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From Treason to Antislavery Patriotism: Unitarian Conservatives and the Fugitive Slave Law

Douglas C. Stange

A. The Bostonian with the "Mark of Cain"

IN 1849, a former slave, Josiah Henson, dictated his memoirs to a wealthy Bostonian, Samuel A. Eliot. Father Henson, as he was known to his people, had established a colony for Blacks in Canada, and Eliot, a lifelong exponent of colonization, wished to further Henson's work. The memoirs were published as *The Life of Josiah Henson* and were sold for one dollar a copy. Thereafter, Henson was a frequent dinner guest at the Eliot home, and long after Eliot's death, Father Henson continued to possess a deep admiration for the "high-minded and public-spirited aristocrat" who had been his patron.¹

Samuel Atkins Eliot (1798-1862) graduated from Harvard College and the Harvard Divinity School. He was never ordained, but served as a vestryman and a warden of King's Chapel. Extremely devout, he held home devotions in which his children recited their catechism and sang hymns. He required his children to memorize one new hymn each week. To help them "to meet and answer the cavils of the infidel, and the pretensions of those who claim an exclusive right to the name of Christian," he wrote a small volume, *Observations on the Bible, for*

¹ Josiah Henson, *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself* (Boston: Arthur D. Phelps, 1849); Mary Eliot Guild, "Samuel Atkins and Mary Eliot: A Memory Sketch by Their Oldest Daughter," p. 27 (MH-Archives); *DAB*, VI, 82.

The following abbreviations are used in footnotes of this article:

Chiq: *Christian Inquirer*

DAB: *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918-1958)

MB: Boston Public Library

MH: Houghton Library, Harvard University

MH-Archives: Harvard University Archives

MHi: Massachusetts Historical Society

UR: *Unitarian Review and Religious Magazine*

the Use of Young Persons, in 1842. He was an intimate friend of his minister, Ephraim Peabody, a "devoted lover" of King's Chapel, and a faithful servant "to his Saviour and to his God."²

Eliot served his alma mater as its treasurer, 1842-1853, and as its historian. The College rewarded him with a LL.D. in 1855. As president of the Academy of Music he helped to introduce the instruction of music into the Boston schools. From 1834 to 1839, he served successively as a state representative, a state senator, and the mayor of Boston. In 1850, he was elected to Congress, but declined to run for re-election at the end of his term. Eliot, a son of a wealthy merchant, was dedicated to his own and the nation's commercial growth and material prosperity. Thus, in September 1857, when he suffered a financial disaster, his good health and enthusiasm gave way. Friends and relatives lent their aid. The Boston Gas-Light Company elected him as its president at a modest salary in 1859. Yet he died three years later, a "poor and disappointed man." Webster wrote of Eliot, in 1850, "he is considered the impersonation of Boston; ever-intelligent, ever-patriotic, ever-glorious Boston."³

The abolitionists in Boston loathed Eliot. He carried the "Mark of Cain" on his brow, said a Unitarian minister.⁴ Thomas Wentworth Higginson declared that he had "darkened forever an honored name";

² Guild (note 1 above), p. 19; Samuel Atkins Eliot, *Observations on the Bible, for the Use of Young Persons* (Boston: John H. Eastburn, 1842), p. v; Henry Wilder Foote, *Christ Stilling the Waves, A Sermon Preached in King's Chapel, Boston, February 2, 1862, the Sunday after the Funeral of the Hon. Samuel A. Eliot* (Cambridge, 1862), pp. 12, 14. Eliot generously gave of his wealth to King's Chapel and the Unitarian denomination. See Samuel A. Eliot, "Journal, 1825-1847," pp. 30, 38, 46, 51, *et passim* (MH-Archives).

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 29-30, 36, 38; Samuel Atkins Eliot, *A Sketch of the History of Harvard College and of Its Present State* (Boston: Charles C. Little & James Brown, 1848); [Harvard College] "Ov. Rec.," IX, 291 (MH-Archives). For addresses, articles, and letters relating to Eliot's presidency of the Academy of Music, see Eliot Papers (MH-Archives). See also *Schiller's Song of the Bell Translated for the Boston Academy of Music* by Samuel A. Eliot (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1837); Joseph Palmer, *Necrology of Alumni of Harvard College, 1851-52 to 1862-63* (Boston: John Wilson & Son, 1864), p. 406; Webster quoted in *DAB*, VI, 82. Cf. also Andrew Preston Peabody, *Harvard Graduates Whom I Have Known* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1890), pp. 149-168; Justin Winsor, ed., *The Memorial History of Boston, Including Suffolk County, Massachusetts, 1630-1880*, III (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1882), 243-247.

⁴ Rufus Phineas Stebbins to John Gorham Palfrey, Meadville, 4 October 1850, John Gorham Palfrey Papers (MH).

a name which would be "indelibly associated," said another abolitionist, "with cruelty and injustice."⁵ Others called him a "Hunker."⁶

Eliot as an alderman had sympathized with the mob which tried to silence William Lloyd Garrison and the radical abolitionists in 1835. Later as the mayor of Boston he had used his influence to turn down the petition of Dr. William Ellery Channing and his friends to use Faneuil Hall for a meeting on the Lovejoy Affair. He fought against the "friends of abolitionist principles" to be re-elected mayor. But his greatest crime, the "Mark of Cain" upon his brow, was to cast his vote in the House of Representatives for the Fugitive Slave Bill, in 1850. He was the only representative from Massachusetts to vote for the compromise measures. His vote lost him dear friends among the abolitionists and gained him implacable enemies.⁷

The Negro population in Boston was disturbed by Eliot's vote and a committee of about a dozen Black citizens came to his home. They listened patiently to his explanation of his vote. His argument, which he later revealed in a letter to the *Boston Advertiser*, was essentially that the compromise measures were conservative measures to insure the peace and prosperity of the United States. The framers of the Constitution knew that slavery could not continue if slaves could escape to freedom in the North. They had to provide for the recovery of slaves or the South would not have consented to join the Union. The founding fathers had acted wisely, said Eliot. Their fugitive slave provision had balanced our government and allowed Americans "sixty years of unparalleled growth and prosperity."

Eliot wanted to continue working with slaveholders to preserve the United States. He sympathized with the slave, but he felt that he had neither the responsibility nor the right to tamper with the slavehold-

⁵ Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Mr. Higginson's Address to the Voters of the Third Congressional District of Massachusetts* (Lowell: C. L. Knapp, 1850), p. 6; [William Jay], *A Letter to the Hon. Samuel A. Eliot, Representative in Congress from the City of Boston, in Reply to His Apology for Voting for the Fugitive Slave Bill*, By Hancock (Boston: Wm. Crosby and H. P. Nichols, 1851), p. 57.

⁶ David D. Van Tassel, "Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Compromise Sentiment in Boston in 1850," *New England Quarterly*, XXIII (September 1950), 316.

⁷ "The Right of Free Discussion," *Morning News*, 4 December 1837; "To the Public," n.d.; "A Dialogue," n.d.; newspaper clippings, Samuel A. Eliot, "Scrapbook, 1837-1860" (MHI-Archives). See also Higginson (note 5 above), p. 57. On the disruptive effect of Eliot's vote upon his friendship with John Gorham Palfrey, see Eliot to Palfrey, Boston, 4 February 1852; Palfrey to Eliot, Cambridge, 5 February 1852 (Palfrey Papers, MH).

er's conscience. The South, he declared, was not an ogre. If it were left alone it would "calculate coolly the advantages and disadvantages of the institution."

It disturbed Eliot that the abolitionists refused to accept the Fugitive Slave Law and to obey "the 'higher law' " of the Constitution. Unless Massachusetts intended to practice nullification, he said, then the state must return the "fugitive from labor." The whole question of obedience to this law was related to the salvation of the Union, a union which he saw as the "political hope of the world." To set aside our constitutional obligations would lead to "disunion and anarchy" and raise havoc for both the "African and the European races."

As far as the Eliot household could tell, wrote his daughter, Mary, the Blacks who had visited him remained his friends: "The coloured waiters continued to serve his family."⁸

Eliot had voted for the Fugitive Slave Law to insure the peace, prosperity, and good order of the United States. He therefore enjoyed the support of Unitarian conservatives. The progression of violent events in the 1850s speedily increased Unitarian conservative fears that the identity of their churches, society, government, indeed their very own lives and consciences would be irrecoverably altered. And many of these conservatives were changed by the cataclysmic events. Some of them became more openly antislavery. Some began to use their vote as a means to slow the aggressiveness of the South. Surprisingly, they supported political action with some ostentation.

B. Natural Conservatives

Most prominent of these Unitarian conservative ministers were Dr. Orville Dewey (1794-1882), minister of the Church of the Messiah, New York City, and New South Society, Boston, and president of the American Unitarian Association, 1845-1847; Dr. Ezra Stiles Gannett (1801-1871), of Federal Street Church and president of the American Unitarian Association, 1847-1851; and Dr. Ephraim Peabody (1807-1856), minister in New Bedford, and afterwards of King's Chapel, Boston.⁹ Several younger conservatives were also of importance.

⁸ Guild (note 1 above), pp. 31-32; "Letter from the Hon. Samuel A. Eliot [on why he voted for the Fugitive Slave Bill]," newspaper clipping, *Boston Advertiser*, Eliot "Scrapbook, 1837-1860" (MH-Archives).

⁹ Samuel A. Eliot (1862-1950), ed., *Heralds of a Liberal Faith*, III (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1910), 84-89, 138-147, 297-303.

One such young conservative was Edward Everett Hale (1822-1909), the son of Nathan Hale (1784-1863), the editor of the Boston *Daily Advertiser*, the recognized organ of the "intellectual aristocracy of eastern Massachusetts."¹⁰ Hale admitted that he possessed a "natural conservatism strengthened by parental opinion." Upon graduation from Harvard he thought Ralph Waldo Emerson was "half crazy," disliked abolitionism and total abstinence, and "in general, followed the advice of [his] Cambridge teachers, who were from President down to janitor, all a hundred years behind their time."¹¹ He served the Church of Unity in Worcester, Massachusetts, between 1846 and 1856, and the South Congregational Church, Boston, thereafter until his retirement from the ministry in 1899.¹²

Another young conservative, who by 1850 had begun to achieve national prominence among Unitarians, was Henry Whitney Bellows (1814-1882). His desire to please all sides makes Bellows a difficult man to categorize. "You are a very easy man to mis-represent," confessed fellow Unitarian minister James Freeman Clarke. But Clarke classified him as a conservative at home in the company of men like Ezra Stiles Gannett and Edward Everett Hale. Neither he nor Garrisonian Samuel J. May included him in their lists of Unitarian ministers who were co-workers in the antislavery cause. Wendell Phillips said that Bellows lowered into a well empty buckets and drew them empty up. Not only the abolitionists scorned his conservatism; fellow Unitarian ministers, Frederic Henry Hedge and George F. Simmons, also complained. "He was always conservative in his sentiment and taste," wrote his son. He was "distinctly and with pronounced conviction," eulogized William Greenleaf Eliot, the minister to the Unitarian Church in St. Louis, "a conservative by nature and in fact; conservative in religion; conservative in ethical principles; conservative in politics, in social interests and institutions, and wherever else the battle of conflicting ideas compels the choice."¹³

¹⁰ Lyman Abbott, *Silhouettes of My Contemporaries* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1922), p. 102.

¹¹ Edward E. Hale, Jr., ed., *The Life and Letters of Edward Everett Hale*, I (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1917), 123.

¹² Jean Holloway, *Edward Everett Hale: A Biography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1956), pp. 81-82, 112-113, 243; Abbott (note 10 above), p. 115; *Heralds* (note 9 above), IV, 153; *DAB*, VIII, 99-100.

¹³ James Freeman Clarke to Henry W. Bellows, Boston, 5 October 1859 (Bellows Papers, MHi); Clarke to Elizabeth G. Huidekoper, Jamaica Plain, 27 May 1859

Bellows emerged as the leader of the Unitarian conservatives in the 1850s. Utilizing his natural talents for leadership and driven by the energy of ambition he eventually organized and headed the National Conference of Unitarian Churches. Although he claimed that it was "all important for [him] to have a right understanding with [the] leading minds" among his conservative Unitarian colleagues, he frequently complained about them privately.¹⁴ Publicly he harbored his displeasure in silence and, by a display of kindness and sympathy to his associates, he accomplished his desire to have things his own way and still not appear despotic. Yet he did not escape the nickname, "Boss Bellows."¹⁵

His father was a wealthy merchant whose failure in business forced Bellows to finance his own education at the Harvard Divinity School. His first parish was the Unitarian Society in Mobile, Alabama. He labored there for two years and refused to criticize the slavery about him. He would have been "torn to pieces" if he had spoken against it, he said; besides, his "conscience as well as policy" forbade him to mention it.¹⁶ When his successor, George F. Simmons, attacked slavery and *was* "torn to pieces," a perturbed Bellows wrote: Simmons "is dogmatic and vain. His hair needs another Delilah. . . . He is such an impracticable dog."¹⁷ Bellows returned to the North and became minister of the First Unitarian Church (later called All Souls Church) in New York City. He remained there until his death.¹⁸

(Clarke Papers, MH); Clarke, *Anti-Slavery Days* (New York: R. Worthington, 1884), pp. 118-119; Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict* (Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing Co., 1969 [1st ed., 1869]), pp. 335-336; Phillips quoted by Cyrus A. Bartol, "Channing and Garrison. A Question of Words and Verbal Virtue," *UR*, XXV (1886), 154; Frederic Henry Hedge to Bellows, Providence, 3 May 1856 (MHi); George F. Simmons to Bellows, Waltham (on a visit), 8 November 1845 (MHi); Russell Nevins Bellows, *Henry Whitney Bellows. A Biographical Sketch with Portrait* [Printed from advance sheets of "The Bellows Genealogy," by Thomas Peck] (Keene, N.H.: Sentinel Printing Co., n.d.), p. 311; William G. Eliot, "The Man of Golden Lips: Henry Whitney Bellows," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 13 February 1882.

¹⁴ Henry W. Bellows to [Eliza] Bellows, Boston, 14 November 1847; Bellows to Cyrus A. Bartol, New York, 25 March 1850; Bellows to Bartol, 13 November 1851 (MHi).

¹⁵ "Rev. Dr. Bellows," *Harper's Weekly*, 27 August 1859.

¹⁶ Henry W. Bellows to Jacob N. Knapp, Augusta, Georgia, 22 November 1837; Bellows to John Bellows, Mobile, 25 January 1838 (MHi).

¹⁷ Henry W. Bellows to Orville Dewey, New York, 26 January 1841 (MHi).

¹⁸ For additional biographical information on Bellows, see *Heralds* (note 9

C. The Declination of Obedience and Order

The conservatives recorded what they saw as the decline of law and order in the 1850s. Orville Dewey complained that American citizens were on the verge of forgetting that anyone, even God, was to be obeyed anymore. He blamed the disorderly state of the country on his fellow citizens. "Our *Democratic deference* in some directions," he said, "is going a great deal too far." Gannett decried the loose morality which pervaded the country, the "luxuriance of vice" in the cities, the crime in villages that were once the "seats of Puritanic propriety," the "Polygamy" and "Paganism" of the great West, and especially the loss of the people's faith "in freedom, in goodness, and in God."¹⁹

The conservatives sadly noted the lengthening and widening cracks in the whole structure of American society. Even the "*discipline of childhood*" was on the decline. Dewey looked upon the relaxation of family discipline with "profoundest anxiety." If every child could say and do what he wanted, the end of society was imminent.²⁰ Women too were beginning to assert themselves. Dewey had very definite ideas concerning the rights and duties of women and his emphasis was on duties. The "duty" and "wisdom" of a woman, he taught, was to yield her opinion to her husband in "ordinary cases of difference." The care of her property "naturally" belonged to her husband. She could be educated, but her place was "beneath the domestic roof." He declared:

When it is contended, that women should do business, labor out of doors as men do — should vote, appear in public life, hold office, be members of Congress, Cabinet Ministers, Presidents — and why not Captains and Commodores,

above), III, 23-24; *DAB*, II, 169; Felix Danford Lion, "Henry Whitney Bellows," B.D. thesis (Meadville Theological School, 1938); Thomas L. Robinson, "Henry Whitney Bellows 1814-1822 [sic]," *Unitarian Christian*, XXIV:3 (Fall 1968), 6-13; Clifford E. Clark, Jr., "Religious Beliefs and Social Reforms in the Gilded Age: The Case of Henry Whitney Bellows," *New England Quarterly*, XLIII (March 1970), 59-78. Unfortunately, errors mar the articles of both Robinson and Clark.

¹⁹ Orville Dewey, *Discourse on Obedience, Preached in the City of Washington, on Sunday, June 27th, 1852* (New York: Charles S. Francis & Co., 1852), pp. 4, 18; Ezra S. Gannett, *The State of the Country: A Discourse Preached in the Federal Street Meetinghouse in Boston, on Sunday, June 8, 1856* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols & Co., 1856), p. 13.

²⁰ Dewey (note 19 above), pp. 6, 7-8.

as well? — I will not say what madness! though that is my feeling; but, I say, the laws of progress, the nature of persons, the relations to the material world, the relations to the social body, forbid. I believe, indeed, that there is a constitutional difference between the sexes, which destines the one to out-of-door life, and the other to in-door life. If it be not so, I should like to have some one tell me, why the one has a *beard* and the other not.²¹

Dewey worried about the lack of appreciation by Americans of the “beauty, the fitness, the reasonableness, the all-binding necessity of obedience.” He was disgusted by non-conformists who lived primarily in the cities and had no apparent feeling of allegiance to anything. They existed, he complained, only “to do what they like.” Obedience was something all must learn. The spirit of disobedience that pervaded America, the general “lawless spirit,” he saw as a “total and enormous wrong.”²² The times called for self-control, said Gannett: “Order is the first condition of a safe or prosperous community.” Obedience to the laws and to the good order of society was the clarion call of the conservatives.²³

The issue of antislavery was an obstacle to the restoration of good order. Many of the conservatives were disturbed by the abolitionists’ misrepresentation of the South’s “peculiar institution.” Dewey believed that it was wrong “to leap upon the South — upon its very character and civilization.” It was wrong to speak of the “pollution” and the “loathesomeness” of the slave system. His southern friends deserved greater consideration and respect. He never knew a “better people, . . . none more kindly, affectionate and religious.”²⁴ Bellows “loved” the South and frequently praised the southern Whites. He offered them greater sympathy than the North was wont to give them.²⁵ Indeed, he believed (as did Dewey) that the “majority of the

²¹ Orville Dewey, *The Laws of Human Progress and Modern Reforms. A Lecture Delivered Before the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New-York* (New York: C. S. Francis and Co., 1852), pp. 18, 19-20.

²² Dewey (note 19 above), pp. 5-6, 8.

²³ Gannett (note 19 above), p. 18; Ezra Stiles Gannett, *Relation of the North to Slavery. A Discourse Preached in the Federal Street Meetinghouse, in Boston, on Sunday, June 11, 1854* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols and Co., 1854), p. 14. This sermon also appeared under the title, “Southern Slavery,” in *Clnq*, VIII:44 [i.e., 45] (12 August 1854), 1.

²⁴ Orville Dewey to Henry W. Bellows, 15 June 1856 (MHi).

²⁵ Henry W. Bellows to Orville Dewey, Walpole, 9 July 1856 (MHi); Bellows, “The Pro-Slavery Testimony of the Northern Conscience Cross-Questioned. A Lecture in the New-York Anti-Slavery Course of 1854-5, Given at the Tabernacle, January 2, 1855,” *Clnq*, IX:15 (13 January 1855), 1-2.

slaves" in the South "were contented with their condition, and would not accept their liberty if offered to them." Add to this his statement that the slave "often hugs his own chains" and the evidence points to an absorption by Bellows of a degree of southern pro-slavery propaganda.²⁶

The racial attitudes of Dewey, Bellows, and other conservatives help to explain their apparently greater sympathy for the southern White than for the southern Black. Dewey accepted the concept of Black inferiority, and believed it precluded immediate emancipation.²⁷ Bellows believed slavery irredeemably reduced many of its victims to the lowest level of humanity. Blacks two generations from slavery he felt could be educated.²⁸ Gannett said life in slavery "disqualified the greater portion of the slaves for taking care of themselves" in a life in freedom. The degraded and depraved existence of Black slaves seemed to occupy Dewey's imagination and he conjured up a frightful Armageddon where a Black humanity of thirty millions clashed with White men in a servile war. He asked anxiously, "What in heaven's name are we to do with them?"²⁹

Bellows did not share Dewey's fears. America was opening up vast areas to White immigrants and the Black population would soon become a "far less serious problem" than at present. He saw no insurmountable difficulties accompanying emancipation:

The calls for domestic service, in a country developing so rapidly independence and equality among the white race, would, perhaps safely and beneficently, absorb the blacks, even if they sustained to the whites the ratio of ten millions to a hundred millions, should a peaceful emancipation be allowed them. This

²⁶ Henry W. Bellows, "Letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, New York, 6 January 1857" [title supplied], *Clnq.*, XI:17 (27 January 1857), 1-2; [Bellows], "Dr. Dewey on the Fugitive Slave Bill," *Clnq.*, V:17 (1 February 1851), 2; Bellows, "Pro-Slavery Testimony" (note 25 above); Dewey (note 21 above), p. 34.

²⁷ Orville Dewey, *On Patriotism, The Condition, Prospects, and Duties of the American People. A Sermon Delivered on Fast Day at Church Green, Boston* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1859), p. 22.

²⁸ Henry W. Bellows to Mrs. Schuyler, n.p., 30 January 1854 (MHi).

²⁹ Gannett, *Relation* (note 23 above), p. 12; "Dr. Dewey's Address," *Clnq.*, XI:2 (11 October 1856), 1. The same address was also published as "The Great Political Question of the Day," *Christian Register*, XXXV:46 (15 November 1856), 1. Cf. also Dewey (note 21 above), p. 34. A southerner differed with Dewey's fear of the increase in America's Black population. The South, he said, wanted the Negroes to "increase and multiply." See [William John Grayson], *Reply to Dr. Dewey's Address Delivered at Elm Tree, Sheffield, Mass. with Extracts from the Same* (Charleston, 1856), p. 15.

is at least one method of disposing of them, favored by their fitnesses, and the tendencies of Northern civilization.³⁰

Dewey advocated colonization as the solution to the "Negro problem," and "a country beyond the Rocky Mountains," as a colony.³¹ Other conservatives supported colonization. Ephraim Peabody wrote a detailed and lengthy study on colonization for the *North American Review* in 1851, and Samuel A. Eliot discussed it as a "peaceful treatment of slavery" in the *Christian Examiner* in 1856.³²

Peabody's essay, which also appeared in pamphlet form, brought him painful notoriety. The abolitionists judged his work as a kind of ecclesiastical imprimatur of the colonizationist proposals by Daniel Webster, and they fired a fusillade of abuse at Peabody. Theodore Parker, who in his private journal lampooned him as the "solemn jester, the fool of the nineteenth century for the rich man," now publicly called him the "*Cur* of King's Chapel and *the Papacy of a Cur*."³³

Some of Peabody's information on colonization probably came from Father Henson, who was a frequent visitor to his home and a communicant at his church. He had drawn up a formal statement for Henson's colony in Canada.³⁴ However, in his essay Peabody did not propose to settle Blacks in Canada, or as Dewey suggested, "beyond the mountains." Unsettled areas were more easily tamed by Anglo-Saxons. Instead he proposed the British West Indies and Liberia — both already settled and settled by Blacks. Inevitably emancipation would come. There certainly would be amalgamation and the creation of a third and inferior race. There possibly would be a "war of races." Colonization was the answer to these problems, a scheme more attractive and possible now in view of the tremendous influx of European immigrants to American shores. The lessons learned from the great immigration of

³⁰ Bellows, "Letter" (note 26 above, 1st item).

³¹ "Speech of Rev. Dr. Dewey at the Great Union Meeting in Pittsfield, Dec. 27th 1850," *Cinq*, V:15 (18 January 1851), 1-2.

³² Ephraim Peabody, *Slavery in the United States: Its Evils, Alleviations, and Remedies* [Reprinted from the *North American Review*, October 1851] (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851); Samuel A. Eliot, "Peaceful Treatment of Slavery," *Christian Examiner*, LXI (September 1856), 211-222.

³³ [Robert S. Peabody and F. G. Peabody], *A New England Romance, The Story of Ephraim and Mary Jane Peabody Told by Their Sons* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1920), pp. 123-126; [Theodore Parker], "Extracts from his Journals," A transcription in the Franklin B. Sanborn Papers (MH); Parker to Charles Sumner, Boston, 21 February 1852, Charles Sumner Papers (MH).

³⁴ Peabody and Peabody (note 33 above), p. 129.

Whites to America could easily be applied to a great emigration of Blacks from America.³⁵

Colonization was so "desirable," he declared, that if those Blacks "now free, or hereafter to be made free, should, as the condition under which liberty was to be enjoyed, be required not to leave the country, it would be deemed, by the best friends of the colored race, a wrong and an injury second only to absolute bondage." The degraded condition of the Negro in the South and the North differed only in degree. Even Negroes with intelligence could never achieve true emancipation. "The black man," Peabody taught, "withers under the shadow of the white. It proceeds in part . . . from some undefined difference of race. . . . In Africa, surrounded by those of his own color . . . he becomes really emancipated."³⁶

Sensitive to the accusations that colonization schemes were "unrighteous and cruel," Peabody defended them as humane proposals and condemned the objections of the abolitionists. They were as "little ready as any" to advocate the alternative to colonization — amalgamation. "The most zealous abolitionists," he declared,

would hesitate long before encouraging intermarriage between their children and those of the blacks. . . . We do not believe that amalgamation is desirable for either race. We believe that the differences of races which Providence established, it is well to maintain. . . . In defending colonization, we are not excusing prejudice or injustice. We simply recognize facts which we have not power to change, and which, if ever removed, are more likely than in any other way, to be so, by its being shown on the part of the blacks, that they are capable of supporting a civilized government of their own.³⁷

The "abolition eloqu Coastal and rhetorical twaddle" disgusted the conservatives. The epithets flung at them by the abolitionists were a heavy cross to bear. Theodore Parker and Wendell Phillips were specialists in vulgarity. Parker's snide remark on Peabody was in fact a variation of a theme by Phillips. The conservative Unitarians who fought reform, sneered the Calvinist Phillips, were "little worms that run about on the surface of corruption call[ing] themselves the children of Channing." Dewey, who so often bore the brunt of the abolitionist attack, argued that he was against the "arrogance of reform," not reform itself. Reform should be calm and gradual; abolitionist agita-

³⁵ Peabody (note 32 above), pp. 16-18, 23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

tion only alienated the public "in large and influential quarters." Samuel A. Eliot called the abolitionists "brawling, noisy fellows," whose activity delayed emancipation. "Great as are the moral and political wrongs and evils of slavery," declared Eliot, "they are probably not so great as those of anti-slavery agitation."³⁸ Bellows also trounced the abolitionists, criticizing their tactics and harangues.³⁹

The conservatives were also skilled in the language of contempt. Bellows called the abolitionists a "sordid, self-seeking and self-indulgent party," and criticized their "rhetorical excess," "personal abuse," and "want of candor and carefulness."⁴⁰ They were superficial in their discussion of slavery in contrast to himself: "I am somewhat deeper than lecturers on this topic in general." He characterized a lecture on slavery that he gave in 1854 as having "breadth, candor, courage, . . . suggestiveness" as well as "*bidden wisdom*." He was pleased when two southern women who owned four or five hundred slaves praised it.⁴¹ Bellows desired to pilot a safe and slow ship to reform. More zealous friends tried to get him involved, tried to get him to speak at meetings of antislavery societies, but he refused.⁴² He refused Oliver Johnson's invitation, in 1855, to speak at the American Antislavery Society's annual meeting in New York. Because he regarded their opinions as "intemperate," and mindful that others regarded them as "blasphemous and treasonable," he prudently forebore to share their podium. They were prophets, but he was a pastor, obliged to follow the "rule of common sense and sober discretion." He did "not belong in their ranks."⁴³ These were his opinions in an open letter. A few years later, in a private letter, he displayed a harsher, more emotional censure of the abolitionists:

³⁸ Hale (note 11 above), I, 137. Parker at first rebuked Phillips for calling Peabody "the Spaniel of King's Chapel," but later told him to call him what he would. See Theodore Parker to Charles Sumner, 21 February 1852, Sumner Papers (MH); Phillips quoted by Irving H. Bartlett, *Wendell Phillips* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 224; Dewey (note 21 above), pp. 12-14; Samuel A. Eliot, "The State of the Country," *Boston Courier*, 21 July 1854.

³⁹ [Henry W. Bellows], "The Union Meetings," *Cinq*, V:15 (18 January 1851), 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; Bellows, "Pro-Slavery Testimony," (note 25 above).

⁴¹ Henry W. Bellows to Cyrus A. Bartol, New York, 4 January 1855; Bellows to John Bellows, New York, 11 January 1855; Bellows to [Orville Dewey?], New York, 17 January 1855 (MHi).

⁴² William Henry Furness to Henry W. Bellows, n.p., 19 April 1850; Furness to Bellows, n.p., 1 May 1850 (MHi).

⁴³ Henry W. Bellows, "Letter," *Cinq*, IX:33 (19 May 1855), 2.

The abolitionists are *sublime* savages; Garrison and Phillips and the rest, the old Pequods of Massachusetts in plain clothes and chalked skins. I admire their fine limbs and wild grace, but if they have any legitimate office, it is what Alaric and the Goths had for Roman degeneracy, to destroy everything and build nothing.⁴⁴

As a pastor Bellows tried to inculcate in his congregation a concern for the preservation of the Union rather than sympathy for abolitionism. He served an important role in securing support for the Union. Several of his wealthy members reaped great profits in trade with the South.⁴⁵ For Bellows and his fellow conservatives the Union was "too rare, too promising, too glorious a spectacle" to be jeopardized.⁴⁶ "I have clung to [the Union]," said Gannett, "as the guide and hope of the oppressed nations of the world." He had lost friends and had been attacked because he maintained that the Union should be preserved "at almost any cost."⁴⁷

In their worship of the Union, the conservatives extolled a deep commitment to patriotism. America was the "most virtuous nation in history," declared Bellows. The nation could only avert destruction, said Dewey, by having a "great patriotic conservatism" come to the rescue.⁴⁸ He called for a special drive to teach in the schools the sense of "patriotic obligation" and the "duties of citizenship."⁴⁹

D. Defensive and Aggressive Patriotism

When the compromise measures of 1850 were passed, conservatives adopted what might be called a "defensive patriotic" posture. At first they generally upheld the execution of the Fugitive Slave Law, and with difficulty defended their patriotic stance against abolitionist attacks. Many agreed with Webster that the refusal by the abolitionists to obey the Law was treason. But with the rendition of Sims and Burns and with the violence in Kansas and in Washington in 1856, several conservatives adopted an "aggressive patriotic" posture; it began with their voting for Frémont in 1856, continued in their spirited

⁴⁴ Henry W. Bellows to [W. Gibbons], Walpole, 29 August 1859 [draft of letter] (MHi).

⁴⁵ Lion (note 18 above), p. 54.

⁴⁶ Bellows, "Letter" (note 26 above, 1st item).

⁴⁷ Gannett, *Relation* (note 23 above), pp. 19-20.

⁴⁸ Henry W. Bellows to [Eliza Bellows], Cincinnati, 21 May 1854; Orville Dewey to Bellows, Sheffield, 15 June 1856 (MHi).

⁴⁹ Dewey (note 27 above), p. 27.

defense of the Union against southern sabre-rattling, and ended in their support of Lincoln and his efforts to save the Union. They had moved from labelling abolitionist activity as treason to a point where they themselves became antislavery patriots.

Daniel Webster's vigorous support of the Fugitive Slave Law undoubtedly inspired conservatives also to defend the Law. They gave Webster a general accolade for his Seventh of March speech, and they admired few statesmen as much as him. Because Webster decreed that the Fugitive Slave Law should be obeyed, a young conservative like Edward Everett Hale went against his own misgivings and acquiesced in Webster's view.⁵⁰

When abolitionists proclaimed the superiority of conscience over the Constitution and the Fugitive Slave Law, Unitarian conservatives denounced them. Orville Dewey relied heavily on the arguments that the execution of the Law was the only means to preserve the Union. At the "Great Union Meeting" in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, on 27 December 1850, he declared that there was an "*absolute necessity*" for a fugitive slave bill. If the slaves could obtain freedom through flight to the North,

in five years the slave population would be upon us *en masse* — in five years there would be such internecine hostilities and bitterness among us, as was never before seen or imagined — in five years there would be an end to the Government and the Nation.

He was certain of this. Because the Law prevented possible bloodshed and preserved the Union, it was not "so terrible an evil — not so revolting to humanity — not so irremediable." He pitied the poor fugitives, and suggested that money could be raised to buy them. But failing this the fugitives should be returned to prevent the "dismemberment and destruction" of the nation. Then Dewey uttered a remark that he was soon to regret: "I would consent that my own brother, my own son should go [into slavery]; *ten times rather* would I go myself, than that this Union should be sacrificed for me or for us."⁵¹

A debate ensued whether Dewey had said "my own mother" rather

⁵⁰ Samuel K. Lothrop, "*The Divine Presence a Support to Human Frailty*": A Sermon Preached in the Brattle Square Church, on the Sunday Succeeding the Death of Hon. Daniel Webster (Boston: Eastburn's Press, 1852), pp. 12-13; Ephraim Peabody, "Extract from a Sermon on the Death of Daniel Webster," *Monthly Religious Magazine*, IX (December 1852), 535, 537; Hale (note 11 above), I, 125, 246-247.

⁵¹ Dewey (note 31 above).

than "my own brother." The abolitionists encouraged the accusation that he had said "mother," and spread the word that Dewey was willing "to sell his own mother into slavery" in order to save the Union. Garrisonian Samuel May, Jr., labelled him a "monster." On several occasions Dewey tried to refute his accusers and offered as evidence his manuscript and the printed text of his speech. Whether he had said "mother" — and it is likely he had not — did not really matter. The abolitionists got as much propaganda mileage from misquotation as from the real thing.⁵²

What Dewey actually did say on other occasions regarding fugitive slaves, very easily lent itself to criticisms and caricature. If a fugitive came to him, professed his divine right to be free, and asked for help, Dewey said he would reply:

your right to be free is not absolute, unqualified, irrespective of all consequences. If my espousal of your claim is likely to involve your race and mine together in disasters infinitely greater than your personal servitude, then you ought not to be free. In such case, personal rights ought to be sacrificed to the general good. You yourself ought to see this, and to be willing to suffer for a while — one for many. If I were in your situation I should take this ground . . .⁵³

Elsewhere he remarked that if a fugitive were caught at his door his "tears would start and [his] blood would boil with indignation and pity at the sight."⁵⁴ But he would not try to stop the fugitive's re-enslavement.

The image of a paralyzed sobbing minister telling a fugitive it was

⁵² Conrad Wright, "The Minister as Reformer: Profiles of Unitarian Ministers in the Antislavery Reform," *The Liberal Christians: Essays on American Unitarian History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 77; Samuel May, Jr., to Mary Carpenter, Boston, 4 February 1851, May Papers (MB); Dewey (note 21 above), p. 32; "Dr. Dewey on Progress and Reform," *Clnq.*, VI:21 (28 February 1852), 1-2; "Rev. Dr. Dewey and the Slavery Question," *Christian Register*, XXXIII:48 (2 December 1854), 2; Henry Fowler, *The American Pulpit: Sketches, Biographical and Descriptive, of Living American Preachers* (New York: J. M. Fairchild and Co., 1856), pp. 279-281. See also Theodore Parker, "Speech at the Ministerial Conference in Boston, May 29, 1851," *The Collected Works of Theodore Parker*, Frances Power Cobbe, ed., V (London: Trubner and Co., 1863), 167; "The Boston Kidnapping. A Discourse to Commemorate the Rendition of Thomas Sims . . .," *ibid.*, V, 205, 210, 213; "The New Crime Against Humanity, A Sermon Preached . . . June 4, 1854," *ibid.*, VI, 65.

⁵³ "Letter from Rev. Dr. Dewey," *Clnq.*, V:21 (29 February [sic, for 1 March] 1851), 2.

⁵⁴ Dewey (note 21 above), p. 26.

his duty to be a slave was disgusting even to Dewey's intimate friend, Bellows. "I don't like your timid, calculating, balancing consideration of this Fugitive Slave bill, a bit," he wrote. It was clearer as "sunlight is to starlight" what a person had to do. One's first duty was to keep his own "conscience whole" and not the "Union whole." If approached by a fugitive, he would simply exercise the Golden Rule, and help him.⁵⁵ When President Fillmore appointed Dewey a naval chaplain, Bellows pleaded with him not to accept it. The "whole pack" of abolitionists "will howl" that it was a reward for "services rendered the Union," and "disgusting and wicked as the imputation would be," declared Bellows, "I confess that the bare possibility of any such suspicions, makes [me] shake in my shoes . . ." ⁵⁶

Bellows had taken a stand independent from the conservatives on the Fugitive Slave Law. In 1850 he had announced to his congregation that he would give a lecture on American slavery. A delegation of trustees from his church urged him to change his plans, but he went ahead. Happily no uproar resulted.⁵⁷ However, he did not escape unscathed when he published an anti-Webster editorial in the *Christian Inquirer*, whose editor he had been since its birth in 1847. He expressed disappointment over the low moral level in the Seventh of March speech of the "great statesman." The speech did little to solve the problem of slavery in America, but paid sole attention to keeping the country quiet. Two days after the appearance of the editorial the *Inquirer's* trustees demanded Bellows' resignation and got it. News of the "Bellows affair" did not spread. In a farewell editorial, Bellows ignored the intrigue behind his resignation; the "sole reason" for his departure was that other duties were pressing and needed greater attention. The martyr's robe ill-fitted him.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Henry W. Bellows to Orville Dewey, New York, 5 February 1851 (MHi); "Dr. Dewey on the Fugitive Slave Bill," *Cinq*, V:17 (1 February 1851), 2.

⁵⁶ Orville Dewey, *Autobiography and Letters of Orville Dewey, D.D.*, ed. Mary E. Dewey (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1883), pp. 108-109; Henry W. Bellows to Dewey, New York, 24 February 1851; Bellows to Dewey, New York, 10 March 1851 (MHi).

⁵⁷ Lion (note 18 above), p. 21.

⁵⁸ Henry W. Bellows, "Mr. Webster's Speech," *Cinq*, IV:23 (16 March 1850), 2; Bellows to Cyrus A. Bartol, New York, 25 March 1850; John W. Cory to Messrs. Thomas and Grinnell, n.p., 18 March 1850; William C. Russel, Ray Boynton, and Benjamin F. Seavers to Bellows, New York, 9 May 1850 (MHi). Bartol, Bellows, "To Our Readers," *Cinq*, IV:38 (29 June 1850), 2. Cf. also Bellows to Bartol, New York, 9 March 1850 (MHi). Bellows later defended Webster against abolitionist censures. See Bellows to James Freeman Clarke, New York, 8 October 1859 (MHi).

In 1850 the discussion of what one would do if a fugitive came to one's door could be carried on as an abstract and hypothetical question of ethics. But the Sims Case of 1851 raised the question to the level of frightening reality. The drama surrounding the rendition of Anthony Burns forced many conservatives to reconsider their previous positions. Ephraim Peabody offered a "very impressive prayer" for Burns in answer to the fugitive's request to the Boston clergy to pray for him. Gannett broke down in tears when he heard that the slave-catchers had succeeded in their task.⁵⁹ Bellows, in writing to a friend in Paris, reported on the great excitement of the rendition of Burns:

The most steady and conservative minds felt it to the quick. So fearful a moment has never been known in Boston, since its involvement [with] British troops. It has made the closest mouth open their lips in protest. Dr. Gannett preached a *fortnight after* (to get cool) a sermon taking a distinct ground of *Disunion*, rather than slave-catching with our help on New England soil! and the people echoed the doctrine.

To Bellows the upheaval over Burns was "tardy and excessive." A continual interest in the fugitive slaves' predicament would have been far more effective. He observed that the antislavery feeling was becoming general among the American people. The public uproar was taking "some wind out of the abolitionist sails." Bellows experienced a feeling of isolation in all of this: "I find myself quite a conservative in the midst of the radicalism of the new abolitionists."⁶⁰

Samuel A. Eliot both contributed fifty dollars towards the purchase of Burns's freedom and condemned abolitionist threats to thwart the law. They were traitors whether they met "a traitor's reward or not."⁶¹ But for other conservatives the Burns incident had caused a transformation of their opinion.

This transformation was easily seen in the sermon by Gannett that Bellows had mentioned. To Gannett, love of the Union had been supreme. But he now felt that the preservation of the Union might be costing America too much. Although he wanted to avoid conflict

⁵⁹ "The Boston Pulpit on the Fugitive Case," newspaper clipping; Theodore Parker, "The Kidnapping of Anthony Burns," [scrapbook], Parker Papers (MB). John Hopkins Morison, "Ezra Stiles Gannett," *UR*, III (1875), 503; William C. Gannett, *Ezra Stiles Gannett, Unitarian Minister in Boston, 1824-1871* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1875), p. 289.

⁶⁰ Henry W. Bellows to Cyrus A. Bartol, New York, 28 June 1854 (MHi).

⁶¹ Harold Schwartz, "Fugitive Slave Days in Boston," *New England Quarterly*, XXVII (June 1954), 207; Eliot (note 38 above).

with the laws of the country, he advocated a passive resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law. Men were to suffer, not fight for the sake of their consciences:

Violence in the support of truths dear to us, or disorderly resistance to offensive legislation, is as unwise as it is improper, and as unchristian as it is injurious. Painful as may be the struggle, we must not disturb the public peace for the sake of redressing a private wrong.

He proposed four ways to oppose slavery. Firstly, the North should grant no further support to slavery. The South should be prohibited any new compromises or concessions. Secondly, steps should be taken to repeal the Fugitive Slave Law, and the provisions of laws "which offend our moral convictions." These steps included petitions to Congress and, especially, the election of candidates who would modify or repeal "obnoxious statutes." Thirdly, all extension of slave territory should be opposed. Fourthly, the North should proceed "to rescue our own soil from being trampled by those [who attempt] to reclaim their fugitive servants . . ." Unfortunately, this might require the peaceful division of America, but Gannett was prepared to accept it.⁶²

Gannett's recommendation of political activity to oppose slavery was for him only a short flirtation with politics. As the 1850s became bloodier and the political problems of the nation more insoluble, he returned to his religion and piety for solace and direction. Prayer, he said, was the only answer for such evil times. He lamented the "personal recrimination" of Sumner's oratory in the Senate, but could not excuse the cowardly vengeance that nearly took the Senator's life. He warned the "persecuted citizens of Kansas" that although "self-defence" was the "law of nature," any "retaliation" was a "breach of the gospel." Truly, the times called for "lowly and importunate prayer."⁶³

Because of the Unitarian mission church in Lawrence, the denomination watched the events in Kansas with special interest. The reports of murder and pillage from the Unitarian minister in Lawrence excited the imagination and enthusiasm of eastern Unitarians.⁶⁴ The

⁶² Gannett, *Relation* (note 23 above), pp. 15-21, 23.

⁶³ Martha Perry Lowe, *Memoir of Charles Lowe* (Boston: Cupples, Upham, and Co., 1884), p. 229; Gannett (note 19 above), pp. 9, 19-20.

⁶⁴ Charles Richard Denton, "The Unitarian Church and 'Kansas Territory,' 1854-1861," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, XXX:3 (Autumn 1964), 307-309, 461-462, 474.

conservatives made a variety of proposals to alleviate the general suffering of Kansas. Gannett had suggested prayer as a means to help quell the conflict and bring the land safely to freedom. Edward Everett Hale proposed another way.

Like so many other Unitarian leaders he had been impressed by Mrs. Child's *An Appeal for that Class of Americans Called Africans* — but *negatively*. He was only a youth when he saw the book for sale in a Boston bookstore. He was indignant, he recalled seventy years later, "that a negro should be called an American at all." On the "principle of penance," he gave small change to Black people he met on the streets.⁶⁵ But his guilt feelings did not drive him to join the antislavery movement.⁶⁶ Still, he was not above using antislavery rhetoric. In order "to save Kansas from slavery," he drummed up support for an Emigrant Aid Company to expedite New England emigration to Kansas.

"It is fair to say," Hale remarked of the several thousand men his company sent to Kansas, "that every man . . . went for the purpose of making Kansas a free State . . . No man went with the primary purpose of enriching himself or his family."⁶⁷ While there is a slight possibility that the ambitions of nineteenth-century men differed from those of our own age, it should be pointed out that freedom alone was not the only goal of New England settlers bound for Kansas. If the letterhead of the company bespoke the truth, they were also seeking "Education," "Temperance," and "Religion" in Kansas, that is New England freedom, education, temperance, and religion. For Hale held the view, probably in agreement with his associates, that the best way to overcome the South's intrusion into Kansas, in fact the best way to overcome the South, was to swamp its people and culture either with New Englanders, or with White immigrants taught by New Englanders. This had been Hale's solution to the problem of Texas in 1845, but he had received no support. Now it was his solution for Kansas in 1854, and he had solid support. The Emigrant Aid Company spent over \$130,000 and had among its supporters the wealthy manufacturer,

⁶⁵ Edward Everett Hale, *Memories of a Hundred Years*, II (New York: Macmillan Co., 1902), 118-119.

⁶⁶ Hale (note 11 above), I, 124.

⁶⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, I, 249-250.

Amos A. Lawrence, and the millionaire merchant, John Carter Brown.⁶⁸

Dewey had little sympathy for the emigration policies of his fellow New Englanders. He thought the South would not submit to a northern veto on slaves in Kansas, and he was anxious that the North should not press the issue. Yet Dewey was horrified at the South's policy of extending slavery: "I say, — no — never — God forbid!" In objecting to the extension of slavery, he was not influenced by the excitement of Kansas and the Sumner affair. In spite of these events he would still be against the "extension of the slave-system" as a "wrong to humanity."⁶⁹

Conservatives began to see that the South's insistence upon the extension of slavery and the rendition of fugitives was more disruptive to law and order than the "treasonous activities" of the abolitionists. Dewey's sympathy for the South waned as soon as it advocated the extension of slavery. With similar displeasure, Gannett rebuked the South for rigidly insisting upon the rendition of fugitives. If the South would let the Fugitive Slave Law remain "comparatively inoperative," he preached, the North "would acquiesce in the legal validity of a claim seldom enforced."⁷⁰ But the South would not. Conservatives looked elsewhere for peace and order. Perhaps these goals, they thought, would be achieved through the election of John Charles Frémont as president of the United States.

⁶⁸ Samuel A. Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom: The New England Emigrant Aid Company in the Kansas Crusade* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1954), p. 114; Jean Holloway, "Edward Everett Hale on 'How to Conquer Texas,'" *University of Texas Studies in English*, XXXI (1952), 68-85; Edward Everett Hale, "Letter Written by Edward Everett Hale, [22 November 1845]," *Cambridge Historical Society Proceedings*, IV (1909), 92; Hale, "The Scriptural and Political Remedy for the North in the Present Crisis on Slavery," *Christian Register*, XXXIV: 36 (8 September 1855), 1. This essay was also published as a leaflet under the title, *The Gospel of Freedom Extended by the Organization of Emigration. An Essay on the Scriptural and Political Remedy for the North in the Present Crisis on Slavery* (n.p., [1855?]); Holloway (note 12 above), pp. 106-107; Hale (note 11 above), I, 249. Cf. also Hale, *Kansas and Nebraska: The History, Geographical and Physical Characteristics, and Political Position of Those Territories; and Account of the Emigrant Aid Companies, and Directions to Emigrants* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, & Co., 1854).

⁶⁹ William G. Eliot, "[Diary] Notebook #4," pp. 96, 98 (William Greenleaf Eliot Collection, Olin Library, Washington University); Orville Dewey to Henry W. Bellows, Sheffield, 13 July 1856 (MHi); "Dr. Dewey's Address," *Chng*, XI:2 (11 October 1856), 1.

⁷⁰ Gannett, *Relation* (note 23 above), pp. 17-19.

In 1856 the conservatives' journal, *The Monthly Religious Magazine*, favorably reviewed the campaign biography of Frémont written by a former Unitarian minister, Charles Wentworth Upham. It called the Republican candidate "a Presidential leader in the cause of freedom, order, and peace."⁷¹ A candidate for order, peace, and freedom was an ideal candidate for conservatives. What better platform was available than one which stabilized their community, ended the rampant violence, and limited slavery to the South? Not only political abolitionists supported Frémont, exasperated conservatives did as well, and they had excellent leadership in Henry W. Bellows.

At his summer home in Walpole, New Hampshire, Bellows helped form a Frémont Club on 2 August 1856. He presented the principal resolutions at its first meeting, condemning American slavery's past "astounding triumphs" and present threats to reopen the slave trade, to annex Cuba, Central America, and Mexico, and, worst of all, to establish "Slavery in the States now free." He also numbered the political successes of the South: It had packed the Supreme Court, held the balance of power in the Senate, furnished three-fourths of all the Presidents (and their presidential appointments) since Washington, supplied two-thirds of the Army and Navy officers, and had constructed a "Cabinet half of northern men, with a New-Hampshire President [Franklin Pierce] at its head, which could not be more slaveholding in its policy and measures if it were the Executive of South Carolina." Bellows' Club pledged to embark upon a campaign for Frémont as if upon a second American Revolution, "with a sacred conviction that the Republican Party represents at this moment the eternal interests of the Constitution and of Civil Liberty; of America and of Humanity; of Man and of God." Bellows wrote to political abolitionist James Freeman Clarke, "I heartily join you in your efforts to help on Frémont's election."⁷²

Bellows revealed the depth of his commitment to the election of Frémont in a remarkable sermon on the Sunday before the election. In the sermon, entitled, "The Apostle's Election; Or, How shall I Vote in the Present Crisis?" he inculcated the religiousness of democ-

⁷¹ Quoted by Denton (note 64 above), p. 472.

⁷² Henry W. Bellows, "Resolutions of the Walpole (N.H.) Frémont Club," *Clnq.*, X:46 (16 August 1856), 3; Bellows to James Freeman Clarke, Walpole, 2 September 1856 (MHi).

racy and the religious democratic imperative of voting for the Republican party. A vote, he preached,

If deposited with a thoughtful deference to the instructions of duty, with a deliberate calculation of moral and spiritual results, with a conscientious faith that the permanent interests of humanity, Christ's Kingdom and God's law are to be promoted — a vote is a prayer, a sacred appeal to God's arbitration, a complete fulfillment of the duty of a Christian citizen so far as regards the election of rulers.

Although all men professed to be governed by patriotism — “which is itself a religious duty” — and could vote dutifully and prayerfully, they could in the end vote for different and opposing parties. Therefore, the voter should view the issues of the presidential election of 1856 in light of his own conscience and the revelation of God's will. One way to determine the will of God was to heed the “voice of the Church,” which in spite of “all its jealous sects and denominations” had decided against the extension of slavery. “It is seldom,” he remarked, “that the clergy of a country — conservative and reserved on party questions by their very studies, and their position as the heads of mixed congregations — take decisive public ground upon a political issue.” Because they had on the issue of the extension of slavery, laymen should seriously consider this as a revelation of the will of God.

Bellows also admitted “reluctantly and cautiously” that the containment of slavery was more important than the preservation of the Union: “the Union is great, precious, sacred! but — yes! we must say it! — humanity, duty, honor, religion — it sticks in the throat to speak it — *are greater than the Union.*” In order to obey God's will and his own conscientious belief that the extension of slavery was worse than disunion, he felt compelled to vote for the Republican party. He exerted no coercion on his congregation to follow him. Instead he told them,

If any of you conscientiously consider Slavery no wrong, no misfortune, and no sin; if you have by physiological argument, or practical observation, brought yourselves to think the negro's natural and providential position to be that of a slave; if you find warrant in Scripture or ethics for his perpetual bondage; if you can countenance the inseparable evils of concubinage, the violent separation of households, and the cruelties of irresponsible power, which belong to the system — then you may contemplate the extension of the peculiar institution without scruple, and stop the leaks in the Union with new bales of cotton watered by the negro's blood and sweat.

And then it would follow that they should also vote for the Democratic party.⁷³

Letters of congratulation were sent to Bellows which praised his sermon: It was the "very *ideal* of a Christian political discourse." Other conservatives read God's will and their conscience in a similar fashion. Hale hoped for Frémont's election, and a dying Ephraim Peabody demanded to be carried to the polls where he could "drop a vote for Freedom."⁷⁴

Most of the conservatives continued to support the Republican party in the presidential election of 1860 and voted for Abraham Lincoln to stop the extension of slavery. Samuel A. Eliot, however, headed the Massachusetts State Committee of the Constitutional Union party of John Bell and Edward Everett, which was pledged to "the Constitution of the Country, the Union of the States, and the Enforcement of the Laws." Americans wanted, he told Bell supporters in Boston, a "more perfect union" and "domestic tranquillity." The Constitutional Union platform was union, order, and peace, but not freedom. The Republican party platform was union, order, peace, free soil, but not freedom for southern Negro slaves. What to do with the Negro slaves remained a question. In an essay "The Position of the Black Race," published in September 1860 and written probably by Samuel A. Eliot, the author had an answer: "Wait for the development of the Divine Plan." The wait would not be long.⁷⁵

⁷³ Henry W. Bellows, "The Apostle's Election; Or, How shall I Vote in the Present Crisis? Learned from their Example. A Discourse in All Souls' Church, on Sunday, November 2, 1856," *CInq.* XI:7 (15 November 1856), 1-2.

⁷⁴ William Silsbee to Henry W. Bellows, Hillside, 8 November 1856; George W. Hosmer to Bellows, Buffalo, 10 November 1856 (MHi). John Weiss, *A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of Rev. Ephraim Peabody, D.D., Pastor of King's Chapel, Boston: Preached Before the First Congregational Society, New Bedford, December 7, 1856* (New Bedford: Mercury Job Press, 1856), p. 23.

⁷⁵ Thornton Kirkland Lothrop, *Some Reminiscences of the Life of Samuel Kirkland Lothrop*, ed. by his son (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1888), p. 172; *Heralds* (note 9 above), III, 311; "National Union Ticket," *Boston Daily Courier*, 2 June 1860; [Samuel A. Eliot?], "Position of the Black Race," newspaper clipping, 24 September 1860, "[Eliot] Scrapbook, 1837-1860" (MH-Archives).

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PURELY BY COINCIDENCE, this turns out to be the Great Southwest Issue of the BULLETIN — five of the contributors are resident in California and the sixth is reaching in Arizona.