do with the idea of emancipation, as revealed in the following statesmanlike and hitherto unpublished letter, for many years in the writer's possession.

Boston, Sept. 9, 1861.

DEAR MR. CHEEVER:

I have delayed answering your letter till now, because I wished to lay your proposition for a national Anti-Slavery Convention, in relation to the war, before the Executive Committee of the American A. S. Society. They held a meeting, a day or two since, and considered the matter in the most friendly and deliberate manner. The conclusion to which they unanimously came was, that such a Convention, called by the parties and persons suggested by you, "prounced abolitionists," would be more likely to excite popular prejudice at this crisis, and thus to damage a movement for the abolition of slavery under the war power, than to do good. So long as the government is in direct and deadly conflict with the Slave Power, it seems to us the part of wisdom to avoid conspicuity as radical abolitionists in convention assembled, and to merge ourselves, as far as we can without a compromise of principle, in the onward sweeping current of Northern sentiment.

In order, however, to further the grand object you have in view,—namely, persuading the government to put an end to slavery as the only feasible method of terminating the war, and rendering a true peace possible,—consultations are going on in this city with reference to the best method of influencing "the powers that be," on this particular subject. We are to have another conference tomorrow afternoon at Dr. Howe's office, at which your brother, Dr. Cheever, will probably be present; so that, through him, doubtless, you will be apprised of the precise scope of the new movement, which contemplates a wide use of the newspaper press in the publication of able and telling articles, simultaneously, printed on slips, and sent privately for insertion—all bearing upon the extinction of slavery by the exercise of the war power: and also contemplates the circulation of a memorial for signatures, with the same

object in view, to be presented at the opening of the next Congress.

The real difficulty lies in the case of the so-called loyal slaveholders. How are they to be propitiated, and satisfactorily disposed of? Cannot Congress be asked to give them a pecuniary equivalent for their slaves, *as a conciliatory measure,* without recognizing or implying the right of property in man? That is a question for grave consideration. If we can devise a petition, which all but the inveterately pro-slavery can sign, no doubt an immense number of signatures can be obtained, and this will greatly aid and strengthen the government in the right direction. Events, however, may render even this spur unnecessary.

Yours, with warm regards,
WM. LLOYD GARRISON.

Rev. Henry T. Cheever.
(Brother of George B. Cheever)

Lincoln really based his determination to issue the Emancipation Proclamation on his moral conclusion that slavery was a wrong thing. The Proclamation itself, however, he was under the necessity of defending on the ground of its military necessity if the Union were to be preserved. He judged that the time had come, although General McClellan had warned him that an abolition policy would disintergrate the armies in the field. Even the most stupid had come to see that slavery was the backbone of the rebellion. "Without slavery the rebellion could never have existed—without slavery it could not continue" said Lincoln in justification of his act. Profoundly convinced that slavery and the Union could not survive together, Lincoln realized from the beginning that the extinction of slavery was as necessary to a restored Union as the winning of battles; but the political necessity must legally wait on the appearance of the military necessity and he alone had the legal right to be the judge of when that time had come.

We of today, who are so drugged with modernism of all kinds that we would hardly recognize a moral issue if we saw it, can with difficulty realize the portentous power of the highly-reverenced clergy of that

time in forming public opinion on such an issue. As these notes proceed, an extraordinary instance of the exercise of such a power by such a man will be presented, in which the Supreme Judicial Court and the Chief Justice of the United States himself were unsparingly and unqualifiedly condemned, defied, and held up to the scorn of all honest and religious men in the most public manner possible—with absolutely no recoil on the head of the abolitionist concerned. A New York pro-slavery religious journal, *The Observer*, commented: "He ought to be hung." His only defense was "Thus saith the Lord."

George Barrell Cheever, the one referred to above, and Henry Ward Beecher were, for a while, the only clergymen of prominence in the New York district to hold and preach publicly the sin of slavery. Many others who undertook to do it had lost their pulpits as a consequence. It is probable that the activities of both men were essential to the election of Lincoln; for, before that vote was taken, their high character and powerful preaching—especially Cheever's—were effective enough to dominate, outlast and finally convict the "dough faces" of the religious journals and personnel of the religious organizations centering there and ramifying the country, of the folly and wickedness of their attempts to straddle the issue; and the anti-slavery cement which held the Republican party together was religious in its nature and depended upon religious leadership for its continuance.

Who was George Barrell Cheever? One cannot find out by consulting the works of the historians, the encyclopedias, or even any but the most recent biographies, which contain the barest sketches, giving but a hint of the great part he actually played in the final stages of the history of that period. There exists a voluminous correspondence between members of his family, dating from before 1800 to 1890. This correspondence affords a complete picture, not only of the quality of George Barrell Cheever, but of his sister,

Elizabeth Bancroft Cheever (Washburn), his brothers, Dr. Nathaniel Cheever and Henry Theodore Cheever, and their mother, Charlotte Barrell (Cheever); also of the religious background of men's lives during that period.

George was born in Maine, April 17, 1807, the son of Nathaniel and Charlotte (Barrell) Cheever, at Hallowell, on the banks of the Kennebec. Nathaniel Cheever, his father, was a printer who learned the art of printing from Isaiah Thomas in Worcester, living at the time with his uncle, Rev. Aaron Bancroft, and throughout his life was of high repute for his integrity, energy and force of character. Nathaniel died when George, the oldest child, was twelve years old.

The mother, Charlotte Barrell Cheever, was born of Nathaniel Barrell and Sarah Sayward, at York, Maine. The father, Nathaniel Barrell, a man of intelligence, firmness and strength of principle, was one of the chosen delegates from the District of Maine, in the Massachusetts Convention at Boston that adopted the United States Constitution. His forcible speech in favor of its ratification is found in the printed volume of the debate thereon. An English ancestor of note was said to be Major John Barrell, of Cromwell's Regiment, the Ironsides. The mother, Charlotte Barrell Cheever, was one of a long line of Barrells who have lived for over two hundred years in the Barrell homestead at York, Maine.

Cheever's life, outlook and character were the products of the training he received in his boyhood in Hallowell, a place suffused with classical culture and the puritan spirit. It was the home of Mr. Benjamin Vaughan, LL.D., a cultivated Englishman, possessed of a rarity in those days—a considerable library, to which the Cheevers, intimates of the Vaughans, had access; a fact which, even in his boyhood, gave Cheever's mind a wide range.

He was educated at Hallowell Academy, at Bowdoin

College, and at Andover Theological Seminary, at all of which institutions he maintained a front-rank scholarship. At Bowdoin he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in the famous class of 1825 containing, among other notables, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Rev. John S. C. Abbott, William Hale, and Cilley, of the historic New Hampshire family, killed in a duel by Graves of Kentucky, the first congressional victim of the strife of the North and South; in college with him, too, was Russwurm, the first educated colored man, afterwards governor of Liberia. Abbott, his fellow townsman and classmate, both at Bowdoin and Andover, said of Cheever "that while pure in lip and life, intelligent, cheerful, amiable, he was firm in his decisions and steadfast in principles as the everlasting hills, polite and genial without devoting himself to any intimate friend." He was distinguished for the universality of his reading. Stowe's comment was "it is fifty dollars damage to the college to have any theme assigned to Cheever to write upon, for he examines every book on every shelf to see if by any possibility he can find a sentence which throws light upon the subject." Such was the influence of his parents—especially his mother—and of the times in forming his mental and spiritual habits, that the text of the Bible became a part of him; whatever he did and felt he related directly to it. Practically every waking moment there bubbled up in his mind a sub-conscious stream of Old and New Testament quotations, so that he scarcely ever in his life wrote a single letter, sermon, pamphlet or book on any subject without incorporating something from religion or the Scriptures. He passed through the Seminary at Andover, the same intense and rather solitary student as in college. "He studied Isaiah and the Prophets, mastering the original Hebrew poetry—with admiration of the moral and physical courage that enabled them to denounce individual and national sins, regardless of the dangers of obloquy, the burning flame, the

lion's paw or of being sawn asunder." His religion, though narrow in the modern sense, was real and deep. In his moral and physical courage and in the dedication of his life to God, to the denunciation of sins, and to saving individual sinners, his contemporaries felt him to be the equal of the prophets. He believed that his own life and the lives of those he could influence ought to conform to all that was set forth in the Bible; certainly the cultivation of his mind, heart and character seemed as fully attuned to this purpose as those of any person who ever lived. While in the theological seminary, and during his ministry at Salem, where he was ordained pastor of the Howard Street Congregational Church in 1832, he was a frequent contributor, in poetry and prose, to the *American Monthly Magazine*, the *United States Literary Gazette*, the *North American Review*, the *Quarterly Christian Spectator*, the *Quarterly Register*, the *Spirit of the Pilgrims*, and the *Bible Repository*. His extended reviews of the character and writings of Edmund Burke, of Lowth's "Isaiah," and of the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, an article on Greek literature and its study, and a Review of the Policy of Government in the Removal of the Georgia Indians, attracted much attention when they appeared. After carrying on vigorously a theological controversy with the Unitarians, he espoused the Temperance Reform with characteristic warmth and energy, at a time when distilling was as respectable a business as any other. He roused the town, state and the whole country by his vigorous and clever attack entitled "Inquire at Amos Giles' Distillery." He had the honor to be assaulted in the street, to be tried, fined, and imprisoned. This gave him a great hold on the public notice and affection. His own defense in court, addressed to the Chief Justice, was printed and extensively circulated as one of the Temperance Tracts for the times. The whole affair has become historic.

In 1833, at the age of 26, while still at Salem, he

emitted his first blast against the sin of slavery. "For a series of years he remained comparatively silent, because the slave power had beaten a truce, and hopes were everywhere entertained that the monster would become reduced in strength and ultimately die out. No sooner had the terms of that truce been clearly violated, and all kindly compromise scouted, than Dr. Cheever opened the batteries of God's Word, and proclaimed the withering denunciations of the Holy Prophets against its arrogance and assumption." (William Herries, Sept., 1860; one of the editorial writers of the *New York Tribune*.) The first time he preached against slavery as a sin, a number of prominent persons immediately bustled out of his church, thereby getting him and his subject into the newspapers and advertising widely his subsequent fulminations.

In the autumn of 1836 he resigned his charge and went to Europe to reinvigorate his somewhat impaired health. During his sojourn he corresponded at length with the New York *Observer* from Spain, France, Egypt, Turkey, Switzerland, Germany, England and Scotland. Immediately upon his return in the summer of 1839, at the age of 32, he was elected pastor of the Allen Street Presbyterian Church in New York. While engaged in his ministry there he delivered to crowded audiences in his church the "Lectures on the Pilgrim's Progress" and in the Broadway Tabernacle, in reply to a lecture by Archbishop Hughes, those on "Hierarchical Despotism," which evoked great enthusiasm. In the year 1843, the subject of capital punishment being under discussion in the daily and weekly press, he met in a public disputation, for three successive evenings at the Broadway Tabernacle, J. L. O'Sullivan, Esq. The debate was sustained with signal ability on both sides, in the hearing of full audiences, and it was fully reported by the New York press. The argument of Dr. Cheever was subsequently published in book form entitled, "A Defense of Capital Punishment," New York—M. W. Dodd—1842. In the

spring of 1844, his health having been considerably affected by his ministerial, literary and controversial engagements, he was given a release from his church and went again to Europe as corresponding editor of the New York *Evangelist.* During the following year that paper published his correspondence and after his return in 1845 he remained with it for more than a year as editor, contributing a great variety of able and independent articles—religious, literary, critical, theological, and political—which gave the *Evangelist* a high position. He married, in the autumn of 1845, Elizabeth H. Wetmore, daughter of Samuel Wetmore, Merchant, of New York, and on the 15th of May, 1846, was installed first pastor of the Congregational Church of the Puritans in New York City—a church which had been organized with a view to securing the ministrations of their author, as a sequel to his lectures on the Principles of the Puritans.

From the commanding position of the Church edifice on Union Square, and the high reputation of its pulpit for the freedom, thoroughness and eloquence with which it had interpreted the scriptures, in their application to popular sins and errors, this church took the lead in the metropolitan, if not the American, pulpit. Four things were noticeable in the ministry of Dr. Cheever;—First, his reverence for, and perfect rest in, the Bible independently of all dicta of men or schools in Theology; second, his faithfulness, persistency and thoroughness in applying its principles to human conduct and human institutions; third, his intense hatred of injustice and oppression, combined with his simple reliance upon the power of truth as he understood it, delivered with utter fearlessness of the consequences to himself; fourth, his majestic elevation, like that of an old Hebrew prophet, in the region of principles, and his entire superiority to personalities, while hurling with a fiery energy the terrific thunders of God's Word at national and reigning sins, his courage and constancy only intensified and strength-

ened by the inevitable hostility awakened by such a course. Intemperance, in its citadels and at its fountains,—Sabbath desecration by railroad corporations and Sunday mails,—the attempted ejection of the Bible from the common schools,—assumption and tyranny in Church and State,—Mammon-worship in all its forms, whether of commerce or cotton,—the Mexican War,—the treatment of the American aborigines,—the Fugitive Slave Law,—the Dred Scott Decision,—the system of American slavery,—the attempted revival of the African slave trade,—were all subjected by him to the searching tests of Scripture. He bravely used the pulpit of his church for these sermons in face of the interested and angry outcries against so-called political preaching from influential pew-holders.

The publicity which attended Cheever in all that he did, and which gave him his place in the history of his times, was partly the natural result of his eminence as a writer and preacher, but mainly flowed from his natural characteristics of positiveness and combativeness and from his peculiar and trenchant literary style. Early in his life he had studied the rhetorical method of Burke's speeches, had conceived an admiration for him and, no doubt, endeavored to follow him as a model. His words and sentences—far from being in the smooth, flowery, sentimental style of the times—were electrified and often seemed to crackle. His anti-slavery sermons created a deep impression wherever he gave them. Accounts are interspersed with such expressions as "Tremendous cheering"—"Immense cheering." Reading them, even now, one's muscles grow tense under the whip-lash of his scorn or the power-hammer of his denunciations. To get the full effect, whole series of sermons must be read, for which there is no space here; but as a partial exhibition of his style a few paragraphs, more or less connected, are given below, as they succeeded each other in an anti-slavery address in 1858, in which he treated of the

principal objection of moralists to slavery—including, however, its effects on the blacks as well as on the whites.

"The intensity of the plague with us, the exasperation and strength of the iniquity and the evil, are in the propositions for its perpetuity and the insurances of its increase. Not content with enduring it ourselves, for one generation, we have by law entailed it upon others; and the generations to come, as God distributes the consequences, must inevitably rise up and call each preceding generation accursed. If this sin had a possible death, like that of intemperance in the grave of the present drunkard, and were not propagated by a legal fatalism forbidding it to die out, or to be renounced, or the will to be broken—a legal fatalism and missionary zeal united, providing future victims for it in the fastest ratio of increase in human population—then would the evil be comparatively trifling, and the sin would speedily come to an end. But there is no such limit, no such natural consumption or wearing out, no such release by death; the evil and the sin are carefully secured *against* death, and injected, as the heart's blood, into the veins of the next generation, and any attempt to stop the process, throws the whole system into convulsions.

"We practice the iniquity upon children, innocent children, the natives of our own land, unbought, unsold, unpaid for, without consultation or consent of father or mother, or the shadow of a permission from the Almighty; and they, the new-born babes of this system, are the compound interest year by year added to the sin and its capital, which thus doubles upon us in the next generation, and must treble in another. We make use of the most sacred domestic affections, of maternal, filial, and I was going to say, connubial love—but the system forbids, and I have to say *contubernal*—for such rapid and accumulating production of the iniquity, as shall be in some measure adequate to the demand. The whole family relation, the

whole domestic state, is prostituted, poisoned, turned into a misery-making machine for the agent of evil. What God meant should be the source and inspiration of happiness, becomes the fountain of sin and woe. The sacred names of husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, babe, become the exponents of various forces and values in the slave-breeding institute. And the whole perfection, completeness, and concentration of this creative power in this manufacturing interest, descends like a trip-hammer on the children, beating them from their birth into marketable articles, and stamping and sealing them as chattels, fore-doomed and fatalized to run till they wear out, as living spindles, wheels, activities of labor and productiveness in the same horrible system." The declarations in this sermon may be compared with a statement contained in a document published by the Presbyterian Synod of South Carolina and Georgia in 1833, declaring: "We are chained to a putrid carcase. It sickens and destroys us. We have a millstone about the necks of our society to sink us deep in the sea of vice. Our children are corrupting from their infancy, nor can we prevent it . . . nor is this influence confined to mere childhood. If that were all it would be tremendous. But it follows us into youth, manhood and old age. In all our intercourse with them (the slaves) we are undergoing a process of intellectual and moral deterioration, and it requires almost superhuman efforts to maintain a high standing either for intelligence or piety."

Cheever's fearlessness and single-mindedness which hark back to the eighteenth century—his holy scorn of compromises, exhibited at a time when the shivering financial, religious and political world around him was putting forth nothing but formulas of expediency and compromise, secured for his utterance the ear of the nation. Its power was felt and feared by hostile editors and politicians, while it buoyed and sustained the faint-hearted, but convinced, anti-slavery clergy whom it nerved to take a positive stand in their pulpits.

In all portions of the North the men of anti-slavery convictions were also "Evangelical Christians" or Unitarians, or else had been profoundly influenced by such, while their local opponents were business people who were trying, for business reasons, to maintain the status quo—and failed. This class of business persons, relatively small, was itself Christian and, as Rhodes points out, was very susceptible to the propaganda of the Christian anti-slavery preachers—of whom there were thousands, scattered through the towns and rural districts. Towards the last, town and country preachers became very influential. Some thirty-six Northern religious journals—including the converted *New York Evangelist*—were, at last, outspoken in their opposition to the extension of slavery to new states. Their ancient "hush! hush!" policy had given way to their indignation at the border-ruffian mass tactics of the slave power to force Kansas to accept a pro-slavery constitution; but the will to adopt this outspoken policy was induced in them mainly by the courageous and terrific preaching and editorial articles by Cheever. No one today can read his long line of articles contributed to the New York *Independent*—one in almost every number for several years before Lincoln's election—dealing successively with each new phase of the effort of the South to subdue the North, or his sermons delivered in his Church of the Puritans, without perceiving their outstanding importance as a major political influence.

He preached abolition on Sunday evenings in his Church of the Puritans, published his sermons in book and pamphlet form, and preached and lectured as far west as Milwaukee, in Pennsylvania, and up and down New England. Writing from Chicago to his brother in Worcester, he said that so far as requests were concerned, he could have preached there every night for a month, if he had had the time. In October, 1856, he delivered in the Academy of Music before an audience of 4000 persons, an address by invitation of a group of

gentlemen which included the names—attached to the request—of thirty-one leading New York men. The invitation was to present "the moral and religious aspects of the question of the extension of slavery in the United States and the criminality of such extension, fully argued before the public." Long after the war started he was invited to preach, and did preach, both in the United States Senate and in the House. His most advertised exploit was when he preached the fourth of a series of anti-slavery sermons which he had been delivering to crowded houses, Sunday evenings, in the Church of the Puritans. This discourse dealt with the Dred Scott Decision and was preached within a month of its appearance. He selected for his text—having been challenged to do it—the words from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, which has been, in all ages within the Christian Era, resorted to, to enforce obedience to authority: "The powers that be are ordained of God." The hostile newspaper reporter says: "He accepted the challenge and handled the matter with great skill, as is shown in the following report of his sermon:—" What the public did with this sermon illustrates ideally the power of the pulpit in those days. The New York papers, *Sun*, *Times*, *Herald* and *Tribune*, were politically very powerful. Of these, James Gordon Bennett's paper, the *Herald*, had much the largest circulation of any in the western world. The first page was reserved for foreign news, gathered from incoming steamships, and news of equal importance. One other page was devoted to important American news and one to editorials, etc. The rest of the eight-page paper carried small local news and advertisements. It was strongly for Buchanan, and pro-slavery. Dr. Cheever's sermon on the Dred Scott decision was printed on the front page, April 9, 1857, filling all six columns, to the exclusion of every other item, and also a column and a half on the reverse side, under the following caption: "Incitement to Revolution." "Religious onslaught on the Govern-

ment and Supreme Court of the United States." "Resistance to Tyrants is Obedience to God." "Maledictions Against Unjust Judges in General, and Chief Justice Taney and Associates in Particular." "Shall we have Civil War?" "Etc., Etc., Etc."

This exclusive use of the front page of a New York daily newspaper for a sermon was unique and unheard of, even in those days, and gave the sermon and Dr. Cheever an advertisement of miraculous proportions. It was followed by a long editorial in the same issue, entitled "Revolution in the Pulpit. The Higher Law Expounded and Proclaimed." The first paragraph states: "One of the most remarkable political discourses that has ever emanated from the pulpit in this city, where the preacher did not belong to the ultra rabid class of fanatics, was that preached by the Rev. Dr. Cheever in the Church of the Puritans last Sunday evening, a *verbatim* report of which we publish today.

"This excitement is evidently spreading, and in a few weeks we shall have the three thousand clergymen of New England all preaching in the most violent strain after the fashion of Cheever, and inculcating the duty of disobedience to old and young. The whole North will evidently be preached into rebellion against the highest Court in the country. Now, where is all this to lead? In what are these absurd and fanatical higher law doctrines of Mr. Wm. H. Seward and his religious and political supporters to result? Why, they can result in nothing else than the utter demoralization of the community, the annihilation of all respect for law and the rending to pieces of this republic. The flame, excited by a few fanatics and enthusiasts, is spreading, and will spread from *pulpit to pulpit* and in short time all the New England churches will avail themselves of this religious fanaticism; and agitation and dissension will enrap the country, and lead to the most deplorable results. . . They must be rebuked and put down. If not we will have four years of dissension

and agitation, to end, not improbably, in a terrible political revolution in 1860."

These sermons were listened to—says the editorial—by as large an audience as could gain admission into the church—audiences representing the most intelligent, enlightened and conservative classes of the community.

The editor of the *Herald* continued to publish long accounts of Dr. Cheever's troubles with a pro-slavery faction in his congregation, and to write editorials, bursting with alarm, on Cheever's position as a denouncer of the Buchanan government and of the Supreme Court, and pointing out the Republican victory just ahead. A few extracts follow: "all tending to show that the religious element of the slavery agitation in the next Presidential election will be a furnace seven times heated compared with the Northern crusade of the campaign of '56. It is but a week or two since that the Young Men's Christian Union of this city (which had excluded the agitation of slavery from its councils last fall, notwithstanding the universal excitement upon the subject) receded from this neutral ground and substantially volunteered its services in support of the great Northern coalition already mustering its legions for the terrible battle of 1860. Men are deluded who say there will be peace. Simultaneously with these religious movements the proceedings of the New York, Ohio and other Northern legislatures on the Dred Scott case give abundant warning of what is before us." An editorial in the *Herald*—April 30, 1857—quotes from the *Charleston* (S. C.) *Mercury* of April 21 as follows:

"The evidences of increased danger to the South, as enumerated in the *Mercury*, in the first of these two articles, are the narrow escape of Mr. Buchanan last November from crushing defeat by the vote of the North as against the South; the general repudiation throughout the north of the decision in the Dred Scott case; the popularity of Dr. Cheever's Sunday lectures;" etc., etc.

On May 15, 1859, Bennett says editorially: "And what are the chances for 1860? Mr. Buchanan will be withdrawn—Pennsylvania will be at sea; and the anti-slavery element of the North will, from present appearances, be stronger everywhere than at the last election. If the South should fly off into a purely Southern organization, and the reaction in the North may result in the nomination and election of Seward by the North, as against the South,—then the dreaded issue to the South of subjugation or secesssion will be made up." Further on he says: "Abolitionism Rampant—Bedlam Broke Loose—The anniversary proceedings of the last few days in this city, of the American Anti-Slavery Society, headed by Lloyd Garrison, and the New York Abolition Society, of which Garrit Smith is the chief, are perfectly astounding. The abolition Society of Gerritt Smith is a different concern. They believe in God, and negro slavery to be a sin against God—but they stand by the federal constitution as an anti-slavery document.—Abolition is rampant among us."

Pro-slavery business democrat as James Gordon Bennett was, without a ray of sympathy for the views of the religious or anti-slavery men, hard-headed and secretly striving for personal political honors at the hands of Buchanan, his reactions to the events of the day constitute most trustworthy indices of the points of highest political pressure. The prominence in the *Herald* which he gave to all the proceedings of the anti-slavery societies, to those of the national religious organizations and, in particular, to Cheever's great speeches and anti-slavery sermons, is a sound gauge of their actual relative importance, as forces in the political field, compared with all others. That the abolitionist threat made Bennett's hair rise is further shown in an editorial in the *Herald,* Dec. 10, 1857, containing the following:

"The book is opened at a most imposing chapter of the slavery agitation. Years ago our most populous

and popular Protestant churches were shivered to pieces upon the shoals and bars of slavery; those social reciprocities as between the North and South, without which the Union is a mockery, were almost annihilated in the campaign of 1856. This great Northern Kansas combination becomes, not a harmless passing cloud, but an imposing hurricane, darkening the whole land with its heavy shadow." In the issue of the next day the editor writes: "We have before us the inevitable contingency of a Northern anti-slavery coalition in 1860, which will sweep everything before it as with a force of a whirlwind. There is something positively awful in the rise, progress and growth of this Northern anti-slavery movement."

The prominence given Cheever's preaching in the *Herald* explains its advertisement in the South, for the Washington correspondent of the *Herald* also served several prominent Southern newspapers, and "Dr. Cheever" was as well-known a figure in New Orleans and the newspaper offices of the principal Southern cities as he was in New York and the North generally. Dr. Ross, whose views were held by three-quarters of the Southern Presbyterian Ministers, referred to "the celebrated sermon of Dr. Cheever," and to the "sin" theory as the only honest ground for opposition to slavery; poured contempt on the "toleration" theory—the theory of the "conservative" anti-slavery men, and affirmed the truth of the "ordained" theory,—that slavery was *right* in the sight of God—the "religious" theory of slavery which the defense mechanism of the slave holders had compelled their clergymen to work up out of the Old Testament for their moral support. Of this theory, Cheever said, in a sermon on the death of John Brown, entitled "Shot out of the Cannon of God's Providence";—"This event must open up the subject. It must be ripped up to the bottom. Either slavery is absolutely right or wrong, either sanctioned of God and just by Common Law, or forbidden of God, and impiously unlawful. Either slaves are the most

sacred of all property or the most diabolical of all robbery." He wrote a book entitled, "The Scriptures on the Guilt of Slavery," published in 1860 in Boston, which was a scholarly inquiry into the subject from the philological, legal, historical and moral points of view.

A Northern woman, writing to a former Southern friend, wrote: "The genius of Mrs. Stowe carried the outworks of your institution at one dash, and left the citadel open to besiegers, who are pouring in amain. In the church, on the ultra-liberal side, it is assailed by the powerful battering-ram of Theodore Parker's eloquence. On the extreme orthodox side is set a huge fire kindled by the burning words of Dr. Cheever. Between them is Henry Ward Beecher sending a shower of keen arrows into your entrenchments; and with him ride a troop of sharpshooters from all sects."

A minister writes in the *Independent*, June 2, 1857: "Dr. Cheever and Mr. Beecher addressed large and overflowing houses at the anniversaries in Boston. The multitudes hung upon their lips as upon no other speaker's—and why? They took high and holy ground; they defended noble truths boldly. It was in expectation of this and for this they were invited. Many in New England look upon them as filling the mission of Caleb and Joshua in many respects."

Henry Ward Beecher wrote—*Independent*, April 2, 1857—"The decision of the Supreme Court (Dred Scott) against God's Word and the Constitution of our country has no more authority upon any of us, or in any department, than the command of Satan to the Lord Jesus to fall down and worship him, on the pretense that all the kingdoms of the world were his." In a two-column article printed in the *Independent*, April 9, Dr. Cheever made merry over the aspersions cast on him by the New York *Observer*, for his sermon on the Dred Scott decision, and concluded that its diatribe was intended for *Southern* consumption. Cheever's article was printed beside a reprint of his recent sermon on "Unjust Judgements and the Duty

of Disobeying Them," seven columns long. The editor deals in the same issue with the strictures of the pro-slavery *Observer* as follows: "Could there be anything more indecent than such language in a religious journal toward the pastor of a prominent church in this city?—a man, too, whose religious writings are in thousands of Christian households, and whose preaching every Sabbath evening attracts more of the intelligence and moral worth of this community than any gathered within the walls of any other house of worship?" As the *Observer* was the only Northern religious paper to be admitted into the South during the years just before the war, the Southerners concentrated on it, and its editorials on Cheever served to make them well aware of him and what he represented.

Undoubtedly the war came when the Southerners finally realized that, on the one hand, the abolitionists were sweeping the North and would never relent in their moral condemnation of them, and that, on the other, the lawyer-politicians would never give them any better terms on which to maintain slavery than they had achieved at the moment. That is, the Southerners saw slavery threatened by the natural operation of *either* group. Given the "fire eaters," as Bennett called the Southern disunionists, and the moral opposition of the North, war lay, concealed but smouldering, in the original pact of Union from the first, and all this care to distinguish between those who were "fanatics" and those who took the correct legal position as between fools and statesmen, is misplaced. The South, stung by the religious reaction of the North to the pro-slavery statesmanship of Buchanan and the Supreme Court, convinced by that religious condemnation that eventually the North could not be stopped short of abolition by any legal dams it could erect, was dragooned into secession by a few of its politicians and "fire eaters." The plain people of the North, responding, fought through to the end, only incidently to save the Union. They thought of "John

Brown's Body." They died to win because of their conviction that the preservation of human rights—of freedom—perhaps their own freedom—was at stake—because of their conviction that slavery was a diabolical sin and should be abolished.

Although causes other than religious feeling co-operated, nevertheless the war—*which was against all the material interests of the North*—was the direct result of the election of Lincoln, which itself resulted from the preaching of the abolitionists, of whom Garrison, Cheever, Beecher, Harriet Beacher Stowe, Whittier and, in his heart, Lincoln himself, were outstanding; and, at the crisis, Cheever carried the load.

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