Documents

A LETTER OF DR. GAMALIEL BAILEY TO JOSHUA R. GIDDINGS

By Grace Julian Clarke

Foreword

In looking over some old letter-files recently I came upon a communication from Dr. Gamaliel Bailey addressed to Joshua R. Giddings, in 1839, that seems to me of extraordinary interest. Dr. Bailey was then living in Cincinnati and editing *The Philanthropist,* an antislavery paper which was started by James G. Birney in 1834. Birney was a native of New Jersey. After being admitted to the bar, he settled in Alabama and rose to be a district attorney there. Because of growing opposition to slavery, he emancipated his chattels and established himself in Cincinnati. The pro-slavery feeling was so strong in that Ohio city that his newspaper venture met with scant support and his press was presently thrown into the River. With the zeal of a true reformer he again launched his newspaper, however, this time in partnership with Dr. Gamaliel Bailey, another native of New Jersey, who, after receiving his medical degree in Philadelphia in 1828, had gone to China as ship's physician. Not entirely pleased with his profession, he decided that newspaper work was more to his liking, and, on his return to America, became editor of *The Methodist Protestant* in Baltimore. This position he soon resigned to go to Cincinnati where he was appointed physician for the cholera hospital during the prevalence of that epidemic in this part of the country. It is said that the expulsion of some students from Lane Seminary first called his attention seriously to the slavery question and led to his joining Mr. Birney in the effort to arouse public opinion against the evil. Twice their printing office was attacked by mobs, their papers burned and presses thrown into the Ohio. On Birney's removal to New York in 1837, Dr. Bailey became sole editor of the re-established *Philanthropist* which, of course valiantly supported Birney as the Liberty Party candidate for the Presidency in 1840 against Harrison and Van Buren, the candidates of the Whig and Democratic parties. The following

year, *The Philanthropist* press was once more destroyed by a mob that was only dispersed at the point of the bayonet. It seems wonderful that the young abolitionist had the courage to go on, but he persisted, supporting Birney again in 1844, when the Liberty Party men were accused of electing Polk by refusing to stand by Henry Clay in his last desperate effort to attain the goal of the Presidency. Dr. Bailey was soon afterwards called to Washington to conduct a new antislavery paper called *The National Era,* which made its first appearance on January 1st, 1847, under the auspices of the American and Foreign Antislavery Society. The next year he became its sole proprietor and editor and it was in this paper that Mrs. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* made its first appearance as a serial. Dr. Bailey's home in Washington was for years the meeting-place of the true-blue antislavery men and women. The weekly gatherings at which he and Mrs. Bailey presided were social events highly esteemed for their literary and cultural flavor. There one met the charming and talented Mrs. Sara J. Lippincott ("Grace Greenwood"), Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, and the members of Congress who were advocates of freedom.

In 1839, when the letter here presented was written, Dr. Bailey was still in Cincinnati, destined to go through much suffering and travail on account of his convictions, but his fine spirit is shown in the communication, and one reading it seems to breathe the tense atmosphere of that time. John Quincy Adams was then in the midst of his great career as a Representative in the lower House of Congress, but he was not ready to demand the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, as some of the antislavery advocates urged. He would first abolish the slave trade between the States. These views, Mr. Adams set forth in a speech in January of 1839. His stand aroused much discussion and he was severely criticised by extremists.

The Mr. Slade mentioned in the letter was William Slade, a Representative from Vermont and afterwards governor of that State. Giddings lived to see slavery abolished, but Slade and Dr. Bailey did not.

I have written all this by way of introduction to the letter which follows. At the head of the sheet on which Dr. Bailey wrote is a wood-cut representing Columbia standing beside a printing-press, while a slave kneels beside her with hands out-

stretched as if imploring help. Across the wood-cut appear the words: "Lovejoy, the first Martyr to American Liberty, Murdered for asserting the Freedom of the Press, at Alton, Nov. 7, 1837."

[THE LETTER]

Cincinnati, Feb. 7th, 1839

Dear Sir,—

I had already decided on pursuing the course respecting Mr. Adams suggested by you and Mr. Slade. Although Mr. Adams is doubtless in error, it is the error of an honest mind, the error of one who has done much for the cause of freedom, and is destined, I trust, to do still more. You will perceive that the *Emancipator* and *Philanthropist* pursue nearly the same course in reference to him. As yet I have not thought it expedient to say anything regarding the conduct hereafter of Abolitionists toward Mr. Adams. I fear the *Liberator* and *Friend of Man* may feel it their duty to excite opposition against him in his own district. We shall see. Then it will be time enough to speak.

You state that you have long proposed to bend your efforts to the single point of abolishing the *slave-trade* in the District. In reference to this question two things are to be considered,—what is proper for the *people,* and what is proper for the *representative.* The people's duty, I think, is to petition for all that is within the reach of the Constitutional power of Congress. Of course I believe this to be expedient as well as obligatory. The duty of the representative, I conceive, is to *begin* to do something. *Where,* or *how* is perhaps of no great importance; as the opposition to a small movement on the subject will most likely be as strenuous and violent as opposition to one of more moment. Slaveholders are now tremblingly alive to the slightest demonstrations of hostility to their beloved institution. They are well aware that a single movement, though only indirectly unfavorable, would be but the *beginning of a series;* and they would array themselves as fiercely and stubbornly against *that* as they would against an effort to do all at once. But, the representative must judge for himself. Assail, if you please, the slave trade first. Abolitionists will help you. It may be the best way—if I were on the spot I could better judge. But what we want is *action, now.* Do something—only make a beginning—it is only by *aggression* that we can put a stop to the further encroachments of slavery and work its final overthrow. Of one thing however I feel certain. Attempt seriously to abolish the slave-trade, and the southern representatives will thunder as furiously as ever about dissolving the Union. To be sure, they will not do it,—neither would they if the proposition were introduced to abolish slavery itself, in the District.

I rejoice to hear that yourself and Mr. Slade are engaged so earnestly on this subject. There is no telling how much may be accomplished by the steady, well-directed, persevering efforts of a few determined

spirits. You have truth, the moral sentiment of the world, and more than all, the God of truth, on your side. May your counsels and efforts be ruled and directed by Him!

Yours with much respect
Gamaliel Bailey Jr.

Hon. J. R. Giddings

LETTERS OF A MASSACHUSETTS WOMAN REFORMER TO AN INDIANA RADICAL

By JAMES A. BARNES

Introduction

Lydia Maria Frances is well worthy of study as one of the women reformers of America. Historians of the reform movement of the middle nineteenth century have neglected her name, despite the fact that she played a vigorous part on that stage. Miss Frances, who, after her marriage, became well known in America as Lydia Maria Child,[1] was born in Massachusetts.[2] From her prodigious amount of writing, one would judge that no New England reformer possessed more energy or determination. She came from old colonial stock, and undoubtedly possessed a brilliant mind, albeit misinformation at times passed with her as fact. Miss Frances apparently profited greatly from her early training. Her first teacher, says Thomas Wentworth Higginson, was "a spinster of supernatural shyness, the never forgotten calamity of whose life was that Dr. Brooks once saw her drinking water from the nose of her teakettle."[3] The children dearly loved "Ma'am Betty,"[4] even though she did chew tobacco while holding classes in her untidy bedroom.[5] Lydia Maria Frances owed much to her brother, Dr. Covers Frances, Professor in the Cambridge Theological Seminary, with whom she read Milton and Shakespeare. It is probable that she got most of her training in the splendid library of this brother, and much of her inspiration from the new group of "Transcendentalists," one of whose favorite meeting-places was the study of Dr. Frances. Here Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, George Ripley and others came to talk over their anti-Calvin

[1] She married David Child in 1828. Their interests became mutual in the anti-slavery crusade.

[2] At Medford, February 11, 1802.

[3] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Contemporaries* (Boston, 1899), p. 122.

[4] Elizabeth Frances. She was not related to Lydia Maria Frances.

[5] Higginson, *Contemporaries*, p. 112.