

CHAPTER X

GARRISON AND THE CIVIL WAR¹

And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.—I KINGS xix: 11, 12.

Garrison is not known as a non-resistant because the world was not ready for non-resistance, but it was ready for Abolition, and consequently upon his labors for Abolition his fame at present rests. But to the young agitator of the thirties one cause must have seemed as hopeless as the other—or rather they must both have seemed hopeless to those who lacked his faith. But he went on his way, full of hope, and sowed his seed faithfully, leaving the harvest to take care of itself. And he had the rare good fortune to reap one harvest, at any rate, during his lifetime. He might, like so many other good men, have passed his life in urging the highest ethics upon a generation too blind to see the

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truth; but fortunately he found a particular cause, completely in harmony with his highest conceptions, and yet ripe for action. Without abating a tittle of his beliefs, he threw himself heart and soul into the struggle for emancipation.

In considering that struggle we are brought face to face at once with the anomaly that the cause fathered by a non-resistant was at last achieved by the greatest war of history. Does not this dispose of all the claims of the doctrine of abstention from violence? Was not non-resistance impotent until men who believed in bloodshed, gun-powder and cold iron came to its assistance? Is not physical force the true remedy for such evils as slavery after all? I think not. Garrison had just one thing to accomplish and that was to make slavery intolerable, and this he succeeded in doing. When it had once become intolerable, it was doomed; but the method of its abolition was a matter of choice in which he was overruled. He has been blamed from the standpoint of non-resistance because he did not continue to protest against the war, and did not dissociate himself more distinctly from its methods. It has been urged against him that when a young friend who had obtained a commission in the army came to bid him farewell in uniform, Garrison slapped him on the back and wished him

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Godspeed without a word of disapproval. If there was any inconsistency in this behavior it was certainly very natural—very human—and he must be indeed a very rigid moralist who would refuse to excuse it. We all remember the story of the lady who, under most provoking circumstances, thanked a neighbor for swearing for her, and if Garrison even went so far as to rejoice over the victories of an army committed to emancipation, it was not a very heinous crime. But his general course during these difficult days seems to me absolutely consistent and praiseworthy. His defense, which we have already considered in another chapter, is impregnable. He was living among people who did not accept his standards of right and wrong. If they chose to fight over an issue which he thought should be settled peaceably, he could not but hope that the side of Abolition would triumph.

Was war the best method of abolishing slavery? Was it a moral method? Was it the most efficient? As to its morality, the North is practically unanimous; but, then, so too is the South, and on the other side! This fact ought perhaps to disturb our confidence. Thousands of men and women who disapprove of most wars would make an exception of this, the holy war *par excellence* waged for the liberation of an enslaved

race. But has not the South an equal right to judge of holiness? It is and was much more religious and orthodox (as those words are ordinarily used) than the North. The leaders of the Northern hosts, Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, Sheridan and the rest, were not "religious" men, and their connection with churches of any kind was usually of the most formal description; while Jefferson Davis, Lee and Stonewall Jackson were pillars of the church. And unprejudiced foreign observers often took the side of the South, too, of whom Mr. Gladstone was a notable example. Was his sympathy with the South a mistake? That depends, I think, on the character of the motives which determined his choice. If it was a kindly feeling for slavery that influenced him, of course it was a mistake. If it was a lurking fondness for the lazy, useless life of the Southern aristocracy—for the life of a class like his own, whose boast it was that it lived on the labor of others—then, too, it was a mistake. But it is possible to take another view of the issue. In the late fifties and early sixties, the North and South hated each other bitterly. I was brought up in the midst of that hatred and partook of it; and I remember suggesting, as a small boy, when Jefferson Davis was captured, that he be taken through the streets of our cities on exhibition in an iron cage. Our favorite song devoted him

to death by hanging on a sour-apple tree. As for the Southerners, they could find no words vile enough to describe their fellow citizens of the North, "Northern scum" being one of the commonest and most polite.

Here, then, is the ethical proposition: We have two neighbors living in partnership and hating each other with a deadly hatred, and one of them desires to separate peaceably from the other. There was no practical difficulty in the way of making a division, for the cleavage ran along geographical lines, and any Master-in-Chancery would have been obliged to report that an actual partition was perfectly feasible. Given this state of affairs, was it morally justifiable for the stronger partner to hold the other to his side by force? This is no Constitutional question, for it rises far above the plane of seals and parchment. Indeed, nothing obscures moral investigations so much as the dragging in by the heels of artificial and unnatural considerations. The simple issue was: Is it right to hold haters together by force? If Mr. Gladstone decided this question in the negative, I, for one, do not see how he could reasonably have done otherwise.

What was the psychological condition of the Northern mind, that the preference should be given to it? It was filled with hatred, as we have seen; and, where it did

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not hate, it was still bent upon having its own way. If we except an inconsiderable number of Abolitionists, the question of slavery did not affect the attitude of the North. It was only the South that was pre-occupied with slavery. President Lincoln said, as we have seen, that the war was undertaken for the sole purpose of preserving the Union, and that he would preserve it, either free or slave, or part free and part slave. He called out the troops to maintain the Union, and not to abolish slavery. The slaves were finally freed, as a war measure, to assist the armies in the field. The war was not designed to help emancipation, but emancipation to help the war. And what was this "Union" for which so many lives were sacrificed and in honor of which so much poetry was written? In the last analysis it was the forcible binding together of mutual haters, and its idealization was a curious example of fetish-worship. Apart from sentiment, the practical element in the Union spirit was the desire to preserve the size of the country; it was devotion to the idea of bigness, and the belief that bigness is a matter of latitude and longitude—the same spirit which prevailed in the Mexican and Philippine wars—in other words, the spirit of imperialism. It is impossible of course to extract any moral essence from a mere matter of geographical

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extension, and it is hardly necessary to point out that the highest civilizations of the past, those of Athens and Jerusalem and Florence, were restricted to narrow areas.

If the morality of the Northern policy in the Civil War was questionable, its worldly wisdom was even more so. What would have been likely to happen if the South had been allowed to secede peacefully and with the good wishes of her late partner? That the Confederacy would have suffered from its new commercial isolation cannot be doubted; and that the States of the Confederation would have quarreled is almost equally certain, for hard times make hard tempers. It is easy to predict, then, that a nation built upon the principle of free secession would not have remained long intact. It is very clear, too, that slavery could not have lasted long along the Northern border; for even before the war, with the fugitive-slave law in full operation, a continual stream of escaping slaves found its way across the intervening States to Canada. If nothing but an ordinary boundary line had separated the slave States from free soil, a general exodus of slaves would have begun, and ere long the border States would of necessity have ceased to be slave States. With slavery extinct, the reason for their separation from the North would have ceased, and their commercial interests

would have demanded reunion with the United States, while the kindly action of the North in permitting them to secede without interference would have left no hostile feelings in their minds to prevent such a reunion. With the border States once annexed, a new boundary would have been created along their Southern frontier, and here again history would repeat itself, until the nation was again one. I do not think that such an outcome of Secession is fanciful, and its realization would have been hastened by the growing impatience of the civilized world with the continuance of chattel-slavery.

Against this natural evolution of the race-difficulty what have we actually to set? Slavery was, indeed, abolished; but it is altogether impossible to sum up the evils which we have entailed upon ourselves by the manner of its abolition. First of all, we have the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, and all the grief and suffering consequent upon that loss. It is a common remark that the wars of Napoleon permanently injured the physique of the French people by killing off the strongest men. Is it not likely that we have suffered to some extent in the same way? Then, how much money did the war cost? And how much more wisely it might have been expended! Furthermore, consider our disgraceful annual pension bill, which, larger

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than the cost of any European standing army, is, I believe, actually increasing, and which seems to have transformed the brave hosts of the North into an army of mendicants! And into that mendicancy who shall say how much fraud has entered? Indeed, the moral effects of the war were its worst effects. Is there a tavern at any cross-roads, North or South, without its venerable toper whose habits were corrupted by the war? And where one has survived, how many have died of intemperance of all kinds, and of loathsome diseases which the war generated, fostered and spread down to this very day? All the flags with which we decorate their graves on Memorial Day cannot conceal the truth. I have seen it stated that discharged soldiers founded our army of tramps, a name which has come into use in my time. Do not think that these are the imaginations of a fanatic who sees in history only that which he looks for. In the Century Magazine for November, 1903, is an article on "The Present Epidemic of Crime," by the Rev. Dr. James M. Buckley, one of the best-known clergymen in the country. At the very head of the causes of this "epidemic" he places the great war. "Among the influences which have powerfully affected the primary causes of crime, and are sources of this present epidemic, is the effect of the Civil War. . . .

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The evil done by that war to public and private morality was almost irremediable. Its effects were seen upon Congress, upon politics, upon reconstruction, upon business, upon society, and upon the habits of the people."

One of the worst results of the Civil War was the resuscitation of the spirit of war and imperialism. Is it a wonder that children brought up in an atmosphere of hate and bloodshed should have had the spirit of hate and bloodshed infused into their hearts? The seed sown then duly bore its crop, and the battle-cry, "Remember the Maine!" (a vessel which all the world but America believes to have been destroyed by accident) was the direct offspring of "The Union Forever!" The Cuban War, waged for the independence of Cuba (which could have been obtained, according to our Secretary of State and our Minister to Spain, without a shot), and the Philippine War, waged for the purpose of depriving a brave people of their freedom, are the legitimate twin offspring of the Civil War, which in their turn may have their accursed progeny a generation hence.

The speculation caused by the interruption of commerce and the derangement of the currency during our war laid the foundations of the new plutocracy. Money was needed to pay the enormous expenses of destruction, and the tariff began to grow, and behind it

monopoly ensconced itself. With the new tramp came the new multi-millionaire, and caste, luxury, pauperism and labor troubles in their train. It would be possible to write a long and plausible book, tracing the origin of almost all the pressing evils of the day to the Civil War. Was the forcing of the issue of the abolition of slavery a few years before its time worth while at such a cost? Garrison was right. The war was a mistake.

This brings us to the sad fact that the war did not settle the race question, but merely aggravated it. Slavery was wrong and should have come to an end, but we ended it in the wrong way. The real trouble with the South at present is that the question of slavery was settled over the heads of the inhabitants by a hostile and hated power. No people could at heart accept such a settlement with good grace, and it is not to be expected of human nature. We stabbed the South to the quick, and during all the years of reconstruction turned the dagger round in the festering wound. The spirit of war and imperialism has never yet properly settled any question, except the question as to which side is the stronger; and now, after forty years, we are beginning to learn that the Negro has yet to be emancipated. If the South had been permitted to secede, slavery would have died a natural death, the South-

erners would have felt that they had consented to its demise, and they would have accepted the new order with that attitude of acquiescence which is necessary to the success of any social experiment. We have still at this late day to learn the ancient lesson of Buddha: "Hatred does not cease by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love; this is an old rule."

The wisest thing that was said by any Northerner at the outbreak of the war was the saying usually ascribed to Horace Greeley: "Let the erring sisters go." Mr. Whitelaw Reid has loyally endeavored to defend his former chief from this ascription, and he declares that Mr. Greeley never used the words. If Mr. Reid is speaking solely in the interests of historical accuracy, well and good; but if he is stretching a point to save his friend, he is doing him a doubtful service, for the final historian of the Civil War will have to record that these were the words, and the only words, of wisdom. And this was substantially the advice which Garrison gave.

In an article in the *North American Review* I took the position that Mr. Gladstone was right in sympathizing with the South, and I was much gratified afterwards to receive a letter from an English ex-official who was close to Mr. Gladstone and familiar with his opinions, in which letter he assured me that

my explanation of the British statesman's position was correct. His communication ran in part as follows:

But what was his real reason for sympathizing with the South? I am quite sure that it was not sympathy with the Southern "aristocracy"—which undoubtedly, however, had a great effect in bringing over the mass of upper-class opinion to that side. I do not believe it was his father's slave-owning connection (although that influenced some of his early speeches during the time he was still a Tory), for he had long since shaken himself free from those ideas. I firmly believe it was, as he viewed it, his love of liberty, his hatred and distrust of any policy of keeping any body of men in a political connection against their will. This he regarded as bad for the community which included an unwilling element in its midst, because it was an element of weakness and not of strength; just as a regiment wherein one-fifth of the men hate their officers or want to desert will not fight as well as a regiment "at union with itself." He further regarded it as bad for the element unwillingly included, because, being deprived of liberty, they were apt to direct all their energies to a struggle to be free, instead of along the natural lines of free and peaceful development and progress. This was at the root of his later Eastern policy, of his sympathy with Italy, and of his Irish policy, and also of his policy of

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union with the Colonies by the silken ties of sentiment and the elastic bonds of freedom, rather than by any forced and formal connection or by any cast-iron scheme of supposed material interests.

Such were Mr. Gladstone's views, and such also were Garrison's. I do not believe that the final judgment of posterity will be favorable to the course of the North in the Civil War, any more than it will be favorable to the policy of coercion in Ireland. It requires delicate instruments to cure national diseases, and we took the sledge-hammer as ours. It may be high treason to say so, but I think that the statesmanship of Gladstone—and of Garrison—was sounder than that of Lincoln.

There is a class of critics which denies the importance of Garrison's services to the country on the ground that all idealists and reformers are mere empty voices, and that none but economic causes affect the condition of men. The world, according to these philosophers, crawls upon its belly, and its brain and heart follow submissively wherever the belly leads. This is known as the "economic interpretation of history," and is particularly affected by Marxian socialists, who believe that state socialism is destined to be established by irresistible economic laws, and that their own idealism and agitation are alto-

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gether fruitless; which does not prevent them, however, from laboring and sacrificing themselves for the cause, like the typical idealist. This belief and this behavior is strangely like the Christian doctrine of predestination, the certain triumph of the church, and the fore-ordained election of the saints, which has never interfered with the missionary activity of believers. The disciple of Marx comforts himself with the materialist equivalent of the statement that all things work together for good, and his dogmatism is as strict as that of any Presbyterian sect. It is the old issue of fatalism and free will, the fatalist usually exerting himself to secure his ends much more strenuously than his adversary.

The most complete application of this theory of economic causes to the subject of slavery has been made by an acute socialist thinker, Mr. A. M. Simons, in a series of articles in the *International Socialist Review* of Chicago during the year 1903. According to him the idealism of Garrison and the Abolitionists—the growing belief in the immorality of slavery and the justice of the demand for freedom, John Brown and his raid, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the battle songs of the North—all these things were phantas-

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magoria and the people were deceiving themselves.

The real conflict was . . . between the capital that hired free labor and the capital that owned slave labor.¹

And Mr. Simons represents the Northern capitalists in the anticipation of a future struggle between themselves and their employes, as deliberately determining that the capitalists of the South should not enjoy the "privilege of an undisturbed industry." It seems to me that anyone who can believe this can believe anything that he wishes to. The fact is that slave labor did not compete with the free labor of the North. The South had a practical monopoly of the production of cotton, tobacco, rice and sugar, and slavery was chiefly confined to that production. The relative cheapness or dearness of slave labor had consequently no appreciable effect on Northern labor; and if it had, it is absurd to suppose that Northern capital appreciated the fact or brought about the war for any such reason. It is true that the North desired a protective tariff for its manufactures, and that the South preferred free trade so that it might have a world-wide market for its cotton. It is true that North and South each desired to control the national govern-

¹ Quoted by Mr. Simons from a former work by Benjamin E. Green.

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ment. But no war would have been fought if the South had not seceded; the South would not have seceded unless she had feared for the future of slavery; and slavery would not have been menaced except for the agitation of the anti-slavery people of the North with Garrison at their head.

As a matter of fact, human idealism enters into all the works of man; and the philosophy which asserts that poetry and religion spring from economic conditions and nothing else, is erroneous or at least one-sided. That mind and body are so intermingled that they react upon each other is undoubtedly true, and our extreme idealists need to be reminded now and then that the bread and butter factor must not be forgotten; but to assert that mind is made of bread and butter is going much too far, and it ignores the commonest experiences of human consciousness. Man's wish—man's will—is a force to be dealt with. Even ordinary hunger involves wish and will in the choice of food. Is our present civilization governed partially by the yield of wheat? But wheat itself is a human creation. The first man who tasted a grain of wild wheat and liked it and proceeded to sow other similar grains was moved as much by fancy as by economic necessity. And there is hunger and hunger. There is a hunger and thirst for knowledge, and a hunger and thirst after

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righteousness, and many other hungers and thirsts which must all be reckoned with in the study of evolution. And man can see the workings of this side of evolution in his own mind. I have become a vegetarian, for instance, and I am unable to detect any economic reason for my change of diet. I know many others of whom the same is true. In time the increase in the number of such vegetarians will produce an appreciable effect upon the economic condition of mankind, and here clearly will be a change occasioned in large part by pure idealism. The same is true of socialism, and I know many leading socialists who, so far from having been impelled to socialism by economic motives, would be economic losers by its victory. And so with the temperance movement, the peace movement, the movement for the prevention of cruelty to animals, and many others. I am conscious and every man is conscious, of doing things every day against mere economic interests, and I do not refer exclusively to philanthropy by any means. The millionaire who spends his money on a trip to Europe instead of saving it overrules his economic interests on account of his higher desire for novel experiences, and he does the same thing when he pays for a superfluous ornament on his house. To overlook men's desires is to overlook life itself, and in the record of the living

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actions of men the thought precedes the thing. You cannot have a dinner without thinking it out beforehand, nor build a house without plans. You might wait till doomsday for "economic conditions" to roast a potato for you. The will of man must intervene before the miracle is performed, and sometimes he wills to rise above his economic conditions and refuses to bend before them. In short, the "economic interpretation of history" is equivalent to the brick interpretation of a house (leaving the architect and the owner who ordered it built out of the question)—that is, no interpretation at all. Economic conditions are more often the limitation than the source of evolution. The exertion of our powers is more or less bounded by our materials, and events which are not economically possible are not likely to happen; but things are not yet in the saddle and the socialist movement, with its devoted and self-forgetful leaders, gives ample proof of it. It is curious to note that our extreme materialists call themselves "scientific socialists," and our extreme idealists, who deny the existence of matter, take the name of "Christian scientists." True "science" lies between these extremes, and perhaps it is wise to fight shy of those who advertise their "science" too conspicuously.

In the history of slavery the element of

human will and initiative is particularly prominent. A sentimental bishop was the first to suggest the importation of Africans to America in order to relieve the Indians from the labor which their spirit could not brook. It was a philanthropic business at the start. Indians would not work, Negroes would. Here again the human factor asserted itself. The cavalier immigrants of the South did not like to work, the Puritans of the North did; hence one of the reasons that slavery flourished only below Mason and Dixon's line. Mr. Simons refers to this fact as "one of those strange happenings" called "coincidences"! "The interesting point lies," he goes on to say, "in the fact that in Europe it was just the cavalier who represented the old feudal organization of society with its servile system of labor, while the Puritan is the representative of the rapidly rising bourgeoisie which was to rest upon the status of wage-slavery." "Strange happening," "coincidence," "interesting point"! This is certainly most naive. There was no reason why slaves should not be employed in the North in raising wheat as well as in the South in raising cotton, except that the Northerners did not want them, and heredity as well as climate goes to account for the difference. Mr. Simons himself quotes from the work of an ante-bellum author a reference to German settlers who, "true to

their national instincts, will not employ the labor of a slave." And in fine, as if to show how little he is convinced by his own arguments, Mr. Simons says of this same volume (Helper's "Impending Crisis"), "This book had a most remarkable circulation in the years immediately preceding the war, and probably if the truth as to the real factors which made public opinion could be determined, it had far more to do with bringing on the Civil War than did 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'"—which involves an admission as to the latter book as well as to the former. Books and arguments and ideals had their leading part to play in the abolition of slavery, and the very adversaries of the belief cannot get away from it. "Public opinion" is and always has been a determining element in history, and it is swayed by novels and agitators and poets. Garrison still has his place in history.

Another class of critic minimizes the work of the Abolitionists upon the ground that they did more harm than good, and that slavery would have been abolished much more easily without them. To refute this argument we must appeal to the entire history of the times, which has been so briefly summarized in these pages. We cannot read it impartially without being conscious throughout of the constant presence, behind statesmen and poli-

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tician, behind orator and editor, of the goad of the Abolitionist. In the troubled waters of controversy his was ever the stirring power. He was not a fly on the wheel, but steam in the engine. And we can call the best of all witnesses in confirmation of this fact. President Lincoln, a few days before his assassination, when congratulated by Mr. Chamberlain, afterwards governor of South Carolina, upon having freed the slaves, answered, "I have been only an instrument. The logic and moral power of Garrison and the anti-slavery people of the country, and the army, have done all."