

## CHAPTER II

### THE BOSTON MOB

Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them.—St. Luke, xi:47.

In 1831 Garrison founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society at Boston, and began to lecture in its behalf. This was followed by the formation of a great number of such bodies, state and local, including the national society founded at Philadelphia in 1833. For some years associations were established at the rate of more than one a day, and a single society sometimes numbered its members by the thousand. Garrison's talents for public speaking stood him in good stead in promoting the formation of these bodies. He was not an orator, but the force, earnestness and logic of his addresses almost always carried his audiences with him. The first great contest in which Garrison had to engage was between the "immediatists" and the American Colonization Society, an institution whose chief function was to put the conscience of the people at rest under the delusion that the

## The Boston Mob

Negroes could be deported to Hayti or Liberia, but which in reality was only effective in removing freedmen whose efforts on behalf of their brethren in bonds were feared by the slave-holders, and the latter were by no means unfriendly to this movement. Garrison exposed the plan thoroughly in a pamphlet published in 1832, and a twelve-month later, on a special mission to England, he won over the principal Abolitionists there to immediatism as opposed to colonization, including the venerable Wilberforce. Six years afterwards, on another visit to Great Britain, he had the satisfaction of securing the adhesion of Clarkson, who hitherto had been induced by misrepresentation to support the colonizationists. In America it soon became clear, owing to Garrison's exposure of it, that colonization meant the indefinite continuance of slavery. Among the humors of his first stay in London was a dinner-party at which his host on receiving him and hearing his name lifted up his hands and exclaimed, "Why, my dear sir, I thought that you were a black man, and I have consequently invited this company of ladies and gentlemen to be present to welcome Mr. Garrison, the black advocate of emancipation from America!" He had in fact supposed that no white American could plead for the slave as he had done in the *Liberator*. This

## Garrison the Non-Resistant

was a compliment to the editor indeed! Garrison attended Wilberforce's funeral at Westminster Abbey, an humble follower in a distinguished throng, but destined to do even more for the African race than the great Englishman.

On landing at New York on his return from England in 1833, Garrison was present at a meeting called for the purpose of organizing a City Anti-Slavery Society. The enemies of the movement had issued circulars calling for a pro-slavery demonstration at the same time and place, with the object of breaking up the meeting, and a mob of drunken blackguards came together in consequence and succeeded in bringing the meeting to a violent close. The Courier and Enquirer had much to do with fomenting the riot on this occasion and the Commercial Advertiser and other "respectable" newspapers joined in denouncing Garrison. The Evening Post said: "We should be sorry that any invasion of his personal rights should occur to give him consequence and to increase the number of his associates." When Garrison reached Boston, he found that there, too, circulars had preceded him, calling upon the public to meet in front of his office on a given evening armed with plenty of tar and feathers, but although a dense mob breathing threatenings

## The Boston Mob

which foreboded a storm came together, they dispersed without doing any damage.

The angry temper of the Northern public had also been shown elsewhere. In Connecticut, in 1833, Prudence Crandall, who had established a school for colored girls, was shut out of the churches, shops and public conveyances; her well was filled with manure, and her house smeared with filth and at last set on fire. At Boston the directors of the Athenæum library excluded Mrs. Child from using it because she was an Abolitionist. When anti-slavery sentiment made itself audible at Lane Theological Seminary, the trustees, with the assent of the president, Dr. Lyman Beecher, suppressed all debate on the subject. The Rev. Dr. Leonard Bacon accused candidates for elective office who were willing to array themselves under the banner of the Abolitionists, with being "political desperadoes;" and the American Bible Society actually refused a gift of five thousand dollars which was to be devoted to the distribution of Bibles among the slaves! The great church assemblies showed their friendship for slavery in many ways, and a Presbyterian elder did not hesitate to say in the General Assembly of that denomination at Pittsburg, in 1835, that the church was the patron of slavery and responsible for its cruelties. Throughout the whole period of agitation

## Garrison the Non-Resistant

against slavery not a Catholic priest nor an Episcopal clergyman came forward as a friend of the oppressed, with one possible exception. They were engaged in the time-honored pastime of passing by on the other side.

Pro-slavery meetings were held in New York and other cities and pro-slavery riots broke out in many parts of the North. A great meeting was held at Faneuil Hall, Boston, on August 21st, 1835, to protest against Abolition. The principal men of the city took part and the mayor was in the chair. One of the orators turned to the portrait of Washington and invoked his example on behalf of the slave-holders. The sum of three thousand dollars was offered in the South for the apprehension of Arthur Tappan, the New York philanthropist. At Concord (auspicious name!) Whittier was pelted with stones and mud. A Harvard professor lost his chair on account of his Abolition sentiments, and leading Northern publishers took pains to assure the South that they would print nothing hostile to slavery. This ignominious subservience to the slave power seemed to be almost universal.

Amid such opposition and although "all pandemonium was let loose," Garrison became only more confident and determined. Four men, he tells us, are enough to revolutionize the world. Financial difficulties continually

## The Boston Mob

beset his path, but he always succeeded in surmounting them, and despite many a gale, the Liberator was able to proceed on its way. But the most conspicuous pro-slavery demonstration was in the event directed against Garrison himself, and was the immediate result of the antagonism of the enemies of Abolition towards George Thompson, a distinguished English Abolitionist, who was lecturing in America, and whose interference with our "domestic" institutions was most offensive to them. It was announced that he would address a meeting of ladies on the afternoon of October 21st, 1835, at a hall adjoining the offices of the Anti-Slavery Society and the Liberator, at 46 Washington street, Boston. Placards were posted in public places urging good citizens to bring the "infamous foreign scoundrel to the tar-kettle before dark." In response to this several thousand angry men gathered in the street at the time set for the meeting, but Thompson had been wisely kept away. The women showed the greatest coolness and courage and went quietly on with their proceedings, although the door of the hall and the stairways of the building were thronged by a threatening and unruly mob. The mayor arrived upon the scene and endeavored to disperse the crowd outside by announcing that the Englishman was not in the city, but

## Garrison the Non-Resistant

they soon showed that they did not care on whom they vented their wrath, provided only that it was on an Abolitionist. At last they broke in through the door of the Anti-Slavery Society office, where Garrison was calmly writing a letter. Some constables succeeded, however, in getting the rioters out of the house before further violence was done, and the mayor, going to the meeting-room, ordered the ladies to leave the building, as he would be unable to protect them longer. They adjourned accordingly to the house of one of their number, marching out two and two, each white woman taking a colored one with her. "When we emerged into the open daylight," says one of the number, "there went up a roar of rage and contempt. They slowly gave way as we came out. As far as we could look either way the crowd extended—evidently of the so-called 'wealthy and respectable,' 'the moral worth,' the 'influence and standing.'"

"Garrison! Garrison!" was now the cry. "We must have Garrison! Out with him! Lynch him!" The mob demanded that the anti-slavery society signboard be removed. The mayor at once ordered it to be taken down, and it was speedily torn to pieces. The mayor now besought Garrison to escape by the rear of the building, and the latter, preceded by a friend, dropped from a back window on the

## The Boston Mob

roof of a shed and sought refuge in a carpenter shop on the street behind; but his retreat was already cut off. The workmen in the shop did what they could for him, shutting the front door and keeping the crowd back until Garrison could hide himself upstairs, but in a few minutes the ruffians broke in and had no difficulty in finding his place of concealment. They seized him and dragged him to the window, intending to throw him out, but someone below in the street shouted, "Don't kill him outright," and, changing their minds, they tied a rope round him and let him down by a ladder. Fortunately he was received at the bottom by two strong men who were determined that the fame of Boston should not be stained by a lynching. They succeeded, with superhuman efforts, in guiding him through the crowd, in which it was evident now that Garrison had some sympathizers, to the door of the neighboring city hall, over the very ground where the first martyrs of the Revolution were slain in the Boston massacre of 1770, and where their degenerate descendants were now taking the part of the oppressors. The mayor had already reached the building. "On my way from the Liberator office to the city hall," he says, "several people said to me, 'They are going to hang him! For God's sake, save him!'" Garrison was conducted with much difficulty

## Garrison the Non-Resistant

to the mayor's office, and as he was now bare-headed and half naked, the friends of the mayor were obliged to lend him clothes to cover him. They decided that the only way to save him was to commit him to jail as a disturber of the peace! A carriage was sent to the door to deceive the mob, and while they waited, another carriage bore him from a door in the rear to the city jail. But the people, when they discovered the ruse, rushed upon the vehicle and tried to drag him out. They clung to the wheels, dashed open the doors, seized hold of the horses and tried to upset the carriage. But the police did their best, the driver plied his whip on the horses and on the rioters, and by some miracle Garrison was deposited at the jail in safety and locked up in a cell. On the morrow he left Boston and did not return until the fury of the storm had spent itself, but even then he was forced to change his residence, as his former landlord feared that his house might be destroyed.

The biographers of Garrison call attention to the attitude of the authorities during this episode. "Law officers in abundance overlooked the scene of the mob; the legislators, in special session at the state house—John G. Whittier among them—hastened down to become spectators. Law was everywhere, but justice was fallen in the streets. . . .

## The Boston Mob

Wendell Phillips, commencing practice in his native city, and not versed, perhaps, in the riot statutes, wondered why his regiment was not called out." An alderman, when questioned while the riot was in progress, "intimated that, though it was the duty of the mayor to put down the riot, the city government did not very much disapprove of the mob to put down such agitators as Garrison and those like him." The editor of the New England Galaxy overheard a justice of the peace remark: "I hope they will catch him (Garrison) and tar and feather him; and though I would not assist, I can tell them five dollars are ready for the man that will do it."

The press, secular and religious, unanimously showed its opposition to the Abolitionists in this matter. The Daily Advertiser considered "the whole transaction as the triumph of the law over lawless violence," and the Christian Watchman (save the mark!), a Baptist journal, declared that the Abolitionists were as culpable as the mob.

In the pages of the Liberator Garrison described the riot, and attacked its promoters and sympathizers with his customary force and ability. During the danger he had not for a moment lost his composure, as all who saw him bore witness, friend and foe alike. "Throughout the whole of the trying scene,"

## Garrison the Non-Resistant

he testifies himself, "I felt perfectly calm—nay, very happy. It seemed to me that it was indeed a blessed privilege thus to suffer in the cause of Christ. Death did not present one repulsive feature. The promises of God sustained my soul, so that it was not only divested of fear, but ready to sing for joy." This same courage enabled him to stigmatize the outrage in his paper according to its deserts, and never for an instant did he alter his tone from any sense of fear. Harriet Martineau, who was visiting America at this time, gives her impressions of Garrison's appearance and manner. "It was a countenance glowing with health, and wholly expressive of purity, animation and gentleness." She found "sagacity the most striking attribute of his conversation," which was "of the most practical cast."

The year 1837 showed a marked improvement in New England sentiment. While it is true that the Congregational Church protested against the discussion of "certain topics" in meeting-houses, and that the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society could not find a suitable hall or church to meet in at Boston and was obliged to organize over a stable, still the legislature went so far as to permit it to make use of the state house. This was a strong indication that the Abolitionists had become a power to reckon with. Twelve

## The Boston Mob

hundred anti-slavery societies were now in operation, and the foul murder of the Rev. E. P. Lovejoy, at Alton, Illinois, by a mob which thus exhibited its disapproval of his anti-slavery journal, did much to stir up Abolition sentiment, already stimulated by many similar outrages in the South. Lovejoy's assassination brought Wendell Phillips into the ranks of the Garrisonians, and he declared himself in an eloquent speech at Faneuil Hall at a meeting called to express the indignation of all that was best in Boston. But still the low passions of the friends of slavery continued to show themselves at the North. In 1838, during a convention of Abolitionists, Pennsylvania Hall, a building recently erected in Philadelphia for these and other philanthropic meetings, was burned to the ground by a pro-slavery mob; and it was only by calling out the militia that a similar crime was prevented in Boston, where another hall had been built for the same purposes.