

Abolitionists of Ontario



Fugitives and Freemen

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by Samuel Ringgold Ward

Ward's Perspective.

KIND READERS,—I am pleased and grateful that the *Provincial Freeman* is afloat. I am glad to have this medium through which to speak to you about many matters, which seem to me to be quite important.

You will, I hope, not be surprised if your enterprise does not meet with very cordial encouragement from some abolitionists. Abolitionists differ and vary in their knowledge and estimate of the negro. Some think we are not to be encouraged to be anything more than a sort of half way set of equals. Others desire and claim for us a full recognition of our equal and inalienable rights.

The former class, like the Yankee Quakers, desire that we should be free; but, as to our being regarded and treated as equals, that is another thing. This class are always desirous to keep us with the short frocks of childhood on. They assume the right to dictate to us about all matters, they dislike to see us assume or maintain manly and independent positions; they prefer that we should be a second-rate set of folks in intellectual matters. A thousand times would they rather see us tied to some newspaper that represents us as being about mid way betwixt slaves and men, than to see us holding up a bold front, with a press worthy of entire freemen.

Such will always doubt “whether you are on the right track,” or “whether you have just the right man at the helm,” or, “whether a movement of the sort is needed at this particular time,” or “whether it is best to encourage ‘our dear colored brethren’ in going too far,” &c. &c. Some people doubt and deny the abolitionism of this class. I simply call them a good sort of folk, who are not exactly up to the idea of human equality. They have been so long accustomed to inferior and degraded Blacks, that they scarcely know how to regard us in any other light. Unfortunately, too many of these occupy leading positions.

Happily, however, such are scarcer in Canada and in England, than in the United States. Let no man be discouraged or disappointed, if too many of this class in Canada, even, give you the cold shoulder, as it is called. Many who are not careful to call themselves abolitionists, will treat your enterprise with much more practical, tangible favor.

Again, I beg you not to lose heart, if many of our own people act as nearly as possible like enemies. Some of them always so treat all efforts of such character. Then, be the friends of the paper black or white, professed abolitionists or not, welcome them, and regard and treat every man less according to what he appears and professes to be, then what he is, as declared by his actions.

In future letters, I shall take great pleasure in giving you somewhat detailed accounts of my

“Self-reliance is the True Road to Independence”

sojourn in England. Of course you will not expect me to write as if I had nothing else to do—were I independent and at leisure. I never was busier. My private and professional engagements were never more numerous; my own personal business never more embarrassed nor perplexing. I never had a less dim and remote prospect of spending my days at home, in the midst of my family, like other men, than I have now. And, may I add, that I never felt more devoted to the welfare of my people, or more hopeful of the ultimate triumph of our cause.

I am quite hopeless as to the peaceable abolition of American slavery, by moral means only. I have some ideas about commercial and agricultural opposition to the “matchlessly horrible bastille,” which I shall unfold to you before any of us shall be much older. But as for moral force, repentance religion, I must first see some faint signs that the initial ideas of elementary religion, or indeed of common honesty, have any control over that people, before I can believe that a measure so just towards the oppressed, shall find any degree of favor among the great majority of them. They trample under foot every one of their avowed principles. They forswear every article in their Puritan creed; they belie their every profession, whether of morals, politics or religion. They have, now, no conscience, no character, no manhood.

“That’s too severe,” says one. Wait, Mr. One. I write with the creed of the Puritans, the Bible of all Christians, the Declaration of Independence, and the Federal Constitution before me, on the one hand; and the Fugitive Slave Law and the Nebraska bill, on the other. I write in view of the fact that one man of six, in that country, with the full and free consent, not only, but by the direct fiat of 99-100ths of the remaining five sixths are slaves. I was born a slave; and the infernal institution by which my fathers were, and my brothers are, crushed and imbruted, thrives under the express sanction of the majority of the leading religionists of the Northern States.

“But Uncle Tom is read now, Mr. W.” Yes; and so is the Bible; and one is treated as much as a piece of fiction as the other.

“You forget, that great opposition is manifested against the Nebraska Bill.” So there was against the annexation of Texas, up to the time it was annexed!

“But the people are fully roused now.” So they were in 1846. Where have they been ever since?

“Yet there is a strong secession feeling at the present time.” It was stronger in 1832, for then it did something. How long did it last?

“Wise men do not believe the Nebraska Bill will pass.” So wise men did not believe about the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law.

“But I read in anti-slavery newspapers, that our cause never appeared so auspicious as at this moment!” I have read that annually for twenty years; in the mean time, Arkansas, Florida and Texas have been added to the number of Slave States; and California made about half and half; and the Douglas-Nebraska plot threatens to be successful; the Fugitive Slave Law and its horrible execution, being a part of the National, and the new constitution of Indiana, and the Free Negro enslaving law of Illinois, parts of State Legislative history. Indeed, the American States grew worse, instead of better, daily, hourly, constantly.

Let us, however, do what we can, by the elevation, improvement and evangelization of the native or adopted British Negro; by adding our quota to the swelling tide of universal public sentiment against slavery; by holding up Yankee character in the light of its facts; to hasten the day when, peacefully, if possible, but if not peacefully, by what cause or causes soever, American Slavery shall be overthrown, and then the despotism of no country can long survive.

Allow me to ask your attention to some business matters. In the British Empire, we have not to devise means, and adopt measures to be free or to regain lost or withheld rights. What we need now to learn is how to use our liberty, and to make it serviceable to the crushed millions of our native land.

My own mind is that the happiest way in which we can do both of these is to seize every means and opportunity for our individual advancement in all things.—One of these advantages is the tillage of the soil. I mean profitable, paying tillage. Let every man among us buy land. And let it be bought and tilled, with the distinct understanding, that there is a most abundant two-fold market for everything, almost, that we can raise in Canada. Wheat, flax, pork, &c., will always command a good price in England, and in the British West Indies.—Besides, in the latter we can find for what we send an abundance of tropical productions to exchange.

Then, too, by machinery, which I shall hereafter describe, a most profitable business can be done in the refining of sugar, which can be bought in Jamaica, unfit for our market, but capable

of being so refined as to pay well for importation and refining.

Thus the free in Canada can trade with the free of the West Indies, both being profited, and both contributing to the elevation of our British American colonies, into successful competition with the North and South of the United States.

Let us, then, as speedily as possible, become producers and traders in wheat, flour, pork, fruit and lumber of Canada, and cotton, sugar, tobacco, coffee, &c. of our British tropical Islands. Thus shall we elevate ourselves, and serve the cause.

S.R.W. Stowmarket, Suffolk, 27th April, 1854.

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