

From the Boston Recorder.

DR. OSGOOD'S LETTERS, No. 6

TO THE REV. RALPH EMERSON, D. D.

*Professor in the Theological Seminary at
Andover.*

Dear Brother,—Although I have made such heavy drafts from your fifth letter, I must revert to it once more. There are assertions in that letter which I beg leave to examine. You give us a reason why you do not wish to see any new plan invented by the opposers of Abolitionists, to destroy slavery, “that the old plan is better;” the good old way of exerting “more power over the South” on this subject, which has been pursued with at least no bad effect, by every son of freedom at the north, for more than 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 for universal emancipation. I confess, Sir, that I was somewhat surprised when I read this sentence. You must be in possession of evidence which I have never seen to justify you in making such assertions. At what period have “every son of freedom at the north” put forth their exertions to persuade the people of the South that slaveholding is a sin—and even the “monstrous offspring of sin?” I admit that some ecclesiastical bodies have passed resolutions disapproving of slavery:—but they have never exerted any good influence, which can be seen. Nor do I suppose that “the sons of the Puritans,” who passed these resolutions, had that abhorrence of slavery which multitudes now entertain. I am ready to confess that I once thought very lightly of slavery. I considered it as many now profess to consider it, as an unfortunate appendage to Southern society, but something in which the slave states alone were concerned. If they were willing to retain it, I did not see what we had to object. I believe, Sir, that this is the feeling which still pervades the minds of many persons of respectable standing at the north, who have not attended to the subject. I occasionally hear men of great moral worth maintain such sentiments. Several of our brethren with whom I conversed, when I united with the Anti-Slavery Society, advanced these sentiments. I have no doubt that many honestly entertain them still. You say “the sons of the Puritans have ever testified their aversion to slavery, and their desire for universal emancipation.” If this aversion was founded upon a sense of the injustice and iniquity of the system, how do

you account for the fact that so many of their sons have so readily embraced the system? Thousands have gone to the South and purchased plantations and slaves, and the native Southerners often tauntingly observe, that the Yankees make the most cruel masters. You are aware, sir, that with all their inherent hatred of slavery, many ministers formerly from the north now hold their fellow men in bondage, vindicate their conduct by arguments deduced from the Bible, and publish sermons to justify the slaveholding community. But some of "the sons of the Puritans" must have changed their views of the enormity of the system of slavery within a few years: That all do not retain their "aversion" to it, I think can be made to appear by a simple statement of facts. Look at the controversy which has been carried on in the Methodist Episcopal church for two years past. You can have a very correct view of this whole subject in the statement of facts which has been put forth by Rev. Orange Scott, in a pamphlet entitled the "Wesleyan Anti-Slavery Review." You will there find a mass of evidence which I think will convince a man of your candor that there is a strong and virulent pro-slavery party among the ministers of that large and respectable denomination of Christians. The abolitionists in that church have been literally persecuted by these *pro-slavery brethren*, because they would not hold their peace, but would lift up their voice against this abomination. I know it may be said that the errors and bad spirit of the abolitionists, are what they wish to correct, and what they inveigh against.— But if this were the case, why do we not hear some condemnation of the system of slavery from their public bodies? Such condemnation as is found in the writings of the venerable founder of their society! I rejoice that the ecclesiastical bodies belonging to the Congregational denomination have not manifested such a pro-slavery spirit, and yet I must say that they have not stood forth in a determined attitude of opposition to the system, as seems to us who are abolitionists, would have been proper. But the clergy of the New England States are fast coming up to the work.

But we will leave the clergy of N. England, with our best wishes for their usefulness, and enquire a little into the correctness of your assertions as it respects the people at large. Most of the inhabitants of N. England are "sons of the Puritans." They ought to have "always testified their aversion to slavery and their desire of universal emancipation." But have they done it? If so, where is the evidence? Suppose a man should constantly assert that he is a *whig* in politics, and should always vote with the

opposing party, and constantly villify the measures of the Whigs and endeavor to cause things were not ordered to suit his humor, or because there were some wrong things in their public acts. Would the assertions of that man be credited? You will say, this is not a parallel case. Well, suppose it is not in every respect, it is sufficiently so for illustration. The measures of the abolitionists are at least feasible. The same measures have liberated the slaves in the British dominions, and they will effect the same thing in this country if they are not nullified by their opponents. You and many other candid and good men honestly believe that these measures have had a bad effect upon the slaveholders. But you do not, I fear, take pains to inform your mind upon this subject. *We* confidently believe the contrary, and we have good reasons for this belief. I ask you, sir, if the sympathies of a vast multitude of the northern people have not been expressed in favor of the slaveholders ever since the action of the abolitionists commenced? and if these expressions have not produced the very effect upon their minds which you ascribe to the accusations of the abolitionists? Those gentlemen have been constantly told by our members of Congress, by our merchants who trade with them, and by other persons who visit them at the south, and who receive them at their own houses at the north, or meet them at the different places of fashionable resort, that every man of distinction in New England, is opposed to all ac-

tion on the subject of slavery, and disposed to leave them in the quiet enjoyment of their domestic institutions. The note which you have appended to one of your letters, shows that it is not from the harsh and censorious accusations of the abolitionists against the "non-conforming clergy," that southern men draw their inferences, but from the *conduct* of those who violently and perseveringly oppose all their measures.— Your friend from Alabama told you that the "southern slaveholders are frequently heard to say that *sensible men at the north agree with them.*" They have had reason to think so in times past, and I acknowledge that the accusations of the abolitionists have tended to strengthen this belief. But what other inference could the politicians of the South reasonably make from the violence with which abolitionists have been treated? Five thousand of the citizens of Boston (among whom it was boasted were many of the most respectable,) broke up a female meeting because an address was expected from the "king of the abolitionists," as you were pleased to call him. Mobs followed in succession for more than a year, whenever a meeting was appointed to discuss the subject of slavery. The southern statesmen well understand the theory of mobs in a free country. They know well that *some* men of respectability must give countenance to them, or they would be crushed in a moment. The bitter and indecent terms in which abolitionists were publicly spoken of, and the threats which were thrown out by men of standing, excited the thoughtless multitude to acts of violence. Was not the burning of the Pennsylvania Hall, any evidence of a pro-slavery party in the city of Philadelphia, and this is north of the Potomac where you say a pro-slavery man cannot be supposed to exist? A gentleman from that State, (a warm opposer of abolition,) told me that the respectable people of that city would never permit a building to be erected for the avowed purpose of supporting abolition doctrines; that it would be burned down immediately. What sources of knowledge he may have, I cannot tell.— To what are we to ascribe the torrents of invective which are poured out against the abolitionists through many of the public Journals, and in many of the speeches of the anniversaries of the Colonization Society, and in private circles of the first respectability, but to a pro-slavery spirit, or a spirit at least which does not wish to rebuke the abomination? I know it is said, "the measures; the measures; the acrimonious and denunciatory spirit of the abolitionists is what we complain of." So says President Fisk, and so say the Bishops of the Metho-

dist Church, and then will write treatises to defend slaveholding upon the Bible, and anathematise those preachers of their order who declare unto them their sins.

Now I would not apologise for the imprudences of abolitionists, but it seems strange to my mind that the subject of slavery itself never excites the indignation of these worthy men in public, if they hate it so bad in private. Indeed, Sir, it is impossible for us to believe that the "sons of the Puritans" desire for universal emancipation, while they "do nothing for the truth," but every thing "against the truth." I would by no means call in question the *sincerity* of their declarations, but I must believe that some of them are *self-deceived*. I have heard professors of religion advocate the system of slavery; I have heard them say that God made the negroes to be slaves to the white men, and that the abolitionists were endeavoring to thwart the benevolent designs of God; and many expressions of a similar character. I could mention a parish in the interior of this State, in which a vote was obtained to shut out abolition lecturers from the meeting-house, and another where the parish committee have refused the house for this object, though they are willing to admit an agent of the Colonization Society! I could tell you of places where christians will not consent to pray with the pastor and some of his church, "for wisdom to direct them" in the choice of measures to abolish slavery, because, they say, "it would be upholding a party;" and when pressed with considerations of the foulness and injustice of the system, will reply, "we have nothing to do with the subject." I have never been able to account for the irritability which the discussion of this subject produces in the minds of multitudes at the north, if they are all really opposed to the system of slavery. There is scarcely any other subject which makes such bad feelings, and sure I am that no other subject, in which *all are professedly agreed*, is so exciting. If the slaveholders claim all "sensible men at the north" as on their side, they have founded their claim upon something besides the accusation of abolitionists; and it would be a very easy thing to undeceive them. It must be done by some kind of action which bears upon their "domestic institutions." They never suspect decided abolitionists as favoring their cause; but if the measures of the abolitionists have put back the cause of emancipation fifty or an hundred years, why should not they be accounted the friends of slaveholders. So long as the south entertained a belief that mobs, indirectly encouraged by respectable men at the north, would put to silence the discussions of the aboli-

tionists, they remained quiet, in a good degree. They felt that their friends here were working for their interests. They would occasionally tar and feather and whip some young man, who ventured into the slave States, and was suspected of being infected with the abolition doctrines, however peaceably he might conduct. They were confidentially told, by their friends here, that abolition was a weak affair; that was sustained by a few misguided zealots and would soon cease. This they believed, for a considerable time, until evidence began to pour in upon them of a serious character. They now begin to understand the subject better, and notwithstanding the assertion of your friend from Alabama, "that they consider every sensible man at the north to agree with them," they believe no such thing.— Let the letter of the Hon. Mr. Rhett to his constituents, speak upon this subject.

Yours respectfully,

S. Osgood.