Reminiscences of the Life and Times of Lydia Maria Child

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Reminiscences of the Life and Times of Lydia Maria Child I

A review of the life and times of Mrs. Child is eminently instructive at the present period of our history. It is an object lesson to all classes of people in this Republic, but especially so to our own race; the name of Lydia Maria Child will descend from generation to generation as that of one of the most benign of women. In reading the story of her pure life with its simple joys, intellectual ripeness and spartan courage, we feel about us the holy atmosphere of a perfect woman’s life, most nobly planned, and we thank God for the inspiration of her example, founded on the great law of love and the brotherhood of man.

If the influence of the lives of such great-hearted Anglo-Saxons as she could radiate through space, and enwrap the Negro youth round about, how different would be the lot of a dependent race!

Mrs. Child’s active life was cast in the iron age of American history. She was born in Medford, Mass., February 11, 1802. Her father, David Francis, was a worthy citizen of the town. Her brother, Convers Francis, afterwards theological professor of Harvard College, aided his sister materially to cultivate the talent which finally blossomed so luxuriantly. Her education was
limited to the public schools, with the exception of one year at a private seminary in her own
town. Her first work, *Hobomok*, was published in the twenty-first year of her age. She met with
great success, and soon after, *The Rebels: a Tale of the Revolution*, was issued and ran through
several editions. Other works followed. It is not too much to say that half a century ago she was
the most popular literary woman in the United States. In 1826 the *North American Review*, the
highest literary authority of the country, said of her, “We are not sure that any literary woman of
our country could outrank Mrs. Child. *** Few female writers, if any, have done more or better
things for our literature in the lighter or graver departments.***¹

Comparatively young, she placed herself in the front rank of American authorship. Her
books and her magazine (she was the editor of the *Juvenile Miscellany*), had a large circulation,
and were affording her a comfortable income, at a time when authorship was not at all a lucrative
profession. But a change was at hand. The resolute and determined purpose of the South to make
slavery national showed plainly; the North was also growing in the determination to make
freedom universal. A crisis was fast approaching on this absorbing question. In 1828 Miss
Francis married David Lee Child, a young and able lawyer, and took up her residence in Boston.
In 1831-2, both became deeply interested in the subject of slavery through the personal influence
of William Lloyd Garrison. Mr. Child was then a member of the Massachusetts legislature and
editor of the *Massachusetts Journal*; he denounced the project of the dismemberment of Mexico
for the purpose of extending slavery. He was one of the earliest members of the New England
Anti-Slavery Society, and his outspoken hostility to the peculiar institution affected his interests
as a lawyer unfavorably. His papers and speeches on the same subject while in England and

¹ Quoted in John Greenleaf Whittier, Introduction to *Letters of Lydia Maria Child*, by Lydia
Maria Child (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1883; a facsimile of the first edition, New York: Negro
France created a profound sensation. In 1833 the American Anti-Slavery Society was formed at Philadelphia. It was at this time that Lydia Maria Child startled the country by the publication of her noble Appeal in behalf of that class of Americans called Africans.

“It is quite impossible for any one of the present generation to imagine,” says John Greenleaf Whittier in his introduction to her life and letters, “the popular surprise and indignation which the book called forth, or how entirely its author cut herself off from the favor and sympathy of those who had previously delighted to honor her. *** Social and literary circles closed their doors against her. The sale of her books, the subscriptions to her magazine fell off to a ruinous extent. She knew all she was hazarding and made the great sacrifice, prepared for all the consequences which followed.”

“There were few women authors when, in 1821-22 she published her first novels,” says Wendell Phillips, in his oration at her funeral.

The success of these was so brilliant, and a woman’s success then so rare, that the Boston Athenaeum,--still the most fashionable and aristocratic, and then the only, public library--paid her the almost unique compliment of sending her a free ticket of admission. When she published her “appeal,” she of course sent that library a copy. Whether they ever placed the book on their shelves I do not know, but at any rate the directors immediately withdrew her ticket of admission. And a prominent lawyer, afterwards a notorious attorney-general of Massachusetts, is said to have used the tongs to fling the obnoxious volume out of his window.

This is a sad record; but to recall it is only a fair tribute to the author, who never faltered; only gave to the hated and struggling cause a more public adhesion

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2 Whittier, Introduction, ix.
and a more liberal support. Hardly ever was there a more costlier sacrifice.

Narrow means just changing to ease; after a weary struggle, fame and social position in her grasp; every door opening before her; the sweetness of having her genius recognized.

No one had supposed that independence of opinion would wreck all this. It was a thunderbolt from a summer sky.³

In the preface to her book she says, “I am fully aware of the unpopularity of the task I have undertaken; but though I expect ridicule and censure, I do not fear them. *** Should this book be the means of advancing, even one single hour, the inevitable progress of truth and justice, I would not exchange the consciousness for all Rothschild’s wealth or Sir Walter’s fame.”⁴

From then on her life was a battle; rowing hard against the stream of popular hatred. Added to this was lack of means, privation and loss of friends. But she held the courage of her convictions. She calmly and without a quiver, placed herself by the side of the despised Negro, and by her words and acts rebuked the cruelty of caste prejudice. Her philanthropy held no taint of fanaticism, and throughout the long struggle she preserved her fine intellectuality and sensibility of the beautiful in art and nature.

While editing the Anti-Slavery Standard with her husband, in New York, she wrote her charming Greek romance of “Philothea” and her lives of Madame Roland and the Baroness de Staël, also her admirable Letters from New York, humorous, eloquent and picturesque, which

⁴ Lydia Maria Child, An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans (Boston: Allen and Ticknor, 1833), [vii], quoted in Whittier, Introduction, ix.
were praised even by a pro-slavery community. Her great work in three octavo volumes, *The Progress of Religious Ideas*, belongs also to this period.

There was another side to this interesting woman’s character. She was wise in counsel; and men like Charles Sumner, Henry Wilson, Salmon P. Chase, and Governor Andrew availed themselves of her sound judgment. Her friends were the most gifted and cultured men and women of the two continents. For America she had Lowell, Whittier, Phillips, Mr. and Mrs. Ellis Gray Loring, Francis G. Shaw, Channing, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson and the philosopher, Emerson; for Europe, Fredrika Bremer, George Thompson and Harriet Martineau.

In 1852 Mr. and Mrs. Child took up their residence in the town of Wayland, Mass., where their domestic happiness is described as perfect. The plain, unpretentious house with its fruit orchard and vegetable garden, under the care of Mr. Child, is a rebuke to the tinsel and glitter of the present age among all classes. Here was a woman whose capabilities and achievements have seldom been surpassed, content to live in unostentatious simplicity like the humble rustic, performing with scrupulous care the humblest tasks and finding pleasure in them. For twenty-two years this companionship continued, mutually serving each other and dependent upon each other for intellectual companionship.

In reading her letters one has a perfect resumé of the exciting incidents of the times in which she dwelt.

**BOSTON, Nov. 22, 1833.**

That most agreeable of all agreeable men, Mr. Crawford of London, was here last night.

He tells harrowing stories of what he has seen at the South during his inspections of prisons there. Slaves kept in readiness to join their coffle were shut
up in places too loathsome and horrid for the worst of criminals. He says had any one told him such things as he has seen and heard, he should have considered it excessive exaggeration. Yet we talk of mild epithets, and tenderness toward our Southern brethren. Curses on “the smooth barbarity of courts.” Of the various cants now in fashion, the cant of charity is to me the most disagreeable. Charity which thinks to make wrong right by baptizing it with a sonorous name; that covers selfishness with the decent mantle of prudence; that glosses over iniquity with the shining varnish of virtuous professions; that makes a garland bridge over the bottomless pit, and calls the devil an “Archangel ruined.” If evil would manifest itself as it really is, how easy it would be to overcome it; but this it cannot do simply because it is evil.\(^5\)

Some of the scenes which she passed through during her eight years of residence in New York as the editor of the *Anti-Slavery Standard* are vividly portrayed in her correspondence.

NEW YORK, Aug. 15, 1835.

(To Mrs. Ellis Gray Loring.)

I am at Brooklyn, at the house of a very hospitable Englishman, a friend of Mr. Thompson’s. I have not ventured into the city, nor does one of us dare to go to church today, so great is the excitement here. You can form no conception of it. ’Tis like the times of the French Revolution, when no man dared trust his neighbors. Private assassins from New Orleans are lurking at the corners of the streets, to stab Arthur Tappan; and very large sums are offered for any one who will convey Mr. Thompson into the Slave States. I tremble for him, and I love him

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in proportion to my fears. He is almost a close prisoner in his chamber, his friends deeming him in imminent peril the moment it is ascertained where he is. We have managed with some adroitness to get along in safety so far; but I have faith that God will protect him, even to the end. Yet why do I make this boast? My faith has at times been so weak that I have started and trembled and wept, like a very child; and personal respect and affection for him have so far gained the mastery over my trust in Providence, that I have exclaimed in anguish of heart, “Would to God I could die for thee!” Your husband could hardly be made to realize the state of fermentation now existing here. There are 7,000 Southerners now in the city; and I am afraid there are not 700 among them who have the slightest fear of God before their eyes. Mr. Wright was yesterday barricading his doors and windows with strong bars and planks an inch thick. Violence, in some form, seems to be generally expected. Alas, poor fools! They are building up the very cause they seek to destroy.6

In September of that year she wrote in reply to a letter of caution from her brother for her personal safety:

You will say a true republic never can exist. In this, I have more faith than you. I believe the world will be brought into a state of order through manifold revolutions. Sometimes we may be tempted to think it would have been better for us not to have been cast on these evil times; but this is a selfish consideration; we ought rather to rejoice that we have much to do as mediums in the regeneration of the world.***

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6 Ibid., 15.
You ask me to be prudent, and I will be so, as far as is consistent with a sense of duty. *** I have examined the history of the slave too thoroughly, and felt his wrongs too deeply, to be prudent in the worldly sense of the term.\(^7\)

Most interesting is her description of Angelina Grimké’s first appearance on the anti-slavery platform. It will be remembered by readers of history that the Grimké sisters, daughters of Judge Grimké, of the Supreme Court of South Carolina, left their native State because of slavery. Angelina addressed a committee of the Massachusetts Legislature on the subject of slavery in the House of Representatives, Feb. 21, 1838. The Grimké sisters were the first women to speak in public against slavery. Their testimonies, given from personal knowledge and experience, produced a profound sensation, and large audiences were addressed by them wherever they appeared.

March 20, 1838.

(To E. Carpenter.)

I thought of you many times while Angelina was addressing the committee of the Legislature. I know you would have enjoyed it so much. I think it was a spectacle of the greatest moral sublimity I ever witnessed. The house was full to overflowing. For a moment a sense of the immense responsibility resting on her seemed almost to overwhelm her. She trembled and grew pale. But this passed quickly, and she went on to speak gloriously, strong in utter forgetfulness of herself, and in her own earnest faith in every word she uttered. *** I believe she made a very powerful impression on the audience. *** The Boston members of the Legislature tried hard to prevent her having a hearing on the second day.

\(^7\) Ibid., 17.
Among other things, they said that such a crowd was attracted by curiosity the galleries were in danger of being broken down; though in fact they were constructed with remarkable strength. A member from Salem wittily proposed that a “committee be appointed to examine the foundations of the State House of Massachusetts to see whether it will bear another lecture from Miss Grimké.”

One sign that her influence is felt is that the “sound part of the community” seek to give vent to their vexation by calling her Devil-in-a instead of Angelina, and Miss Grimalkin instead of Miss Grimké.8

Again writing to her brother, she tells of a Southern gentleman who wrote to her from New Orleans, inviting her to that city, promising her a “warm reception, and lodgings in the calaboose, with as much nigger company as you desire.” She writes a few sentences which show the grand character of this most noble of women more clearly than any eulogy.

“In spite of bolts and bars, I should have been off, like a witch at midnight, holding fair discourse with Orion, and listening to the plaintive song of Pleiades mourning for the earth-dimmed glory of their fallen sister. How did he know, in his moral midnight, that choosing to cast out lot with the lowliest of earth was the very way to enter into companionship with the highest in heaven?”9

The passage of the Fugitive Slave Bill was a sad event to the colored citizens of the country. At that time there were eight thousand nine hundred and seventy-five persons of color in Massachusetts. In thirty-six hours after the passage of the bill was known, five and thirty colored persons applied to a well-known legal light for counsel. Before sixty hours had passed, forty persons had fled. Speaking of this infamous law, Mrs. Child writes:

8 Ibid., 26-27.
9 Ibid., 41.
Mrs. Stowe’s truly great work, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, has also done much to command respect for the faculties of women. Whittier has poured forth verses upon it. Horace Mann has eulogized it in Congress. Lord Morpeth is carried away with it; the music stores are full of pieces of music suggested by its different scenes; somebody is going to dramatize it; and 100,000 copies sold in little less than six months. Never did any American work have such success! The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law roused her up to write it. Behold how “God makes the wrath of man to praise Him!” Charles Sumner has made a magnificent speech in Congress against the Fugitive Slave Law. How thankful I was for it! God bless him! The Republican party don’t know how to appreciate his honesty and moral courage. They think he makes a mistake in speaking the truth, and does it because he don’t know any better. History will do him justice.

It is really droll to see in what different states of mind people read “Uncle Tom.” Mr. Pierce, Senator from Maryland, read it lately, and when he came to the sale of “Uncle Tom,” he exclaimed with great emotion, “Here’s a writer that knows how to sympathize with the South! I could fall down at the feet of that woman! She knows how to feel for a man when he’s obliged to sell a good honest slave!” In his view the book was intended as a balsam for bereaved slaveholders.\(^\text{10}\)

(To be continued.)

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\(^{10}\) Ibid., 69-70.
Continuing the perusal of Mrs. Child’s *Letters*, we reap a rich harvest of anecdotes made valuable from the fact that they are compiled by a participant in the stormy scenes portrayed. A vivid picture of the political situation when the Nebraska Bill was passed, is given in a letter to Francis G. Shaw, which is invaluable in its truth and vigor.

With regard to the present, here in our own country, my dear friend, it is gloomy enough…. Of all our servile Senates, none have been so completely servile to the slave interest as the present one. They have passed the Nebraska Bill in open defiance of the people.... These measures have been followed up by the most outrageous insults and aggressions upon the North. Only three day ago another poor slave was hunted in Boston, and though a pretty general indignation was excited, he was given up by the Boston magistrates and triumphantly carried back to bondage, guarded by a strong escort of United States troops. (Anthony Burns.) The courthouse was nearly filled with troops and hired ruffians, armed with cutlasses and bowie-knives. No citizen was allowed to enter without a pass, as is the custom with slaves; and the passes were obtained with great difficulty, none being given to any one suspected of being friendly to the slave. The Rev. Samuel May had his pass taken from him, and he was thrust out rudely by the soldiers. Men were even arrested and imprisoned for merely making observations to each other which the ruling powers considered dangerous. My dear friend, my very soul is sick in view of these things. They tell me “The Lord will surely arise for the sighing of the poor and needy,” as He has promised. I think to myself, “Oh, yes, that promise was made some three thousand years ago, and the
fulfilment seems as far off as ever.” But I suppress the impatient blasphemy and only say, as poor Aunt Chloe does in Uncle Tom, “Yes, Missis, but the Lord lets dreadful things happen.”

Whether there is any limit to the servile submission of the North, I know not. The South seems resolved to try to the utmost how much kicking and cuffing she will bear. The Richmond Enquirer compares the connection between North and South to the relation between Greece and her Roman masters.

The dignity and energy of the Roman character, conspicuous in war and politics, were not easily tamed and adjusted to the arts of industry and literature. The degenerate and pliant Greeks, on the contrary, obsequious, dexterous, and ready, monopolized the business of teaching and manufacturing in the Roman Empire, allowing their masters ample leisure for the service of the State, in the Senate or the field. We learn from Juvenal that they were the most useful and capable servants, whether as pimps or professors of rhetoric.

Now do you know that my inmost soul rejoices in all the manifestations of contempt? The North richly deserves them, and I have a faint hope that they may be heaped on till some of the old spirit is roused….

My soul is just now in a gloomy state, and it curses “law and order,” seeing them all arrayed on the wrong side. This fierce mood will soon give place
to a milder one. But, oh, my friend, these continually baffled efforts for human freedom, they are agonizing to the sympathizing soul.\(^\text{11}\)

What a perfect presentation of the present position of North and South toward the Negro is here presented! We of the present day are agonized by baffled efforts for human freedom. Many times do we repress the “impatient blasphemy,” ”the Lord lets dreadful things happen.”

Speaking of her great work, The Appeal, she says,--

My Appeal in favor of anti-slavery walked into the enemy’s camp alone. It brought Dr. Channing to see me for the first time; and he told me it had stirred up his mind to the conviction that he ought not to remain silent on the subject. Then came Dr. Palfrey, who years afterward said that the emancipation of his slaves might be traced to the impulse that book had given him. Charles Sumner writes me that the influence of my anti-slavery writings years ago has had an important effect on his course in Congress.... I trust I have never impelled any one in the wrong direction. In the simplest things I write, whether for children or grown people, I always try to sow some seeds for freedom, truth and humanity.

...Most devoutly do I believe in the persuasive and ever-guiding Spirit of God; but I do not believe it was ever shut up between the covers of any book, or that it ever can be. Portions of it, or rather breathings of it, are in many books. The words of Christ seem to me full of it, as no other words are. But if we want truth, we must listen to the voice of God in the silence of our own souls as He did.\(^\text{12}\)

In these words the soul of a good woman is laid bare; the crystal purity of a noble mind is presented to us always “sowing seeds for freedom, truth and humanity.” Such lives cannot be too

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 71-73.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 77-78.
strongly commended to the earnest study of the youth of any race. Still mirroring the times surrounding her, she touches upon a great national tragedy in a letter to Mrs. S. B. Shaw.

Wayland, 1856.

The outrage upon Charles Sumner made me literally ill for days. It brought on nervous headache and painful suffocations about the heart. If I could only have done something, it would have loosened that tight ligature that seemed to stop the flowing of my blood. But I never was one who knew how to serve the Lord by standing and waiting; and to stand and wait them! It almost drove me mad. And that miserable Faneuil Hall meeting!... Poisoning the well-spring of popular indignation, which was rising in its might! Mr. A., on the eve of departing for Europe wrote to me, “The North will not really do anything to maintain their own dignity. See if they do! I am willing to go abroad, to find some relief from the mental pain that the course of public affairs in this country has for many years caused me.”

But I am more hopeful. Such a man as Charles Sumner will not bleed and suffer in vain. Those noble martyrs of liberty in Kansas will prove missionary ghosts, walking through the land, rousing the nation from its guilty slumbers.\textsuperscript{13}

To Miss Lucy Osgood.

Wayland, July 9, 1856.

My anxiety about Charles Sumner and about the sufferers in Kansas has thrown a pall over everything. The fire of indignation is the only thing that has lighted up my gloom. At times my peace principles have shivered in the wind;

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 78-79.
and nothing could satisfy my mood but Jeanne d’Arc’s floating banner and consecrated sword. And when this state of mind was rebuked by the remembrance of Him who taught us to overcome evil only with good, I could do nothing better than groan out, in a tone of despairing reproach, “How long, O Lord! how long?”

To David Lee Child.

Wayland, Jan. 7, 1857.

Charles Sumner called to see me and brought me his photograph. We talked together two hours, and I never received such an impression of holiness from mortal men. Not an ungentle word did he utter concerning Brooks or any of the political enemies who have been slandering and insulting him for years. He only regretted the existence of a vicious institution which inevitably barbarized those who grew up under its influence.

Henry Wilson came into the anti-slavery fair, and I talked with him an hour or so. He told me I could form no idea of the state of things in Washington. As he passes through the streets in the evening, he says the air is filled with yells and curses from the oyster shops and gambling saloons, the burden of which is all manner of threatened violence to Seward and Sumner and Wilson and Burlingame. While he was making his last speech, the Southern members tried to insult him in every way. One of them actually brandished his cane as if about to strike him, but he ignored the presence of him and his cane, and went on with his speech. He says he never leaves his room to go into the Senate without thinking,

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14 Ibid., 80.
whether he has left everything arranged as he should wish if he were never to return to it alive.\textsuperscript{15}

The year 1859 will ever be memorable for the bold attempt of John Brown to burst the doors of bondage asunder. We count not the success of that venture by the ignominious death of the little band of intrepid heroes who dashed themselves recklessly against the mighty torrent of Southern power, but by the impact which in its recoil shook the foundation stones of prison-walls and carried frenzied terror to the very heart of the slave-land.

We who justly honor Washington and Warren and Tell and Wallace, we who glory in the revolutionary struggles of the fathers of this Republic cannot refuse equal merit to the strong, great, free, heroic Brown, who consecrated all he had to the help of the most friendless and unfortunate in the land even unto this present day. Washington’s fate would have been the same as Brown’s if England had conquered the struggling colonies; calumny, not adulation, would have crowned his honored head as dark and despairing as that which has rested over the memory of the hero of Ossawatomie.

Upon the arrest of Captain Brown, a long correspondence was entered into between Mrs. Child and Governor Wise of Virginia. She wished to nurse the hero, but the desire of friends, enforced by the request of Captain Brown, finally determined her to forsake the idea. The entire correspondence relating to this matter is of such importance that it is hard to draw the line in quoting what may be of most interest to the reader; we will, therefore, give Mrs. Mason’s spicy letter of vituperation and some portions of Mrs. Child’s scholarly and convincing reply.

Letter of Mrs. Mason:

Alto, King George’s Co., Va.,

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 88.
Nove. 11, 1859.

Do you read your Bible, Mrs. Child? If you do, read there, “Woe unto you hypocrites,” and take to yourself with twofold damnation that terrible sentence; for, rest assured, in the day of judgment it shall be more tolerable for those thus scathed by the awful denunciation of the Son of God, than for you. You would soothe with sisterly and motherly care the hoary-headed murderer of Harper’s Ferry! A man whose aim and intention was to incite the horrors of a servile war....

The antecedents of Brown’s band proved them to have been the off-scourings of the earth; and what would have been our fate if they had found as many sympathizers in Virginia as they seem to have in Massachusetts?

Now, compare yourself with those your “sympathy” would devote to such ruthless ruin, and say, on that “word of honor, which has never been broken,” would you stand by the bedside of an old Negro, to alleviate his sufferings as fast as human aid could? Do you soften the pangs of maternity in those around you by all the care and comfort you can give? Do you grieve with those near you even though their sorrows resulted from their own misconduct? We do these and more for our servants, and why? Because we endeavor to do our duty in that state of life it has pleased God to place us....Go thou and do likewise, and keep away from Charlestown. If the stories read in the public prints be true of the sufferings of the poor of the North, you need not go far for objects of charity. “Thou hypocrite! take first the beam out of thine own eye, then shalt thou see clearly to pull the mote out of thy neighbor’s.”...
I will add, in conclusion, no Southerner ought, after your letter to Governor Wise and to Brown, to read a line of your composition, or to touch a magazine which bears your name in its list of contributors; and in this we hope for the “sympathy” at least of those at the North who deserve the name of woman.

M. J. C. MASON.

Reply of Mrs. Child:


Prolonged absence from home has prevented my answering your letter so soon as I intended. I have no disposition to retort upon you the “twofold damnation” to which you consign me. On the contrary, I sincerely wish you well, both in this world and the next. If the anathema proved a safety valve to your own boiling spirit, it did some good to you, while it fell harmless upon me. Fortunately for all of us, the Heavenly Father rules his universe by laws, which the passions or the prejudices of mortals have no power to change.

As for John Brown, his reputation may be safely trusted to the impartial pen of history; and his motives will be righteously judged by Him who knoweth the secrets of all hearts. Men, however great they may be, are of small consequence in comparison with principles, and the principle for which John Brown died is the question at issue between us.

You refer me to the Bible from which you quote the favorite text of slave-holders:—”Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear.” Abolitionists also have favorite texts, to some of which I would call your attention:—”Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” “Thou shalt not deliver unto his
master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee.” “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, to show thy people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins.” “Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.”...

To the personal questions you ask me, I will reply in the name of all the women of New England. It would be extremely difficult to find any woman in our village who does not sew for the poor, and watch with the sick, when occasion requires. We pay our domestics generous wages, with which they can purchase as many Christmas gowns as they please; I have never known an instance where the “pangs of maternity” did not meet with requisite assistance; and here at the North, after we have helped the mothers, we do not sell the babies.

With regard to your declaration that “no Southerner ought to henceforth read a line of my composition,” I reply that I have great satisfaction in the consciousness of having nothing to lose in that quarter. Twenty-seven years ago I published a book called An Appeal in Behalf of that Class of Americans called Africans. It influenced the minds of several young men afterward conspicuous in public life, through whose agency the cause was better served than it could have been by me.... Literary popularity was never a paramount object with me, even in my youth; and, now that I am old, I am utterly indifferent to it.... I am exiled with honorable company. Dr. Channing’s writings breathe what you call arrant treason. William C. Bryant is openly on our side. The inspired muse of Whittier has sounded the trumpet for moral warfare with your iniquitous institution; his stirring tones have been answered by Pierpont, Lowell and Longfellow. Emerson, the
Plato of America, leaves the scholastic seclusion he loves so well, and bravely
takes his stand among the trumpeters. George W. Curtis, brilliant writer and
lecturer, elegant man of the world, lays the wealth of his talent on the altar of
Freedom, and makes common cause with rough-shod reformers.

The genius of Mrs. Stowe carried the outposts of your institution at one
dash. In the church, it is assailed by Theodore Parker’s eloquence. On the
orthodox side is the burning fire kindled by Dr. Cheever. Between them is Henry
Ward Beecher, sending a shower of keen arrows into your intrenchments.... The
fact is, the whole civilized world proclaims slavery an outlaw.¹⁶

To Mrs. S. M. Parsons.

Wayland, Dec., 1859.

What a sublime martyrdom was that of old John Brown! There was
nothing wanting in the details of his conduct. There was grand simplicity and
harmony throughout.

The colored people of Boston held a prayer-meeting all day, on the 2d of
December (the day on which John Brown was hung), and I chose to spend the
solemn day with them. There was nothing to jar upon the tender sadness of my
feelings. There was no one to question the old hero’s claims to reverence, or to
doubt his sanity of mind. All they knew about it was, that he was the friend of
their oppressed race and was dying for them. It was very touching to hear them
sing appropriate Methodist hymns so plaintively.... One old black man who
informed the Lord that he “had been a slave and knew how bitter it was,”

¹⁶ Ibid., 120-122; 123-124, 134-137.
ejaculated with great fervor, “and since it has pleased thee to take away our
Moses, oh! Lord, God! raise us up a Joshua.” To which all the congregation
responded with a loud “Amen!”

To Mrs. S. B. Shaw.

Medford, 1860.

You doubtless remember Thomas Sims, the fugitive slave who was
surrendered in Boston, in 1852. I saw a letter from him to his sister, expressing an
intense longing for his freedom, and I swore “by the Eternal,” as General Jackson
used to say, that as Massachusetts had sent him into slavery, Massachusetts
should bring him back. I resolved, also, that it should all be done with pro-slavery
money. They told me that I had undertaken to “hoe a very hard row.” I laughed
and said, “It shall be done: General Jackson never retreats.”

I expected to have to write at least a hundred letters, and to have to station
myself on the steps of the State House this winter, to besiege people. Sims is a
skilful mechanic, and his master asks $1,800 for him; a large sum for an
abolitionist to get out of pro-slavery purses! But I got it! I got it! I got it! Hurrah! I
had written only eighteen letters, when one gentleman promised to pay the whole
sum, provided I would not mention his name. [Major-General Devens, who was
United States marshal at the time of the rendition of Sims.]  

(To be concluded.)

Reminiscences of the Life and Times of Lydia Maria Child III

17 Ibid., 137-138.
18 Ibid., 144-145, 189.
History repeats itself; how closely only those know who carefully follow the trend of events in the life of the negro [sic] of to-day and compare them with those of scarce a half-century ago.

Mrs. Child dealt with the question of Slavery as she did with every other question,—in a deep, kindly, respectful sympathy. But for her there were no half-way measures, no foolish tenderness about Anglo-Saxon brotherhood and supremacy over the “dark races” of the earth. She demanded of everyone, what she gave herself, a strict adherence to duty as expounded in the immutable laws of Divinity.

Were she living to-day, her trenchant pen would do us yeoman’s service in the vexed question of disfranchisement and equality for the Afro-American. From a letter written in 1861, we can judge how her caustic criticism might arouse the wrath of the southern press, and draw down upon her head the vials of Tillman’s billingsgate.

To The Hon. Lemuel Shaw:

Medford, Jan. 3, 1861.

By this mail I send you three pamphlets, for which I ask a candid perusal.

With deep sadness I saw your respected and influential name signed to an address in favor of repealing the Personal Liberty Bill. I trust you will not deem me disrespectful if I ask whether you have reflected well on all the bearings of this important subject. Perhaps you may consider me, and those for whom I labor, as prone to look only on one side. Grant that it is so--is it not the neglected side? Is it not the right side? And are not you yourself, in common with all human beings, liable to look upon things too much from one point of view? I presume that your
social environment is almost entirely conservative; and conservative of habits and
stereotyped sayings, rather than of the original principles on which the
government of this country was founded. Have you carefully examined and duly
considered the other side? This mutual agreement between north and south to
keep millions of fellow-beings in abject degradation and misery cannot possibly
be right. No sophistry can make it appear so to hearts and minds not frozen or
blinded by the influence of trade or politics.

If the common plea of the inferiority of the African race be true, that only
adds meanness to our guilt; the magnanimous strong are ashamed not to protect
the weak. But then everybody knows that an immense proportion of American
slaves are not black. Thousands upon thousands of them are lighter than Italians,
Spanish, Portuguese, Greeks, etc. They are the sons and daughters of our
presidents, governors, judges, senators and generals. The much-vaunted Anglo-
Saxon blood is coursing in their veins, through generation after generation.

If you set aside heart and conscience as appropriate guides for women
only, and assume pure cold intellect for a standard of action, what answer will
enlightened reason give, if you ask whether free institutions in one part of the
country can possibly survive continual compromises with despotism in another
part? If the lowest person in the community is legally oppressed, is not the highest
endangered thereby? And does not the process inevitably demoralize the people
by taking away from law that which renders it sacred, namely, equal and impartial
justice? I again ask you, respectfully and earnestly, to read my pamphlets with
candid attention. If the request seems to you obtrusive or presumptuous, my
apology is that I believe you to be an upright and kind man, and therefore infer that your heart and conscience are not in fault, but only the blinding influences of your social environment.

Yours respectfully,

L. Maria Child.19

To Mrs. S. B. Shaw:

Medford, January, 1861.

On Wednesday evening I went to Mrs. Chapman’s reception…. I went home to Derne Street very weary, yet found it impossible to sleep. I knew there were very formidable preparations to mob the anti-slavery meeting the next day, and that the mayor was avowedly on the side of the mob... I was excited and anxious; not for myself, but for Wendell Phillips. Hour after hour of the night, I heard the clock strike, while visions were passing through my mind of that noble head assailed by murderous hands, and I obliged to stand by without the power to save him.

I went very early in the morning, and entered Tremont Temple by a labyrinthian passage. There I found a company of young men, a portion of the self-constituted body-guard of Mr. Phillips. They looked calm, but resolute and stern. I knew they were all armed, as well as hundreds of others; but their weapons were not visible. It was a solemn gathering. I assure you; for though there was a pledge not to use weapons unless Mr. Phillips or some other anti-slavery speaker was personally in danger, still nobody could foresee what might

19 Ibid., 145-146.
happen. The meeting opened well. The anti-slavery sentiment was there in full force; but soon the mob began to yell from the galleries. They came tumbling in by hundreds.... It was a full realization of the old phrase, “All hell broke loose.”

Mr. Phillips stood on the front of the platform for a full hour, trying to be heard whenever the storm lulled a little. They cried, “Throw him out! Throw a brick at him!”... Then they’d sing, with various bellowing and shrieking accompaniments, “Tell John Andrew, tell John Andrew, John Brown’s dead.” I should think there were four or five hundred of them. At one time they all rose up, many of them clattered down-stairs and there was a surging forward towards the platform. My heart beat so fast I could hear it; for I did not then know how Mr. Phillips’ armed friends were stationed at every door and in the middle of every aisle.... I forgot to mention that Wendell Phillips was preceded by James Freeman Clarke, whom the mob treated with such boisterous insults that he was often obliged to pause in his remarks. After Mr. Phillips, R. W. Emerson tried to address the people, but his voice was completely drowned. After the meeting adjourned, a large mob outside waited for Mr. Phillips, but he went out by the private entrance, and arrived home safely.

In the afternoon meeting the uproar was greater than it had been in the forenoon. The mob cheered and hurrahed for the Union, and for Edward Everett, for Mayor Wightman, and for Charles Francis Adams. The mayor came at last, and mounting the platform, informed his “fellow-citizens” in the galleries that the trustees of the building had requested him to disperse the meeting and clear the hall. Turning the meeting out-of-doors was precisely what they wanted him to do.
To the same:

Wayland, May 5, 1861.

I am glad to witness the universal enthusiasm for the United States flag, though the sight of that flag always inspires a degree of sadness in my own breast. I should so delight in having it thoroughly worthy of being honored! But every flap of the Stars and Stripes repeats to me the story of those poor slaves who, through great perils and sufferings, succeeded in making their way to Fort Pickens, strengthened by the faith that President Lincoln was their friend, and that his soldiers would protect them. They were chained and sent back to their masters, who whipped them till they nearly died under the lash. When such things are done under the United States flag, I cannot and I will not say, “God bless it!” Nay, unless it ceases from this iniquity, I say, deliberately and solemnly, “May the curse of God rest upon it! May it be trampled in the dust, kicked by rebels, and spit upon by tyrants!”

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When it treats the colored people with justice and humanity, I will mount its flag in my great elm-tree, and I will thank you to present me with a flag for a breast-pin; but, until then, I would as soon wear the rattlesnake upon my breast as the eagle. I have raved and I have wept about that Fort Pickens affair.

We rather think it would be surprising to the old abolitionists if they could return to earth and view the enormities committed against Negroes in this day. When such race scholars as Mr.

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20 Ibid., 147-149; 150-151.
W. Burghardt Du Bois write in gloomy pessimism of the present outlook for our race, we may all tremble for our future under this government.

To Miss Henrietta Sargent:

July 26, 1861.

One can’t think about anything else but the war; and where is the prophet inspired to see the end thereof? All seems to me a mass of dark thunderclouds, illumined here and there with flashes of light that show God is behind the clouds. I have never in my life felt the presence of God as I do at this crisis. The nation is in His hand and He is purging it by a fiery process. The people would not listen to the warnings and remonstrances of the abolitionists, uttered year after year in every variety of tone, from the gentle exhortations of May and Channing to the scathing rebukes of Garrison; from the close, hard logic of Goodell to the flowing eloquence of Phillips. More than a quarter of a century ago, Whittier’s pen of fire wrote on the wall,--

“O, rouse ye, ere the storm comes forth,
The gathered wrath of God and man!”

In vain. The people went on with their feasting and their merchandise, and lo! the storm is upon us!21

To John G. Whittier:

September 10, 1861.

Dear Friend Whittier,—Nothing on earth has such effect on the popular heart as songs, which the soldiers would take up with enthusiasm, and which it

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21 Ibid., 153-154. Child cites the couplet from Whittier, “Expostulation” (1834).
would thereby become the fashion to whistle and sing at the street corners. “Old John Brown, Hallelujah!” is performing a wonderful mission now.... It warms up soldiers and boys, and the air is full of it; just as France was of the Marseillaise, whose author was for years unknown....

Dr. Furness wrote me of a young man who was ordered on picket-duty, and was told that while he was sentinel, if any slave attempted to pass the lines, he must turn him back. He replied, “That is an order I will not obey!” Being reminded of his duty to obey orders, he replied, “I know the penalty I incur, and am ready to submit to it, but I did not enlist to do such work, and I will not do it!” The officers, being aware that his feeling would easily become contagious, modified the order thus: “If anybody tries to pass, ascertain that all’s right before you allow them to pass.” That night the moon shone brightly, and the sentinel on duty saw a moving in the bushes before him. “Who goes there? Answer quickly!” Up rose a tall ebony man. “Who are you?” “A fugitive.” “Are you all right?” “Yes, massa.” “Then run quick.”

To Mrs. S. B. Shaw:

1863.

As for the President’s proclamation, I was thankful for it but it excited no enthusiasm in my mind. With my gratitude to God was mixed an undertone of sadness that the moral sense of the people was so low that the thing could not be done nobly. However we may inflate the emancipation balloon, it will never ascend among the constellations. The ugly fact cannot be concealed that it was

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22 Ibid., 157-158.
done reluctantly and stintedly, and even the degree that was accomplished was
done selfishly; was merely a war measure, to which we were forced by our own
perils and necessities; and that no recognition of principles of justice or humanity
surrounded the politic act with a halo of moral glory. This war has furnished
many instances of individual nobility, but our national record is mean.....

Speaking of individual nobility, how beautifully and bravely young
Russell behaved when Savage was wounded! Your Robert, too,—people say the
war has ripened in him all manly qualities. God bless and protect the two young
heroes! They tell me in Boston that they both offered to lead colored soldiers. Is it
so?

To the same:

1863.

I am rejoiced that Robert is so well pleased with his regiment. The Lord
seems to have inspired the colored people to behave remarkably well all through
this terrible conflict. When I was in Boston, last week, I said to Edmund Quincy
that never in the course of my observation, or in my reading of human history,
had I seen the hand of Providence so signally manifested as in the events of this
war. He replied in a very characteristic manner: “Well, Mrs. Child, when the job
is done up, I hope it will prove creditable to Providence.” My own belief is that it
will. Think of Victor Hugo’s writing a tragedy with John Brown for its hero!

To the same:

1863.
Oh, darling! darling! if the newspaper rumor be true, what I have so long
dreaded has come upon you. But rumor very often exaggerates and sometimes
invents; so I still hope, though with a heart that bleeds for you. If the report be
true, may our Heavenly Father sustain you under this heavy sorrow. Severe as the
blow must be it is not altogether without consolation. If your beautiful and brave
boy has died, he died nobly in the defence of great principles, and he has gone to
join the glorious army of martyrs; and how much more sacred and dear to
memory is such a life and such a death, than a life spent in self-indulgence,
gradually impairing the health and weakening the mental powers. Your darling
Robert made the most of the powers and advantages God had given him by
consecrating them to the defense of freedom and humanity. Such a son in the
spirit-world is worth ten living here for themselves alone. Besides, dear, the
separation is only for a little while. You parted from him a young man, but
rendered thoughtful and anxious beyond his years by reason of the heavy
responsibilities that devolved upon him. You will meet him a serene angel,
endowed with larger vision and better understanding why it is we are doomed to
suffer here... God comfort you! He alone can carry you through this dark
passage.\(^\text{23}\)

To Miss Eliza Scudder:

1864.

I am a happy woman since the election. It makes me feel that our
republican form of government rests on more secure foundations. There was no

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 171-172; 173; 176-177.
enthusiasm for honest old Abe. There is no beauty in him, that men should desire him; there is no insinuating, polished manner to beguile the senses of the people; there is no dazzling military renown; no silver flow of rhetoric; in fact, no glittering prestige of any kind surrounds him; yet the people triumphantly elected him, in spite of all manner of machinations, and notwithstanding the long, long drag upon their patience and their resources which this war has produced. I call this the triumph of free schools; for it was the intelligence and reason of the people that re-elected Abraham Lincoln....

To think of the triumphal arch in the streets of Baltimore, whereon, with many honored historical names, were inscribed the names of Benjamin Banneker and R. R. Forten, two colored men! Glory to God! This is marvellous progress. Glory to God! Hallelujah!24

To Miss Lucy Osgood:

1865.

I received a letter last week from William H. Channing, in acknowledgment of funds sent to the freedmen in his department. He is the same infinite glow that he was when he took my heart captive twenty years ago. He writes: “You ought to have been in Congress on the ever-to-be-remembered 31st of January, 1865.” (The day on which the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution abolishing slavery in the United States, passed the House of Representatives and went to the Legislature of the several states for ratification.)

24 Ibid., 183-184.
Such an outburst of the people’s heart has never been seen in the Capitol since the nation was born. It was the sunrise of a new day for the republic. I was standing by John Jay, and as we shook hands over the glorious vote I could not but say, “Are not our fathers and grandfathers here with us? They surely must be here to share our joy in thus gathering the fruit of which they planted the seed.” Yes! and our blessed, great-hearted Theodore Parker was there, with a band of witnesses. Selah.

To Theodore D. Weld:

July 10, 1880.

I thank you cordially for the interesting memorial of your excellent wife (Mrs. Angelina Grimké Weld)....

The memory of the early anti-slavery days is very sacred to me. The Holy Spirit did actually descend upon men and women in tongues of flame..... All suppression of selfishness makes the moment great; and mortals were never more sublimely forgetful of self than were the abolitionists in those early days, before the moral force which emanated from them had become available as a political power. Ah! my friend, that is the only true church organization when heads and hearts unite in working for the welfare of the human race!

And how wonderfully everything came as it was wanted! How quickly the mingled flute and trumpet eloquence of Phillips responded to the clarion call of Garrison! How the clear, rich bugle-notes of Whittier wakened echoes in all living souls! How wealth poured from the ever-open hands of Arthur Tappan, Gerrit

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25 Ibid., 188.
Smith, the Winslows, and thousands of others who gave even more largely in proportion to their small means!

How the time-serving policy of Dr. Beecher drove the bold, brave boys of Lane Seminary into the battlefield! Politicians said, “the abolitionists exaggerate the evil”; and in response up rose Angelina and her sister Sarah to deliver this message to the world: “We know whereof we affirm; for we were born and bred in South Carolina, and we know that the abolitionists have not told, and could not tell, half the horrors of slavery.”

Then, like a cloud full of thunder and lightning, Frederick Douglass loomed above the horizon. He knew whereof he affirmed, for he had been a slave. Congress seemed in danger of becoming a mere “den of thieves,” when Daniel Webster walked out with Ichabod written on his garments; and, strong in moral majesty, in walked Charles Sumner, a man so honest and pure that he could not see any other line than a straight one. What if the pulpits were silent? Theodore Parker, that Boanerges of the clerical ranks, spoke in tones strong and far-reaching as a thousand voices.\(^\text{26}\)

Such was the character of Lydia Maria Child, one of Christ’s elect when on earth. Of her Wendell Phillips said:

Few scholars ever gave such fair play to their mother-wit; what a variety of gifts! everything but poet. Narrative, fiction, journalism, history, sketches of daily city life, ethics, consolation for the evening of life, ennobling our nature by showing how, under all error, there lives the right purpose and principle..... The fallen

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 257-259.
woman, the over-tempted inebriate, she could take to her home and watch over
month after month...... We felt that neither fame, nor gain, nor danger, nor
calumny, had any weight with her; that she sought honestly to act out her thought;
obeyed the rule,--

    Go put your creed

    Into your deed,

was ready to die for a principle and starve for an idea.\footnote{Phillips, “Remarks of Wendell Phillips at the Funeral of Lydia Maria Child,” 267-268. Phillips cites a couplet from Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Ode, Concord, July 4, 1857.”}

(Conclusion.)