

THE RELIGIOUS PRESS AND THE COMPROMISE OF
1850: A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE
METHODIST, BAPTIST, AND PRESBYTERIAN
PRESS TO THE SLAVERY CONTROVERSY
1846-1851

BY

L. WESLEY NORTON

A.B., Olivet Nazarene College, 1944
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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY
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BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF Doctor of Philosophy in History

Arthur E. Bestor, Jr.
In Charge of Thesis *AMS*

J. W. Swain
Head of Department

Recommendation concurred in†

J. Leonard Bates
Austin Ramsey
Libby Taylor
C. Ernest Dawn
John B. Sirick
Robert M. Sutton

Committee
on
Final Examination†

†Required for doctor's degree but not for master's.

PREFACE

Historians of the Civil War have discussed, from various points of view, the role of the popular churches in bringing a moralistic and highly religious sentiment to bear upon the sectional animosities of the prewar decades. Contemporary statesmen also recognized this factor and were alarmed by its implications. When Gilbert Hobbes Barnes published his Antislavery Impulse in 1933 under the auspices of the American Historical Association, he made historians aware of the primary role of the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian Churches of the North in organized anti-slavery from 1830-1844. The interest of these denominations did not cease at that date and their very widely circulated weekly journals were among the foremost exponents of anti-slavery doctrines reaching far larger numbers than the specifically anti-slavery press. Under the provocation of this tide of Northern criticism the press of the Southern churches responded in defense of Southern institutions with a moral and religious rationalization of its own.

The object of the present study is a systematic review of the discussion of slavery in the denominational press, North and South, from 1846, when the Wilmot Proviso was introduced, to 1851, when the controversy over the extension of slavery into the territories subsided temporarily with the Compromise in late 1850. The author has selected for detailed examination twenty-one of the most widely circulated denominational weeklies of the period. In addition, the selection has been designed to give adequate representation to each of the denominations, to all sections, and to all points of view.

Since these papers are so widely dispersed the author is indebted to a large number of librarians and their staffs for their loan service and their courteously rendered aid in person. The study would not have been possible for this author financially nor from the standpoint of time without this service. Of great importance has been the very efficient service of the Inter-Library Loan staff of the University of Illinois. Through this service Denison University of Granville, Ohio, at great inconvenience, sent a bound volume of one paper vital to this work. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary of Louisville made several papers of their denomination available through the loan of microfilm. Duke University and Emory University did the same for key publications of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

In addition there was the consistent helpfulness of library staffs of those institutions which the author visited. They include McCormick Theological Seminary of Chicago, the Divinity School Library at the University of Chicago, and Garrett Biblical Seminary of Evanston, Illinois. Very important to the research in the Chicago area, was the hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Tresner, in whose home the author was entertained for the equivalent of several weeks.

Special thanks are due to Arthur E. Jones, Jr., and his staff of Rose Memorial Library, Drew University in Madison, New Jersey; Charles Anderson and his staff of the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia; and to Edward C. Starr, curator of the American Baptist Historical Society of Rochester, New York. These officers not only gave aid through correspondence but took a

personal interest when the author visited their institutions, so that the limited time available could be used to the greatest possible advantage in rounding out a thoroughly representative selection of denominational papers.

The author is indebted to Arthur Bestor of the University of Illinois who has supervised and encouraged, not only this writing, but a general interest in this and related subjects throughout the author's years of graduate study at the University of Illinois.

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CHAPTER I

AMERICAN CHURCHES FROM THE REVOLUTION TO 1850

The churches of America, and especially the three popular denominations, the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian, assumed a very active role in the slavery controversy well before 1850. Most American churches had, early in the century, defined slavery as an evil and voiced sentiment in favor of its ultimate removal. These early pronouncements had been of a non-sectional character. When the aggressive anti-slavery movement of the 1830's developed, however, it drew the churches into its vortex and resulted eventually in schism in the three leading denominations. From the 1830's on, the popular churches of the North were the principal carriers of anti-slavery sentiment and activity while their Southern counterparts became increasingly active in slavery's defense. The development of American church life from the Revolution to 1850 explains why the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians became involved in, and how they functioned in a controversy so heavily fraught with political significance.

The American churches, in the era immediately following the Revolution, followed the general tendencies of the nation toward nationalism and expansion. Several of the churches found it necessary, with the severance of Old World ties, to reorganize completely. Other churches, also, found it necessary either to reorganize, or to expand existing organization to keep pace with the rapidly developing nation. The history of the three denominations of this study is especially notable as showing the degree to which all three adapted themselves to the currents of nationalism and

expansion.

The organizing conference of American Methodism met at Baltimore in 1784. As a result of this meeting the Methodist Church in America became a body distinct from both the Episcopal Church and the Methodist movement in England and distinct, also, from the leadership of John Wesley. While this action was in accord with the directions given by the English founder of Methodism, nevertheless it was taken with a view to organizing an institution adapted to conditions in America.¹ John Wesley's position during the Revolution had been an embarrassment to American Methodists, which accounted to some extent for the fact that the movement was relatively weak when this organization took place.²

Of all the denominations, theoretically the Presbyterians were in the best position to advance at this juncture because they were in general favor for their firm support of the American Revolution, they had an educated and able American leadership, and they faced no complications from Old World connections. In addition, they were already in a stage of rapid growth by 1789.³ The organizing activity of the Presbyterian Church, looking toward the needs of the denomination in the new setting of an independent American nation, took place in the years 1785 to 1789. By the time the new General Assembly met in Philadelphia in 1789⁴ the Presbyterians had

¹ William Warren Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840, Vol. IV, The Methodists; A Collection of Source Materials (Chicago, 1946), pp. 12-30.

² Anson Phelps Stokes, Church and State in the United States, Vol. I (New York, 1950), p. 724.

³ William Warren Sweet, The Story of Religion in America, second revised edition (New York, 1950), p. 199.

⁴ Stokes, Church and State, Vol. I, p. 728.

adopted a form of government that anticipated a great church of national scope.⁵

The Baptist congregations had always been locally autonomous and they, too, had no problem of any connections abroad. Local autonomy, however, did not prevent the Baptists from developing a national consciousness and a degree of national organization during and after the American Revolution. The Baptists had led in the fight for religious liberty and the separation of church and state and this in itself required some national organization. In addition, the postwar period was characterized in the Baptist Church by the rapid formation of Baptist associations.⁶ Finally, in 1814, representatives of Baptists from eleven of the eighteen states formed the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the United States of America for Foreign Missions. The representatives then arranged for a board of commissioners which was to function under the auspices of a triennial convention.⁷

Although this study deals with the press of the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian Churches specifically, some brief notice of other major denominations is in order, to explain the disproportionate growth of these three denominations. The Congregational Church was the dominant and the established church in New England and it had played a very important part in colonial and revolutionary history. For various reasons, however, Congregationalism was, in many New England communities, in a stationary condition, if not

⁵ Sweet, Story of Religion, p. 200.

⁶ Ibid., p. 204.

⁷ Stokes, Church and State, Vol. I, pp. 761, 762.

in a state of decline at the end of the war.⁸ Congregationalism's limited position geographically, its tendency toward provincialism, and its lack of a central authority contributed significantly to its inability to meet the challenge of national expansion.⁹ The Congregationalists had the largest membership of all American churches in 1783 but by 1850 ranked only fourth among the Protestant Churches. They had a membership of 197,000 at that time, or less than one half the membership of the Presbyterians, who ranked third.¹⁰ The Congregational Church was nevertheless influential during the period under study, especially in New England and in some areas of the West which had been populated by New England immigration.

In 1801 the Presbyterians and Congregationalists devised a plan for cooperative activity, looking toward the necessities of Western expansion. This was known as the Plan of Union. Under the scheme, Congregationalist and Presbyterian residents in a new community could combine and call a minister of either denomination and the congregation would follow the discipline of the denomination in the majority.¹¹ This plan of cooperation was not entirely given up until 1852, though there was some dissatisfaction with the results before that.¹² The plan generally worked to the advantage of the Presbyterians, who were more interested than the Congregationalists in maintaining their denominational characteristics.¹³

⁸ Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier 1783-1850, Vol. III, The Congregationalists; A Collection of Source Materials (Chicago, 1939), p. 5.

⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁰ Sweet, Story of Religion, p. 221.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Stokes, Church and State, Vol. I, p. 755.

¹³ Sweet, Ibid., pp. 211, 212.

The Episcopal Church was in some disrepute during and after the Revolution because of its Tory connections. At the close of the war the denomination gained its independence from the English Church and by 1789 it consummated a national union and developed a national organization. This status was a disadvantage in that it brought with it the loss of revenue from England for missionary purposes. In addition, the eventual disestablishment of the Church in some states created further financial difficulties.¹⁴ The fact that the Episcopal Church did not develop a definite policy for the West until 1835 was another reason for its failure to penetrate that region in strength. By that time the three denominations under study had not only swept through the West but they had numerically largely supplanted the Episcopal Church in the regions of its original supremacy, such as Virginia and the Middle Atlantic States. By 1850 this denomination numbered only 90,000 throughout the entire nation and was seventh in point of numbers.¹⁵ Size cannot be taken as an accurate index to prestige or even influence, but numerical leadership was increasingly important in a nation that was rapidly expanding its voting privileges and otherwise becoming increasingly democratic.

The Lutherans and other predominantly Old World groups had special difficulty adjusting to new conditions because of the persistence with which they held to Old World languages and Old World conservatism. The missionary activity of these churches was ordinarily directed toward those already affiliated with the church. It

¹⁴ Stokes, Church and State, Vol. I, p. 734.

¹⁵ Sweet, Story of Religion, p. 221.

was largely through immigration that the various Lutheran bodies reached a combined membership of 163,000 by 1850.¹⁶ The Lutherans were plagued during the period by disunity among themselves, sharing that feature, at least, of the American church.¹⁷

The Roman Catholic Church expanded in a way no less phenomenal than the three major Protestant bodies, but for different reasons, chief of which was the heavy immigration from Roman Catholic countries.¹⁸ Numbering about 30,000 at the end of the Revolution, the Roman Catholic Church had grown to 1,190,700 by 1850.¹⁹

The growth and ascendancy of the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian Churches were due to their adaptation to conditions peculiar to America and especially to the frontier. This is particularly true of the Methodists and Baptists. The Presbyterian Church followed a more conservative missionary policy, her ministers, as a rule, settling in a community only after there were already a sufficient number of Presbyterian laymen, usually of Scotch-Irish descent, to warrant a new church. The Presbyterians were also inclined to insist on higher educational standards than either the Methodists or Baptists, hence Presbyterian ministers were fewer in number. Then, too, their preaching was frequently more "theological" and less "practical."²⁰ Because of this emphasis, however, the Presbyterians had a cultural influence greater

16 Sweet, Story of Religion, p. 221.

17 Stokes, Church and State, Vol. I, 767.

18 Ibid., p. 852.

19 The Methodist Almanac for the Year of Our Lord 1849 (New York, 1849), p. 21.

20 Sweet, Story of Religion, pp. 214, 215.

than their numbers would suggest.²¹ Another asset to their influence was their republican form of organization which harmonized well with the democracy of the West. By 1850 the Presbyterians claimed a membership, as the third largest Protestant denomination, of about 487,000. They had somewhat more than one half the membership of the Methodists.²²

The Methodists and Baptists went into the West prepared by their missionary philosophy and their methods to keep pace with the vigorous growth of the nation. The adherents of these churches went into the West to win any and all to their faith, regardless of previous class or group connections.²³ The Methodists, in addition to this broadly aimed evangelism, were peculiarly adapted to the growth of the nation by an organization which developed directly out of experience with frontier conditions.

Organized Methodism in America began with a tradition of a highly centralized episcopal government. Initially there was one bishop who was overseer of the entire church. Under him worked the presiding elders, who were supervisors of groups of circuits and in frequent contact with each one. This office was established by the first General Conference in 1792 to compensate for the growth that had occurred, a growth which made it impossible for a single bishop to give adequate supervision. By 1808 the Church had grown so large that the governing body, the General Conference,

²¹ Carl Russell Fish, The Rise of the Common Man 1830-1850, Vol. VI, of A History of American Life (New York, 1929), p. 185.

²² Sweet, Story of Religion, p. 221.

²³ Sweet, The Methodists, p. 31.

was made a delegated body. Even at this early stage the Methodists were a closely knit and well-disciplined group with an organization capable of unlimited expansion as need required.²⁴

Ultimately, however, the key to the rapid advance of Methodism was its itinerant or circuit rider system. A single circuit rider might serve as many as twenty or thirty preaching points in widely scattered and sparsely settled communities. The circuit might extend for one hundred miles or more. The presiding elder had complete authority to form new circuits or extend old ones, hence the denomination was always in a position to keep pace with advancing settlement.²⁵

The Methodists did not insist upon a formally educated ministry. Many, even of the circuit preachers, were not of ordained status and on the local level the widespread use of lay preachers greatly expedited the growth of Methodism. A major function of the circuit rider was to supervise and direct the work of these local lay leaders.²⁶ The adaptability of the denomination and its leaders is indicated by the fact that meetings were conducted in homes and schools, or even barns in lieu of church buildings. It was the persistent, dedicated, and unspectacular activities of this army of leaders and not the sensational aberrations of the revival and the campmeeting which account for the spectacular growth of the Methodist Church. This was true on the frontier and in settled society as well, for the Methodists penetrated New England and the

²⁴ Sweet, The Methodists, pp. 38-42.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 47, 48.

Old South almost as spectacularly as they did the frontier.²⁷

The Baptists shared the genius of the Methodists in creating an abundance of local leaders to carry forward the work of the church, though under a very different discipline. Baptists found the frontier inviting both as a congenial place for their democratic views and as a location which promised the enhancement of their economic status. Hence Baptists and Baptist ministers were numerous in the westward immigration. The historian of the frontier church describes the minister's identification with the people thus: "Their preachers came from among the people themselves and were largely self-supporting, and were liable to be as much attracted to the better land and the freer air of the West as were the people to whom they preached, and they were to be found numerous among the immigrants."²⁸

The process by which a Baptist became a minister was simple to the extreme, although a man had to prove his moral and spiritual capacity before a congregation made his ordination to the ministry final. No formal education was requisite to this action. The "licensed" minister of the Baptist Church was roughly equivalent to the "local" minister of the Methodist Church. There was no scarcity of such men. In fact, they were frequently so numerous that it proved embarrassing to the local church when selecting a minister.²⁹ This type of ministry, however, assured that there would

²⁷ Sweet, The Methodists, pp. 51, 52. See also appendices B and C.

²⁸ Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists 1783-1830; A Collection of Source Materials (New York, 1931), p. 21.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 39, 40.

be someone to keep the Baptist movement going forward wherever there were people.

Not only in organization and method, but in general characteristics as well, these churches were suited to the dynamic frontier society. They shared deeply the intellectual climate of the era. They endorsed, from their own particular points of view, the activism and the self-confident belief in progress and perfectibility of man and society which characterized the intellectual life of a nation with unlimited horizons before it. In addition, the Baptists and Methodists, especially, made a strong emotional appeal, insisted upon a dynamic, "crisis" conversion, and stressed severe moral taboos in personal life.³⁰ These moral taboos were rigidly enforced in local church discipline.³¹ These elements seemed to meet effectively some of the needs felt by a frontier society.

A key factor in the religious life of the nation in a period when religion was increasingly important, was the "union between religion and morality," a union that "was so strong that the two became practically indistinguishable, and that almost every subject was invested with the religious qualities of certainty and enthusiasm."³² Many of the social issues in which this variety of the religion of the day interested itself had significant implications politically. This was especially true of the care of the insane,

³⁰ Fish, Rise of the Common Man, p. 185.

³¹ See entire series on the various denominations by Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier. . . . A Collection of Source Materials. The local church records are replete with examples of the exercise of this discipline.

³² Fish, Ibid., p. 179.

the temperance issue, education, and the slavery question. Preaching frequently stressed the connection of religion with life with a fervent humanitarian emphasis.³³

The revivalism of the first half of the nineteenth century reflected and promoted this emphasis. About the turn of the century a renewal of religious interests began rather quietly in the East. When the revival reached the West, however, it exhibited those characteristics which are a favorite subject of study in the field of abnormal psychology. Violent emotionalism attended much of the revival movement, which centered in Kentucky, even producing varied and peculiar bodily contortions. The revival had an immediate and rather marked effect for a time upon the growth of the churches, especially in Kentucky.³⁴

This revival movement had many effects, some good and some bad. Out of it came the beginnings of intensive home and foreign missionary activity, the founding of many educational institutions, and the founding of numerous interdenominational benevolent societies and philanthropic organizations. The renewed interest in religion also led to the beginnings of religious journalism.³⁵ The effect on morals in the West, in a rough and violent era, was undoubtedly beneficial in spite of the emotional imbalance which the movement at times reflected. One of the less beneficent results was in the multiplication of schisms and controversies that followed in all the churches affected by it. Even those churches which were not involved in open schism experienced unrest and

³³ Fish, *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 183.

³⁴ Sweet, Story of Religion, pp. 223-231.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 226.

controversy during this half century, produced in part by the inevitable tensions which accompanied the mingling of the old and the new. As with the emotionalism of the revival, there is a tendency to stress the unusual in the studies of these schisms not, perhaps, without some warrant. The main streams of the Protestant Churches, however, flowed on relatively unchecked and unchanged and exerted a much more substantial, if less spectacular, influence on the nation as a whole than did the schismatics.

A second and very important revival movement and one of particular significance in the context of this study, was the movement associated with Charles G. Finney, a movement which reached a climax in the 1830's. Finney had revolted against the strict Calvinism of his Presbyterian background. He challenged the doctrines of total depravity and original sin, insisting that moral depravity was a quality of voluntary action and not a substance in human nature.³⁶ Man's depravity was, to Finney, an acquired condition of voluntary selfishness which existed prior to an individual's conversion.³⁷ Conversion was "a change from that state of selfishness in which a person prefers his own interest above everything else, to that disinterested benevolence that prefers God's happiness and glory."³⁸ But salvation was a continuing process proceeding toward a perfect "holiness" wherein specific acts of benevolence and morality, under the control of the will, played the decisive role.³⁹

³⁶ Charles G. Finney, Sermons on Important Subjects (New York, 1836), p. 84.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 114.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 16, 43.

Finney's movement was of considerable influence in the popular churches and in the promotion of anti-slavery agitation and organization during the 1830's. Many of his converts, most notably Theodore Dwight Weld, and the churches in the areas most effected by the Finney revivals, provided the strength of the anti-slavery impulse of that decade. Weld and his associates from Oberlin College in Ohio carried forward the anti-slavery crusade with all the passion and zeal of the most devoted and enthusiastic revivalist. Their techniques as well as their zeal were, in fact, borrowed from the revival movement. They worked through the churches and primarily through the Methodists and Baptists and New School Presbyterians. The latter constituted most of Weld's initial support and associations. From the areas in which this influence was felt came the flood of petitions to Congress and the first election of abolitionists to prominent state and national office. Even in New England, the Congregational stronghold, the Methodists and Baptists of the rural areas provided over two thirds of the membership of anti-slavery conventions.⁴⁰

This revival movement was persistent, Finney himself remaining active down to the Civil War. This revivalism and the previously described, less obvious routine activity of the denominations whose press furnishes the material for this study, contributed greatly to the fact that the years 1830-1850 were "distinctly and increasingly a religious period."⁴¹ This increased religious interest existed not only in a statistical sense but in the tendency to infuse all

⁴⁰ This story is documented in Gilbert Hobbes Barnes, The Anti-Slavery Impulse, 1830-1844 (New York, 1933).

⁴¹ Fish, Rise of the Common Man, p. 179.

issues, political included, with a moral significance which "left few things not classified as right and wrong."⁴²

One may be aware of this without assuming an individual piety and a social morality in excess of what in fact existed, and without assuming a system of social values motivated only by religious considerations. It is not possible to offer a simple analysis of the effective relationship between convictions engendered by religious beliefs and social-political conduct. It varied, obviously, from individual to individual and from time to time and conclusions will vary with what the interpreter himself may believe. But the fact remains that the period in question was one of unusual emphasis upon a type of religious experience which involved intense enthusiasm, coupled with the view that benevolence and reform were integral parts of that religious experience.

This religiously inspired sentiment found a very substantial and very effective instrument in the rapidly expanding denominational press. An immense proliferation of religious journals occurred between 1830 and 1850, a phenomenon directly related to the interest in religion and the rapid expansion of the churches. An historian of journalism described this phenomenon, referring to religious periodicals as springing "into existence in endless numbers in every direction, and pinned to every faith."⁴³ One editor in 1850 recorded an estimate of 150 religious weeklies in America, with a total circulation of one half million.⁴⁴ This seems to have

⁴² Avery Craven, The Coming of the Civil War (New York, 1942), p. 11.

⁴³ Frederic Hudson, Journalism in the United States from 1690 to 1872 (New York, 1873), pp. 300, 301.

⁴⁴ Biblical Recorder, January 12, 1850. Many papers did not have numbered pages.

been a fair assessment of the scope of the religious press when all denominations, with their local as well as general organs, are taken into account. The largest papers, such as the Baptist Watchman and Reflector of Boston or the Methodist Christian Advocate and Journal of New York had individually a national circulation that equalled, or nearly so, the circulation of the most influential secular weeklies such as the New York Tribune.

The religious weeklies followed almost universally the same pattern. They were usually four-page papers, several columns wide, and closely printed. They not only carried news and comment of religious significance, but political items, including news and comments on events abroad, general news, and miscellaneous items of a literary or scientific nature. Denominational editors assumed that many, if not most, of their readers had access to their papers only for information, an assumption based in part on the reaction of their constituents. Most editors carried the annual messages of the president, their governors, and frequently the speeches or summaries of them, of leading figures in Congress. All news and issues of probable interest to the subscribers found their way into the religious press along with the specifically denominational material.

No denominations were better equipped with this instrument of instruction and persuasion than the three popular denominations of this study. Nor did any others share quite as completely in the identification of religion and morality, a morality social as well as personal. The Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches, in that order, were also the largest denominations in the nation and the only ones with a membership substantially nationwide in 1850.

CHAPTER II

THE IMPACT OF SLAVERY ON THE METHODIST, BAPTIST, AND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES BEFORE 1850

The tendency of the three popular churches to criticize society and to seek to effect reform, focussed, in the North, increasingly upon the issues raised by slavery. These churches voiced among the common people the stirrings of conscience, a conscience which found in slavery a challenge to action. This was an action which, for the most part, consisted of denunciation and agitation rather than overt efforts to forcibly remove the evil. This triumvirate of denominations possessed the national organizations, the implements of public opinion, and just the emotional elements to make such denunciation and agitation effective and to help keep the controversy at white heat.

In this form of Protestantism, with its deep consciousness of the evil nature of sin and its clear-cut moral distinctions, there was a compulsion to seek to eradicate evil. There was also a confidence born of a belief in divine aid in eliminating evil which made the early removal of social ills seem to be a distinct possibility.¹ While the Northern churches were bringing these views to bear increasingly in the form of a denunciation of slavery, the churches of the South with the same general characteristics were increasingly constrained to find a defense for slavery. Fundamentally and increasingly, the churches of that area reflected the sectional point of view. The churches had grown in the South, in

¹ Roy F. Nichols, The Disruption of American Democracy (New York, 1948), p. 22.

some cases, even more rapidly than in the North. In the South, too, emotionalism, a sharp sense of right and wrong, and a staunch theological orthodoxy characterized religious life.²

The South took pride in its orthodoxy and its morality. Southerners, then, were understandably incensed when the label of sin was attached to their economic and social system, and they refused to accept that label for it. It was no accident that one of the favorite elements in their counter-attack was a challenge of the orthodoxy, particularly as touching the Bible, of those who called slavery a sin and a crime.³ This counter attack was directed toward a public which thrived on oratory, whether political, court, or pulpit.⁴ When finally the Southern press and pulpit were called upon to defend the institution of slavery, they were willing and able instruments, and they served a receptive public.

Given these traits in common and the diverse sectional interests, it was inevitable that the North's increasing agitation of the slavery question as a moral and political issue, should result in a collision within the churches. Statesmen such as Henry Clay noted this result, and its grim suggestion for the future of the nation as early as 1845. Clay wrote on April 7, 1845: "Scarcely any public occurrence has happened for a long time that gave me so much real concern and pain as the menaced separation of the church by a line throwing all the free States on one side and all the slave States on the other." The danger, as he saw it, was not in

2 Craven, Coming of the Civil War, p. 15.

3 L. Wesley Norton, "The Bible in the Slavery Dispute After 1830," typed Master's Thesis (University of Illinois, 1956), pp. 44-46.

4 Nichols, Disruption of Democracy, p. 35.

this alone, but that, linked with other causes, it might threaten the entire confederacy.⁵

The slavery conflict tore the Methodist Church more severely than the others because the centralized administration of the Methodist Church gave it greater rigidity and it could not be divided without complicated problems of property and jurisdiction. The increasing agitation of slavery in the thirties in the North coincided with the increasing importance of slavery to the South. Conservative Methodist leadership, however, kept the issue effectively submerged in the quadrennial General Conference of 1840. At this juncture some of the more radical members withdrew to form the Wesleyan Methodist Church with 6,000 members. In addition to the issue of slavery, which was basic, the new body established lay representation and the right of each annual conference to elect its own president.⁶

This minor schism seemed to crystallize latent sentiment as official Methodist papers became more outspoken and many extra-legal Methodist conventions were held to promote anti-slavery sentiment. The crisis was reached in the General Conference of 1844 when the issue was precipitated by the discussion of the action of the Baltimore Conference in dismissing a slaveholding minister, an action upheld by an overwhelming vote. A more important question was that raised by the situation of Bishop James O. Andrews of Georgia who by a second marriage had become owner of some household

⁵ Quoted in Anson Phelps Stokes, Church and State in the United States, Vol. II (New York, 1950), p. 165.

⁶ Sweet, Story of Religion, p. 303.

slaves. The Conference by a vote of 111 yeas to 60 nays asked him to cease from his episcopal duties as long as he remained a slaveholder.⁷ The historic disciplinary provision of the Methodist Episcopal Church under which these actions were taken was:

Quest. What shall be done for the extirpation of the evil of slavery?

Answ. 1. We declare that we are as much as ever convinced of the great evil of slavery: therefore no slaveholder shall be eligible to any official station in our Church hereafter, where the laws of the state in which he lives will admit of emancipation, and permit the liberated slave to enjoy freedom.

2. When any travelling preacher becomes an owner of a slave or slaves, by any means, he shall forfeit his ministerial character in our Church, unless he execute, if it be practicable, a legal emancipation of such slaves, conformably to the laws of the state in which he lives.⁸

The 1844 Conference then drew up a moderate plan of separation and the Southern delegates met in Louisville on May 1, 1845, organizing the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.⁹ In the four year interval before the General Conference of 1848, many annual conferences in Northern states expressed strong reaction to the plan of separation. In 1848 the General Conference of the Northern Church repudiated the agreements contained in the plan and refused to seat a fraternal delegate from the Methodist Church, South.¹⁰ Even after separation the Methodists in the North retained several

⁷ Sweet, Story of Religion, pp. 303, 304.

⁸ The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Cincinnati, 1845), pp. 202, 203.

⁹ Sweet, Ibid., p. 304; for a detailed treatment of the schism in the Methodist Church see L. C. Matlack, The Antislavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York, 1881); John N. Norwood, The Schism in the Methodist Church 1844: A Study of Slavery and Ecclesiastical Politics (Alfred, New York, 1923); Bauer Swaney, Episcopal Methodism and Slavery with Sidelights on Ecclesiastical Politics (Boston, 1926).

¹⁰ Sweet, Ibid., p. 305.

conferences in slave states,¹¹ and North and South alike feared losing border areas to the other. Hence the slavery agitation continued to affect church politics within the Methodist Episcopal Church, and sectional wounds were kept from healing by the protracted court action in connection with the division of denominational property, action which was not concluded finally until 1854 in the Supreme Court.¹²

As curious as the fact that the Methodist Episcopal Church continued to have relationship with conferences in slave states, was the fact that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, retained for some time the same disciplinary provision in regard to slavery. Why it was retained is made clear by the General Conference action of the Southern Church.

Resolved, That this section was inserted by a majority of votes, when the church embraced the whole country; and as the Church South still embraces a wide extent of country with various views and conflicting interests, it is not removed, although it has long since become inoperative, and ceased, by common consent, to set forth a practical rule or principle.¹³

The same fear of losing the border areas led to official moderation in the North and South for some time. General Conference action in the North in both 1848 and 1852 was moderate in regard to slavery itself. In both instances even the discussion of slavery was discouraged, although the practical problems of separation had to be faced.¹⁴ This was not due to diminishing feeling but to the inexpediency of the agitation under the circumstances.

¹¹ Swaney, Methodism and Slavery, p. 199. See also Appendix B.

¹² Sweet, Methodism in American History (N. Y., Cincinnati, Chicago, 1933), pp. 262-267.

¹³ Western Christian Advocate, May 22, 1850, p. 82.

¹⁴ Matlack, Anti-Slavery Struggle and Triumph, pp. 209-214.

The Presbyterians underwent schism in 1837 and 1838. Slavery was an important undercurrent in a division which centered principally in loose doctrine and loose discipline among the New School Churches and ministers who had followed a modification of the rigid Calvinism of traditional Presbyterian stock. The New School had strong New England components flavored with a Congregational background.¹⁵ Even though slavery did not appear openly as an issue in the General Assembly, the sectional distribution of the two groups is significant. Observers of the event as well as modern historians agree that the slavery controversy was a significant factor in the division.¹⁶

The New School element continued to take an active interest in anti-slavery. The issue was discussed in each General Assembly, where numerous petitions and memorials were brought in from synods and presbyteries.¹⁷ The editor of the Central Christian Herald of Cincinnati, calculated that about one fifth of the churches and one seventh of the membership were directly represented in the anti-slavery memorials and petitions of 1850.¹⁸ In 1849 the

¹⁵ Sweet, Story of Religion, pp. 259-263.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 262-263. See also C. Bruce Staiger, "Abolitionism and the Presbyterian Schism of 1837-1838," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXVI (Dec., 1949), pp. 391-414. For the view of a contemporary New England Congregationalist see Zebulon Crocker, The Catastrophe of the Presbyterian Church, in 1837, Including a Full View of the Recent Theological Controversies in New England (New Haven, 1838), pp. 56-70. Areas of the controversy are covered in Walter B. Posey, "The Slavery Question in the Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest," The Journal of Southern History, XV (August, 1949), pp. 311-324; J. F. Lyons, "The Attitude of Presbyterians in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois Toward Slavery 1825-1861," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XI (1921-23), pp. 69-82.

¹⁷ Central Watchman, June 1, 1849, p. 35.

¹⁸ June 6, 1850, p. 34. The Central Christian Herald was successor to the Central Watchman.

General Assembly had adopted the following resolutions by a vote of 84-16.

1. Resolved, That we exceedingly deplore the workings of the whole system of slavery, as it exists in our country, and is interwoven with the political institutions of the slaveholding States, as fraught with many and great evils to the civil, political and moral interests of those regions where it exists.

2. Resolved, That the holding [of] our fellowmen in the condition of slavery, except in those cases where it is unavoidable, by the laws of the State, the obligations of guardianship, or the demands of humanity, is an offence in the proper import of that term . . . which should be regarded and treated in the same manner as other offences.¹⁹

The discussion of the issue among the New School Presbyterians usually focussed upon the investigation and proper discipline of those members who held slaves.

The Old School Assembly, on the other hand, consistently attempted to remain aloof from the issue of slavery, avoiding controversy as much as possible. This group congratulated themselves upon their conservatism,²⁰ their effectiveness in the amelioration of the condition of the slave,²¹ and their key role in holding the Union together.²² The relative position of the two groups was set forth in a statement by a New School adherent who had been a central figure in the schism.

The one has endeavoured to carry out, by a proper application to the subject, the principles avowed before by the whole body and which were the common inheritance of both; the other has endeavoured to arrest the progress of opinion,

19 Central Christian Herald, June 6, 1850, p. 34.

20 Stokes, Church and State, Vol. II, p. 174. The author quotes from Dr. N. L. Rice, a leading Old School Presbyterian.

21 Central Watchman, June 8, 1849, p. 39.

22 Central Christian Herald, May 23, 1850, p. 27. The editor quotes Dr. R. J. Breckenridge of Kentucky speaking in assembly debate.

to check all advances, to avoid all the proper application to those principles; and so far as appears, to make slavery a permanent institution of the church.²³

The Old School Presbyterians in the South and many in the North were among the ablest and firmest conservative defenders of slavery. It was not difficult to find in rigid Calvinist theology the "rational premise of master and slave."²⁴

The division within the Baptist Church occurred at the point of the cooperative efforts of the locally autonomous Baptist congregations in foreign and home missionary enterprises. The two organizations involved were the General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions formed in 1814 and the Baptist Home Missionary Society formed in 1832. These societies met together triennially. In the Convention of 1841 slavery was a prominent issue, but moderates of both sections remained in control. In 1844 the issue again came up as both groups met in Philadelphia. Moderates again were in control and, as far as the Convention was concerned, the matter was laid on the table and its solution left to the two executive boards.²⁵ The division came when Baptists of the South requested the boards to appoint slaveholders as missionaries. Both boards refused to make such appointments on the basis that it implied sanction of slavery. At this point the Southern churches withdrew, setting up their own

²³ Albert Barnes, The Church and Slavery (Philadelphia, 1857), p. 53. Barnes was on trial in 1835 for the typical New School deviations. See Crocker, Catastrophe of the Presbyterian Church, pp. 101-102.

²⁴ Posey, "Slavery Question in the Presbyterian Church of the Old Southwest," p. 324.

²⁵ Sweet, Story of Religion, pp. 298, 299.

boards and a convention which first met on May 8, 1845, in Augusta, Georgia.²⁶

Anti-slavery opinion of sufficient strength to precipitate these divisions was not enough to satisfy some of the minor extremist groups. One conservative Presbyterian deemed it necessary, because of attacks from such groups, to defend the Old School Presbyterians against the pro-slavery aspersions cast upon them and to reveal the "utter falsehood of the charge shamelessly made, and unweariedly reiterated, that the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Church are pro-slavery."²⁷ Such criticism of the Old School could be expected but one Presbyterian dissenter criticized the New School for trying "to gain the applause of slavery," charging that "this double dealing is surely for effect's sake."²⁸ He applied his criticism to all the principal denominations and such interdenominational agencies as the American Tract Society, the American Bible Society, and the American Sabbath School Union.²⁹

Two missionaries of the American Baptist Free Missionary Society wrote a book in an effort to document their assertion that the Baptist Church, even of the North, was pro-slavery. They reproduced in full many of the documents involved in the controversy among the Baptists, convinced that they had made their case. "The mass of humiliating facts we have laid before you cannot leave a

²⁶ Sweet, Story of Religion, pp. 300-301; this schism is treated fully in Mary B. Putnam, The Baptists and Slavery 1840-1845 (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1913).

²⁷ John Robinson, The Testimony and Practice of the Presbyterian Church in Reference to American Slavery (Cincinnati, 1852), p. 76.

²⁸ William B. Brown, Religious Organizations and Slavery (Oberlin, 1850), p. 21.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

doubt that there has been, and there is in our denomination . . . a combination in favor of the slaveholder, to oppose the emancipation of the slave."³⁰

At least one such book was written relative to the Methodist Episcopal Church. The author presented many documents concluding that "we have sketched our history, from a pure anti-slavery church, to a deeply corrupted and practically pro-slavery one--have shown our present deplorable condition, and its remedy--have shown why that remedy should be applied, and how the desired purification may be realized."³¹ It was characteristic of the most extreme elements in the churches to separate from the main bodies as the slavery controversy deepened. The Wesleyan Methodists, the Free Presbyterians, and the American Baptist Free Missionary Society owed their existence to this tendency.

After the division and reorganization of the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, largely along sectional lines, the churches continued to expand with unabated vigor. The Methodist Episcopal Church reached a membership of 629,660 in 1849, including 29,961 Negroes and Indians.³² Since Methodist conferences were not necessarily divided strictly on the basis of state boundaries it is not possible to give an entirely accurate view of the ratio of membership to population on a state by state basis. In New England

³⁰ A. T. Foss and E. Mathews, Facts for Baptist Churches (Utica, N. Y., 1850), p. 382.

³¹ H. Mattison, The Impending Crisis of 1860; or the Present Connection of the Methodist Episcopal Church with Slavery, and Our Duty in Regard to It (New York, 1859), p. 135. The crisis referred to is not the Civil War but the General Conference meeting in 1860.

³² The Methodist Almanac 1849, p. 17. See Appendix B for membership by annual conferences.

there was approximately one Methodist for every thirty-eight inhabitants of all ages. In the Middle States the ratio was about one in twenty. In the Northwest the ratio was approximately the same.³³ Conferences in border areas overlapped with others until no estimate is feasible. The Baltimore Conference was the largest in this category with a membership of 68,855 by 1850.³⁴

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, numbered a total of 465,553 in 1849. Of this number 130,694 were Indians or Negroes. The membership ratio in Kentucky was about one in twenty or about the same as for the Methodists north of the Ohio. In the deep South the ratio was slightly more favorable to Methodism, being about one in eighteen. In such states as Tennessee and Virginia the proportion was about one in twenty-three.³⁵

The regular Baptists, by 1851, had reached a membership of 686,806.³⁶ The Baptists attained a ratio to population in some Southern states as high as one member for every thirteen inhabitants as in Georgia, one to fourteen in Kentucky, one to fifteen in South Carolina, and one to sixteen in Virginia. The ratio in the North was much less. In Ohio it was one to eighty, in Pennsylvania one to seventy-seven, in Vermont one to thirty-nine, in New York one to thirty, and in Illinois and Indiana one to forty-five.³⁷

³³ Estimates based on figures from Methodist Almanac 1849 and 1850 population figures.

³⁴ Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the year 1850 (New York, 1850), p. 540.

³⁵ Based on statistics in Methodist Almanac 1849 and 1850 population figures. See Appendix C for membership by annual conferences.

³⁶ See Appendix D for membership by states.

³⁷ American Baptist Register for 1852 (Philadelphia, 1853), from a table on p. 410. Statistics are principally from 1851.

The New School Presbyterians reached a total of 140,076 by 1850.³⁸ Their principal strength was in the North and specifically in the New York-New Jersey area where nearly half their membership resided, attaining there a ratio to population of about one to forty-five. They were otherwise rather evenly distributed throughout the Western states. The New School was quite insignificant numerically in Southern States except for Tennessee where 6,764 resided in a total population of 1,002,625. Otherwise there were 3,816 in Virginia, 1,174 in Kentucky and 951 in Mississippi.³⁹

The Old School Presbyterians with twelve synods in the North and ten synods in the South had a total membership of 217,135 with 70,075, or about one third of their members being residents of slave states.⁴⁰ The geographical distribution was much the same as for the New School body except for the South. The heaviest concentration was in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in the North with very substantial membership in Virginia and the Carolinas in the South. Except for New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, the ratio of Presbyterians to general population did not approach that of either Methodists or Baptists.

This analysis does not offer a means of calculating absolutely the influence of these churches individually or collectively.

³⁸ See Appendix E for membership by synods.

³⁹ Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America With an Appendix (New York, 1851), p. 135. Population figures are those for 1850.

⁴⁰ Central Christian Herald, December 12, 1850, p. 142. For membership by synods see Appendix F. The table is for membership in 1839, but it shows accurately the geographical distribution by 1850 as well. The proportion of increase in membership from 1839 to 1850 was about the same North and South.

It serves simply to indicate the geographical distribution of membership and it does suggest potential influence. It also serves to define the constituency of the voluminous press of these denominations since most of this widespread constituency was served by at least one substantial, weekly, denominational newspaper.

The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church authorized the publication of several regional papers all bearing the title Christian Advocate.⁴¹ During the period under study there were four of these publications in Northern Methodism. In addition most annual conferences published their own organs, nearly always using the parent name.⁴² The regional Methodist papers were better patronized than those of most of the other denominations because the General Conference authorized a limited number. On occasion editors of other denominations noted this strength with mild envy.⁴³ Editors of the Methodist papers were elected by the General Conference,⁴⁴ and any profits from the papers went into the ministers' relief fund of the general church. This close official supervision did not prevent the founding of other papers on an independent basis and the semi-official Zion's Herald of Boston was prosperous and, in fact, a leading Methodist paper in circulation and influence.⁴⁵

⁴¹ The Methodist Almanac for the Year of our Lord 1851 (New York, 1851), p. 31.

⁴² Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal, June 19, 1850, p. 98; January 8, 1851, p. 6. Will be cited henceforth as Zion's Herald.

⁴³ Presbyterian Herald, July 3, 1850, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Journals of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. III, 1848-1856 (New York, 1856), pp. 105, 106 of the 1848 Journal.

⁴⁵ Hudson, Journalism in the United States, p. 296; Norwood, Schism in the Methodist Church, p. 211.

The Zion's Herald of Boston and the Northern Advocate of Auburn, New York, were strongly anti-slavery. The Western Advocate published in Cincinnati, was anti-slavery, but more moderately so than the Boston or Auburn papers. The Christian Advocate and Journal of New York was the general organ of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Because of its general circulation, some even in border states, its editor was usually much more moderate than his colleagues. These were all papers of large circulation, with the latter probably the largest with 35,000 or more subscribers by 1850.⁴⁶ Circulation figures are given only incidentally, if at all, hence they are seldom known.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, followed an identical pattern with its denominational organs. The Nashville Christian Advocate which had reached a circulation of 13,000 in 1851 with its editor ambitious for 20,000,⁴⁷ was the official organ of the Methodists in the South. Its editors shared the typical sectional view on slavery. The Richmond Christian Advocate was a well edited journal, the editor of which remained aloof to a considerable degree, from the controversy. When he did express himself, it was not only to uphold the Southern view but to emphatically condemn Northern editors for their agitation of the issue. The Southern Christian Advocate, published in Charleston, had 8,200 subscribers by 1851.⁴⁸ The views of its editors did not deviate from those prevailing in the South and, on occasion, they showed the more

⁴⁶ January 3, 1850, p. 3.

⁴⁷ January 29, 1851.

⁴⁸ February 7, 1851, p. 140.

radical viewpoint of their state of South Carolina.

The Baptists North and South listed forty periodicals published in 1851.⁴⁹ Of these, twenty-eight were weeklies, with the Watchman and Reflector of Boston being probably the largest and most generally circulated. This paper was distinctly anti-slavery although the Christian Watchman, before its absorption by the Reflector, had been very mild on the subject. The New York Baptist Register published at Utica, New York, was typical of its section although not as aggressive as the Northern Advocate of Auburn. The Cross and Journal was a Baptist paper published in Columbus, Ohio. The editors of this paper from October, 1845 to October, 1847, exhibited a statesmanlike attitude unusual for the time as far as slavery was concerned.

A Baptist paper, the Watchman of the Prairies, was founded in Chicago in 1847 and soon reached a circulation of 1,000. This paper, privately owned as were most Baptist papers, operated at a loss at least in the early stages of its growth.⁵⁰ The Watchman was distinctly anti-slavery.

Baptist papers were very numerous in the South and their editors were frequently among the more aggressive advocates of slavery. The Southern Baptist of Charleston and the Christian Index of Penfield, Georgia, were the most extreme. These papers circulated 3,000 and 2,700 respectively in 1848 and the editors still had difficulty making ends meet.⁵¹ This suggests that

⁴⁹ Baptist Register, 1852, p. 411. The statistics in this publication pertain mostly to 1851.

⁵⁰ October 12, 1847.

⁵¹ Southern Baptist, November 29, 1848, p. 534; Christian Index, March 30, 1848, p. 63.

papers which carried on over a period of years had to circulate at least that number, if not more.

The Baptist Banner of Louisville was a paper of moderate pro-slavery sentiment, representing those who were most vitally interested in compromise between the sections. The Biblical Recorder of Raleigh, North Carolina, was also notably more moderate than the Southern Baptist, but its editors were clearly sectional in their interests. The Religious Herald of Richmond seldom carried editorial comment on the issue of slavery or its political manifestations. Its editor was inclined to be more mild and charitable toward Northern editors than were most of his Southern colleagues, whatever their denomination.

These weeklies were, as a rule, individually owned and edited by outstanding Baptist ministers, although sometimes a committee of a state convention or an association was temporarily in charge, as in the case of the Christian Index from the end of 1848 to December, 1849, and the Southern Baptist at various times. Private ownership was regarded as preferable both by the denomination and by the editors themselves.⁵² Whether privately owned or otherwise, they were always designed for Baptist consumption and were invariably strictly denominational.

The Presbyterian press was also extensive. The Presbyterians, Old and New Schools, had at least twenty-one substantial weekly papers during the period in question.⁵³ Presbyterian papers bore

⁵² Watchman of the Prairies, February 1, 1847.

⁵³ This information comes from a list on file at McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago.

much the same relationship to the denomination as did the Baptist press. In fact, in 1850, the General Assembly, Old School, rejected both the proposed establishment of a cheap, general, denominational organ and control of other Presbyterian papers, although the problem was referred to a select committee for further study. Some agreed that a subsidized paper, cheaper than the usual three dollars per annum was desirable and would be conducive to a larger circulation. It was felt, however, that official sponsorship would be opposed by all papers then in existence, that it would be difficult to keep the papers from becoming party organs within the church under such sponsorship, and that there was not sufficient unity of mind in the church to make it practical. The church newspaper, some said, "can best be sustained by private enterprise" and since it was a free church and freedom of thought and mind was characteristic of it "the press must be free. You cannot place it under restrictions without destroying its utility."⁵⁴ Hence the religious press, with the exception of the Methodist regional Advocates, was largely in private hands. This accounted, in large part, for the frequent failures of weaker papers noted by a historian of journalism.⁵⁵

The Presbyterian Advocate, published in Pittsburgh, was the general and most prominent organ of the Old School. It was very conservative in discussing the subject of slavery, its editor being much opposed to the agitation. In the South the Old School is

⁵⁴ The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review for the Year 1850 (July), pp. 442-446.

⁵⁵ Hudson, Journalism in the United States, p. 301.

represented in this study by the Presbyterian Herald of Louisville, a paper which was in accord with the sentiment in the border states, i. e., moderately pro-slavery and very much interested in compromise.

The two most prominent of the papers of the New School representing a typically Northern point of view were the New York Evangelist, which was very strongly anti-slavery, and the Central Christian Herald of Cincinnati, which was anti-slavery, but to a somewhat milder degree than the Evangelist. A New School Journal, the Christian Observer published in Philadelphia, was intended for circulation among New School adherents in the South and was moderately pro-Southern.

These papers represent the three denominations, the extremes of view within the sections, and the papers of widest circulation within their particular denominations. In varying degrees, the editors of these papers entered the controversy over slavery from 1846-1851, a controversy which reached its climax in the politics of the Compromise of 1850. For the most part, however, the Southern section of the press, while carrying news items, discussed political matters editorially only with reluctance and then with an apology. This tendency is demonstrated by the editor of the Baptist Banner of Louisville, who felt it necessary to defend himself against charges that publishing one of Clay's speeches showed favoritism toward the Whigs. He said,

We respectfully inform our good brother, and all others concerned that as the editor of the Banner we pander to no political party. As many of our readers take no paper beside the Banner, we feel it our duty, in fulfilment of our promise to them, to furnish them, as far as possible, the

news of the day, free from party preferences and strifes and this we shall continue to do.⁵⁶

A North Carolina editor experimented, to his regret, with an analysis of the morality or immorality of the Mexican War, a question which the editor regarded as a proper subject for discussion. The editor wrote,

The experiment, however, has shown us, that there are many of our readers who are disposed to hear nothing on the subject--and further, that it is impossible to prevent correspondents from clinching each other on points of purely party politics. Under such circumstances we hold it to be our duty to close our columns against the whole affair.⁵⁷

The editor of the Watchman of Boston agreed in principle but added the qualification that he would not avoid a political yellow jacket's nest if political parties interfered with the "discharge of his duties as Watchman in declaring the council [sic] of God, as revealed in His word."⁵⁸ The editor of the Richmond Christian Advocate was among the most consistent in his refusal to be drawn into discussion of issues that could possibly be construed as political. Provoked by Zion's Herald, a Boston publication, he called attention to the view that "In the South the Religious press, following the example of Christ mingle not with political questions. They leave the potsherds of the earth to strive with each other. . . . Religious Editors in politics, like monkeys in China shops may do a great deal of harm and no good."⁵⁹

The editor of the Southern Christian Advocate of Charleston

⁵⁶ Baptist Banner, January 13, 1848.

⁵⁷ Biblical Recorder, August 28, 1847.

⁵⁸ Quoted in the Biblical Recorder, August 28, 1847.

⁵⁹ Richmond Advocate, August 15, 1850, p. 130.

had difficulty even in bringing himself to discuss the questions raised by the division of the Methodist Church. "Those who have read our paper regularly for some months past," he said, "cannot but have observed our total abstinence from the agitating question which has occasioned so much unfortunate collision between the Northern and Southern divisions of the M. E. Church." He claimed the support of his constituents for his position. It is interesting that he devotes two columns to material from a Northern paper disclaiming finally, that he is going to give any notice to it.⁶⁰

Two Southern papers were exceptions temporarily to this reluctance to discuss controversial issues. The editor of the Christian Index of Georgia emphatically claimed the right to express his opinion on any subject of political or religious interest since he regarded political and moral interests as inseparable.⁶¹ The editor of the Southern Baptist of Charleston agreed that a religious journalist should remain true to his course and not meddle with purely political and partisan questions. He too, however, saw many questions as having both a political and religious bearing and freely discussed such things as the Wilmot Proviso. He further openly suggested the mobilization of the press and other instruments to protect "the Southern Social System."⁶² Each of these papers reverted to a more typically Southern attitude after a change in editorship, experienced by the Index late in 1848 and the Southern Baptist in October of 1847.

⁶⁰ December 4, 1846, p. 102.

⁶¹ March 9, 1848, p. 77.

⁶² August 4, 1847, p. 259.

There was not such a tendency to divorce politics from religion, however, that sufficient provocation from the Northern politicians or the Northern press would not get a response eventually. Southern editors qualified their opposition to political discussions by asserting that whenever "the great foundations and fundamentals of religious and civil liberty . . . are endangered by the collision of political parties, then we think it becomes our religious duty to speak out, and warn the people of the impending danger."⁶³ The Christian ethic applied just as fully to political matters as to anything else. "It is just as wicked to lie about politics as to lie about merchandize. [sic]. It is just as immoral to act without reverence to God at a caucus, as anywhere else."⁶⁴ With views such as these, the door could be readily opened to the discussion of any subject if that subject was sufficiently provocative. The Southern press, however, consistently exercised more restraint than the Northern press in commenting upon political issues, whether related to slavery or not.

This restraint met with ridicule in the North. The editor of Zion's Herald of Boston said,

It is enough to provoke the righteous indignation of a saint to see so often reiterated by our Southern press this stolid nonsense that the church must not interfere with a heinous moral wrong because the civil legislature has to do with it. What would have become of the temperance cause if this is true? What of the whole Reformation itself?⁶⁵

Editors throughout the North advocated the view that the pulpit and the press had the right and duty to discuss any political question

⁶³ Baptist Banner, February 11, 1847, p. 22.

⁶⁴ Religious Herald, August 19, 1847.

⁶⁵ August 7, 1850, p. 126.

that could conceivably have a moral bearing. This, of course, slavery had. The editor of the Northern Advocate of Auburn, New York, warned ministers to stand at a respectable distance from party strife but at the same time he warned them to

beware of running into the opposite extreme of shunning to declare all the counsel of God, merely to escape the censure of preaching politics. There are moral duties, which it is the peculiar province of the pulpit to inculcate, that have a most intimate relation to the prosperity of civil society; and there are some evil practices which have become so general, and so interwoven into the texture of our social compact, as to be fitly denominated 'national sins,' that must be clearly pointed out and faithfully rebuked.⁶⁶

A later editor of this paper urged upon the church its duty to take advantage of the republican form of government by seeking to influence public opinion and votes, specifically in connection with slavery.⁶⁷

The editor of the Boston Zion's Herald declared that "the PULPIT and the PRESS are the great instrumentalities; they should be rendered more independent, and imbued with more courage, zeal and Christian patriotism, in attacking this stronghold of the devil."⁶⁸ A Baptist editor of Boston went so far as to cautiously approve the action of a fellow minister in expressing regret in the pulpit at the defeat of Governor Briggs of Massachusetts. He was not quite sure whether that particular utterance was politic or impolitic but he declared for the right of a minister as that of other men, to speak his political convictions freely.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ March 31, 1847, p. 200.

⁶⁷ William Hosmer, Slavery and the Church (Auburn, N. Y., 1853), p. 173.

⁶⁸ Zion's Herald, November 28, 1849, p. 189.

⁶⁹ Watchman and Reflector, December 5, 1850, p. 194.

It was specifically party politics which all editors, North or South, tended to avoid. The editor of the Chicago Watchman of the Prairies attempted a definition of that term. "It should be well understood what is meant by party politics," he said. "They are those unsettled questions in state and national policy on which many able and good men as well as the community in which one lives are almost equally divided. Such subjects are not within the province of the religious press or the pulpit." There were reservations, however. "This rule is true in respect to those subjects which are strictly political; but it is not true in respect to those subjects which have a moral character and a direct moral influence. To this class belong temperance, war and human freedom." This was true regardless of how evenly the public was divided. In addition, many issues having party associations might yet be sufficiently national to overrule the inhibition.⁷⁰

A noticeable lack of confidence in the efficacy of politics and politicians frequently accompanied expressions of aversion to political discussions. A comment on the Mexican War revealed the view that any superior national unity in the United States was surely due to the good sense of the people, for "our leaders at home, on both sides, are doing all they can to discredit each other, and, we fear, would, if they could, drown the din of the Mexican War with the din of party strife--and all for the spoils of office--to hold or to take."⁷¹ After taking a position in regard to party politics

⁷⁰ Watchman of the Prairies, February 8, 1848.

⁷¹ Christian Index, October 23, 1846.

typical of others, a Louisville editor stated that his journal was established for a higher purpose than to discuss politics. He declared that he would never allow it "to be prostituted to any such object as promotion of a mere political party, even did we suppose the success of either of the present parties which now divide the country to be far more important than we do."⁷²

Some doubt of the honor of political parties was expressed in the North as well. From Columbus, Ohio came further agreement as to the Christian editor's responsibility to stand aloof from political parties, as such. But because the editor of the Western Christian Journal expected to have to answer to God he could not permit political parties to ruin the country, "the hope of the world, without lifting up the voice of warning. These parties will certainly do it, unless God interposes. They are all corrupt; they will all corrupt; they will all sell their birthright for a mess of pottage."⁷³

In spite of some reservations, especially in the South, the denominational press discussed the slavery issue at great length, because the issue was believed to have a significance beyond mere politics. The press of the North dealt at length with the political issue of extension, but, as a rule, the political aspects were discussed under a cover of moral considerations. The Northern press was concerned with the "larger" moral issue which made it sensitive to the question of slavery in general, to the progress or decline of slavery anywhere, and finally to the question of the

⁷² Presbyterian Herald, July 27, 1848.

⁷³ July 9, 1847. The Western Christian Journal was the successor of the Cross and Journal.

extension of slavery into the territories. In the South the posture of the religious press was primarily defensive as the Southern editors usually awaited Northern attack before discussing specific issues. In neither case was there sufficient inhibition to ultimately restrain the editors from entering all aspects of the controversy on behalf of the sectional interests characteristic of this era.

CHAPTER III

THE DISCUSSION AND DEFINITION OF THE ISSUE OF SLAVERY IN THE CHURCH PRESS

The editors of the denominational weeklies often concerned themselves with the question of the propriety of discussing the slavery question when it was so obviously involved in politics. This was particularly true of the Southern editors who frequently challenged the press of the North at this point and in this case, it was Northern editors who were on the defensive. Conservative journals in the North frequently sided with the South in criticizing the more radical Northern editors for carrying on the agitation in the manner in which they did. Even strongly anti-slavery journals condemned the extremes of Garrisonian abolitionism as well as the extremes among the schismatics. This criticism did not eliminate the discussion nor did it diminish it appreciably. It was, in itself, yet another of the great multitude of debatable issues which slavery spawned. Nevertheless it seemed to be a necessary preliminary to a grappling with the ultimate question of the moral and theological nature of slavery.

The Louisville Baptist Banner, in order to emphasize the evil results of the agitation, cited as an example of contrast with what was usually expected from the North, a series of articles in the Boston Daily Star, a series written by a Northerner who had lived fourteen years in the South. The editor did not agree with the view of the author on slavery in the abstract, but he thought the author's description of the system fair and his spirit just. These articles caused the editor to reflect on what might have

been.

Had the North approached the South . . . in the spirit of these articles, they might have effected much for their object; whereas the course they have seen proper to pursue, has sundered the dearest ties of Christian Brotherhood, . . . embarrassed the councils of the nation, and drawn a line between the two great sections of the nation, along which they have strewn revolutionary combustible sufficient to sunder and consume every tie which binds our happy country in union.

To continue the agitation on the same basis, he was sure, would incurably alienate the two sections and end in "fearful anarchy, war, and bloodshed."¹

One aspect of the agitation which was particularly repulsive to the South was the exaggeration which Southerners felt accompanied the discussions. The Presbyterian Herald of Louisville was sure that a certain class of editors had come to identify all religion and virtue with denunciation of Southern churches and Southern ministers when this denunciation was based upon overdrawn pictures of the horrors and cruelties of slavery.² The Biblical Recorder of North Carolina complained that the Christian Reflector of Boston never permitted "an opportunity to escape for villifying the South" on the basis of all material published, true or false, that might reflect on slavery. The Reflector had indicated its "spirit of acerbity and ill-breeding which usually signalizes abolition papers," by the publishing of favorable comments on the slavery system, only after stigmatizing them by the label, "apologies for slavery."³

1 Baptist Banner, October 1, 1846, p. 154.

2 November 10, 1846.

3 Biblical Recorder, August 28, 1847.

The editor of the Southern Baptist of Charleston sarcastically introduced a clipping from the Michigan Christian Herald thus: "We clip the following truthful paragraph." Following this introduction he quoted the Herald's account as follows: "The assembling of colored persons to worship God in a peaceable way, it seems, is an insufferable nuisance in Charleston--an act so flagrant that a respectable mob of white persons recently assembled to destroy a church, which had been erected for the worship of the blacks." The paper then described a mob attack on a certain Calvary Church. The Charleston editor retorted, "We hope our brother editor of the Herald will restrain his holy indignation, and colored irony against the good people of Charleston, until he informs himself as to the facts he is commenting upon. In the first place, no person, either white or black, ever worshipped in Calvary Church as it is not yet built."⁴ The church was, in fact, later built and dedicated for Negro use as a part of the Baptist's program to extend religious opportunities to the colored people.⁵ How this false rumor reached Michigan is unknown.

A Northern editor also challenged the accuracy of anti-slavery reporting. A pro-Southern New School journal, the Christian Observer of Philadelphia, carried an article entitled "Wonderful Credulity of Northern Abolitionists." This editor charged that the South had lost confidence in the honesty and good intentions of the

⁴ Southern Baptist, August 22, 1849, p. 686.

⁵ See J. H. Thornwell, The Rights and Duties of Masters, a Sermon Preached at the Dedication of a Church, Erected in Charleston, S. C., for the Benefit and Instruction of the Colored Population (Charleston, 1850).

abolitionists because they had seized "upon every false statement respecting the cruelty of slaveholders." Such loss of confidence deprived anti-slavery of any possible remedial influence in the South. He pled for a charitable spirit which would make one slow to believe false and slanderous reports and also remove the delight with which "gross falsehoods" were believed and circulated. It pained him to see the two sections of his country torn asunder by such editorializing.⁶ The editor of the Observer went on to charge anti-slavery writers with the "habit of collecting reports of all the social and moral evils that they ever heard of in the Southern States, and charging the aggregate, all in one item, to the account of slavery. In doing so, they impose both on themselves and their readers."⁷

The Observer was consistently interested in a moderate policy advanced from a pro-Southern view. Its editor insisted that the South had first expressed anti-slavery feeling, that the South had made the largest sacrifices on behalf of the slave, and that Southern slave-holders could create the only pacific and healthy anti-slavery. He declared also that the journals of the North were unreliable sources of the knowledge required to deal with slavery. He contended that it required men who lived in the South to judge the best means to benefit the slave.⁸ Certainly "hard words, and strifes, and new tests" were not the "remedies for the servitude of the African race." He declared, in fact, that all the

⁶ Christian Observer, August 19, 1848, p. 134.

⁷ November 18, 1848, p. 186.

⁸ February 5, 1847, p. 22.

discussions had probably retarded progress on behalf of the slave by fifteen years.⁹ The exciting of the people in the North to rise against the social relations and usages of the South could never effect the "great and honorable work" which "God has assigned his Church."¹⁰

A clergyman preaching in Central Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia on December 12, 1850, expressed much the same feeling. He was convinced that the agitation of slavery had at that point done more than anything else to endanger the Union. He did not approve of forever perpetuating slavery, but he sympathized with the revulsion of the South at the attempt "to force them by denunciation to a stricter morality than the Bible requires. . . . They have been denounced as manstealers, robbers, monsters of cruelty, and everything horrible and outrageous, because they would not do what in their circumstances was impossible."¹¹

The editor of the Raleigh Biblical Recorder, apparently on the basis of a misunderstanding, charged his colleague of the Boston Christian Watchman with "Abolition Fairness" in giving a one-sided version of Southern views. "This, we suppose, is a fair specimen of abolition sagacity;--and, we presume we may add, of abolition honesty."¹² As a matter of fact, the Watchman was usually mild on the subject and was so recognized until its later merger with the Reflector. In his own defense, the editor of the Watchman said,

⁹ December 3, 1847, p. 194.

¹⁰ June 29, 1850, p. 102.

¹¹ W. Henry Green, Our National Union: A Sermon Preached on Thanksgiving Day, December 12th, 1850 (Philadelphia, 1850), p. 21, 22.

¹² Biblical Recorder, December 4, 1847.

"We have never intentionally misrepresented the South, and we feel no special obligation to correct what others may have said." He agreed that a large portion of what was published in the North about slavery was "mere twaddle." Then he challenged the South to "take up the subject in earnest" after which he expected such useless vituperation to cease. "Will not our brother Meredith," he asked, "who writes on the subject with so much ability and vigor, put forth some candid appeals to his Southern brethren? Never mind what the abolitionists at the North say about you."¹³

One editor referred to the abuse of the South by the denominational press of the North in urging his subscribers to pay their subscriptions. "Who thinks," he asked, "that the denomination in the State would be better without an organ at home and its place supplied by periodicals from the North, which insult our feelings, sneer at our institutions, are spending their strength to deprive us of our property?"¹⁴

In an impassioned speech at the General Assembly, New School, meeting in Detroit in 1849, Joseph Stiles joined others in the North who cited the constant agitation as a source of ever more serious trouble. In the course of his speech he said,

Nothing can more seriously mutilate the character of master and servant: for it spreads an influence over the spirit of both, and makes the one hostile and insurgent--the other suspicious and severe;--nothing [can] so effectually dissipate the prospect of present comfort or future deliverance: for without respect, the serving of the one must be pure hardship; without love, the spirit of the other will never cherish an inclination to emancipate; . . . Abolitionism

¹³ Christian Watchman, December 17, 1847, p. 202.

¹⁴ Southern Baptist, August 1, 1849, p. 674.

will disturb both parties for the present, and, if it ever frees the slave, it will entail an eternal hostility upon the races it tears apart.¹⁵

The editor of the New York Advocate and Journal, the general organ of the Methodist Episcopal Church, excited the wrath of his colleagues in the North when he questioned the safety and rightness of the agitation in the spirit and manner with which it had been conducted. He insisted that perpetual agitation offered no cure and would, instead of hastening emancipation, actually retard it. He did not question the honesty of his colleagues but he did question their wisdom. He warned, "Let the system of agitation be pressed a step or two further, and the United States of America may be plunged into the horrors of a Civil War." He condemned severely those who misused their rights to speak and act as they pleased to heap irrational abuse upon others.¹⁶

The editor of the Advocate and Journal found himself in a unique position since the paper's circulation was denomination wide. Its constituency, then, included border conferences which had some slaveholding membership. Under the editorship of George Peck, 1848-1852, the paper was moderate in tone and Peck was probably elected to his post because he was moderate.¹⁷ But Thomas E. Bond, who had been editor from 1840-1848,¹⁸ had expressed himself quite freely and critically on the subject of slavery. His position as

¹⁵ Joseph C. Stiles, Speech on the Slavery Resolutions Delivered in the General Assembly which met in Detroit in May Last (New York, 1850), p. 53.

¹⁶ December 26, 1850, p. 206.

¹⁷ July 5, 1848, p. 106.

¹⁸ Norwood, Schism in the Methodist Church, p. 209. Norwood is in error in saying that the paper was bitterly anti-Southern from 1836-1854.

described by the editor of the Boston Zion's Herald had been "manly" and worthy of the paper. The Herald quoted Bond as saying that he "hated slavery and loved to hate it!" The Herald's complaint was that "since then the Advocate had been editorially mute on the subject."¹⁹

The moderate Mr. Peck was also attacked in the Western Christian Advocate, published in Cincinnati. He defended himself against the charge brought by a correspondent of this paper to the effect that he was in favor of the Fugitive Slave Law. He did so by saying that he privately hoped for the repeal of the law, but he said, "We never intended to be concerned in any political movement, or to enlist in the public discussions which we foresaw would arise."²⁰ He took this ground in part because he doubted the efficacy of the agitation but principally because the circulation of the Advocate and Journal was denomination wide and moderation was expedient in regard to the "peace of the church." For the sake of the church it was important to forget sectional difficulties and controversies.²¹

As he traveled throughout the church, Dr. Peck frequently faced the necessity of explaining his relative silence on the subject of slavery. He explained to the Michigan Annual Conference that "the discussion of slavery in the columns of the Journal would result in confusion, discord, and the dissolution of a considerable portion of the Church." He added, however, that it

¹⁹ Zion's Herald, January 1, 1851.

²⁰ Advocate and Journal, December 12, 1850, p. 198.

²¹ January 14, 1848, p. 94.

would no doubt produce good if the local organs would continue to pursue the subject. Not only was a moderate policy justified by the work of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the slave states, but for the benefit of laymen in the East who engaged in commerce with the South.²²

In any case Zion's Herald of Boston and the Northern Advocate of western New York refused to accept Peck's explanations as entirely valid. The Herald would have Dr. Peck fairly heard and granted the validity of a cautious policy in view of the border area circulation. But Peck had gone too far according to the editor:

In attempting to meet these difficulties it was not required that it should attack the whole anti-slavery sentiment and policy of the Northern Church and put itself on the platform of the Southern Church by denouncing the agitation as "political" and denying the right of Christian men to secure great moral principles which have been siezed and perverted by politicians.

Agitation, the Boston editor declared, was the only hope for the removal of the evil. It stirred those "whose inertness and love of repose render them reluctant to either feel or act in behalf of a cause which involves serious embarrassments and in some places contempt."²³

The editor of the Northern Advocate reminded his readers of such agitators as Luther, Knox, and John Wesley and asked what the world would be without them. "If slaveholders become enraged," he said, "this is not the fault of those who speak the truth . . . neither will the North be to blame, if the South, maddened by the

²² Reported in a letter from a member of the Michigan Conference to the Western Christian Advocate, November 5, 1851, p. 177.

²³ Zion's Herald, January 1, 1851, p. 4.

truth, shall commit political and religious suicide, rather than liberate its slaves." The rights of three million slaves could not be bartered for the sake of harmony.²⁴

The editor of a Western paper, the Watchman of the Valley of Cincinnati, also came to the defense of those who agitated the issue and he showed his pleasure at the obvious increase of such agitation. He noted that in the early years of his editorship he had had to serve almost "alone in the odious work of rebuking this national sin. Now the Northern religious press generally speak [sic] out freely and boldly on the subject, and that, in most cases, without qualifying what they say with a cowardly abuse of abolitionists."²⁵ This editor's successor, while denying the efficacy of violent agitation, said that, "if the clear, calm, decided enunciation of the truth agitates, on account of the opposition it excites, let it do so."²⁶

While most of the Northern papers of the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians were anti-slavery in varying degrees, and freely agitated the issue, they were all openly hostile to Garrisonian abolitionism and made that abundantly clear. They did not like its narrowness, its contempt for religion, its excesses, nor its effects. All these dislikes were apparent in the report of the meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-slavery Society by the New England correspondent of the New York Advocate and Journal.

²⁴ January 8, 1851, p. 162.

²⁵ March 15, 1849, p. 98.

²⁶ Central Christian Herald, successor to the Watchman of the Valley and the Central Watchman, April 3, 1851, p. 206.

The discussions were characterized as usual by bitter denunciation and rancorous assault upon everything political, moral, and religious, which will not bow down and worship its image. Whig, Democrat, and Free-Soiler in the political world, Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian in the religious world, were put hors du combat by its redoubtable champions. . . . A strange infatuation appears to lead these men into the wildest excesses of thought and speech. They manifestly fancy themselves to be the moral heroes of the age. Beyond their narrow and bigoted circle they see nothing but hypocrisy, falsehood, and hostility to humanity.²⁷

The editor of the New York Advocate and Journal refused to agree with another of his correspondents that abolition had been harmless or that it had done enough good to compensate for its evil results. He then quoted a letter from the South challenging such an assertion. The correspondent noted abolitionism's effects in the South in checking the friends of emancipation there and extinguishing instead of diffusing a light which had previously pervaded the section. It had also afforded a plausible pretext for suppressing discussion and the circulation of books and papers relating to the slavery issue.²⁸

The evil effects of abolitionism did not escape the notice of another moderate editor in the North. The editor of the Christian Watchman of Boston deplored the church divisions and sectional animosities, attributing them to abolitionists who were such bitter opponents of the churches. He contended that abolitionism's appeals to passion swept many church leaders along causing many "wrecks of conscience and consistency." All this was done with no gain whatever toward the elimination of that "great evil which we

²⁷ February 7, 1850, p. 23.

²⁸ April 21, 1847, p. 62.

so deeply and justly lament, that foulest blot on our countries' fame."²⁹

These were attacks from relatively conservative papers, but Garrison and his associates were frequently attacked by more radical papers also. The Watchman of the Prairies of Chicago labeled Garrison

one of those revengeful and reckless spirits who are [sic] ready to trample upon the most sacred institutions of God in order to accomplish any of his favorite objects, to inveigh against every existing institution human and divine, to advocate rebellion, license and revolution, and who care for nothing but a conspicuous notoriety. Of a similar character is the notorious preacher of transcendental infidelity, Rev. Theodore Parker.³⁰

Obviously, some of the hostility was over issues that pertained to theology rather than slavery.

One New England editor of positive anti-slavery convictions, found occasion to comment on Garrison on the basis of an event in 1846. Garrison and Frederick Douglass, a famous fugitive, had made a lecture tour of England in 1846 and their return evoked comment from Zion's Herald, a neighbor of the Liberator. "This gentleman," he said, "has been received by his fellow abolitionists (demolitionists is better) with considerable ceremony." His trip, he supposed, had revealed to the English the rashness of Garrison "whose hand is against every man, and every thing, that does not accord with his own exceedingly narrow views."³¹

The Northern Advocate of upstate New York which, along with Zion's Herald, was the most anti-slavery of Methodist publications,

²⁹ Christian Watchman, August 6, 1847, p. 126.

³⁰ February 22, 1848.

³¹ Zion's Herald, December 23, 1846, p. 202.

was also very critical of the tour. The editor conceded that some good might have been associated with their travels both here and abroad, especially in revealing, through Mr. Douglass, a first hand account of the horrors of slavery. But their influence was, to the editor, substantially evil in that it was abusive of the strong and increasing anti-slavery sentiment that refused to go as far as Garrisonianism. He was critical also of Douglass' lack of modesty, contending that it strengthened the "prejudice of those who say, 'allow the colored class to rise at all in society, and they will tread you under foot.'" But his most serious objection was to "the slander, contempt and ridicule which they pour upon the Christian religion," the influence of which was, in the editor's own view, the best hope of the slave.³²

One event showed even more completely the tendency of the main stream of the Northern churches to dissociate themselves from extremism. The Central Christian Herald followed closely a Christian anti-slavery convention from the time it was announced in late 1849 until it was held in his own city of Cincinnati in the spring of 1850. The editor also followed the same group in a subsequent meeting in Chicago in the summer of 1851. Others gave notice to the first meeting but the reaction of the Herald, a New School paper with its editor a first hand observer, was typical. When the editor first heard of the convention he thought it might be useful, if well conducted, in bringing people of divergent views together and harmonizing their efforts in an area of common

³² Northern Advocate, September 20, 1847, p. 102.

concern.³³ A self-appointed committee of fourteen had issued a general call for the meeting. Eleven of the fourteen were clergymen representing seven denominations, including the three under study.

The reasons for the call, as stated by the committee, are instructive. 1. Guilt existed in the church in proportion to light and knowledge and the church no longer had an excuse on that basis. 2. The sin of the church was so much the greater because it now attracted the attention of the world. 3. The influence of the church was so great that the evil of slavery could not be destroyed while the church countenanced the evil. 4. An individual could share in the guilt of his church. 5. Silence gave consent to proslavery principles and involved one in the sin and its consequences.³⁴

The speeches and resolutions as described by a correspondent of the Central Christian Herald were directed almost exclusively at the churches and the convention members pledged themselves to withdraw from their respective churches unless those churches separated themselves from all fellowship with slaveholding. The observer wittily remarked of the many accommodations which the various members of this motley assembly had to make to each other over matters of church polity and doctrine, then said, "Away with this sickly cooing on the one hand, and a disregard or forgetfulness on the other, which leaves us to ride, rough-shod, over the brotherly feelings and conscientious principles of those we should

³³ November 23, 1849, p. 130.

³⁴ Central Christian Herald, January 10, 1850, p. 158.

respect and win."³⁵

The editor himself, in the same issue, noted the lack of interest in the proceedings as only 150 had gathered, with about one third coming from Cincinnati. Nearly all were from dissenting factions which had already withdrawn from the churches. Of them the editor said, "As is usual in conventions of zealous reformers, some things were stated as facts which were not correct, some propounded as arguments which were not sound and logical, and some demonstrations were wanting in Christian courtesy and propriety."³⁶

The editor repudiated the methods suggested by the group at this time and again when the convention met in Chicago the next year. The local Prairie Herald described the meeting in Chicago as an "Ohio convention in Illinois." Again the convention was composed of dissenters with whom both the Prairie Herald and the Central Herald took issue. The convention defined both the Old and New Schools in Biblical terms as "marks of the beast" and "ships of perdition," and labeled them as corrupt, apostate, and beyond all hope. But the editor of the Prairie Herald said that "it should also be remarked, that our dissent from these brethren, is not in regard to the evils themselves of which they complain, it relates almost wholly to the remedy." The editor of the Central Herald sanctioned those sentiments, saying that "the removal of slavery is . . . of the highest consequence, and no Christian should feel unconcerned about it," but he insisted that there was a more excellent way of seeking its removal.³⁷

³⁵ April 25, 1850, p. 10.

³⁶ Central Christian Herald, April 25, 1850, p. 10.

³⁷ The Prairie Herald is quoted in the Central Christian Herald, July 24, 1851, p. 62.

The extremists tended to separate themselves entirely from the church and not only was there open hostility between Garrison and the churches and vice versa, but there was great animosity between the churches and the extremist dissenters among them. One such was LaRoy Sunderland, a one-time Methodist minister in good standing, who had edited the anti-slavery Zion's Watchman of Boston. He had fallen upon evil days, and was then billing himself as the "American Wizard" who gave exhibitions of mesmerism. A former colleague cited Sunderland as a prime example of the corrupting effect of fanaticism.³⁸

Although many Northern churchmen went out of their way to dissociate themselves from abolitionism, this was not true of the ministers of the Maine Conference, at least as far as a title was concerned. One resolution of the 1847 Annual Conference read: "Resolved, That while we are not tenacious of a name, being equally satisfied to be called abolitionists, or anti-slavery men, we regard with no favor any attempt to flatter the unreasonable prejudices of the Southern Church, by abandoning either of these terms for a less expressive one."³⁹ This did not mean, however, that they endorsed Garrisonianism. Only the year before the same conference had declared themselves free of the taint of radicalism and as unqualifiedly opposed to it "whether it be developed among slaveholders and their ultra apologists on the one hand, or among ultra abolitionists on the other."⁴⁰

³⁸ Northern Advocate, December 9, 1846, p. 146.

³⁹ From the "Anti-Slavery Report of the Maine Conference" printed in Zion's Herald, September 22, 1847, p. 152.

⁴⁰ Zion's Herald, July 22, 1846, p. 116.

There was, in fact, much confusion in the use of terms abolition and anti-slavery. The term abolition was applied loosely, not only in the South but at times in the North as well, to cover the entire range of anti-slavery sentiment. A New England correspondent of the New York Advocate and Journal attempted to clarify this usage, as far as his own section was concerned. He defined four classes of "abolitionists" among Methodists in New England where the most extreme anti-slavery doctrines were found. The first class he called radical abolitionists who had accepted the name, considered slavery heinous under all circumstances, and believed that Christians should withdraw all fellowship from slaveholders. These individuals had left the Methodist Episcopal Church and were busy denouncing their original connection. A second group had equally decided convictions about the immorality of slavery and put equal emphasis on immediate emancipation without regard to consequences, but this group did not withdraw from the church as long as they could express themselves. The third class, and much the most numerous among the accredited leaders of abolition, believed slaveholding to be in every case sinful with the exception of what was called "nominal slaveholding" where the legal relation was retained for the protection of the slave. This group did not engage in extreme and violent denunciation of the South and the slaveholder.

There was yet a fourth class which he described as very respectable in number, who would settle for gradual emancipation although they abhorred the system and demanded immediate amelioration of the conditions of the slave. The slaveholding relation was not necessarily sinful to this group. This analysis was held to be

appropriate for the majority in all denominations. The correspondent added that all these groups were much more united than they had been before and that the term "abolitionist" had ceased to carry the reproach it had in former years in that region.⁴¹

The confusion in the use of terms received the notice of the editor of the Western Advocate of Cincinnati. Referring to a communication from Missouri which made an allusion to abolitionists he said,

Some of the mild, constitutional anti-slavery men of the North, suppose such allusions are made in reference to them. The allusions are to the anti-constitution, anti-law, and anti-order abolitionists. We have made similar explanations of this before; but some of our mild anti-slavery men seem to forget them. . . . We have not one word of condemnation to utter against any safe, constitutional measures for the "extirpation of slavery."⁴²

There was, of course, much more tendency in the South to confuse the degrees of anti-slavery in the one appellation of "abolitionism." Some of it was probably deliberate but most of it was due to the view increasingly held, that anti-slavery of any degree was equally offensive. Northern editors recognized this and protested. The editor of the New York Evangelist quoted the action of the Synod of Virginia condemning the spirit and method of abolitionism. The Evangelist took the members of the Synod to task for pinning such a broad label on any form of hostility to slavery. The editor pointed out that the great masses of the North did not share the fanaticism of the extremists. The Synod's real protest, he correctly insisted, was at the point of the North's

⁴¹ Advocate and Journal, August 30, 1848, p. 139.

⁴² November 13, 1846, p. 122.

condemnation of slavery as an unrighteous system.⁴³

The Central Christian Herald, the Cincinnati journal of the New School, used the incident of the sale of a fugitive slave and his forced return, to lecture the South at essentially the same point.

Many persons in the South brand everything like sympathy for the slave, with what they consider the opprobrious name of abolitionism. We can assure such, that, let the character of the abolition movement be good or bad, there are a very large number, who have no sympathy with it, and who even oppose it, who are shocked with such transactions. . . . Such things shock not our fanaticism but our Christianized humanity.⁴⁴

Professor McClintock, a Northern Methodist, and Luther Lee, editor of the Richmond Advocate, had an exchange over the same issue. McClintock objected, as a man who simply spoke and wrote against slavery, to being classified by Lee with the Garrison school. Lee apologized forthwith for this application of the term abolitionist, but he challenged McClintock to be as sensitive when he applied, indiscriminately, the term pro-slavery to his Southern brethren.⁴⁵

The editor of the Louisville Baptist Banner seemed, however, to be one of those who tried to distinguish degrees of anti-slavery. His effort is revealing. He carried an item about the New England Anti-Slavery Convention describing the proceedings as characterized by the usual recklessness of such gatherings. He fervently wished that all its members were then fighting under Taylor in Mexico and concluded by saying, "They held a meeting

⁴³ New York Evangelist, November 26, 1846, p. 190.

⁴⁴ February 6, 1851, p. 174.

⁴⁵ Richmond Advocate, October 7, 1847, p. 158.

last evening on the expediency of dissolving the Union. They probably dissolved it."⁴⁶ On the other hand, he printed the letter of an R. Graham, a visitor from Illinois to Alabama, who gave a very favorable account of slavery. The editor gave Mr. Graham as an example of an anti-slavery man who was not an abolitionist, although no anti-slavery was apparent in the letter.⁴⁷

The editor's difficulty in really distinguishing degrees of anti-slavery was apparent even while he professed to make a distinction. He contrasted the old and the new in anti-slavery, denouncing abolitionism as "impious and treasonable." He said further that

thousands of professed Christians in the North, while they profess allegiance to the government, and to be opposed to Garrison and his infidel and revolutionary associates, are throwing all their political and religious influence in favor of the measures set on foot by that party, for the subversion of the government, and the utter destruction of all the religious interests of the country.⁴⁸

One can excuse the editor of the Banner for having had little affection for the abolitionists. He found himself the subject of scathing ridicule in the Courier, an abolitionist journal of Louisville. The Banner carried the offensive material describing the item as "destitute of intellect and decency," which it was.

A correspondent to our paper this morning deals some rather heavy blows to our very amiable, excellent, gentle, pious, meek, excessively Christian, and extensively tobacco-chewing friend, Parson Buck, of the Baptist Banner. The deeply Christian parson has been begging, with tears in his eyes, all of his Baptist friends to discontinue their subscription to the Courier because, as he says, it is "one of the

⁴⁶ Baptist Banner, June 11, 1846, p. 92.

⁴⁷ June 7, 1848, p. 88.

⁴⁸ Baptist Banner, December 24, 1846, p. 201.

most rabid and reckless Abolition prints in the State." A very curious, dangerous, terrible man is the parson-- particularly when he spits his tobacco juice over everything in his vicinity, his beautiful white shirt bosom included--and if any body ever read his paper our annihilation would be effectual.⁴⁹

All these discussions relating to the propriety of the agitation and to an effort to establish distinctions, were largely secondary and incidental to the differing sectional views as to the nature and effects of slavery. Nothing reveals more clearly the depth of the sectional division and its irreconcilable nature than this discussion of the institution itself, a discussion which was carried on extensively in the church press.

Discussion of slavery in the North hinged upon an effort to define the degree to which slavery was a sin and the slaveholder a sinner. Even the most conservative in the North regarded the system as a great evil and most editors identified some degree of personal guilt with the institution. To the most extreme, slavery was a sin and a crime to be dealt with "as with other gross immoralities."⁵⁰ William Hosmer of the upstate New York Northern Advocate placed slaveholders in the category of horse thieves or even worse, hence unchristian, a sentiment which the Nashville Advocate immediately challenged. Hosmer replied with an elaboration of his meaning.

~~When we say a slaveholder cannot be a Christian, we use the term slaveholder in its ordinary acceptation. It is possible for a man to be a nominal slaveholder, and yet be free from guilt of slaveholding. The South may contain many individuals of this latter class--men who are technically the owners of slaves, but who abhor slavery, and would gladly banish it from the earth. . . . The very word slave implies a~~

⁴⁹ Baptist Banner, September 12, 1849.

⁵⁰ "Anti-Slavery Report of the Maine Conference" quoted in Zion's Herald, September 22, 1847, p. 152.

crime; it proclaims violence done to humanity. But, like all other crimes, that of slaveholding consists in the spirit and intention of the act, rather than in the act itself. Killing is not always murder.⁵¹

In another connection Hosmer said that slavery was a crime but that the form of slavery was not necessarily accompanied by its spirit.⁵² Such a qualification did not make this view more palatable to the South. In the final analysis, however, Hosmer, who was one of the most aggressive and able opponents of slavery of all Northern editors, could come to no compromise with it. "Sinful it is, and sinful it will remain," he said, "in spite of the most accommodating casuistry. It must be prohibited entirely or nothing is done. It is prohibition we want--not a sublimation of motives. . . . It is not regulation that slavery calls for but extirpation."⁵³

The editor of the Central Watchman of Ohio was not as extreme as most of the journalists of the Northeast, but he felt forced to denounce slavery as a sin per se condemned as such by the Bible. He contrasted slave laws prohibiting the teaching of a slave to read and write with the Bible law to "search the scriptures." He contrasted also the law permitting the separation of husband from wife or child from parent with the scriptural laws, "the twain shall be one flesh" and "honor thy father and thy mother."⁵⁴ He declared his respect for those who were involuntarily caught up in the system and those who were anxious to ameliorate it. He could not, however, "avoid the conviction that it is a system, which all

⁵¹ Northern Advocate, September 11, 1850, p. 94.

⁵² William Hosmer, The Higher Law, in its Relations to Civil Government: With Particular Reference to Slavery, and the Fugitive Slave Law (Auburn, N. Y., 1852), p. 126.

⁵³ Hosmer, Slavery and the Church, p. 196.

⁵⁴ August 17, 1849, p. 73.

good men should seek not to modify and ameliorate, but to discourage and destroy. However kindly and justly slaves may be treated, while a good man holds them as slaves by the law of the land, he gives some countenance to the system itself."⁵⁵ This sentiment was shared by an editor in Chicago. Acknowledging the undoubted kindness and humaneness of many masters, the editor of the Watchman of the Prairies still held that the "main features of slavery in its general principles and practices, are socially, political[ly], morally and religiously evil and sinful."⁵⁶

The Boston paper, the Watchman and Reflector, referred to the "original doctrines of Christianity touching human rights, touching the natural equality of all men before God and before the law" which made slavery as inconsistent with Christ's teachings as any other crime. It was the duty of the church to return to those teachings in order to put forth enough moral power to extirpate the evil.⁵⁷ The Methodist ministers of the New England Conference anticipated a day when the "moral reprobation of the world" would rest on the evil of slavery. Men would then regard "slavery and its supporters with all the abhorrence with which they now look on the tribunals and dungeons of the Inquisition."⁵⁸

Being a sin, slavery was of course fundamentally a moral problem incumbent upon the church to remove. The Reflector and Watchman quoted the Journal of Commerce in favor of allowing slavery to

⁵⁵ Central Christian Herald, May 25, 1849, p. 31.

⁵⁶ March 7, 1848.

⁵⁷ March 8, 1849, p. 38.

⁵⁸ Minutes of the New England Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Boston, 1850), p. 13.

enter the territories, indicating that mere commercial connections could be expected to so handle questions of great moral worth and dignity. But the leading question was moral and the victory would have to be a moral one.⁵⁹ It was the awakening of moral sentiments, not the notice in political and fiscal circles, that gave joy to the men of the church.⁶⁰

Editors in the South did not necessarily deny the evil of slavery or the evils that tended to accumulate around it. To the members of the Synod of South Carolina, however, the insinuation that slavery was essentially a sin was "profane" in view of the Biblical sanction for it.⁶¹ But the Biblical Recorder of North Carolina had conceded, indirectly at least, that slavery was an evil that should be removed wherever and whenever it would not produce still greater evils which, with the stress the editor gave it, was a very large qualification. In view of this concession the Christian Watchman of Boston charged that the only thing the editor could do and be consistent would be to seek at once to remove it under all circumstances. The Recorder charged in its turn that the North was insincere and hypocritical in seeking the facts about slavery.⁶²

Slavery was a system which most Southern editors found to have the positive sanction of divine law and to be potentially

⁵⁹ Reflector and Watchman, October 26, 1848, p. 170. This paper resulted from the absorption of the Watchman by the Reflector. Very soon afterward the name was changed to Watchman and Reflector.

⁶⁰ Minutes of the New England Conference, p. 13.

⁶¹ Charles Anderson, "Presbyterians Meet the Slavery Problem," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XXIX, (March, 1951), p. 20.

⁶² Christian Watchman quoted in the Biblical Recorder, February 12, 1848.

benevolent in its effects upon the Negro. Of such an opinion was the editor of the Baptist Banner of Louisville, who also noted the failure to distinguish between the system itself and unrighteous laws enacted by some slaveholders.⁶³ An Alabama writer, after weighing carefully the best arguments to the effect that slavery was an evil in itself, decided that the argument must always go against the abolitionist. It was another matter when one considered the abuses growing out of the institution and his work was directed toward instructing masters in their proper duties in order to avoid such abuses.⁶⁴

The Southern Presbyterian Review declared that the Bible unquestionably sanctioned slavery, at least as the Review defined it. The essence of slavery was the providentially given right of the master to use, control, and dispose of the service of his slave. The writer denied that slavery implied property in persons as the North insisted. He also discussed what the South meant by slavery as a positive blessing.

As respects the whole community of whites and blacks, whom an unscrutable [sic] but wise Providence has joined here together, we also say the same thing, as comparing Slavery with Emancipation. But as comparing the present advantages of our white population with what they might have been, had not the negro been introduced, the Christian people of the South have never yet said that Slavery is a positive blessing,

⁶³ Quoted and sanctioned by the Religious Herald, another Louisville paper, August 9, 1849, p. 126.

⁶⁴ C. F. Sturgis, "Melville Letters; or The Duties of Masters to Servants" in McTyeire, Sturgis, and Holmes, Duties of Masters to Servants: Three Premium Essays (Charleston, 1851), p. 59.

and we know not that they will ever be driven by all the fierceness of the attack upon them to say so.⁶⁵

Christianity sanctioned the relation, it civilized the slave, and softened the master. "The master learns to feel that he and his slave are children of the same God and Father, and while he cannot admit him to the social privileges of a Brother, he recognizes in him a valued and esteemed, though humble dependent."⁶⁶

The Calvinist theology of foreordination led to the conclusion that "if a man is justly and providentially . . . a slave . . . he has . . . only the rights of a slave . . . All men have an equal and perfect right to the status in which they are born, with all its established rights and privileges, and also to whatever else they can legally and meritoriously acquire."⁶⁷ This was the author's answer to the natural rights doctrine which he regarded as fictitious.⁶⁸ Not so in the North where, in theory, as long as the Negro was admittedly "a man--a human being--so long has he the same inalienable rights which are prized so highly by our white population."⁶⁹

The irreconcilable nature of the difference over slavery between the Northern and the Southern editors is clearly epitomized in exchanges between the Cross and Journal of Columbus, Ohio, and the Biblical Recorder of North Carolina. Neither was edited by an

⁶⁵ Anonymous, The Christian Doctrine of Human Rights and of Slavery in Two Articles from the Southern Presbyterian Review for March, MDCCCXLIX (Columbia, S. C., 1849), p. 13.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁹ Western Advocate, May 30, 1849, p. 86.

extremist and neither served such a radical constituency as either New England or South Carolina. The Cross and Journal began a series on slavery by calling attention to the fact that slavery had become such a prominent issue that neutrality was no longer possible. "The subject is no longer a question of mere abstract opinion, but it comes right up before us, and compels us by actions to give our verdict concerning its character. The issue in church and state on this question, is one between freedom and slavery." One could not serve both. The question for this editor, and he raised it with deep sincerity and seriousness, was with regard to the nature of the action to be taken. There were sure to be, in his judgment, differences of opinion which must be expressed in a Christian spirit in order to elicit light for wise action.⁷⁰

To elicit such light, the editor of the Journal gave an objective and very comprehensive analysis of the slavery system with all its complexities. He called the attention of the public to certain facts to be considered when approaching this problem. There was first of all the existence of three million slaves in a variety of conditions, but all sharing the unnatural position of the slave wherein intellectual and social, and to some extent moral improvement was uncared for. The second existing fact was that of racial antipathy, North and South, which vastly complicated the solution to the problem of abolition.⁷¹

The Journal described the complexities offered by a system so deeply imbedded among Southerners for generations in all their

⁷⁰ Cross and Journal, November 27, 1846.

⁷¹ Ibid.

"plans of life, their modes of living, and their principles of government and political economy." A different condition prevailed in the North, but one as deeply imbedded. This marked a difference so fundamental that a collision and separation was the only alternative to abolition, a term which he used with a mild intent. With rare statesmanship he demonstrated that the entire nation shared the guilt of the system, pointing to those fortunes of the North built on the slave trade, profits from which still circulated into the treasuries of benevolent societies of the North. Denunciation and abuse was hardly the answer to so profound and complicated a problem any more than was the withdrawal of fellowship from slaveholders.⁷²

The editor of the Cross and Journal cited the Christian Index of Georgia as he sadly indicated the failure of the enlightened means he suggested as an approach to the problem. The editor of the Index had said:

The South was never more united on this subject than it is at present. The time was when many of us were accustomed to acknowledge that slavery is an evil, without attaching though any definite idea to the phrase; but of late years we have been led by our affectionate Northern friends to examine the subject, and are now convinced that it is sanctioned by the Bible, and just such an institution in its social and political influence as we need.⁷³

It was the response of the Biblical Recorder of Raleigh, North Carolina, however, -which was the most discouraging. After several issues in which the Journal showed a considerable degree of sympathy for the position of the Southerner, the Biblical Recorder

⁷² Cross and Journal, December 4, 1846.

⁷³ Christian Index quoted in Cross and Journal, December 4, 1846.

noted the respect and gentlemanliness with which this paper treated the South. The only specific item which the Recorder really noticed, however, was the label "sin" which the Journal placed upon slavery. The editor of the Recorder said, "We would suggest to our worthy contemporary, that the most direct and effectual way of accomplishing the end proposed would be, to show something like proof, that slavery is a sin." The Journal's position was finally but little, if any more acceptable to the Recorder than the most rabid abolitionism. The Bible argument in support of slavery was to the editor of the Recorder impregnable, a fact which made it a "poor business, to be prosing to the people of Ohio about the removing of slavery" when they had "no power to reach it . . . and no right to interfere with it if they had."⁷⁴

The Journal answered the Recorder by projecting the following imagery.

We know of no course that would be more convincing to our brother editor, and amount to "something like proof," than to send an armed band privately to Raleigh with instructions to seize him by force in some of his retired walks, bind him, gag him, transport him to this place, and set him up for sale to the highest bidder. We might be induced, just for the sake of argument, to bid him off, shut him up in a back room, feed him on corn meal, and set him to writing abolition editorials, at the rate of a column a day. If two or three years such service did not convince him of the sin of slavery we would give him up as incorrigible.⁷⁵

Not only did the South refuse to accept such overtures, but some of the constituency of the Journal did not heed the counsel of their editor, and continued to pass resolutions denouncing slavery and urging the withdrawal of "fellowship from all whose interests

⁷⁴ Biblical Recorder, January 23, 1847.

⁷⁵ Cross and Journal, February 5, 1847.

are identified with that wicked institution."⁷⁶ Others, comprising a larger segment of his constituency, seemed to share somewhat the breadth of mind and statesmanship of the paper. "Many of us have long waited, with the cherished hope that some reformatory movement, commenced and prosecuted by those to whom the whole matter more appropriately pertains, would render all action, on our part, unnecessary." Instead, a growing disposition to extend and perpetuate the institution had appeared. There could be no ultimate sympathy for the system even making the largest possible deductions which charity required. Before the association disposed of the matter, they once more affirmed their joy were they to hear of Southern initiative to remove the system, in due time, without Northern interference.⁷⁷

One other exchange serves to illustrate the complete incompatibility of views North and South by 1850. The Southern Baptist of Charleston quoted from the Christian Review, a Northern Baptist quarterly, an article written by a Dr. Williams of New York.

It makes concessions to the South such as are not commonly met with at the North--it denies that slaveholding is, in itself, a sin--it denies the justice of the ground assumed by the Boston Board, which resulted in our denominational separation--and yet, when it comes to the great practical, pressing questions that now agitate the land, it has no compromise whatever to offer, but much even to demand.⁷⁸

The editor then showed how Dr. Williams refused to allow the justice of a single demand made by the South as he opposed the major

⁷⁶ Resolutions of the Middlefield, Ohio, Baptist Church, published in Cross and Journal, January 15, 1847; Resolutions of the Concord, Ohio, Baptist Church, Ibid.

⁷⁷ Resolutions of Boston, Ohio, Baptist Association, published in Cross and Journal, March 26, 1847.

⁷⁸ Southern Baptist, April 24, 1850. The Boston Board is the agency which refused the application of a slaveholding missionary, which precipitated the division in the Baptist Church.

premises in Webster's seventh of March speech in support of the Compromise. The Baptist raised the question to show its readers the ephemeral nature of the hope of permanent settlement. "When a confessedly moderate man like Dr. Williams, one who still calls Southern Christians brethren . . .--when such a man calmly rejects every assertion put forth by those who feel themselves aggrieved and dishonored, what is to be the result? The future must answer."⁷⁹

The situation at this point was aptly described by a clergyman who had been a life long resident of New England. During a visit to the South he wrote to a Southern paper: "The North are very apt to think no good can come out of the Nazareth of the South; but I am finding a very practical and pleasing refutation of that idea. I am more and more impressed with the thought of how imperfectly the two extremes of our country understand each other."⁸⁰

The rift between the sections was further demonstrated and enhanced by the good and bad effects imputed to slavery, reflecting the same sectional bias as did the discussion of the nature of slavery. Northern editors consistently hammered at the evil results of the "sinful" institution. The editor of the Western Advocate was one of those who did so. "Slavery, politically considered, is a curse to any nation. This is admitted by the honest men of all parties. Its practical effect is a blighting and withering influence upon the morals of the white population, as well as the negro." This editor wanted to avoid the sectional controversy

⁷⁹ Southern Baptist, April 24, 1850.

⁸⁰ In a note to the editor of the Nashville and Louisville Advocate, February 27, 1851. This was the name of the paper temporarily after it had absorbed the Louisville Advocate.

caused by the "unfortunate existence of slavery in our country." He was not inclined to irrationally heap scorn and ridicule on the South or to blame the South exclusively for the system. Nevertheless the system was unjust and wrong and he insisted on raising his voice in defense of "the natural rights of man."⁸¹

The threat of the slavery system to civil and political liberties was of particular concern to the editors of Northern journals. The editor of the Western Advocate saw in the extreme words of Southern editors, some of which he quoted, the indication of "a spirit capable of producing almost unbounded injury to our free institutions." Among those items which attracted his attention were, first, an account of the indictment in Virginia of a Quaker who had reviewed a lecture defending slavery, second, excerpts from the Richmond Advocate threatening tarring and feathering and even hanging to certain men of the North, and finally, remarks to the effect that abolitionist ministers had fallen into gross sins, apostacy, and heresy.⁸²

This sense of "injury to freedom" was very widespread in the North, sometimes genuine, sometimes simply another issue to cover an attack on slavery. Zion's Herald quoted the Chicago Democrat purporting to show how the South had a disproportionate representation in the House of Representatives. This provoked the editor to answer the "taunt" of the South. This "taunt" consisted of a challenge to the North to explain what business it had meddling with slavery. In his view, the "moral interest and general

81 Western Advocate, May 30, 1849, p. 86.

82 Ibid., September 12, 1849, p. 146.

responsibility which all good men owe to the cause of truth and liberty the world over," was sufficient to justify concern. "But nearly all our political and even ecclesiastical relations are involved in the vile system. It besets us continually with its embarrassment and infamy." The real encroachment was not that of the North upon the South, but that of slavery, with its degrading effects, upon the North. It was not concessions that the South ought to demand, therefore, but forbearance.⁸³

One editor called upon the people of the North to be alert to this threat, a threat posed in the name of the Constitution. "If one man's right may be sacrificed by the constitution, then another's may be, and so on, till all except the usurping few are reduced to vassalage." No limit could be assigned to the enslaving power of a document that could rightfully be found to enslave a single man. The right to make slaves of black men put every man's liberty in peril. The North must remonstrate to save its own liberties.⁸⁴ One of the worst evils of the slavery system was its "smiting with a sort of palsy, all freedom of opinion, of conscience, of speech and of the press. . . . The Genius of Slavery develops its nature in binding the masses of the whites in vassalage to a few political leaders."⁸⁵

The system had come to challenge the freedom of the press in particular. The Northern Advocate of Auburn, New York, received a subscription from a Virginian with the request that the editor must

83 Zion's Herald, May 2, 1849, p. 70.

84 Hosmer, Higher Law, p. 174.

85 Watchman and Reflector, December 27, 1849, p. 205.

be sure that the first issue to be sent had nothing of slavery in it. This first issue was likely to be examined and if it passed censorship the paper would henceforth be unmolested. The editor said:

Slavery seeks darkness rather than light, for its deeds are evil. It has denied to the slave the word of God, because therein is taught that God has made of one blood all the nations of men; and now it seeks to deprive the free white citizen, not only of the right of free discussion, but even of the privilege of reading a religious newspaper, because it condemns the domestic institution.⁸⁶

Zion's Herald of Boston found South Carolina a prime example of barbarism because her legislature was contemplating a bill to impose a fine and jail sentence upon postmasters who knowingly delivered any mail

calculated to disturb the peace of the people in relation to the slave population. Such then is the advancement of this glorious republican State, that she cannot trust her citizens with the choice of their own reading. . . . Now such things are sheerly ridiculous; it would be folly to argue against them. A people who can be guilty of them must be the objects of the pity and scorn of the world.⁸⁷

Such interference might, however, be overruled for good. "It will tell with moral force in the minds of many. It will open their eyes. It will show them their real condition, as living under censorship of the press, as rigid and terrible as that of Austria under the reign of Metternich."⁸⁸ This result was unlikely to follow. The editors of the South did not feel that their freedom was denied because their sympathies were fully with their section.⁸⁹ This fact did not, however, detract from its effectiveness

⁸⁶ Northern Advocate, January 16, 1850, p. 166.

⁸⁷ January 2, 1850, p. 2.

⁸⁸ Reflector and Watchman, October 19, 1848, p. 166.

⁸⁹ Clement Eaton, Freedom of Thought in the Old South (Durham, N. C., 1940), p. 189.

as an issue in the North.

The New York Evangelist expressed great alarm over an incident involving the apprehension in the South of an Indiana citizen and member of the Free Soil party. Mr. John M. Barrett's private correspondence had been seized on suspicion that he was an abolitionist. The correspondence contained a circular labeled by the authorities as "treasonable and incendiary." The editor of the Evangelist was stirred to say: "What that freedom can be worth which cannot protect the private correspondence of a man, and which permits him to be exposed to outrage, and imprisonment, and death perhaps, on the strength of a suspicion, it is difficult to estimate."⁹⁰

There was another incident pertaining to freedom of opinion and the exercise of political liberty which attracted more attention in the church press than any other of its kind. It developed out of the 1849 election for candidates to a convention to write a new constitution for the state of Kentucky. A provision for some plan of gradual emancipation was the issue upon which one slate of candidates ran. The Reverend Howard Malcolm, D. D., had resigned, under pressure, from the presidency of the Baptist college at Georgetown, Kentucky, after he had voted for Mr. Stevenson, who was the emancipation candidate in his district. All concerned agreed that Dr. Malcolm's conduct was inoffensive both before and during the incident, except for this vote. Without doubt the Western Advocate was correct in assuming that the trustees acted as they

⁹⁰ August 9, 1849, p. 129.

did because they believed that the Baptist churches of Kentucky would not patronize this college under Dr. Malcolm after he had so voted. The incident moved the editor of the Advocate to ask:

Where is religious freedom, if a minister dare not utter his convictions upon a moral subject? and where is the freedom of the ballot, if, for simply casting a vote as a citizen and freeman, the public will not tolerate him at the head of an institution? A few more proscriptions will probably convince thinking men that slavery has chains for the whites as well as the blacks.⁹¹

The Central Watchman contrasted the attitude displayed in this incident with the attitude toward the president of Center College, a Presbyterian school, who took an active part in the cause of emancipation without being molested. The editor then offered this prophecy regarding the Georgetown incident:

In forcing Dr. Malcolm to resign slavery has inflicted on itself a severe blow. Such invasions of personal freedom will rouse the spirit of free men, and the punishment for a simple vote that Dr. M. was given will be like the dragon's teeth in the fable--it will release up hundreds of men armed in truth and righteousness to overthrow this system so full of iniquity.⁹²

The editor of the Baptist Watchman and Reflector of Boston expressed shame and regret over the energy of pro-slavery in his own Baptist Church whose members were among the most numerous and wealthy slaveholders of the state of Kentucky. In more general terms, the editor stated his belief that in this incident the "genius of slavery manifest its essential character, and never in its rage, did it more effectively lick the dust."⁹³ The New York Evangelist labeled its story on the Malcolm incident, "Southern

⁹¹ Western Advocate, September 5, 1849, p. 142.

⁹² August 31, 1849, p. 82.

⁹³ August 30, 1849, p. 138.

Ideas of Liberty." Said the editor,

This is a characteristic specimen of the kind of feeling that slavery naturally produces. . . . If the slaveholders of Kentucky or elsewhere fancy that they are buttressing up their darling system by such cowardly acts as this, they possess but a poor knowledge of human nature, at least as it exists at the North.⁹⁴

Southerners charged that the press of the North, religious and secular, misrepresented the Malcolm incident and used it to excite sympathy for a political party. The editor of the Louisville Baptist Banner knew Dr. Malcolm personally and he was sure that Dr. Malcolm would not have felt complimented by the attention drawn to him and the use made of him by political demagogues.⁹⁵ The Biblical Recorder of North Carolina insisted that the affair was none of the North's business. The only misrepresentation which the editor could specifically charge against the Northern press was the contention by the North that Dr. Malcolm had been dismissed only because he had exercised his rights as a voter. The editor of the Raleigh paper agreed that Dr. Malcolm was conscientious and that he had a right to participate in the state election, but he argued that Dr. Malcolm should not have insisted on the exercise of this right. He advanced three reasons for this: first, the exercise of this right had no connection with his duties as an officer of the college; secondly, his voting involved interference in a highly excited political contest; and finally, and most of all, his voting necessarily identified him to a great extent with the "hateful causes of abolitionists and foreign agitators." In addition he

⁹⁴ New York Evangelist, August 30, 1849, p. 138.

⁹⁵ August 29, 1849.

should have foreseen just such antagonism as he aroused, according to the editor of the Recorder.⁹⁶ Restraints at these points, of course, were exactly the ones which disturbed the North.

To a very considerable degree the denominational press of the North refrained from exploiting the moral results of the system from a sexual standpoint. Perhaps it was largely because of the reluctance to deal with a subject essentially taboo. It did not, however, go entirely unnoticed. The Boston Zion's Herald referred to an advertisement for the sale of a mulatto girl described as of fine figure. "Who can fail to see what horrid appetites are pampered in this advertisement?" The editor pointed out that the girl was as closely related to the white as to the Negro race, a fact which only served to make the chains of slavery more galling.⁹⁷ He later saw a similar situation in which an Anti-Slavery Society was attempting to buy the daughter of a free woman of the North. In a letter, the dealer set the price at \$1800, stating that he had "two or three offers for Emily from gentlemen from the South. She is said to be the finest looking woman in the country." The editor asked, "Is it any wonder that good men become 'fanatics' against an institution which involves such horrible evils? . . . Is it not essentially iniquitous, intolerable and damnable?"⁹⁸

In various ways the editors tried to show the blighting economic effects of the institution. This was an especially popular argument in conservative circles. The editor of the Presbyterian Advocate of Pittsburgh quoted remarks "truly and forcibly" made by

⁹⁶ September 22, 1849.

⁹⁷ September 5, 1849, p. 142.

⁹⁸ Zion's Herald, February 27, 1850, p. 34.

a commercial journal to the effect that Pennsylvania and Ohio had economically far outstripped Virginia and Kentucky respectively because Pennsylvania and Ohio were free states. He pointed out that the superior value of land in Ohio, greater production, and many more internal improvements left no doubt as to the blighting effects of slavery in states like Virginia or Kentucky.⁹⁹ The poverty and degradation of the whites in South Carolina was attributed to this same blight.¹⁰⁰

The reason for interest in this line of argument was made quite clear. The Christian Watchman of Boston expected the opinions of a Carolinian regarding the retardation of wealth and population in the South, to be more candidly received because they dealt with "politico-economical" aspects of the system.¹⁰¹ The editor of Zion's Herald, also of Boston, welcomed such information because "the avarice of the public may be appealed to perhaps, more successfully than its conscience." He gave statistics showing the economic growth of free over slave states as offering a conclusive argument against slavery.¹⁰² The Watchman of the Prairies of Chicago used the statistics of patents issued to reach the same conclusion, quoting from the Chicago Journal. Residents of free states had taken out 465 patents in a given period compared to 80 taken out in the same period in the slave states.¹⁰³ There was obvious disregard for any other economic factors as causes of this phenomenon.

99 Presbyterian Advocate, January 19, 1848, p. 50.

100 Zion's Herald, August 25, 1847, p. 134.

101 March 26, 1847, p. 49.

102 November 24, 1847, p. 186.

103 Watchman of the Prairies, October 26, 1847.

Editors of the South, from their perspective, saw another form of blight, this time in the North. The editor of the Baptist Banner had singled out reports which indicated a decline in the state of the church in the North. The Nashville Advocate made note of one such report and quoted the editor of the Banner to the effect that this declension was due to "the blighting influence of abolition principles."¹⁰⁴ The Biblical Recorder noted a series of anti-slavery resolutions passed by the Ashford Baptist Association of Connecticut. As a suitable and instructive commentary on the proceedings, the editor quoted as follows: "The letters represent the churches in a cold and dead state, and the statistics show a larger number of exclusions than Baptisms."¹⁰⁵

In view of these arguments pro and con with regard to the system of slavery, and its effects, approaches to the questions of removal or amelioration of the system had to follow. The churches of the North looked to its containment and its ultimate removal. The churches of the South took an increased interest, during the period in question, in the amelioration of a system which they were more and more inclined to view as perpetual.

¹⁰⁴ Nashville Advocate, November 6, 1846.

¹⁰⁵ July 31, 1847.

CHAPTER IV

THE QUESTION OF EMANCIPATION

The definition of slavery in moral and theological terms placed the religious leaders of the North under obligation to act. Sin in society or in the person was an intolerable condition. To a very great extent the action projected was simply that of discussion and agitation until the slaveholder saw the evil of his ways and took the initiative himself in removing the system. Northern church leaders were not disposed to recommend the violent overthrow of slavery in the states where it existed. They were, however, also committed to a doctrine of progress and perfection which created an impatience with any evil which seemed to be within reach.

William Hosmer, the editor of the Northern Advocate published in western New York, most clearly expressed these views.

It requires but slight knowledge indeed to see that men are not what they should be. Evil is conspicuous, undeniable. But yet there is no sufficient conviction with most men, that anything can be done to remove it, and for want of this conviction they yield themselves, age after age, to the dominion of error. There is a truth, however, that shall break the spell, and this truth is firmly fixed in the mind of him who is to be the instrument of deliverance. He sees that man was designed to rise, and that the goal of improvement is nothing short of perfection. Here we have the secret of those yearnings for advancement which mark the philanthropist. He is a witness of the wrongs of human nature, he sees sin and error domineering over those whom God intended to be free.¹

Hosmer saw an urgent necessity for action, but again it was largely the action of "reproving." The "moral force" of which he spoke, however, had an immense potential for more aggressive action. "It would seem, that the time has come for men who cultivate

¹ May 2, 1849, p. 18.

virtue, and who cherish a righteous repugnance to sin, to gather up the moral force of their souls, and give the world some adequate demonstration of their abhorrence of a system of such extensive and unmitigated wickedness."² The human effort, of course, had providential sanction, but the assurance of ultimate providential action for the removal of slavery was no check on this activist sentiment. According to Zion's Herald of Boston it was "a most mischievous error to suppose that because Providence evidently destines an evil to pass away, therefore we must leave it to Providence; rather let us labor the more energetically, because the more hopefully for its removal, for Providence must have means."³

The responsibility for such labor was defined in very personal terms. Moral wrong was not chargeable to corporate bodies, according to another New Englander, but to the individuals of the body. "This doctrine of individual responsibility for national sins must be felt, before there can be any great improvement in the course of legislation. So long as nobody feels their [sins] guilt, nor admits them to come to view as cases of conscience, how can we hope for improvement?"⁴

There were those, even in the North, who took issue with these doctrines of radical reform, individual guilt for social ills, and perfectionism. The editor of a Methodist ladies' magazine denied the efficacy of radical reform. He thought that reform could "only be effected by patient perseverance, by the gradual but

² Hosmer, Higher Law, p. 172.

³ November 14, 1849, p. 182.

⁴ Watchman and Reflector, June 27, 1850, p. 102.

certain action on public opinion of reason and religion. A different course impedes the progress of improvement, and renders evil worse. Slavery and intemperance have both gained ground by the intemperate zeal of their opponents."⁵

The Christian Watchman of Boston carried a pointed criticism of the perfectionist doctrine. A correspondent, a native New Englander, then a resident of the South, cited the more enlightened benevolence of the South and what the section had accomplished in practical ways and means for improving the lot of the Negro. "But here," he said, "they do not make a world of noise about it; aiming at no impossibilities--taking hold of the evil as they find it, not as they would have it--their work is a practical one."⁶

The editor of the leading organ of the Methodist Episcopal Church also, in effect, attacked perfectionism. He counselled men to forego theories and speculations and to think of practical matters in remedying existing evils. "Every effort of this sort should have a practical basis. We should not only consider the adaptation of the means to the end, but should also take into consideration the circumstances which constitute the essential conditions of success."⁷

The doctrine of individual responsibility for corporate action was emphatically challenged by the Central Christian Herald of Cincinnati, a paper which was by no means pro-slavery. He was thinking primarily of preserving the unity of the church. "The

⁵ "Reformers and Reform," Ladies' Repository, XI (August, 1851), p. 288.

⁶ September 10, 1847, p. 145.

⁷ Advocate and Journal, December 26, 1850, p. 206.

idea of organic sin," the editor said, "and organic responsibility is imaginary. Men are responsible for what they think and say and do themselves, or what is done for them by their consent. Their connection with a body does not make them morally responsible for its acts unless they consent to them."⁸

It was to be expected that the South would go even beyond these exceptions to the more extreme interpretations of social morality, in view of the fact that men of this section preferred to consider slavery a political rather than a moral issue. The Southern Baptist of Charleston cited a warning that Calhoun had issued to Webster in 1833. Calhoun had said, "You will make your people believe they are responsible for this institution, and the day that that principle gets into their minds, and that feeling into their hearts, this Union will be at an end." The editor assumed that, to a very great extent, this had happened and that men of the North did feel a personal responsibility to rid themselves of slavery.⁹

A very able Southern spokesman issued a warning against such counsels of perfection as were found in the Northern Advocate, while tacitly admitting the evils of slavery.

Our world exhibits, everywhere, the traces of sin--and if we tolerate nothing but what we may expect to find in a state of perfection or holiness, we must leave this scene of sublunary distraction. The education of States is a slow process. Their standards of rectitude slowly approximate the standard of God, and in their ages of infancy, ignorance and blindness, they establish many institutions

⁸ Central Christian Herald, January 30, 1851, p. 170.

⁹ April 30, 1851.

upon false maxims, which cannot subsequently be extirpated without abandoning the whole of the real progress they have made, and reconstituting society afresh.¹⁰

The Synod of South Carolina granted the relevance of the church and its doctrines to the progress and prosperity of society. Under the leadership of the above spokesman, its members refused to admit, however, "that it is the purpose of God, that . . . all ill shall be banished from this sublunary state, and earth be converted into a paradise, or that the proper end of the church is the direct promotion of universal good." The church was not, they insisted, commissioned to readjust the different elements of society, "to rearrange the distribution of its classes, or to change the forms of its political constitutions."¹¹

Southern editors were forced to face the realities that Northern editors were inclined to ignore while they were contending for the removal of slavery. Southern editors repeatedly called attention to the factors in the system which, in their view, required realistic consideration. The editor of the Southern Advocate of Charleston declared that his suffrage would be in favor of any practical plan for freeing the slaves, and by practical he meant one that would be

safe to the white population and advantageous to the blacks. . . . But the question comes not before us in this shape. It is not about an abstract principle; it is entirely a practical, matter-of-fact affair. Slavery is upon us, it mingles in all the operations of business, agricultural or commercial; in short, it is interwoven with the very framework of society.¹²

10 Thornwell, Rights and Duties, p. 46.

11 Anderson, "Presbyterians Meet the Slavery Problem," p. 11.

12 August 4, 1848, p. 34.

The editor then touched upon the problem which, as it appears from the religious press, was the most formidable barrier to any program for freeing the slaves, i.e., racial animosity. No sane man, he said, would consider freeing the hundreds of thousands of slaves to remain in the South. They could not, on the other hand, be sent northward because the attitude of the North was progressively hostile toward the free black. True, he said, Canada and New England were still open but unfortunately freedom was not an edible commodity and employment opportunities in those areas were by no means equal for the Negro. Under those circumstances no conscientious master would "consent to send his slaves to take rank as free men."¹³

The very large element of the colored race in the population attracted the attention of the editor of a border state paper. The editor emphasized that the presence of the Negro on a large scale had to be taken into account in the future destinies of the republic. He disputed the theory of "a certain class of philanthropists" who implied that eventually the Negro race would be placed upon an equality with the Anglo-Saxon race civilly, socially, and intellectually. Such a plan was, to him, utterly utopian.¹⁴ To many, it appeared that the Negro did not have the capacity for such a position and this view was not confined to the South. The Presbyterian Advocate published in Pittsburgh expressed a loathing for the political inequality of the free Negro in the North, but the editor refused to enjoin commingling because the intellectual

¹³ Southern Advocate, August 4, 1848, p. 34.

¹⁴ Presbyterian Herald, June 26, 1851, p. 157.

superiority of the white would debase the blacks even below their natural level.¹⁵

Nor was this feeling confined to Southern and Old School editors. A Presbyterian of the New School found the Negro obviously incapable of self-government. Because of this, releasing the slave from the master's guardianship would greatly harm the Negro and society.¹⁶ Another divine, in this case of the Old School, feared that a sudden emancipation of the slave before proper preparation might make him totally unable to enjoy liberty, make a living, or to avoid vice.¹⁷

This incapacity was not necessarily permanent in this minister's view and in that of yet another of his denomination. The Princeton Review declared that no man, white or black, had a right to any privileges which he was incompetent to exercise. Even personal competence might not necessarily be the basis for the grant of privilege if it did not serve also the interests of the community. This writer did not find, however, any justification in this line of thought for perpetuating that incompetence.¹⁸ He was convinced that it was folly to deny that the black was an inferior race, a fact which history placed beyond dispute. This was seen as leading naturally to an evil contempt and disregard for the rights and feelings of the black race when living in association

¹⁵ Presbyterian Advocate, February 12, 1851, p. 62.

¹⁶ Stiles, Speech on the Slavery Resolutions in the General Assembly, p. 13.

¹⁷ Robinson, Testimony and Practice of the Presbyterian Church, p. 109.

¹⁸ "Emancipation," The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review for the year 1850, XXII. (October), p. 591.

with the white. Whenever emancipation was an issue then, it was to be expected that one of the strongest sources of opposition among the people would be this "pride of race" especially among the less cultivated of the whites.¹⁹

There were, on the other hand, defenders of the Negroes' capacities. To Hosmer, editor of the Northern Advocate, the Negro had no more incapacity for government than he had for food. "Political freedom," he said, "is only political justice, and all men are as ready for this description of justice, as for any other. It will be as harmless to give them full freedom, as it would be to give them full light for the eye, or full air for the lungs, or full pay for honest dues."²⁰

A correspondent from Kentucky, writing for a Cincinnati paper, advanced the view that the intellectual capacity of an individual or a people depended, to a great extent, upon the state of the society in which they lived, i.e., "the amount of liberty which they enjoy, the facilities for acquiring knowledge;--the peculiar circumstances with which they are surrounded." He attributed the inferior state of the African to the despotism under which he lived.²¹

Whether the rationalization of the racial prejudice involved the Negro's incapacity or something else, it loomed very large in the minds of those who considered emancipation. Very few, North or South, were willing to accept the implications of the new racial

19 "Emancipation," Repertory and Review, p. 588.

20 Hosmer, Higher Law, pp. 152, 153.

21 Watchman of the Valley, February 3, 1848, p. 73.

and social adjustment which would be required by the presence of more than three million free Negroes.

The sentiment in the declaration of the committee of citizens which met Calhoun when he returned from Congress in 1847 was typical and was echoed many times. The Philadelphia Christian Observer, a New School journal with its circulation primarily Southern, summarized the statement. "Slavery is with them a political institution, by the maintenance of which the two races who inhabit the Southern States may live together, as experience demonstrates, in peace and prosperity; and the destruction of which, would involve the destruction of one or the other."²² Another Southern writer phrased a similar view in the form of a question: "Will Christianity ever allow us to manumit here our three millions of Africans--our three millions increased to five or ten millions? Will Christianity, that unquestionably makes masters benevolent, ever satisfy us that it is possible for two such dissimilar races to dwell together on equal terms?"²³

A border state editor charged that the effort to set up the Negroes as republican citizens on equal terms was a subversive device of the British and American abolitionists. The strength of the threat was in the fact that the Negro "should, by force, be freed throughout the South, left in the midst of their owners, and they compelled to recognize their equality."²⁴ In advancing a proposal for emancipation a writer in the New York Advocate and

²² April 2, 1847, p. 55.

²³ Anonymous, Christian Doctrine of Human Rights, p. 18.

²⁴ Baptist Banner, March 1, 1848.

Journal included as a condition the removal of the freed slaves from this country. He said in that connection:

It is impossible to disregard the voice of history, which declares, that two distinct races of men cannot dwell on the same soil, in the enjoyment of equal political and social rights and privileges; the one must subdue or exterminate the other. The only remaining alternative is amalgamation, which is not to be thought of.²⁵

Amalgamation was universally feared and condemned, but especially so in the South. The editor of the Baptist Banner gave an account from a secular paper of the North, of the arrest of a colored man for flogging a white man who had reportedly married a Negress. The editor's comment was:

Now in our estimation, this heroical negro is a better judge of decent propriety and political economy than either the amalgamating white husband of the negress or the abolition-amalgamating, court and officials who deprived him of his liberty for doing an act of justice to the negro-hearted white man whom he flagellated.²⁶

A Northern correspondent of the Advocate and Journal pointed, however, to another factor relevant to the question of amalgamation. The difficulty as he saw it was that "though amalgamation may not be thought of, in a scheme for the removal of slavery; yet, under the existence of slavery, it has been going on, until there are many of the slaves so white as to have lost all trace of the African; and multitudes more are of all shades from this to those who are half white." The question raised by the correspondent related to the propriety of forcing this class to Africa.²⁷

The editor of the Western Advocate was less disturbed by the

25 J. P. Durbin, "Plan for the Removal of Slavery," Advocate and Journal, February 10, 1847, p. 21.

26 July 9, 1846, p. 106.

27 March 24, 1847, p. 45.

thought of the commingling of the races, but he did not feel that amalgamation would actually take place. The editor advocated that the Negroes be made free in due time whether they should find their homes finally in the United States or elsewhere. As to the circumstances of color, that might be "left to the ameliorating operation of truth, right, justice, mercy, and all the good tempers and operations of pure Christianity."²⁸ He believed, however, that most freed slaves after a period of residence in the free states, or in many cases with their former masters, would in all probability emigrate to Africa or the West Indies to escape the disabilities of their social condition in this country.²⁹

It was the view of such as the editor of the Northern Advocate which excited the worst fears of the South. "Perhaps it is the design of Providence," he said, "that American slavery shall be the occasion of developing a principle new to the political world, though not new to Christianity, namely, the equality of races as well as of nations." He condemned the inconsistency of permitting white men to strike for their liberty as in the American Revolution while making the Negro guilty of a high misdemeanor if he aimed for freedom.³⁰ He claimed that the South would be much more secure if slaves were freed and given the responsibilities of men. "Oppression and degradation," he said, "are provocations of sedition and insurrection. Let the galling chains of the slave be broken off, and let his attachments be those of kind and

²⁸ Western Advocate, February 5, 1847, p. 120.

²⁹ November 5, 1847, p. 118.

³⁰ Hosmer, Higher Law, pp. 189, 190.

honorable dealing, and we hazard nothing in saying that he will be orderly and confiding. . . . That the South is in danger, may be true," he continued, "but if so, it is a danger created by its wickedness, and the only means of giving security is to banish the tyranny from which the danger arises."³¹

Even more revealing of the racial factor as a barrier to emancipation than the discussion of the problem theoretically, were the many incidents and concrete measures which reflected racial feelings. The prejudice against the free Negro appeared in the North as well as in the South. The Cross and Journal of Columbus, Ohio, summed up some of the indications of this. "They show themselves in our statute books in the form of Black laws, they manifested themselves in the Mercer County proceedings against Randolph's slaves, and they thunder in the hundred thousand majority against negro suffrage in New York." The editor referred to this situation as "wrong, wicked, devilish," but it was a fact which he felt called upon to face in considering the problem of the removal of slavery. He considered all this as evidence that three million blacks could not immediately or in a few years settle in the free states without producing a violent explosion. To believe otherwise required more confidence in "the dignity of human nature" and "the natural goodness of man" than experience ever justified.³² He was one of the few realists among the editors of his section.

To the Southern press the facts to which the Cross and Journal referred were very intriguing indeed. One of the incidents

³¹ Hosmer, Higher Law, p. 197.

³² November 27, 1846.

which attracted much attention in that section was alluded to in the Cross and Journal. This was the attempted resettlement of the three hundred Randolph Negroes from Virginia, in Mercer County, Ohio, after they had been manumitted by the will of their owner. After extended litigation the will was executed by a Judge Leigh who exhibited a sufficient interest in the prospects of the freed slaves to himself sacrifice a very substantial legacy to witness on their behalf. These Negroes were then conducted in a body to Ohio where they expected to settle.³³

Luther Lee, the capable editor of the Richmond Advocate, pounced on the news that this group of Negroes had been met by a mob and denied opportunity to settle in Mercer County.

The way the abolitionists love the Negro race is nothing to nobody. . . . The citizens of few states have been more zealous for the freedom of the Negro race than those of Ohio. And yet they are not willing to allow them the privilege of settling within their State. The fact . . . is as discreditable to their philanthropy, as it is illustrative of the hypocrisy of their humanity in the matter of their abolitionism. They love the colored race mightily--at a distance!³⁴

The Nashville Advocate had further comment.

When negroes are to be stolen, "life, fortune and sacred honor" are put in pledge to achieve the glorious larceny, but when legally emancipated slaves come peaceably among them asking only permission to live, they are hunted down and banished from every place. The benevolent spirit of modern Abolitionism is too ardently employed in the pious mission of slave-stealing to pay any attention to those already enjoying the great blessing of freedom among them.³⁵

The Baptist Banner of Louisville used the same occasion to comment on the wish of the North to confine all free Negroes to the

³³ Cross and Journal, July 24, 1846. Mercer County is on the Ohio-Indiana border in West Central Ohio.

³⁴ July 23, 1846, p. 82.

³⁵ December 10, 1847.

slave states in spite of Northern sympathy for them.³⁶ The editor later observed:

Their zeal for the slave is boundless, burning with intense fervor; even to the consuming of all the masters on earth if need be, to effect the freedom of the slave; provided the masters are made to bear all the expense, the trouble and disadvantage of the emancipation and settlement among them: but if the free States are to bear any part in any of its consequences, their charity for the slave ceases.³⁷

His colleague of the North Carolina Biblical Recorder reminded the North further, that had a similar incident been perpetrated in the South, it would have been shouted from the house tops.³⁸

The press in Ohio was almost equally critical of this action by the citizens of Mercer County. It was identified by the Cross and Journal of Columbus as a manifestation of racial hatred which, as has been noted, was listed as one fact which greatly complicated the prospects of emancipation.³⁹ This editor had previously condemned the spirit of mobocracy and the actions of the white men on this occasion, but he thought it might have been due to recent immigrants and specifically to the Catholic Dutch.⁴⁰ The Watchman of the Valley of Cincinnati also condemned this mob action in retrospect.⁴¹

This incident was simply a dramatic instance of a sentiment written into the "black laws" of states in the North, imposing restrictions upon the rights and liberties of the free Negro. Issues in regard to such laws were current in various states of the

³⁶ Baptist Banner, October 29, 1846, p. 171.

³⁷ December 10, 1846, p. 194.

³⁸ May 23, 1846.

³⁹ November 27, 1846.

⁴⁰ July 24, 1846.

⁴¹ January 14, 1847, p. 61.

North at this time. The religious press in the North consistently opposed such enactments. The Cross and Journal, which, as a rule, offered a more profound analysis of the slavery question than the average paper, condemned the injustice of the requirement of the Negro in Ohio to post security for good behaviour, the taxing of the colored man's property while denying him access to the benefits of the poor tax, and the denial of the rights to give testimony and to peaceably acquire property. The editor charged that it was within the power of the church to ameliorate the condition of the free Negro and urged action when the state legislature met in the winter.⁴²

Another Ohio editor thought it would be more appropriate to require surety in the opposite direction in view of the mob action against the Negroes in Mercer County.⁴³ He hoped that public opinion might eventually avail against the activities of the political parties and that more politicians even, might develop a higher moral sense so that the Negro might eventually receive a fair chance in the contest for preferment.⁴⁴

A bill to repeal the Ohio "black laws" was killed in 1847 by a decisive vote in the state Senate, much to the regret of the Ohio correspondent of the New York Evangelist. He regarded the outlook as not hopeful. "In fact," he said, "so much of the Southern feeling pervades our rulers as well as the people, that it will require a great revolution to accomplish this simple act of justice to our

⁴² July 24, 1846.

⁴³ Watchman of the Valley, January 14, 1847, p. 61.

⁴⁴ Ibid., January 21, p. 66.

own character as a State, and to colored citizens."⁴⁵

This issue reached the legislature again in the following year. The Western Advocate of Cincinnati reported the failure again of the repeal of this "disgrace to the statute-books of any civilized country." This did not enhance the editor's respect for politicians. "Partisan politicians," he said, "when candidates for office, and party meetings in their resolutions, have denounced these laws; and yet when the time came to vote them out of the statutes, the motion signally failed." This caused him to almost add another to the endorsements of the Free Soil Party, then active. "Such a moral wrong is well calculated to lead every good citizen, who hates oppression, to seek a better form of political parties, than either of the two leading parties which are now striving for mastery."⁴⁶ Finally in 1849 the New York Evangelist had the pleasure of reporting the repeal of Ohio's "absurd, inhuman Black Laws."⁴⁷ The Watchman of the Prairies of Chicago attributed this success to the efforts of the Free Soil Party and predicted a similar result in Illinois.⁴⁸

Illinois and other states as well faced issues relating to the civil liberties of the free Negro. The states of New York, Illinois, and Connecticut and the Territory of Wisconsin faced the question of Negro suffrage during this period. The Northern religious press consistently supported the cause of Negro rights in these instances. The New Englander dealt in general with the

⁴⁵ New York Evangelist, February 18, 1847, p. 28.

⁴⁶ February 25, 1848, p. 183.

⁴⁷ February 15, 1849, p. 26.

⁴⁸ February 27, 1849.

question of such suffrage. It pled for the extension of the franchise to the colored citizens of the free states and for a perfect equality of political rights.⁴⁹ When the suffrage issue was placed before the people of New York, the Northern Advocate of that state reminded its readers that foreigners received the franchise after five years; hence, it was inconsistent to deny the Negro the vote when America was his native land. Permitting the Negro equal suffrage would exalt him without degrading the white man. The editor further condemned the neglect of the mental, moral, and social condition of free colored people.⁵⁰ He noted the results of the election with regret but attributed the failure to give the Negro equal suffrage "to the large number of Irish voters who in all our cities manifest the strongest antipathy to the free colored population."⁵¹

One area which did extend suffrage to the Negro at this time was Wisconsin. In the Constitutional Convention a vote of 53-46 conferred suffrage on the free Negro. This incident attracted the notice of the Georgia Christian Index which carried it as news without comment. The announcement also carried a hint of distress at the preparation of Wisconsin, and eventually Minnesota, for statehood within a few years with their Senators and legion of House members.⁵²

As with the Mercer County incident many Southern editors found occasion to openly chide the North for the denial of rights

49 "Extension of the Elective Franchise to the Colored Citizens of the Free States," V (October, 1847), p. 527.

50 October 21, 1846, p. 118.

51 November 11, 1846, p. 130.

52 January 14, 1847, p. 23.

to the free Negro. In the convention held in Illinois in 1847 for amending the constitution, the extension of suffrage to the free Negro was defeated by a vote of 137 to 7. The editor of the Old School journal of Louisville, the Presbyterian Herald, an ardent colonizationist, reported this with the comment:

A few more such triumphs on the part of the abolitionists will, we trust, open their eyes to the fact that, with all its difficulties, it will be an easier matter to colonize our free Negroes on the coast of Africa than to elevate them to a political and social equality with the white people of this country.

In the light of this action, the editor asked, "Is this the fruit of all the abolition agitation in Illinois?"⁵³

This action in Illinois drew further comment from another border state. A Dr. A. Bullard of St. Louis was quoted by the Watchman of the Prairies of Chicago as he castigated the people of Illinois for the oppressive clauses written into their constitution. He was sure that the people of Missouri would be willing to make a greater pecuniary sacrifice to get rid of slavery than any free state and that his own state would never be guilty of such oppression as was Illinois. The editor of the Watchman accepted the humiliation associated with these provisions of Illinois law.⁵⁴ He had been bewildered originally when the free Negroes had been excluded from coming into his state, having regarded this action as a "gross violation of personal liberty."⁵⁵

In the face of a similar issue Connecticut, by a majority of three to one, voted against striking out the word "white" from its

⁵³ July 8, 1847.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Zion's Herald, January 24, 1849, p. 14.

⁵⁵ Watchman of the Prairies, March 28, 1848.

constitution so as to give the Negro equal freedom. To the editor of the Baptist Banner of Kentucky this was "proof positive that even abolitionism itself is not prepared to practice upon the principles it wishes to force upon the South. Shame upon such inconsistency."⁵⁶

But the Northern church press was not itself inconsistent for it never endorsed such action. In fact, it usually openly supported the opposite ends as did the editor of the Watchman and Reflector of Boston when he unequivocally faced the issue of segregation in the local school system. "Strange as it may seem there is really amongst us, and that to a foolish if not a sinful extent, a bitterer prejudice against colored people than exists in some of the slave states. That prejudice, if it did not work positive harm to the weaker party, might be suffered to pass unnoticed." In fact, he contended, it did the Negro a grave wrong, and wounded society itself, in addition to which it was contrary to the principle of the laws of the state. He condemned the making of color a cause of caste to be perpetuated through the public schools. He pointed to the fact that surrounding towns got along very well with white and Negro children attending school together.⁵⁷

A member of the Boston school board replied by disclaiming prejudice while insisting on the inferiority and distinctiveness of the Negro, not only physically, but mentally and morally as well. The editor's comment was, "There is clearly in the above no

⁵⁶ October 28, 1847, p. 170.

⁵⁷ August 30, 1849, p. 138.

prejudice against color, only a very good-natured, but somewhat obstinate, 'forgone conclusion' against race."⁵⁸

Against the background of such nationwide evidences of racial prejudice, thoughtful observers viewed the problem of emancipation. The Cross and Journal of Ohio showed a keen grasp of the difficulties which confronted those interested in genuine reform. "In all our schemes of reform, in which the mass is concerned," the editor said, "we cannot count on the existence of Christian principle, strictly so called. Christian truth is tolerated in this country, to be sure, but never yielded to by the 'million,' when it crosses either their interests, or their prejudices, or their wills." The question was, then, not what was to be done in terms of what things ought to be, but what could be done in the face of the fact that men acted "taking their interests, their prejudice, and their wills as their guide."⁵⁹

He saw the difficulties enhanced by the fact that not only was freedom demanded for the slave, but that the same spirit demanded equality for the free Negro. "It demands that the slave now cringing beneath his master's lash, be raised to his feet, placed on the same level with that master, and the two walk on together in society in peace and harmony, loving and being loved." He could find no human power that could accomplish this result against the background of his own frank recognition of existing barriers to such progress, the chief of which was prejudice. "It must be a creative power, a power that can change both hearts, reverse the

⁵⁸ Watchman and Reflector, September 13, 1849, p. 146.

⁵⁹ November 27, 1846.

workings of the whole inward machinery of man, and alter the whole framework of society." He believed that such a power existed.⁶⁰

This editor was not alone in seeing the depth of the dilemma.

The editor of the Presbyterian Advocate of Pittsburgh said:

The present state of things is this. The slave States are legislating in every possible way to crowd out the free blacks into the free States. Forseeing evils from this, many of the free States are imitating the legislation of the slave States Now it is easy to see that a crisis is here forming which calls for the exercise of all the wisdom and benevolence that is available for this unfortunate race of people.

This all suggested to him that the finger of God was pointing to colonization as the answer and he welcomed the upsurge of interest in that scheme,⁶¹ a scheme which the Cross and Journal had rejected as obsolete.⁶² The editor of the Presbyterian Advocate believed that the rate of growth of racial hostility exceeded the rapidity with which abolitionism grew. He saw, therefore, no practical alternative to colonization if the Negroes were to be freed.⁶³

The statement of the Rev. J. M. Peck to the Illinois legislature in 1850 also accurately depicted the difficulties of emancipation against the background of race prejudice and offered the same alternative.

The people of Illinois in adopting that section of their new constitution, three years since, gave a majority in its favor of more than thirty thousand votes. How, then, can it be expected that slaveholding States will emancipate their slaves when the free States refuse to receive the

⁶⁰ Cross and Journal, November 27, 1846.

⁶¹ April 16, 1851, p. 97.

⁶² November 27, 1846.

⁶³ September 24, 1851, p. 190.

African race when free? There are insuperable objections against the two races living together. This is the strong objection to the emancipation of slaves. Call it prejudice against color, or what you please, it is a barrier that cannot be surmounted.

The only star of hope remaining was the continent of Africa.⁶⁴

In the period of intense anti-slavery activity during the 1830's, opposition to the plan to colonize free Negroes in Africa grew out of the fact that it was felt to be an adjunct of the pro-slavery cause, being offered as a device to protect the slaveholder from the embarrassment of the presence of the free Negro. The Boston Zion's Herald felt that two new concerns had, by 1850, come to dominate the Colonization Societies' interest which called for a changed attitude on the part of anti-slavery people. They were the emphasis on the colonization of Africa by voluntary immigration and the interest shown in the suppression of the slave trade as free colonies were established on the African coast. As long as colonization remained within that sphere this editor gladly offered his support and commended it to the vigilant patronage of his friends.⁶⁵ The Western Advocate was similarly cautious but approved colonization, nevertheless, because it would not only promote general emancipation, but also the civilizing and Christianizing of Africa.⁶⁶ This latter point, of course, the churches stressed very much,⁶⁷ and even expected such a program, if African colonies prospered, to have a salutary influence in respect to the

⁶⁴ J. M. Peck, Duties of American Citizens: A Discourse Preached at the State-House, Springfield, Illinois, January 26, 1851 (St. Louis, 1851), p. 22.

⁶⁵ January 30, 1850, p. 18.

⁶⁶ November 13, 1846, p. 122.

⁶⁷ Advocate and Journal, July 25, 1850, p. 118.

condition of the Negroes who remained here.⁶⁸

There were only a few in the North who troubled themselves to challenge the colonization program on the grounds that it was not practical. The conservative editor of the Boston Christian Watchman, while noting the increased favor which the idea enjoyed, had not and would not advocate the scheme because he had never fully believed in its practicability.⁶⁹ The New York Baptist Register tentatively endorsed the program but warned of the necessity of being sure that the quality of the immigrants, and even the quantity, was such as to sustain the "administration of a government in a state of infancy and feebleness" as was that of Liberia, made an independent republic in 1848.⁷⁰

Colonization received a varied endorsement in the South as well. This section was not so much inclined, however, to think of it as an adjunct to emancipation but as providing a place for those free Negroes to go who had, under existing circumstances, attained their freedom.

The editor of the Richmond Advocate was a long standing friend of colonization who saw in it relief for the South from the residence of the free Negro, a relief which would never come from the North.

The blind fanaticism of the North, with its mock-philanthropy, would spend thousands, yes even blood as well as treasure, to entice the slave from his master, whose condition is absolutely a princely one compared to that of a majority of our free colored population, while this abject

⁶⁸ Zion's Herald, February 6, 1851, p. 22.

⁶⁹ September 10, 1847, p. 145.

⁷⁰ March 21, 1850, p. 30.

and suffering portion of our community has no part in their sympathies, and would not be permitted even to enter the pure region of Northern civilization.⁷¹

The editor of the Nashville Advocate held views similar to those of the Richmond paper, in regard to colonization, with an additional note to the effect that "one collateral evidence of its goodness is, that it is more bitterly opposed by ultra abolitionism than even Southern slavery is."⁷²

But there were those in the South who frankly opposed colonization. The Southern Baptist of Charleston opposed it so long as it carried any suggestion of indirect challenge to the system of slavery. Its editor said, "If slavery is wrong, we will yield it freely and of right. If it is not wrong, but, on the contrary, the best system of servitude, then we will have no intermeddling either of societies or of government."⁷³ The anonymous Southern author of a pamphlet rejected colonization relative to emancipation for very practical reasons, scoffing at the prospect of a free and strong Liberia and the availability of the resources within the United States to secure compensated emancipation and colonization.⁷⁴

In spite of mixed feelings regarding colonization, nearly every scheme of emancipation provided for it in some form. Only occasionally were such plans offered to the public through the religious press, but such as were offered as food for thought

⁷¹ Richmond Advocate, May 9, 1850, p. 74.

⁷² February 1, 1850.

⁷³ March 5, 1851.

⁷⁴ Anonymous, A System of Prospective Emancipation, Advocated in Kentucky, by Robert J. Breckinridge, D.D., and Urged and Supported in the Princeton Review, in Article VI,--October, 1849: Examined by a Presbyterian in the Far South (Charleston, 1850), p. 15.

usually provided for some form of compensation to the owners, and for the colonization, usually in Africa, of the slaves thus freed.⁷⁵

The South tended to reject all such specific plans, though often giving Northern truculence as a reason for skepticism in regard to them. A border state paper, the Baptist Banner, discussed one plan which included colonization on the public domain, using the full resources of the Federal Government in emancipation. The residence on the public domain was not expected to be permanent, but to offer the opportunity for an apprenticeship in freedom, after which the free Negro would be transported to Liberia. The editor was sure, however, that ultra abolitionists of the North would oppose the plan and perhaps a few Southern ultraists also. He had no real confidence in it.⁷⁶

It was a fact that anti-slavery papers in the North were opposed to offering compensation to the slaveholder to give up something that was a sin. The editor of the Watchman of the Prairies of Chicago said, "If slavery be morally wrong in itself and a violation of personal liberty, civil rights, and that commercial intercourse to which all men are entitled, we cannot see that anyone is under any obligation to pay slaveholders for ceasing to do wrong."⁷⁷

There was little real confidence expressed in any section in plans of emancipation. The reason for this feeling in the South

75 For examples of such plans see the Advocate and Journal, February 10, 1847, p. 21; Zion's Herald, February 17, 1847, p. 26; Western Advocate, June 13, 1849, p. 94.

76 September 12, 1849.

77 March 6, 1849.

was that the Southerners had come, to a very large extent, to accept slavery as the best if not the only possible arrangement. This was true of the anonymous writer who criticized a plan of emancipation put forth by the Princeton Review. After showing that the resources of the nation would not permit the financing of the scheme, he condemned all such schemes as visionary. But, most important, they were unnecessary. "God has doomed the African race to slavery, for ages past, and so far as we can see, for ages to come."⁷⁸ The South was also extremely reluctant to give sanction to any plan which gave Congress any control over their domestic institution.⁷⁹ The Baptist Banner of Louisville was very insistent that any plan must respect the laws of the slaveholding states and their social organization and no practical plan then seemed to be available that would harmonize with those needs.⁸⁰

The views of the Cross and Journal of Columbus, Ohio, have already been cited as exceptional in another connection. The views of the editor are also exceptional in connection with the specific question of emancipation. The position of this paper is significant not because of the influence it had nor alone for the perception it demonstrated, but for the fact that the view expressed attracted little if any attention in the North, and went unappreciated in the South. The Cross and Journal offered a careful analysis of slavery and the prospects of emancipation. The editor had rejected colonization as obsolete, just as he rejected the idea of a

78 Anonymous, System of Prospective Emancipation, p. 22.

79 Southern view quoted in Advocate and Journal, February 10, 1847, p. 21.

80 April 15, 1847, p. 58.

forced emancipation. He felt that any successful plan must be acceptable to the slaveholder and have his full cooperation. He also rejected the optimism some expressed with regard to appealing to the self-interest of the slaveholder since "men's prejudices are stronger than their interests."⁸¹ The editor of this paper was just as convinced as anyone that slavery was a sin which cried for removal, an opinion that had been singled out from all else he had said by the Christian Index of Georgia.⁸²

But the editor of the Cross and Journal refused to charge that slave owners had any peculiar faculties for sinning. "The slaveholding spirit . . . does prevail in the North, and we have more than once heard the crack of the slaveholder's whip, from those who never saw an African slave." His indictment of the North was sweeping. He saw this spirit in those who would pass, by threats, anti-slavery resolutions in ecclesiastical bodies or those who, in the same spirit, prevented their passage. Intemperance and coveteousness were productive of many of the evils of slavery, such as that coveteousness which forced women to work for ten cents a day, a sum less than that required to maintain a slave, and a sum which strongly encouraged a loss of virtue. The power of the creditor over the debtor, "as tyrannically used as that of the master over the slave," was another Northern sin which he confessed, declaring that if "all these instances be paraded in a book after the manner of 'Slavery as it is' . . . we should all be astonished at the aggregate of 'northern oppression.'"⁸³

81 Cross and Journal, December 4, 1846.

82 Christian Index, November 13, 1846.

83 Cross and Journal, December 11, 1846.

Interestingly enough, the editor of the Cross and Journal recommended an aggressive spirit toward reformation. It was enjoined upon the Christian to go out and search for evil and eradicate it, "to clear the rubbish from a fallen world," but he qualified this zeal in a way that his Northern contemporaries frequently did not. It was to be done in a gentle spirit and a patient one, however contrary to the spirit of the age those qualities might be. He complained of the excessive speed and recklessness of the age in general, then warned his contemporaries that "great moral, like physical changes, require time for their introduction." He managed to find the scripture that inculcated the sowing of the seed and the patient waiting for the harvest.⁸⁴ To him prudence and expediency were not terms of opprobrium as they were to so many anti-slavery men.⁸⁵

In approaching a specific answer to the manner of removing the evil, the editor of the Journal candidly acknowledged that such guilt as there was for the system was national, not sectional. As the whole community was guilty the burden of its voluntary removal must be assumed by all. The good of the master as well as the slave must be considered. This editor did not offer a specific plan of emancipation. His only specific recommendation was for the calling of a convention

from the free and slave States, composed of those from the former who are willing to acknowledge that a slaveholder may be a Christian, and from the latter of those who acknowledge that slavery is an evil that ought to be abolished.

⁸⁴ December 18, 1846.

⁸⁵ January 15, 1847.

. . . Let this convention digest some definite and feasible plan, and let that plan be steadily pursued, till one State after another is rid of the curse of slavery.--Let such a convention be once held, and the abolition of slavery would be half accomplished.⁸⁶

The discussion at this conclave was to exclude all questions of politics and sectarianism. The editor was quite willing that any plan coming from such a group should proceed on the basis of one area or state at a time. He refused to minimize the immense cost to all of any satisfactory procedure in emancipation, but he considered the end worth it.⁸⁷

The views of the editor of the Cross and Journal were challenged within his own constituency on the basis both that the suggestions were impractical and that they were not severe enough in dealing with such a sin as slavery.⁸⁸ They were challenged in the South because the editor had called slavery a sin and his magnanimity was practically overlooked. Otherwise it attracted little if any notice. That such a modest suggestion in view of the increasing pressure of the issue of slavery, was in fact so impractical at the time, and attracted so little attention, is a significant commentary on the state of feeling in the nation.

There were some trends, most of them very minor, in border states during these years, which created a flurry of optimism in Northern journals when it looked as though emancipation might actually occur at the initiative of a state. The most important of these was the emancipation movement in Kentucky which focussed in

⁸⁶ Cross and Journal, January 8, 1847.

⁸⁷ January 15, 1847.

⁸⁸ March 12, 1847.

the election of delegates to a constitutional convention in 1849. A slate of candidates ran on the issue of whether or not a provision for gradual emancipation should be included in the new constitution. The avid interest in the emancipation movement in Kentucky and the exaggerated optimism expressed in all sections of the Northern press in regard to it, bear witness to the editors' belief in and hope for a constitutional method in the elimination of slavery which would be respectful of the volition of the states. The issue in Kentucky drew notice even before it came to a climax. The Watchman of the Prairies of Chicago, late in 1847, expected Kentucky to join the ranks of the free states in the near future simply because of a more open discussion of the question.⁸⁹

The early optimism of the Northern Advocate was based on the probable calling of a constitutional convention. The editor entertained little doubt that such a convention would provide for at least gradual emancipation.⁹⁰ The Western Advocate, just across the river from Kentucky, was also optimistic. Denying the adverse effect of Northern agitation upon the possibility of emancipation, the editor said, "We trust the fine state Kentucky will soon be rid of slavery by the exertion of her own sons."⁹¹ The Boston Zion's Herald shared the general optimism of the North, citing the fact that four fifths of the people of Kentucky were non-slaveholders, many of whom must surely be opposed to slavery.⁹²

89 December 28, 1847.

90 September 13, 1848, p. 95.

91 November 5, 1847, p. 118.

92 October 25, 1848, p. 170.

It was to be expected that Kentucky editors would show an interest in this issue. As the subject of emancipation arose, the Louisville Presbyterian Herald predicted an increase in the discussion of the question of slavery from the stump, from the press, from Congress, and even in conversation. The editor gave his views, agreeing with many others even in his own section, that slavery was an incubus on prosperity. He believed that God had not made a servant race as some ultras believed, but he did not believe, with the abolitionists, that slavery was a sin.⁹³ The Baptist Banner, also of Louisville, refrained for a long time from entering the discussion, partly because of the political nature of the question and partly because he did not want to disturb "the religious peace." The editor resolved to give a brief summary of his views, however, in the hope that it would stimulate people to think of the issue and investigate it for themselves.⁹⁴ He carried a series of editorials from April 11 through May 16 on slavery in general in which he expressed hope that the Negroes would be so elevated eventually in art, science, and religion that "they will be useless as slaves," at which point their owners would "cheerfully surrender them to be transplanted to . . . the great African Republic."⁹⁵

The editor of the Banner opposed any interference with the Kentucky constitution as it then provided for the subject, because the original had been adopted as a compromise when heads were clearer than under the influence of the ultraism of the day.⁹⁶

93 March 1, 1849.

94 April 11, 1849.

95 May 2, 1849.

96 May 9, 1849.

This editor considered the issue a state issue and felt that the church should remain aloof. He expressed the fear, too, that many ministers were agitating for political purposes of their own.⁹⁷ He saw the abolitionists using the churches "to get up a religious excitement upon the slavery question, . . . hoping thereby to get up an influence in their favor, which they could not do politically."⁹⁸

There was much active participation by ministers in the campaign to elect delegates to the convention. A Rev. John L. Waller, a Baptist, announced as a pro-slavery candidate in Woodford County. The Central Watchman of Cincinnati, whose correspondent was a native of Kentucky, hoped for a severe rebuke from the public for a minister who would advocate perpetual slavery. Most ministerial activity, however, where there was such, seemed to be directed toward emancipation. The same editorial described the work of Dr. R. J. Brekinridge in his opposition to slavery at a meeting of the Friends of Emancipation. This position the editor found typical of Presbyterian ministers and laymen, both Old and New Schools throughout Kentucky, as they rallied to support gradual emancipation "almost to a man." The correspondent's last word was to warn the North to keep "hands off." He said, "Don't hinder us by trying to help us."⁹⁹ One week later the editor of the Watchman again referred to the interest of ministers in emancipation, citing a Whig paper, the Cincinnati Atlas, relative to the numerous clergy at the meeting of the Friends of Emancipation.¹⁰⁰

97 The Baptist Banner, July 26, 1849.

98 August 22, 1849.

99 April 27, 1849, p. 14.

100 Central Watchman, May 4, 1849, p. 18.

This activity on behalf of emancipation was apparently not so characteristic of the Methodist Church. The editor of Zion's Herald of Boston criticized his Southern colleagues for their inactivity on behalf of emancipation. Said he, "Not an article, so far as we have observed, has appeared in any Southern Methodist paper in favor of the Kentucky movement. . . . There is a serious,--we are about to say, an immeasurable guilt, in this indifference of the M. E. Church, South." He felt that the Methodist ministers of Kentucky were sufficiently numerous and influential that they could control the situation in favor of emancipation.¹⁰¹ Later, however, he noticed that a minister of the Methodist Church was among the Baptists and Presbyterians laboring in earnest for emancipation and he urged his fellows to "rush into the field to labor."¹⁰²

The editor of the Nashville Advocate broke his silence on the subject under this provocation from the Boston Zion's Herald. He disclaimed any intention to meddle in Kentucky's affairs himself and he was deeply resentful of Northern interference and particularly that from Zion's Herald. The true procedure, he insisted, was that adopted by the Southern church in going forward on the "higher authority of the Bible," preaching to the Negroes and converting them, by the thousands, annually. Were Northern abolitionists to take their place in that work, he said, "blast and mildew" would fall on the church.¹⁰³

Widely distributed opinion from the press of the North indicated much pleasure over Clay's endorsement of emancipation in

101 June 27, 1849, p. 102.

102 July 5, 1848, p. 106.

103 Nashville Advocate, August 31, 1849.

Kentucky and in his active participation in the movement. Clay had, in a letter that appeared in the Lexington Reporter, enclosed a scheme of gradual emancipation with complete separation of the two races through colonization. The editor of a Cincinnati paper viewed this interest of Clay as an important gain for freedom since Clay was expected to attract a majority of his state to the cause locally, and would very likely, in the United States Senate, support the restriction of slavery in the territories.¹⁰⁴ The Western Advocate, another Cincinnati paper, carried Clay's letter rejoicing over this position on the part of so distinguished a statesman. The very gradual plan of compensated emancipation which Clay outlined, he did not discuss, leaving that to the citizens of the state of Kentucky.¹⁰⁵

Hosmer of the Northern Advocate, shared his pleasure with his readers, a pleasure derived from such a statement by one of Clay's "great prominence in the political world, for the last forty years, his residence in a slave State, and his popularity with the now dominant party in politics." All this combined to make Clay's letter of endorsement an important document. Hosmer had reservations concerning the gradual approach, but he recognized that this was the best that could be expected from the source.¹⁰⁶ Later he compared Clay somewhat unfavorably with Senator Benton who "like a farseeing, bold and honest politician" appealed for the non-extension of slavery and the "power of Congress to prevent it in all

¹⁰⁴ Watchman of the Valley, March 8, 1849, p. 94.

¹⁰⁵ March 14, 1849, p. 41.

¹⁰⁶ March 21, 1849, p. 202.

the Territories."¹⁰⁷ The Watchman and Reflector also took issue with the specifics of Clay's plan of emancipation, but its editor was much impressed by his anti-slavery argument and the importance of his association with the movement.¹⁰⁸

Not even Clay, however, could carry the issue. The defeat of the emancipation candidates in every district was greeted in the North with a distress commensurate with the earlier optimism. This failure demonstrated to the editor of the New York Evangelist "how fearfully the poison of slavery has affected the mass of the people, and how desperate and earnest is to be the struggle by which the country is to be eviscerated of the terrible evil."¹⁰⁹ The Northern Advocate offered this combination of disappointment and consolation:

The subject has been strongly discussed, and light has been shed upon it which will yet work its legitimate effects. But that, at this late day, with such convincing proofs before them of the identity of freedom with their prosperity, as well as honor, Kentucky should not have a single district really to take a stand for emancipation, is a fact both melancholy and instructive.¹¹⁰

The very moderate Presbyterian Advocate also offered consolation to its readers based upon the 10,394 votes received by emancipation candidates. It quoted the St. Louis Courier to the effect that emancipation was not dead in Kentucky, that the movement actually accomplished wonders, and that the Friends of Emancipation were proceeding with a thorough organization of the state in spite of their defeat.¹¹¹

107 Northern Advocate, June 27, 1849, p. 51.

108 March 22, 1849, p. 47.

109 August 23, 1849, p. 134.

110 August 29, 1849, p. 86.

111 Presbyterian Advocate, September 26, 1849, p. 622.

The Princeton Review, also conservative, declared that the failure was not due to the Presbyterian Church, regarding with satisfaction the activities of that group. The failure, as the editor saw it, was due to "the unhealthy state of the public mind produced by the abolition controversy, and to the want of preparation on the part of the people."¹¹² This periodical gave a large place also, as a factor in defeat, to a racial antagonism complicated by the class prejudice of the white laborer.¹¹³ The editor of the Central Christian Herald of Cincinnati was encouraged to believe that the more democratic provisions of the new constitution would finally lead to emancipation, particularly in view of the fact that the dominance of the slave owner was challenged in the changed basis of representation.¹¹⁴

While the North had looked with fond hopes upon this border state movement, the state of Kentucky and the South in general rather emphatically rejected it. As something of an alternative to emancipation, the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians in the South took an increasingly active interest in the religious welfare of the slave and in teaching the proper duties of both parties in the master-slave relation. Accepting providential sanction for slavery, by no means allowed for the abuse of the relationship by the master. God "has plainly defined our duties, as masters," said one writer, "to make them happy and comfortable in their bondage, and to give them the gospel; and we own and endeavour to fill these obligations in a degree, which is increasing

112 "Emancipation," Repertory and Princeton Review, p. 586.

113 Ibid., pp. 587, 588.

114 January 3, 1850, p. 154.

every year."¹¹⁵

There is no question but that this activity was greatly encouraged and accelerated during these years. Papers abound with reports of the action of synods, conferences, and conventions in the South toward the end that the Negro be instructed in the Gospel. The Southern Advocate proudly called attention to the "missions to the blacks" as "the glory of Southern Methodism," missions which had had widespread sympathy, support, and success.¹¹⁶ The editor especially wanted such efforts to be noted "abroad."¹¹⁷ The Baptist paper in Charleston indicated great pleasure at this news that the spiritual wants of the colored population were being supplied.¹¹⁸ This same editor noticed with joy the increase in Sunday schools throughout the South. The reason for special joy in this connection was that the Negro's capacities were too limited for the preached word to be effectual in their improvement.¹¹⁹

The Georgia Christian Index carried an article bearing on this, entitled, "An Essay in the Religious Oral Instruction of the Colored Race." This article not only showed an interest in this subject, but condemned the moral example which so many slaves saw in their masters and overseers. "The morals of the slaves," this missionary charged, "are fully as good, if not better than the free colored people of non-slaveholding States. They are as good as a large class of white people in our country, who, though free have

115 Anonymous, System of Prospective Emancipation, p. 22.

116 December 3, 1847, p. 102.

117 July 19, 1850, p. 26.

118 Southern Baptist, May 10, 1848, p. 418.

119 Ibid., May 3, 1848, p. 414.

not advanced one step beyond our slaves in knowledge or morals."¹²⁰
 On the other hand, one reason advanced for giving this instruction to the Negro was the moral self-preservation of the whites. The editor of the Southern Baptist said, "These people are in our very families, and their ignorance and their irreligion must inevitably affect the morals of our offspring."¹²¹

The Northern press was by no means indifferent or hostile to these efforts. The Northern Advocate, Auburn, New York, heartily endorsed the sentiments of the Louisville Journal which described the religious work among the Negroes in these terms:

We have noticed lately, in several of the Southern States, evidence of a desire on the part of the whites, to promote the elevation of the colored people, by means of more extensive religious influences than have heretofore existed. All such efforts have our heartiest wishes for their entire success.¹²²

The Christian Watchman of Boston decried the necessity of the Georgia Baptists for admitting that slaves had no access to the written word, but the editor rejoiced nevertheless at these new efforts and their success. He could not, however, refrain from offering a word of encouragement to the South to give the blessings of freedom along with the written word.¹²³ The New York Evangelist and the Western Advocate both noted with approval the discussion of the matter of the religious instruction of the slave in the Old School Assembly and in the Southern Baptist Triennial Convention in 1849. In each case the bodies had made recommendations in

120 Quoted by the Baptist Banner, August 13, 1846, p. 125.

121 June 26, 1847.

122 Quoted in the Northern Advocate, January 3, 1849, p. 158.

123 December 11, 1846, p. 198, referring to an article in the Christian Index.

regard to this matter. The comment made by the Evangelist was not in the best grace, however. "We are happy," the editor said, "to discover some sign of conscience on this vastly neglected and most imperative duty."¹²⁴ The Advocate, in spite of the very limited action taken by these bodies, was also glad to see the conscience of the Southern churches awakened to the claim of the Negro to the gospel.¹²⁵

There was one claim often made by the South which the North emphatically rejected. A Southern minister attempted to show that slavery had brought a great many more Negroes under the gospel than could otherwise have been the case. The response of the Central Christian Herald was a typical reply to a typical assertion.

God has overruled much wickedness, for his glory. . . . He has done so with reference to slavery. . . . But so far from justifying or palliating slavery on this account, we would as soon write a defense of Joseph's brethren for selling him, or of the Jews for crucifying the Lord, on account of the blessings which Providence brought out of these events, as we would defend this dreadful iniquity.¹²⁶

The Southern ministers were not satisfied merely to teach or preach a religion to make the slaves contented with their lot. Some unquestionably had this in mind, and made it the basis for an appeal to the masters, but they also emphasized the mutuality of the duties between master and slave. One of the most comprehensive of the works dealing with this subject resulted from an essay contest authorized by the Alabama Baptist Convention. The Convention offered \$200 for the best essay on "The Duties of Masters to Servants." Three of the essays were published in a single volume.

124 June 14, 1849, p. 94.

125 June 13, 1849, p. 94.

126 March 6, 1851, p. 190.

The author of the first essay accepted the premise that the slave was property, hence, for reasons of policy as well as humanity, certain rules should be observed. The slave should be worked judiciously, well rested, well fed, and well housed, for deprivation inclined the slave to thievery and gave the institution of slavery a bad name. Punishment should be fair and moderate, marriage should be respected and formalized, and the sick and aged should have good care.¹²⁷

A special responsibility pertained to religion. The slaves had a full ethical character and some of the most unexceptionable specimens of Christianity were to be found among them.¹²⁸ This writer thought that it was desirable for master and servant to worship together since "religion appears in its loveliest form where rich and poor, bond and free, meet together."¹²⁹ Family worship should also include the slave. The author urged also the teaching of the Bible to the slave. If so, he said, "docility, honesty, fidelity, will be promoted. Submission is taught on the ground of principle, not necessity. . . . No reasonable master could draw out a code of laws for the government of his servants that will meet his own welfare at so many points, as those to be found in the Word of God."¹³⁰

The second author, in an essay entitled, "Melville Letters," urged the establishing of a model farm either as a joint-stock or

127 H. N. McTyeire, "Master and Servant," in Duties of Masters to Servants: Three Premium Essays (Charleston, S. C., 1851), pp. 7-34.

128 Ibid., p. 35.

129 Ibid., p. 38.

130 Ibid., p. 42.

a government project where an effort could be made to furnish the right kind of overseer and to experiment in matters of husbandry, seeds, and animals.¹³¹ Overseers, this minister said, should be married or encouraged to marry. "The reasons for this are of a nature too delicate to comment upon, but far too important to be passed over in silence."¹³² He specified certain qualities in the Negro such as a childlike dependence, a sufficient capacity for self-respect to serve as a basis for moral culture, and an eminently religious character as indicative of the fact that the slave could and would respond to proper attitudes in the master.

The author declared that the slaves' feelings for honor and self-respect were all too often only found amusing. He counselled masters to speak to their slaves and of them with the feeling that a man may be a black or a slave and yet scorn low or base action.¹³³ This essayist pointed out that the laws forbidding the slave to learn to read placed a special obligation on the masters to teach them orally.¹³⁴ The third essayist spoke of justice and equity as the foundation governing the relationship between master and slave. This should prompt the master to treat his slave as he would be treated if the situation were reversed.¹³⁵ Northern men applied the golden rule somewhat differently, of course.

A correspondent of the Nashville Advocate offered many of the

131 C. F. Sturgis, "Melville Letters; or, The Duties of Masters to their Servants," Ibid., pp. 85, 86.

132 Ibid., p. 87.

133 Ibid., pp. 95-100.

134 Ibid., pp. 123, 124.

135 A. T. Holmes, "The Duties of Christian Masters," Ibid., pp. 135, 136.

same views as the above writers. He felt that the South had not done enough to benefit the slave. The master, he suggested, should use his position to control the associations of the Negroes to see that those associations were such as to elevate the slave. Both for the sake of the slave and for the sake of the master in this present life, he counselled faithful attendance at worship.

This would have the tendency to make your servants religious--religion makes the soul happy, and the spirit bouyant, and these give impulse and facility of operation to the body. Add to this, that religion leads your servants to take account of time and to improve it, as well as to care for your interests. And thus you secure their facility of operation, their economy and vigilance.¹³⁶

Apparently this editor shared the feeling of some in the North, that a more effective appeal could be made to avarice than to principle.

Amelioration of the system, then, and a moral and spiritual elevation of the slave were the best means which Southern editors could find to resolve their dilemma. This was consistent with their view that slavery was not only not a sin per se, but that it was in fact, a positive good. It was also a response to the completely unacceptable alternative of emancipation in any form in which it may have been suggested by the North, especially if it left the free Negro residing among the white population. On the other hand, the humanitarianism of their own religion and the constant pressure from the North at this point, forced them to emphasize a just and humane relationship within the system itself.

¹³⁶ Nashville Advocate, April 30, 1847.

CHAPTER V

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE WILMOT PROVISIO

While the more abstract issues provided a constant undercurrent of discussion during these years, the discussion in the church press focussed more intensely upon the question of the extension of slavery into the newly acquired territories. In the North, with its view that slavery was a great moral wrong, consistency required as a minimum, that slavery must not push forward. To the South it was a matter of pride and a defense of their peculiar institution to insist that it could be carried anywhere. The extension of United States territory westward in the 1840's precipitated a controversy over the extension of slavery, which distracted the nation until the outbreak of war. It was a controversy in which the religious press freely joined.

The question of the annexation of Texas had been fraught with this controversy even, at certain stages, dividing the parties on a sectional basis. To the very last, there was determined opposition to the admission of Texas as a slave state, but on December 29, 1845, Polk signed the joint resolution by which Texas became a member of the Union. When Mexico threatened war and severed diplomatic relations with the United States, as she had previously warned she would in case of annexation, Polk sent troops into Texas and deployed the navy to strategic advantage. He sent John Slidell as a special emissary to arrange a peaceful settlement of the boundary of Texas at the Rio Grande. When Mexico refused to talk peace, Polk ordered Taylor to advance to the river which was

the western edge of the territory in dispute. Taylor was attacked there by Mexican forces on April 23, and on May 12, 1846, Congress declared war. It was clear immediately that this war would very likely result in the addition of new territory to the United States. This was only one of several reasons, however, that the war attracted the attention of the church press.

The war itself was the subject of extended coverage in the religious press and frequently that coverage was accompanied by editorial comment. The views expressed on the subject of the war were mixed and one cannot define sharp lines on the basis of section or denomination because many factors complicated the views of the churches.

On the question of the Mexican War in particular some factors were conducive to support: desire to regain public approval, evangelical emphasis, anti-Catholic feeling, tradition permitting "just" war, and substantial stakes in the territory adjoining Mexico. Other factors made for opposition: belief in the injustice or inexpediency of the present war, belief in the principle of absolute pacifism, concentration of the membership at a distance from the war.¹

Nor was the fact lost upon those who opposed the war itself, that territorial acquisitions would furnish an opportunity to carry superior religious institutions to the Mexican people.

In addition, many, especially in the North, stressed the undesirable features of the war and its consequences, including war's inevitable horrors,² the "depravation" of public conscience,³ the

¹ Clayton Sumner Ellsworth, "The American Churches and the Mexican War," AHR, XLV (January, 1940), p. 326. As one of his sources Ellsworth samples the religious press. While his work is thorough, for the purposes of this study there are discussions of the war, particularly as it posed the problem of territorial expansion and the extension of slavery, which need amplification.

² Christian Watchman, April 16, 1847, p. 62; Advocate and Journal, April 7, 1847, p. 54.

³ New York Evangelist, April 22, 1847, p. 62; Christian Journal, June 25, 1847.

expense of war with the accompanying threat to internal freedoms,⁴ and the diffusion of the war-spirit even into national literature.⁵ Regardless of any possible advantages that might accrue from the war, the press of the North generally found much to criticize. Nor were the Southern editors unconcerned about the unpleasant results of the war.⁶

It is noteworthy, however, that the Southern press was much more ready to condemn Mexico and less critical of the United States in this action. The editor of the Richmond Advocate labelled as incredible a peace rumor which followed Taylor's victories in the fall and winter of 1846-1847. He thought that yielding at that point would reflect weakness and imbecility on the part of our government because it would indicate that the nation was "too weak to avenge the wrongs and assert the rights of our country."⁷ This editor's enthusiasm for American feats of arms was only dampened, not extinguished, by his "religious opposition to war" and the disasters and death consequent upon success in arms.⁸

The Christian Index of Georgia said that Mexico had filled up the measure of their iniquity, and heaven is now pouring out her vials of wrath upon the guilty nation. Her acts of treachery, and rapine, and violence, have long called for vengeance, and the day of recompense has at last come. . . . It does appear to us that she is destined to be swept from the nations of the earth.⁹

⁴ Presbyterian Advocate, August 19, 1846, p. 173.

⁵ Western Christian Advocate, June 11, 1847, p. 34.

⁶ Southern Baptist, October 20, 1847, p. 267; Presbyterian Herald, April 1, 1847.

⁷ January 28, 1847, p. 14.

⁸ July 8, 1847, p. 116.

⁹ October 28, 1847, p. 350.

The editor of the Baptist Banner of Louisville rebuked what he thought to be "a morbid sentiment too often advanced in opposition to war, as if the parties were of necessity, at all times and under all circumstances guilty."¹⁰ He later expressed his confidence that "the miserable and deluded followers of equally degraded and fanatical leaders, will be taught to respect and sue for peace with this government."¹¹ In spite of the complicated motivation and a mixed sentiment, the tendency of the press in the North to be critical and in the South to lend approval is too pronounced to be ignored.

A considerable segment of the Northern press found the basis for criticism in the expected extension of slavery, some blaming the war itself on those interests presumably served by it. A correspondent of the Christian Journal published in Columbus, Ohio, was most vehement, although his views were not fully endorsed by the editor.

We are not content to be borne on the full tide of national prosperity, with the blessings of civil and religious freedom universally diffused; but we must enter on a career of rapacity, enslaved by the lust of dominion, and maddened by the insane thirst for conquest; seized and possessed by the phrenzied demon of slavery; we must rush heedlessly on to erase from the map of nations, a sister nation's boundaries and to set ourselves on the High Road to Ruin. . . . We have not yet been purged of the corruptions that were entailed upon us by the last war; when shall we be rid of the evils that will follow a war started by the lust of dominion, of territorial aggrandizement, of Slavery extension.¹²

The Western Advocate of Cincinnati was not so extravagant; nevertheless the editor attributed the war, at least in part, to

10 June 4, 1846, p. 86.

11 July 2, 1846, p. 103.

12 April 30, 1847.

slave interests. Referring first to the annexation of Texas, he said:

We fear there has been at work the principle of moral wrong. The extension or permanency of slavery seems to be one element, without which annexation would not have taken place. And, then, the further extension of the control of slavery, a grievous moral wrong, seems to have had much to do in the war with Mexico. And that this was an aggressive war of mere conquest, there are very few doubts, indeed, in the minds of sober men of every political school.¹³

The New York Evangelist held the view that Mexicans were backward and barbarous and that it was more desirable for them to be colonized by the United States than under British auspices. However mistaken the editor may have been concerning the British desire to colonize Texas, he was not misinformed in regard to British interests there since the British did not want to see Texas become a part of the United States because of commercial advantages in the status quo. But the editor was troubled by other considerations:

We say that if the question of the acquisition of territory were disconnected from the question of slavery, and from all necessity of taking into account the violence, cruelty, and wrong of an aggressive war, there could hardly be two opinions about it among intelligent men. But if slavery is to be planted in the territories which may now be acquired--and what is still worse, planted too, by the bayonet--what will be the gain to the great American people-- . . . such a movement may stimulate the slave markets of Norfolk and Richmond, of Baltimore and Washington; it may even paralyze the growth of cotton in South Carolina, and turn her chivalry into slave-traders and breeders of slaves for the market--but what will the world gain?¹⁴

The fact that the hitherto free Mexican area was being forced by our arms to become a receptacle for "human cattle," made this an

¹³ February 22, 1847, p. 162.

¹⁴ January 14, 1847, p. 6.

especially bitter possibility.¹⁵

A correspondent of the Raleigh Biblical Recorder also advanced the view somewhat cautiously, that the war grew out of a desire for territorial acquisition and that, if so, it would evoke the displeasure of God. The editor, however, qualified the view, carefully explaining that the correspondent referred only to a possibility, not a fact.¹⁶ Taking account of this desire for territorial conquest attributed to the South, the editor of the Boston Christian Watchman pointed out that conquest of Mexican territory could well bring loss rather than gain to the South. The free Negroes and Indians, which constituted six sevenths of the population in that region, could not be reduced to slavery. They would sympathize with any slaves brought in and offer them every opportunity to escape. Slaves would be reduced in value, therefore, and the whole system weakened.¹⁷

A New England periodical, although considering the war justified,¹⁸ later was very critical of its conduct. The editor saw the war's origin in the efforts of the South to prevent possible freedom in Texas, and in the wild impulsiveness of the West when the South was prudently trying to accomplish its goals without war. "The war . . . is not only an effect of the causes we have already adverted to as acting upon the direction and constitution of parties, but is itself a cause which before it can exhaust its force,

15 New York Evangelist, March 25, 1847, p. 46.

16 May 29, 1847.

17 August 14, 1846, p. 130.

18 "The War With Mexico," New Englander, V (January, 1847), pp. 140-142.

will have swept away all parties as now organized."¹⁹

A journal in the West also predicted this result from the intra-party bitterness engendered by the issue of possible slavery extension resulting from the war. "The probable result threatens to be, that Whig and Democrat may be lost in the local designation of north and south." The editor did not welcome the prospect, however, and counseled against partisanship, calling for forbearance on the basis that "even real evils should be borne with patience, for a time, rather than have recourse to anarchy."²⁰

One of the agents which revealed as well as produced this eventual realignment was the Wilmot Proviso introduced in August, 1846. It was proposed by David Wilmot, Democrat of Pennsylvania, as a condition to the two million dollar appropriation requested by Polk to aid in peace negotiations. The Proviso would have expressly prohibited slavery in any territories to be acquired from Mexico as a result of the war. Wilmot was a spokesman for the sentiment of many others who did not necessarily oppose the acquisition of New Mexico and California if slavery could be prohibited there. The Proviso became the focal point for the increasingly emotional debate over all the issues involved in the slavery controversy. It drew little comment, however, in the religious press at the time of its introduction so late in this session of Congress. The Northern Advocate of Auburn, New York, did carry news of it with an expression of approval, stating that "Mr. Wilmot's resolution was passed by a vote of 83 to 64 though Mr. Wick of Iowa moved

19 "The State of Political Parties," Ibid. (April, 1847), p. 320.

20 Western Advocate, February 22, 1847, p. 162.

that this prohibition should not extend South of 36 degrees and 30 minutes."²¹ The Proviso failed in the Senate, as did the original appropriation bill.

As the second session of the Twenty-ninth Congress met, however, in December of 1846, excitement mounted and it seemed certain that a severe crisis approached over the question of slavery and its extension. The New York Evangelist predicted an exciting session based on a passionate discussion of the war itself "to say nothing of what will be called forth by the existence of that war. It is probable that the question of the extension of slavery over the territories lately wrested from Mexican rule by the United States' arms, must come up." The editor pointed to the need of a much wiser influence than party, stating that "It is in the power of the Christians of this country to rule it on Christian principles; to check and fetter the unruly, turbulent and threatening passions that endanger us."²²

Elements of the Methodist press shared this sense of excitement. The editor of the Boston Zion's Herald wrote,

It is very clear . . . that this great question is beginning to assume its true importance before the nation, and is destined to become the question of the country. The tendencies of the public mind toward it are strong and inevitable, and we predict that for some years hence it will rock the union with agitation, if not ruin.²³

The Northern Advocate of upstate New York carried much the same view.

The abolition question--or whether the conquered territory shall become a field for the enlargement of slavery.--this is a point which, for its magnitude, the heated debate and

²¹ Northern Advocate, August 19, 1846, p. 83.

²² December 10, 1846, p. 198.

²³ Zion's Herald, January 20, 1847, p. 10.

the explosive passion it will occasion, yields to no other. In the affirmative, the chivalry of the South is enlisting; in the negative, the patriotism and philanthropy of the North will be marshalled.²⁴

Others, North and South, did not permit themselves such excitement. The editor of the Old School Presbyterian Advocate of Pittsburgh was not quite sure exactly what the Wilmot Proviso was nor of its exact origin even by February 10, 1847.²⁵ The editor of the Nashville Advocate was not impressed by the first weeks of Congressional activity. "The business of this august body is proceeding in about the usual manner, that is, by carrying on party strife, and personal quarrels."²⁶ As the discussion intensified, however, he took the occasion, as Southern editors frequently did, to reprimand his colleagues in the North. "We perceive that a number of religious papers are taking part in the political discussions of Congress on the question of boundary lines involving the subject of slavery. . . . Now we give it as our deliberate opinion, that religious journals had better keep within their own proper sphere."²⁷

In February and March of 1847 another appropriation to be used in arranging a peace with Mexico, this time involving three million dollars, was before the House and Senate. The House passed the bill by a majority of nine with the Proviso attached, sending it then to the Senate where the Proviso was stricken from it. The appropriation bill passed and was returned to the House and passed as the House receded from the Proviso by a majority of five. All

²⁴ Northern Advocate, January 13, 1847, p. 166.

²⁵ February 10, 1847, p. 62.

²⁶ January 8, 1847.

²⁷ January 29, 1847.

the Whigs and many Democrats from the free states voted for the anti-slavery amendment, but every member from the slave states except the one from Delaware voted against it.²⁸ Thus did the amendment reveal the sectionalization that had occurred by that time.

The passage of the bill in the House and its progress to the Senate was noted by the editor of the Boston Zion's Herald. He was sure that "that grave and dignified body cannot insult the age, or degrade the character of the country by sending [sic]. A surer indication of the moral dissoluteness of the republic, could not be given, than the opposition of the Senate to this measure."²⁹ the passage of the Proviso in the House sounded, in the editor's estimation, the death knell to the pro-slavery power in that body. He noted with relish the increase in Northern political power.

The power to control the subject is now clearly in the grasp of the free States. Let there be no succumbing now. The whole moral sentiment of the age summons us to but one course--decided, uncompromising hostility to slavery. . . . Let it be settled that the responsibility of the further extension of slavery among us rests upon the free States.³⁰

It was a dark day for the editor of the Herald when he received word that the Proviso had failed to pass. He consoled himself with the view that right must prevail and that reverses would serve to enhance the fitness for battle of the proponents of the measure. The shame of it all was that five of the majority of ten against the Proviso in the Senate were from the North.³¹

28 John Ford Rhodes, History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 to the Final Restoration of Home Rule at the South in 1877, Vol. I, 1850-1854 (New York, 1910), p. 90.

29 February 24, 1847, p. 30.

30 March 3, 1847, p. 34.

31 March 10, 1847, p. 38.

The editor of the New York Evangelist followed the movement of the bill with similar fluctuations of fear and hope. Its initial adoption by the House led this editor also to say that the power of the slaveholding interest was at least temporarily broken because the long held majority of representatives of free-labor states had finally asserted the principles and interests of their constituents.³² When it failed to pass in the Senate, he named the five Senators from the free states who had voted against it so that their baseness could be more easily remembered. He derived consolation from the fact that the struggle was not yet over and that the "deliberate voice of the Free States has been uttered against the extension of slavery," leaving a record in Congress "and in the memory of the civilized world."³³

The passage of the measure in the House was more than the editor of the Cincinnati Watchman of the Valley had hoped for. After giving a detailed account of its progress, he observed:

The result thus far is far better than our fears, or even our most sanguine hopes. True, the bill has yet to run the gauntlet in the Senate and the Cabinet, in one or the other of which it may not improbably receive its death-blow. Let them kill it; the effect of this decided condemnation of the pet institution of the South, by the popular branch of the national Legislature, they cannot kill. Slavery from henceforth, we would fondly hope, is a doomed institution.³⁴

That his feelings could be stirred deeply by the question, he openly admitted. "Why should they not?" he said. "It involves the present and eternal well-being of millions among us; it involves, and that deeply, the morals and the future prospects of

³² March 4, 1847, p. 34.

³³ March 4, 1847, p. 35.

³⁴ February 25, 1847, p. 87.

the whole nation. We envy not the heart of that man whose sympathies are proof against such claims- . . . We envy him not his conscience nor his patriotism."³⁵

The Northern Advocate of western New York shared the initial disappointment over the final defeat of the Proviso. He said, "We had thought there was independence and humanity enough in the House, to maintain the noble ground they at first took on the subject." It was in an evil hour that they consented to its passage. "And by this act of freemen and republicans and Christians, slavery is to be carried into regions of America hitherto unpolluted by its curse, and entailed, with all its sufferings and horrors, upon millions yet unborn."³⁶ By another week, the editor had found reassurance in the fact that the real test was to come later when Congress erected territories and states.

The voice of humanity and of conscience both plead our cause. God and the Bible each stand upon our side. . . . The majority vote in the House of Representatives, is a guaranty of the success of our cause when the final struggle comes. . . . The sceptre of the Giant Oppression, is to be broken. Lovers of freedom, be of good cheer. Let the right men be sent to represent you in the national halls of Legislation, and success is yours.³⁷

This editor was not alone in suggesting the relevance of political pressures to this issue. The editor of the Boston Christian Watchman traced the possibilities with regard to the future treaty with Mexico. He thought it possible that the treaty might be signed before the Thirtieth Congress met and that this treaty, without restrictions on slavery, might possibly be

³⁵ Watchman of the Valley, February 25, 1847, p. 87.

³⁶ March 10, 1847, p. 199.

³⁷ March 17, 1847, p. 202.

confirmed. The question of slavery in these new territories would inevitably come before that Congress in which the North would have a large majority.

Let, then, a demonstration be made through the length and breadth of the free States, previous to the meeting of the next Congress. Let the whole people, irrespective of party limits, speak out, and make their representatives understand, that political death, and an execrable memory, await the man who dares so to outrage the feelings of his constituents as to vote for another inch of slave territory.³⁸

It was quite common in the North for papers to attack the possible extension of slavery into the Mexican territories because they had previously been free under Mexican law.³⁹ For the New Englander the question was not the Proviso itself and its attachment to an appropriation for peace negotiations. The question was

whether the glorious old ordinance of 1787 shall be incorporated as fundamental law in acts for the organization of territorial governments between the upper Rio Grande and the Pacific. That question, be it remembered, will not be a question of the abolition of slavery, but, for the first time since our independence, a question of the deliberate abolition of freedom by the sovereign legislation of the Union. For it cannot be forgotten that in all those regions there is now no slave; the fundamental law there is the law of freedom.⁴⁰

Reaction to the Proviso in the Southern press reveals, at this stage in the debate, very firmly congealed sentiment against any interference with the extension of slavery westward. The editor of the Nashville Advocate expressed his feelings by means of the punctuation in his headline, "Wilmot Proviso Rejected! Three Million Bill passed!!," and the very brief story, "The Senate this morning struck out the Wilmot Proviso from the Three Million bill

³⁸ Christian Watchman, April 7, 1847, p. 57.

³⁹ Northern Advocate, March 10, 1847, p. 199; New York Evangelist, March 25, 1847, p. 46.

⁴⁰ "State of Political Parties," p. 320.

by a majority of ten!"⁴¹ Others were not quite so reserved but almost as brief. The Christian Index of Georgia was among them.

"The Wilmot Proviso, which passed in the House of Representatives, excluding slavery from any State or States that may hereafter be annexed out of the Mexican Territory--that fire-brand, we are pleased to learn, was extinguished and thrown out by the Senate."⁴²

Still stronger was the reaction of the Raleigh Biblical Recorder. The editor first quoted what he regarded as an injudicious resolution passed at a protest meeting in Richmond, Virginia. The resolution had asserted the right of all citizens to take their property anywhere they chose, affirmed their resistance, with arms if necessary, to any unconstitutional restrictions, and had warned the North that it must submit to slavery extension or to war.⁴³

In spite of his dislike of this extreme action he was at a loss to see what right the North had to meddle since the territory west to the Pacific was Southern. He was certain

that, as it regards her own territory, whether it be increased or not, the South will never tolerate northern interference. Nor will she ever consent, until she sees fit to do so freely and of her own accord, to have a free state, and a nest of abolitionists and runaways, on her western frontier. On this point northern men may as well make themselves easy at once.⁴⁴

He also noted the threats in the Northern press directed toward those who voted against the Proviso. "Now it appears," he said, "northern men are sent to Congress, not to legislate for the country, as of yore; but to agitate for the North; not to follow

⁴¹ Nashville Advocate, March 12, 1847.

⁴² March 11, 1847, p. 86.

⁴³ Biblical Recorder, March 13, 1847. Quoted from the Christian Chronicle, a Baptist paper published in Philadelphia.

⁴⁴ Biblical Recorder, March 13, 1847.

the dictates of their own judgment; but to crouch to the biddings of factionists, demagogues and the makers of public sentiment."⁴⁵

The editor of the Georgia Christian Index entered the debate in April when his Baptist colleague of the Reflector denied that the Proviso originated with an abolitionist. The reply from the editor of the Index was typical of the tendency common to both sections to distort terms and images.

It originated, reader, with that class of men who are wont to denounce us as ultraists--who disavow abolitionism, but are in favor of the universal abolition of--that form of slavery which prevails in the South--who only wait for the tide to turn in favor of abolitionism, ere they openly advocate it--who are distinguished only as Anti-slavery men.⁴⁶

The only difference which he saw was that the anti-slavery men used a cat's paw in effecting their object.

As might be expected, Charleston was apt to produce a more violent reaction. The editor of the Southern Baptist published in that city was deeply stirred by the Northern advocacy of the Wilmot Proviso. He said,

The fact is most glaringly palpable, that a crisis in the history of Southern Christians has arrived, which renders it the imperious duty of all Southern Christian patriots to meet promptly and energetically. All the indications are that the time is at hand when Christians in the South, must assume higher responsibilities.⁴⁷

The editor was especially disturbed by the poisonous influence of printed material from the North which bore against the "Southern Social System." In the face of this the South was too complacent. "Dangers there are. It must not be disguised and it behooves Southern Christians not only ecclesiastically and religiously, to

⁴⁵ Biblical Recorder, March 13, 1847.

⁴⁶ April 8, 1847, p. 117.

⁴⁷ August 11, 1847, p. 259.

prepare themselves for self-protection, but politically to maintain that balance of power which is now more than ever in our political history dangerously jeopardized." He called for the building up of the institutions of the South systematically so that they could be independent of "foreign" influence.⁴⁸

To the editor of the Southern Baptist it was a question of life or death, "to be or not to be." He calculated matter of factly the strength of the forces opposing the South. Number one on the editor's list of facts was the casting of 60,000 votes for president to a man who said he would rather see the South deluged with blood than to witness the preservation of the Union at the cost of perpetuating Southern institutions. This reference was presumably to the Liberty Party which ran James G. Birney as its candidate in 1844. The editor cited also the strength of the Northern vote on the Proviso, anticipating a majority favorable to its passage in the next session. He found that the Northern press and politicians were against the South, a fact which he took as a recent revolution in opinion there. A final factor was the incalculable increase of strength from the flow of immigration into the North. This editor saw no prospect for a change in Northern and Western opinion except in the direction of greater antagonism toward the South. His counsel, then, was in behalf of a complete mobilization of the South in terms of "Southern conventions to be called and committees of correspondence and vigilance to be appointed, and some uniform system of tactics to be adopted suitable

⁴⁸ Southern Baptist, August 11, 1847, p. 259.

to the emergency. Yes--Speedily. Let Charlestonians lead off."⁴⁹

Two weeks later he carried in his Southern Baptist notice of a meeting to be held in Edgefield, South Carolina, for the purpose of protesting the Proviso. This set "the ball in motion" on the question which was "not only political but also religious." The object of the movement he understood "to be organization for the embodiment of a Southern public opinion, to preserve the Constitution, the Union, and the Sacred Compromises between the Northern and Southern States." Negatively, it was "to array against sixteen hundred Abolition Societies, in the non-slaveholding states, associations of Southern citizens for their self-preservation in the peaceable enjoyments of the rights, privileges, and compromises guaranteed by the nation." To this movement so interpreted he, "as a religious journalist and as a Southern Baptist," could give his unqualified approbation.⁵⁰

For this editor it was not principally the Wilmot Proviso itself which was at issue. The Proviso was simply further evidence that the tenure of Southern rights was uncertain, and that it required the careful watchfulness and determination of the people of the slave states to safeguard those rights. The issue being forced upon the South by the North was the abandonment of slavery itself. "The plain issue, then, presented by the free to the slave States is this: The Union may be preserved if you abandon slavery voluntarily--or if you will permit us to force you to the same result: But with slavery we will not tolerate your States as equal members

⁴⁹ Southern Baptist, August 25, 1847, p. 267.

⁵⁰ September 8, 1847, p. 275.

of the Union." This led him to comment that in spite of his love and veneration for the Union, "there are greater evils than a dissolved Union; among which we rank political degradation and dishonor, and the loss of our liberties."⁵¹

The press in the North was optimistic with regard to the growing public sentiment against slavery in the late months of 1846 and the early months of 1847. In this regard the Liberty Party and its new organ at Washington, the National Era, received some attention in the church press. This paper in itself was taken by the Cincinnati Western Advocate as a mark of rising reaction to the "misdeeds of pro-slavery men, . . . their grasping for unlimited power, or their unwillingness to submit to the restraints of just authority." This state of affairs had "roused the public mind to a state of unflinching resistance, which is accumulating and will accumulate with uncommon rapidity."⁵² In contrast, of course, the Nashville Advocate expected "unhappy results," from the establishing of such a paper and could "conceive of nothing good as likely to attend it."⁵³

The New York Evangelist, of the New School, was particularly impressed by the increased sentiment against slavery on the part of politicians as well as the general public. Men like John Quincy Adams, champion of free discussion of slavery in Congress, and Joshua Giddings, champion of anti-slavery and the Proviso, furnished some of the ground for this. "The doctrines of Adams and

⁵¹ Southern Baptist, September 25, 1847, p. 283.

⁵² Western Advocate, December 11, 1846, p. 139.

⁵³ December 25, 1846.

Giddings, boldly preached by them under great reproach, even to the expulsion of the latter, are spreading with power and it is one of those revolutions that 'never go backwards.' Those are not dead fish that swim up such a stream."⁵⁴ The editor expressed surprise at the unanimity and firmness of feeling in the North during the Congressional debate on the Proviso.⁵⁵ He warned the South not to misconstrue public sentiment in the North and West on slavery simply on the basis that many condemned the abuse heaped on the South by extremists. "The number in the free States who are willing to identify themselves with the slave interest is exceedingly small and is diminishing every day."⁵⁶

Some, at least, were realistic about the interest of politicians in anti-slavery doctrine and action. In one of a series of articles a correspondent of the Advocate and Journal of New York noted the increased opposition to slavery, but he indicated some reservations in connection with it.

I have already remarked that the public mind in our Northern States has recently been roused to new and vigorous opposition to slavery. The politicians are taking hold of this feeling, not so much, I suppose, because they care greatly about the moral aspects of the question (although some of them do, thank God,) but because it promises to afford a good political handle for some years to come.

He was afraid that, with this development, the church might lag behind the state.⁵⁷

The widespread endorsement of the principle of the Wilmot

⁵⁴ New York Evangelist, January 21, 1847, p. 10.

⁵⁵ February 4, 1847, p. 18.

⁵⁶ February 25, 1847, p. 30.

⁵⁷ John M'Clintock, Jr., "Slavery," Christian Advocate and Journal, March 31, 1847, p. 49.

Proviso by state legislatures also encouraged the hopes of Northern churchmen. Even the state of Delaware eventually endorsed the Proviso. Incidental to an attack upon the view that agitation had retarded the real progress of anti-slavery, the editor of the Cincinnati Watchman of the Valley brought this action of the states to the attention of his readers. "But above all note the fact that Nine of the free States, through their Legislatures have adopted resolutions, protesting against the extension of slavery; some of them proclaiming full and explicit anti-slavery doctrines." The committee of the whole was being heard from.⁵⁸

Zion's Herald noted the unanimity with which the Northern papers denounced the attempt of the South to extend slavery over new territories as another encouraging factor. This rising sentiment seemed to indicate that "no party can last in the North, if it shrinks from this position."⁵⁹ Even the defeat of the Proviso did not destroy this optimism. The Providence Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church hailed "with gratitude the growing interest in the subject, both in the country and in the church. While we deprecate its existence and its extension, we can but rejoice to witness the indications of its growing unpopularity, and the measures taken for its extinction, and ultimate overthrow."⁶⁰

With this posture on the part of the press in the North and the readiness of the press in the South to defend itself and the

⁵⁸ March 25, 1847, p. 102.

⁵⁹ February 3, 1847, p. 18.

⁶⁰ From the report on slavery of the Providence Annual Conference as reported in Zion's Herald, April 28, 1847, p. 66.

interests of its section, the religious press in general was open to the increased intensity of the debate as the opening session of the Thirtieth Congress approached. During the summer of 1847 the political winds were already beginning to blow and this did not escape the notice of editors. The editor of the Baptist Banner was impressed with what seemed to be the relative quiet on the party front. He said, however, that

devotées of abolitionism and popery are doing their best to organize themselves into political parties, and that this state of quietude is liable to be disturbed at any time, by one or both of these anti-republican factions, and the country be exposed to new causes of excitement and a more alarming and threatening state of political rivalry.⁶¹

This editor's sensitivity to discord was not misinformed. The political scene was neither quiet nor stationary for very long. The sessions of the Thirtieth Congress were destined to offer much by way of excitement, rivalry, and threats to the existence of the Union. The war had been vigorously prosecuted during 1847 and from March to September many victories had been won and Mexico City taken. The United States had, in the meantime, also taken possession of New Mexico and California. In April of 1847, Polk sent N. P. Trist to negotiate for a settlement which was to include possession of upper California and New Mexico as well as further concessions toward the south.

A brief armistice prevailed in late August and early September. Soon after the resumption of hostilities a new Mexican government anxious to negotiate a peace replaced the Santa Anna regime. Trist had been recalled in October, but the Mexicans persuaded him

⁶¹ June 23, 1847, p. 98.

to negotiate anyway on the basis that they had not received official notice of his recall. The negotiations led to the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo on February 2, 1848, a treaty which was submitted to the Senate and ratified on March 10, 1848, by a vote of 38 to 14. The Thirtieth Congress, then, was to deal not only with the conclusion of the war itself, but also with the need for governments in these newly acquired territories in the Southwest as well as that of Oregon in the Northwest.

CHAPTER VI

DEBATE IN THE THIRTIETH CONGRESS

The new House of Representatives which met in December, 1847, differed quite widely from the preceding House, especially in its attitude toward the Polk administration. In the old House there had been a majority of sixty for the Democrats, but in the Thirtieth Congress the Democrats were a minority by eight. According to Webster, this alignment was an authentic expression of the feeling of the people with regard to the Mexican War. The House embodied this sentiment in a resolution condemning the war as "unnecessarily and unconstitutionally begun by the President of the United States."¹

The gravity of the issues to be faced by the members of this Congress was apparent to the editors of religious papers. Some indicated this through a call to pray for the members as they assembled to discuss "questions of the gravest character, and momentous in their consequences, to us, and to our children."² Another call to prayer was more specific. "The present state of our nation demands the prayers of all God's people, that war may cease, and that those who hold their fellow men in bondage may have a disposition and see a way by which they may let them go free."³

The Southern Baptist shared a similar concern for the seriousness of the hour. "Indeed, everything indicates that the present

¹ Rhodes, History of the United States, Vol. I, p. 91.

² Christian Watchman, November 24, 1847, p. 190.

³ Watchman of the Prairies, December 14, 1847.

session of Congress is to be one of deepest interest, and that its doings may be fruitful in great events. Questions of fearful import and vital consequence, must be discussed and decided upon." At such a time to "trust to the patriotism, and wisdom and diplomacy of our statesmen" was to "lean upon a broken reed."⁴

That the issue of the extension of slavery was to be forced to the center of the arena was obvious to most. All other action, and particularly any relating to the termination of the war with Mexico, was to focus upon this question. The view of the editor of the New York Evangelist was typical of that of many in the North who were determined even to force the issue if necessary.

No appropriation can be made for a treaty of peace, without first adopting or rejecting the Wilmot proviso. No discussion can be had in regard to the objects for which the war is to be prosecuted, or the conditions on which peace is to be granted to the vanquished Mexicans, without involving the question of the expediency or constitutionality of conquering free territory at the expense of the Union, for the sake of converting it by the legislation of Congress, into slave territory.⁵

The forthcoming presidential election was expected to complicate the fate of the Proviso, which was still the rallying point for anti-extension feeling. "The great object with the leaders of both parties will be to get rid of the Wilmot proviso by some evasion, which shall save them at the North without compromising them at the South."⁶ Compromise for such practical results was anathema to most churchmen of the age, and a chief reason for their lack of confidence in parties and politics.

⁴ Southern Baptist, December 8, 1847, p. 322.

⁵ December 2, 1847, p. 190.

⁶ Ibid.

The Watchman of the Prairies of Chicago gave Baptists of the far regions of the Northwest a complete report of Polk's message to Congress on December 7, even though it left no room for editorials or correspondence. The editor felt that there was a strong desire to understand the views of the President on these matters, but his own enthusiasm for the message was less than extravagant. He disdained comment in view of the fact that his own opinion respecting the inexpediency and immorality of the war was already known. He said, "The political reasons by which it is justified the President gives. Our readers must judge for themselves, which ought to influence our nation, the christian and economical principles, which condemn the war, or those in accordance with which it has been waged and is justified."⁷ The editor had previously referred to a speech which Polk had made on the annexation of Texas wherein he had claimed a bloodless achievement without having sought territory by conquest or to impose institutions on a reluctant people. To this editor the inconsistency was obvious.⁸

The question of the acquisition of territory from Mexico was, of course, not yet fully resolved in the early weeks of this session. The usual opinions, as previously expressed, still held with regard to the war itself. An additional factor by now was the weariness resulting from its prolongation. It was regarded as a national calamity along with every other kind of strife by a pro-Southern newspaper.⁹ A border state paper considered the war yet

⁷ December 21, 1847.

⁸ November 30, 1847.

⁹ Christian Observer, December 3, 1847, p. 194.

justified insofar as it entailed a defense of national rights. But, the editor of the Baptist Banner stated, "We are opposed to all war for conquest or reprisals, (except so far as reprisals may be considered essential for self defence). We are therefore utterly opposed to the acquisition of a single foot of Mexican Territory by conquest or by way of reprisals or indemnity for the war." Exception was made, however, if Mexico voluntarily wished to offer territory as indemnity in lieu of money, but it was not to be forced from her.¹⁰

The New York Evangelist had a different slant on the matter. Its editor did not expect the war to end without such an acquisition of territory, although he conceded that it would be commendable if it did. It would dispose of the ugly question of the Wilmot Proviso, but even so the issue of extension could not be permanently evaded. He then urged all who did not want to see the United States acquire territory under those circumstances to "give their voices and votes for the Wilmot proviso. Let the Wilmot proviso be adopted by the whole vote of the free States in both houses of Congress, and within ninety days we shall have a treaty of peace with no acquisition of territory."¹¹

Thus sure was he of the designs of the South and of its power. He favored taking this territory, however, because Mexico, in her feeble condition, would present an open invitation to wild and disorderly elements including "slavers." Paralleling what Texas had done, they would then win their independence and request

¹⁰ December 9, 1847, p. 194.

¹¹ December 16, 1847, p. 198.

admission to the Union. "Thus the game that has been played once, may be played over and over again; and the extension of slavery southward may be continued indefinitely."¹²

In spite of considering the subject a non-religious one, the Georgia Christian Index could not withhold its disapproval from the conduct of Congress as debate dragged on.

Our members in Congress appear to have assembled for little else than to carry on a political partizan [sic] warfare against each other. A number of resolutions have already been introduced in reference to the Mexican war and slavery, with no other view, that we can see, than to test the strength of parties.¹³

He advised Christians to withdraw as much as possible from such morally debilitating warfare.

On January 4, 1848, Calhoun spoke to Congress in opposition to the continuation of the war and the continued occupation of central Mexico. The editor of the Northern Advocate refused to accept, at face value, Calhoun's stated motives for assuming this position. The editor offered as the real motive, Calhoun's fear that freedom would likely triumph in the new territories. The editor did not share the belief he imputed to Calhoun. "It were to be wished there was more cause for his apprehensions than I fear really exists, for politicians have seldom acted with reference to the lofty principles of humanity, when those principles have come in conflict with their political ends."¹⁴

The news of a treaty and its ratification in the Senate and

¹² New York Evangelist, December 30, 1847, p. 206.

¹³ January 20, 1848, p. 23.

¹⁴ January 19, 1848, p. 166.

eventually by Mexico was received with pleasure and enthusiasm in all sections of the nation.¹⁵ The occasion was used by some to again pronounce against war as they expressed their relief at its end. Editor Lee of the Richmond Advocate, contrary to some earlier sentiment which he expressed when he seemed concerned about more specific aspects of it, felt that it had been productive of much evil to his own country. He could see not one element of good in it and he declared that it was not possible to "repair the evils of this war."¹⁶ The Christian Index of Georgia was relieved that the carnage of the war was over, the editor retreating just long enough from his fear of being identified with a feeling for either party, to rejoice that the treaty had been ratified by Mexico.¹⁷

There were, however, many who could pause but briefly to note the war's end, then must move on to the question of slavery extension. Such was the New York Evangelist. This paper assumed that the territory acquired by the treaty was free until Congress legalized slavery there. The question would necessarily come up, "and we have all the hope," the editor said, "of a growing hostility to slavery among the people of the North, of party exigencies, and of the claims of conscience and truth, that a righteous decision will be reached."¹⁸ According to the members of the Athens Presbytery of Ohio, the war itself had been abhorrent to their own feelings and an injustice to the Mexicans. But their principal concern was

15 Southern Baptist, March 29, 1848, p. 394; Northern Advocate, March 15, 1848, p. 199; Religious Herald, March 16, 1848, p. 43.

16 March 9, 1848, p. 38.

17 June 15, 1848, p. 189.

18 March 16, 1848, p. 42.

expressed in a resolution abhorring "the acquisition of free Mexican territory for the purpose of establishing slavery therein, and we do hereby express our entire disapprobation of any such measure."¹⁹

The day before the Senate received the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, John Q. Adams, long a key figure in Congressional debate on slavery, was stricken at his Senate desk and was soon dead. It was always the custom of the religious press, upon the death of a prominent figure in government, to eulogize him respectfully and, if so disposed, in glowing terms. Adams received much of this kind of tribute from that part of the press which was strongly anti-slavery. His incorruptibility and his championship of unpopular causes caused the editor of the Watchman of the Valley to remind church functionaries that they could learn from him.²⁰

Even in the South more than the routine respect showed in some instances. The mild Religious Herald of Richmond recognized his eccentricities but these were "readily overlooked when contrasted with his great excellencies. . . . When he erred it was from a decided conviction of the propriety of his course."²¹ This was a quality respected throughout the churches.

The individual who succeeded Adams, Horace Mann, commended himself to those who venerated Adams. The New York Evangelist was impressed with Mann's deportment in his letter of acceptance. His discussion of "grave matters of political and moral interest" was "worthy of his fame, and his relation with the Puritan character."²²

¹⁹ Watchman of the Valley, May 4, 1848, p. 121.

²⁰ March 9, 1848, p. 94.

²¹ March 2, 1848.

²² March 30, 1848, p. 49.

For the Zion's Herald, Horace Mann's debut in Congress on the subject of slavery was one more of the blows which was causing the foundations of slavery to tremble. There was, however, no endorsement of Mann's party. It was enough that he opposed American slavery.²³ The editor of the Watchman of the Prairies of Chicago declared that Mann was equal to the best in the nation and in many respects not excelled even by Adams. His enthusiasm prompted him to say that "the United States will be laid under renewed obligations to Massachusetts for the salutary influence she exerts on national councils."²⁴

The war was over, but the issues which it raised were now further intensified and the "great" question, the inevitable question of whether the new territories were to be slave or free, remained to inflame the emotions of an already disturbed public. The Thirtieth Congress was not destined to settle the issues beyond the ratification of the treaty. It did admit Wisconsin into the Union and it did organize the Oregon Territory. It was not long before the questions of the Oregon Territory and the territories in the Southwest were interwoven.

With the compromise settlement by treaty in July, 1846, of the long-standing dispute with England over the Oregon boundary, this area became artificially involved in the question of slavery extension. It was evident that Oregon was not adapted to the institution of slavery, nor did its people want it, their provisional government having provided for its exclusion. Both North and

²³ July 12, 1848, p. 110.

²⁴ March 28, 1848.

South, however, chose to use the occasion to assert their sectional principles. Senator Hale of New Hampshire proposed to apply specifically to Oregon the anti-slavery clause of the Ordinance of 1787 in spite of the obvious barriers to slavery already in existence there. The South, on the other hand, contended against the efforts to prohibit slavery in the area. To overcome the delay in Congress occasioned by this wrangling, Polk proposed the extension to the Pacific of the Missouri Compromise line.

The editor of the Northern Advocate of Auburn, New York, was disturbed by the tendency of so many to want to avoid discussing the issue on the basis of Senator Hale's proposal. It seemed to him that Hale was one of the very few who manfully defended the principle of free territory during this debate. The Advocate defended the necessity for thus dealing with the issue on the basis that the South, by successfully establishing the principle that Congress had no right to prohibit slavery in Oregon, would automatically open the door for carrying slavery into the new territories of the Southwest.²⁵

The Boston Reflector and Watchman objected strenuously to the boldness of the slave power in trying to abolish freedom in Oregon when the local law ruled slavery out. Its editor was convinced that this move represented a fixed plan to increase and perpetuate slavery.²⁶ A Chicago journal also interpreted this attempt by Southern statesmen as a part of "a fixed purpose on the part of these members not to extend the area of freedom, but the dominion

²⁵ June 14, 1848, p. 43.

²⁶ July 27, 1848, p. 118.

of slavery," and as an indication of Southern love for despotism. The editor also challenged the sincerity of the South in view of previous excuses to the effect that the system had been "entailed on them by their ancestors."²⁷

The New York Evangelist attacked Calhoun, the chief exponent of the Southern position on slavery extension doctrines. "His grand principle . . . by which his interpretation is guided seems to be, that whatever act or policy is favorable to human freedom, is unconstitutional, and that the General Government has no other legitimate end than the security, permanence and propagation of slavery."²⁸ The editor reviewed carefully the compromises of the Constitution which pertained to slavery whereupon he asked, "Which of these compromises is it that requires Congress to establish slavery, or to permit its establishment, upon soil already free, which the Union may acquire by purchase or by conquest?" He apologized for giving so much attention to the subject but with the question verging toward decision he felt no question of "morals, or philanthropy, or theology, . . . of more momentous significance."²⁹

Almost as these words were being written, the Senate turned to the method of compromise in dealing with the issue of slavery extension. A special committee of eight, two Northern and two Southern members from each party, with Clayton of Delaware as chairman, was given the responsibility to offer a measure covering all the questions relating to the extension of slavery. The committee

²⁷ Watchman of the Prairies, June 20, 1848.

²⁸ July 6, 1848, p. 106.

²⁹ July 13, 1848, p. 110.

reported a bill which passed the Senate on July 27, 1848. The bill approved the provisional laws of Oregon, which excluded slavery subject to later action by the territorial legislature. The bill prohibited the legislatures of the territories of New Mexico and California from taking action relating to slavery. The question was to be handled instead by the territorial courts with provision for appeals to the Supreme Court. In effect, this placed the decision on the expansion of slavery in the territories in the hands of the Court.

Before this proposal had come up, the editor of the Watchman of the Prairies of Chicago reviewed the earlier compromises between North and South and concluded that the question of extension at this time offered another chance for compromise. He thought that Polk's proposal to extend the compromise line would be accepted and was not hostile toward it as long as territories south of the line could choose for themselves.³⁰ The Chicago editor's reception of the Clayton Compromise was, however, not quite so passive. After outlining the procedure and the details of the committee's recommendations, he said: "If this bill is carried, in its present form, it will be one of the greatest conquests which the friends of Slavery have ever achieved in Congress." Before the issue got off the press, however, he was able to insert the "cheery" news of the bill's defeat.³¹

To the editor of the Northern Advocate, the very movement in the direction of compromise was "ominous of evil to the true

³⁰ July 11, 1848.

³¹ August 1, 1848.

friends of freedom and free territory." He found a large number of Northern Senators who were in favor of the extension of slavery and who would sanction this "pretended" compromise giving to slavery the whole of the territory ceded by Mexico. He complained of the lack of unity in the North on the subject of slavery which was in sharp contrast to the unanimity of the South on the question.³² His specific complaint against the proposed compromise was that it placed power in the hands of the slaveholding President who appointed the judges and governors of territories.³³

The editor of the Boston Reflector and Watchman saw the question as beyond the range of compromise. Instead it was "a question of principle. The slave system is at war with the laws of God and the inalienable rights of man; and he who believes this must do violence to his own conscience, if he in any way sanctions its extension to a realm where it does not exist."³⁴ The New York Evangelist labelled the compromise "a cowardly attempt to evade responsibility" in view of the fact that Congress, not the judicial branch, clearly had authority in the matter. "And," the editor added, "of all the methods of evading responsibility, the Clayton Compromise seems to us to be, upon consideration, the most unmanly."³⁵

The papers of the South were largely content to describe the proposal more or less factually with stress upon its potential value in eliminating the tensions associated with the discussion

³² Northern Advocate, July 19, 1848, p. 62.

³³ July 26, 1848, p. 67.

³⁴ July 27, 1848, p. 118.

³⁵ August 3, 1848, p. 122.

of the "distracting" question.³⁶ The emphasis upon the use of constitutional agencies appealed to one Southern editor. In his view Clayton's proposal to let the Constitution work by its "own tranquil operation" offered to those who would rail at any settlement the opportunity "to vent their indignation against their ancestors who adopted it."³⁷

Although the Senate adopted the Clayton Compromise, the House tabled the measure at once and passed its own bill for organizing the territory of Oregon with slavery excluded. The Senate finally passed the bill in this form on August 13, 1848. The Northern Advocate hailed the defeat of the compromise bill with joy and its editor expected it to be so hailed throughout the North. He stressed the anomaly of slavery in a model republic and declared his belief that

so long as it is tolerated it will be a fruitful source of discord, endangering our political existence and blighting the prosperity of the States where it prevails. . . . The extension of slavery . . . by a model republic, in the nineteenth century, is an evil and a disgrace scarcely to be conceived, and certainly not endured.³⁸

In the South, the occasionally severe inhibition upon the religious press in political matters was operative at the time of the defeat of the Clayton Compromise. When the Baptist Banner published a speech favorable to the compromise by Kentucky Senator J. R. Underwood, the editor did so because he felt that the people should be informed about their Senator's views and that Mr. Underwood himself had a right to be heard. The necessity for such information

³⁶ Religious Herald, August 3, 1848, p. 122.

³⁷ Southern Advocate, July 28, 1848, p. 31.

³⁸ August 2, 1848, p. 70.

existed "especially because we apprehend the time is not far off when these subjects will stir the nation to its heart, and at such a time the good people of this commonwealth ought to know where they can find a man they can trust."³⁹ The editor of the Georgia Christian Index noted the publication of the speech and the editor's protests "against being regarded as having, in any way, taken part with either of the political parties."⁴⁰

Of course, the religious press of the North was as delighted by the organization of the Oregon Territory with the principle of the Ordinance of 1787 as a condition, as it had been at the defeat of the compromise. The editor of the Chicago Watchman of the Prairies hailed it as "the most important victory which Congress has ever achieved in behalf of liberty since 1787." It was to him the victory of an aroused public sentiment and the noble struggle of friends of freedom in Congress. It also marked a victory over the restraint imposed on free discussion in Congress by the fear of the dissolution of the Union. He was sure that the subject would not cease to be heard in Congress until slavery no longer existed within the jurisdiction of the national government.⁴¹

The New York Evangelist stressed the element of defeat for Southern views and for the men who had sought to purchase slavery for California with a free Oregon as the price. It was "one more precedent, complete and clear, against the new-light dogma of certain Southern statesmen, who have discovered that Congress has no power to provide for the establishment of universal freedom."⁴²

³⁹ Baptist Banner, August 30, 1848.

⁴⁰ September 21, 1848, p. 302.

⁴¹ Watchman of the Prairies, August 29, 1848.

⁴² August 24, 1848, p. 134.

The editor of the Boston Zion's Herald was another who looked with great enthusiasm upon the agitation in this session of Congress, noting again the breaking up of parties over it. And "even cowards," he said, "will now begin to waive [sic] their hats and shout 'down with it.'" He expected the issue to be settled with finality within twenty years because the "usurpations and corruptions" of slavery were becoming so "loathesome and intolerable to all good men."⁴³

The Boston Reflector and Watchman also welcomed all the discussion which had issued from the topic of slavery in this session of Congress. The editor looked forward, as a result of it, to the exposure of the evils of slavery and the consequent arousing of the country to ring the death knell of slavery.⁴⁴ As was so often true among Northern editors, he either overlooked or accepted the inevitable consequences for the Union, of this posture.

A Washington visitor wrote to the Charleston Southern Baptist in a vein of optimism at the close of this session of Congress, but it was an optimism with a different base than that among Northern editors. He wrote:

I shall go from Washington impressed with the belief that if our Union is preserved unfractured, it will be so under the guidance of Heaven, through the ability, patriotism, and conservative character of the Senate of the United States . . . It is very clear to my mind that there is a great crisis at hand with us, that elements are at work which threaten the downfall of our Republic. For what is disunion but destruction, the beginning of a long line of calamities to both parties concerned. . . . I was glad to hear such a result deprecated on all sides in the Senate Chamber to-day.⁴⁵

⁴³ June 28, 1848, p. 102.

⁴⁴ August 3, 1848, p. 122.

⁴⁵ Quoted in the Biblical Recorder, September 2, 1848.

Preparation for and conduct of the 1848 political campaign, coincided in part with this first session of the Thirtieth Congress. The issue of slavery extension, combined with intra-party power struggles, produced a third party movement in the Free Soil Party of the North. The Barnburner Democrats of New York, moved more by hostility toward Lewis Cass, the Democratic nominee, than by anti-slavery principles, bolted and nominated Martin Van Buren of New York. Cass was also in disfavor among anti-slavery democrats because of his support of squatter sovereignty and his bid for Southern support. Taylor, the Whig nominee, was a slaveholder and, as such, mistrusted by some Northern or "conscience" Whigs.

The Democratic platform endorsed the view that Congress had no power to interfere with the domestic institutions of the states. Neither the Democrats nor the Whigs offered a specific doctrine with regard to slavery in the territories. It was natural for the disgruntled Democrats and Whigs to meet on the common ground of the Proviso and unite with the Liberty Party which they did in convention at Buffalo on August 9, 1848. The nominee of the Free Soil Party was Van Buren, who had bolted his party for political reasons. He won over Hale, who had bolted for reasons of conscience. Charles Francis Adams was the vice-presidential nominee. The platform disavowed any intention of interfering with slavery where it existed, but declared for a policy of discouragement and limitation.

The religious press reacted to these nominations and to the campaign in a variety of ways. In the South, especially, editors pointed out the dangers to Christians which were inherent in the

political campaign itself. The young were warned against the evil impulses and examples to which they would be exposed by the "giddy multitude of the world."⁴⁶

Christians were not to sacrifice their better feelings by being brought into the "current of party excitement" or by lending their "influence to the entertainment of popular meetings, whose object and tendency are, not to convince the reason, but to arouse the passions."⁴⁷ A broad threat to Christian devotion was seen in "counter excitements, the stir and vehemence of party issues, the absorption of the attention, the neglect of private prayer," all of which results were liable to follow when one permitted himself to be drawn into the "maelstrom suck of party-politics."⁴⁸

These were only warnings, however, and they were not intended to discourage voting or even overt political action. "Our objection," said the Southern Baptist, "is not to the entertaining and acting upon, in a spirit of moderation and forbearance, known and fixed political opinions."⁴⁹ The Baptist Banner stated that it was the Christian's duty and privilege to vote for the man he esteemed "best qualified to serve his country and preserve its constitution."⁵⁰

On occasion, Northern editors also offered counsel in regard to Christian conduct during political campaigns. The Watchman of the Prairies identified misrepresentation, bustle, and intrigue as

⁴⁶ Baptist Banner, June 21, 1848.

⁴⁷ Southern Baptist, June 21, 1848, p. 442.

⁴⁸ Southern Christian Advocate, July 14, 1848, p. 22.

⁴⁹ June 21, 1848, p. 442.

⁵⁰ June 21, 1848.

evils of partisan warfare. In view of this, two extremes were to be avoided:

The one is that of those who will turn the sabbath into a day of political conversation, read political newspapers instead of religious, and show more interest in attending a caucus, than a prayer meeting. . . . The other is of neglecting to take any part in the government of his country, and leave it to the control of partizans [sic] and unprincipled men.⁵¹

The editor saw further dangers of the political campaign in the destruction of the moral sense of the community, its rendering it difficult to know the true qualities of candidates, and the weakening of respect for public officers. The only remedy was a proper sense of responsibility to God since "men will be called to account for their violation of the claims of conscience, not in parties, but as individuals."⁵²

In spite of such dangers, some elements of the religious press of the Northwest showed much interest in the presidential election as it related to Free Soil doctrines. Early in 1848 the Watchman of the Prairies began to comment on the party alignments and possibilities. The bearing of Taylor's military career upon his charm for North and South alike drew a wry comment from the editor of the Watchman. "Others think it no evidence of statesmanship or qualifications for the presidency that a man can fight." But Taylor's attraction to the South was partly due to the fact that he was a slaveholder. The editor noted also that Cass had attempted to make himself acceptable to the South by opposing the Proviso. The net result was that "the candidates thus far contemplated by the

⁵¹ Watchman of the Prairies, June 27, 1848.

⁵² Ibid., September 5, 1848.

parties are southern men or those who seek southern favor."⁵³

The editor of the Watchman took more than a casual interest in Liberty and Free Soil movements. The paper carried many notices and comments on their meetings without any specific endorsement of parties. The editor did say that no man was more worthy of his party's confidence and few more competent to carry out its measures than Owen Lovejoy, Liberty nominee for Congress from Illinois.⁵⁴ He also noted the divided interest of the Democrats at a meeting in Chicago when, after an adjournment and reorganization, action favorable to the Proviso was taken. He found it a hopeful aspect of the times that fewer and fewer of any party in the North favored the extension of slavery.⁵⁵

After the Whigs and Democrats had made their choices of Taylor and Cass, the editor of this Chicago paper said, "In General Taylor the nation will have a Southern man with Southern principles, while in General Cass we have a Northern man with Southern principles." He identified the controlling principles in the nomination of Taylor as popularity and availability. These choices led him to believe that many Whigs and Democrats in the North would vote for neither and he announced the meeting of Ohio citizens to "nominate a man with northern principles to be supported by men of both parties." It was to this meeting that dissenters looked for the calling of a Free Soil convention.⁵⁶

When the editor of the Watchman of the Prairies discussed the

⁵³ Watchman of the Prairies, February 8, 1848.

⁵⁴ February 15, 1848.

⁵⁵ February 29, 1848.

⁵⁶ June 13, 1848.

results of the Buffalo convention of the Free Soil Party, he disavowed allegiance to any political party, apparently feeling that some need existed for him to do so. He firmly endorsed the principles of the party, principles which he believed would survive and relieve the nation of the oppression of slavery whether the candidates were successful or not.⁵⁷

The Watchman of the Valley, a New School paper of Cincinnati, entered the political contest with an even more partisan interest. From the beginning the editor looked with favor upon the Van Buren nomination and the support it received from those papers which declined to "hoist the Taylor flag." The editor took the abuse Van Buren received from the Cass faction, the slaveholders, and the Whigs as a mark of the importance of the nomination. He asked all "Christians to look with unprejudiced vision at the fearful crisis" and to "merge every minor political consideration in this paramount one of saving our country, at this last opportunity, from the perpetual domination of slavery."⁵⁸

The South had been able, he thought, to direct both nominations for the presidency because of their "paramount regard for the one issue" and with the aid of the subserviency of the North. He again urged the North to present a united front, which he was sure its people would do if they could know how to vote to defeat slavery extension. For him, the choice was between Taylor and Van Buren. To help the voters make up their minds he gave pro and con

⁵⁷ Watchman of the Prairies, August 29, 1848.

⁵⁸ July 27, 1848, p. 124.

testimonials in regard to Taylor's position.⁵⁹ He was then accused of partiality for not mentioning Cass. He had left him out, he said, because he knew Cass would oppose restrictions on slavery extension and Taylor was at worst an unknown quantity. Neutrality he would not accept any more than party. His religious convictions compelled him to take a position on the basis of what was "morally true and right," which was, for him, precisely the challenge in the crisis over slavery.⁶⁰

Finally, on the eve of the election, the editor of the Watchman of the Valley frankly endorsed the Free Soil Party. He did not look for victory for the party in a single state, but that was not the party's destiny.

It has a higher service to perform for the nation than to give it a President. It is principles, not men, which it promises to give; and the success which has already crowned its patriotic work, in this department, its friends may well contemplate with benevolent satisfaction. Give the party the privilege of saving the nation, and others may have the pleasure of ruling it.⁶¹

Zion's Herald showed much interest in the third party movement also. The editor thought the election might result in the "entire subversion of the two prominent parties." The dissension manifest by the existence of the Barnburners and the Conscience-Whigs gave this prospect substance for him. He observed further that, "Could a suitable candidate be proposed who would represent the anti-slavery sentiment of the North, and on whom these dissentient portions could unite, he would poll a very large vote, and might possibly sweep the free States, and thus gain the election."⁶²

59 The Watchman of the Valley, August 10, 1848, p. 182.

60 September 28, 1848, p. 2.

61 November 2, 1848, p. 22.

62 July 12, 1848, p. 111.

Although the Herald never endorsed the party or its leadership openly, it seemed to the editor of the Georgia Christian Index that it had departed from the neutrality appropriate to a religious paper to advocate the views of the "Free Soil or Abolition party." This was a noticeable departure from the "brotherly, christian spirit towards the South" that he had been accustomed to seeing in the Herald.⁶³

The Western Christian Advocate experienced a change of editorship just after the election. As did his predecessor, the new editor refrained from expressing preference for men or parties contending only for principles which were directly moral. The single question of moral bearing in the election was the extension of slavery. Neither of the two great parties, in his opinion, rose to this challenge and the Free Soil Party carried away the honors with results at that time still doubtful.⁶⁴

The Southern editors were generally silent about the specific developments in party politics, but the Southern Advocate carried news of the Buffalo Convention labeled by the editor, "The Abolition Convention." In addition to mere reporting he added, "There has been a good deal of bluster, and some passion, but nothing definite. The colored delegates did not present their credentials."⁶⁵

Even before the election was over, attention began to focus on the second session of the Thirtieth Congress, where more and more the issue of slavery extension posed a threat to the Union. Well

63 Christian Index, October 5, 1848, p. 317.

64 November 15, 1848, p. 126.

65 August 18, 1848, p. 43.

in advance of the session, the discussion in the church press reflected a concern over this threat. In September and October of 1848 the New York Evangelist discussed the implications for the future of the Union, of insistence upon the exclusion of slavery from the new territories. Disunion, in the editor's view, was a Southern invention to gain privilege by terrifying the North. He then declared his complete confidence that the Union could not be broken.

The Union of these United States does not depend for its existence upon the personal consent of Mr. John C. Calhoun, or any of his particular friends. The existence of the Union does not depend on a popular vote in the State of South Carolina. That State is not now to be negotiated into the Union by concessions to her pride, her avarice, or her passion for slavery. South Carolina is in the Union, and there is no way for her to go out of the Union, or to be put out of it. . . . There is no power on earth, that as things now are, can tear these States asunder.⁶⁶

The Evangelist, in addition to objecting to allowing slavery to expand merely to pacify the South, objected as emphatically to the idea of extension in the interest of justice. The argument which its editor sought to counter, was to the effect that the South must share equally in the benefits of the territories acquired at the expense of all. The editor contended that each territory should receive the laws and institutions for the "benefits of its own population, present and prospective." True justice to the South, peopled mostly by poor whites, would consist of removing from these same poor whites the "foul temptation" to mortgage their property to get slaves.⁶⁷

He justified the insistence upon the Wilmot Proviso on the basis that, at worst, it would be a needless precaution, but he

⁶⁶ September 7, 1848, p. 142.

⁶⁷ October 5, 1848, p. 158.

cited an 1847 decision of the Missouri Supreme Court to indicate the need for such an express prohibition. The effect of the decision was that slavery could exist without positive law and that its existence presumed its legality.⁶⁸ When the petition from New Mexico asking for territorial status without slavery was publicized, he expressed himself thus: "We do not believe that even to please the South, that body will assume such a monstrous attitude before the civilized world as to force slavery upon an unwilling people." At the same time he noticed the prevailing temper in California along the same line.⁶⁹

As Congress convened for its essentially fruitless session the Reflector and Watchman identified the nature and importance of the struggle thus: "A great moral battle between the Slave-power and Freedom is to be waged, and the issue must give color and complexion to our history for generations to come." In this editor's opinion the South had become increasingly aggressive and through political finesse and cunning statesmanship had deliberately sought "new and wide fields for the extension of its dark and gloomy realm."⁷⁰ This interpretation could not find support from the columns of at least one Southern paper whose editor feared the result of the national system of expansion in the weakening of the national tie. To destroy or mar that tie would, in his view, "result in injury to the moral as well as the social interests of the land."⁷¹

⁶⁸ New York Evangelist, October 12, 1848, p. 162.

⁶⁹ December 7, 1848, p. 194.

⁷⁰ December 14, 1848, p. 198.

⁷¹ Presbyterian Herald, December 14, 1848.

Polk, in his message to this session of Congress, recommended the organization of territorial governments for New Mexico and California and repeated his suggestion to extend the Compromise line to the Pacific. Various proposals were introduced in both Houses for the organization of the territories, but no one proposal received endorsement. During the session, the question of slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia came up in the form of the Gott Resolution asking for a prohibition on the slave trade in the District. This prompted the meeting of the Southern members of Congress under the guiding genius of Calhoun. The group eventually issued an address to their constituents dwelling upon Northern injustice to the South in regard to fugitive slaves, respect for the Missouri Compromise line, and refusal to the South of a share in the Mexican session. These events generated considerable excitement in both sections.

The editor of the Religious Herald reported without comment the territorial bills introduced by Senator Douglas and the petition of New Mexico requesting protection from slavery.⁷² At this point the religious press throughout the South was relatively quiet, awaiting further provocation, which it was to receive in liberal amounts from the North.

Zion's Herald of Boston, for instance, described the sensation of joy throughout the North upon news of the reception of the petition from New Mexico. This was expected to make it practically impossible to extend "the black curse" into these areas. The

⁷² December 21, 1848, p. 203.

editor wrote:

What a spectacle, to behold a great body of enlightened, not to say Christian Legislators, deliberating in the nineteenth century how they may propagate over the continent the abomination of human slavery! or, at least, how, by a compromise, they may partially extend it. What must be the moral sense of such men!"

Tacit sanction of the earlier compromise with slavery within the limits where it already existed did not for him imply the least sanction for its extension. "It remained for the nefarious Calhounism of this day to propose the abominable idea."⁷³

The Watchman of the Prairies of Chicago expressed wonder at Calhoun's reaction to the petition from New Mexico, echoing much the same sentiment as the Herald. The editor regarded Calhoun's insistence upon extending slavery into an area against the will of the inhabitants as an anomaly at a time "when the doors of tyranny are being thrown open, and the oppressed are going free."⁷⁴

The Boston Watchman and Reflector at this point observed simply, without predicting the outcome, that the crisis involved whether the national government would be the patron of slavery or liberty in the territories, and at the capitol.⁷⁵ This is the Reflector and Watchman which carried this title for a few months after the absorption of the Watchman by the Reflector. The editor of Zion's Herald was very optimistic about the outcome in view of the fact that a moral revolution was making itself felt, destined eventually to abolish slavery by peaceful means.⁷⁶ William Hosmer,

⁷³ Zion's Herald, December 27, 1848, p. 106.

⁷⁴ Watchman of the Prairies, January 16, 1849.

⁷⁵ January 4, 1849, p. 2.

⁷⁶ January 17, 1849, p. 10.

editor of the Northern Advocate, was uncertain of the outcome, but was pleased that the subject was at last fairly admitted to Congress. "The operation of gag laws could not keep it out, the extreme dread of the south to touch the subject, the persevering neglect of the north to give consequence to antislavery movements, could not check the progress of sentiment, nor prevent its approach to the Capitol." Congress could no longer avoid the subject if it would.⁷⁷

The Watchman and Reflector had overcome some of its uncertainty of the month before and joined those who were optimistic. At a time when sixteen states had declared against extension through their legislatures, the South was not united and this was a reversal of an alignment of long standing. In fact, this editor viewed the position of Calhoun as an effort to conjure up a crisis to unite the South.⁷⁸

The typically mild Religious Herald of Richmond expressed distress over the difficulties inherited with the territories including the interruption of the harmony of the Union and the trials and difficulties of those who succumbed to "gold fever." He said wistfully, "We trust that the cloud which now lowers over us, may be dispelled, and that for ages to come we may continue to bear and forbear, avoid sectional differences, and remain an united, happy and prosperous people."⁷⁹

The Louisville Presbyterian Herald, still restrained by indecision, in regard to the propriety of discussing the subject, noted

⁷⁷ January 17, 1849, p. 166.

⁷⁸ February 1, 1849, p. 18.

⁷⁹ January 4, 1849, p. 3.

that, in his political and religious exchanges, there was an increasing tendency to calculate the value of the Union. He expressed a firm belief, however, in the survival of the Union "even if New England and South Carolina could be brought up to the sticking point," a possibility he considered remote. He located the force that would bind the Union together in the "great West" which was able to "swallow them both up and not feel it." The Mississippi Valley was to be the great bulwark of the Union, where Northern and Southern interests coincided and where there was a comingling of their people.⁸⁰

The Georgia Christian Index quoted the New York Observer in connection with the strength of Northern feeling at this time. In the view of the Observer about nine tenths of the North was inflexibly opposed to extension and many leading men were so opposed that they were prepared to dissolve the Union. The writer opposed this feeling but he thought the South should know of its existence, after which the two sections should sit together and discuss just how mutually important the Union was.⁸¹

The same editor cited the plea of the Southern Presbyterian in behalf of the preservation of the Union for the sake of all sections. This paper, nevertheless, asserted the rectitude of the Southern position, citing the fact that God gave no free soil proclamation when the Hebrews invaded Canaan. The South had a full right to expect the protection of their right to slavery in the territories, when the territories had been acquired at the "expense

⁸⁰ Presbyterian Herald, January 25, 1849.

⁸¹ Quoted in Christian Index, February 8, 1849, p. 41.

of common blood." The question of the common rights to territories had long been settled. "All that now remains, is, to ascertain the proper quota of each section, and define the lines of demarcation. This surely need not in any sense endanger the union."⁸²

The editor of the Nashville Advocate broke the usual silence of his paper on the subject to comment on the excitement in Congress. He said,

The abolitionists in Congress appear stubbornly determined to carry out their purpose, cost what it may; and the Southern members are resolved to resist every unconstitutional encroachment. . . . The results of these oft repeated and heated discussions, we apprehend, will be fearful. It is surprising that men who profess to love their country, and to glory in the Union of the States of this vast Republic, would so wantonly and in violation of the constitution and state-rights, strike at the basis of that Union. But there is no accounting for fanaticism and run-mad politicians.⁸³

He adjudged the people of the South entirely competent to act for themselves and to manage the question ably without the "intermeddling of those who have no particular interest in the matter."⁸⁴

Zion's Herald of Boston quoted all this in full and denied the possibility of "free and manly discussion" leading to the dissolution of the Union. The editor also denied that the matter was of purely local concern as the Nashville editor had inferred. "It is not with the interests of the South," he said, "but with the common interests of our country, and with her own rights and constitutional immunities, that the North is 'intermeddling'. . . . Light is increasing and spreading, the Republic will not be perilled, but slavery must die."⁸⁵ The Herald warned of the fate

⁸² Quoted in the Christian Index, February 8, 1849, p. 41.

⁸³ January 26, 1849.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ February 14, 1849, p. 26.

of the South if there were disunion. There would be little enough hope for the North, "but what shadow of hope would there be for the South in such an exigency? With millions of slaves within it, and the hostility of the world without, it would dissolve and perish forthwith."⁸⁶

Of all the specific items dealt with in this session, the Gott Resolution received the most attention. Hosmer of the Northern Advocate expressed uncertainty over the result of the Southern caucus, provoked by this resolution. In spite of his uncertainty in this matter, he continued to expect that the slave trade and slavery would soon disappear from the District on the rising tide of anti-slavery sentiment.⁸⁷ The Georgia Christian Index gave a detailed notice of the Southern caucus and those who attended. The editor stated that the object of the meeting was "to unite the South in measures for their defence from Northern abolitionism, which has now come to a crisis in legislation."⁸⁸ The Biblical Recorder of North Carolina counselled special deliberation, on the part of Southern men, urging them to attempt nothing that could be construed as rashness since nothing could better suit the "agitators and disorganizers" behind the proceedings in Congress. He did, however, urge firmness and unity in the South.⁸⁹

When news of the action of the meeting of Southern Congressmen reached the editor of the New York Evangelist, he scoffed at any plan to form a confederacy of the South, questioning that it

⁸⁶ Zion's Herald, February 14, 1849, pp. 26, 27.

⁸⁷ January 3, 1849, p. 159.

⁸⁸ January 4, 1849, p. 2.

⁸⁹ January 6, 1849.

was proposed seriously. He had this to say: "'A Southern Confederacy' is a good theme for eloquent declamation; it may even be adroitly worked up for party purposes, but we deem it just as impracticable as the construction of a railroad to the moon." He disavowed any desire to see the Union severed, much as he deprecated slavery.⁹⁰

Gott's Resolution was originally adopted December 21, 1848, by a 98 to 88 vote, but on January 10, 1849, it was reconsidered and the bill died. This brought distress to the editor of the Watchman of the Valley who saw all hopes dashed by this parliamentary maneuver. "Posterity will be amazed," he said, "to learn that the slave trade was once carried on at the metropolis of our boasted land of freedom."⁹¹

The Southern Address issued by Calhoun and the Southern members of Congress was itself the occasion for some of the most heated controversy. The Southern Baptist of Charleston gave the entire front page to its publication because the editor felt that his readers would be pleased to read it even though being deprived of material of a more religious nature.⁹² This is all he had to say at the time, but under provocation he chided the New York Recorder for dabbling in politics when the paper featured a series of letters to Mr. Calhoun criticizing the Southern Address. "Perhaps it would be well to attend to the religious questions," he said, "and refrain from travelling a distance to find something to comment on

⁹⁰ New York Evangelist, January 18, 1849, p. 10.

⁹¹ February 1, 1849, p. 74.

⁹² February 14, 1849, p. 578.

in the regions of politics."⁹³

The Biblical Recorder of Raleigh also took issue with this series of letters on the same basis, stating that the question was in fact "whether Congress should, or should not, interfere for arresting the progress of slavery. How any question could be more effectively secularized, and thereby placed beyond the province of religious journals, we think it is difficult to decide." As to slavery in the territories, the editor adopted the principle of popular sovereignty contending that the question belonged to the people of the territories and not to Congress.⁹⁴

The Charleston Southern Baptist's restraint was broken to an even greater extent than it had been earlier, when the Boston paper of his denomination, the Watchman and Reflector, showed contempt for South Carolina and her effort to get a following in the South for her secession views. The Boston editor had used the following language:

The world knows how just are her claims to this sympathy. A fundamental principle of her pure democracy is, that slavery is a blessing and ought to be perpetuated. Strange that the wisdom of nearly a score and a half of free, sovereign and independent States is so dead to the truth of the above principle, and so deaf to her call in the hour of agony. Why, the old Whiskey insurrectionists met with better luck. . . . Yes, South Carolina is permitted to cry in vain for help out of her own boundaries.⁹⁵

The Charleston paper also quoted the Watchman concerning the Fourth of July orations in 1849 in the South:

The dinner sentiments were, perpetual slavery, extension of slavery, no Wilmot Proviso, no Union, and "Down with

⁹³ New York Recorder, February 28, 1849, p. 586.

⁹⁴ April 28, 1849.

⁹⁵ Quoted in the Southern Baptist, July 15, 1849, p. 670.

the North!" We mention this last exhortation that our readers may have a chance to join in the laugh. It is altogether probable that the Union will stand yet a while in spite of South Carolina madmen.⁹⁶

To the Watchman, the editor of the Southern Baptist made this reply:

We copy the following rich specimen of withering contempt from the Watchman and Reflector, a religious (?) paper published at Boston. "Do, Mr. Editor, spare us, we cry enough! We could bear with composure the sneers of a little editor in some petty town or State, but when the mighty representative of Boston, the Athens of America, puts his foot upon our neck, we lie silent and trembling. Boston, "the place of many whites and few blacks" has spoken. . . . The city that owns not a black slave, (thinks white ones better,) calls us "madmen."⁹⁷

Thus did leading ministers of their respective sections speak in crisis.

This minimizing of the efforts of Calhoun's state was a favorite pastime of Northern editors other than that of the Boston paper. The New York Evangelist referred to the excitement Calhoun's efforts used to stir. "But now," according to the editor, "Southern caucuses, slaveholding eloquence, and even the deliberate manifesto, drop unnoticed, and not a pulse beats the quicker for the demonstration." The thought of the withdrawal of the South "conjures up no images of national famine or decay. Fears of disunion disturb nobody; nobody really believes such an event possible--least of all at the bidding of the inconsiderable oligarchy of slaveholders, who speak for and in the name of the South."⁹⁸

The editor of the Boston Zion's Herald also gloated over the

⁹⁶ Quoted in the Southern Baptist, July 15, 1849, p. 670.

⁹⁷ Ibid., July 25, 1849, p. 670.

⁹⁸ February 1, 1849, p. 18.

lack of attention which the Address received. The Union was too valuable to all for such as this to be taken seriously. He felt that the South, in spite of its alleged grievances, faced disaster at the separation of the states. "Let us discuss slavery," he pled, "but keep within the Constitutional provisions respecting it, and assert forever the indissolubility of the country."⁹⁹

The Watchman and Reflector greeted "Mr. Calhoun's Manifesto" as an example of Southern ultraism becoming more aggressive, "high-toned," and extravagant in its claims. Contrary to a belief he imputed to Calhoun, the people of the North would not recede from their position of hostility to slavery and its extension. The motivation, he said,

is a mighty religious sentiment awakened among them which speaks with the voice of authority, and forbids them to become the tools in the hands of the politicians to extend and perpetuate the empire of slavery. In their view, the cause of freedom is the cause of Christianity and of man, the zeal which they cherish for it is kindled at the altar of God, and it is the daily prayer of multitudes that they may not prove faithless to it in its hour of trial.¹⁰⁰

The great majority in the North were by no means interested in violently effacing slavery from the slaveholding states. The District of Columbia, however, was considered common property and slavery there was a special blot on the national honor, reflecting discredit upon the entire nation. The North was, therefore, determined that slavery should be removed from that area. The Watchman and Reflector went to some lengths to declare that the existence of slavery in the states was a state question and not subject to

⁹⁹ Zion's Herald, February 7, 1849, p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ February 15, 1849, p. 26.

national legislation, although subject to free discussion anywhere. But the extension of slavery was a national question to be decided by Congress in behalf of liberty, the Proviso being designed to apply the non-extension principle to California and New Mexico. To get this prohibition, the editor declared, "The people of the North are united. Slavery may live on or die out in the States it now curses; but never will its feet be permitted to desolate a span's breadth of the new territories."¹⁰¹

The Thirtieth Congress had closed in a scene of spectacular disorder. What must have been a frustrating session to all, reached its climax and end early on a Sunday morning in March, 1849, with drunkenness, profanity, and fighting prevailing on all sides. Taking this as one of those aspects of politics which should be treated by the religious press, the Georgia Christian Index protested vigorously.¹⁰² A fellow Baptist of the North protested with equal vigor, partly because the session ran over into the Sabbath. "Thus was night made 'hideous,' and thus," the editor said, "was ushered in the Sabbath by the Representatives of a Christian Republic. The entire scene in language and violence was ruffianly, and deserves the scorn and indignation of all the virtuous in the land."¹⁰³

Editors of the North looked more hopefully to the next Congress. The Watchman of the Valley described the "obstinacy" of the Senate, which had prevented the organization of New Mexico and California and, nearly so, that of Oregon. This was due to the

101 Watchman and Reflector, August 9, 1849, p. 126.

102 March 29, 1849, p. 102.

103 Watchman of the Prairies, April 3, 1849.

Senate's unwillingness to grant "protection to these territories from the curse of slavery." In view of this, the editor said, "How the next Senate will be likely to act on this question, becomes therefore a deeply interesting enquiry. And it is an encouraging fact that the Senatorial changes in the next Congress will be generally in favor of Liberty."¹⁰⁴

The editor of the New York Evangelist had been encouraged by the same observation. He mentioned Salmon P. Chase of Ohio of whom he said, "No public man in the State could better answer the desires of Northern freemen than Mr. Chase." Then, too, William H. Seward as governor of New York had taken a "manly" position which gave "a pledge of fidelity to human rights, which we are glad to accept."¹⁰⁵ Discussing further the personnel of the new Senate, he referred to the instructions given by their state legislatures to Senator Cass of Michigan and Senator Bright of Indiana, as to how they should conduct themselves with regard to Free Soil doctrines.¹⁰⁶

Many of the forecasts of the editors of the religious press proved to be reasonably accurate and demonstrated a degree of acumen in interpreting political trends. The editor of the Boston Zion's Herald, however, could not have been more wrong when he had this to say during the lull in politics in the summer of 1849:

The prospect is that the "Proviso" controversy, so far as it concerns California and New Mexico, will be terminated by the adoption of State constitutions and application for admission to the Union by those territories. . . . The probable termination of the question in this manner ought to

¹⁰⁴ Watchman of the Valley, March 15, 1849, p. 98.

¹⁰⁵ March 1, 1849, p. 34.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

afford universal satisfaction to all parties. It will save much waste of time and temper in Congress, and tend to assuage those rankling sectional jealousies which the controversy has thus far excited. It is indeed another evidence of that good Providence which watches over our national safety, and which has so often made a way of escape for us when the precipice of dissolution seemed alone before us.¹⁰⁷

It awaited only the stormy opening of the Thirty-first Congress to dash such hopes.

¹⁰⁷ Zion's Herald, August 22, 1849, p. 134.

CHAPTER VII

"THE GREAT DEBATE"

With the approach of the Thirty-first Congress, which was to meet in its first session on December 3, 1849, it was more and more apparent that the issue of slavery extension had to be settled. The gold rush of 1849 had, almost overnight, created a population qualifying California for admission as a state, although no territorial government had yet been established. The new President gave encouragement to statehood through Thomas Butler King, acting as his special agent in California. On September first a body of delegates met and, on October 13, signed a constitution which was adopted by the people of California one month later. The constitution contained a clause forever prohibiting slavery in the state, a proposition which had been unanimously adopted by the convention. Officers were chosen under the new constitution and as Congress assembled California stood awaiting admission into the Union. The issue raised by David Wilmot in 1846, which had underscored as well as accentuated sectional differences, would brook no further postponement.

The editor of the Northern Advocate of Auburn, New York, was fully cognizant of this situation. He expected the destiny of slavery to be decided by the Thirty-first Congress, and he apprehended a Southern revolt growing out of the South's desperation in the face of the constant agitation of previous months. Division would be a certainty, he felt, if it were possible without open revolution. He calculated the value of the Union thus:

Be it, however, that our worst fears are realized, and that there is not enough of conservatism in the South, to endure

the impending conflict between essential right and prescriptive wrong, shall the north shrink from its task, rather than meet the shock? Shall it betray humanity at the bidding of mere expediency? Is the Union worth more than three millions of people, and their posterity after them to the end of time? Is it worth more than religion, or justice, or safety, or money? These are questions that must be answered in the affirmative, before threats of dissolution are of any force. Upright men would sacrifice a thousand unions sooner than crush the African race.¹

An editor of the West also anticipated the primacy before Congress of the question of slavery versus freedom in the new territories. He expressed his concern in a call to prayer, as was the custom, but with foregone conclusions as to what the answer should be, i.e., "that all our country which is now free should be kept so; . . . that even where the curse is found it may be removed. Let Christians pray for Congress and entreat of God so to order events, that our Pacific Coast may ever remain unstained by the tears and blood of the slave."²

The issue quickly came to focus upon California. From the time of the discovery of gold there, California had received a great deal of attention from the religious press, North and South. Hardly an issue left the press without news of California, news ranging from mere geographical descriptions and notice of groups leaving from or arriving in the area, to warnings of the dangers inherent in "gold fever."

The Southern Advocate of Charleston anticipated that California would fuse "a new centralization of the nations of the earth-- the beginning of a great American epoch in the history of the world!"

¹ Northern Advocate, November 7, 1849, p. 126.

² Central Christian Herald, November 16, 1849, p. 126.

The editor saw California as the meeting place between Europe and Asia with the Western United States being the "half-way-house" between both sides of the Old World.³ The direction of vision was clearly set toward California in spite of many forebodings about the gold.⁴ It was with great delight that most of the Northern editors received the news of California's action in applying for statehood as a free state. There was one small fly in the ointment, however, for the Central Christian Herald. The constitution excluded free blacks from the state, a provision which the editor expected to be reconsidered since it had passed by a narrow margin.⁵ The editor of the New York Evangelist was pleased that Californians had protested the introduction of slavery into their area. He was yet afraid, however, that the "unfortunate discovery of the gold mines with the moral derangement and mischief" it would be apt to bring, would modify this praiseworthy feeling.⁶

The joy of the editor of the Northern Advocate was quite complete and he expected it to be so for all who had any regard for the colored race. The development did not seem strange to him in view of the character of the emigrants to the area. Most, he observed, came either from free states or from countries abroad where slavery was not allowed.⁷ The editor of the Western Advocate

³ Southern Advocate, May 25, 1849, p. 202.

⁴ Western Advocate, February 14, 1849, p. 26; Southern Baptist, June 27, 1849, p. 656; and Advocate and Journal, February 1, 1849, p. 18.

⁵ December 13, 1849, p. 143.

⁶ December 14, 1848, p. 198.

⁷ November 21, 1849, p. 134.

could not, however, agree that this was the cause of the prohibition. Although this correspondent from California had supported a view similar to that of the Northern Advocate, the editor, probably to justify the prolonged agitation over slavery, insisted that "the discussion respecting the Wilmot Proviso, or the Jeffersonian ordinance, and the known determination of the northern states to enforce it, was the great cause of this unanimous vote."⁸

The New York Evangelist was among those papers which too quickly accepted the development as the conclusion of the matter for California at least.⁹ Upon receiving the news, its editor said,

The solution which this auspicious event also furnishes of the vexed political question, removes many just apprehensions. If now, as triumphant an exodus can be gained out of the perils which hang upon the destiny of the other new territory, New-Mexico, we may draw our first long breath in reference to this matter.¹⁰

Such optimism was proved unfounded as soon as Congress met. The Senate was forced to mark time while the House consumed three weeks in electing a Speaker. The House numbered 112 Democrats, 105 Whigs, 12 Free Soilers, and one Native American.¹¹ Obviously the dozen Free Soilers held the balance of power if party lines were not broken. Howell Cobb of Georgia was the Democratic choice for speaker and Robert C. Winthrop of Massachusetts the Whig choice. The Free Soilers persisted in scattering their votes. As the balloting and debate proceeded, it revealed the pronounced sectional hostilities which presaged the erasing of party lines.

⁸ November 28, 1849, p. 190.

⁹ See pp. 180, 181.

¹⁰ November 15, 1849, p. 182.

¹¹ Allan Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, Vol. I, Fruits of Manifest Destiny 1847-1852 (New York, 1947), p. 251.

This development was observed and welcomed by some in the North, including the New York Evangelist. This editor did not consider the time consumed in electing a speaker as time wasted. "It is certainly accomplishing much," he said, "towards bringing about a new arrangement of parties. The inevitable division of parties into North and South, is rapidly hastening on; it has never been so rapidly promoted as by the occurrences of the present session."¹²

To most both North and South, however, the general implications of the opening days of the session were ominous. The Western Advocate of Cincinnati reported them thus: "A whole week has passed in strife, and the only result is deep excitement. In itself, this may be regarded as a small matter, but in connection with the exciting topics which will engage the attention of Congress, it is an unfavorable omen."¹³ The editor of the Northern Advocate shared with his fellow-Methodist this sense of the ominous nature of the situation. But, while he feared somewhat the result, he rejoiced that the issue could no longer be evaded and that it appeared as though the rights of the colored race were no longer to be sacrificed to a fear for the Union.¹⁴

Many Southern papers also reacted to these opening scenes with some alarm. The Washington correspondent of the Southern Baptist described the intensity of an excitement which could only mark the eve of "startling events." Only Providence, he asserted, could avert the calamity that was bound to ensue from the fact that the North and South had apparently taken their final positions on the

12 December 20, 1849, p. 203.

13 December 12, 1849, p. 198.

14 December 26, 1849, p. 154.

slavery question.¹⁵

The Southern Advocate of Charleston, neighbor of the Southern Baptist, also noted the great excitement. The editor informed his readers of the stand taken by Southern leaders to resist all aggression at all hazards. "The North," he said, "affects to consider it Southern thunder, which can do no harm." He then cited the tone of the recommendations of governors throughout the South made to their legislatures in "resistance to the Proviso and to the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, to the last extremity." This indicated, to the editor, that there was a sufficient degree of unanimity and determination throughout the South to make this more than thunder.¹⁶

The Baptist Banner, a border state publication, saw little grounds for hope for the country, if Congress could be considered a true miniature of the population at large. The editor believed that such was not the case and that the people might yet force their leaders to listen to measures of compromise. He then proceeded to use the occasion to lecture the religious press of the North. "Justice constrains us to say that the religious press of the North, has contributed as much or more than any other influence to bring about the present alarming state of things." He then addressed the North directly.

Surely by this time you must be convinced that ribaldry, detraction, political intrigue, nor force can avail you, and that if ever your wishes are realised [sic], our religious and civil rights preserved and the Union of these happy States perpetuated, it must be brought about by a

15 Southern Baptist, December 19, 1849, p. 753.

16 Southern Advocate, December 21, 1849, p. 115.

very different spirit and policy than that which has characterised [sic] your former course.¹⁷

The election eventually of a Southern speaker served to call attention to a reality in connection with the Senate which was distressing to the North. Two Northern journals, one a conservative paper, called attention to the preponderance of the South in the Senate organization. The Advocate and Journal said: "Of the chairmen of the twenty-seven standing committees of the Senate, sixteen are from the slave States, and eleven only from the free; and in filling up the committees the South have a preponderating influence in all the important ones."¹⁸ A correspondent of the Northern Advocate was much more perturbed by the same consideration. He observed that "the spirit of dictation and tyranny, which prevails upon the Southern plantation, is also manifest in the Congress of the United States." His complaint went even further. "We have dough-faces in Congress, who would lick the spittle from the boots of Southern men-stealers, to obtain the loaves and fishes of political preferment."¹⁹

With the House finally organized, Congress and the nation were ready to receive the message of President Taylor. He indicated the readiness of California to apply for admission, with the prospect that New Mexico would very probably assume the same posture soon. He recommended that Congress receive them on their own conditions as free states, thus settling the territorial question on the basis of the desires of the areas in question, presumably avoiding danger

17 Baptist Banner, December 19, 1849.

18 January 3, 1850, p. 3.

19 January 2, 1850, p. 158.

to sectional harmony. This was, of course, unfavorable to slavery, and unrealistically ignored the intensity of feeling about this issue and others now equally adamant, i.e., the status of Utah, the Texas boundary question, fugitive slave measures, and slavery in the District of Columbia.

The President's proposals as they related to California and New Mexico removed some of the mistrust or uncertainty previously expressed toward President Taylor by the Northern press. The New York Evangelist fully endorsed the message.

The message is brief, explicit and manly. . . . There can be no doubt that it will commend itself to the good sense and patriotism of the country. The just and moderate views it takes of the question, and the evident solicitude it manifests for the settlement, on the only right grounds, of this subject, will not fail of being appreciated.²⁰

The New York Baptist Register likewise approved the speech in a later reference to General Taylor's views. "The disposition of Gen. Taylor for harmony, and the avoidance of dangerous collisions, is here clearly evinced; and if the application of California for admission should be rejected, it can only be by a few hot heads who would sacrifice the Union."²¹ As far as that part of the message which called attention to Washington's warning against parties on the basis of "geographical discriminations" was concerned, the Cincinnati Central Christian Herald insisted that the South had long been so organized on the issue of slavery. Then he issued this warning: "If the North can be dissuaded from following their

²⁰ January 24, 1850, p. 14.

²¹ February 7, 1850, p. 6.

example, the South will be able to have everything their own way."²²

The editor of the Baptist Banner of Louisville belatedly carried the President's message in its entirety. His editorial comment and hope was: "It is an important State paper, and is regarded by our political exchanges as setting forth the grounds upon which the question now agitating the country, will in all probability be settled."²³

The Central Christian Herald sought to define the crisis in very simple terms. To this editor it was no other than a "contest between the conflicting principles of Liberty and Slavery. Our newly acquired territory is the theater of that conflict." On the other hand, it was clearly a contest also between abstract principle and property interest. The property interest united the South and divided the North between those who stood upon principle and those who vacillated because of property interests.²⁴ The New York Evangelist noted the nature of the crisis in the saturation of Congress with the subject of slavery, correctly placing the cause of the excitement with issues raised well before Congress met. The editor observed that the subject of slavery pervaded every issue, with the Southern members prepared to defend their "favorite institution" to the last gasp.²⁵

The chief interest in these few weeks focussed, as it often had before, on the possibility of the dissolution of the Union. A

²² Central Christian Herald, December 27, 1849, p. 150.

²³ January 30, 1850.

²⁴ January 10, 1850, p. 158.

²⁵ January 3, 1850, p. 3.

border state journal typical of the Old School decried the presence in Congress of demagogues and fanatics from either section who posed these threats. The editor was as confident that the results of disunion would be unhappy as he was that Christian people would avert such a disaster through prayer when they saw the evil approaching.²⁶

An Ohio journal of the New School was not quite sure just how serious the threats were. "The members from the far South threaten disunion very loudly, and on every occasion. What the result will be, Providence alone can decide."²⁷ The New York Recorder took the threat very seriously and considered the nation on the verge of disunion. The editor of the Chicago Watchman of the Prairies, however, discounted the possibility but he indicated that he would face the prospect if necessary, since the cause of the slave was dearer than the Union. The real point at issue was the question of moral and natural rights.²⁸ Yet this editor, as did many who declared this conviction so emphatically, disavowed violent emancipation and aggressively sought only to remove slavery from the spheres of national influence, i.e., the territories and Washington, D. C.²⁹

Quite generally throughout the North, however, the threats of disunion which came from the South were thought of as a gigantic bluff. This appeared especially in an intradenominational controversy between the Baptist paper published in Boston and the one

²⁶ Presbyterian Herald, January 24, 1850.

²⁷ Central Christian Herald, January 17, 1850, p. 163.

²⁸ Watchman of the Prairies, February 19, 1850.

²⁹ Ibid., February 5, 1850.

published in Charleston, both leading papers of their respective sections. These papers frequently sought to draw journalistic blood from each other.

The Southern Baptist of Charleston quoted several Northern journals to show the prevalent attitude in the North to the effect that disunion was only a Southern cry of "wolf" designed to frighten the North into making concessions. The editor especially singled out the Watchman and Reflector of Boston. The Charleston paper declared that

the Union can and may be sundered. In a day, in an hour, by the rash and misguided zealots at Washington, who believe that all cry of determination to resist, is unmeaning bluster, and who are sustained in this belief by the reckless assertions of their editorial constituents, this great confederation of States may be broken up, and the fabric that now commands the admiration of the world, become a by-word and a hissing.³⁰

The really violent haters of the Union, he insisted, were those who were writing just such propaganda as the Watchman. "Pretty men, these," he said, "to denounce people as disunionists, who are themselves indulging, weekly, in taunts and invectives that evince their bitter enmity to one half of their fellow-countrymen."³¹

The Watchman and Reflector gave notice of this reaction and again discounted any threat to the Union.

The American people, North and South, are undoubtedly sound on the great question. They know the exalted position to which the nation has been raised by means of the Union, and they will not permit even the momentous question of slavery to alienate them from it. . . . The disunion factionists at the South are as impotent in their effect upon the masses as are those at the North. We have a few infatuated men in

³⁰ Southern Baptist, January 16, 1850.

³¹ Ibid.

our midst, who assume that slavery can only be crushed under the mouldering fragments of the Constitution.³²

The final word of the Southern Baptist was an expression of the hope that the North was truly sound on the issue of the Union, although its editor feared that the North's "love for the Union is the Union as she intends to have it, with the lion's share." He affirmed also the South's love of the Union and her willingness to sacrifice anything for it but justice and equality. "These she will not sacrifice, and it is well for the Reflector and all Northern papers to be fully and fairly advertised of the fact."³³ It was precisely at these points, of course, where the irreconcilable differences existed. What was equality and justice to the South was increasingly an evil which tormented the conscience of the North.

The editor of the New York Baptist Register also belittled the Southern threat of disunion and considered that the "vaporizing about it is worse than nonsense." He was sure that most of the residents of the North would never encroach upon the constitutional rights of the South and he was equally sure that the South would consent to the principle of majority rule. But he added this typical qualification. "The South may be assured, that the North will never rest until they can say their skirts are clean from the blood of a slave. The free States are determined not to be responsible for the existence of slavery anywhere."³⁴

Within the month, on the eve of the submission of Clay's

³² Watchman and Reflector, January 31, 1850, p. 18.

³³ February 13, 1850.

³⁴ January 3, 1850, p. 194.

Compromise, the editor felt differently about the Southern threat to dissolve the Union. By that time he felt that "all the excitement in the political heavens is not wind." He saw an uncompromising spirit in the South and a "determined and unconciliating spirit in many from the North." The breach was widening in his view and in fact. The Southern component of the widening breach was "the impulsive, high toned and reckless excitability of the South" which would not cease "under real, or supposed aggression, until they conquer or die." The Northern component was "her unwavering consciousness of truth and right upon her side" which would cause her to never give up a principle.³⁵ After such statements as these, the usual disavowal of extreme methods in agitation and re- crimination were quite useless.

On January 29, after these weeks of rancorous debate and uncertainty, Clay brought his compromise resolutions to the floor of the Senate. The proposals provided for the admission of California as a free state, a territorial government for the remaining Mexican territories without provision as to slavery, a restricted boundary for Texas with compensation to that state, the abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia, and a new and more effective fugitive slave law. The immediate reaction of those Northern editors who expressed themselves, varied from mild to an extreme disapproval.

The editor of the Central Christian Herald of Cincinnati expected to follow Senate action on the proposals with great interest. The editor mildly questioned the justice to the North of the

³⁵ New York Baptist Register, January 31, 1850, p. 3.

suggested measures. "It will be seen that there are four calling for something like compromise from the South, and four also which contemplate something more than compromise from the North."³⁶ A Chicago editor reacted somewhat more strongly. He thought the compromise "five times" as favorable to the South as to the North. He asked why these new states should be "left open to the liability of slavery in any future and more corrupt generation?" He then naively asked, "If there be no such liability or expectation of its ever being introduced, why is its prohibition opposed?"³⁷

The correspondent of the New York Evangelist commended the spirit of the plan but was skeptical of its success. It did not please the South since Southerners wanted more than the plan offered. The North was dissatisfied because her original position was "reasonable, constitutional, and safe." He complained that concessions were all to the South with the North gaining nothing. He, too, questioned that such a compromise would be accepted or that it was right.³⁸

After several weeks of debate the editor of the Evangelist revealed the paper's position more fully. He attempted to reassure the South concerning the hostility of the North toward the slaveholder and as to the extent of fanaticism. He stated that he had never scorned a slaveholder, had never felt above him, and had never felt that the slaveholder was responsible for the circumstance of slavery. He also stated that ultraism was not characteristic of

³⁶ Central Christian Herald, January 31, 1850, p. 171.

³⁷ Watchman of the Prairies, February 12, 1850.

³⁸ February 7, 1850, pp. 22, 23.

the North. "But," he said, "beneath all this, there is a deep, inborn, universal, uncompromising detestation of slavery. . . . It will do no good to make compromises--to pass the thing off, or to open new fields for slavery, and to hope by spreading it, to make us quiet." He believed that it was impossible to "have entire, intelligent, progressive freedom and perpetual slavery under the same government." He would accept the fact that emancipation must be gradual and he assured the South that the North would give its sympathy and cooperation once the South admitted slavery's undesirability and made an effort to get rid of it, however gradually.³⁹ This was quite exceptional for a paper as strongly anti-slavery as the New York Evangelist.

The Watchman and Reflector of Boston questioned further the efficacy of compromise even with Mr. Clay's genius and great prestige behind it. The editor admired the boldness of the effort and he, too, vowed to watch the action with interest, but again there was "too much slavery in them for the North, and not enough for the South" to offer hope for their success.⁴⁰

But the Northern Advocate of western New York offered no such mild appraisals. Hosmer, the editor and a leading exponent of anti-slavery in the Methodist Episcopal Church, offered a rather keen analysis of the matter, in view of the feelings as they then existed. He had this to say:

We have no great faith in compromises, especially where moral principle is involved.--In general it is a poor way of settling matters, and amounts to but little in the long

³⁹ New York Evangelist, March 21, 1850, p. 46.

⁴⁰ February 7, 1850, p. 23.

run.--Mr. Clay's resolutions, as a palliative for the present distress, may be satisfactory to moderate men, but they cannot prevent the final catastrophe--they can only delay it for a time. . . . We are not where we were seventy years ago, when the constitution was formed. Then a compromise could be made, because the things to be compromised were considered as political, rather than moral. At that day the slave trade was lawful, and the holding of slaves simply inconsistent; but now the one is piracy, and the other sin. Again the slave-holding States were then a majority; now, in number as States, and much more in wealth and population, the free States have the pre-eminence. Under these circumstances, and with a full knowledge of all the besotting and blighting influences of slavery, exhibited in ten thousand instances before ther, it is not likely that the difficulty can be reached by any possible compromise.⁴¹

The editor of the Boston Zion's Herald quoted this in full, adding his comment.

We like this tone well and know not but that the doctrine may be found correct. Yet abolitionist as we are, we say frankly that if the parties concerned were more reliable, we should be quite inclined to favor Mr. Clay's propositions, with the exception of one that refers to fugitives, and that is yet too vague to be fully understood. . . . We oppose slavery, but we also oppose disunion; and we think the true measure of our political action on the former should be the moral preparation of the natural mind for such action. All other action will produce disaster.⁴²

This clearly indicates the common view of editors throughout the North that, while slavery was ultimately a moral problem of immense dimension, its removal, where it existed, must be by moral suasion only, however aggressive that suasion might be. It also indicated that considerable naïveté which rested in the assumption that such moral suasion could ever be calmly accepted by the South.

After further appraisal the Herald was much cooler toward the proposals. The editor did not like to see the continuance of slavery in the District of Columbia. He saw, however, that Clay's

⁴¹ Northern Advocate, February 6, 1850, p. 178.

⁴² February 13, 1850, p. 26.

proposal to relate the problem of its removal to the sentiment of the people of Maryland, was consistent with the method of working through the moral preparation of the public mind. But the factor which, in his view, rendered the Compromise most offensive and its defeat probable, was the fugitive slave provision. This, he insisted, the North would not tolerate if it went beyond the existing constitutional provisions. But all objections rested ultimately on moral grounds.

Slavery is not like the tariff and the other usual party questions, a matter of mere fiscal or geographical interest; it involves the inexorable conditions of moral obligation. The conscience, the religious convictions of these free States have become identified with it, and no compromise with it that compromises these can possibly be admissable.⁴³

The editor of the Nashville Advocate noticed and quoted this material from the two leading Methodist papers of the North. Noting the mild difference between the two, he said of the Northern Advocate:

We have seldom read anything indicating a more tyrannical and oppressive spirit than is manifest by this official editor of a Methodist paper. We hope for the honor of Americans, not to say Christians, that there are only a few such spirits in the North. Might constitutes right in his estimation. He would have made a good leader in the Romish inquisition.⁴⁴

This fraternal exchange was observed with regret by the editor of the Presbyterian Herald of Louisville. He believed these articles to be "calculated to increase the sectional contest which is now raging in the halls of our national Legislature. They may," he warned, "ere they are aware, kindle a flame that cannot be

⁴³ Zion's Herald, February 20, 1850, p. 30.

⁴⁴ Nashville Advocate, March 8, 1850.

extinguished until all that is good in our glorious Union has been consumed."⁴⁵ The Nashville Advocate quoted this paragraph, calling it to the attention of the Northern editors,⁴⁶ although the Presbyterian paper had included both sections in his admonition.

Other than this kind of editorial exchange, the Southern press was, at the time, relatively quiet about the compromise proposals. The Georgia Christian Index, however, was an exception insofar, at least, as the editor quoted the correspondent of the Charleston Courier. In contrast to the Northern view, this correspondent felt that the South made the real concession, the North only conceding matters relating to feelings. This individual believed that the proposals were brought forth for display only and not for practical use although they might eventually furnish a basis for adjustment.⁴⁷ A paper of Clay's home state gave strong support to the proposals of its native son. The editor of the Baptist Banner called Clay's speech great in many ways including especially the greatness of its object. He could see no material damage to either section in the compromise plan and argued that some such plan must prevail or the results would be ruinous.⁴⁸

As the debate moved along, however, there were occasions when Southern journals or conservative Northern journals defended some of the specific provisions of the compromise. This was especially true of the fugitive issue. The fugitive question had long been a fruitful source of resentment among the members of the editorial

⁴⁵ Presbyterian Herald, March 14, 1850.

⁴⁶ March 22, 1850.

⁴⁷ Christian Index, February 7, 1850, p. 23.

⁴⁸ February 27, 1850.

profession in the South. The Biblical Recorder of Raleigh had taken special offense at Bostonians. One incident which had provoked comment, concerned the apprehension of a runaway slave by the proper authorities, bound by their legal duty. The editor described what followed.

For this fact, however, they appear to have come very near being mobbed, by the tender-hearted, order-loving people of Boston. Indignation meetings have been held--indignation speeches have been made--indignation resolutions have been passed--and indignation hisses have been hissed! The press has spoken "in tones of thunder"--saints have sympathized--patriots and sages have been forced from their retirement--orators have poured forth their eloquence--and as it would seem, the community has been convulsed to its centre. And all for what? To shew the interest these good people take in other people's business!!⁴⁹

In this connection, there was strong reaction in some quarters to activities and motives attributed to abolitionists. Touched off by an article on the primitive church and slavery, the Baptist Banner, a border area paper, had this to say:

Abolitionists teach them [the slaves] to rob their master, to hate them and to run off and do them no service. They encourage each other to slander the Christian master and to steal away his servants--and should one of these thieves suffer under the law for his or her dishonesty, the abolitionists revile the authorities of the land and glorify the thief as a martyr.--Verily there is a vast difference between an abolitionist and a primitive Christian.⁵⁰

The most famous runaway of the period was probably Frederick Douglass. He had been on a lecture tour in the North, in England, and in Ireland during 1846. The Georgia Christian Index and the Louisville Baptist Banner were especially incensed by this activity. The editor of the Index had this on his mind when he wrote, "We

⁴⁹ October 17, 1846.
⁵⁰ April 8, 1847, p. 54.

doubt not the emissaries of England and runaway Negroes have cause to wish the destruction of the Union. Every libertine is an enemy of law and good order."⁵¹

The most disturbing feature of the events which the tour set in motion was an incident involving Dr. Thomas Smyth, a minister from Charleston. This noted divine was required to retract certain allegations made against Mr. Douglass or face the threat of legal action. Dr. Smyth was condemned for his duplicity in making a "penitential" apology,⁵² but the real barbs were reserved for Mr. Douglass and the abolitionists. The Index quoted a Rev. Dr. Cox, an Englishman, writing for the New York Evangelist as to the extravagant denunciation of American life and institutions in which Douglass engaged. The editor ascribed his haughty demeanor to the fact that "the man has been petted, and flattered, and used, and paid by certain abolitionists not unknown to us, of the ne plus ultra stamp, till he forgets himself."⁵³

When the fugitive issue appeared in the Compromise, the Christian Observer of Philadelphia, the New School Presbyterian journal with strongly pro-Southern leanings, condemned the tender conscience of the Northerners which required them to "aid the fugitive servant in the most flagrant transgression of the express law of the New Testament, enjoining obedience."⁵⁴ Later the editor insisted that he regretted the existence of slavery as sincerely as any. "But it exists, and the Constitution requires the restoration

⁵¹ Christian Index, June 3, 1847, p. 182.

⁵² Baptist Banner, October 22, 1846, p. 166.

⁵³ Christian Index, October 9, 1846.

⁵⁴ March 30, 1850, p. 50.

of the fugitive. . . . It is better to denounce the Union with Garrison--than to break the bonds by tricks and quibbles [designed] to deprive our neighbors of their constitutional rights to their servants."⁵⁵

The South was not incapable of claiming a moral justification for their posture on this question. The editor of the Georgia Christian Index had earlier dealt at length with the fugitive slave provisions of the Constitution. Then he said,

We insist upon justice relative to this plain enactment, upon the performance of a great moral duty, which our sister States owe us. And until the North is prepared to render it in good faith, she should deal very tenderly with the South, as to matters of conscience. Let her first take the beam out of her own eye, before she busies herself so anxiously and incessantly to extract the mote from ours.⁵⁶

He then indicated the depth to which the South felt aggrieved.

"The South has never trespassed upon the North. . . . On the contrary our National history from the first organization of the government down to the last session of Congress, has been one continued series of aggressions by the North upon the South."⁵⁷

Most Northern editors were willing to agree that constitutional provisions required something of the North with regard to the fugitive slave. The Western Advocate reiterated the position that the South was using scare tactics to get a fugitive slave bill with "strong and offensive provisions." Such a bill, he asserted, would never be acquiesced in and would only begin fresh excitements until "every representative and senator from the north, who has favored

⁵⁵ Christian Observer, May 11, 1850, p. 75.

⁵⁶ November 29, 1849.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

it, shall be swept away and the obnoxious law shall be repealed." But after this assertion, he indicated that he would abide by the Constitution in permitting the master to recapture the slave and by not giving positive aid to the fugitive.⁵⁸

The editor of the New York Evangelist expressed very much the same view although he admitted to a very strict interpretation of constitutional law at this point. The North should not put any positive hindrance in the way of recovery, but should not go beyond the letter of the Constitution. A new and more stringent law would do no good because

there is not a conviction of justice, or a principle of religion, more unchangeably settled in the minds of most moral men at the North than this, that to deliver up to his pursuers a man who has had the courage and the skill to make his way out of bondage, is one of the wickedest and meanest deeds that goes unwhipt of justice.⁵⁹

From Chicago came another statement of this view. The editor of the Watchman of the Prairies was particularly revolted at the thought of making human bloodhounds of Northerners. He, too, however, would give the slaveholder the right of way without assisting him.⁶⁰ Thus it seemed that this element in the North was at least not actively enticing slaves from their masters.

The Northern press took a special interest in the provision of the Compromise which related to California. Under the circumstances the North was quite willing to have California admitted on her own terms. There was strong objection, therefore, to tying in California's admission with compromise proposals. The Northern Advocate

58 Western Advocate, April 3, 1850, p. 53.

59 February 28, 1850, p. 34.

60 April 2, 1850.

of western New York condemned the refusal of the Southerners to immediately grant California's application when, bereft of "decent" justification, they vindicated their course on the basis that the number of free and slave states would be unequal.⁶¹

The Boston Watchman and Reflector insisted strongly that California should be admitted

exclusively upon her own merits, without any entanglement in other questions. . . . No compromise can rightfully be made a condition of her admission. . . . After the admission of California as a free State, with two Senators and two Representatives, Congress will be the better prepared to settle the territorial question.⁶²

Such a statement must have taxed to the limit the temper of Southern editors and verified their worst fears.

The Western Advocate of Cincinnati took some pleasure in exposing the inconsistency of the South in denying California's plea. The opposition of the South to the Proviso had been, supposedly, on the basis of an unwillingness to yield to Northern dictation, not to a repugnance to the organization of a free government. Now, it appeared, ~~the admission~~ of a free California was more offensive than the Proviso itself had been. The thought of yielding any portion of territory to the inroads of slavery as a price for California's admission was exasperating to this editor and he was sure that the entire North was equally revolted by the possibility.⁶³

The pro-Southern Christian Observer of Philadelphia correctly analyzed the basis for understanding this inconsistency and showed clear perception of the issue. "The admission, or non-admission of

61 Northern Advocate, February 27, 1850, p. 190.

62 March 7, 1850, p. 39.

63 March 6, 1850, p. 37.

California," its editor said, "is not the question which now threatens the country with the evils of disunion. The question is one of power in Congress."⁶⁴ And of course the above statement of the editor of the Watchman and Reflector frankly admitted that perspective.

The introduction of the compromise proposals had the immediate effect of subduing much of the general excitement and of raising the hopes of the nation that disaster might be averted. Some of the rash talk about disunion tended to abate and, in fact, Union meetings were called throughout the nation as support gathered for a peaceful settlement. The correspondent of the Advocate and Journal noted the indications of the "unmistakable attachment to the Union on the part of the people, which have been sent up here from nearly every State." He also pointed to the position taken by the leading minds of the Senate and these facts together nearly dissipated all his fears for the Union. Among the more potent causes of this optimism were the speeches of Clay and Webster.⁶⁵

The voices of the leaders of the Senate were raised to express pleas for the Union or to defend a sectional point of view. The attention of the church press focussed, after Clay's introduction of the compromise measures, upon the efforts of Calhoun, Webster, and William H. Seward, then serving his first term as Senator from New York, and advocate of a Free Soil position. Old and new leadership, then, faced each other in the "Great Debate."

⁶⁴ Christian Observer, February 16, 1850, p. 26.

⁶⁵ March 28, 1850, p. 50.

Calhoun was so ill by this time that his speech was read for him by Senator Mason of Virginia. Calhoun pointed out the grave peril to the Union that had grown out of Southern reaction to the long-continued agitation of the slavery question and to the imbalance increasingly evident between the two sections. He stressed how this imbalance had affected adversely the interests of the South. He referred to the division of the churches and the sectionalization of the parties as marks of the tenuous nature of Union ties. Salvation of the Union could come only by granting the South equal rights in the territories, cessation of the agitation over slavery, the effective enforcement of fugitive slave laws, and assuring by constitutional amendment the restoration of political balance between the sections. The speech carried a strong disunionist sentiment.

It was by no means appealing to a great many in the South, but Southern editors of religious papers refrained to a large extent from expressing themselves. This may have been due to a tendency to withdraw from political issues once they became so heated. The Southern Advocate of Charleston did take up Calhoun's reference to the divisions in the churches. The editor admitted that the sun-dering of religious bands might well foreshadow a similar disruption on a broader front.

They indicate at least, such a state of feeling on the part of large masses of the population, as would render possible a disruption of political ties. . . . What is it that now threatens the Union? Every Southern man knows what it is. A pseudo-religious movement, with its plea of conscience overriding the constitution, exulting in its avowed determination to sweep from the nation what it considers the deep disgrace of Southern institutions.⁶⁶

66 April 5, 1850, p. 174.

The Biblical Recorder of Raleigh took issue quite sharply with Calhoun. "We feel assured that the South will not concur in that part of the speech which goes to tamper with the constitution."⁶⁷ The Watchman of the Prairies of Chicago, in quoting this, noticed that reaction in the South to Calhoun's speech was divided. This Chicago editor labelled as preposterous Calhoun's project to artificially maintain the balance. Nature and Providence, he asserted, had made freedom and slavery unequal and to equalize them would involve the rolling back of history.⁶⁸

Across the nation in Boston the Watchman and Reflector just as emphatically identified the imbalance as an inevitable result of progress. Nature absolutely denied any such equilibrium. To restore equilibrium between the sections would require the abolition of slavery since "no slave State can compete with a free State in the race of population, civil, political, and moral advantages, or in any of the elements of prosperity, happiness and greatness." To attempt to enact equilibrium by law was utterly fantastic.⁶⁹ The only comment of the New York Evangelist was, "if this should prove, as is likely, to be the last public effort of John C. Calhoun, with what sorrowful and unfortunate associations will the memory of a great man go down to history."⁷⁰

This indeed proved to be the last of Calhoun's public appearances. Within a month the papers had news of his death and were commenting upon it. Even on this occasion no editor recorded a

67 Quoted in Watchman of the Prairies, April 2, 1850.

68 April 2, 1850.

69 March 14, 1850, p. 42.

70 March 7, 1850, p. 39.

full endorsement of Calhoun's views, although North and South alike extolled his personal virtues. A typical attitude was that of the editor of the Religious Herald of Richmond, always quite mild, when commenting on slavery or politics. "On many national questions, Mr. C.'s views were not in accordance with those of the great majority of his countrymen, but for his ability and moral worth he was universally regarded as a great and good man, and an ornament of his country."⁷¹ The Biblical Recorder of North Carolina mentioned Calhoun's superior intellectual endowments and that, "although considered somewhat ultra in some of his views in regard to Southern policy, he was no doubt a person of the strictest integrity, and of the most ardent devotion to the interests of his country."⁷²

The Chicago Watchman of the Prairies conceded Mr. Calhoun's irreproachable private character and the sincerity of even his ultra views.⁷³ Some in the North, however, broke the usual custom of treating even enemies kindly at death, and could not forgive Calhoun his recently expressed views. The Central Christian Herald of Cincinnati identified him as one of the most uncompromising advocates of slavery and disseminators of disunionist sentiments. It was, therefore, to be expected as soon as correct views prevailed, as they inevitably would under the gospel, that "these things will more and more impair the regard in which his country will hold his memory."⁷⁴ The New York Baptist Register also called him one of the

blindest devotees of the slavery system perhaps of any man in the South, and to maintain it, the fair fabric of the

⁷¹ ⁷³ April 9, 1850. 54.

⁷² ⁷⁴ April 4, 1850.

⁷³ April 9, 1850.

⁷⁴ April 4, 1850.

Union could be deliberately sacrificed. Such a man may be great in intellect and mighty in the Senate, but exceedingly narrow minded after all, and wanting in the great principles of true republicanism and enlarged philanthropy. . . . Such a man may be awarded high eulogy by many, but never by us. We think more of the great fabric of our national Union than of a million such men.⁷⁵

The great torrent of words, however, followed neither Calhoun's speech nor the event of his death. It was the speech of Webster, given on the seventh of March, which drew this comment. In the North, it was sometimes a torrent of abuse even from his own New England. The South was pleased, since Webster's support seemed to assure the passage of the Compromise. The North was displeased and actually hostile toward his apparent betrayal of the anti-extension views of his section.

Webster denied the possibility of a peaceful dissolution of the Union as he challenged the extremists of both sections. He stressed the role of nature both in the disparity between the sections and as a barrier to the further extension of slavery. He asked the North, therefore, not to insist on reenacting the laws of nature by legislative decree. Webster examined the sources of discord, granting the justice of the South's claims that the North was not performing her constitutional duty in regard to fugitives, and that abolitionist agitation was responsible for the growing attachment of the South to its system of slavery. On the other hand, he took the South to task with equal frankness for trying to force slavery into new territories, for saying that slaves were better off than the free laborers of the North, and for its laws putting

⁷⁵ New York Baptist Register, April 4, 1850, p. 38.

colored sailors in custody while in Southern ports.

There was much in Webster's speech to excite the animosity of Northern radicals. Zion's Herald of Boston took issue with each of Webster's criticisms of the North. The editor denied that nature had erected a sufficient barrier to slavery in the territories. "Moral causes . . . not natural ones, have, in every instance on record led to the overthrow of slavery." He also reiterated his own view that the local and state authorities should never help capture the fugitive slave. He gave also a ringing defense of abolitionist agitation while conceding that evils had attended the movement if only because fanaticism and acrimony were inevitable accompaniments of any popular reform movement. But it had accomplished a great deal in arousing the nation from "moral slumber" and showed great promise of sealing off slavery in that same year. In summary the editor said:

We are dissatisfied we repeat with the general character as well as the particular positions of this speech. The country, and we will add also the world, had a right to expect a different bearing from Mr. Webster at this crisis. . . . If there is a New Englander who does not read this speech with a profound sentiment of sadness, we have misjudged the spirit of New England.⁷⁶

The Herald quoted later from a speech Webster made upon his return to Boston in early May wherein Webster explained himself and defended his position. Webster declared his refusal to support any "agitations having their foundations in unreal, ghostly abstractions." The editor commented on the welcome, as he saw it, which Webster received. "We thought the manifestation rather a tame one, and think Mr. Webster himself must have noticed the

⁷⁶ March 20, 1850, p. 46.

absence of many of his oldest and hitherto best friends."⁷⁷

Another Boston paper, the Watchman and Reflector, credited Webster with purer motives than some were inclined to do. The editor credited him with trying to pour "oil upon the troubled waters, though in so doing he has compromised his position at the North, which can never sanction any concession, even with the alternative of disunion before it. His attachment to the Union has evidently led him to magnify the dangers which apparently threaten its existence." In view of Webster's former position "his determined opposition to the Wilmot Proviso" was expected to take most people by surprise.⁷⁸

Later, however, the editor was not quite so magnanimous and attributed Webster's position, in part, to party spirit.

The prevalence and power of party spirit have much to do with the lame and inefficient stand taken for freedom. As long as men make their party, its identity and unity, paramount to all other considerations, while the slave power overrules all such distinctions, and binds its adherents compactly together, so long will slavery gain continually new advantages.⁷⁹

He, too, took specific objection to Webster's view that nature rendered the Proviso negatory. "The proviso is a re-enactment of the laws of nature, which have no sanction for slavery, and of the moral laws of God, of which the system of slavery, is one vast and compendious violation." And, he insisted, "slavery has always been independent of climate and soil." He thought Webster's position on fugitive slaves was even worse than his position on other

⁷⁷ Zion's Herald, May 8, 1850, p. 74.

⁷⁸ March 14, 1850, p. 42.

⁷⁹ March 28, 1850, p. 50.

measures of the Compromise.⁸⁰

In summary, he saw Webster thus:

He may retard but he cannot prevent the coming of that day when the earth shall be free,--"free, indeed." Perhaps his life may be prolonged to see the time when he would fain blot from the calendar the day in which he earned the praise of the Charleston Mercury and of Mr. Calhoun. But the opportunity to lead the ranks of freedom has passed by him, and his will be the dubious fame of those who, with great endowments and greater opportunities, could not discern these times.⁸¹

The Northern Advocate recorded the pleasure of its editor over "the finest set of speeches that ever originated" in Congress, speeches moved by the great theme of the right of man to be man. "Every speech, whether for or against slavery, is a deadly blow at the slave power, because it calls for light." He then decried the unsoundness of heart which caused the South to threaten disunion for "so ignoble a cause as spite against those who would treat man as man," an unsoundness of heart that showed a want of "true republicanism." This spirit was evident in a South which had "too many bowie knives and too few Bibles, too many slave drivers and too few school teachers . . . and hence they cannot keep pace with their more fortunate neighbors."⁸²

The editor's hostility toward the South apparently distracted him from any remarks more derogatory to Webster's person. He did later note that Webster seemed "ill at ease in his new position as defender of the peculiar views of the South, on the slavery question. It is evident that high as he is, he is not beyond the reach

⁸⁰ Watchman and Reflector, March 28, 1850, p. 50.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² March 20, 1850, p. 202.

of public opinion."⁸³ Later he also cited a letter from the delegate to Congress for the Oregon Territory purporting to show that slavery could go anywhere, even to Oregon, or to the mining regions of California or New Mexico, where a slave would have rented for \$800 to \$1000 a year. "This letter," said Hosmer, "would seem to be in direct conflict with Mr. Webster's law of nature, which was to exclude slavery from the territories. Slavery will go wherever it is not prohibited by positive law. This fact is most thoroughly established by all history."⁸⁴

In New York the Evangelist registered profound disappointment as the prevailing impression which Webster's speech had left. Even the South, this editor said, was disappointed at Webster's having gone so far.⁸⁵ He later expanded the description of his own feelings.

The deepest and most abiding emotion Mr. Webster's speech has left in our minds, and we believe in the minds of all true Christian men at the North is one of pity and regret. In the history of the country we hardly know of a case, all things considered, in which there was a more cool, deliberate, statesman-like, dispassionate exchange of principle for enthronement of expediency, on a great moral question, than in that speech.⁸⁶

This in its severity and injustice to Webster was stronger even than New England criticism. The Evangelist joined others in citing material to refute the view that slavery would be checked by nature in the Southwest. The editor carried the rumor of a slavery expedition supposedly awaiting only the outcome of the slavery question

⁸³ Northern Advocate, June 26, 1850, p. 51.

⁸⁴ July 10, 1850, p. 59.

⁸⁵ March 14, 1850, p. 42.

⁸⁶ April 4, 1850, p. 54.

in Congress to leave for California.⁸⁷

On the other hand the New York Baptist Register, published in Utica, gave neither criticism nor approval to Webster's views on the natural barrier to slavery. Its editor was more concerned by the fact that Webster left it in doubt as to how he might vote on the admission of California.⁸⁸ The editor of the New York City paper, the Advocate and Journal, generally conservative, had been a visitor to Congress when Webster delivered his speech. He found the speech conciliatory and anticipated fully the censure which because of that, would fall upon Webster from many in the North.⁸⁹

The Western press also expressed its disapproval of Webster. The Western Advocate, however, many weeks prior to the compromise proposals and Webster's speech, had received an interesting report from a correspondent in California. This person had expressed the opinion that the "Wilmot proviso, or other legislation to prevent the introduction of slavery into California, was a most precise humbug." The correspondent then asked if it was not the editor's duty, therefore, to help quiet "the needless anxiety of our people on this subject, and in plucking plumes from the caps of those who have stolen into high places by operating on this false alarm? . . . Excuse me for adding," he said, "that current events are proving, and will continue to prove, that, in reference to the fancied danger of slavery in the territories, the people of the free states have suffered their wills and their imagination to overcome

⁸⁷ New York Evangelist, May 2, 1850, p. 70.

⁸⁸ March 14, 1850, p. 27.

⁸⁹ March 14, 1850, p. 42.

their good sense and matter-of-fact knowledge."⁹⁰

In spite of this prior substantiation of Webster's position the Western Advocate and its New England correspondent quoted extensively from Eastern journals in opposition to Webster's position. The correspondent described the nearly unanimous expression of the religious press in hostility to the speech. He sanctioned this criticism of Webster's abandonment of the section's long cherished sentiments on slavery.⁹¹ The paper's New York correspondent actually labeled the speech as of most "incendiary" and "treasonable" character, especially with reference to the duty of Northerners to become slave-catchers. This was incendiary because it gave such powerful aid to the ultra abolitionists since great multitudes would join them in resistance to such a pact.⁹²

The editor of the Watchman of the Prairies, with its constituency in the far Northwest, was just as fervent in his criticism of Webster as any New England journal. He charged that Webster yielded ten times greater privileges and encouragement than Clay. "It has been read," he said, "by a million of people in the free states with mingled astonishment and regret." In contrast, the South had received it with praise. He objected to a more stringent fugitive slave law or to leaving the question of extension to chance. For him Webster's recommendations were incredible. "Mr. Webster knew, as well as we know, that such principles are a stench in the nostrils of Northern men, and they had reason to expect

⁹⁰ Western Advocate, November 28, 1849, p. 190.

⁹¹ April 17, 1850, p. 62.

⁹² May 22, 1850, p. 81.

better things of a Northern Senator."⁹³

It was indeed true, as the Northern press contended, that Webster's speech found favor in the South. The Biblical Recorder of North Carolina endorsed it as a "most manly and patriotic" effort deserving great credit. Of Webster the editor said, "Although no friend to slavery, he is clearly a friend to justice--to the punctual observance of constitutional obligations--to a preservation of the Union--and to the whole country North and South, East and West. Should his views be generally adopted, there need be no fears for the Union." He expected general approval for Webster's position throughout the South and he hoped also that Northern men would back Webster, thus avoiding the fate of disunion.⁹⁴

Webster's key position in the compromise movement was recognized by a border paper, the Baptist Banner. The editor believed that this speech had greatly enhanced the possibility of a peaceful settlement. To him, perusal of the speech, was an intellectual feast with the added bonus that it afforded him "the high gratification of recognizing in the great Daniel Webster of the North, a fearless defender of the Constitution and the rights of the people as secured by it." With such men as Clay and Webster working in behalf of Union, he was sure that the constitutional rights of the South would be secured against the aggressions of Northern fanatics. "And with that," he said, "the South should be content."⁹⁵

The Southern Baptist of Charleston shared the general relief which Webster's speech occasioned in the South. The editor noted

⁹³ Watchman of the Prairies, April 2, 1850.

⁹⁴ March 23, 1850.

⁹⁵ March 20, 1850.

that the turbulent waters had been calmed and the fears about dissolution much weakened. He quoted from the Courier to the effect that the speech was a "great speech, noble in language, generous and conciliatory in tone, and in the matter having one general, broad and powerful tendency towards the peaceable and honorable adjustment of the existing controversy."⁹⁶

The Southern Advocate of Charleston described the speech as one of the two greatest in the present Congress, the other being Calhoun's. He regarded Webster's speech as a scathing rebuke to ultra anti-slavery and a

denouncement of the politico-religionism which has done for the church what it is attempting to bring about in the state, a division by trampling upon the Constitutional right of the Southern section of the Republic, by presenting new and impracticable issues, and by creating unwarrantable and degrading terms of fraternization.⁹⁷

The Nashville Advocate mentioned

with pleasure the manly, frank, independent and patriotic course of Mr. Webster. . . . We do admire his uncompromising spirit in this hour of peril, and mark with unbounded pleasure his love for the Union, and the boldness with which he steps forward to arrest the spirit of fanaticism, discord, and strife. . . . We rejoice that there are thousands. . . in the North who are friends to the Union, and are willing to see justice done to the Southern States, men who are not governed by fanatical "moral sentiments," but who proceed upon the broad principles of justice and constitutional right.⁹⁸

Just as the North made note of the approval which the South gave to the speech, the South made note of the disapproval registered by the North. The Southern Advocate observed that "Mr. Webster's speech . . . gives great dissatisfaction to the North."⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Southern Baptist, March 13, 1850.

⁹⁷ April 5, 1850, p. 174.

⁹⁸ March 29, 1850.

⁹⁹ March 22, 1850, p. 167.

The Biblical Recorder of Raleigh noticed the tendency of the North to denounce "every conciliating measure or sentiment emanating from Northern men" as a response to intimidation and as cowardly and traitorous.¹⁰⁰

The editor of the Georgia Christian Index quoted the expressions of disapproval of the Webster position from his sister paper, the Watchman and Reflector of Boston. He believed this to be a very common sentiment in the North. He hoped, however, that the real friends of the Union would be strong enough to sustain such efforts as Webster's in order to reach equitable adjustment. This was easily found to be another occasion for lecturing the religious editors of the North. He thought that the strong and influential support which Webster received would "serve as a stern rebuke to those religious papers which, forgetting their proper business, lend their aid to faction and disorganization."¹⁰¹

Everything which Webster's speech was not, was found by the Northern editors in the speech of Senator Seward of New York. Seward gathered up and expressed views which accorded well with those of the anti-slavery church press. He rejected all compromise as a surrender of conscience. He recommended the admission of California at once, as she wished, and settlement of future problems by a majority of national sentiment. Seward refused to accept the view of Calhoun that the minority section should have special compensatory rights. Churchmen were stirred by his declaration that the issues were moral and involved a higher law than the Constitution,

100 March 23, 1850.

101 Christian Index, May 9, 1850, p. 75.

a moral law which compelled the nation to make its territories free. Perhaps this approach was part of Seward's formula for future political success as he read the sentiments of his section.

At any rate Seward received much approbation from some quite widely circulated weekly journals throughout the North, and at least one journal thought his stand of future consequence politically. The editor of Zion's Herald gave credit to Seward for a manly expression in which Northern freemen would sustain him against the "abuse of a prostituted party press." Seward's speech was as lucid and as brave in its expression of "the true anti-slavery sentiment of the people of the North" as any avowed Free Soiler's or even the late John Quincy Adams. Then he said,

If our great men are seeking for the Presidency by their tactics on this question, Gov. Seward has out-generalled them all. As sure as fate, his position is destined to become the national position of the country, and the country will then remember the brave and truthful man who feared not to define and assert it amidst the craven succumbency of demagogues.¹⁰²

He was delighted to observe the position of the Northern Advocate which had carried a "severe but just" criticism of a secular paper's abuse of Seward for his higher law doctrine.¹⁰³ The editor of the Northern Advocate had declared that "Governor Seward in his late speech in the Senate, very distinctly avowed what every man in Christendom should be ashamed to deny, namely, the supremacy of the law of God. . . . There can be no constitutional rights in opposition to the law of God. Whatever is contrary to this law is null, has not, never had, nor can have power to bind one."¹⁰⁴ He quoted

¹⁰² March 27, 1850, p. 50.

¹⁰³ April 3, 1850, p. 54.

¹⁰⁴ March 20, 1850, p. 206.

the National Era, organ of the Liberty Party, to the effect that it would be appropriate for the Senate to revise the Lord's prayer to accord with the sentiment of those who objected to considering God's law higher than the Constitution. As revised it would read, "Let thy will be done--provided it do [sic] not conflict with the Constitution of the United States."¹⁰⁵ This kind of sentiment was a portent of the refrain that was to be chorused by anti-slavery papers once the Fugitive Slave Law was passed.

The New York Evangelist described Seward's speech as a "calm, manly, noble utterance, in the name of the great and free State he so worthily represents, of the Northern sentiment."¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, the conservative Methodist journal of the same city was accused by Zion's Herald of having believed a prejudicial and unfavorable view of the speech given by its Washington correspondent.¹⁰⁷ The reason for the Herald's discomfort is obvious from the correspondent's report.

Gov. Seward of your State, it is generally conceded; made an able speech on the subject, and one prompted by good motives; but one of very questionable tendency, in view of the emergency, as well as an ultra one. . . . His position that it became his duty to disregard the constitution wherever it conflicted with the superior or Divine law, although correct, abstractly considered, seems to place him in an unfortunate dilemma. If the two codes disagree, it seems he should either have refused to take the oath of allegiance to the former, or should resign his Senatorship.¹⁰⁸

Seward's speech also found much favor with Ohio and Illinois editors. The Western Advocate was content to quote the favorable

105 Northern Advocate, March 20, 1850, p. 206.

106 March 14, 1850, p. 42.

107 Zion's Herald, April 3, 1850, p. 54.

108 Advocate and Journal, March 28, 1850, p. 50.

comment from the New York Evangelist including the "electric thrill" that went through the audience when Seward described the North's refusal to let slavery advance.¹⁰⁹ But the editor of the Central Christian Herald was quite carried away when he read accounts of the speech.

Noble sentiments indeed! And however strongly they may have sounded to some ears in Congress, they are the more beautiful and impressive as contrasted with the noisy and angry appeals so constantly made to slave law, slaveholding rights and interests, or at best to mere human enactments. Considering the scepticism, the jealousy, the heat and madness of party and of private interest that were poisoning the very atmosphere in which Mr. Seward spoke, there was true moral heroism in his stepping so out the circle and above the level of other men's thoughts, and appealing to the authority of the Bible, to the law of God and the sanctions of religion, as the final and binding rule--the end of controversy.¹¹⁰

The Watchman of the Prairies was not quite so emotional, but its editor spoke warmly of Seward, nevertheless. Contrasting this speech with Webster's speech, he said, "The speech of Mr. Seward. . . is of a different character. It makes no compromise with what is right, but moves straight forward with clearness and power. No moral question is finally settled until it is settled right."¹¹¹ He specifically, if somewhat wistfully, endorsed Seward's proposal to admit California without accompanying compromises. "If the no compromise plan could be carried, it would be a noble triumph in the cause of humanity and righteousness."¹¹²

From South Carolina and Georgia came, of course, exactly the opposite appraisal of Mr. Seward and his views. The Southern

109 Western Advocate, April 10, 1850, p. 58.

110 April 4, 1850, p. 207.

111 April 2, 1850.

112 March 26, 1850.

Baptist reported the speech as the most important matter in Congress at the time, "not from its intrinsic merits, but from the dangerous sentiments it contains." One thing that made them so dangerous was the possibility that they might have represented a majority of Seward's constituency. This dampened his optimism in regard to the prospects for compromise.¹¹³ The Christian Index reported Seward's speech as neither "pleasing nor forcible" in sustaining fully the ultra, anti-slavery position.¹¹⁴ The Southern Advocate identified Seward's ground as the "highest ground of northern abolitionism." He called the doctrine of the higher law, as avowed by Seward and one of the editor's "most respectable Northern exchanges," as "revolutionary and treasonable."¹¹⁵ Thus sharply did the religious editors divide in their reaction to the speeches of leading senators.

It was not until many weeks after these major speeches of Clay, Calhoun, Webster, and Seward that the Compromise measures were finally passed. Much parliamentary maneuvering, many speeches by lesser lights, and yet many more by the leading statesmen all consumed time and kept tempers heated throughout the summer. After the initial reaction to the views of these Congressional leaders, however, the religious press was relatively calm for a time.

113 Southern Baptist, March 20, 1850.

114 March 21, 1850, p. 47.

115 March 22, 1850, p. 167.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMPROMISE MEASURES PASSED

In the course of the speechmaking which followed the addresses of Calhoun, Webster, and Seward, even more radical sectional views than those of either Calhoun or Seward were advanced. In spite of this, however, compromise became more attractive and more and more groups gave support to the move. Sheer weariness from the strife was an important factor, but increasingly individuals and groups began to give positive support to the principle of compromise.

On April 18 the Clay resolutions and others relating to the subject of slavery were referred by the Senate to a select Committee of Thirteen by a vote of 30 to 22. Clay was its chairman and it was constituted otherwise by three Democrats and three Whigs from each of the two sections. Significantly, the Committee consisted of a majority of Whigs although the Democrats had a majority in the Senate, indicating that the balance sought was sectional rather than party. Except for Phelps of Vermont and Mason of Virginia the men were clearly moderate. The constitution of the committee in such a manner was indicative of the disposition of the Senate to compromise.

On May 8, 1850, Clay read to the Senate the majority report of the Committee of Thirteen and spoke briefly in explanation of its recommendations. The report consisted of seven proposals which were very much the same as Clay had originally offered at the end of January. They included the honoring of Congress' pledge to Texas if any new states were formed there, admission of a free

California, territorial governments in New Mexico and Utah without stipulation as to slavery, the fixing of the Texas boundary and compensation for territory she had claimed under the old boundary, a new fugitive slave law, and the abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia.

Debate on the report began in earnest by May 13 and it was evident that it would be a long one. The Senate had decided to consider the proposals, in their main features, as one bill, a bill which Taylor, who opposed it vigorously in favor of his original position, referred to contemptuously as the "Omnibus Bill." Outstanding in support of it were Clay, Webster, Cass, Douglas, and Foote. Outstanding in opposition were Davis and Mason of the Southern extremists and Northern radicals such as Seward, Chase, and Hale and ~~the~~ independent Democrat, Senator Benton.

The reference of the issues to the Committee of Thirteen and the beginning of the Committee's work gave rise to the view that a compromise was quite sure to be consummated. This view was reflected in the religious press. The editor of the conservative Advocate and Journal expected severe struggles to ensue before this occurred but considered compromise probable and to him it was a pleasant prospect. From the nature of the talent on the committee he was encouraged to believe that its report would be able, and that it would carry great weight toward final settlement. "It is pretty evident," he said, "that there is much common ground on which individuals of conservative views can honorably meet."¹ The optimism

¹ April 25, 1850, p. 66; May 2, 1850, p. 70.

changed to pessimism, however, as he followed the bill's course and after new propositions and new objections to old ones kept cropping up.²

The correspondent of the Northern Advocate of western New York had been equally certain of the ultimate passage of the Compromise. He did not share the pleasure in the anticipation of such a result. "It will only salve over the wound for a while," he said, "since slavery itself seems doomed by the sovereign voice of public opinion in this land. Politicians are inclined to act less on great moral principles, than on grounds of present expediency."³

The Central Christian Herald of Cincinnati gave notice to the activities of Congress and the reference of the measures to the committee. The editor continued to insist that the principle of the Proviso should not be abandoned and that a specific prohibitory law was necessary to express the conviction that nature had operated benevolently in the regions in question. He insisted that "no principle of justice to the South requires that any concessions should be made on this point."⁴ A week later he expressed the feeling that the committee report seemed unlikely to do anything toward a settlement of the "vexed question."⁵

Still later the editor of the Herald identified the difficulty in the whole question with "a desire to do what, at present seems most politic, rather than to calmly enquire for and follow what is right." He had faith in compromise only when it did not affect

² Advocate and Journal, July 4, 1850, p. 106.

³ May 1, 1850, p. 18.

⁴ May 9, 1850, p. 18.

⁵ May 16, 1850, p. 23.

matters of such moral character as slavery. "It would much better become our rulers," he said, "to set themselves at work to rid it, [the land] in a judicious manner, of the curse and shame of oppression, than to be spending months of their time, and thousands of the people's money, in fruitless efforts to fix it where it is, or extend its blight over smiling regions which now are free."⁶

The Western Advocate, also of Cincinnati, was as opposed to compromise as ever. A correspondent saw the Compromise as the means whereby the South would "carry their plans in every important particular." The South, he insisted, demanded nothing less than the compromise of the religious conviction of the sinfulness of slavery. He did not wonder that the South should make such a preposterous demand in view of their system of morals which wholly disregarded the consciences of slaves and inspired the motto, "might gives right."⁷ The editor was somewhat less extreme, but any appearance of the passage of the Compromise caused his sky to take a dark aspect. He saw "but little prospect of the interests of freedom and the rights of humanity being regarded." One thing that disturbed him was the refusal of the Senate to refer petitions against compromise which came from "thousands of American citizens from the east and the west."⁸

A very different view of the movement toward compromise and of the leaders of the movement prevailed among Southern editors. The Washington correspondent of the Southern Baptist gave his full

⁶ Central Christian Herald, June 13, 1850, p. 38.

⁷ May 1, 1850, p. 69.

⁸ May 15, 1850, p. 78.

approval to the proposals of the committee and Clay's speech in introduction of them.

Mutual concession and compromise are our only hope. If the North refuse to "give up," or if the South "keep back" there can be no such thing as allaying the agitation till it shall have shaken this nation asunder. Nor will the dissolution of the Union put a stop to it. On the contrary, it will add fuel to sectional passions and bitterness to hostility. Even though a peaceful separation were possible, a peaceful condition is not. The flight and shelter of fugitive slaves would lead to a perpetual border warfare, and the involved interests and wounded pride of the South, on the one hand, and the very warped philanthropy and the religious conscience of the North, on the other, would whet the edge of the sword and nerve the arm of conflict.⁹

This correspondent for a paper from Calhoun's home state had consistently and emphatically condemned secession as an absurd alternative, which would play into the hands of the North.¹⁰

The Presbyterian Herald of Louisville, representing border state sentiment, greeted the report of the committee with gratitude and high praise and with too much optimism. He said:

We regard the crisis passed. Those to whom the country have looked as the pillars of the nation, have once more shown themselves adequate to its support in the most trying hour. Sectional interests and local prejudices have been wholly sacrificed on the common altar of Union. . . . We cannot allow ourselves to doubt that Congress will pass the bill recommended by the report, and thus put to rest the questions which have so fearfully agitated the nation.¹¹

The studied aloofness of the Presbyterian Church Old School was nowhere more openly demonstrated than in their General Assembly of the spring of 1850, a meeting which coincided with the work of the Committee of Thirteen. R. J. Breckenridge of Kentucky, with the Compromise in mind, pled with the body to memorialize Congress

⁹ Southern Baptist, May 15, 1850.

¹⁰ Ibid., January 30, 1850.

¹¹ May 22, 1850.

in behalf of the wish of the church for the "preservation and perpetuation of the National Union and the Federal Constitution."

The action, he declared, was warranted by the great danger in the present crisis and the uncertainty of the outcome. The proposal was debated but finally tabled, largely on the basis of irrelevancy,¹² a description which was completely incomprehensible to the Watchman and Reflector of Boston.¹³

A movement which coincided with this debate in Congress, and that not by accident, was the proposed Nashville Convention. The Mississippi Legislature had issued a call in October, 1849, to all slaveholding states to send delegates to a convention to meet in Nashville the next June "to devise and adopt some mode of resistance" to Northern aggressions. The decline in disunionist sentiment in the South and progress toward legislative enactment on the Compromise caused a loss of interest in the approaching convention. There was a widespread and embarrassing indifference to the election of delegates in many sections of the South. Only nine Southern states sent delegates to Nashville where little was done except to hear a few speeches, affirm the position of the South as represented by Jefferson Davis in Congress, and to adjourn to meet six weeks later.

A few Northern papers showed an ungentlemanly disrespect for Southern pride, in the treatment of the movement. The Northern Advocate recorded the "contempt in which this proposed gathering is held by the great body of southern people" and cited the

12 Presbyterian Advocate, May 29, 1850, p. 121.

13 Watchman and Reflector, June 20, 1850, p. 98.

Southern Banner of Georgia to indicate popular revolt against it.¹⁴

The editor of the Advocate later referred to the meeting as the second Hartford Convention and described it contemptuously as a "complete fizzle out."¹⁵ The editor of the New York Baptist Register, while considering the whole affair as mortifying to the nation, regarded its effects as ultimately beneficial.

It will afford no little satisfaction to the true friends of the Union, that the development of public sentiment at the South has shown up the threatenings of disunion by all the Calhouns, the Davises, the Clements, and Clingmans, at Washington, to be but mere self-important assumption, unsustained by the voice of the people.¹⁶

Insofar as they deigned to treat it at all, the church papers of the South took a cautious and subdued attitude toward the meeting. The Charleston Southern Baptist, in November of 1849, described the proceedings of an informal meeting of the Senators and Representatives of the state to consider the response of South Carolina to Mississippi's appeal. The occasion was solemn, the discussion was earnest on some incidental points, but there was unanimity as to the propriety of responding promptly to the call.¹⁷

The North Carolina paper, the Biblical Recorder, in January, 1850, carried the observation that the Southern press was strongly recommending the proposed convention. The editor confessed that he did not know what to think. To think of any necessity for it was to do so with heavy heart. Yet he could see no alternative.

The fanatics, having tried the work of defamation in vain; --and having found themselves completely overthrown in argument; --have at length resolved to try what can be done by

¹⁴ Northern Advocate, April 24, 1850, p. 15.

¹⁵ Ibid., May 15, 1850, p. 26.

¹⁶ April 11, 1850, p. 42.

¹⁷ December 12, 1849, p. 749.

force, and have accordingly concentrated their influence in Congress, with the hope of forcing through some legal enactment which may be regarded as an entrenchment [sic] on the rights of the South.¹⁸

The editor considered the proposed abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and any restrictions upon slavery in the territories that came within the Southern latitude as "so palpable a violation of the Federal Constitution that we see not how it can be borne by the Southern States." His final thought on the convention was that, if one were actually held, all Southern states should participate fully, including North Carolina.¹⁹

The Georgia Christian Index reflected the reserved sentiment of its state. It was, of course, a matter of principle to the editor that he would not join any debate that might be partisan; hence he refused "to raise a finger either in support of or in opposition to the Nashville Convention." The fact that there were several able political papers on both sides indicated clearly that he should leave the discussion to them and that sentiment was evenly divided.²⁰

Several Southern editors described the tone of the meeting when it was held in June. One editor described the proceedings as "manly, dignified, conciliatory, and firm."²¹ While the convention was still in session the Nashville Advocate remarked that the deliberations were remarkable for their calmness as though he expected them to be otherwise.²² The description by the editor of the

18 Biblical Recorder, January 26, 1850.

19 Ibid.

20 April 11, 1850, p. 59.

21 Southern Advocate, June 21, 1850, p. 11.

22 June 14, 1850.

Southern Baptist was also in this vein. "It takes strong and dignified grounds on Southern rights, but favors a reasonable compromise. The proceedings of this body have, on the whole, been of a conciliating character."²³

Thus a meeting that was at one time fraught with possible danger to the Union, came to a relatively quiet climax and no longer posed any threat to the Compromise. Another major obstacle to compromise was to be removed when the determined hostility and opposition of the Taylor administration was replaced by the sympathy and support of the Fillmore administration.

Taylor, as a Southern slaveholder, had been somewhat mistrusted by the Northern church press. He soon demonstrated, however, that he was national rather than sectional in his views, and in his first message had recommended the admission of California as a free state. Seward had considerable influence over him, which was reflected in Taylor's determined resistance to the further extension of slavery. He just as determinedly resisted the Compromise and consistently used his influence against it. The death of President Taylor on July 9, 1850, revealed, as one might expect then, that a change in sentiment toward him had occurred on the part of the religious press of the North. His support of the immediate admission of California was undoubtedly a decisive factor, as was the indication of his opposition to slavery extension. In addition, his inflexible posture was very attractive to most of those who stressed slavery as fundamentally a moral question upon which compromise was impossible.

23 June 19, 1850.

In the view of the Northern Advocate, the political relations of the country had never sustained so heavy a loss as at the death of Taylor. The editor liked his avowed and actual non-partisanship, his nationalism, his moral firmness, and the fact that, on the "great" question, he seemed to lean toward the side of the oppressed, even though a slaveholder.²⁴ The New York Baptist Register commended very specifically Taylor's counter-proposals to the Compromise. The President, the editor said, even though in office only a little more than a year, had outdistanced the most distinguished of the veteran statesmen in his profound wisdom and his keen and discriminating sagacity. Had Congress adopted Taylor's plan, California would have long since been in the Union and all strife put to rest.²⁵

That Taylor had possessed the equal confidence of the North and South impressed the Watchman of the Prairies of Chicago, but especially impressive was his support of the admission of California independently of other questions.²⁶ This feeling that Taylor possessed the confidence of the entire nation also characterized the editor of the more conservative Advocate and Journal. Sharing the view that Taylor's death was a national calamity, he said, "Why God should have removed the executive head of the government, at a time when the influence of his associations with southern institutions and interests would give him great influence in bringing the pending controversy to a sane and happy termination, we are not able to see."²⁷

24 July 17, 1850, p. 62.

25 July 18, 1850, p. 98.

26 July 16, 1850.

27 July 18, 1850, p. 114.

The New York Evangelist regarded Taylor as being peculiarly qualified to lead the country through a time of violent strife.²⁸ But one Northern editor acknowledged the existence of the view that Taylor's death actually expedited the process of saving the Union from ruin. Without contradicting the implications of such a view, he expressed his own belief that civil war had been averted "by the hand of Providence alone."²⁹

Taylor received somewhat more reserved commendation from the South, but here also, there seemed to be genuine respect for his personal qualities, and, in some instances, the view was shared with the North that he was the indispensable man. The Southern Advocate and the Southern Baptist of Charleston, the Christian Index of Georgia, and the Biblical Recorder of North Carolina routinely expressed the shock, the uncertain bearing of the event upon the crisis, and their confidence in Taylor's character.³⁰ There was no obvious expression of feeling that Taylor had betrayed the interests of his section.

Other papers, however, with moderately pro-Southern views, were more disturbed by the possible consequences of his loss. The editor of the Presbyterian Herald of Louisville wrote:

The present critical attitude of our public affairs, to our poor short-sighted judgments, makes this the greatest calamity that has ever befallen this nation. It does seem that God has abandoned us as a nation, for our sins, and is about to give us over to temporary destruction, as a punishment for them.³¹

28 July 11, 1850, p. 110.

29 Baptist Memorial, 1850, pp. 392-393.

30 July 19, 1850, p. 26; July 17, 1850; July 18, 1850, p. 114; July 13, 1850.

31 July 11, 1850.

The next week he gave as his reasons the fact that Taylor combined "inflexible firmness and determination, an honest love of country and an integrity of purpose to preserve it inviolate." He remarked also of Taylor's "strong and abiding hold upon the confidence and affections of the masses in all sections of the country, a hold which would enable him to carry his message over the heads of intriguing partizans [sic]." He frankly admitted his earlier doubts about him.³²

The Richmond Religious Herald commended the same qualities in the President, but with a somewhat more general comment as to his capacity "to advance the interests and further the prosperity of the Union."³³ The Christian Observer, the paper of Southern sentiment published in Philadelphia, said of Taylor:

Many eyes were turned to him as a citadel of strength, as the Patriot and Hero, of quiet firmness, invincible energy, endowed with singular wisdom for presiding over a great nation at such a crisis as the present--THE MAN above all others, fitted by Providence, to exert a strong conservative and pacific influence over public affairs.³⁴

Thus it seems that during Taylor's brief tenure, and before there was any chance to see the results of his policy, men tended to see in it what, from their own point of view at least, seemed to be effective leadership.

There were several things about Fillmore which indicated that his administration would have a different bearing toward the Compromise. There was, first of all, the fact that Seward's influence would be lost since Seward and Fillmore were enemies. Then,

³² Presbyterian Herald, July 18, 1850.

³³ July 18, 1850, p. 114.

³⁴ July 13, 1850, p. 110.

too, Fillmore had already indicated to Taylor that he would vote for the Compromise in case of a tie.³⁵ Fillmore's cabinet was a much stronger one than Taylor's had been and, while Webster's vote was lost in the Senate, his key position in the Fillmore cabinet was probably even more significant for the Compromise.

Sentiment in the church press was varied as to the policies and personnel of the new administration. The editor of the Central Christian Herald of Cincinnati expected Fillmore to guide successfully general affairs.³⁶ He found the new cabinet to be a strong one and composed of men who would "regard the whole Republic as their country, and the preservation of the Union as eminently a part of their official duty."³⁷ The editor of Methodism's central organ had "great confidence in the practical wisdom, patriotism, and firmness" of the new President.³⁸

The judgment of the editor of the Watchman and Reflector of Boston was more reserved. He was not sure of either Fillmore's or his cabinet's policy in regard to slavery and territorial questions. He noted that a majority were from the slave states and he noted Webster's position which now removed him from voting in favor of the Compromise. The editor anticipated the failure of the Omnibus and that, in such a case, the new administration would be likely to adopt Taylor's plan.³⁹

The Omnibus Bill was indeed to go down to defeat at the end of

³⁵ Nevins, Ordeal of Union, Vol. I, p. 335.

³⁶ July 11, 1850, p. 54.

³⁷ July 25, 1850, p. 63.

³⁸ Advocate and Journal, July 18, 1850, p. 114.

³⁹ July 25, 1850, p. 119.

the month of July, but not, of course, before more heated debate, parliamentary diversions, and excited fears. The Boston Watchman and Reflector was quite disgusted with Congress by this time.

"Nearly eight weeks of something worse than inaction have now gone over the heads of men who were elected to legislate for the interests of the nation.--We are well nigh sick of recording, week after week, the all-talking but do-nothing propensities of Congress orators."⁴⁰

The conduct of Southern Congressmen drew the notice of the editor of the Northern Advocate of western New York who recorded an altercation in Congress when Northern and Southern men launched verbal attacks that came close to actual blows. The point at issue was Chase's explanation of the higher law reference in Seward's speech. The editor of the Advocate severely condemned what he considered to be the "haughty, arrogant and discourteous demeanor" of the Southern Senators on this occasion.⁴¹ For the most part such expressions as these fairly represented the interest of the press during the weeks of debate during the summer. There seemed to be little inclination on the part of the editors to rediscuss the issues that had borne with such intensity upon the public mind for so long.

Debate continued in the Senate, however, and frequently with considerable heat. Butler of South Carolina and Benton of Missouri attacked the bill and Webster and Clay each made their final rebuttal speeches before Webster assumed his new position and the aging

⁴⁰ July 11, 1850, p. 111.

⁴¹ July 31, 1850, p. 70.

Clay left for a rest. In spite of a majority in favor of compromise in general and also in favor of the individual measures, the Omnibus Bill did not pass. Many Senators were willing to vote for most of the measures who would not support the whole. Those who could not support the bill in its entirety, joined with its opponents in introducing amendments designed to defeat the Omnibus. Finally, through complicated maneuverings, the bill died on July 31 and its extreme opponents celebrated a premature victory.

Most editors of the church papers were fully aware that the defeat of the Omnibus was relatively insignificant in terms of the outcome. To the editor of the Watchman and Reflector, however, it was proof of the folly of trying to harmonize antagonisms where such great principles were involved. Said he,

Mr. Clay may have thought he was seeking to adjust vexed questions of expediency which only tended to disturb needlessly, the amity of sections; but the bill for this purpose, which he had so carefully prepared as to have it look like an unexceptionable compromise, embodied the most fearful sacrifices of principle. It left the question of slavery-extension wide open, and encouraged slavery propagandists to hope that they might gain a foothold in all the new territory which should be left after the admission of California as a State.⁴²

Instead of the scheme preventing disunion, it would have, this editor insisted, simply fed the fires of disunionist sentiment among the extremes of both sections. He rejoiced in its defeat and looked forward to a fairly simple task ahead of Congress, i.e., to admit California and New Mexico and to properly adjust the boundary of Texas. That done, Congress could adjourn.⁴³

⁴² August 8, 1850, p. 126.

⁴³ Ibid.

Zion's Herald of Boston welcomed the defeat of the bill because, as its editor had contended all along with the confidence of one who felt he had a majority, each question should have been decided on its own merits, by majority rule. "Let that test be applied, and whatsoever section of the nation refuses to abide the result, let it be denounced as treasonable and promptly brought to its senses by the executive power."⁴⁴

The New York Evangelist attributed the failure to the bill's being "overloaded with freight, and set to achieve impossible heights." In addition, the editor said,

The scheme was too unfair and oppressive to command the confidence of the honest representatives of the North, however desirous to secure the peace which was its object. It has only exemplified what was well known before, that as long as the South shall choose to assert the claim to subsidize the total power, commerce, policy and reputation of the nation for the security and extension of her slave system, there can be no harmony.⁴⁵

Obviously such men did not anticipate that, almost to the exact detail, the measures would be passed piecemeal.

The Chicago Watchman of the Prairies saw the defeat of the bill as clearing the way for specific action. The editor, however, did not look for action beyond the adjustment of the territorial question.⁴⁶ A correspondent of the Advocate and Journal of New York noted the immense amount of debate that had occurred, accounting it as time well spent. There is some question as to his characterization of the Congressional analysis as "patient." He felt that most people would really care little whether the matters

⁴⁴ August 7, 1850, p. 126.

⁴⁵ August 8, 1850, p. 127.

⁴⁶ August 13, 1850.

were settled in one or several bills. The latter he fully expected.⁴⁷ The Presbyterian Advocate of Pittsburgh fully concurred in the view that much good must have resulted from this "full comparison of views."⁴⁸

The Biblical Recorder voiced the regret of many in the South at the defeat of the Compromise Bill. This editor realized, however, that it had become so "eviscerated by amendments" that it was no longer feasible. Nor did its defeat deter him from believing that the existing difficulties would be adjusted and the slavery question finally disposed of in a different way.⁴⁹ This, in fact, it was.

After the defeat of the Omnibus, Senator Douglas, chairman of the Committee on Territories, took command of the situation and steered the various measures through to piecemeal passage in the Senate. The Utah Bill, the only remnant of the original Omnibus, was passed without a roll call on August 1. On August 9, after four days of debate, the Texas Boundary Bill passed, including more territory than the Omnibus had provided for, and paying Texas ten million dollars for what she had yielded. This vote was 30 to 20. On August 13, the California Bill passed by a vote of 34 to 18, on the 14th the New Mexico Bill passed by a vote of 27 to 10, and on the 19th the Fugitive Slave Bill by a vote of 27 to 12. On this last bill the nays were eight Northern Whigs, three Northern Democrats, and Chase, a Free Soiler. Fifteen Northern Senators

⁴⁷ Advocate and Journal, August 8, 1850, p. 127.

⁴⁸ August 7, 1850, p. 162.

⁴⁹ August 10, 1850.

did not vote. The bill abolishing the slave trade in the District of Columbia passed by a vote of 33 to 19 on September 16, with the vote again largely sectional. Within a few days the House had passed these bills intact and the Compromise was complete along substantially the lines outlined by Clay in January and the Committee of Thirteen in May.

From the time these bills began to pass the Senate and it was apparent that the House would concur, the Southern church press expressed its relief and its optimism. This was before the reaction of the North to the Fugitive Slave Law developed. With a heading of "One Difficulty Settled," the editor of the Biblical Recorder of Raleigh wrote with favor of the passage of the Texas Bills and with anticipation that peace and harmony would soon prevail after the speedy passage of other bills.⁵⁰ The conservative Presbyterian Advocate of New York also joined in these sentiments,⁵¹ as did the pro-Southern Christian Observer of Philadelphia. "We rejoice," the editor said, "that these great disturbing questions have been settled. We bless God that our country has been delivered from the atrocities of civil war."⁵²

The editor of the Presbyterian Herald of Louisville was no less pleased and certain that this presaged indefinite harmony. "The bills that have been passed may not be the precise ones which any one man or party would have deemed best, but they will restore quiet and take away the fuel that fed the flame of agitation, and that of itself will compensate for much that would otherwise be

⁵⁰ August 17, 1850.

⁵¹ August 21, 1850, p. 170.

⁵² September 14, 1850, p. 146.

objectionable." He was sure, in spite of ultraist meetings in South Carolina and Massachusetts, that the masses would support the Union.⁵³ The Religious Herald of Richmond called these acts all praiseworthy efforts of the Congress,⁵⁴ and in retrospect gave thanks for "an overruling Providence, and the efforts of many of our wisest statesmen" by means of which the dark clouds had dissipated and left the Union intact.⁵⁵ The editor of the Raleigh Biblical Recorder found the measures considerably more than he had been prepared to expect. He was also gratified to find the people in and around Baltimore, which he was visiting at the time, in firm support of the measures.⁵⁶

The passage of the Compromise was especially satisfying to some in the South because they felt that their section had, in the past, always been the conciliatory party. One editor remarked of this with the fond hope that the North would "make amends for aggressions on the South, and cease to clamor for the abolition or restriction of slavery."⁵⁷ The Christian Index, also, placed the chief responsibility for the sectional difficulties upon the North. The editor, however, expressed encouragement at the now mounting evidence that there was a disposition to put down slavery agitation, indicating a change in the posture of the North.⁵⁸

In the North the feeling was one of having lost the issue.

53 Presbyterian Herald, September 12, 1850.

54 October 10, 1850, p. 162.

55 January 2, 1851, p. 2.

56 September 28, 1850.

57 Southern Baptist, September 25, 1850.

58 September 26, 1850, p. 156.

Not even such a conservative paper as the Advocate and Journal of New York could endorse the Fugitive Slave Act nor could it accept, without some misgivings, the Texas settlement. In spite of this, the editor endorsed the settlement in general because of the expected result. "The painful solicitude in which the public mind has been kept for a year past, will be temporarily, if not permanently removed thereby. Sectional recriminations and jealousies, it may be expected, will thus be, to a large extent, suppressed." Certainly, he thought, a free California and a reasonable assurance that New Mexico and Utah would be free, gave cause for rejoicing.⁵⁹

The editor of the Advocate, however, had previously revealed his free soil propensities in spite of the moderation with which he voiced them. This was indicated by his comment on Virginia's opposition to the admission of California as a free state. "Why the Virginia Senators, the prosperity and importance of whose State have been so palpably retarded by the exhausting effects of this institution, should thus put themselves forward as champions for its extension, appears to me to be somewhat strange."⁶⁰

In the West, where both free soil and nationalist sentiment were strong, there was relief at the end of discussion but varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the territorial settlement. The abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia was regarded as a welcome gain. The editor of the Cincinnati publication, the Western Advocate, said that

an immense majority of the public, although by no means unaware of the objectionable features attaching to some of these

⁵⁹ September 19, 1850, p. 150.

⁶⁰ August 22, 1850, p. 134.

measures, will be gratified at the result, I take for granted. Attachment to the Union is a sentiment so predominant in the minds of nineteen-twentieths of the citizens of the United States, from Maine to California, that they are willing to submit to almost any sacrifice, not compromising a good conscience, to avoid circumstances endangering its perpetuity.⁶¹

This editor had insisted throughout the controversy that the Union was not really in danger. "We viewed it," he said, "from the beginning as we still view it, as a system of intrigue for the federal offices, and especially for the next presidency and the offices dependent upon it."⁶²

While the bills were being discussed, the Central Christian Herald, another Cincinnati paper, remarked simply that the Fugitive Slave Bill then pending was more stringent than that of 1793.⁶³ When the Texas Boundary Bill passed, however, the editor was not quite sure whether the provisions were more or less favorable to liberty than those of Clay's Omnibus Bill. The effect of the bill as he viewed it, was to convert one hundred thousand square miles of territory otherwise free into slave territory. "Thus Congress," he said, "a majority of whose members were thought to be strenuously opposed to slavery-extension, in its very first act, which had any relation to the subject, passed a vote which extended slavery over a region larger than Ohio and Indiana put together."⁶⁴

According to the editor of the Herald, to yield any free territory to slavery permitted sin by law, and no necessity or

61 Western Advocate, September 18, 1850, p. 150.

62 Ibid., September 25, 1850, p. 154.

63 August 29, 1850, p. 82.

64 September 12, 1850, p. 90.

expediency could warrant this. "The principles of God's law and the rights of humanity are among those sacred things, which man should never presume to make the subject of bargain or compromise." The nature of the present compromise was such that the rights and interests of the colored man were bartered away in order to appease the clamor of the South. There can be no denying that the question he raised was of some relevance and while it had abstract components, to some it was certainly not an abstraction. Perhaps it reached the very heart of the dilemma in 1850. "There is a third party in this Compromise," he said, "which is not permitted to have a voice in the matter, whose interests are sadly overlooked in its stipulations."⁶⁵ This act, which seemed to the editor to unjustly attach free territory to Texas, a slave state, was for him the bitterest feature of the entire Compromise. As to other measures, he expected the Fugitive Slave Law to have little effect because it was unenforceable, and he felt that the restriction of the slave trade in the District of Columbia was good as far as it went.⁶⁶

Zion's Herald of Boston still had some hopes in early September that the House might modify or reject some of the Senate measures. The editor complained that the Texas Bill yielded more than under Clay's Omnibus, that the Fugitive Slave Bill would, if carried, "be as foul a blotch . . . on our national character as could disfigure it."⁶⁷ One week later he uttered his astonishment that

⁶⁵ Central Christian Herald, September 19, 1850, p. 94.

⁶⁶ Ibid., October 3, 1850, p. 102.

⁶⁷ September 11, 1850, p. 146.

Christian men could wish to protect slavery, to extend it over new regions, and to express such hostility to the admission of a free state. "Is there," he asked, "a generous citizen in these free States that does not feel the deep mortification of these facts?"⁶⁸

Another Boston paper, the Watchman and Reflector, warned that "a fearful accountability . . . both political and moral" rested upon those members of Congress from the free states "who forgot the feelings and convictions of their constituents in their zeal to bring about compromises in favor of slavery, and against principle." The editor made his views known on each specific issue. He said,

The ten millions given away will not do much harm, but the accession of new slave territory, is something that Northern men had no business to sanction. New Mexico has a territorial Government, and, even without the Wilmot Proviso, which ought to have been made part of the bill, she will not be likely to let slavery into her borders. Utah also has a territorial Government, and it is not at all probable slavery will find a standpoint there.⁶⁹

He very briefly identified the Fugitive Slave Law as "an abomination unworthy of the age." And finally, he expected to see a more radical change eventually follow the abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia.⁷⁰

The editor of the Watchman overlooked the posture of his own section, and especially those of his own persuasion who had insisted so emphatically on the Proviso, when he accused the South of turning the question of the admission of California upon the question of slavery. He urged the North to learn from the session of

⁶⁸ Zion's Herald, September 18, 1850, p. 150.

⁶⁹ September 26, 1850, p. 154.

⁷⁰ September 26, 1850, p. 154.

Congress just past, to unite across Whig and Democratic lines whenever slavery was at issue, thus challenging the supremacy of the South at this point. He wrote this particular editorial entitled, "A Free State on the Pacific," to express his joy at California statehood. It was no concession to Southern feelings to accent as he did in conclusion, that "admission of California destroys the fatal equilibrium which Mr. Calhoun labored through life to maintain."⁷¹ He denied completely that there was any justification for concession to the South for economic advantage, as some had argued. That such commercial advantages existed was not the point. To American freemen he addressed an appeal to rise up and break the "golden chains" on behalf, not of the "pocket of the merchant" but in behalf of "the conscience and the heart of humanity."⁷²

It was not in connection with the territorial questions, however, that the fury of the North arose. An immense volume of protest was to swell from most of the papers of the Northern churches when the full force of the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Act dawned upon their editors. Other issues quickly became minor by comparison with the case of the hounded fugitive and the Northern citizen impressed, by the new law, into the business of catching slaves.

⁷¹ Watchman and Reflector, October 17, 1850, p. 166.

⁷² Ibid., October 24, 1850, p. 170.

CHAPTER IX

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT AND THE HIGHER LAW

The Fugitive Slave Law was as infuriating to the North as any proviso or any resolution condemning Southern slavery had been to the South. This law generated great feeling in the few weeks immediately following its passage. Only a strong conviction that it was unenforceable prevented more intense reaction. There was little real perception of the temper of the land when legislators passed this law under the heading of compromise.

Northern churchmen offered four main criticisms of the Fugitive Slave Law as it came from Congress in 1850. First, no trial by jury was allowed the fugitive. Second, the hearing was held, not before a judge, but before a special Federal commissioner who could issue a certificate returning the fugitive to slavery without stay or appeal. Third, the commissioner received a fee of ten dollars if he declared in favor of the master and five dollars if he gave the decision in favor of the slave. The argument that more paper work was involved in the first instance was no palliative to Northern feeling that it was a bribe. Fourth, the marshal or deputies who were to make the arrest were subject to a fine of \$1000 if they refused to execute it, or if the slave escaped. With this was the provision that the arresting officers might summon all citizens to their aid, thus making the North a gigantic camp of "bloodhounds," in the view of many.

Even the most conservative editors of the Northern churches could not receive this law with equanimity. The editor of the

general organ of the Methodist Church, the Advocate and Journal, had repeatedly voiced his relief with a settlement which seemed to him to have gone so far to allay public anxiety. But he made a specific exception to the Fugitive Slave Law. Of it he said,

Nothing has been done at Washington for many years which has created dissatisfaction so deep and general in the Northern States as the passage of this law. And should its workings continue as they have begun, its repeal or modification will be sought with untiring zeal, until the object is attained.¹

The editor of the Christian Observer, Philadelphia journal of the New School and pro-Southern, said that he was "not so sure that the law is so well adapted to secure the rights of the South, and at the same time meet the feelings of the North, as it might have been." He was sure that friends of the measure would be willing later to modify it if it proved defective.² The Old School Presbyterian Advocate gave a very similar notice of the passage of the bill. Its editor said, "It has been well remarked that it is conceived in a spirit of great rigor, and indicates a disagreement between public opinion and the legislative power." He then described the reported effect of the act in alarming the free Negro population to the point that they were leaving for Canada in large numbers.³

The Presbyterian Advocate later reported discussion of the Fugitive Slave Law in the Synod of Pittsburgh. The Synod did not take the action in protest against the Fugitive Law requested by one of its churches, since the usual conservative spirit prevailed. The law was too new, the body asserted, to have been tested, or

1 October 10, 1850, p. 163.

2 February 15, 1851, p. 26.

3 October 2, 1850, p. 194.

for the members of the body to be well informed of the law itself. It would be of no practical benefit, therefore, and it would "compromit [sic] the wisdom and dignity of the body" to make any "rash or hasty expression of its mind on this subject." The body called attention to its consistent opposition to "chattel slavery as a great political and moral evil."⁴ The same paper later reported the New Jersey Synod as having taken similar mild action, although this Synod went on to express regret at the passage of the bill.⁵

Many of the anti-slavery papers of the North, before or while they denounced the new law, reaffirmed their willingness to abide by the spirit of the constitutional provisions for the return of fugitives. This was partly due to the fact that the old law had been greatly qualified by state laws and public opinion in the North. The editor of the New York Evangelist said, "Now, if a law had been enacted which should simply have carried out the provision of the Constitution, and been kept in harmony with other great rights of that instrument . . . there would be no complaint and no resistance."⁶ Two weeks later he stated his belief that the real "disunionists and truce-breakers" were those who refused to modify the law "so as to make it consistent with the Constitution and the eternal laws of justice and mercy."⁷

The editor of the Cincinnati Western Advocate emphasized that "especially the more intelligent portion . . . consider it a requirement of the United States Constitution, obligatory on their

⁴ Presbyterian Advocate, October 30, 1850, p. 2.

⁵ Ibid., November 27, 1850, p. 18.

⁶ October 17, 1850, p. 166.

⁷ October 31, 1850, p. 174.

respective states, to deliver up fugitives of this class to their southern masters, after a fair hearing and proof of their identity."⁸ He had no objection himself to a "fair and proper enactment, to carry out the constitutional provision." If it did not protect the free against the kidnapper then he looked to a "higher law" to make the bill "comparatively nugatory."⁹ Even William Hosmer, the very strongly anti-slavery editor of the Northern Advocate granted the reality of the compromises of the Constitution while regretting the existence of such compromises.¹⁰

But these mild and tentative reservations were distinctly in the minority. Much more typical of reaction throughout the North was the description by the editor of Zion's Herald of Boston.

A profound sentiment of disappointment and national degradation has been spread through the North, at least, by the announcement that the bill, with all its original, unmitigated enormity, has become a law of the land, and that too by Northern votes--with a Northern majority in the House, and a Northern President in the executive chair.¹¹

During the next few months the organs of the Northern churches were filled with descriptions of public protest meetings, and more especially those protests emanating from church bodies. The New York Baptist Register and other Baptist papers quoted in full, the following resolution of the Baptist Convention of the state of Michigan.

Resolved, That the recent law of Congress relative to the recapture of fugitive slaves, violating as it does, every guaranty of personal rights--setting aside all the ordinary forms of law--giving an exclusive regard to the interests

⁸ Western Advocate, September 4, 1850, p. 142.

⁹ Ibid., September 25, 1850, p. 154.

¹⁰ Hosmer, Higher Law, pp. 157, 158.

¹¹ September 25, 1850, p. 154.

of the slaveholder, and requiring freemen and Christians, in order to its enforcement, to violate their obligations to humanity, to conscience, and to God--is a flagrant violation of civil and moral rights, and calls for prompt and efficient effort on the part of all Christian citizens, by all lawful measures, to obtain its speedy repeal.¹²

The Watchman and Reflector of Boston carried a notice of similar action by the Massachusetts Baptist Convention.¹³ Resolutions of disapproval came also from the New School Synods of New York and New Jersey. These groups counseled their anxious colored brethren to await the action of the states and, in case of any emergency, to seek the advice of their presbyteries.¹⁴

The Methodist Episcopal Church papers of East and West also carried numerous editorials, accounts of meetings, and correspondence which condemned the measure. The Western Advocate carried a letter from its New York correspondent calling the law the most infamous enactment to be found in the statutes of any civilized nation in the nineteenth century. He then proceeded with one of the most violent condemnations on record of the Compromise and its leaders.

Then in comes the great compromiser--whose whole life has been a system of trimming, and who is now evidently attempting to effect a compromise between the devil and the church, by which he may escape the reward of his own misdeeds--with a plan to appease the antagonist sections of the Union, and the sacrifice of this covenant of peace is seen to be the sacred liberties of three millions of American people, whose maternal ancestors were of African extraction. Next follows the great expounder of the Constitution, who proceeds to show that the sacred compact of the nation demands of northern freemen the restoration of persons claimed as fugitives from labor.¹⁵

¹² Proceedings of the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Baptist Convention of the State of Michigan (Detroit, 1850), p. 7.

¹³ November 7, 1850, p. 178.

¹⁴ Central Christian Herald, October 31, 1850, p. 118.

¹⁵ October 16, 1850, p. 65.

The editor had been absent when this was printed and in the next issue indicated his disapproval of the aspersions cast by the correspondent on Clay and Webster.¹⁶

The Western Advocate's correspondent from northern Ohio described meetings held throughout the Western Reserve for the purpose of "denouncing the abominable slave-catching law recently passed by Congress." He remarked of the significance of the fact that people of all classes and parties joined in the denunciations. This led him to conclude that good might ultimately result from the act by uniting all parties and factions into one group "against the slave power of the South."¹⁷ The New England correspondent described similar activity and he, too, was impressed by the fact that all parties and classes agreed on the highly objectionable nature of the law and many were even willing to do all they could to prevent its enforcement.¹⁸

Zion's Herald of Boston paraded a similar host of witnesses against the law, some inside, some outside, his own Methodist Church.¹⁹ One meeting held in a New England Methodist Church condemned the law as "at variance with every sentiment of humanity--repugnant to the principles of natural justice as recognized among civilized men, and utterly at war with the express precepts of the Bible." This group pledged themselves to their Christian duty of helping "by all proper means" in the effort of the fugitive to

¹⁶ Western Advocate, October 23, 1850, p. 169.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 170.

¹⁸ October 30, 1850, p. 174.

¹⁹ October 16, 1850, p. 166.

escape from the "man stealer."²⁰

The editor of Zion's Herald commended his colleague of the new Michigan Advocate for his "brave stand on public questions." The Michigan organ had carried five columns of quotes and comments in opposition to the "Black Law" on the first page of its first issue.²¹ Next month the Herald carried many resolutions and comments from widespread sources, including Maine and western New York,²² and in May, the resolutions from Providence Annual Conference. This group pointed to the atrocious nature of a law that compelled the "panting slave, flying from the home of bondage," to seek refuge under a monarchy.²³

At this time and probably inspired more by this legislation than any other factor, it became the custom of nearly all Methodist annual conferences, in whatever section of the North, to establish a standing committee on slavery. Heretofore some of the New England conferences only had such committees. In 1850 and 1851 only those conferences in areas that had a decidedly New England ancestry such as the Michigan Conference or the Erie Conference of Ohio passed the strongly worded resolutions. Nevertheless these committees mark the origin of an important instrument for keeping the slavery issue constantly alive by annual review.²⁴

The propagandists of anti-slavery in the church exploited the harsh features of the law to the very limit. "It not only denies

²⁰ Zion's Herald, October 23, 1850, p. 171.

²¹ Ibid., January 8, 1851, p. 6.

²² February 19, 1851, p. 30; February 26, 1851, p. 36.

²³ May 28, 1851, p. 85.

²⁴ See Journals of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

the person claimed as a slave a trial by jury," said the editor of the Northern Advocate, "but makes the marshall, or other officer into whose custody he shall come, responsible in a penalty of one thousand dollars for his safe delivery to his alleged master."²⁵ Hosmer, the editor of this Advocate, listed the usual objections to the law, with some additional ones. Not only was the law unconstitutional because of the special court which Congress had set up, but also in that the expense of recovering slaves was placed unjustly upon the national treasury. It made slave-catching a national business; hence it made the entire United States a slaveholding nation when the only constitutional right of the South in the matter was a prohibition of Northern hospitality to the runaway slave.²⁶

Hosmer did not expect the law to be a success. Only absolute coercion, he said, could make it so. In it Congress had enacted a portion of the law of slave states with its "total disregard of personal rights and sheer contempt for humanity." A similar law enacted only in slave states, would have recieved no notice.²⁷ He was sure that the law was destined to "remain a dead letter, wherever either virtue or intelligence have existence."²⁸

The papers of the Northwest offered much the same objections to the law as did Hosmer. His fellow Methodist of the Western Advocate in Cincinnati was somewhat delayed in getting to examine the law in detail. When he did, he declared his "utter astonishment that such a law could have passed in any enlightened tribunal." He

²⁵ September 18, 1850, p. 99.

²⁶ Hosmer, Higher Law, pp. 158-163.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

²⁸ Northern Advocate, October 9, 1850, p. 110.

identified the usual objections, but he refused to impugn the motives of the statesmen. "We cannot believe," he said, "that these estimable men perceived the tendency of their votes."²⁹ Later he cited incidents which indicated that the law was unenforceable and offered the hope of an early repeal.³⁰

He received the censure in full force of the Indiana State Sentinel edited by W. J. Brown, a member of Congress. Brown defended the law point by point, after which he advised the ministers and papers of the Methodist and other churches to cease attempting to influence the public mind on issues which students of divinity could not be qualified to judge. He warned that "if the Methodist Church set their faces against delivering up fugitive slaves, they will divide the Union as they divided their own Church."³¹

The editor of the Advocate promptly denied that he had counselled men to resist the law or that he had even opposed delivering, by proper means, the fugitive to the master. This was entirely true. He then specified his ultimate objections. "But we do disapprove of a law which makes the whole north a hunting-ground for kidnappers, exposes freemen to the claims of slavery, offers a premium to corrupt officers, and taxes and attempts to turn the whole population into slave-catchers or kidnappers."³² This was, of course, a highly colored, emotional view of the law's results.

This exaggeration of its anticipated effects was nowhere greater than in New England. A clergyman of that section declared

²⁹ Western Advocate, October 9, 1850, p. 162.

³⁰ Ibid., November 13, 1850, p. 181.

³¹ Quoted in Western Advocate, November 20, 1850, p. 186.

³² Western Advocate, November 20, 1850, p. 186.

that the bill made virtual slaves of everyone

binding us, under the penalty of fine and imprisonment, not only to refuse to harbor, or give a morsel of food to the panting fugitive, but to assist in recapturing him and fastening upon him the chains which he has broken. At the bidding of the most recreant, cruel, and debased slave driver in the country, every man, woman, and child, every freeman, philanthropist and Christian, in the land--every senator, national representative, governor, minister, lawyer, physician, teacher, merchant, and mechanic, is bound to assist in carrying into execution this law. . . . Under this atrocious law there are no free States.³³

This minister was completely certain that the issue which the politicians regarded as settled was far from settled. He anticipated such an excitement as the nation had never before witnessed, a storm that would "try the hearts of men, and shake this republic to its centre."³⁴ A Boston pastor declared in a sermon that he expected much the same result. He believed further that the law would "recoil with resistless power upon slavery itself," for this "overt and frenzied act of the slave power."³⁵

The editor of the Watchman and Reflector of Boston condemned the law on the basis of its spirit which was so completely foreign to the democracy of the age. "No court, judge, magistrate, or other person," he said, "can, by habaeus corpus, jury trial, or any conceivable procedure, question the words of this certificate, or interfere with the despotic prerogative of the commissioner, a single officer, on the affidavit of a single man, is thus made

³³ Rufus W. Clark, A Review of the Rev. Moses Stuart's Pamphlet on Slavery, Entitled Conscience and the Constitution (Boston, 1850), pp. 102, 103.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 103.

³⁵ Nathaniel Colver, The Fugitive Slave Bill; or, God's Laws Paramount to the Laws of Men. A Sermon, Preached on Sunday, October 20, 1850 (Boston, 1850), p. 23.

supreme arbiter of the fate of a human being; and this in a free State." He feared the grievous results in riot and bloodshed that might ensue, but he emphatically counselled forbearance and discretion on the part of both Negro and white citizen.³⁶

Zion's Herald of the same city listed all the objectionable features besides emphasizing the bill's destruction of national concord and its fatal interference with general prosperity. The editor indicated that repeal was the nation's only honorable alternative, an action which citizens should seek by every honorable means.³⁷ He also added his agreement to a view espoused by others, i.e., that the ultimate reaction would be a boon to the anti-slavery cause. He introduced his argument by citing a new objection to the law which he had discovered in the South. A Southerner had complained that the law made it more difficult than ever to secure the return of the fugitive since so many had fled to Canada. The editor commended the man's good sense, then said, "It is the greatest blow against slavery ever given in the history of the country. The proslavery political leaders in the South, stand stunned and paralyzed by the reaction of [to] this consummately foolish act of legislation."³⁸

This was not an accurate description of the posture of the editors of the Southern church. Many, in fact, who had previously adhered with great consistency to the self-imposed rule of silence on political matters now broke that silence. No editor had been more circumspect in this regard than the very capable Luther Lee of

³⁶ Watchman and Reflector, October 10, 1850, p. 162.

³⁷ November 6, 1850, p. 177.

³⁸ November 20, 1850, p. 186.

the Richmond Advocate who became, for a time, the leading spokesman of his denomination on this issue. He did not, however, break his silence until after some provocative editorials in the Methodist press of the North, specifically the Northern Advocate of western New York and Zion's Herald of Boston. Lee said,

This wise and just provision for giving efficiency to an article of the Constitution of the United States, seems, if we may judge from the temper of the religious press of the North, to have produced an effect never dreamed of by our honest and patriotic legislators. It works well in catching fugitive slaves,--but it has made a great many fugitives from sanity. Insane ravings against it are almost as common as the subjects whose wanderings it was intended to prevent.³⁹

Two weeks later he said, "We not only regard it as wise, but eminently conservative; and as now forming the strongest, and it may be the only link in the golden chain that binds our National Confederacy in glorious union." He then condemned the Northern Methodists for striving to "stimulate the excitement that already demands its repeal; and unite with political factions in promoting resistance to its execution." This, of course, was in obvious contrast to a Southern press which left the "hotheads of earth to strive with each other" while devoting its time to the building of the Kingdom of God among men.⁴⁰

The editors of Zion's Herald and the Northern Advocate both gave space to Lee's reference to the possibility that the Fugitive Slave Law was the last link between the sections. Said Hosmer,

If the law in question is the only link that binds our National Confederacy, it cannot be severed too soon. An alliance founded in any measure upon the odious privilege of tracing the free states in search of men, women, and

³⁹ Richmond Advocate, October 24, 1850, p. 170.

⁴⁰ Ibid., November 7, 1850, p. 178.

children, who have escaped from bondage, is at once a disgrace and a crime. No, we are not united to the South by this law. The law is a mere act of sufferance on our part. The union of these States is not, or was not, a conspiracy against human rights, though Congress has well nigh made it so, by enacting this abominable law.⁴¹

The editor of the Richmond Advocate continued to castigate his Northern brethren for constantly agitating the subject and for seeking to control the state and national legislatures on the subject. He considered it entirely the prerogative of those legislatures.⁴²

As time went on he became "more than ever convinced of the great evil of Northern Methodist preachers of fanaticism."⁴³

Before the Fugitive Slave Bill actually became law, the Southern Baptist of Charleston carried a report that the effective part of the bill was the section which provided a \$1000 penalty to the marshal who neglected his duty in arresting a fugitive.⁴⁴ After the law went into practical operation the editor showed enthusiasm for the fact that the fugitive slaves who had found security and protection in Pennsylvania and other states had taken alarm and fled to Canada, thus proving the law's efficacy. He anticipated that the law would be subject to dispute and that the dispute would probably break the old party lines in many areas.⁴⁵

For this editor it was not a matter of how to remove the evil of slavery, but of how to remove the evil of abolition. "How are we to stop the mouths or palsy the hands of those who persecute us?" he asked. "We know no cure for religious madness, the world

⁴¹ Northern Advocate, November 20, 1850, p. 134.

⁴² November 14, 1850, p. 182.

⁴³ November 28, 1850, p. 190.

⁴⁴ September 4, 1850.

⁴⁵ October 9, 1850.

has never discovered a remedy for fanaticism. But we can withdraw ourselves from its influence." He then went on to take the most extreme position in the South.

We can exclude their books from our schools, their slanderous papers from our tables, but the acts of our common government which brand slavery as a curse, and slaveholders as tyrants, remain to bring the blush of shame to our cheeks. . . . We cannot now doubt that the North is in earnest, that the agitators are in power there, and there is no safety for them or for us but in our leaving to them the field of contest. . . . We deceive ourselves if we suppose that anything short of secession will give us peace or put a stop to the progress of abolition.⁴⁶

He actually expressed the hope that the bill would be repealed in answer to Northern protests. "It always was a pretence [sic]," he said, "and could never be enforced. Its repeal will unite the South and rouse her to a sense of her danger. Mr. Seward is not alone in holding to the doctrine of a law higher than the Constitution."⁴⁷

For these sentiments, one of the constituents of the Southern Baptist took the writer severely to task. "Can you or ought you to be serious in this?" he asked.

Is it Christian? Is it common charity or common justice, to North or South, considered as a whole? Does the spirit of Christ teach us to hope that bad men of any kind will become worse? Wicked action (as we avow it to be) more wicked? Is it not, moreover, worthy some thought, that many, very many of your brethren North and South, regard this matter very differently? Honestly deprecate what you venture to hope for, and earnestly pray that the work of all these late excitements may terminate. . . . And this very Fugitive Slave Law, as a last measure, perhaps, for the peace of the country, be fairly obeyed.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Southern Baptist, October 23, 1850.

⁴⁷ Ibid., October 23, 1850.

⁴⁸ January 29, 1851.

The editor's reply was to offer an assessment of the status of public opinion in the North.

The disease of which we sicken and die is a religious one. It commenced in the pulpit and there it continued to spread until the religious journals of the North and West having caught the infection, are now spreading it through the masses young and old. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the matter is confined to abolition papers.⁴⁹

The editor of the Southern Advocate, neighbor of the Southern Baptist, had much the same complaint. He was pessimistic in the light of the ominous times. He also attributed the trouble to Northern churchmen. "Every mail brings us a budget of politico-religious ravings and reasonings,--the former greatly preponderating--in regard to matters utterly beyond the province of those who are set for the defence of the gospel." The final wreck of the confederacy, which he thought entirely possible, would be "mainly chargeable to the restlessness and phrensy of Northern ecclesiastical demagogues. They have identified conscience--a morbid and exacting conscience--with the cause in which they have embarked."⁵⁰

The pro-Southern Christian Observer of Philadelphia cited some of the protest meetings and the union meetings, giving an account of the active participation of ministers. That the agitation had entered the church was a source of deep regret to this editor. He did not regard the participating ministers as competent to appreciate "a political measure, intended to meet the complicated relations and circumstances of the extensive territories of our country."⁵¹

⁴⁹ Southern Baptist, January 29, 1851.

⁵⁰ Southern Advocate, December 20, 1850, p. 114.

⁵¹ November 16, 1850, p. 182.

The Observer complained that "amid the din of politics and agitation on the mooted questions of the day, Christian men at the South--men who love the Union, and who aspire to no distinction in the political world--have hardly been heard on the subject of the so-called 'compromise.'" The editor then quoted a Southern minister who expressed the hope that the North would carry out the fugitive provisions in good faith. He, too, warned that the stability of the Union depended upon the conduct of Northern men. "I am a Union-man," he said, "but if that law is nullified or repealed, I will go with the South for such measures of redress as a majority of the Southern States may deem proper."⁵²

It was precisely to the question of what kind of obedience or whether any obedience at all was required by such a law, to which the Northern press and pulpit addressed itself. On this issue Northern men faced the greatest challenge to their feelings and to their mode of action when those feelings were so deeply offended. The law and its enforcement invited abstract analyses which resolved themselves into the question of obedience, which in turn involved the question of a "higher law" that Seward had injected into the discussion months before.

When Seward made his speech in the Senate in opposition to the Compromise, he referred to the doctrine of the "higher law." This was not new doctrine either in politics or in religion. Whatever the acknowledged relationship between church and state, the church had always asserted in some form or other that all human

⁵² March 29, 1851, p. 50.

institutions were subject to the measurement of a divine law. The doctrine of natural rights in political thought was also an assertion that there was a superior measurement to which all constitutions must be subjected.

It is very likely, as Rhodes suggests, that Seward had not intended the doctrine to receive as wide an application as it did, and that Seward was the most unlikely person to be "suspected of soaring to such a moral height."⁵³ Seward had insisted that the constitution did not recognize property in man. Then he said that, even if it did, a higher law than the constitution decreed that the United States government not sanction the further growth of slavery.

The doctrine of the higher law provided the focal point of the debate that raged over the Fugitive Slave Law. It was used in the North to justify resistance to it, a resistance, however, which remained largely verbal. It did not require a Seward to introduce it. Anti-slavery men were keenly aware of its presence in their verbal arsenal well before 1850. On November 15, 1848, William Hosmer of the Northern Advocate, a paper published in Auburn, New York, voiced his conviction of the superiority of the law of God to all human enactments. He said,

The law of God is supreme, and it is not possible for men to give rectitude or authority to their laws, where they contravene the divine law. The civil law makes nothing right that God has not made right, and nothing lawful that he has not made lawful. Some, forgetful of this, pretend to justify slavery and other evils, because they are established by law, and they, as Christians, are required to yield obedience to the law.-- . . . Laws must be right, or they are of no force; they must be right, or the Christian

⁵³ Rhodes, History of the United States, Vol. I, p. 167.

is under positive obligation to disregard them.⁵⁴

The editor of the Watchman of the Prairies, even earlier in the controversy, amplified the common understanding of this view.

Politics like everything else should subserve God and religion and not religion politics as its God. And this should be done not by binding them together by any legal statute but by that leavening influence which results from love and obedience to God as supreme. . . . Civil government is ordained of God; by which is meant not that every unjust law is acknowledged of God, but that it is the will of God that men should live under a civil government and enjoy its benefits.⁵⁵

As a matter of fact, the whole argument of anti-slavery, that the issue was basically a moral one, implied the doctrine of a higher law. But like almost every other declaration in the debate of the era, this one was thrown out of proportion by the prevalent emotionalism. Hence a doctrine that normally implied simply a fairly rational review of institutions, became itself the center of irrational diatribe. And, as already noted, it made Seward a very popular man with those who made this special application of the higher law.

Hosmer was not the only, but he was the chief, exponent of the higher law as applied specifically to the Fugitive Slave Act. He not only advanced the view in his paper, but he offered it to the public in 1852 in a book entitled The Higher Law. According to Hosmer, there were three sources of the higher law: the natural constitution of things, the course of Providence, and direct revelation.⁵⁶ Civil government he defined as "an institution of nature, confirmed and sanctioned by Christianity."⁵⁷ Civil government was limited in that it could not bind conscience, impair any

⁵⁴ Northern Advocate, November 15, 1848, p. 130.

⁵⁵ February 8, 1848.

⁵⁶ Hosmer, Higher Law, p. 18.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

of the natural rights of man, release man from his responsibility to God, or change the nature of virtue and vice.⁵⁸ Obedience to civil law was a duty just as was obedience to the law of God except when the character of a civil law subverted the law of God.⁵⁹ "It is quite as patriotic," he said, "to break laws as to keep them, provided they are not what they should be. We may go even further, and affirm that patriotism absolutely demands resistance to bad laws."⁶⁰

In summary, he emphatically reiterated the supremacy of the higher law.

The higher law is first, midst, and last. It is the sum total of all authority, because on it rests whatever of obligation can be found in any human law. So vital is this doctrine of the Divine supremacy, that with it must stand or fall not only civil liberty, but religion itself. It is true beyond all contradiction, 1. That no man can preach the gospel without preaching the higher law; 2. That no man can believe in God without believing in the higher law; 3. That no man can be a Christian without keeping the higher law.⁶¹

The editor of the Boston Zion's Herald found it necessary to argue with the Scriptures in his promulgation of this doctrine. Titus 3:1 had stated, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates." The editor granted that the literal meaning of the text, as it stood, referred to human government, but he insisted that the declaration should be accepted in a qualified sense. He deemed it impossible

to yield at the same time obedience to that law of Christ which is written upon our hearts, and some of the barbarous

58 Hosmer, Higher Law, p. 41.

59 Ibid., p. 75.

60 Ibid., p. 85.

61 Ibid., p. 190.

enactments which stand as laws on the statute books of our own nation. Our conclusion therefore is, that St. Paul here speaks of all proper or righteous government, and that we are not bound either by this or any other passage of the inspired word, to yield obedience to unrighteous laws, or the irreligious commands of evil magistrates and rulers.⁶²

Among the many sermons preached at this time on the subject of obedience to law was one by a New York clergyman on December 12, 1850. He carefully analyzed various texts of scripture which seemed relevant to either side in the argument, concluding that there were indeed limitations upon obedience to civil government. Of course the history of the United States itself required a defense of the principle of revolution. He carefully circumscribed the right to disobedience while making it clear that "as a human constitution is superior to all particular statutes, and may modify or even nullify them, so are God's commands paramount to all other laws in the universe."⁶³ When the human law, therefore, conflicted directly with the divine, "it is then both the privilege and the duty of the subject to refuse compliance."⁶⁴

An anonymous pamphleteer of the North cited several categories of laws in which the higher law principle operated.

There are some laws which are ridiculous, and fall to the ground by the Higher Law of common sense;-some laws which are obsolete, and are defeated by the Higher Law of human progress;-some laws which are inconvenient and are overruled by the Higher Law of necessity;-some laws which are unnatural, and are null by the Higher Law of instinct and nature; and some laws which are unjust, and are void by the Higher Law of conscience and of God.⁶⁵

62 Zion's Herald, January 29, 1851, p. 20.

63 Asa Smith, Obedience to Human Law (New York, 1851), p. 18.

64 Ibid., p. 15.

65 Anonymous, The Higher Law Tried by Reason and Authority (New York, 1851), p. 11.

This author's real objection to the Fugitive Slave Law was in the fact that public opinion did not justify such a law. Public opinion, in his view, was the only foundation of law, and government was simply the intermediary or agent of the public which demanded a law.⁶⁶

If a higher law existed, then some agency was necessary to act in deciding when a specific law came into conflict with that higher law. The final arbiter was conscience, and ultimately the conscience of the individual. This anonymous author insisted that the verdict of conscience must be quite clear, but in the final analysis conscience alone determined duty and that conscience was ultimately an individual one. In practice, however, a law of obviously unjust nature, the conscience of the community would not support.⁶⁷

He looked upon politics as "national morals;" hence political questions were not mere questions of expediency. "To say that 'conscience has nothing to do in politics,' is as monstrous a falsehood as the old maxim that 'reason in religion is of unlawful use.' The one is the unfailing refuge of bigotry and superstition; the other is the perpetual argument of demagogues and tyrants."⁶⁸

The editor of Boston Zion's Herald scorned the view that man's conscience must subserve human law. With this view Christianity itself, the Reformation, and the American Revolution could

⁶⁶ Anonymous, Higher Law Tried by Reason and Authority, p. 8.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 31-33.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 33, 34.

not have occurred. "Good laws should not yield to men's conscience . . . but conscience, on the other hand should never yield to human laws. He that honestly believes his course is right, (even though it might be uncertain to all the rest of the world) should, if his belief is a matter of conscience, persist in it even to death."⁶⁹

His Boston neighbor of the Watchman and Reflector was equally vehement in his defense of the right of private judgment over humanly enacted law. He insisted that the value of a constitution was in the fact that the people could understand it and use it to "try the doings of their legislators by its fundamental principles." To deny the right of private judgment, even in the sacred name of religion, would be to reduce the constitution to valueless parchment.⁷⁰

It was at once obvious that all such discussion was simply preliminary to bringing the Fugitive Slave Law into the category of those laws which demanded some form of disobedience. The pastor of a Boston Baptist Church told his people on October 20, 1850, that the law with its "strange and iniquitous provisions" had shocked humanity. "The feeling is almost universal," he said, "that its execution would be the commission of a monstrous crime." Only a crime of appalling magnitude, a crime involving the "hopeless ruin of thousands" and committed in the name of law could cause him to counsel disobedience to the laws of the land.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Zion's Herald, November 20, 1850, p. 186.

⁷⁰ December 19, 1850, p. 202.

⁷¹ Colver, Fugitive Slave Bill, p. 14.

Gilbert Haven, a New England bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, while preaching in Amenia, New York, in November of 1850, implied that the law was clearly morally wrong and agreed that its execution would be nothing short of criminal.⁷² To the editor of the Cincinnati Central Christian Herald slavery was a violation of natural law and justice. No such legal enactment as the Fugitive Law could ever render the system just or sanctify its oppression.⁷³

Southern ministers saw that, behind such words, was the basic issue of the North's contention that slavery itself was immoral. The Synod of South Carolina charged that the excitement stirred by the Fugitive Slave Law derived its fury from the view, held without warrant, that slavery was a sin. This was the justification that fanaticism had offered for the "series of assaults in which treachery to man is justified as obedience to God."⁷⁴ Professor Hodge of Princeton also saw the whole stress of the argument that the law was immoral, as resting on the fact that slavery was viewed in the North as in itself sinful, hence it was deemed wrong to enforce the master's claims.⁷⁵

Anti-slavery men took no pains to hide this fact from view. Bishop Haven had said, "The ground of our opposition to all laws that protect slavery is the feeling against slavery itself. We may

⁷² Gilbert Haven, "The Higher Law," National Sermons. Sermons, Speeches and Letters on Slavery and its War: From the Passage of the Fugitive Slave Bill to the Election of President Grant (Boston, 1869), p. 23.

⁷³ November 7, 1850, p. 122.

⁷⁴ Anderson, "Presbyterians Meet the Slavery Problem," p. 14.

⁷⁵ Charles Hodge, "The Fugitive Slave Law," Cotton is King and Pro-Slavery Arguments: Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright, ed. E. N. Elliot (Augusta, Ga., 1860), p. 812.

profess to give political or other reasons for this feeling, but we fail to see, or to acknowledge, the true reason by any such pretenses." Slavery itself was simply the "most extreme and terrible violation of human rights," therefore nothing done to protect it to any degree could be right.⁷⁶ A correspondent of Zion's Herald echoed this conviction.⁷⁷

Most, however, argued the matter beyond this point, usually turning to the Bible to do so. One New England minister used the Biblical text which states, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me" to inform his congregation that to betray the "poor outcast, outlawed saint" was to do no less than betray the Son of God himself.

After such an act of treason you may be prepared, perhaps, like Judas Iscariot, your exemplar, to go out and hang yourself: Beware, too, lest justice eventually consign you, like him, to your "own place," and mercy say of you, "It were good for that man if he had never been born!"⁷⁸

Most frequently, appeal was made to the Golden Rule. According to one minister, the demands of the law violated this divine statute if no other, but he found also, that it violated Old Testament laws prescribing hospitality to strangers as well as other Old Testament precepts.⁷⁹ Another minister stated that no law could bind him "to do that to another, while innocent of crime, which would be unjust and cruel" if done to himself. He could not

⁷⁶ Haven, "The Higher Law," pp. 15, 16.

⁷⁷ December 4, 1850, p. 194.

⁷⁸ K. Arvine, Our Duty to the Fugitive Slave: A Sermon Delivered on Oct. 6, in West Boylston, Ms. and Dec. 15 in Worcester (Boston, 1850), pp. 20, 21.

⁷⁹ Colver, Fugitive Slave Bill, pp. 13, 14.

be bound to rob another of his natural and inalienable rights.⁸⁰

A Western clergyman objected, in this connection, to the provision of the law which required all citizens to help execute it if called upon. This was a "palpable violation of the Golden Rule" which no legal enactment could make right. Since the question involved a law that came into open conflict with a law of God, civil disobedience was morally right.⁸¹

In the nature of the case, then, to many Northern churchmen disobedience was mandatory. Hosmer of the Northern Advocate put it very succinctly. "Any civil law that is not right, is therefore, null and void from the beginning, and it is the imperative duty of all men to disobey it. To catch slaves in Boston or New York, and by the authority of Congress, is no better than to catch slaves in Africa, and on our own authority."⁸² A group meeting in a New England Methodist Church passed the following resolution: "Resolved, That we recognize the divine law as paramount to all human enactments, and therefore hold that obedience to the requisitions of this unrighteous and unchristian act, would be a violation of our obligations as men and as Christians, and a sin against God."⁸³

Many other New England clergymen joined their editors in this feeling and frequently carried it into the pulpit. One said,

⁸⁰ Anonymous, Higher Law Tried by Reason and Authority, p. 17.

⁸¹ William Carter, A Reply to Hon. William Thomas' Exposition and Defense of the Fugitive Slave Law (Winchester, Ill., 1851), p. 5.

⁸² February 12, 1851, p. 183.

⁸³ Quoted in Zion's Herald, October 23, 1850, p. 171.

It commands every citizen of the North to disregard the expressed will of his God. . . . The authors of this Bill have taken issue with God. To yield obedience to the claims of both is impossible. Neutrality is impossible. There remains therefore to the upright but one decision, and that is the decision of the apostle in our text,--"We ought to obey God rather than man." . . . In short, as we would avoid renouncing the moral government of God or incurring the wrath of heaven, we must disobey and repudiate this Bill.⁸⁴

Another clergyman was no less emphatic. "I abjure this bill altogether,--now and forever!" he said.

Unprincipled men may go to Congress, to fatten on the spoils of office, to play their games for the presidency, to sell their principles in the shambles for party or plunder,--if they will! They may write a document like this, full of libels on the Bible and outrages on humanity and treason against heaven; they may call it law, and send it to be signed with all authority, but God forbid that I should plunge myself into the deep damnation of obeying it! No; I shall not abide by this bill; but I shall violate it on every occasion, and in every way that a Christian can.⁸⁵

The qualification imposed in the last sentence of this statement tempered the disobedience in practice. Even the most radical counsels included these qualifications. They probably did not materially reduce the impact of such statements upon the South or upon the public mind of the North. The minister just quoted called for direct disobedience of the law itself in its workings. Equally important was the use of all legitimate social, religious, and political power for its repeal.⁸⁶

The same clergyman who had called for "disobedience and repudiation of the law," disavowed any desire to promote rebellion. He said that "every law of the land gives to all this privilege, the right, not to disobey it and be tried for treason, but to

⁸⁴ Colver, Fugitive Slave Bill, p. 15.

⁸⁵ Arvine, Duty to the Fugitive, p. 28.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 30.

disobey it and receive its prescribed penalty."⁸⁷ From the most radical to the mildest opponent of the law, these qualifications were typical. The closest to a suggestion of violent armed resistance coming from the mainstream of these denominations was an early statement by Zion's Herald when the exact application of the law was still in doubt. The editor spoke of the posture the colored citizen should assume in these terms:

Let them first commit themselves to God by special occasions of prayer; secondly, organize among themselves plans of vigilance and mutual aid in case the pursuers should be discovered near; third, appeal to their white neighbors and fellow citizens to organize some co-operative arrangements--we say organize, for nothing should be left at loose ends in this matter; and fourth, let them then, with Christian prudence but manly determination, resist the execrable kidnapper to the last power God has given them.⁸⁸

This was advice only to those who were free men of color looking to possible action in self-defense.

The same editor specifically repudiated organized, forcible resistance to the operation of the law in connection with the true fugitive. "Communities have the power and right," he said, "of rendering as nugatory as possible bad laws, provided it be done only by the force of public opinion--not by violent resistance." It was too much to expect, however, that human nature in the North should so radically change that all "inconvenience to the execution of the infamous statute should be removed."⁸⁹

The Watchman and Reflector, also of Boston, the most rabid corner of the anti-slavery world, was equally firm in repudiating

⁸⁷ Colver, Fugitive Slave Bill, p. 19.

⁸⁸ October 9, 1850, p. 162.

⁸⁹ Zion's Herald, May 14, 1851, p. 78.

violent resistance. In fact, its editor stated that, while in existence, the law must be obeyed passively if not actively. "We must either do the thing it requires, or suffer the penalty for refusing." He vigorously protested against construing unfavorable opinions and efforts to get it repealed as treasonable activity. "We call upon every man who has any regard for freedom of opinion, to contend for the right of discussing this subject, and of opposing this law by all lawful means, with a view to its repeal."⁹⁰

Even earlier, when the issue was at white heat and many talked of violent means, the majority, and the editor of the Watchman and Reflector tacitly and openly supported the majority, refused to support even harsh and general denunciations of the government. The editor quoted a portion of the action of one of the many protest meetings convened shortly after the law was passed. This meeting proposed as action, the aiding of the fugitive when opportunity offered, and public protest against the law with a view to its repeal. But they decided that "to excite distrust and indignation towards all civil rule, and to oppose, in marshall array, even this most infamous law, or to encourage the oppressed themselves to do so, would be unchristian and impolitic."⁹¹

No one among Northern editors of these churches assumed a more radical posture on slavery than Hosmer of the Northern Advocate. Yet, as much as he had to say and as violently as some of it was said, when he discussed means he was not radical. He was

⁹⁰ Watchman and Reflector, April 17, 1851, p. 62.

⁹¹ Ibid., November 14, 1850, p. 182.

pleased to see any fugitive break his chains but he disapproved completely of any attempts to abduct the slave. He considered it not only hopeless in alleviating the problem, but it was also unconstitutional means of redress. The means he had in view as action upon the whole problem of slavery, was the throwing of the light of argument upon the slaveholder and relying upon the justice and truth of the cause to produce relief through the franchise.⁹² Obviously such men did not calculate carefully the effect that much of what they said would surely have in producing the opposite result.

The press in the West was, if anything, even more opposed to any active resistance to the law. The editor of the Western Advocate of Cincinnati was very fervently opposed to such resistance. "Under any contingency," he said, "constitutional or unconstitutional, resistance is wrong." He interpreted the bearing of Christianity upon the question thus:

Christianity does not require her votaries to obey laws that conflict with God's law--she does not even allow her disciples to conform to the mandates of any earthly power, at the peril of death in its most frightful forms, if those mandates are directly opposed to God's word. But she never teaches resistance. Suffer, if need be, but resist not. If any law be in opposition to the word of God, the Christian may pass it by unheeded, but he must be prepared for all its penalties.⁹³

The editor of the Central Christian Herald of the same city noted with pleasure the many published sermons dealing with the problem and offering this same counsel.⁹⁴

⁹² Northern Advocate, August 21, 1850, p. 82.

⁹³ November 13, 1850, p. 182.

⁹⁴ February 6, 1851, p. 174.

These views were shared fully by an anonymous minister from the West, probably Ohio. This clergyman condemned the action taken in a community meeting at Pleasant Valley, Ohio. The resolutions of this group expressed contempt and abhorrence for those who had voted in favor of the Fugitive Law. They were no "better than Algerian pirates." The writer contended that Christianity did not permit such abusive and irreverent expression. Neither was violent, active resistance to even an unjust government permitted, although refusal to obey a law and submission to the penalty prescribed by law was not only permissible, but was required in the case of unrighteous enactments.⁹⁵

It is thus quite clear that beneath the surface, the reaction to this law, while reflecting greatly offended sensibilities in the Northern churches, did not anticipate or overtly encourage forcible resistance. Unfortunately the expression of the opposition to the law was cast in such form as to obscure the qualifications which nearly always followed espousal of the higher law doctrine. Hence an already tense and distraught nation was further confused by the many expressions in support of the higher law.

There were, however, in many instances among Southern editors, varying degrees of discrimination in reviewing this sentiment in the North. In fact, the editor of the Presbyterian Herald of Louisville went to some length to give his endorsement in general to the doctrine of a higher law. He urged his readers not to let the use being made of the doctrine to obscure the truth. He

⁹⁵ Anonymous, The Design of Civil Government and the Extent of Its Authority, as set Forth in the Holy Scriptures (no place or date), pp. 6, 7.

deplored the fact that political editors and politicians were sneering at the idea that there was a law higher than the constitution.⁹⁶

Nor was the extreme advice given by the Independent, a New York paper of Congregational origin, taken as necessarily representative. The Independent had counseled the Negroes to shoot down those who sought them. The Baptist Banner of Louisville cited this account from the Christian Observer, the pro-Southern journal of Philadelphia. The editor of the Banner simply stated that this identified the Independent with Garrison.⁹⁷ The Observer, however, had emphasized that there was "not another religious or even political paper in the Northern States, that endorses this atrocious counsel."⁹⁸

Most reaction among Southern or pro-Southern editors was not as discriminating. A very able and statesmanlike Southern minister, while admitting the intemperance of Southern defiance and Southern laws, condemned "a spurious charity for a comparatively small class in the community" which dictated "the subversion of the cherished institutions of our fathers, and the hopes of the human race." This minister considered it a remarkable spectacle when conscience constrained people to violate agreements and contracts and oaths and caused them "to trample in dust the plainest obligations of duty, rather than infringe the speculative rights of man."⁹⁹

The editor of the Nashville Advocate quoted a local organ of

96 Presbyterian Herald, January 16, 1850.

97 Baptist Banner, November 27, 1850.

98 Christian Observer, February 1, 1851, p. 18.

99 Thornwell, Rights and Duties of Masters, p. 9.

the Methodist Church, the Buffalo Christian Advocate and cited it as more representative than it actually was. The Buffalo Advocate furnished another of those instances in which those who voted for the Fugitive Slave Law were reviled. The Thirty-first Congress was referred to as "one of the most depraved bodies that ever met to legislate upon the destinies of the Nation." The Buffalo paper continued: "The man who would pinion his soul on the back of such a master, with his eyes open on the crushed millions around him, bleeding and panting for liberty, ought to ride to perdition amid a constantly gathering storm of howlings, wailings, and despairs."¹⁰⁰

The editor of the Nashville Advocate failed to distinguish clearly between this abuse and the tentative counsel which Zion's Herald offered to the fugitive Negroes already settled in the North. The Herald had urged them to prepare to protect themselves if necessary. The Nashville paper did point out, however, some exceptions to the general trend toward treason, of which he openly accused his colleague of Zion's Herald in Boston. The Nashville editor proceeded to label that Christianity as spurious which promoted "rebellion, revolution, and lawless violence" from the pulpit and religious press.¹⁰¹ Previously he had said:

Gladly would we throw a veil [sic] over the fanaticism of these run-mad and deluded spirits; but it is due to the South to know how their rights are regarded at the North, and what kind of appeals are made to the religious community by these saintly editors and writers, whose Bible and discipline teach them "to be subject to the powers that be." If these men can influence a majority at the North, our days as a confederated republic are numbered.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Nashville Advocate, October 25, 1850.

¹⁰¹ Nashville Advocate, November 1, 1850.

¹⁰² October 25, 1850.

The Southern Advocate published in Charleston devoted much attention to Northern pronouncements and activities relative to the Fugitive Slave Law and the higher law. The editor cited as instances of fanaticism the statement in the Northern Advocate to the effect that the editor would sacrifice a thousand unions rather than support the law if it were in truth the only remaining link as the Richmond Advocate had said. He also quoted the Boston Watchman and Reflector which had condemned those who, for the sake of quiet, yielded to wrong on the issue.¹⁰³

The Southern Advocate took note of resolutions passed by various bodies of churchmen in the North, "true to the fanatical instincts now so prevalent at the North."¹⁰⁴ The editor believed this fanaticism to be the "legitimate result of transcending the province of ministerial duty." He was gratified to note, however, exceptions among the ministry "who had some respect for civil authority."¹⁰⁵ He noted, too, that there was some lay resistance to the "meddlesome spirit and disorganizing movements of the clergy." He had quoted a somewhat contradictory resolution adopted at a preacher's meeting in New England which read thus:

Resolved, That although we believe that civil government is a divine institution, and that it is the imperative duty of every citizen to submit to it, . . . yet we cannot and will not yield obedience to this most iniquitous enactment, neither will we ever respect it as an integral and legitimate part of the laws of the land.¹⁰⁶

The editor of the Southern Advocate commented, "There is a moral philosophy with a witness. That is submission to civil government."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Southern Advocate, November 22, 1850, p. 99.

¹⁰⁴ December 13, 1850, p. 110.

¹⁰⁵ December 27, 1850, p. 118.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Southern Advocate, December 27, 1850, p. 119.

¹⁰⁷ December 27, 1850, p. 119.

From a different source came an even more emphatic and reasoned repudiation of the application of the higher law doctrine which the anti-slavery men were making. The editor of the Presbyterian Herald of Louisville brought this source to his readers' attention. The more conservative ministers and editors of the North, he noted, had been inspired by the "reckless positions assumed by some of the rabid presses and ministers of the gospel" to come out in favor of obedience to the law. In particular, he referred to a large number of sermons preached, and later published, on the occasion of Thanksgiving Sunday on December 12, 1850.¹⁰⁸ These sermons emanated largely but not exclusively, from Old School Presbyterian pulpits.

None of these men took issue with the higher law doctrine itself nor did they all rule out passive obedience if one's conscience directed. Their interest was chiefly in repudiating violence and inflammatory denunciation although some counseled active and complete obedience. A Presbyterian minister of Buffalo, New York, insisted that obedience to civil law was a religious duty. "Men are guilty," he said, "of sophistry and falsehood, when, to excuse wicked evasion of Law or violent resistance, they pretend to appeal to what they call 'the higher laws of God.'" He proceeded to point out the logical result of such a position.

If one man has a moral right, either cunningly to evade or openly violate Law, under such pleading, then another man has the same right to violate another Law; and thus any villainy on earth may be perpetrated under the sacred

¹⁰⁸ January 9, 1851.

names of "conscience," and "the higher laws of God."¹⁰⁹

The editor of the Old School Journal, the Presbyterian Advocate, mentioned this sermon and approved its conservative content, considering the views sound and helpful.¹¹⁰ A Presbyterian minister of Philadelphia substantially supported the position that the law must be obeyed. Civil laws were to be "sacredly observed; compromises made must be faithfully carried out; pledges given must be kept with fidelity." The obedience must be an honest and complete obedience. "We may seek in lawful and proper ways to have that, which we esteem wrong, corrected; but failing in that, the majority must rule, and our own individual preferences and judgments must be given up."¹¹¹

An Illinois Baptist voiced these same sentiments when he spoke to the Illinois Legislature in January of 1851. His chief objection to the view of the higher law then being promoted, was that it tended to erase the line of demarcation between church and state. This he considered to be a serious danger to the morals of the country and to the government.¹¹² He neatly divided duties into those involving religion where God was supreme and those involving the state where civil law was supreme.¹¹³ As to obedience to the Fugitive Slave Law he said: "I It is the duty of American citizens to obey the constitution and laws of our national govern-

109 John C. Lord, The Higher Law in its Application to the Fugitive Slave Bill. A Sermon on the Duties Men Owe to God and to Governments. Delivered at the Central Presbyterian Church, Buffalo, on Thanksgiving-day (Buffalo, New York, 1851), p. 28.

¹¹⁰ January 8, 1851, p. 42.

¹¹¹ Green, Our National Union, pp. 18, 19.

¹¹² Peck, Duties of American Citizens, p. 19.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 7.

ment. II The constitution and laws, and especially the law to arrest fugitive slaves, do not conflict with any 'higher law' of the Sacred Scriptures."¹¹⁴

Most of the pulpiteers did not object to passive obedience, but only to the extremes of interpretation and of denunciation which had accompanied the promulgation of the doctrine. An influential Old School divine of Philadelphia was openly critical of the slavery system and he admitted the possibility that the law was unjust or defective in some respects. His chief concern, however, was not with an analysis of the law or the system.

What we are called upon to discountenance is the spirit in which this excitement is promoted--the recklessness and violence with which the unconditional repeal of the obnoxious law is demanded irrespective of consequences--the abusive attacks which are constantly made upon the South.¹¹⁵

He was equally critical of the slave system and its evils.

The pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania believed that Christians, the wisest and best of them, should discuss this great problem. He proceeded to discuss it, drawing a distinction between obedience and submission. To yield either one or the other left a man above reproach. One could obey the precept, or he might not obey the precept, in which case he quietly suffered the penalty.¹¹⁶

To dramatize the proper procedure when faced with the dilemma, he imagined himself in a situation where a fugitive and master and

¹¹⁴ Peck, Duties of American Citizens, p. 13.

¹¹⁵ Henry A. Boardman, The American Union: A Sermon Preached Dec. 12, 19, 1850 in the Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1851), pp. 32, 33.

¹¹⁶ David McKinney, The Union Preserved, or the Law-Abiding Christian (Philadelphia, 1851), p. 7.

an officer of the law stopped successively at his door. He would, he stated, give the fugitive food and send him on his way. He would also refresh the master when he came and show him the same way and offer no obstacle to his pursuit. Then the officer would come and charge him with violation of the law in which case penalty would be assessed, a penalty he would bear without resistance. "I had the freeman's choice," he said, "made my election--chose rather to endure the law's penalty than to obey its precept. I estimated the sympathies of humanity at a higher price than the inflictions of the law, and rejoice in a conscience void of offense."¹¹⁷

A Presbyterian clergyman of Brooklyn voiced much the same view of the matter. He believed the Fugitive Slave Law committed a gross moral wrong against its victims. In view of that fact he said, "As a moral being, I will, whenever it is my duty so to do, put on record my expression of the wrong: as a good citizen I will submit."¹¹⁸ He would refuse to help capture a fugitive and he would not approve the capture when made by the civil authorities, but he would not interfere with such action.¹¹⁹

Thus feeling was quite mixed in regard to the higher law doctrine and its application to the Fugitive Slave Law. While at no point was it as radical as its expressions made it seem, discussion of the higher law made its distinctive contribution to the confusion of the issue and to the enhancement of sectional animosities.

¹¹⁷ McKinney, Union Preserved, p. 14.

¹¹⁸ Samuel T. Spear, The Law-Abiding Conscience, and the Higher Law Conscience, With Remarks on the Fugitive Slave Question (New York, 1850), p. 24.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

CHAPTER X

CALM AFTER THE STORM

After the initial reaction in the North to the Fugitive Slave Law the national scene began to assume a calmer aspect. The struggle had been long and there was an inevitable sense of relief that specific action had been completed. In spite of reservations in either section, as was bound to be true with any compromise, the general consensus was one of acceptance. Union meetings were well attended throughout the nation and enthusiasm therein was equal to or greater than that exhibited at protest meetings. The adjourned Nashville Convention met again in November with a small attendance and little enthusiasm and it attracted little attention. The fugitive issue was certainly still alive in the North, but Union sentiment for most men outweighed these convictions, and men began to see ways to protest and resist without doing violence to the Union.

The church press seemed to reflect this general feeling. In early December of 1850 there seemed to be considerable reason for alarm. This is indicated by a comment made in the Louisville Presbyterian Herald.

To all who are careful observers of the signs of the times, it must be manifest that our country is now passing through the most trying period of its history. Those who flatter themselves that the crisis has been passed, and that the fearful sectional contest, which has been waged in our capital for years past, is now to cease, must have shut their eyes to what has transpired in each extreme of the Union since the adjournment of Congress. . . . The prospect now is, that the present and the ensuing sessions of Congress will be still more strong than any that have preceded them. The repeal of the fugitive slave law will be the rallying cry in one section, and secession from the Union in the other.¹

¹ December 5, 1850.

This view was much more pessimistic than the situation warranted. Actually, efforts to revive the agitation in the second session of Congress were entirely fruitless. This opinion, however, is understandable in view of the rather violent agitation that had preceded the opening of Congress. But by the early weeks of 1851 there was a noticeable decline of agitation in the church press. While the editor of the Watchman and Reflector of Boston continued to condemn the Fugitive Slave Law, he conceded that there was practically no hope for its repeal by the Thirty-first Congress.²

The editor of the Zion's Herald, also of Boston, had been among the more radical anti-slavery men of the Northern press. He had, in fact, accused the conservative editor of the Advocate and Journal, of "unmanly, not to say unchristian, remissness" in his duty in remaining silent on the Fugitive Slave Law.³ In reply the editor of the Advocate on January 9, 1851 challenged the "perpetual hum-drum" over a law that was clearly a dead letter. He insisted that New England needed no further enlightenment on the issue and that to insist on its repeal would disrupt the Union. The only logical alternative was to let the issue rest.⁴

The editor of Zion's Herald then replied that he contended only for "moral hostility" to the law.

We have taken no little pains to qualify it with conservative sentiments. We have written repeatedly against disunion doctrines; we anticipated and recommended the non-repeal policy of the present Congress long before its session,

² January 23, 1851, p. 14.

³ Advocate and Journal, December 26, 1850, p. 206.

⁴ January 9, 1851, p. 6.

and while the political conventions and presses were generally recommending repeal. We objected to the repeal because we deemed it dangerous to the Union, and because we believed the law could morally be rendered nugatory.⁵

This latter was typical of the motivation leading to a calmer acceptance of the Fugitive Law and the Compromise after the initial reaction. It early became apparent to most observers that the Fugitive Slave Law was not going to change the fugitive picture very substantially.

The editor of Zion's Herald not only became milder in regard to the Fugitive Law, but he showed a considerable moderation in his general views. He lamented the slavery of the border states but he expressed his belief that the best means of dealing with the problem was to permit existing local tendencies to take their course rather than to attempt to ameliorate it by "extraneous agencies."⁶ As early as January, 1851, the editor of the Herald began to show obvious signs of wearying of the controversy.⁷ Some weeks later he indicated that enough had been said and that he was reluctant to continue to carry correspondence in regard to the Fugitive Slave Law. "For ourselves," the editor said, "we are quite tired of it, and as we think the necessity for it is passed, we have resolved to say nothing more editorially upon it." He did reserve the right to "unload a full battery" should the occasion call for it later.⁸

Another Northern clergyman took severe issue with men who insisted on repeal of the law. He said,

5 Zion's Herald, January 15, 1851, p. 10.

6 Ibid., January 15, 1851, p. 10.

7 January 29, 1851, p. 18.

8 February 12, 1851, p. 26.

Disunionists insist upon the repeal of a law passed . . . entitled the Fugitive Slave Law, even though its abrogation should involve a dissolution of the Union. . . . I may say that the men who can put the American Union, with all its untold and inconceivable blessings, into one scale, and the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law into the other, and then strike the balance in favor of the latter, is without an exemplar in the history of the race.⁹

The New York Baptist Register, while never radical, had been distinctly anti-slavery. Its Washington correspondent noted the peaceful conditions prevailing in Washington during the second session.

We can not help looking upon present appearances here, and all over our country as peculiarly ominous of future peace and prosperity. Would that every uneasy, ultra spirit, North and South, would seriously and calmly consider that no good can come from further agitation of these questions so satisfactorily settled.¹⁰

The editor of the Watchman and Reflector of Boston indicated, as Congress prepared to meet, that all the real disunionists of the North would fit into one hall. This group, he insisted, was weak morally as well as numerically. He noted that the disunionists were made to seem more formidable by the South than they actually were. Nevertheless, the editor was troubled lest the recent Union meetings should deceive the South as to the hostility of the North to the Fugitive Slave Law.¹¹

Later this editor affirmed his view that the framers of the law were honestly zealous to write an efficient law but in guarding against all contingencies they had inadvertently overlooked the rights of free citizens.¹² Still later the editor of the Watchman

⁹ Boardman, American Union, p. 30.

¹⁰ January 2, 1851, p. 194.

¹¹ December 12, 1850, p. 198.

¹² January 9, 1851, p. 6.

warned against men becoming so "excited or maddened" by desire for reform that they could not wait for the gradual but sure ways of Providence.¹³

The Western press followed about the same pattern as that of the East. The editor of the Western Advocate noted the threats of secession then being voiced in South Carolina without being seriously alarmed thereby. He then expressed his feeling that the government was founded on the interests and affections of all parts of the nation. Expecting to see intervals of excitement and agitation until provision was made for ultimate emancipation, he insisted, nevertheless, that the issue belonged to the good pleasure of the states, where he was certain action would eventually be taken.¹⁴

Many papers reflected this attitude by simply dropping mention of the issues recently compromised. Papers that had been giving over many columns to the issue of slavery now began to show a greater interest in such matters as "spirit rappings," temperance, worldly amusements, and the usual news of the churches of their constituency. Quite obviously most Northern religious editors joined theirs with the vast national sigh of relief.

The Southern church press had already indicated its support of the Compromise and there was no marked change of attitude in late 1850 or early 1851. The Biblical Recorder of North Carolina appreciated the conciliatory nature of Fillmore's message to Congress in December of 1850.¹⁵ Its editor also noted with

¹³ Watchman and Reflector, March 6, 1851, p. 22.

¹⁴ February 5, 1851, p. 22.

¹⁵ December 7, 1850.

appreciation the views of "reasonable" men emanating from such conservative journals as the Christian Observer of Philadelphia.¹⁶ Among the views of the Observer which the editor of the Recorder shared with his readers were those contained in an article on "Mistakes of the Abolitionists." Among those mistakes were, an over-estimation of their own strength, a mistaking of public sentiment, and their capital mistake of assuming that slavery was a sin per se.¹⁷

The editor of the Georgia Christian Index found occasion to criticize his Boston colleague of the Watchman and Reflector. This, of course, was not exceptional. He expressed his approval of the general quality of the work of his Boston colleague but he complained that just as he became interested in one of the Watchman's features he encountered an offensive editorial on some subject relating to slavery. The freedom with which the Watchman had "applauded or condemned the acts of different Statesmen" during the crisis was cited as an abuse of the function of the church paper. The Georgia editor challenged the sincerity of the Watchman's warm profession of friendship for the Union in view of his advocating principles and measures "which necessarily involve the destruction of our national government."¹⁸

There were those in the South who expressed their pleasure at the lukewarmness of the South to secession movements. The Baptist Banner of Louisville noted that the interest in a proposed Southern Congress was slight even among the voters of South Carolina.¹⁹ The

¹⁶ February 8, 1851.

¹⁷ Biblical Recorder, May 3, 1851.

¹⁸ Christian Index, February 17, 1851, p. 34.

¹⁹ March 12, 1851.

Southern Baptist of South Carolina withheld any comment on the matter of a general Southern Congress as soon as the editor saw that it was the occasion for party division within his own state. In withdrawing from the debate, he expressed the hope that the differences between those in South Carolina who wanted to pursue the issue of secession alone and those who were interested in secession only in conjunction with other states would be resolved. He desired this condition "so that we may continue in harmony to oppose the aggressions of the common enemy."²⁰

In spite of the relative calm achieved by the middle of 1851, no fundamental change of feeling had occurred with regard to the issue of slavery, and there were more than mere whispers to indicate it. Peace and union were luxuries to a prominent class of men in the North, luxuries which the country could not afford if the price was the perpetuation of slavery.

The demands of moral principle had a firm grip upon the sensibilities of a great many in the North. This was embodied often in the works of William Hosmer, the capable and influential editor of the Northern Advocate of Auburn, New York. To him the question was not settled by the Compromise because of this compelling demand.

We can see no prospect of a speedy settlement, or indeed, of any settlement of this question, short of the extinction of slavery. Christianity, in the Providence of God, has aroused the consciences of men, and they cannot be quieted by the customary opiate expediency. The virtue of this drug seems to be exhausted, and the somnolency which it once produced does not return. Under this awakened state of public sentiment, compromises are no longer a finality. This is plainly

20 May 7, 1851.

not the day for compromises on moral questions.²¹

This was the same view which the editor of the Boston Watchman and Reflector had expressed in spite of the fact that he was repelled by disunionist sentiment.

We believe that the great mass of Northern Christians are ready to make as large sacrifices for the sake of the Union and for the peace of the country, as it is possible for men to offer, if those sacrifices have relation only to matters of finance, to tariffs, banks, lands, taxation, and things of like nature; but they cannot lay their religious principles . . . on the shrine of political unity, at the bidding of any government, in an aggressive warfare against the inalienable rights of man, the claims of human brotherhood, and "the higher laws of God."²²

The author identified the rise of the cotton interest as the culprit which created demand for the surrender of the religious convictions of the free states in so boldly asserting the rights of extension.²³

This editorial was inspired by an address made by a moderate Baltimore clergyman at a colonization meeting in the nation's capitol. The clergyman had expressed the fear that the great threat in the slavery question was the "deep, calm, advancing religious sentiment of the North against slavery, and the irritation and resentment of the South on account of that feeling."²⁴

This sentiment was sure to be kept alive by that increasing number of Northern Congressmen who shared in this "advancing religious sentiment." Joshua Giddings not only promised to keep the issue alive in Congress but to carry it into the General Assembly of his church. He announced this determination in a speech to his

21 Hosmer, Higher Law, p. 187.

22 February 20, 1851, p. 30.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

constituents. He was reported as saying that "he would far sooner give the right hand of religious fellowship to Hobbes, Voltaire and that whole school of sceptics, than to those infidel occupants of the pulpit who quoted Scripture in defense of that law." His Presbytery elected him delegate to the General Assembly, New School, with instructions to make one more effort to get stronger anti-slavery action in that body under threat of secession.²⁵

In spite of these important indications that convictions in regard to slavery had not fundamentally changed, relief was the typical attitude of the religious press in the early months of 1851. This is expressed in a statement by the editor of the Central Christian Herald of Cincinnati. He issued the following under the heading, "NEWS."

This article is very scarce now. Congress is over, business is going on regularly, general health is enjoyed, and there are no excitements or wars to chronicle. We know not that this is to be regretted. The world has been so fearfully stirred up, it needs rest, and even if it would go to sleep for a little while, would be better for it.²⁶

²⁵ Presbyterian Herald, May 1, 1851.

²⁶ March 20, 1851, p. 198.

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APPENDIX A

MEMBERSHIP IN THE PRINCIPAL
RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES, 1849¹

Methodist Episcopal	629,660
Methodist Episcopal, South	465,553
Baptist	664,566
Presbyterian, Old School	179,453
Presbyterian, New School	155,000
Congregational	193,093
Dutch Reformed	32,840
German Reformed	69,750
Protestant Episcopal	72,099
Lutheran	149,625
United Brethren	15,000
Evangelical	15,000
Unitarian	30,000
Roman Catholic	1,190,700

¹ Methodist Almanac, 1849, adapted from a table on page 21.

APPENDIX B

MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, 1849¹

<u>Conference</u>	<u>Traveling Ministers</u>	<u>Local Ministers</u>	<u>White Members</u>	<u>Negro, Indian Members</u>	<u>Total</u>
Baltimore	245	311	49,423	16,156	65,579
Philadelphia	162	299	40,691	9,612	50,303
New Jersey	157	188	29,863	718	30,571
New York	281	217	47,297	381	47,678
Providence	113	74	13,226		13,226
New England	113	81	13,330		13,330
Maine	161	167	20,281		20,281
New Hampshire	81	64	10,384		10,384
Vermont	71	46	7,953		7,953
Troy	183	156	24,477	84	24,561
Black River	113	169	16,635		16,635
Oneida	160	202	25,600	176	25,776
Genesee	187	253	26,624	58	26,682
Erie	128	193	20,085	58	20,143
Pittsburgh	184	265	42,033	345	42,378
Ohio	208	528	61,684	514	62,198
North Ohio	133	242	25,988	55	26,043
Michigan	118	193	16,071	473	16,544
Indiana	114	309	30,571	174	30,745
North Indiana	113	258	26,252	50	26,302
Rock River	141	319	18,725	188	18,913
Iowa	54	97	8,408	32	8,440
Illinois	130	425	24,098	60	24,158
Liberia Mission				827	827
	<u>3,350</u>	<u>5,056</u>	<u>599,699</u>	<u>29,961</u>	<u>629,660</u>

¹ Methodist Almanac, 1849, adapted from a table on page 17. Traveling ministers were those with ordination. Local ministers were those still of lay status who served at a single point of a circuit in the absence of the itinerant.

APPENDIX C

MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH,
1849¹

<u>Conference</u>	<u>Traveling Ministers</u>	<u>Local Ministers</u>	<u>White Members</u>	<u>Negro, Indian Members</u>	<u>Total</u>
Kentucky	93	240	23,441	5,183	28,624
Missouri	51	87	9,760	1,164	10,924
St. Louis	59	163	12,860	895	13,755
Louisville	66	199	16,730	3,742	20,472
Holston	84	334	34,344	3,957	38,301
Tennessee	147	378	32,899	7,249	40,148
Virginia	96	165	28,292	5,691	33,983
Indian Mission	32	32	97	3,718	3,815
Arkansas	43	148	7,986	1,750	9,736
Memphis	101	344	24,872	6,068	30,940
North Carolina	75	139	20,169	7,750	27,919
Mississippi	73	195	10,415	6,183	16,598
Georgia	126		41,489	16,062	57,551
Louisiana	47	71	4,523	3,749	8,272
South Carolina	108		27,085	38,082	65,167
Alabama	118	449	29,324	15,279	44,603
Florida	32	74	3,993	2,736	6,729
Texas	29	54	2,414	799	3,213
Texas, East	23	70	4,166	637	4,803
Total	1,403	3,142	334,859	130,694	465,553

¹ Methodist Almanac, 1849, adapted from a table on page 19. Traveling ministers were those with ordination. Local ministers were those still of lay status who served at a single point of a circuit in the absence of the itinerant.

APPENDIX D

MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH, 1850¹

<u>State</u>	<u>Ordained Ministers</u>	<u>Licensed Ministers</u>	<u>Accessions One Year</u>	<u>Members</u>
Maine	201	20	236	19,957
New Hampshire	73	14	119	8,526
Vermont	71	10	136	8,092
Massachusetts	246	37	945	29,876
Rhode Island	55	7	107	7,153
Connecticut	114	13	530	15,916
New York	705	132	3,864	84,243
New Jersey	88	14	796	12,121
Pennsylvania	213	49	1,548	27,678
Delaware	2	2	11	352
Maryland	18	2	184	2,004
District of Columbia	5	1	6	692
Virginia	272	81	4,743	81,344
North Carolina	236	75	3,749	36,730
South Carolina	188	72	2,609	41,638
Georgia	387	157	5,353	55,155
Florida	25	8	186	2,115
Alabama	233	69	4,095	36,421
Mississippi	181	42	2,846	22,718
Louisiana	40	12	249	3,749
Texas	27	5	248	1,361
Arkansas	39	10	310	2,509
Tennessee	283	79	3,263	34,097
Kentucky	354	127	3,835	62,598
Ohio	294	70	1,240	24,561
Indiana	191	47	1,148	18,311
Illinois	210	53	1,497	13,441
Missouri	194	62	1,579	19,523
Michigan	105	14	326	8,175
Wisconsin	40	9	184	2,560
Iowa	22	3	72	1,142
Minnesota Territory	2			12
Indian Territory	20	7	242	1,946
Oregon Territory	4		24	63
California	4			28
Total	5,142	1,302	46,280	686,807

¹ Baptist Memorial and Monthly Record, 1850, adapted from a table on page 372. The licensed ministers of the Baptist Church corresponded roughly to the local minister of the Methodist Church.

APPENDIX E

MEMBERS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEW SCHOOL, 1850¹

<u>Synod</u>	<u>Accessions</u>	<u>Members</u>
Albany	566	10,555
Utica	683	9,197
Geneva	997	20,765
Genesee	476	15,461
New York and New Jersey	1,380	22,413
Pennsylvania	638	10,780
West Pennsylvania	106	2,436
Western Reserve	367	8,566
Michigan	784	7,011
Ohio	322	4,149
Cincinnati	367	2,910
Indiana	778	4,759
Illinois	472	3,654
Peoria	280	2,456
Missouri	324	2,199
Virginia	265	3,715
Tennessee	257	4,776
Kentucky	86	915
West Tennessee	199	2,188
Mississippi	48	892
Total	9,395	139,797

¹ Minutes of the General Assembly, 1850, adapted from a table on page 423.

APPENDIX F

MEMBERS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, OLD SCHOOL, 1839¹

<u>Synod</u>	<u>Accessions</u>	<u>Members</u>
Albany	546	6,745
New York	621	8,041
New Jersey	798	12,102
Philadelphia	1,361	17,009
Pittsburgh	1,931	23,176
Ohio	816	6,667
Cincinnati	552	3,785
Indiana	393	3,962
Illinois	239	1,366
Missouri	33	597
Kentucky	553	7,116
Virginia	422	9,902
North Carolina	559	10,225
Tennessee	203	3,135
South Carolina	477	8,310
Alabama	703	3,468
Mississippi	207	1,328
Total	11,564	128,043

¹ Minutes of the General Assembly, 1839, adapted from a table on pages 272-274. While this antedates 1850 by eleven years, this shows accurately the geographical distribution of membership, which is the chief purpose for this study.

VITA

L. Wesley Norton was born near Three Rivers, Michigan, in Cass County, January 13, 1923. He attended the local schools, being graduated from Three Rivers High School in 1939. He attended Olivet College, Kankakee, Illinois, receiving the A.B. degree in 1944 and the Th.B. in 1945. For several years he pastored churches in Iowa, Michigan, and Illinois. From 1948 to 1951 he was in attendance at Evangelical Theological Seminary at Naperville, Illinois, where he received the B.D. degree in 1951. From 1948 to 1959 he served as pastor of churches in the Illinois Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church while a student first at Naperville, then at the University of Illinois, where attendance began in 1955.

He received the M.A. degree from the University of Illinois in the spring of 1956. In the fall of 1956 he became a teaching assistant, a position held until 1959. For two of those years he taught courses in American History at Chanute Air Force Base under the auspices of the University Extension Division. In the summer of 1959 he became an Instructor in the Department of History and Government at Lamar State College of Technology in Beaumont, Texas.