



CHAPTER III

NON-RESISTANCE, DISSENSIONS

Integer vitæ scelerisque purus
Non eget Mauris jaculis neque arcu
Nec venenatis gravida sagittis,
Fusce, pharetra.

—HORACE, Odes, 1:22.

Any account of Garrison which failed to give due emphasis to his belief in “non-resistance” would be most imperfect, for he regarded this principle as the very root of all his convictions. He seems very early to have had an instinctive repugnance to the use of physical force. In the declaration of sentiment which he drew for the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, and which was adopted, he says: [“Our principles forbid the doing of evil that good may come, and lead us to reject, and to entreat the oppressed to reject, the use of all carnal weapons for deliverance from bondage. . . . Our measures shall be such only as the opposition of moral purity to moral corruption—the destruction of error by the potency of the truth—the overthrow of prejudice by the

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power of love—and the abolition of slavery by the spirit of repentance.” In the midst of the Boston mob he exhorted his friends not to resort to violence, and he expressed his regret that Lovejoy fell fighting. The question of the moral character of war was much agitated about this time, and Garrison contended that if peace was invariably incumbent on nations, it must be no less so between individuals.

As was the custom of the day, a convention was called to consider non-resistance as the true basis of peace. Some hundred and fifty delegates met in September, 1838, at Boston, and Garrison as usual dominated the deliberations, and drew up a declaration which was carried and afterwards signed by a large majority, and which he fondly hoped would “make a tremendous stir, not only in this country, but in time throughout the world.” “Mankind shall hail the 20th of September with more exultation and gratitude than Americans now do the 4th of July.” The document is a long one, but the salient paragraphs are as follows:

We cannot acknowledge allegiance to any human government; neither can we oppose any such government by a resort to physical force. We recognize but one King and Lawgiver, one Judge and Ruler of mankind. [We are bound by the laws of a

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Kingdom which is not of this world, the subjects of which are forbidden to fight.]

As every human government is upheld by physical strength and its laws are enforced virtually at the point of the bayonet, we cannot hold any office which imposes upon its incumbent the obligation to compel men to do right on pain of imprisonment or death. We therefore voluntarily exclude ourselves from every legislative and judicial body, and repudiate all human politics, worldly honors and stations of authority. If we cannot occupy a seat in the legislature or on the bench, neither can we elect others to act as our substitutes in any such capacity.

It follows that we cannot sue any man at law to compel him by force to restore anything which he may have wrongfully taken from us or others; but if he has seized our coat, we shall surrender up our cloak rather than to subject him to punishment.

[We believe that the penal code of the old covenant, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," has been abrogated by Jesus Christ, and that under the new covenant, the forgiveness instead of the punishment of enemies has been enjoined upon all his disciples in all cases whatsoever.]

The history of mankind is crowded with evidences proving that physical coercion is not adapted to moral regeneration; that the sinful disposition of men can be subdued only by love; that evil can be exterminated from the earth only by goodness. \

[But while we shall adhere to the doctrine

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of non-resistance and passive submission to enemies, we purpose, in a moral and spiritual sense, to speak and act boldly in the cause of God; to assail iniquity in high places; to apply our principles to all existing civil, political, legal and ecclesiastical institutions.

The triumphant progress of the cause of temperance and abolition in our land . . . encourages us to combine our means and efforts for the promotion of a still greater cause.

This "greater cause" (an admission indeed for Garrison) held its own for some years. The convention founded a Non-resistance Society, and published a semi-monthly paper, with Edmund Quincy as editor, who showed his sincerity by returning to the governor his commission of justice of the peace. His journal was issued for several years and paid expenses. But the demands of Abolition and non-resistance upon the same individuals proved too great, and gradually and imperceptibly the movement subsided, destined doubtless at some future day to reassert its claim upon the conscience of mankind, although it may present itself in a different and more philosophical form.

During these years signs of disaffection began to show themselves in the Abolitionist ranks. The scandalous inhumanity and cowardice of the churches had kindled against

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them the just indignation of Garrison and many of his followers. They retorted that he was an "infidel" and that his harsh language was unchristian. Five Abolitionist clergymen led a revolt against him and insisted upon the formation of a new organization with a new journal of its own. It would be tedious to trace the history of these dissensions. They continued for many years, but Garrison stood to his guns without flinching, and in the end his course was fully justified. He also aroused opposition by refusing to countenance political action and by preaching non-resistance in the *Liberator*. His opponents urged that any Abolitionist who failed to vote was a traitor to the cause. Garrison, however, had conscientious scruples against voting, and in the whole course of his life only voted once for a political officer, and that was when he was a very young man. The seceders nominated candidates for president and vice-president in the national election of 1840, a course which only revealed their weakness, as party spirit ran so high that most of the anti-slavery voters followed their old party leaders to the polls. The "third party" Abolitionists, who supported their own candidates in 1840, eventually drifted into the Free Soil Party, and in 1852 were contented with a declaration against the extension of slavery and the enforcement

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of the fugitive slave law—so far had political compromise allured them from the principle of immediate emancipation. It was fortunate that they never got the upper hand in the American Anti-Slavery Society. The question of woman's rights was also a burning one among the Abolitionists, and the cause of divisions. Should they or should they not take an equal part with men in conventions and committee work? Garrison stoutly upheld their right on all occasions; and when at the world's anti-slavery convention in London in 1840 they were excluded from the floor, he declined to present his credentials as a delegate and took his seat among the spectators in the gallery.

Garrison's policy against slavery was chiefly directed toward the creation of sentiment, but he had several minor measures at heart which he strove to forward with his customary persistence. He was active in petitioning Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. For years, as is well known, the Southern members tried to deny the right of petition in this regard, and John Quincy Adams bravely withstood them. The course of the South in opposing this clear Constitutional right disgusted all fair-minded people in the North and helped to spread and consolidate anti-slavery opinion. Another aim of Garrison's was to persuade

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England to buy her cotton from the free labor of India and thus strike a blow at the pockets of the slave-holders. Commercial reasons had much to do with Northern pro-slavery feeling, for the merchants of the free States did not wish to have their markets disturbed. General Dix, afterwards governor of New York, records that in 1850 he found merchants of high standing in the metropolis who declared their readiness to advocate the re-establishment of the foreign slave trade and the reintroduction of slavery at the North.