CHAPTER I

THE LIBERATOR

In a small chamber, friendless and unseen,
  Toiled o'er the types one poor, unlearned young man;
The place was dark, unfurnitured and mean;
  Yet there the freedom of a race began.
—LOWELL, "To Garrison."

Oliver Johnson gives a graphic description of the room under the eaves of Merchants' Hall, Boston, in which Garrison printed the early numbers of his Liberator in January, 1831. "The dingy walls, the small windows bespattered with printer's ink, the press standing in one corner, the composing stands opposite, the long editorial and mailing table covered with newspapers, the bed of the editor and publisher on the floor—all these," he tells us, "make a picture never to be forgotten." "It was a pretty large room," says a later visitor, "but there was nothing to relieve its dreariness but two or three very common chairs and a pine desk in the far corner at which a pale, delicate and apparently overtasked gentleman was sitting. . . . He was a quiet, gentle and I might say handsome man." The editor and his partner, Isaac Knapp, lived for more than a year "chiefly upon bread and milk, a few cakes and a little fruit, obtained from a baker's shop opposite and a petty cake and fruit shop in the basement, and were sometimes on short commons at that." Here they worked fourteen hours a day at the manual labor of their enterprise. Garrison was at this time only six-and-twenty, and he had just been released from Baltimore jail, where his sympathy for the slave had placed him. He had no money, no subscribers, and scarcely a friend, but he procured some well-worn, second-hand type, and went forward against the Goliath of slavery with the calm assurance of a David "choosing him five smooth stones out of the brook." And indeed the language which he holds differs not essentially from that of the Hebrew shepherd. Thus spake David: "Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear and with a shield, but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts; . . . this day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand." In the first number of his journal the penniless and friendless Garrison delivered himself as follows:

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> I determined at every hazard to lift up the standard of emancipation in the eyes of the nation within sight of Bunker Hill and in the birthplace of liberty. That standard is now unfurled, and long may it

> float, unhurt by the spoliation of time or the missiles of a desperate foe—yea, till every chain be broken and every bondman free! Let Southern oppressors tremble—let their secret abettors tremble—let their Northern apologists tremble—let all the enemies of the persecuted blacks tremble. . . . I will be as harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject I do not wish to think or speak or write with moderation. . . . I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—*and I will be heard.* . . . Posterity will bear testimony that I was right.

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The picture of this shabby room with the pale young man at the case deserves to hang in the rotunda of the National Capitol, next to those of Columbus landing on the shores of the new world and Washington receiving the sword of Cornwallis.

Who was this rash and intemperate fellow, who dared for many years to shock every respectable fiber in the character of New Englander and Northerner as well as of Southerner? William Lloyd Garrison was born at Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1805, the eldest of three children. When he was three years old, his father, who "followed the sea" and had taken to drink, deserted his wife and family and was never heard of more. They were left utterly destitute, and the mother, a noble woman, supported her babes by going out as a monthly nurse. She also made candy, which Lloyd peddled about town. He was apprenticed to a boot-maker at an early age, and afterwards to a cabinet-maker, but he had neither the strength nor the mechanical skill necessary for these occupations. At last, when he was thirteen years old, he found his proper place in the printing office of the Newburyport "Herald." He soon became an expert at the types, a fellow printer testifying that he could work faster than anyone he had ever seen with one exception, and that he was far more accurate than this solitary rival. At sixteen he began to write for the paper, sending in his contributions anonymously by the post. His first article arrived in this way while he was engaged in setting up type, and his employer read it aloud approvingly in his presence, and turned it over to its author to set up, little guessing his identity. Long before his apprenticeship of seven years expired, Garrison was practically the sub-editor of the newspaper. At twenty-one he had a journal of his own, the Free Press, in his native town, and he distinguished his six months' interest in this sheet by discovering Whittier. The future poet was then a clumsy, half-taught farmer's lad of eighteen. He had already begun to write verses, and his sister, without his knowledge, sent some of them to the Free Press. Garrison at once recognized their merit and published them. He drove over to Haverhill to see the author and found him working in the fields barefoot. It was this encouragement that confirmed Whittier in his career and induced him to seek further education. As Garrison's venture at home was not sufficiently successful, he removed to Boston. Two years later he is editor of the first total abstinence paper ever published, the National Philanthropist, and in its columns he also declares his opposition to war.

The year 1828 was the turning point of Garrison's life, and his conversion to the cause of the slave was the work of a Quaker who had already devoted thirteen years of his life to that object. Benjamin Lundy had given up a profitable business at a great sacrifice to edit an anti-slavery newspaper and urge the formation of anti-slavery societies. He was now the editor of the Genius of Universal Emancipation, which he conducted at Baltimore, and in which he advocated gradual Abolition and the colonization of freedmen in Hayti. He traveled all over the country on foot in the prosecution of his designs, walking in this way thousands of miles. Visiting Boston in 1828, he happened to board at the house in which Garrison was living, and the latter was much impressed by the spirit of the missionary.

Lundy tried to rouse the Boston clergy to an interest in his plans, and to induce them to form an anti-slavery society. He invited them to a private meeting, but only a few responded, and of these only eight would go so far as to recommend his paper. One or two expressed their readiness to take part in an active movement, but they were men of small weight in the community. All of those who attended the meeting were opposed to slavery, but with one consent most of them made excuse. "It would enrage the South to know that an anti-slavery society existed in Boston." "It would do harm to agitate the subject." The project of a society had to be abandoned.

But if Lundy had failed with the clergy, he had inspired one more powerful than they were. Garrison was at the meeting, and was scandalized at the cowardice of these, the bravest representatives of the churches. A sudden enthusiasm for the cause of Negro freedom seized him. He began at once to attack slavery in his temperance paper, and announced as his triple aim the abolition of slavery, intemperance and war. Soon after this he went to Bennington, Vermont, to take charge of a newspaper which was supporting the re-election of President John Quincy Adams. In this journal Garrison continued to denounce slavery, to insist on its abolition in the District of Columbia, and to suggest the formation of anti-slavery societies. The hunting of escaped slaves was common at this time in the North, and occasionally they preferred death to capture. Yet with such things taking place before their eyes, the population was blind to the iniquity of the system which rendered them possible. Garrison's management of the new paper was most successful. We have Horace Greeley's authority for the statement that it was "about the most interesting newspaper ever issued in Vermont."

Lundy at Baltimore had watched the course of his disciple with pleasure, and in 1829 he came to Bennington, walking much of the way, to persuade him to join him in editing the Genius. Garrison did not hesitate for a moment to follow his friend's example and to give up a promising career for the certain want and hardship of a life consecrated to the liberation of the slave. He proceeded to Baltimore, and in September his name appears with Lundy's in the latter's paper. His experiences at Baltimore accentuated his hatred of slavery. He saw the auction of Negoes continually in progress, for many poor wretches were sold here and shipped to the New Orleans market. With his own ears he heard, while walking in the streets of the city, "the distinct application of a whip and the shrieks of anguish" of the victim. One slave exhibited to him his back bleeding from thirty-seven terrible gashes inflicted by a cowhide thong. The courage of both editors in these surroundings knew no bounds, and in their columns they openly rebuked the worst offenders by name. On one occasion Garrison heard of slaves being shipped in a vessel belonging to a prominent citizen of Newburyport. He immediately began an attack upon him in the Genius, printing his name in capitals. He branded him and men like him as "the enemies of their own species—highway robbers and murderers." The result of this plain speaking was an indictment for malicious libel. Garrison was tried by a jury, found guilty, and sentenced to the payment of a fine of fifty dollars and costs, amounting in all to over one hundred dollars, a sum far greater than he could raise, if he felt disposed to. In consequence he passed seven weeks in jail, and while there he prepared a pamphlet giving an account of his trial, which attracted attention far and wide, and also devoted himself to his fellow-prisoners, drawing petitions for pardon for several of them. He was finally released through the liberality of a New York merchant, Arthur Tappan, and he came out of prison undaunted and in buoyant spirits. Meanwhile the Genius had ceased to appear on account of lack of support, and the partnership with Lundy was of necessity dissolved.

As Garrison had no longer any reason for remaining in Baltimore, he returned to Boston, and in August, 1830, he issued proposals there for a paper of his own. He also began to lecture on slavery. When he advertised for a free hall in Boston for an anti-slavery address not a church volunteered, although it was the custom of the time to hold all kinds of meetings in churches, but a favorable response was received from an "infidel" society. It was actually a fact that at that period Garrison was almost the only man in New England whose eyes were entirely open to the sin of slavery.

On January 1st, 1831, the first number of the Liberator made its appearance. At the head of its columns was the motto, "Our country is the World. Our countrymen are Mankind;" and it was further ornamented by a wood-cut representing a slave-auction block and whipping post with the dome of the Capitol at Washington in the background. This initial number struck one note which distinguished it at once from all other anti-slavery publications. It called for immediate and unconditional emancipation. Until recently Garrison had believed in the gradual freeing of the slaves, but on thinking the matter over he came to the conclusion that it was immoral to favor the continuance for an hour of a system which is morally wrong. This novel "immediatism," as it was dubbed, coupled with the intentional harshness of the editor's vocabulary, which was in striking contrast with his manner in private life—these two peculiarities of the Liberator made it a mighty force almost from the beginning. The slave-holders themselves did much to make the paper widely known, proving once again that nothing helps a cause so much as a strong opposition. Taunted with being "man-stealers," they were soon goaded into a fury. The legislature of Georgia offered a reward of five thousand dollars for Garrison's capture. Throughout the South demands were made that the State of Massachusetts should put a stop to the incendiary publication and arrest the editor with or without the law. The public officials of the slave states inaugurated a system of examining the mails and throwing out all pamphlets and circulars reflecting on slavery, and this plan was followed for many years in flagrant violation of the postal laws. The high-handed conduct of the South produced a double effect in the North. A large portion of the community was in favor of humbly submitting to all the claims made upon them, either from sympathy with slavery or from a craven desire for peace; but there were many who, while by no means approving of Abolition, still cherished some prejudices in favor of the freedom of white men, and were forced by the overbearing insolence of the slave-holders in some degree to sustain Garrison in the right of free speech. The Abolitionists themselves, whose cause had dragged on without result for many years, in spite of the sincerity, ability and vigor of Lundy, for want of a definite programme, at once recognized the fact that their true leader had appeared; and most of them flocked to his banner, although Lundy himself, who died in 1839, never became an immediatist.