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WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON,

At the Garrison Memorial Meeting in the 15*th Street Presbyterian Church, Monday, June* 2, 1879*, Robert Purvis Esq., presiding, among other speeches, the following was delivered by Frederick Douglass, U. S. Marshal of the District of Columbia:*

MR. PRESIDENT AND FRIENDS:

There are times when silence is more potent than speech; when words seem too thin, tame and poor to express our thoughts and feelings. I am impressed with a sense of this destitution in contemplating the event that has brought us here to-night. An hour spent here in silent meditation upon that solemn event, would perhaps be more impressive than any formal addresses, however eloquent, can be. But in the presence of great affliction and sorrow, the heart ever presses for utterance. It seems meet that we of the colored race should speak at such a moment, even though our speech should be thin, poor, broken and imperfect. In a case like this any word, or sign of grief or gratitude, of appreciation, affection or admiration will be tolerated if not applauded in us.

To every anti-slavery man and woman in the land, to every friend of impartial liberty at home or abroad, and especially to every colored man, this is a sad and mournful

hour. The abolitionists of this country were never a numerous class. Their power and influence were always greater than their numbers, for they had with them the invisible and infinite forces of the moral universe. But lately death has been busy in reducing their already thinned ranks. Some of the earliest, truest and most eminent of them all have gone the way of all the earth, much in advance of their great leader. Only a few of those noble and brave men and women who rocked the anti-slavery movement in its cradle, who watched and worked during the first years of its existence, and saw with grateful hearts its steady growth and development, from the tiny thing it was at the beginning, to the giant it became in the end, are still on the stage of busy life. Here and there at broad intervals, one and another of that class may be found standing like stately pillars of a fallen temple as belonging to another age.

Mr. President, you are fortunate. Only a few like yourself can now tell from actual experience, from earnest participation, something of the darkness and peril that brooded over the land when the anti-slavery movement was born. You can name over the men who were then its friends, you can trace its history. You can tell of the wondrous trials, persecutions and hardships through which those early workers had to pass; how step by step, the anti-slavery sentiment of the country rose from weakness to strength, from conflict to victory, and from shame to glory. You can tell of the fire and fury with which it was assailed in its infancy, how the Herods of that day sought its infant life, how its friends were sometimes only rescued from danger and death by hiding themselves from the wrath and fury of the mob, as in dens and caves.

Mr. President, it is a thrilling story. Aftercoming generations will read it and wonder at it. But soon the time will

come when no living witness will be left to tell it. One pillar after another, as I have said, has already fallen and others are falling—one luminous star after another has disappeared. We have witnessed their departure with throbbing hearts and silent awe, and now the brightest and steadiest of all the shining hosts of our moral sky has silently and peacefully descended below the distant horizon, whither all are tending, no more to take part in the busy scenes of life.

In the death of William Lloyd Garrison, we behold a great life ended, a great purpose achieved, a great career beautifully finished, and a great example of heroic endeavor nobly established. For our own good and the good of those who come after us, we cannot let this event sink too deep into our hearts, we cannot too often recur to this noble life and thrilling history, or too closely copy this great example.

The world has seen many heroes, some who have founded empires, some who have overthrown governments, some who have with their strong arms and broad swords hewed their way to power, fame and fortune. There have been great Bishops, great Kings, great Generals, and great Statesmen; but these great ones for the most part owed their greatness to circumstances apart from themselves. Our great Bishops have had great Churches behind them, our great rulers, great nations behind them, our great Generals, great armies behind them. Their light was brilliant but borrowed. It was not so with the great man whose memory we celebrate to-night. He owed nothing to his early surroundings. He was born to poverty, to labor and to hardship. He was his own counsellor, his own guide and his own college. He stood among the learned and great of his day by his own exertion. He moved not with the tide, but against it. He rose not by the power of the Church or the State, but in bold, inflexible and defiant opposition to the mighty power of both. It was the

glory of this man that he could stand alone with the truth, and calmly await the result. He went forth a slender youth, as we all know, without purse, without scrip, without friends and without fame, to battle with a system of boundless wealth and power. He had faith in the simple truth and faith in himself. He was unusually modest and retiring in his disposition; but his zeal was like fire, and his courage like steel, and during all his fifty years of service, in sunshine and storm, no doubt or fear as to the final result, ever shook his manly breast or caused him to swerve an inch from the right line of principle.

No wonder that in their moral blindness men called him a fanatic and a madman, for against such overwhelming odds it was thought that nothing but madness would venture to contend. But there was nothing of madness in the composition of William Lloyd Garrison, or in his espousal of the cause to which he gave his mind and heart. On the contrary he was among the sanest of men. He had duly measured the mighty system of slavery, and knew the ten thousand sources of influence by which it was sustained. He knew how it had dictated the policy of political parties, controlled the action of statesmen, wielded the power of the Government, dominated the pulpit, chained and fettered the Christian Church, sheltered itself from attack in the Bible; forced itself into the Constitution, molded the manners, morals and religion of the times into its own image; and created conditions in all directions, favorable to its own existence, and permanence; but above all, he knew the terrible strength and vehemence of the contempt, hate and scorn everywhere felt for the class whose cause he undertook to plead, and knew moreover that the same malign spirit of hate would attach to him; but none of these things moved him. He knew the immeasurable heat of the furnace through which he would be required to pass,

no man knew it better, while no man could fear it less, or bear it with more equanimity and unflinching fortitude.

Massachusetts is a great State, she has done many great things; she has given to our country many scholars, and statesmen, many poets and philosophers, many discoverers and inventors; but no son of hers has won for her a more enduring honor, or for himself a more enduring fame than William Lloyd Garrison. No one of her sons has stamped his convictions in lines so clear, deep and ineffaceable into the very life and future of the Republic. Of no man is it more true than of him—that being dead he yet speaketh. The lessons he taught fifty years ago from his garret in Boston are only yet half learned by the nation. His work will not stop at his grave. Our General has fallen; but his army will march on. His words of wisdom, justice and truth, will be echoed by the voices and votes of millions, till every jot and tittle of all his prophecies shall be fulfilled.

Mr. President, this is not the time and the place for a critical and accurate measurement of William Lloyd Garrison; but no friend of his has need to fear the application to him of the severest test of honest and truthful criticism. He himself courted such criticism. His was no cowardly journalism. He never refused to see, or allow his readers to see in the "*Liberator*," the worst that was thought, felt and said of him. A candid examination of his character and his work in the world, may disclose some things we would have had otherwise. Speaking for myself I must frankly say I have sometimes thought him uncharitable to those who differed from him. Honest himself, he could not always see how men could differ from him and still be honest. To say this of him is simply to say that he was human, and it may be added when he erred here he erred in the interest of truth. He

revolted at halfness, abhorred compromise, and demanded that men should be either hot or cold.

This great quality of the man though sometimes in excess, is one explanation of his wonderful and successful leadership. What it cost him in breadth and numbers, it gained him in condensation and intensity. He held his little band well in hand all the time and close to his person, no leader was ever more loved by the circle about him. Absolute in his faith, no sect could proselyte him, inflexible in his principles, no party could use him, content with the little circle about him, he did not mingle directly and largely with the great masses of men. By one simple principle he tried all men, all parties, and all sects. They that were not for him were against him. What his name stood for at the beginning, it stands for now, and will so stand forever.

It is said that the wicked shall not live out half their days. This is true in more senses than one. “For the coward and small in soul scarce do live.” Mr. Garrison lived out his whole existence. For to live is to battle—and he battled from first to last. Although he had reached a good old age, time had not dimmed his intellect, nor darkened his moral vision, nor quenched the ardor of his genius.

His letter published three weeks before his death on the Exodus from Mississippi and Louisiana, had in it all the energy and fire of his youth.

Men of three score and ten are apt to live in the past. It was not so with Mr. Garrison. He was during his latest years fully abreast with his times. No event or circumstance bearing upon the cause of justice and humanity escaped his intelligent observation. His letter written a few months ago upon the Chinese question was a crowning utterance. It was in harmony with the guiding sentiment of his life. “My

country is the world, and all mankind are my countrymen." With him it was not race or color but humanity.

Mr. President, our country is again in trouble. The ship of State is again at sea. Heavy billows are surging against her sides. She trembles and plunges, and plunges and trembles again. Every timber in her vast hull is made to feel the heavy strain. A spirit of evil has been revived which we had fondly hoped was laid forever. Doctrines are proclaimed, claims are asserted and pretensions set up, which were, as we thought, all extinguished by the iron logic of cannon balls. I have great faith, sir, that the nation will deal with this new phase of affairs wisely, vigorously and successfully; but in this conflict between the semi-barbarous past, and the higher civilization which has logically and legally taken its place in this second battle for liberty and nation we shall sorely miss the mind and voice of William Lloyd Garrison. Firm and fearless, clear sighted and strong, quick to discern the right, eloquent and able to defend it, he would in this, as in other trial hours prove a fountain of light, and a tower of strength. Mr. President, in the first year of my freedom while residing in the City of New Bedford, Massachusetts, it was my good fortune to see and hear, for the first time the man who was then and will ever be regarded as the chief apostle of the immediate and unconditional emancipation of all the slaves in America. I was only a few months from the house of bondage. I never shall forget the feelings with which I went to hear this man. It was more than forty years ago, it was in old Liberty Hall, it was a large, but dilapidated old place. Its wood work was marred and defaced, its doors off hinges, and its windows broken by stones and other missiles thrown to break up abolition meetings, for such meetings then were like free meetings in the South outside of protection. Upon first blush I saw as I sat in the gallery of this old Hall that the

hour and the man were well met and well united. In him there was no contradiction between the speech and the speaker. This man and his cause were one. But what a countenance was there! what firmness and benignity, what evenness of temper, what serenity of mind, what sweetness of spirit, what sublime intelligence were written as by the pen of an angel on that countenance! a million of human faces might be searched without finding one like his, at least so it then seemed to me. In him I saw the resurrection and life of the dead and buried hope of my long enslaved people. As I now remember his speaking he was not as the phrase goes, an orator. There were no striking gestures, no fine flow of words, no dazzling rhetoric and no startling emphasis. His power as a speaker was the power which belongs only to manly character, earnest conviction, and high moral purpose. He complied with Emerson's idea of a true reformer. It was not the utterance, but the man behind it that gave dignity, weight and effect to his speech. Though he was quite young at the time I first saw him, Mr. Garrison was even then a venerable looking man. His part in the battle of life had been at the front. The serious work he had been called to perform had left its tracery upon his matured features. Popular displeasure, and bitter persecution had poured upon him their fiercest wrath. Two of the slave States had offered rewards for his head. He had already become a tempting target for the assassin's bullet. A halter had been upon his neck, and the mad cry of hang him! hang him! had sounded in his ears. He had felt the damp walls of more than one prison, and had withstood the peltings of many furious mobs.

He had been driven from the doors of the Church he loved, and had been made to feel the keen cutting edge of social ostracism. He had been taunted, ridiculed, caricatured, misrepresented and denounced by the vulgar, and treated

with contempt and scorn by the rich and great. Yet there he stood, without bitterness, without hate, without violence in speech or act, in thought or wish. Self poised, erect and serene. He neither bewailed his hardships nor exulted over his triumphs. His one single purpose was to excite sympathy for the enslaved, and make converts to the doctrine that slavery was a sin against God and man, and ought to be immediately abolished.

Now that this man has filled up the measure of his years, now that the leaf has fallen to the ground as all leaves must fall, let us guard his memory as a precious inheritance, let us teach our children the story of his life, let us try to imitate his virtues, and endeavor as he did to leave the world freer, nobler, and better than we found it.