Representative Attitudes of American Protestantism Toward the Problem of Slavery

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REPRESENTATIVE ATTITUDES OF AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM

TOWARD THE PROBLEM OF SLAVERY

By

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CHAPTER I

THE METHODIST POSITION RELATIVE TO SLAVERY

PREVIOUS TO THE CIVIL WAR

In the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church of 1844 a battle raged. This conflict divided the Church into two major groups, the original, which, expressed geographically, represented the states in the North, with certain border-line, Annual Conferences, retaining the name, the Methodist Episcopal Church; and the Southern states, with border-line Annual Conferences, called by the schismatic group, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

This battle, sometimes rather violent and bitter, was not new in the history of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It was not a battle attempting to decide whether slavery was right or wrong. That issue, from the very beginning of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, had been decided by its leaders. Its pronouncement, with almost one voice, condemned the evil institution called slavery. The issue, however, rose in regard to the way in which slavery, an existent civil and social institution, should be regarded. Should an attitude of toleration toward slavery be taken? Should the whole question
be handed over to the civil and political agencies, for them to
decline as to its times of disintegration, or should an attitude
of abolitionism be adopted, an attitude which would demand that
the Church as a Christian institution give its clear cut testi-
mony against this "sum of all villainies"? The former group
were sure that they were following in the steps of the Apostle
Paul, who while doubtlessly recognizing the evil of slavery,
only attempted to make the relationships Christian. To make
certain Christian principles powerful in the lives of Christian
masters and slaves was his way of mitigating the evil of the
institution of slavery. The latter group asserted that since
slavery is recognized as wrong, Methodism ought to use its
powerful voice in decrying the evil of slavery, and help to
secure its complete abandonment. Naturally the issue was not
always as black or white as this. Various shades of differing
opinions traversed the scale of thought in regard to this subject,
and in the period especially preceding 1844 many tolerationists
had permitted themselves to believe that slavery, *per se*, was
not an evil, but that certain evils had come from slavery,
which if corrected would make the institution, not a curse, but
a blessing. This thought, however, was not the earliest in the

1 The Epistle of Paul to Philemon; I Tim. 6:1,2
history of the Methodist Episcopal Church, but finds its gradual progression from perhaps the third decade of the nineteenth century, finding expression, shortly later, in the various abolitionist, anti-slavery societies. Even after the actual schism had come Southern Methodist leaders were loathe to pronounce slavery either a Christian social institution, or a social institution, altogether compatible with Christianity. This fact is demonstrated by the failure of the Southern General Conference of 1846 to make any new ruling in regard to slavery.

It was not until the General Conference of 1856 that the Southern Church passed a resolution asking the Annual Conferences to agree in expunging from the Discipline the general rules on slavery. Later in the chapter this fact will be dealt with in more detail.

In order to properly understand the battle waged within the Methodist Episcopal Church it will be well to consider the progressive development of the attitude of the Church, leading


3 *Journal of the General Conference of 1856*, Alexander, 67
up to the climactic period of 1844, when the split, previously considered, became a reality.

Four outstanding periods or phases of thought in respect to slavery within Methodism have been suggested: From the preliminary period, before the actual establishment of Methodism, when the institution of slavery was rooted and grounded in the American social order, by the aid and abetment of European and American Christians, there developed the primary period, when slavery was unsparingly and scathingly denounced by the leaders and early fathers of the Methodist Church. Gradually the spirit of toleration entered the Church, during which time slavery, though recognized as evil, was tolerated and practiced by the people within the Methodist Church. The final development within Methodism is that of extirpation, when slavery was finally eliminated from the Methodist Episcopal Church. This action produced a separation, and was certainly a contributing factor in the break-up of the union between the states. What had been done religiously on a smaller scale, had established a precedent for a similar schism on a larger scale, in the political and social dimension.

With the first period we will not need to deal. It is

4 L.C. Matlack, The Antislavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church, Phillips and Hunt, N.Y., 7
well understood that Christians were not blameless in the establishment of the slave trade. Though slavery was practiced by many peoples of various denominations, yet in this early period slavery was denounced by many pulpits. It was difficult for the preacher and Christian to affirm the value of the human personality, to stress the brotherhood of man in Christ, and not recognize the evil of slavery. It was during the second phase, however, that we discover slavery being attacked the most vigorously.

It was under the leadership of John Wesley, Francis Asbury, and Thomas Coke, that Methodism, in its infancy, expressed its horror of the slave trade, and the evil of slavery per se.

The attitude of John Wesley is clearly revealed in his letters, his Journal, and also in a pamphlet expressing his attitude toward slavery published in 1774. This booklet may be summarized in very brief words: "Away with all whips, all chains, and compulsion". Just two years before Wesley had written a letter in which he had revealed his hatred of slavery, a letter which has become famous in the annals of Methodism:

5

In returning, I read a very different book, published by an honest Quaker, on that execrable sum of all villainies, commonly called the Slave Trade. I read of nothing like it in the heathen world, whether ancient or modern: and it infinitely exceeds, in every sense of barbarity, whatever Christian slaves suffer in Mahometan countries.6

In writing to a certain friend, in London, February 26, 1791 (thought by some to have been Mr. Wilberforce), dated just four days before John Wesley's death he said:

Dear Sir, -- Unless the Divine power has raised you up to be as Athanasius contra mundum, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise, in opposing that execrable villainy, which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But, 'If, God be for you, who can be against you?' Are all of them together stronger than God? O 'be not weary in well doing!' Go on in the name of God, and in the power of his might till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.

Reading this morning a tract, wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by that circumstance, -- that a man who has a black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man can have no redress; it being a law in all our colonies, that the oath of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villainy is this!7

6 The Heart of John Wesley's Journals, Edited by P.L. Parker, F.H. Revell Co., Chicago, 1903, 370
7 To A Friend: Works, VII, 237, Selections From the Writings of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Edited by Herbert Welch, Eaton & Mains, N.Y., c.1901, 336
"Slave holding is utterly inconsistent with mercy or justice\(^8\) John Wesley wrote on still another occasion. Certainly there can be no doubt as to the position taken by the founder of the Methodist Episcopal Church in regard to both the institution of slavery, and the slave trade.

The other two outstanding leaders of the American Methodist Church were equally clear. Thomas Coke, sent to America by John Wesley, and the first General Superintendent of the Methodist Church was unequivocal in his denunciation of slavery. The Methodists were not lacking for precedent in their established policy. Thomas Coke appraised it thus:

> It [slave trade] affords to the contemplative mind, one of the most questionable forms in which the providence of God can, perhaps possibly, appear. And yet it is not an improbable case, that even this most abominable traffic (for the abolition of which every Christian will bless the God of love,) and this condition in which human nature appears, in one of its most degraded and unhappy forms, may be made subservient to those wise designs, which we shall not be able to fully unravel on this side an eternal world.

Thus even the slavery of the human species, (though so directly contrary to the spirit of Christianity) we plainly perceive, is now overruled by the unerring wisdom of God.\(^9\)

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8 Thoughts Upon Slavery, Works, VI, 287, Selections, 336

9 Thomas Coke, A History of the West Indies Containing the Natural, Civil, and Ecclesiastic History of Each Island: with an Account of the Missions Instituted in Those Islands, From the Commencement of Their Civilization; 3 Vols., Nuttall, Fisher, Dixon Co., Liverpool, 1803, I, 38
In another portion of his history Coke speaks with
great contempt of those African traders who "buy the muscles
and the bones of man".

Francis Asbury, who with Thomas Coke, became the first
American bishops of the Methodist Church, worked and spoke
throughout his life against slavery. In his Journal we have
arrayed before us, a series of statements covering a period of
over thirty years, inveighing against the evil of slavery. On
June 10, 1778, he states:

I find the more pious part of the people
called Quakers are exerting themselves for the
liberation of the slaves. This is a very laudable design and what the Methodists must come 11 to or, I fear, the Lord will depart from them.

On April 27, 1780, at the eighth Annual Conference of
Virginia, Francis Asbury recorded with approval an action taken
by that body:

Two questions which were asked at the
conference acknowledge that slavery is contrary
to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society; contrary to the dictates of
conscience and pure religion and doing that
which we would not others should do to us and ours? Do we pass our disapprobation on all
our friends who keep slaves, and advise their freedom? Ques.23. Do we disapprove of the
practice of distilling grain into liquor?

10
Ibid., II, 127

11
The Heart of Asbury's Journal, Edited by E.S. Tipple, Eaton
and Mains, N.Y., c.1904, 130
Shall we disown our friends who will not renounce the practice? The answer to each was significantly affirmative. 12

On June 4, 1780 he cried, "O Lord, banish the infernal spirit of slavery from thy dear Zion!" Fourteen years later, November 4, he questioned once again, "O, when will liberty be extended to the sable sons of Africa?" In the same year (1794) he records that a conference of preachers were collected together in an Annual Conference, where great siftings and searchings were had, "especially on the subject of slavery". He then states,

The preachers almost unanimously, entered into, an agreement and resolution not to hold slaves in any state where the law will allow them to manumit them, on pain of forfeiture of their honor and their place in the itinerant connection. 15

If, as in some states, the law was such that the slave could not be manumitted, the preacher agreed to pay the slave the worth of his labor, and to will the slave to persons or organizations, in trust, looking forward to their complete freedom.

Speaking in his Journal concerning a certain conference, held in Charleston, December 30, 1796, he observes, "Here are

12 Ibid., 167
13 Ibid., 172
14 Ibid., 389
15 Ibid., 389, 390
the rich, the rice, and the slaves; the last is awful to me."

It was with some discouragement, two years later, that he decided,

I am brought to conclude that slavery will exist in Virginia perhaps for ages; there is not a sufficient sense of religion nor of liberty to destroy it. Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, in the highest flights of rapturous piety, still maintain and defend it. 17

On February 1, 1809, he strikes at the tolerant and compromise position:

Would not an amelioration in the condition and treatment of slaves have produced more practical good to the poor Africans, than any attempt at their emancipation? The state of society, unhappily, does not admit of this; besides the blacks are deprived of the means of instruction. 18

Together these men founded a clear cut policy for the Methodist Church. As we shall see later, at no time did the Church depart from the position taken by these three men. They departed from consistency in not abiding by their policy, but their policy was clear: Slavery is evil, and every possible means, consistent with both the best welfare of the slave and the owner ought to be taken to destroy it. Not only is there evil in slavery but slavery is evil in itself. This was the early instruction of the Church, and a large reason for the

16 Ibid., 405
17 Ibid., 439
18 Ibid., 608
attitude taken by the General Conferences in the formation of the Disciplines. It is true that a more conciliatory attitude had already been taken by some of the Annual Conferences, but it was not until the early part of the nineteenth century that a General Conference expressed a more conciliatory attitude.

In close conformity with the divisions of Matlack (as already presented) Willis J. King, in the Centennial Number of the Christian Advocate presents 1784 to 1804 as the strong anti-slavery era; 1804 to 1844 as the reactionary trend; and 1844 to 1864 as a time when the "church showed an agressive determination to rid the country of this giant menace to religious institutions".

We have presented evidence in proof of the fact that the voice of the leaders in early Methodism is clearly unequivocal against the institution of slavery. But it is equally true that the voices of the Annual and General Conferences in this early period present a clear cut testimony against slavery.

At a Conference in Baltimore, four years before the Methodist Episcopal Church had actually been organized (1780), it was discovered that some of the preachers owned slaves.

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In the Conference, at this time, there was no written rule, and so the following resolution was included in the minutes:

Question 16. Ought not this Conference to require those traveling preachers who hold slaves to give promises to set them free?
Answer. Yes. Question 17. Does this Conference acknowledge that slavery is contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society; contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion, and doing that which we would not others should do to us and ours? Do we pass our disapprobation on all our friends who keep slaves, and advise their freedom? Answer. Yes.20

It is certain that there were many cases of violation of this rule, for four years later the same conference found it necessary to warn certain ones that if any member of the Church should buy slaves with no other design in mind than to hold them as slaves he would be expelled from the Church. In regard to the local preachers who violated the rules on slavery they would be employed no longer. At this time certain preachers in Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, were suspended, while preachers in Virginia, not having been given sufficient warning were allowed to continue preaching for another year. 21

20 Rev. Charles Elliot, D.D., History of the Great Secession From the Methodist Episcopal Church in the Year 1845, Even tuating in the Organization of the New Church, Entitled the Methodist Episcopal Church South, Swornstedt & Poe, Cincinnati, 1855, 31
21 Matlack, 55; David Sherman, History of the Revisions of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Nelson and Phillips, Cincinnati, 1874, 116
It is apparent that during this early period Methodism was very greatly under the influence of John Wesley, Francis Asbury, and Thomas Coke.

In the year in which the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized, 1784, a strong statement was made by the first General Conference against the "buying or selling the bodies or souls of men, women, or children, with an intention to enslave them". At the same Conference, rules were included, though later suspended, which very clearly characterizes the attitude of the early Methodist Church. The forty-second question of the Minutes was raised: "What methods can we take to extirpate slavery?" the declaration followed:

We view it as contrary to the golden law of God, on which hang all the law and the prophets, and the inalienable rights of mankind, as well as every principle of the Revolution, to hold in the deepest degradation, in a more abject slavery than is perhaps to be found in any part of the world except America, so many souls that are capable of the image of God.

Six methods were chosen for extirpating slavery:

1. Within twelve months every slave-holding member was required to execute a deed of manumission, gradually giving his slaves their freedom.

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22 Elliot, 34
23 Sherman, 116
2. All infants were to have immediate freedom who were born after these rules went into effect.

3. Members who chose not to comply were requested to withdraw within twelve months.

4. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was to be denied to all who chose to disobey.

5. No slave-holder was to be admitted into the membership of the Church.

6. Any member who bought, or sold, or gave slaves away, except for the purpose of freeing them, was immediately to be expelled.24

These rules, though suspended for the sake of harmony, and in order that the Church might remain united, were still considered as a true expression of the unofficial attitude of the Church, and the body which suspended the rules, in so doing made this statement: "We do hold in the deepest abhorrence the practice of slavery, and shall not cease to seek its destruction by all wise and prudent means." 25

That all through this early period the Church expressed itself against slavery became a very powerful argument for the radical or abolitionist groups in later years. It was maintained that the Church, through compromise, had lost much of its
effectiveness, and power, and that it ought to go back to the attitude of their early Church history. This argument plays an effective part in the debates of 1844.

The attitude of the early Methodist Church in respect to slavery can best be expressed by quoting in full from the Discipline of 1796:

Ques. 12. What regulations shall be made for the extirpation of the crying evil of African slavery?

Ans. 1. We declare, that we are more than ever convinced of the great evil of the African slavery which still exists in these United States; and do most earnestly recommend to the yearly conferences, quarterly meetings, and to those who have the oversight of districts and circuits, to be exceedingly cautious what persons they admit to official stations in our Church; and, in the case of future admission to official stations, to require such security of those who hold slaves, for the emancipation of them, immediately or gradually, as the laws of the states respectively, and the circumstances of the case will admit. And we do fully authorize all the yearly conferences to make whatever regulations they judge proper, in the present case, respecting the admission of persons to official stations in our Church.

2. No slave-holder shall be received into society, till the preacher who has the oversight of the circuit has spoken to him freely and faithfully on the subject of slavery.

3. Every member of the society who sells a slave shall immediately, after full proof, be excluded from the society. And if any member our society purchase a slave, the
ensuing quarterly meeting shall determine on the number of years in which the slave so purchased would work out the price of his purchase. And the person so purchasing shall, immediately upon such determination, execute a legal instrument for the manumission of such a slave, at the expiration of the term determined by the quarterly meeting. And in default of his executing such instrument of manumission or on his refusal to submit his case to the judgment of the quarterly meeting, such member shall be excluded the society. Provided also, that in the case of a female slave, it shall be inserted in the aforesaid instrument of manumission, that all her children which shall be born during her years of servitude, shall be free at the following times, namely, every female child at the age of twenty-one, and every male child at the age of twenty-five. Nevertheless, if the member of our society, executing the said instrument of manumission, judge it proper, he may fix the times of manumission of the children of the female slaves before mentioned, at an earlier age than that which is prescribed above.

4. The preachers and other members of our society are requested to consider the subject of negro slavery with deep attention, till the ensuing General Conference, through the medium of the yearly conferences or otherwise, any important thoughts upon the subject, that the conference may have full light in order to take any further steps toward the eradicating this enormous evil from that part of the Church of God to which they are united. (Italics mine) 26

The above is a picture of the attitude of Methodism, throughout the early days, leading up to the General Conference of 1804. It is in that year that what may be termed a period

26 Journal of General Conference of 1796
of toleration began. One other General Conference was held between 1796 and 1804, that of 1800. No change in policy was effected, however. Three new suggestions were passed. The idea of memorializing state legislatures was adopted. A committee was appointed to prepare an address for all Methodist societies. It was also decided by the Conference that if any of the traveling, or itinerant preachers, became an owner of a slave, or more, he was to forfeit his ministerial character in the Methodist Episcopal Church, unless the laws of the state made it impossible for them to be freed. 27

There is just a faint note of a more conciliatory attitude toward slavery in the General Conference of 1804, a tone, a prophecy, indicative of the attitude of the Methodist Episcopal Church, during the following forty years. The changes from the Discipline of 1796 were not large, but they were significant. In place of the question "What shall be done for the extirpation of the crying evil of slavery?", the word "crying" was omitted. It indeed was a small change, and still stated the necessity of destroying the "evil of slavery". In the Conference Francis Asbury, refused to act as a bishop upon the motion of Freeborn Garrettson, that the subject of slavery be left to the three

27 Journal of General Conference of 1800
bishops, to form a section that will be best for both the North and the South. Because of Bishop Asbury's refusal to act, the motion, though carried, never became fact. Also a change was made in answer "Number 1" as quoted above. In place of the statement, "We are more than ever convinced of the great evil of the African slavery", the words "as much as ever" were substituted. Also, in 1796 it had been stated that no slaveholder would be received into society, until the preacher who had the oversight of his circuit would speak to him very "freely and faithfully on the subject of slavery". Now, however, the member would not be received only "into full membership".

There were also at least four other changes. No member of the Society could sell a slave except at the request of the slave, or in a case of mercy or humanity, "agreeable to the judgment of a committee of three male members of the society, appointed by the preacher who has charge of the circuit, or station". If he were to do otherwise he was to be immediately excluded from the Church. Also it was provided that even if a member should purchase a slave, who had been provided with a certificate of future emancipations, that nevertheless his relationship to the slave, and the whole question of that slave's emancipation would be subject to the decision of the quarterly meeting conference. In these rules, however, the door was left ajar.
It was provided that "the members of our societies in the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia shall be exempted from the operation of the above rules". Also for the first time an exhortation was given to the slave in his relationship to his master, it being stated, "let our preachers from time to time as occasion serves, admonish and exhort all slaves to render due respect and obedience to the commands and interests of their respective masters". 28

Two more steps in the direction of a more lenient attitude toward slavery expressed itself in the General Conference of 1808. Each Annual Conference was authorized to form their own regulations relative to the buying and selling of slaves. The Conference also agreed to print 1000 forms of the Discipline, for use of the South Carolina Conference, a Discipline in which the section and rule on slavery should be omitted. 29

Little change in respect to the rule on slavery was made either in 1812 or 1816. It was decided by the Committee on Slavery, however, and concurred in by the General Conference of 1816 that, "no slave-holder 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

28 Journal of General Conference of 1804
29 Journal of General Conference of 1808
liberated slave to enjoy freedom". The same Committee, pessimistically reported, "little can be done to abolish a practice so contrary to the principles of moral justice". The evil appeared to be past remedy, and they were led to deplore the destructive consequences of the whole issue of slavery, many evil results which have already taken place, and many more that are to follow. Thus we discover that while an appeasement policy was being adopted, by which it was hoped that unity might be achieved, yet it is equally true that the policy even during this period was clearly anti-slavery.

The problem was not as to the evil of slavery. That was admitted; but rather how shall we deal with the evil of slavery? Shall strong and violent methods be used, which contain within them the seeds of religious disorganization, or shall it rather be our policy to deal cautiously and quietly, hoping thereby to attain unity? In either case the grand goal of both policies was the eventual abolition of slavery.

"Answer 2" of 1796, in which it was stated that no slaveholder should be received into the Church until he should have been spoken to by the pastor in charge of the circuit, was omitted in the making of the Discipline of 1820. Also the

30 Journal of General Conference of 1816
31 Journal of General Conference of 1820
paragraph authorizing Annual Conferences to form regulations relative to buying and selling slaves was rescinded.

In 1824 the section on slavery was amended for the last time until 1860. The Discipline now stood as it was to be during the climactic period of 1844. Though modified to some extent, it is still anti-slavery. It declared that the Church was as much as ever convinced of the great evil of slavery, and that no person who held slaves would be eligible to any official station in the Church, that is if the laws of the state will both permit him to be liberated, and to enjoy his freedom.

It was also declared that if any traveling preacher became an owner of slaves he was to lose his ministerial character in the Church, unless he emancipate such slaves. It was recognized, however, that at times this would not be practicable, or possible, in accordance with the laws of the state in which he lived.

The preachers were to enforce upon the members the necessity of teaching the slaves to read the word of God, and to attend public worship service.

The colored preachers and official members were to be given equal privileges with the white officials in the District and

32 Matlack, 71
Quarterly conferences, that is, where the laws of that particular district did not interfere. The presiding elder was also given the privilege of holding a separate district conference if the number of colored preachers would seem to justify such action.

Also, the Annual Conferences were given the right to employ colored preachers as itinerants where their services were judged necessary, and to be recommended according to the form of Discipline.

This was the Discipline as it read on the question of slavery until the outbreak of the Civil War. Its beginning words, "We are as much as ever convinced of the great evil of slavery", are expressive of the constant policy and attitude of the Church. The various qualifying phrases modifying certain statements in the law and rule on slavery indicate the compromise attitude which was adopted during this period.

Because it has been stated that the section on slavery was not changed from 1824 until 1860 does not indicate there was no controversy during this period. This would be far from true. The action (or lack of action) as was taken by the General Conference of 1828 was destined to excite the fervor
of radical, anti-slavery men. To them it seemed a gross injustice that a resolution should be laid on the table, a resolution to the effect that where creditable testimony is given showing that Methodist's members have treated slaves harshly they should be dealt with in the same manner as in the case of all other immorality. This was sufficient to excite the radical elements, and it was such a course undoubtedly that had its effect in the formation of anti-slavery societies, but a few years later.

The anti-slavery societies were to promote much agitation during the coming years, and it was during this decade that they were born. In 1832 the New England Antislavery Society was formed, and in 1833 the American Antislavery Society. In 1834 the first Methodist Antislavery Society was formed in the City of New York, and one year later the New England Methodist Anti-slavery Society. Later in the same year the New Hampshire Conference organized a similar society. From the beginning Methodism in New England and Abolitionism were to be identified.

Never at any time, however, among the leaders of the General Conference, which represented Methodism as a whole, was Abolitionism strong. The cause appeared to be more popular

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34 Journal of General Conference of 1828
35 Matlack, 82, 87; Thomas B. Neely, Bishop, American Methodism, Its Divisions and Unification, Fleming H. Revell Co., N.Y., c.1915, 52
among the lay-members of the North, than among the preachers and bishops. But one indication of the accuracy of this assertion is the action taken by the General Conference of 1836:

 Whereas, great excitement has prevailed in this country on the subject of modern abolitionism, which is reported to have been increased in this city recently by the unjustifiable conduct of two members of the General Conference, in lecturing upon and in favor of that agitating topic; and whereas, such a course, on the part of any of its members is calculated to bring upon this body the suspicions and distrust of the community, and misrepresent its sentiments in regard to the point at issue; and whereas, in this respect of the case, a due regard for its own character, as well as a just concern for the interests of the Church confided to its care, demand a full, decided, and unequivocal expression of the views of the General Conference in the premises, therefore,

 Resolved, by the delegates of the annual conferences in General Conference assembled, 1. That they disapprove, in the most unqualified sense, the conduct of two members of the General Conference, who are reported to have lectured in this city recently upon and in favor of modern abolitionism,

 Resolved, 2. That they are decidedly opposed to modern abolitionism, and wholly disclaim any right, wish, or intention to interfere in the civil and political relation existing between master and slave, as it exists in the slaveholding States of this Union.

 Resolved, 3. That the foregoing preamble and resolutions be published in our periodicals.36

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Debate on "Modern Abolitionism" in the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held in Cincinnati May, 1836, Edited by J.G. Birney and Orange Scott, Pub. by Ohio Anti-slavery Society, Cincinnati, 1836, 1
In 1840 two cases were before the General Conference relative to slavery. In the case concerning a slave man's testimony against a white man in Missouri, a resolution was adopted, stating that it was not expedient for any preacher to permit a colored person to give testimony against a white person, where the same privilege was denied the colored person in accordance with the laws of the state.

Also relative to a petition coming from the Baltimore Conference a resolution was adopted declaring that the simple holding of slaves, or mere ownership of slave property, in states and territories where the laws would not admit emancipation, did not forfeit the right of a minister to ordination, or to some official position in the Church.

The radical wing would hardly be satisfied at such action taken by the General Conference. In part, because of this two separations were made from the general body.

The first group to separate, in 1841, met in Michigan to organize a body known as the Wesleyan Methodists. This society, though small, did act as a protest against the "compromise attitude" of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Two years

37 Matlack, 106
38 Ibid., 106; Elliot, 213-230, in regard to the entire General Conference of 1840.
39 Matlack, 151
after organization they had 17 stationed preachers, nine circuits, and 1,116 members.

The second small separation took place in 1843, under the leadership of LaRoy Sunderland and Jotham Horton. At the meeting in Utica, New York, they named their group the Wesleyan Methodist Connection. Two years later the society possessed a total membership of 15,000.

It was thought by many that since two groups of abolitionists had departed from the main body there would now be harmony. Such, however, was not the case. The controversy raged all the more fiercely, and was to find its final expression in the great division of 1844. It was a climactic year of controversy and collapse. Two whips goaded the rebellion.

The Southern delegates had requested that a slave-holding, travelling preacher, suspended by the Baltimore Annual Conference, be reinstated. The Conference refused to establish a precedent, by taking action upon the suspending powers of an annual conference.

40 Ibid., 151; Neely, 57, 58
41 History of the Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; Compiled and Published by the Editors of the South-Western Christian Advocate, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, By Order of the Louisville Convention, 1845, 1-10
The second problem, and that which was destined to be the direct cause of the schism, pertained to a certain Southern bishop, who through marriage had become the owner of slaves. At least three possible actions were open to the Conference. The problem could be dropped, thereby retaining the good-will, and the membership of the South. If this had been the action adopted it is quite possible the North would have broken away rather than the South. To them, such action, would have seemed a direct violation of the Church's policy on slavery. Secondly, an action of suspension, temporarily, could be taken. This action, though perhaps consistent with the policy on slavery, would produce schism within the Church, and possibly permanent disruption. The third possible course of action, and one which appealed to the conservatives within the Conference, a course which seemed less dangerous than the others, was that of compromise. This policy of compromise was neither to depose or suspend the bishop. It merely in effect, stated, that it is the thought of this Conference, that is, the considered majority opinion, that Bishop Andrew desist from his office, as long as he continues a slave owner. It is to be remembered that this course was for the Conference to state an opinion. The bishop could have continued his episcopal work, if he had desired to do so.

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42 Ibid., 11 ff
The minority report in answer was very prompt, and very definite. It stated that the law of the Church in regard to slavery has always been a contract of "mutual concession and forbearance". It stated that the two groups within the Methodist Episcopal Church had existed then as now, and therefore insisted the North had no right to interfere with that which had such precedent. The North, they asserted, have seen fit to disregard the rights of the South. The North, in agreeing to compromise, in 1804, and 1816, had intended the compromise to cover all conceivable cases, not excluding bishops, and that therefore the Northern leaders were attempting to initiate a new policy, rather than the South. The protest, part one, ended in these significant words:

It must be seen, from the manner in which the compromise was effected, in the shape of a law, agreed to by equal contracting parties, 'the several annual conferences', after long and formal negotiation, that it was a not merely legislative enactment, a simple decree of a General Conference, but partakes of the nature of a grave compact, and is invested with all the sacredness and sanctions of a solemn treaty, binding respectively the well-known parties to its terms and stipulations. If this be so,--and with the evidence accessible who can doubt it?--if this be so, will it prove a light matter for this General Conference to

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Ibid., 73
violate or disregard the obligation of this legal compromise, in the shape of public recognized law! 44

The argument as presented by the Southern delegates declared that the North had broken its compromise contract. But also, it was declared, the General Conference is attempting "to establish a dangerous precedent subversive of the union and stability of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and especially as placing in jeopardy the general superintendency of the Church by subjecting any bishop at any time to the will not only without law, but in defiance of the restraints and provisions of law". The South insisted that the Conference had no power to suspend or depose a bishop of the Church, without presenting formal charges. If the Bishop had been suspended according to law "after due form of trial", there would have been no remonstrance. Moreover, it was insisted, the resolution as passed by the majority was mandatory, in spite of the protests of the majority to the contrary.

It is true that the majority had laid a resolution on the table, to the effect "That it is the sense of this General Conference...the vote be understood as advisory only, and not


45 Alexander, 27, 28
in the light of a judicial mandate; and that the final disposition of Bishop Andrew's case be postponed until the General Conference of 1848,". This was cited as proof by the South that the resolution against Andrew was mandatory. However, the very fact that the interpreting resolution could be offered gave evidence that the language of the original resolution would allow for such a construction. That the latter resolution was laid on the table could very likely have been due more to the attempted setting over of Bishop Andrew's case to the General Conference of 1848 than to its interpretative section.

Thus the crisis was precipitated. In prospect was the cutting off of 13,000 preachers, and 450,000 members. Three days after the resolution had been voted the South presented a declaration, stating that submission was impossible, and that division was inevitable. The General Conference at this time attempted to pacify the South, first, by stating that Bishop Andrew's name would continue to stand in the Minutes, the Hymn Book, and the Discipline. It was also stated the action was neither judicial nor punitive, asserting, "It neither achieves a deposition nor so much as a legal suspension; Bishop Andrew

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History of the Organization, 69
is still a Bishop, and should he, against the expressed wish of
the General Conference, proceed in the discharge of his functions,
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his official acts would be valid".

In spite of attempts by the General Conference for
reconciliation the Southern delegates chose a committee of nine
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to draw up a plan of separation. The report of the Committee,
as follows, shows very clearly the intentions of the delegates
of the slave-holding states:

Whereas a declaration has been presented
to this General Conference, with the signatures
of fifty-one delegates of the body, from
thirteen Annual Conferences in the slave-
holding States, representing that, for various
reasons enumerated, the objects and purposes
of the Christian ministry and church organiza-
tion cannot be successfully accomplished by
them under the jurisdiction of this General
Conference as now constituted; and

Whereas, in the event of a separation,
a contingency to which the declaration asks
attention as not improbable, we esteem it the
duty of this General Conference to meet the
emergency with Christian kindness and the
strictest equity; therefore,

Resolved, by the delegates of the Several
Annual Conferences in General Conference
assembled,

1st. That should the delegates from the
conferences in the slave-holding States find
it necessary to unite in a distinct ecclesiastical
connection, the following rule shall be
observed with regard to the Northern boundary
of such connection: All the societies,

47 Ibid, 72, 89
48 Ibid, 90
stations, and conferences adhering to the church in the South, by a vote of a majority of the members of said societies, stations, and conferences, shall remain under the unmolested pastoral care of the Southern Church; and the ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church shall in no-wise attempt to organize churches or societies within the limits of the Church, South, nor shall they attempt to exercise any pastoral oversight therein; it being understood that the ministry of the South reciprocally observe the same rule in relation to stations, societies, and conferences adhering, by vote of a majority, to the Methodist Episcopal Church; provided also that this rule shall apply only to societies, stations, and conferences bordering on the line of division, and not to interior charges, which shall in all cases be left to the care of that church within whose territory they are situated. etc; etc. 49

Two outstanding facts presented themselves in this plan of separation. There was to be a new church organized; and if it were mutually agreeable, there would be a boundary line drawn, dividing the conferences, geographically, between the North and the South. The plan also called for the equitable division of invested funds, properties, and other financial interests.

The General Conference of 1844 adjourned June 10. The very next day the Southern Delegates called a convention for

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Journal of General Conference of 1844, Alexander, 135
May 1, 1845, to meet in Louisville, Kentucky. All the portion of the Methodist Episcopal Church was invited to attend.

During the same year, several Annual Conferences from the Southern territories met, and approved in resolution the action taken by the Southern delegates. The Kentucky Conference, the first of the Annual Conferences to meet, after the General Conference, passed a resolution which is typical of those also passed by the Conferences of Missouri, Holston, Tennessee, Memphis, Mississippi, Arkansas, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Texas, Alabama, and the Indian Mission Conferences. In the resolution it was stated that the action in the case of Bishop Andrew was not sustained by the Discipline of the Church, and that the proceedings constituted a highly dangerous precedent. Although deep regret was expressed at the necessity of separation, yet the action taken by the Southern delegates was approved, and it was declared, "we approve the holding a convention in Louisville next May agreeable to the recommendation of the Southern and Southwestern delegates in the late General Conference". Unless some effective means can be found to prevent the recurrence of future aggressions, it was stated, and except reparation be made for past injury, there seems no other course but that of division.

50 History of the Organization, 104 ff
51 Alexander, 39, 40
52 History of the Organization, 109, 110
It was, therefore, with the full approval of the Southern sections of the country that the delegates representing the Southern Annual Conferences met on May 5, 1845. After a lengthy debate of nine days the following resolution was adopted:

Resolved by the delegates of the several Annual Conferences in the Southern and Southwestern States in General Convention assembled:

That we cannot sanction the action of the late General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church on the subject of slavery by remaining under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of that body without deep and lasting injury to the interests of the church and the country; we therefore hereby instruct the committee on organization that, if upon a careful examination of the whole subject they find that there is no reasonable ground to hope that the Northern majority will recede from their position and give some safe guarantee for the future security of our civil and ecclesiastical rights, they report in favor of a separation from the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the said General Conference.

After careful examination into the reasons and causes for withdrawal the Committee on Organization presented a report, stating the complete separation of the Annual Conferences represented in the Convention from the Methodist Episcopal Church.
Church, an organization which should be known as the Methodist Episcopal Church. Thus over the issue of slavery Methodism was divided into two great camps.

The first General Conference of the Southern Church met in 1846. No essential change was made in regard to the rule and section on slavery except that a statement was added explaining that the rule was to be understood in the sense of the resolutions passed in 1836 and 1840. It was also declared that the duty of giving the gospel to the slave was binding upon all according to their ability.

No further action on the subject of slavery was taken by the Southern General Conference until 1856, when a resolution was adopted expunging from the general rules of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the section dealing with the subject of slavery. Within the resolution it was declared that it is the settled opinion of the Southern Church that slavery is not a subject of ecclesiastical legislation. Slavery is a civil institution, and therefore the Church has no right to deal with her in her legislative capacity. The foremost object of the Church, therefore, is to mold the Discipline into conformity with the resolutions passed in 1836 and 1840.
with this fact. It was claimed that they were only setting themselves right on an issue which had so long troubled the Church and the country. The legislation in regard to slavery, within the Discipline "has been contradictory and absurd," for while it denounced slavery as evil, and pledged itself for its extirpation yet, "it provided by statute for its allowance and perpetuation". It is interesting to note that here the Southern Conference put itself on record as in agreement with the consistency of the abolitionists. If slavery be recognized as a great evil how can compromise be made to square with consistency? What before had been maintained by the radicals was now affirmed by the Southern Conference. It was then concluded:

We have surrendered to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and, holding ourselves to be debtors to the wise and the unwise, the bond and the free, we can now preach Christ alike to the master and the servant, secure in the confidence and affection of the one and the other. The benign spirit of our holy religion not only demands that masters should render to their servants that which is just and equal as to food, raiment, and shelter, but that religious instruction should be provided alike for servants as for children. The gospel is God's gift to the black man as well as to the white, and Christian masters should see to it that all their dependents are regularly supplied with the preaching of the Word and all the privileges of the Church
of God. The salvation of the colored race in our midst, as far as human instrumentality can secure it, is the primary duty of the Southern Church. Let us earnestly seek to meet our responsibilities, and then, whatever evil thing may be said of us, we shall have the testimony of a good conscience and the blessing of Him who is judge of all.56

The Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, during the years leading to the Civil War were unable to resolve their differences in such a way that harmony could be established between the two groups. Two outstanding problems faced the Conferences, that of the border conferences, and the problem of the divisions of funds and properties. At times the feeling became intense, and many unkind words were spoken. That ill-will would be completely displaced by trust could hardly be expected. They were in the very center of an intense and bitter controversy, which but a few years later was to plunge the whole country into a civil war. That Christians should have been able to exercise the spirit of love is true. The hard fact of cold reality reveals that quite often the spiritual is substituted for the temporal and the material plane.

Certainly the Northern section of the Methodist Church must face the problem of consistency. While maintaining in their

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56 Taken from Journal of the General Conference of 1856; Resolution quoted in full by Alexander, 67
discipline that slavery was a great evil, they sought, and in certain cases successfully, to retain border conferences, which in large part were peopled by slave-holding members. Naturally the problem was recognized, and a rationalization presented. In the Northern General Conference of 1856 six bishops signed a statement which they considered an answer to the problem. In their judgment, they state, the existence of certain conferences in their jurisdiction, which are constituted, in part, by slave-holding members, does not tend to either extend or perpetuate slavery. These conferences understand that they are under a Discipline which characterizes slavery as a great evil, and which makes the slave-holder ineligible to any official position in the Church, that is, where the laws of the state permit the slave to be liberated and to enjoy his freedom. The Discipline under which they are organized, they continued forbids a traveling preacher to be an owner of a slave, that is, unless it be impracticable to liberate such a slave, in accordance with the laws of the state in which the preacher lives. Also, it was asserted in this document for publication, it is the duty of the ministers to enforce upon their members the necessity of teaching their slaves to read the Bible, and to give them time to attend public worship. They closed with the question, why should it be
thought inconsistent to allow these border conferences within our group when it is known that we are operating under a Discipline "which prohibits the buying and selling of men, women, and children with an intention to enslave them, and inquires what shall be done for the extirpation of the evil of slavery?" In the writer's opinion this is the very reason why they were inconsistent.

In the General Conferences of 1848 and 1852 no important action was taken in respect to slavery. During these years, however, and leading up to the General Conference of 1856 much discussion was presented as to whether slave-holders ought to be excluded from the Membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Two main bodies of thought were represented in the Conference, those in favor of the status quo, and those in favor of excluding slave-holders from the Church. Undoubtedly the latter group was stronger in the years just previous to the Civil War. During these eight years twenty-nine conferences of the total of thirty-eight memorialized the General Conference in favor of anti-slavery action.

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57 Journal of General Conference of 1856
58 Matlack, 229, 230
59 Ibid., 225
On the first day of the Conference of 1856 a committee was appointed to investigate the feasibility of anti-slavery action. After much discussion there was finally reported out of committee, seventeen in favor, and sixteen opposed, the following resolutions:

1. That we recommend the Annual Conferences to so amend our General Rule on Slavery as to read: 'The buying, selling, or holding a human being as property.' 60

It was then planned to substitute the following in place of the previous similar chapter on slavery:

What shall be done for the extirpation of the evil of slavery? Answer 1. We declare we are as much as ever convinced of the great evil of slavery. We believe that all men by nature have an equal right to freedom, and that no man has a moral right to hold a fellow-being as property. Therefore, no slave-holder shall be eligible to membership in our Church hereafter where emancipation can be effected without injury to the slave. But, inasmuch as persons may be brought into the legal relations of slave-holders, voluntarily or involuntarily, by purchasing slaves in order to free them; therefore, the merely legal relation shall not be considered of itself, sufficient to exclude a person who may thus sustain it from the fellowship of the Church. 61

Also within the resolutions it was declared, that whenever a member of our Church becomes an owner of a slave it shall be

60 Ibid., 229, 230
61 Matlack, 229, 230
the duty of the preacher of that district to call together a committee to determine the time in which the slave shall be freed. If the member were to violate the decision of the committee he would be dealt with as in the case of any other immorality. Also it was resolved that the members should teach their slaves to read the word of God, to attend public worship, to give them compensation for their services, to protect them in their conjugal and parental relations, to make all provisions possible that their progeny shall not pass into perpetual slavery, and to treat them under all circumstances by the law of love.

The above report of the Committee began a controversy which was discussed for several days on the Conference floor. A vote was then taken on the first resolution only. Requiring a two-thirds majority, which it failed to receive, no further resolution was acted upon. Thus in spite of the "great Debates of 1856" no action was taken on the subject of slavery.

During the following four years the discussion continued unabated. In the Annual Conferences memorials were prepared, both for and against the proposed change in the section on slavery. Finally in 1860 some action was taken in the General Conference. After a favorable report by the Committee on

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62 Ibid.
63 Journal of General Conference of 1860
Slavery the following resolution was adopted, 155 in favor, and 58 against:

Question---What shall be done for the extirpation of the evil of slavery?

Answer---We declare that we are as much as ever convinced of the great evil of Slavery. We believe that the buying or selling, or holding of human beings, to be used as chattels, is contrary to the laws of God and nature and inconsistent with the Golden Rule and with that Rule in our Discipline which requires all who desire to continue among us to 'do no harm', and to 'avoid evil of every kind'. We therefore affectionately admonish all our preachers and people to keep themselves pure from this great evil, and to seek its extirpation by all lawful and Christian means.⁶⁴

It is to be noted, however, that action desired by the abolitionists and radicals, that slave-holders be excluded from the Church had not yet been taken, and was not to be taken, until the need for such action had passed. It was not until 1864, after the Emancipation Proclamation had been signed, that the General Conference adopted by 207 to 9 the rule forbidding slave-holding and the buying or selling of

⁶⁴ Journal of General Conference of 1860
⁶⁵ Daily Christian Advocate, of 1864. This is a collection of the proceedings of each day of the General Conference. A very valuable collection for research work of that year.
slaves. Thus, it was not until 1864 that slavery was finally prohibited to members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Rather than setting the pace in social and moral reform, they had followed in line with the political, and war-impelled hysteria of the time.
CHAPTER II

ATTITUDES OF AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM TO SLAVERY

Until the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, American Presbyterianism, both north and south, was, with few exceptions, anti-slavery. At that time, not only because of the rise of abolitionism, but also because of the economic factor involved, voices were lifted justifying slavery both on scriptural and reasonable grounds. In the earlier history of Protestantism in general, and Presbyterianism in particular, there was more anti-slavery agitation originating in the South, than in the North. Much of the discussion had taken place south of the Mason-Dixon line. Many of the outstanding leaders of the North, strong anti-slavery proponents, were originally from such states as Carolina and Kentucky. Many had moved from the South to the North because of this very question, to a land where they could speak freely against "the evil of slavery". Of the 101 anti-slavery societies in this country, in the year 1826, less than one-fourth were in the Northern

1 E.H. Gillett, History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 2 Vols., Presbyterian Publication Committee, Philadelphia, 1864; II, 522
states. In North Carolina 41 such societies had been organized, 23 in Tennessee, 6 in Kentucky, and several in Virginia. Many of these organizations had been established in the South between 1824 and 1826. Thus during this period the anti-slavery cause was very active in the South. It was not until the rise of abolitionism, the violent anti-slavery crusade emanating from the North, the agitation of inflammatory publications, and the preachments from hall and pulpit of "immediate emancipationists" that the attitude of the South began to shift. More and more an attempt was made to justify an institution which had molded the South in the cultural patterns where she then stood.

The very earliest expressions of American Presbyterianism were anti-slavery. The earliest available pronouncement was made by the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, in the year 1787. This does not mean that the problem had not presented itself before, but merely that a declaration had not hitherto been made.

been made. An affair in respect to the enslaving of Negroes had been before the Synod of 1774, but because of many other vital problems of the time, had been passed over until 1787. In that year it was stated, "The Synod of New York and Philadelphia do highly approve of the general principles in favour of universal liberty, that prevail in America, and the interest which many of the states have taken in promoting the abolition of slavery;". A more cautious note was then sounded, however, by stating that inasmuch as men introduced immediately from one of bondage to that of freedom, without a proper education, and without a knowledge of how to use that freedom, would be dangerous to the community in which they lived, it would be proper to see that before emancipation they should enjoy a good education. And so it was recommended to all those belonging to their communion to give such persons a good education, to better prepare them for the enjoyment of freedom. To masters it was recommended that wherever they found slaves disposed to make "a just improvement of the privilege, would give them a peculium, or grant them sufficient time and sufficient means of promoting their own liberty at a moderate rate", that by this means they may be brought into a society as useful citizens. The Synod closed their declaration by an injunction to all their

3 Minutes of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, 1774 457
people, "to use the most prudent measures, consistent with the interest and the state of civil society, in the counties where they live, to procure eventually the final abolition of slavery in America".

For some time the Synod of New York and Philadelphia had been discussing a division for the purpose of forming a General Assembly. By the year 1789 this had actually been accomplished, and thus it was in that year that the first General Assembly convened. Four Synods, embracing sixteen Presbyteries, composed the Assembly. Four years later, in response to a memorial signed by a certain Warner Mifflin, a member of the Society of Friends, the newly organized General Assembly ordered the pronouncement of 1787 to be republished in the extracts of the Minutes. Thus the declaration of 1787 received not only the sanction of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, but the reindorsement of the Assembly of 1793.

Two years later, a committee of the Assembly brought an overture in before the attention of the general body, to the following effect: A certain "serious and conscientious person", a member of the Presbyterian Church, who views slavery as a

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4 Minutes of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, 1787, 540
5 Gillett, I, 283
6 Minutes of the General Association of 1793, 76
moral evil, "highly offensive to God and injurious to the interests of the gospel", lives under the ministry of a pastor, who while he agrees with the anti-slavery sentiment, yet for certain reasons, holds slaves himself, and tolerates the practice in others. The question is asked: "Ought the former of these persons under the impressions and circumstances above described to hold Christian communion with the latter?" The Assembly replied that as the same difference of opinion in regard to slavery exists in various parts of the Presbyterian Church, notwithstanding which they continue to abide together in peace and love, according to the teaching and the example of the apostles, that therefore all conscientious persons ought to do the same. At the same time the Assembly assured the churches that they viewed with a deep concern any vestige of slavery which exists in the country, and reasserted its position as stated by the Synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1787, and as republished in the extracts of the Minutes of the General Assembly of 1793. The committee which had been appointed to draft a letter to the Presbytery of Transylvania on the subject of the overture, had drafted a letter which was not acceptable to the Assembly as a whole. The paragraph unacceptable contained the following words: It urged the duty

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7 Minutes of the General Association of 1795, 103
of religious education of slaves, stating, "A neglect of this is inconsistent with the character of the Christian master: but the observance might prevent, in great part, what is really the moral evil attending slavery,--namely, allowing precious souls under the charge of masters to perish for lack of knowledge". It was then explained, "Freedom is desirable, but cannot at all times be enjoyed with advantage.... A slave let loose upon society ignorant, idle, and headstrong, is in a state to injure others and ruin himself; no Christian master can answer for such conduct to his own mind. The slave must first be in a situation to act properly as a member of civil society before he can be advantageously introduced therein."

This entire paragraph, however, was stricken out, and the Assembly merely stated: We have taken every step which we think "expedient or wise" to encourage emancipation, "and to render the state of those who are in slavery as mild and tolerable as possible".

The Presbytery of Transylvania, acting in accordance with the declaration of the General Assembly, stated in their next annual meeting (1796),

That although Presbytery are fully convinced of the great evil of slavery, yet they view the final remedy as alone belonging

Ibid., 104
to the civil powers; and also do not think that they have sufficient authority from the word of God to make it a term of Church communion. They, therefore, leave it to the consciences of the brethren to act as they may think proper; earnestly recommending to the people under their care to emancipate such of their slaves as they may think fit subjects of liberty; and that they also take every possible measure, by teaching their young slaves to read and giving them such other instruction as may be in their power, to prepare them for the enjoyment of liberty, an event which they contemplate with the greatest pleasure, and which, they hope, will be accomplished as soon as the nature of things will admit.⁹

From the very beginning Presbyterianism in Kentucky had expressed itself as anti-slavery. One of the earliest individual expressions is that of the attempt of a certain "Father Rice", a Presbyterian minister, while a member of the convention that framed the State Constitution to insert a provision for the ultimate emancipation of the slaves. On the eve of the Convention, held in 1792, Dr. David Rice published a pamphlet, under the signature of Philanthropos, entitled "Slavery Inconsistent with Justice and Good Policy". Within

⁹ Minutes Transylvania Presbytery, Volume II, 102, 103, Quoted from Rev. Robert Davidson, D.D., History of the Presbyterian Church in the State of Kentucky; with a Preliminary Sketch of the Churches in the Valley of Virginia, Robert Carter, New York, 1847, 336
this paper he spoke of the evils of slavery, that it infringed personal rights, that it failed to protect or allow for female chastity, that it violently separated families, that it made possible social and political insurrection, that it sapped the foundations of moral and political virtue, that it induced habits of idleness and vice, and would result in the eventual deterioration of the country. Within the pamphlet he answered the objections frequently drawn from the scriptures in support of slavery. He proposed within the Convention that they should "resolve unconditionally to put an end to slavery in Kentucky". Dr. Rice was not an immediate emancipationist, however. He proposed that the legislature should prevent the importation of any more slaves, that they should enact that all born after such a date should be born free, that slaves should be properly educated in order that they might become useful citizens, he ended by declaring: "It is no small recommendation of this plan, that it so nearly coincides with the Mosaic law, in this case provided; to which, even suppose it a human institution, great respect, is due for its antiquity, its justice, and humanity." This is an example but representative of anti-slavery sentiment in the state of Kentucky. That it is expressive of the thought of the Church as a whole is discovered by the action of the Presbytery of 1794 when a resolution was

10Davidson, 335, 336
passed to the effect that slaves should be instructed to read the Scriptures to prepare themselves for freedom.

The slave question again came to the attention of the Presbytery in 1797. The question was asked, "Is slavery a moral evil?", and was answered in the affirmative. However, in answer to the question "Are all persons who hold slaves guilty of a moral evil?", the answer was no. In a further question, "Who are not guilty of moral evil in holding slaves?", the Presbytery refused to answer, deeming it of such importance that it ought to be further studied. The next year the question was again debated, and again postponed.

For twenty years the General Assembly considered their previous declarations sufficient, and refused to deal with the controversial question of slavery. To some extent the Synods and Presbyteries followed suit. In 1800 in answer to a memorial from two towns, Cane Ridge and Concord, the West Lexington Presbytery referred the matter to a session of the Synod of Virginia. In the letter to the Synod they termed slavery "a subject likely to occasion much trouble and division in the churches in this country". At the same time, however, it was expressed as the opinion of the majority of the Presbytery, and of the sister Presbyteries, that slave-holding should

11 Gillett, 522
12 Davidson, 337
13 Sweet, 169, 170
exclude from church privileges. It was stated that they hesi-
tated to such action, unless directed to do so by higher judi-
catories. In 1802 the question was again raised, and the
West Lexington Presbytery refused to allow churches to prohibit
slaveholders from communion, because such action had not been
sanctioned by the higher bodies. In 1811 the Synod of Kentucky,
declared the holding of negroes in bondage to be a moral evil,
and directed the members of the church to set them at liberty,
or if this could not be done, because of the laws of the state
under which they lived, they were to treat the negro the same
as though he were free, in regard to the food, clothing,
instruction, and wages. Those who refused to comply were
declared to be unworthy of the fellowship. Although declared
unworthy there is no available evidence that any were removed
from the fellowship because of the holding of slaves.

During these early years slavery was also a live issue
in the Synod of the Carolinas. In their meeting in November,
1796 the majority of the time was spent discussing the perplex-
ing problem of slavery. Except for passing an order enjoining

14 Minutes West Lexington Presbytery, Volume I, 38, from
Davidson, 337
15 James Brown Scouller, History of the United Presbyterian
Church of North America, (American Church History Series),
Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1911, 178
the heads of families to instruct the slaves in the Christian religion, teaching them to read the Bible, and for a statement declaring it to be inexpedient "to admit baptized slaves as witnesses in ecclesiastical judicatories where others cannot be had", very little was accomplished.

During this same session the case of James Gilliland was brought before the Synod. The Presbytery of South Carolina, of which he was a member, had enjoined upon him to be silent upon the subject of the emancipation of the Negro. James Gilliland had declared this to be contrary to the counsel of God, and in a memorial to the Synod, requested their action. The Synod, however, endorsed the action of the Presbytery, asserting that he must restrict himself to the cause of emancipation in private, declaring, "to preach publicly against slavery, in the present circumstances, and to lay it down as the duty of every one to liberate those who are under their care, is that which would lead to disorder and open the way to great confusion". Some nine years later James Gilliland removed himself to the state of Ohio where he could speak freely on the subject of slavery.

In the year 1774 a small group of Presbyterians, mostly in the state of Pennsylvania, organized into what is known as

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16 Gillett, 366
17 Ibid.
the Reformed Presbytery. While the records are not available, yet it is stated by an eminent church historian that the abandonment of slave-holding was a prerequisite to their church communion.

A somewhat larger body, organized into a Synod in May 1801, became known as the Associate Synod of North America. Some twenty years later this organization became united with the General Assembly. One of the strongest declarations against slavery ever pronounced by a church group was set forth by this Associate Synod in 1811. They declared it to be a moral evil to hold negroes or children in perpetual slavery, "or to claim the right of buying and selling, or bequeathing them as transferable property". Moreover, it was declared that in those states where the freedom of the slaves is rendered impracticable by the existing laws, that it is the duty of the masters to treat them as if they were free; to give them suitable food and clothing, to teach them to read, to instruct them in the principles of religion, and where their work deserves it to give them extra pay. It was further stated that any member of the church who refused to abide by these regulations

set forth was unworthy to be retained in the fellowship of the Christian church. The enforcement of these rules was to be left to the jurisdiction of the various sessions of the body. The lawfulness of buying slaves, providing such purchase was with the view to taking them away from those who were holding them in absolute and perpetual slavery, and provided such purchase was with the consent of the Negro, was declared. They were to be treated in accordance with the views already set forth. The slave was to do service for the master until the money paid out in the purchase of the Negro had been recompensed the master. Before any of these resolutions were to take effect the people were to be instructed in regard to the moral evil of slave-holding.

Returning to the actions of the General Assembly on the subject of slavery we discover that the question which had been left undisturbed for twenty years was reintroduced in the Assembly of 1815. Certain elders, entertaining conscientious scruples on the subject of holding slaves, introduced petitions on the subject. At the same time a petition was introduced by the Synod of Ohio, asking that the Church make a statement in regard to the buying and selling of slaves. The answer of the Assembly, after being amended was as follows:

19 Ibid.
The General Assembly have repeatedly declared their cordial approbation of those principles of civil liberty which appear to be recognized by the Federal and State Governments in these United States. They have expressed their regret that the slavery of the Africans and of their descendants still continues in so many places, and even among those within the pale of the Church, and have urged the Presbyteries under their care to adopt such measures as well secure at least to the rising generation of slaves, within the bounds of the Church, a religious education; that they may be prepared for the exercise and enjoyment of liberty when God in his providence may open a door for their emancipation.

The petitioners were referred by the Assembly to the action taken in 1787 by the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, to the fact that it was republished by the Assembly of 1793, and to the action taken by the Assembly of 1795. This was deemed sufficient reply to the petitioning elders, but to the Synod of Ohio a further reply was presented: It is observed, they declared, that in some sections of our country the transfer of slaves may be unavoidable, yet they consider the buying and selling of slaves by way of traffic and also "all undue severity in the management of them", as out of harmony with the spirit of the gospel. They recommend to the Presbyteries and Sessions under to their care to use all the methods at their disposal to prevent such shameful and unrighteous conduct.

Minutes of the General Assembly of 1815, 585, 586
Again in 1816 the subject of slavery was brought before the General Assembly, this time by the Presbytery of Philadelphia. The Presbytery had objected to the subject in the Discipline, which referred to the subject of men-stealing. The Assembly decided to omit from the Discipline the objectionable section, but at the same time, in directing the omission, declared, they were impelled by far other motives than any desire to favor slavery, or to retard the extinction of that mournful evil as speedily as may consist with the happiness of all concerned. At the same Session the Assembly decided that it was necessary for masters to present the children of parents in servitude for the ordinance of Baptism.

In 1818 there was brought before the notice of the Assembly the case of a slave, a member of the Church, who had been sold by his master, who was also a member of the Presbyterian Church. It was brought before the attention of the Assembly by the submission of the following resolution:

That a person who shall sell as a slave a member of the Church, who shall be at the time of sale in good standing in the Church, and unwilling to be sold, acts inconsistently with the spirit of Christianity, and ought to be debarred from the communion of the Church.23

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21 General Assembly of 1816, 630
22 Ibid., 617
23 Gillett, II, 239
The report of the committee of the Assembly, a committee composed of two from Virginia, and one from Ohio, was adopted unanimously by the Assembly.

The report of the committee, as adopted by the Assembly, will be presented in full fashion, for it is an outstanding historic document, constantly being referred to by the Synods, Presbyteries, and later Assemblies in their discussions of the slavery question. It was adopted as follows:

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church having taken into consideration the subject of Slavery think proper to make known their sentiments upon it to the churches and people under their care.

We consider the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another, as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature; as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, which requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves; and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the Gospel of Christ which enjoin that, 'all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them'. Slavery creates a paradox in the moral system—it exhibits rational, accountable, and immortal beings, in such circumstances as scarcely to leave them the power of moral action. It exhibits them as dependent on the will of others, whether they shall receive religious instruction; whether they shall know and worship the true God; whether they shall enjoy the ordinances of the Gospel; whether they

Ibid., 239, see footnote
shall perform the duties and cherish the endearments of husbands and wives, parents and children, neighbours and friends; whether they shall preserve their chastity and purity, or regard the dictates of justice and humanity. Such are some of the consequences of Slavery,--consequences not imaginary--but which connect themselves with its very existence. The evils to which the slave is always exposed, often taken place in fact, and in their very worst degree and form; and where all of them do not take place, as we rejoice to say that in many instances through the influence of the principles of humanity and religion on the minds of masters, they do not---still the slave is deprived of his natural right, degraded as a human being, and exposed to the danger of passing into the hands of a master who may inflict upon him all the hardships and injuries which inhumanity and avarice may suggest.

From this view of the consequences resulting from the practice into which Christian people have most inconsistently fallen, of enslaving a portion of their brethren of mankind--for 'God hath made of one blood all nations of mankind to dwell on the face of the earth'---it is manifestly the duty of all Christians who enjoy the light of the present day, when the inconsistency of slavery, both with the dictates of humanity and religion, has been demonstrated, and is generally seen and acknowledged, to use their honest, earnest, and unwearied endeavors, to correct the errors of former times, and as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion, and obtain the complete abolition of slavery throughout christendom, and if possible throughout the world.

We rejoice that the church to which we belong commenced, as early as any other in this country, the good work of endeavoring to put an end to slavery, and that in the same work
many of its members have ever since been, and now are, among the most active, vigorous, and efficient labourers. We do, indeed, tenderly sympathize with those portions of our church and our country, where the evil of slavery has been entailed upon them; where a great, and the most virtuous part of the community abhor slavery, and wish its extermination, as sincerely as any others—but where the number of slaves, their ignorance, and their vicious habits generally render an immediate and universal emancipation inconsistent, alike, with the safety and happiness of the master and the slave. With those who are thus circum­stanced, we repeat that we tenderly sympathize.— At the same time, we earnestly exhort them to continue, and, if possible, to increase their exertions to effect a total abolition of slavery. ---We exhort them to suffer no greater delay to take place in this most interesting concern, than a regard to the public welfare truly and indispensable demands.

As our country has inflicted a most grievous injury on the unhappy Africans, by bringing them into slavery, we cannot, indeed, urge that we should add a second injury to the first, by emancipating them in such a manner as that they will be likely to destroy themselves or others. But we do think, that our country ought to be governed in this matter, by no other considera­tion than an honest and impartial regard to the happiness of the injured party; uninfluenced by the expense or inconvenience which such a regard may involve. We therefore warn all who belong to our denomination of christians, against unduly extending this plea of necessity; against making it a cover for the love and practice of slavery, or a pretence for not using efforts that are lawful and practicable, to extinguish the evil.

And we, at the same time, exhort others to forbear harsh censures, and uncharitable reflec­tions on their brethren, who unhappily live among
slaves, whom they cannot immediately set free; but who, at the same time, are really using all their influence, and all their endeavours to bring them into a state of freedom, as soon as a door for it can be safely opened.

Having thus expressed our views of slavery, and of the duty indispensable incumbent on all Christians to labour for its complete extinction, we proceed to recommend—(and we do it with all the earnestness and solemnity which this momentous subject demands)—a particular attention to the following points.25

Having therefore set forth strong anti-slavery views, and stating therein their strong desire for its total extinction, they proceed to set forth a three point program whereby this might be accomplished.

It is recommended to all the members of their group to patronize and encourage in every way possible the Colonization Society. It is pointed out with rejoicing that this Society found its beginnings and organization among the holders of slaves, which they state, is in itself a pledge of their future emancipation. If the society is to prosper, however, it must be supported by that part of the American Union, whom God has dealt with especially favorably. Thus the two sections of the country will work together, cooperating with each other, "in bringing about the great end contemplated".

25 Minutes of the General Assembly of 1818, 691-694
Moreover, it is recommended to all the members of the Presbyterian Church, that they facilitate and encourage the instruction of their slaves, in the principles and duties of the Christian religion. To do this they must be given the liberty to preach the gospel; they must be aided in the establishment of "Sabbath Schools", and must be given every possible opportunity of understanding their duty both to God and man. The Assembly disclaimed the idea that such instruction would lead to insubordination and insurrection, but "would, on the contrary, operate as the most powerful means for the prevention of those evils".

As the last point, it was enjoined upon all Church Sessions and Presbyteries, under the care of the Assembly, to "dis­countenance", and to prevent, all cruelty of every kind in the treatment of slaves. The cruelty of separating husband and wife, or the separation of parents and children were especially condemned. The selling of slaves to those who will deprive them of the blessings of the gospel, or who will transport them to places where the gospel is not proclaimed, or into states where it is forbidden to slaves to attend the Christian institutions, is also condemned. It is stated, that should anyone disregard or violate this injunction, he will be a proper object of the censures and disciplines of the Church.
The Assembly also threatened to suspend anyone from the privileges of the Church, who would sell a slave-member of the Church, unless it should be in the will of the slave that this should be done.

The declaration of 1818 by the General Assembly was, therefore, strongly anti-slavery, but was not abolitionist. It demanded a gradual process of emancipation, rather than "immediatism". It recognized the problem, as well as the evil, and by its policy sought to correct the evil in a way that would cause to arise the fewer new problems. It was a sane, logical, and sympathetic pronouncement. It deserved the support of all the churches. That it would receive the support of all was too much to expect. It was but a short time later, but after the beginnings of abolitionism, that this declaration was flatly contradicted by certain of the Southern Presbyteries. The Presbytery of Harmony, South Carolina, resolved in 1836, "that the existence of slavery is not opposed to the will of God". In the same year the Synod of Virginia declared, "The General Assembly had no right to declare that relation sinful which Christ and his apostles teach to be consistent with the most unquestionable piety".

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26 Ibid.
27 Charles L. Thompson, 199
The declaration of 1818 was the last important action taken by the General Assembly until after the division of the Assembly into the Old School and New School factions. However, in 1825 the Assembly embodied in its narrative a reference to the claims of the African race: The Assembly noted with pleasure the attention which was being paid to the claims of the African race, in the way of religious instruction and evangelizing. The "prudence and zeal" of the Presbyteries of Charleston Union, Georgia, Concord, South Alabama, and Mississippi, in relation to activities to and for the slaves was especially commended. They concluded, "no more honored name can be conferred on a minister of Jesus Christ than that of Apostle to the American slaves; and no service can be more pleasing to the God of heaven...."

In 1836, one year before the division, slavery had been brought to the attention of the Assembly by the report of a committee, appointed the preceding year, to deal with an overture based on memorials and petitions from individuals and Presbyteries. The majority report refused to take any action.

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28 In 1837 the Presbyterian Church, which at that time covered the whole country split into the New School, and the Old School factions. In 1858 and 1861 these two groups split into northern and southern bodies. In 1864 the southern New School and Old School united, and in 1869 the New School and Old School of the North united. See page 30ff; also chapter on Congregationalism pages 89-92

29 Minutes of the General Assembly, 1825, 281
The minority report was longer and proposed certain resolutions dealing with the matter of slavery, but the final result was, the whole matter postponed.

Because no action was taken during these years does not mean that the subject was not of interest. The truth is, the subject was so full of interest, the matter was so vital in the thinking of the men and women of the time, and it was such a controversial topic that it was deemed more wise, insofar as it was possible, to leave the matter rest.

Although the "General Assembly of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States of America" took no action on the subject of slavery, until after the division, and until the matter was forcibly called to their attention once again, yet other groups both within the Assembly, and without, legislated upon the matter.

There was hardly a year passed except through overtures, memorials, and reports of committees the Synod of Kentucky dealt with the problem. In 1823 the Synod had appointed committees to further the American Colonization Society. Their

30 Minutes of the General Assembly, 1836, 248-250
31 Minutes of Synod of Kentucky, III,65, from Davidson, 337
object was to correspond with various influential men of the state and secure their support for the society. In 1825 the Synod directed ministers to pay more attention to the religious instruction of the slaves. In 1830 the churches under the care of the Synod were enjoined to raise collections for the purpose of building a church in Liberia, and because the injunction was not complied with, they were enjoined again the next year. In 1833 a resolution to the effect, that in the view of the Synod, slavery as it exists within our bounds is a great moral evil and inconsistent with the word of God, and that therefore a recommendation is made to all ministers and members who hold slaves that they endeavor to instruct them in the knowledge of the gospel, to promote the interests of the Colonization society, and also to use all "proper measures for gradual emancipation", was discussed for two days. Finally a substitute motion was made suggesting that the whole delicate

32 The American Society for the Colonization of the Free People of Color of the United States was formed in 1816 for the purpose of carrying free negroes out of the country and colonizing them in Africa. In 1830 it was supported by the churches with almost complete unanimity. See Sweet, 112

33 Minutes Synod Kentucky IV, 199 From Davidson, 338

34 Minutes Synod of Kentucky IV, 199, 220, from Davidson, 338
question of slavery be "indefinitely postponed". When this motion carried by the small margin of 41 to 36, one of the members of the Synod, a strong anti-slavery man, rose to his feet, and in a dramatic moment shouted, "Since God has forsaken the Synod of Kentucky, Robert J. Breckinridge will forsake it too".

In 1836 a committee of ten were appointed by the Synod of Kentucky to digest and prepare a plan "for the moral and religious instruction of our slaves and for their future emancipation". The committee was to suggest a plan which would then be reported to the various Presbyteries for their consideration and approval. The report of the committee suggested the following five points. It was recommended that all slaves, now under twenty years of age, and all yet to be born, be emancipated as soon as they reach their twenty-fifth year. They also recommended that deeds of emancipation be drawn up, and recorded in the respective county courts, specifying the slaves who are to be freed, and the time at which they are to be liberated. The committee further recommended that the slaves be instructed in the common elementary branches of education. It was suggested that strenuous and persevering efforts be made, to induce them to attend regularly upon the ordinary services of religion.

*Ibid.*, V, 28, 31, from Davidson, 338; See also Gillett, II, 523
both domestic and public". And finally it was recommended that "great pains be taken to teach them the holy Scriptures; and that to effect this, the instrumentality of Sabbath-schools, wherever they can be enjoyed, be united with that of domestic instruction".

This plan of emancipation was never sanctioned by the Presbyteries, and was never formally accepted by the Synod. The document apparently was too far in advance of the thought of the times, but it does reveal the thought of the prominent leaders of Presbyterianism in the state of Kentucky. Doctor Robert J. Breckinridge, one of the committee, asserted later: "The Presbyterians have taken the lead in the struggle. There is not a prominent man in the Synod of Kentucky, who has not been conspicuous for his zeal and efforts in behalf of emancipation..." While this may be an exaggeration, yet it is true that the cause of emancipation during this period was exceedingly strong in the state of Kentucky.

36 An Address to the Presbyterians of Kentucky, Proposing a Plan For the Instruction and Emancipation of Their Slaves, By a Committee of the Synod of the Synod of Kentucky, Charles Whipple, Newburyport, 1836; Also A System of Prospective Emancipation, by Robert J. Breckinridge, Steam Power Press of Walker and James, Charleston, 1850

37 Breckinridge, Prospective Emancipation, 9
But while in the border state of Kentucky the emancipation cause was high in 1836, the states further south were beginning more and more to uphold the cause of slavery. During this year the Presbytery of Chillicothe, Ohio, addressed a letter to the Presbytery of Mississippi, asking that the resolution which they had adopted be made a part of the Minutes of action on the subject of slavery. The resolution adopted by the Ohio Presbytery is as follows:

"Resolved, That the buying, selling or holding a slave, for the sake of gain, is a heinous sin and scandal, requiring the cognizance of the judicatories of the Church.

Resolved, That giving, or bequeathing, slaves to children or others as property, is a great sin; and when committed by a member of the Church, ought to subject him to Church censure.

Resolved, That to sell a slave, his own liberty, except when the slave was purchased at his own request, and has failed to remunerate his master for the price paid, is a great injustice, and ought to be made a term of communion...."38

We have already observed (21) that the Presbytery of Harmony, South Carolina, resolved in 1836, that the existence of slavery is not opposed to the will of God, in defiance of the declaration of 1818, and how in the same year the Synod of

38 James Smylie, A.M., Review of a letter from the Presbytery of Chillicothe to the Presbytery of Mississippi, on the Subject of Slavery, Wm. Norris and Co., Woodville, Miss., 1836
Virginia declared that the General Assembly has no right to declare that institution sinful which Christ and his apostles teach is consistent with true piety. Also in the same year the Charleston Union Presbytery affirmed "that as the relation of master and slave is a civil institution, it is one on which the Church has not power to legislate". Also in the reply from the Presbytery of Mississippi to that of the Presbytery of Chillicothe the answer was definitely pro-slavery.

With the advent of abolitionism even the milder methods of emancipation, the more gradual, such as the Colonization Society began to be looked upon with suspicion by the southern states. Now no longer was slavery merely a civil institution upon which the church had no authority to legislate, but had become in the thinking of many southern leaders an institution for positive good. As radically as slavery was attacked by the abolitionist of the North, it was defended by the left wing of the South.

Thus the groups within the General Assembly could not agree as to the moral values of slavery. Ordinarily, however, the

Gillett, II, 526; In this same year the Presbytery instructed their commissioners to the General Assembly that in case any attempt was made to discuss the question of slavery they would be expected to try to forestall such a discussion, but should they fail then they should withdraw from the Assembly. See Sweet, 120
smaller groups, without the Assembly, expressed themselves as
decidedly anti-slavery. As an example of this we have recorded
the action of the Associate Reformed Synod in 1830, and that
of the Synod of the Associate Church in 1831.

The Associate Reformed Synod resolved,

That the religion of Christ Jesus requires
that involuntary slavery should be removed from
the Church, as soon as an opportunity, in the
providence of God, is offered to slave-owners
for the liberation of their slaves.

That when there are no regulations of the
State to prohibit it; when provision can be made
for the support of the freed man; when they can
be placed in circumstances to support the rank,
enjoy the rights and discharge the duties of
freedman, it shall be considered that such an
opportunity is afforded in the providence of God.

That Synod will, as it hereby does, recommend
it to all its members to aid in placing the slaves
that are within the jurisdiction of this Synod
in the possession of their rights as freedmen;
and that it be recommended to them especially to
take up annual collections, to aid the funds of
the American Society for the Colonizing the Free
People of Color in the United States.

That the practice of buying or selling of
slaves for gain, by any member of this Church,
be disapproved and that slaveowners under the
jurisdiction of this Synod, be, as they hereby
are, forbidden all aggravations of the evils of
slavery, by violating the ties of nature, in the
separation of husband and wife, parents and
children, or by cruel or unkind treatment; and
that they shall not only treat them well, but
also instruct them in useful knowledge and the
principles of the Christian religion, and in all
respects treat them as enjoined upon masters

Robert Ellis Thompson, 368, 369
towards their servants by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Synod of the Associate Church, in equally clear fashion, determined,

That as slavery is clearly condemned by the law of God, and has been long since judicially declared to be a moral evil by this Church, no member thereof shall, from and after this date, be allowed to hold a human being in the character or condition of a slave.

That this Synod do hereby order all its subordinate judicatories to proceed forthwith to carry into execution the intention of the foregoing resolution, requiring those church members under their immediate inspection, who may be possessed of slaves, to relinquish their unjust claims, and release those whom they may have heretofore considered as their property.

That if any member or members of this Church, in order to evade this act, shall sell any of their slaves, or make a transfer of them, so as to retain the proceeds of their services, or the price of their sale, or in any other way evade the provisions of this act, they shall be subject to the censures of the Church.

Further, that where an individual is found, who has spent so much of his or her strength in the service of another, as to be disqualified from providing for his or her own support, the master, in such a case, is to be held responsible for the comfortable maintenance of said servants.

In 1837 when the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church in the United States of America divided into two groups, the New School, and the Old, the reason for the split was ostensibly
for an entirely different reason than that of slavery. The apparent reason was the abrogation of the "Plan of Union", of 1801, between the General Assembly and the General Association of Connecticut. The seeming reason for the division is further strengthened by the action of the Assembly in 1837 which by a vote of 93 to 28, lay the matter of slavery upon the table, when brought before the house by one of the Assembly. In this case the apparent reason is not altogether the real reason. Slavery had assumed new proportions during this time. The subject, because of its extremely controversial and divisive possibilities was hushed. It was in New England, among those who followed the New England Theology, who believed in the congregational, free church system, that the anti-slavery and abolitionist sentiment was the strongest. It was this group that protested at the action of the General Assembly of 1837 in abrogating the "Plan of Union". Thus the fact that from the beginning the New School was more definitely an anti-slavery group, than was the Old, the fact that from the division the policy of the Old was acceptable to the southern states, while that of the New School was not, must have a certain significance in the fact of the division itself. Of the four synods which in 1837 were excinded from the General Assembly each had within

41 Gillett, II, 528
the two years previous passed strong resolutions condemning slavery; and as William Warren Sweet has stated were "well known in the Church as anti-slavery centers". If the subject of slavery did have a significant part in the division what was the reason for the exclusion of the subject from the Assembly of that year? The subject had occupied considerable attention in the Old School convention which had preceded the General Assembly, but if the attempt had been made to introduce the subject into the General Assembly, to introduce the slavery views, of such men as Breckenridge, Wilson, and David Rice, the Assembly would have been split apart, the Southern delegates would have withdrawn, and perhaps a Southern Assembly would have been established. The Northern Old School would then have been the only section remaining of the original General Assembly. To secure cooperation between the Old School men, both North and South, it was necessary to leave the subject of slavery entirely alone. In discussing the reason for the division William Warren Sweet explains:

With all these exciting controversial matters before the church which have been described; the creeping in of loose discipline and the tearing down of strict presbyterian polity, as the result of the working

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42 Sweet, 118
43 Sweet, 123; Also Gillett, II, 525; C.L. Thompson, 191.
of the Plan of Union; the growing missionary rivalry between societies controlled by the Presbyterian church and the great voluntary societies; the doctrinal controversies and the numerous exciting heresy trials; and last of all the cleavage arising as a result of the rabid anti-slavery propaganda lately fostered by the New School Presbyterians; in the light of these facts, the bisecting of the church by the General Assembly of 1837 becomes fully understandable.44(Italics mine)

That the deductions we have drawn are correct is further evidenced by the subsequent actions of the New and Old School Assemblies. The Old School affirmed its policy of non-interference with the slave institution while the New School came out strongly against the institution.

The Old School General Assembly in 1845 at Cincinnati took the ground that where Christ and the Apostles had not legislated it was not lawful for the Church to do so. In their declaration the Assembly called to the attention of the Church that slavery was a problem which was agitating and dividing other branches of the church, and therefore, it was implied, great care ought to be taken in the way with which it was dealt. The question was then asked, is slavery under all circumstances, a great sin calling for the discipline of the church. The answer was returned, the church of Christ is a spiritual body, whose rule of government extends only to religious faith, and the moral conduct of her members. Because of this, the church can not

44 Sweet, 119
legislate "where Christ has not legislated, nor make terms of membership which he has not made". The question which was then asked attempted to resolve the entire problem into a single question: "Do the Scriptures teach that the holding of slaves, without regard to circumstances, is a sin, the renunciation of which should be made a condition of membership in the church of Christ?"

It is impossible to answer this question in the affirmative, it was observed, without "contradicting some of the plainest declarations of the word of God". Slavery existed in the days of Christ and his Apostles. This relationship was not denounced as sinful, or as inconsistent with Christianity. Slaveholders were admitted to membership in the early church. It is true, they affirmed, that the slaveholder was required to treat their slaves with kindness, "and as rational, accountable, immortal beings, and if Christians, as brethren in the Lord". They were not asked to emancipate them. Moreover, slaves were required to be obedient to their masters according to the Lord. After relating these facts the Assembly concluded: We cannot therefore "denounce the holding of slaves as necessarily a heinous and scandalous sin, calculated to bring upon the Church the curse of God, without charging the Apostles of Christ with conniving at such sin, introducing into the Church such sinners, and thus bringing upon them the curse of the Almighty".
By thus determining the attitude of the Church, the Assembly does not mean to affirm, it is stated, that there is not evil connected with slavery. The Assembly does not approve of the "defective and oppressive laws by which, in some of the States, it is regulated". They do not approve of traffic in slaves for the sake of gain, the separation of husbands and wives, parents or children, or the cruel treatment of slaves in any respect. "Every Christian and philanthropist certainly would seek by all peaceable and lawful means the repeal of unjust and oppressive laws, and the amendment of such as are defective, so as to protect the slaves from cruel treatment by wicked men, and secure to them the right to receive religious instruction." (See footnote reference 45)

This Assembly, it was further stated, does not countenance the idea that slaves are to be regarded only as property. Rather, they are human beings, "rational accountable, and immortal". Not only do the Scriptures teach the duty of slaves to masters, but also they prescribe the duty of masters to servants.

The Assembly then denounced the movements of the abolitionists, characterizing their work as that which only tends to perpetuate and aggravate the very evil which they seek to destroy. The church of Christ will ameliorate the conditions
of the slaves, not through denouncement and excommunication, but through the spreading of the doctrines of Christ. This, it was asserted, is the only way in which the condition of the slaves can be improved, by the church.

The problem as to the extent of the evil of slavery, and the best methods of removing them was set to one side, it being stated that they possessed no authority to deal with such a question. However, it was pronounced piously, the master ought always to act in the spirit of the golden rule, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even the same to them".

The Assembly concluded their declaration by the passage of two resolutions, stating that in view of the above principles and facts, resolved:

That the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States was originally organized, and has since continued the bond of union in the Church upon the conceded principle that the existence of domestic slavery, under the circumstances in which it is found in the southern portion of the country, is no bar to Christian communion.

That the petitions that ask the Assembly to make the holding of slaves in itself a matter of discipline, do virtually require this judicatory to dissolve itself, and abandon the organization under which the Divine blessing, it has so long prospered. The tendency is evidently to separate the northern from the southern portion of the Church; a result which every good citizen must deplore as tending to the dissolution of the union of our beloved country, and which every enlightened Christian will oppose as bringing
out a ruinous and unnecessary schism between brethren who maintain a common faith.45

This was the last pronouncement of the Old School Assembly until the outbreak of the Civil War; at that time, as we shall see they changed as completely from the position of 1845, as in 1845 they changed from the position of 1818. In 1818 slavery per se was condemned. In 1845 only the evils in slavery were condemned, and it was not thought expedient by the Assembly to discuss even those. In 1861 the Assembly was once again to swing back to the position adopted in 1818.

The position as taken proved very satisfactory to the churches south of the Ohio, and it was not until the change in attitude in 1861 that a division was to be brought about between the south and the north. At that time, as Dr. Alexander White has observed, the Declaration of the Assembly of 1845 "was in entire harmony with the attitude toward slavery maintained by the Southern Assembly throughout the period of the Confederate War".

The General Assembly of Presbyterian Churches in the United States of America (New School) presented divided opinion, as in the Assembly of the Old School. Year after year memorials

45 Minutes of the General Assembly, 16-18
46 Henry Alexander White, Southern Presbyterian Leaders
The Neale Publishing Company, N.Y., 1911, 349
and overtures were presented, upon which serious and extended discussions were elicited. The action taken usually failed to satisfy either side, neither satisfying the abolitionist of the North, nor the constituents of the South. Yet the Assembly was preponderently anti-slavery, and from time to time responded in that way. In 1850 the Assembly declared:

We exceedingly deplore the working of the whole system of slavery as it exists in our country and is interwoven with the political institutions of the slave-holding States, as fraught with many and great evils to the civil, political, and moral interests of those regions where it exists.

The holding of our fellow-men 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, as used in the Book of Discipline, chap. 1. sec. 3., and should be regarded and treated in the same manner as other offences.

The sessions and presbyteries are, by the Constitution of our church, the courts of primary jurisdiction for the trial of offences.

That, after this declaration of sentiment, the whole subject of slavery, as it exists in the church be referred to the sessions and presbyteries, to take such action thereon as in their judgment the laws of Christianity require. 47

Three years later the Assembly inquired of the Southern churches what was being done to purge the church of the evils of

47 Minutes of the General Assembly, 1850, 325
slavery, and of the evil of slavery. An attitude of forbearance was enjoined upon all those who have no personal connection with slavery in their attitude toward who are not so happily free from the evil of slavery. In their recommendations they requested the southern Presbyteries in each of the slave-holding states to make "distinct and full statements" before the next Assembly in regard to the number of slave-holders and the number of slaves held by those members of the church. Also the extent to which slaves are held by an unavoidable necessity, because of the demands of the laws of the States, the obligations of guardianship, or the demands of humanity. Furthermore these Presbyteries were required to submit a report in regard to the way in which the Southern members deal with conjugal and parental relations among slaves, the faithfulness in which they administer the rite of baptism among the children of slaves, the way in which slaves are treated in the church courts, "in general, to what extent in what manner provision is made for the religious well-being of the enslaved".

To this request by the Assembly of the New School the Presbytery of Lexington showed open defiance, by declaring that the ministers and members of its churches who were slaveholders were so on principle and by choice. In return the

48 Minutes of the General Assembly, 1853, 333
Assembly issued a deliverance of condemnation, which resulted in the Southern part of the New School church, withdrawing from the General Assembly. This new group, meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1857, organized themselves into the United Synod of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. In justification of their action of severance they stated that the action of the General Assembly has convinced them that no longer could peace and harmony exist among them. The Assembly, they declared, instead of being a bond of union, is nothing, and will continue to be nothing, but a theatre of strife and discord. Therefore the glory of God, the welfare of the churches, and the good of the country demands a separation of the various elements, and the bringing into being of another Assembly, in which "the slavery question will be unknown". It was the intention of the United Synod to unite with the Old School Church, but because of objections to this course by members of the Old School this failed to materialize.

What had now taken place in the New School was also to take place in the Old School, but not until actual civil war.

49 Minutes of the General Assembly, 1857, 405.
49 At this time, the United Synod contained six Synods, twenty-one Presbyteries, and 15,000 communicants. See Robert Ellis Thompson, 135

50 Joseph M. Wilson, The Presbyterian Historical Almanac Annual Remembrancer of the Church, For 1858, 1859, Joseph M. Wilson, Phil., 1859, 135
had been begun. In the declaration of loyalty made in 1861 (Gardiner Spring Resolutions), the Assembly proclaimed its allegiance to the "Federal Government in all the exercise of all its functions under our noble Constitution; and to this Constitution, in all its provisions, requirements, and principles, we profess our unabated loyalty". This action though strongly protested by a minority report, led by Doctor Hodge and other outstanding leaders, was nevertheless adopted. Upon this action, the Synods and Presbyteries of the Confederate States renounced the jurisdiction of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, and joined together to form the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America. No change was made in either doctrine or policy, but in respect to slavery they declared it to be at the root of all the difficulties which have resulted in the dismemberment of the Federal union and in civil war.

We are neither the friends nor the foes of slavery, they declared. "We have no commission either to propagate or abolish it. The policy of its existence or non-existence is a question which exclusively belongs to the State."

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51 Minutes of the General Assembly, 1861, 329,330
52 Ibid., 383
53 Thomas G. Johnson, D.D., History of the Southern Presbyterian Church, (American Church History Series), Charles Scribner's, N.Y., 1894, The entire address given from PP. 348-354.
Returning to the action of the General Assembly of the Old School with respect to slavery we discover that finally in 1864 it came out wholeheartedly against slavery. In 1863 they had broken the great silence on the issue, but only to assert that they abided by their former statements on the subject. "The Assembly has," they declared, "from the first, uttered its sentiments on the subject in substantially the same language."

As has already been revealed, such an assertion was entirely without foundation. The right or wrong of their attitude does not concern us, but the revelation of its substance does. From a forthright denouncement of slavery per se in 1818 they had by 1845 turned to a policy of extreme moderation, of expediency, in order that unity might be achieved. To make an affirmation of consistency, that is, that the position of the General Assembly had been historically the same, was completely inaccurate. They were not without precedent in this matter, however, for once before, in 1846, the Assembly had declared that the church had "always held and uttered substantially the same sentiments" on the subject of slavery. This was pronounced immediately after the declaration of 1845.

54 Minutes of the General Assembly of 1863, 55
55 Ibid.
56 Minutes of the General Assembly of 1846, 206, 207
The churches of the South, at that time, had been in agreement with the declaration, and continued to maintain that not the declaration of 1818, nor those after the Civil War had begun, were the true teachings of the Church, but that of 1845.

In 1864, after the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued, the Assembly declared the war to be a working of God, in which he was seeking to stamp out "the evil and guilt of slavery". Once again slavery was declared to be an evil per se. They now looked forward to the "extirpation of slavery", and all the evils that followed "in their train". From an ultra conservative position, at the beginning of the war, the Assembly had gone to a position of complete endorsement of the administration, with its policy of immediate and complete emancipation. Lewis G. Vander Velde has suggested four possible reasons for this change in attitude:

1. Fear of the people.

2. Examples of other religious groups.

3. An East-West sectionalism which incited the West to act as a unit in forcing the East to a more radical position.

4. The desire of a large element to seek favor in the eyes

57 Minutes of the General Assembly of 1864, 296, 299
of their New School brethren, in order to promote the cause of reunion.

Perhaps we ought to add a fifth reason: The reason why the war was being fought, as maintained by the propagandists of the time. To fight a war to preserve the union, to force recalcitrant states to remain within the structure of the federal government must have possessed very little emotional appeal. Men would not willingly lay down their lives for such a cause. But when they said, that they were fighting, under God, for the abolition of slavery. That therefore, it was a righteous war, one ordained by heaven, one in which, by fighting, they were fulfilling their obligation to a large section of mankind, this furnished the emotional appeal. This the North believed. And it was this the Northern Old School Assembly accepted, and now pronounced as right.

The New School Assembly had only to reiterate their previous judgments. In 1861 they declared slavery to be both a social and political evil, one which lies "at the foundation of our present national difficulties", and an evil which we must work and pray for its extirpation. Again in 1862 they declared that in their opinion the whole "insurrectionary movement can be traced to one primordial root, and to one only---African Slavery".

59 Minutes of the General Assembly, (N.S.) 1861, 448
60 Minutes of the General Assembly, (N.S.) 1862, 24
The war had fashioned to a great extent the attitude taken by the Presbyterians in respect to slavery. This was not entirely true or there would have been no pronouncements in respect to slavery previous to the war, which would conflict with any large group within the church. Within the New School especially fearless declarations had been made, previous to the war. But in both, the complexion of the statements, their tone and coloring, were those of war years. On the whole the church, rather than shaping the thought and expression of the age, was shaped by that thought and expression. As long as the mind of the public was opposed to abolitionism, the Church expressed itself hesitantly, and often with equivocation; with the advent of war, and the change in public opinion, the Church came out fearlessly and strongly opposed to slavery.
CHAPTER III
ATTITUDES OF CONGREGATIONALISM TO SLAVERY

In a very definite way the history of Presbyterianism in its relationship to slavery is closely connected with that of Congregationalism and slavery. These two ecclesiastical groups had for many years an interrelated history. From 1766 to 1775 an annual joint convention of representatives of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia and the Associations of Connecticut had met. After the Revolutionary War an even closer union was proposed, and after some discussion and correspondence in 1788, 1790, and 1791, an agreement was reached between the Presbyterian General Assembly and the Connecticut General Association whereby delegates from each organization should regularly be sent to the session of the other body. At the request of the Presbyterians in 1794 these delegates were given full power of voting in the meetings. In but a few years a similar agreement was worked out between the Congregational State organizations of Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. These
arrangements continued in force until the rupture in 1837.

There were various reasons for such a close relationship, which however stopped short of a merger of the two groups. The two denominations had a common origin. They were part of the journeyings west to find religious, economic, and political freedom. These early colonists from England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland, had a Calvinistic theology. Depending, however, in large part upon their previous contacts they were divided into two schools of thought in regard to church polity. Those from England were in large part separatists, believing in local church autonomy. The churches, they believed, were composed of local congregations entirely capable of complete self-government. These colonists, settling largely in New England, became known as Congregationalists. Others, from Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the Continent, accepted the more centralized authority of church government. Such groups organized themselves into Synods and Presbyteries, and later, General Assemblies. It was thus because of polity that a merger was not effected. Doctrine and origin were very similar, and sometimes identical.

Such being the case the program of each was the same. In the late part of the eighteenth century, discovering that they

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were working in identical fields and for the same ends, a "Plan of Union" was proposed. Thus in 1801 such a course was adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and the Congregational Connecticut General Association. By the plan the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians agreed to combine their forces in carrying Christianity to the outposts of the Middle West. The scheme was such that settlers in a new community, Congregational and Presbyterian, might combine their forces and organize a single congregation, and then call a minister of either denomination. If the majority of the church were Presbyterian they could conduct their business and discipline according to the regulations of that church even if their minister were a Congregationalist and vice versa. In case of a disagreement between the Pastor and the church the matter could be settled by the presbytery or association of which he was a member, or if this was not agreeable, by a committee composed of equal representatives of each group. But a few years later the other New England Congregational Associations approved the "Plan". This "Plan of 1801" continued in force until its repudiation by the Old School delegates in the General Assembly of 1837. Such a policy was continued, however, by the New School body until its abrogation by the Congregationalists in the Albany Convention in 1852. The reason for the repudiation
was the increasing denominational consciousness of the Congregational delegates, and the realization that the "Plan" was operating more in favor of the Presbyterians than themselves.

It is estimated that "over two thousand churches, which were in origin Congregational", had turned into Presbyterian churches.

From what we have already said it is to be understood that the statements relative to slavery adopted by the General Assemblies previous to the split of 1837 were, in a small way, also the action of the Congregational Associations. These delegates, though few in number, had the opportunity both to sit and vote upon this mooted question. During these earlier years, as we have already seen in an earlier chapter, the main agitation came from the south, so that we ought not to place too great an emphasis upon the part played in the General Assemblies relative to slavery previous to the outbreak of the northern abolitionist movements. Strong anti-slavery feelings among Congregationalists arose simultaneously with the outbreak of northern "immediatism".

New England had accepted slavery in years previous to the Revolutionary War. Indian slavery had not only been allowed but encouraged; such a sanction readily led to the sanction of negro slavery. Sweet has declared that this was the direct

result of the New England Calvinistic theology. These early colonists considered themselves as God's elect, and that God had given them the heathen for an inheritance. To enslave them was but entering into their inheritance. Later under a more modified Calvinism opposition to slavery developed.

Men such as John Davenport of New Haven, Ezra Styles, president of Yale, Jonathan Edwards, Cotton Mather, John Hovey, Thomas Smith, Thomas Prentice, all outstanding men and preachers owned slaves, in the years before the Revolution.

Even during this time, however, there were outspoken critics of slavery. Such a man was Dr. Samuel Hopkins, who became the minister of the First Congregational Church at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1769. At one time he himself had been a slaveowner, but what he saw of the slave-system in Newport made him an implacable foe of the institution. He began preaching against the evils of slavery. By so doing he alienated many of the wealthy men of the town, but also stimulated the thinking people of the city into discussing the evil of the system. He began going from door to door urging people

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3 Sweet, The Story of Religion, 412, 413
4 Ibid., also Calvin Montague Clark, American Slavery and Maine Congregationalists, A Chapter in the History of the Development of Anti-slavery Sentiment in the Protestant Churches of the North, Published by the Author, Bangor, Maine, 1940, 6
to free their slaves, and soon his influence was widespread throughout New England. His most influential anti-slavery publication was his "Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans" published in 1776. The second edition of this booklet was published by the New York Manumission Society, established in New York, 1785, under the presidency of John Jay, then secretary of state for foreign affairs. This society presented each of the members of Congress with a copy. We can judge something of the repute in which Dr. Hopkins was held, and his influence as an anti-slavery crusader when we understand that also such distinguished men as Honorable Alexander Hamilton, Robert R. Livingston, chancellor of the State of New York, and the Mayor of the City of New York were members of this society.

In the form of a dialogue Hopkins spoke with powerful persuasion of the evil of slavery. After discussing his convictions of the terrible evil of the slave trade he makes this pointed observation: "If the slave trade be unjustifiable and wrong, then our holding the Africans and their children in bondage is unjustifiable and wrong, and the latter is criminal

Dr. Samuel Hopkins, "A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans, Showing it to be the Duty and Interest of the American Colonies to Emancipate All the African Slaves with an Address to the Owners of Such Slaves. Dedicated to The Honorable Continental Congress", (Timely Articles on Slavery) Congregational Board of Publication, Boston, 1854
in some proportion to the inexpressible baseness and criminality
of the former". The question is then asked: Is it possible
to free all our negroes, especially at once, in present circum-
stances? Hopkins declares that if slavery be a sin, and a
"flagrant violation of all the rules of justice and humanity",
then we cannot put forth too much zeal, nor attempt too soon 6
to set them free. He declares:

Let this iniquity be viewed in its true
magnitude, and in the shocking light in which
it has been set in this conversation; let the
wretched case of the poor blacks be considered
with proper pity and benevolence, together with
the probably dreadful consequence to this land
of retaining them in bondage, and all objections
against liberating them would vanish. The
mountains that are now raised up in the imagina-
tion of many would become a plain, and every
difficulty surmounted."

In the same year Dr. Hopkins published an address to the
slave-owners in which an appeal is made for them to liberate 8
their slaves.

In 1793 he published an article on the slave trade and
slavery in general. After declaring the evils of slavery he
expressed his hope that the time would soon come when the slave

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6 Ibid., 572
7 Ibid., 573
8 Dr. Samuel Hopkins, An Address To The Owners of Negro Slaves
   in the American Colonies, (Timely Articles on Slavery),
   Congregational Board of Publication, Boston, 1854
trade and all slavery would be totally abolished. Sweet declares that opposition to slavery became strong among Congregational ministers at this time, and states that "their influence was almost unanimously exerted in the direction of emancipation, and they were undoubtedly a large factor in bringing about the emancipation acts which were passed by the New England and middle states, during and immediately following the war".

Many Congregationalist pastors spoke from the pulpit against slavery as had Hopkins. In 1774 the Reverend Levi Hart, pastor of the Congregational Church in Preston, Connecticut, gave a strong sermon against slavery, using as his text, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath annointed me--to proclaim liberty to the captives".

Reverend Myron N. Morris declared in 1876 his "Historical Discourse" delivered at the Centennial celebration of the General Conference of Connecticut that "a hundred years ago

9 Dr. Samuel Hopkins, A Discourse Upon the Slave Trade and the Slavery of the Africans (Timely Articles on Slavery) Congregational Board of Publication, Boston, 1854
10 Sweet, Story of Religion, 414, 415
11 Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Connecticut Prepared Under the Direction of the General Association To Commemorate the Completion of One Hundred and Fifty Years Since Its First Annual Assembly, W.L. Kingsley, New Haven, 1861, 59
slavery existed in Connecticut as in the other States, but there was very early manifested strong opposition to it. He cites the examples of Reverend Ebenezer Baldwin and the Reverend Jonathan Edwards who in 1773 and 1774 were publishing essays against slavery. Other ministers, he declared, also spoke out against slavery, and its injustice.

The Jonathan Edwards referred to above is the "younger" who in 1791 delivered a very forceful sermon before the "Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom, and For the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Holden in Bondage". In this sermon, entitled the "Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave Trade, and of Slavery", he declared that slavery is unjust in itself. We have no more right to enslave than we have to murder, to steal, or to rob. He asserted that the slave trade is not only wicked and abominable because of the cruel manner in which it is carried on, but it is also wrong on the ground of impolicy. In a country which permits slavery to be carried on it is hurtful in a number of ways. It depraves the morals of the people; it discourages industry, and it weakens the state.

After discussing the various arguments in favor of slavery and

\[\text{Rev. M.N. Morris, "Historical Discourse Delivered at New Haven, Nov. 15, 1876, Before the General Conference of the Congregational Churches of Connecticut", Centennial Papers, Case, Lockwood and Brainard Co., Hartford, 1877, 188, 189}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
attempting to show their groundlessness he declared: "To hold a slave, who has a right to his liberty, is not only a real crime, but a very great one". It is a greater crime than fornication, theft, or robbery. These are but once, whereas slavery is a crime continued for the life period of the slave.

We also have an early record of an action taken by an Association in the western district of New Haven county in which it was voted in 1788 that the slave trade is unjust, and that every justifiable means ought to be taken to suppress it. In this same year a committee was appointed to draw up a petition to the General Assembly of Connecticut in which it was requested that some effectual laws be made for the abolition of the slave trade. At the very next session of the Assembly the trade was actually abolished.

In an annual sermon before the Maine Missionary Society in 1813, delivered by Reverend K. Bailey, of Newcastle, a reference to slavery was made in which he referred to the "three million souls" who were "living in neglect of all the stated means of grace".

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14 Tryon Edwards, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, D.D., Late President of Union College, With a Memoir of His Life and Character, Two Volumes, Allen Morrill & Wardwell, Andover, 1842, II, 75-97

15 Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Connecticut, 58, 59

16 Clark, American Slavery and Maine Congregationalists, 14
In 1820 Mr. Asa Cummings, later the pastor of the First Congregational Church of North Yarmouth, preached a strong sermon against slavery, and two years later established the Congregationalist paper, The Christian Mirror, in which he maintained his anti-slavery sentiments.

In 1825 certain essays first published in the Boston Recorder and Telegraph, a Congregationalist paper, was the next year re-published in book form. The authors anonymously signed themselves "Vigornius, and others". Within these tracts the subject of slavery is dealt with very extensively. The origin and progress of slavery in primitive times, the supposed Old Testament sanction of slavery, the supposed inferiority of the negro race and its relation to slavery, the conflict between slavery and democratic government and the great moral evils connected with slavery were discussed very thoroughly. In the last tract the author speaks of the means whereby slavery can be abolished. In this discussion he recognizes the danger of immediatism, and maintains that education and colonization will work for ultimate emancipation. Much discussion was aroused by these tracts, some of which was printed within the pages of the pamphlet.

17 Ibid., 17
16 Essays on Slavery; Republished from the Boston Recorder and Telegraph Congregationalist for 1825, By Vigornius, and others, Published by Mark H. Newman, Amherst, Mass., 1826
One other strong voice raised against slavery by Congrega-
tionalists before the rise of Northern abolitionism was that
of Dr. Leonard Bacon, pastor of the Congregationalist Church
in New Haven, Connecticut. One of his first sermons, after
becoming pastor of that church in 1825, was relative to the
slavery question. In 1816 the American Colonization Society
had been established, and was to receive strong support from
this anti-slavery advocate. In 1828 he drew up an "Address
to the People of Connecticut" in which he set forth the ad-
antage of Colonization. His slogan was: "Gradual emancipa-
tion by compensation". Later when abolitionism had come to
the front he was denounced by the more radical as being pro-
slavery. By 1839 Bacon came to the realization that the
Colonization plan could not possibly succeed, and so withdrew
from the body at that time. He continued his fight, however
against slavery. In 1846 he published his Essays on Slavery.
Two years later he became editor of a new Congregationalist
weekly, The New York Independant which had as its slogan, "We
stand for free soil". His editorship of this paper has been

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19 O.E. Maurer, D.D., A Puritan Church and Its Relation to
Community State and Nation, Yale University Press, New Haven,
1938, 122, 123

20 Ibid., 130

21 Leonard Bacon, Slavery Discussed in Occasional Essays, From
1833 to 1846, Baker and Scribner, N.Y., 1846
described as one of the most influential of the times. In 1851 Bacon preached a sermon, destined to become famous, on the "Higher Law", in which the law of God is stated to be possessed of more authority, and therefore to be obeyed before that of country.

The anti-slavery attitudes already cited are indicative of the attitude of the whole of New England, and therefore of the Congregational churches, relative to the slavery institution. Previous to the rise of modern abolitionism these expressions appear on the whole to have been confined to individuals within the church. The Associations and Consociations appear not to have been troubled so much by the question.

When modern or Northern abolitionism finally developed, its center of activity was to be found in New England. This also, as we have stated, was the center of Congregationalism. The type of church in New England made the spread of abolitionism possible. Though the abolitionist was almost invariably the minority in the church, yet under the system of free speech in Congregational churches in New England they thought they had a right to ask abolitionists to come into the local churches and address the congregations. Often this was done against

22 Maurer, 134
23 Leonard Bacon, The Higher Law, A Sermon, Preached on Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 1851, Printed by B.L. Hamlen, New Haven, 1851
the wishes of the Pastor, and when this was so, naturally aroused the antipathy of the ministers. A growing hostility was thus aroused against abolitionism. It is interesting to note, as Barnes has pointed out, that in spite of the predominance of Congregationalism in New England the majority of abolitionists were either Methodists or Baptists. This is true, he asserts, because of the fact that abolitionism found its greatest support in the rural districts where the Methodists and Baptists were the stronger. Congregationalism dominated in the cities.

The original hope of the Abolitionist Societies had been "to abolitionize" the ministers of the community, and from that point reach the churches of the community. This, while effective in some degree, did not reach the success that had been hoped. There was a constant collision between the advocates of colonization, and those of immediatism. Some, such as Lyman Beecher, attempted to reconcile the two positions, and in his case was quite successful in his persuasion of the feasibility of such a policy. This fact is evidenced by the fact that when in 1834 Amos A. Phelps, spokesman for the Boston Anti-Slavery Society, appeared before the Association of the

Congregational clergymen of Massachusetts and pleaded the cause of immediatism the Association would declare only that insofar as the objects of the American Anti-Slavery Society did not collide with those of the American Colonization Society would they meet with their approval. The Connecticut Association passed the same resolution.

While this attitude was not satisfactory to the abolitionists, it was not an unfriendly attitude and as Barnes has pointed out, the way was still open for more discussion. Mr. Garrison, however, opened a broadside against this declaration of the Association, terming it a "cowardly and time-serving attempt" to avoid a positive pronouncement upon the subject. Naturally, at later meetings the Congregationalists were less friendly than heretofore.

Lyman Beecher's plan for emancipation of the slaves had been that of the union of all Colonizationists with Abolitionists, and all other anti-slavery men. This plan found formal organization in the "American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race". The union came to nothing, but it did lessen the opposition on the part of the Congregationalists to abolitionists, for it was pledged to a plan of good will between the two. However, as Barnes has pointed out, more and 

25 Ibid., 242
26 Ibid., 92
more of the Congregational ministers refused to grant their pulpits to the immediatists; oftentimes this closed the entire community to the lectures of the agents of abolitionists. Such action by supposedly anti-slavery groups caused Garrison to characterize such ministers and churches as standing "at the head of the most implacable foes of God and man". Toward them, he declared "the most intense abhorrence should fill the breast of every disciple of Christ".

In 1836 when Beecher finally realized that his plan of union would not succeed, mainly because of the opposition of Garrisonism, he gathered his strength to strike a blow at Garrison and his followers. At his suggestion the Norfolk Resolutions were passed, according to which churches were closed against "itinerant agents and lecturers" who advanced sentiments "of an erroneous or questionable character". Beecher was at this time a Presbyterian so Leonard Bacon made these proposals in the Congregational Association of Connecticut, while Beecher gave it his support, by saying the necessary 28 words. In the same year the General Association of Massachusetts passed similar resolutions. Beecher's plan had been to close the doors to abolitionism in every state of New England, and while this was not done, yet a severe blow had

27 Ibid., 93
28 Ibid., 244
been dealt against Garrisonism. Many ministers, before identified with Garrison, publicly condemned him in what is known as the "Clerical Appeal". This plan separated Garrisonism from Abolitionism, so that the two were no longer to be identified. From this time Garrisonism decreased more and more. Abolitionism had accomplished a task, that of awakening the public mind to the evils of slavery. Its greatest work had already been accomplished.

From what has been said we have a picture in brief of the relationship of Congregationalism to Abolitionism. It is necessary to remember, however, that while many churches, ministers, even State Associations were anti-abolitionist, yet there was not a church, or minister, in all Congregationalism in New England that was not anti-slavery. Upon being awakened to the evil of slavery which the radical agitation had caused practically every organized group passed resolutions condemning the slave institution. Congregationalism being a sectional church there was no split in her ranks as there had been in other bodies. Local churches discussed how far they ought to go in their anti-slavery agitation but as to the evil of slavery they had complete unanimity. In session after session from the fourth decade of the nineteenth century until

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Ibid., 95
the Civil War representative Congregational bodies pronounced upon the evil of slavery.

The General Conference of Maine has a long record of such resolutions. In 1829 they had urged by resolution the support of the American Colonization Society. Again in 1830 they had warmly approved the "great objects of the American Colonization Society", and had recommended its support to the churches and ministers of the state. They had spoken of their deep sense of national guilt "in having inflicted innumerable wrongs upon Africa". They declared that such guilt called for a deep repentance before God, and "to unremitted efforts by a calm, prudent, and conciliatory course of measures to redress these wrongs to the full extent of our power".

In 1834 a stronger statement was resolved "That it is the duty of Christians to sympathize with the enslaved of our race; and to pray that involuntary servitude may come to an end, as soon as may be, throughout the world". The same year a very influential book was published entitled Lectures on Slavery

30 Clark, American Slavery and Maine Congregationalists, 21. Many of the early members of the Colonization Society were Congregationalists.

31 Minutes of the General Conference of Maine, at Their Annual Meeting in Winthrop, June, 1830, 8

32 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Bath, 1834, 14
and Its Remedy in which it was declared that immediate emancipation is both possible and necessary. This document was signed by 124 clergymen, all from New England. Twenty-six were from the state of Maine. Twenty-four of these were Congregationalists. The author of the book was himself a Congregationalist. The year before, the first Maine anti-slavery society had been formed and was called the Hallowell Anti-slavery Society. The first president was Ebenezer Dole, pastor of the Hallowell Congregational Church. Other Congregationalists were also in the movement.

Many local Conferences had already, and were about to take local action on the issue of slavery. In 1834 the Kennebec Conference had recommended to the churches belonging to the Conference that they observe the fourth Monday evening in each month, as a day of prayer to God for the colored population of the United States, requesting of God that they might enjoy "their inalienable rights, and the advantages of education and Christian instruction". In 1834 they had declared that slavery "is a violation of the law of God and is therefore a sin which ought immediately to be abandoned". In 1835 the

33 Amos A. Phelps, Lectures on Slavery and Its Remedy Pub. by N.E. Anti-Slavery Society, Boston, 1834, VII
34 Clark, American Slavery and Maine Congregationalists, 38, 39
35 Ibid., 40
36 Ibid., 68
same Conference had resolved:

That in view of the present, excited state of feeling in this country on the subject of slavery, it is the imperious duty of the churches to humble themselves before God, on account of the sin of this system, and earnestly to pray for its immediate removal, and purify themselves from all its abominations.

In 1838 they again declared slave-holding to be a great sin, the removal for which ministers and churches ought greatly to strive.

Other Conferences soon followed suit. Such Conferences as the Hancock, Waldo, the Oxford, the Penobscot, and many others had soon pronounced on the evil of slavery. Clark declares that by the middle of June, 1839, nine of the total eleven Conferences had spoken their condemnation of slavery. The tenth Conference was to speak in 1842.

But to return to the actions of the General Conferences leading to the period of the Civil War, the next action taken is that of 1841. In 1839 the subject of slavery had been brought to the attention of the Convention but on a vote was indefinitely postponed. In 1840 a committee had been appointed to deal with correspondence between themselves and certain

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37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 69
39 Ibid., 85
40 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Brunswick, 1839, 17
Southern bodies relative to the slavery issue. In 1841, however, the Conference again lamented the existence of slavery in the land, and declared that it was the duty which Congregationalists owed to their country, to mankind and to God, to employ every means at their disposal "to promote the removal in the best and speediest manner of this great evil from our beloved country".

The only reference to slavery in the Minutes of 1843 is that the Reverend Mr. Tappan had addressed the Convention on the subject of slavery. In 1844, however, we discover the Convention addressing a letter to the Congregational Union of England and Wales, in which they declared, "We suffer in feeling as in reputation abroad,...on account of the disgrace and sin of slavery...." The Convention declared, nevertheless, that they were powerless, except by prayers and a full expression of their views, to do anything in regard to the issue. They affirmed that no slaveholder is ignorant that "the entire voice of the Northern churches is against the whole system and practice of slavery". There may be differences as to the methods used or desired to be used, they declared, in the

41 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Hallowell, 1840, 5
42 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Machias, 1841, 4
43 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Bangor, 1843, 4
removal of the sin, but with a possible few exceptions, the entire North is agreed in regard to the evil of slavery.

In 1846 the Maine Conference received a communication from the General Association of Massachusetts relative to their stand on the institution of slavery. Again the Maine Conference reaffirmed its conviction as to the evil of slavery, that it is "a great sin against God and man, and a most threatening evil". They declared that every Christian ought to pray for its complete and speedy removal. An appeal was then issued to all slave-holders to review their position, in the light of their Christian profession, and to turn themselves from this great evil.

The next year (1847) certain memorials were presented from members of the churches in the Union and Hallowell Conferences in respect to the subject of slavery. It was requested that the Convention discontinue their correspondence with "religious bodies, composed in part of slaveholders". The memorials were presented to a committee which in 1848 presented their report, which was accepted and adopted. They again declared their abhorrence of slavery, but refused to

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44 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Bath, 1844, 31
45 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Augusta, 1846, 8
46 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Portland, 1847, 5
take any action in regard to the memorial. They declared that
to take such action, would be to follow a disciplinary course
toward the Southern churches, and moreover would be to virtually
declare that the Old School and New School General Assemblies
of the Presbyterian Churches were illegitimate churches of
Christ. Such action caused much dissatisfaction from many
more radical members of Congregational churches, and in 1849
many memorials were received by the Convention. All of these
were referred to committee. The dissatisfaction appears to
have been based around two points: 1. the conference had
failed to answer whether slavery was a bar to church communion,
and a proper subject of discipline. 2. they had not answered
as to how long correspondence and fellowship was to be main-
tained with those churches who had within their number slave-
holding members. It wasn't until the next year, in 1850,
that the committee made their report. Again strong anti-
slavery views were reaffirmed. They declared that those bodies
which still have slaveholders within them have many difficulties
to contend with. Some of these bodies have churches within
them containing slaveholders amounting to only a small fraction
of the entire membership of the bodies. "Wise and good men

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47 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Bangor, 1848, 22-24
48 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Bath, 1849, 7, 30-31.
within them opposed to slavery, sincerely deprecating evils which it is easier both in the church and the nation, to lament than to remove, hesitate as to the course of duty." These men desire to consider both discretion and feeling, hoping that in maintaining peace they will not be forced to break up the organization of the church. In answering the first point mentioned above (whether slavery is a bar to church communion), the committee declared that to make it a point of church discipline, would involve legislation "both for ourselves and for others", which they declared they would not attempt to do. In regard to the second objection (that they had not answered as to how long fellowship was to be maintained with these church groups), they declared they could not anticipate the future. They would not attempt to decide whether the correspondence would be perpetual. Circumstances, might arise on either side which would make a termination of such correspondence necessary. The Committee ended in these words:

The committee doubt not that we all agree in lamenting the existence of this great evil, against which we have, as a Conference, often borne a plain and united testimony. But since we entertain different opinions respecting certain points of duty connected with the subject, let us treat each others views with mutual respect.... 49

49 Minutes, Annual Meeting in South Berwick, 1850, 22, 23
In 1852 the report of the Reverend Chickering, delegate from the General Conference, to the churches of England was read. Within the report he declared that when he had been received in England the floor had been thrown open for questions, most of which had been in regard to the slavery issue. It declared, "These were all answered satisfactorily by him, and in such a way as to show that the churches of the Northern States were happily redeemed from any sympathy with slave-dealers".

In 1854 the Maine Conference spoke with the "strongest disapprobation and dissent" of the "recent action of Congress" which had opened to slavery a vast new territory. They deplored such action as "essentially and wholly wrong", and called upon all Christians to resist such action in all possible ways in accordance with propriety.

The attitude of the Maine Conference is sufficiently clear. Such continued to be their attitude until the actual outbreak of the Civil War. In 1856 an entire evening had been set aside for the discussion of slavery, and after discussion, and prayer for the enslaved, the hymn "Oppression Shall Not Always Reign" was sung. Such a hymn was declared by the Minutes

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50 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Searsport, 1852, 8, 28
51 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Bangor, 1854, 6
to have found a hearty response in every heart. The last mention of slavery before the war was that in 1857 when the action of the Executive Committee of the American Home Missionary Society was commended. We will discuss in more detail the action of the Home Missionary Society later in the paper.

Another state organization which took a decided stand on the slavery issue was that of the General Association of Massachusetts. The first mention of slavery in their Minutes appears to be that of 1832. In that year the high importance of the objects and claims of the American Colonization Society are recognized. The evils of slavery are mentioned and the prayer that such may be overcome. Again the next year they recommended the activities of the Society.

In 1834 the Colonization Society was recommended for support, but this time along with such approval four resolutions were adopted; it was resolved:

That the Slavery existing in this country, by which more than two millions of our countrymen are deprived of their inalienable rights, and held and treated as mere merchandise, is a violation of the law of God and of the fundamental principles of our national government.

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52 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Calais, 1856, 12, 13
53 Minutes, Annual Meeting in Bath, 1857, 12, 12
54 Minutes of the General Association of Massachusetts At Their Session in Northampton, June, 1832, 9
55 Minutes, At Their Meeting in Dorchester, June, 1833, 9
That this Association regard those laws and usages in the slave-holding States, which withhold the Bible as a book to be read, from the Slave population, as inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity.

That we deeply sympathize with our enslaved brethren, and commend their cause to the prayers of the Christian church.

That the principles and objects of the American Anti-Slavery Society, so far as they do not come in collision with those of the American Colonization Society, meet with our approbation. 56

This last named point we have already discussed in the earlier part of the paper.

In 1836 the Reverend Mr. Pinney, who had just before, been governor of the state of Liberia, delivered a message discussing the work of the Colonization Society. After hearing the message the Society was again recommended.

One of the most extensive declarations is that made in a letter in 1837 in answer to a communication from the Congregational Union of Scotland. In this letter which was adopted unanimously, their full appreciation of the evil of slavery was declared, and their knowledge of the desirability of its abolition. They declared to the Scotch Congregationalists that no one could wish for the removal of slavery more than they; however certain difficulties attend the abolition of slavery

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56 Minutes, Session in Lee, June, 1834, 12, 13
57 See page 103
58 Minutes, Session in Worthington, June, 1836, 10
which those who live in another country find it difficult to appreciate. The Massachusetts Association declared that the wisest and most conscientious of their own citizens could not decide upon the best and wisest measures in regard to this problem. At the conclusion of the letter the following very full pronouncement was made:

Whereas: Slavery, as it exists in our country is a great moral and social evil, and

Whereas: No man should feel indifferent respecting that which the God of Heaven disapproves:

1. Therefore, resolved: That the assumed right of holding fellow men in bondage, working them without wages, and buying and selling them as property, is obviously contrary to the principles of natural justice and the spirit of the gospel, offensive to God, oppressive to men, and ought to cease with the least possible delay.

2. Resolved, That we approved of free and candid discussion on the subject of slavery, and also of all other proper methods of diffusing light and promoting correct moral sentiments, which may have an influence to do away the evil.59

In 1841 the Association appointed a Committee to institute a friendly correspondence with some ecclesiastical body in one of the slave states, for the purpose of creating a favorable atmosphere in favor of emancipation. Two years later the Association received a letter from the Old Colony Association, in which the actions of the General Association were deplored.

59 Minutes, Session in North Brockfield, 1837, 5, 8-10
60 Minutes, Session in Westfield, 1841, 11
It was declared that they had no right to deal with the subject of slavery at all, that such discussion only tended to evil both among themselves and their Southern brethren. They unanimously "remonstrated against any action on the part of the Association in reference to the subject of American slavery". The General Association, in return, declared that they could in no way reciprocate the sentiments in the "Remonstrance of the Old Colony Association" on the subject of slavery. They declared it was their duty and privilege to speak openly and freely in order that their oppressed and suffering countrymen might be relieved.

In 1845 the General Association again expressed their "abhorrence of slavery", and declared their belief that to the extent in which the Bible gained the ascendancy in the heart and the conscience of the Christian they would free themselves from the slave system. An appeal was then made to all bodies connected with slavery to free "the Church of Christ from the pollution of this guilt". This resolution, adopted unanimously, was sent to each of the "ecclesiastical bodies with which we are in correspondence". This anti-slavery declaration was reaffirmed in 1846.

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61 Minutes, Session in Sunderland, 1843, 8, 9
62 Minutes, Session in Westminster, 1845, 9
63 Minutes, Session in Pepperell, 1846, 10
In 1847 slavery was again condemned. The withholding of the Bible from the slave was declared wrong and the system which made such necessary was declared to be an abomination in the sight of Heaven. At the same session the American Colonization Society and the American Bible Society were commended for their work among the colored race.

The General Association in expressing themselves as so decidedly opposed to human slavery was but expressing the majority opinion and sentiment of all the Congregational churches in Massachusetts. Quite often the local churches went even beyond the action of the larger group. Such was that action taken by the Second Congregational Church of Millbury. They declared slavery to be "an unfruitful work of darkness", and "a most heinous sin in the sight of God", a "heaven-daring sin", an "outrage on the dearest rights of man"; after having described slavery thus, they declared they could no longer extend the hand of fellowship to those who continued, contrary to the law of love, to hold their fellow men as chattels, or who traffic in them.

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64 Minutes, Session in Worcester, 1847, 9, 12-13.
65 Worcester South Chronicles, A Brief History of the Congregational Churches of the Worcester South Conference, of Massachusetts, 1670-1876, Edited by a Committee of the Conference Lucius P. Goddard, Worcester, 1877, 50
The First Evangelical Congregational Church in Uxbridge in 1845 bore equally strong testimony against slavery, declaring they could not fellowship with any Christians who supported such a system. They denied however, that they had any sympathy with certain "professed friends of the slave who deal in harsh denunciations against the church and ministry, and are seeking to abolish slavery at the cost of our civil and religious institutions".

In 1849 the General Association took cognizance of the relationship of the two General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church to slavery. They declared it was their desire that their delegates to these Assemblies should make known in a positive manner their position in regard to slavery. This resolution was presented before the Old School Assembly in the same year, the result of which was resentment on the part of the Presbyterian Assembly that they should be interfered with in their policy in regard to the subject. The Assembly declared the action of the Association was "offensive", and must lead to a break in the fellowship between the two bodies. This actually did terminate the sending of delegates between these two bodies.

66 Ibid., 27
67 Minutes, Session in Roxbury, 1849, 7
68 Minutes, Session in Sandwich, 1850, 10
69 Ibid., 11
In 1851 the action taken in 1845 was again reaffirmed. Between 1851 and 1853 some criticism had been expressed registering dissatisfaction at the continued correspondence between the Association and certain Southern ecclesiastical bodies. In 1853 the Association explained that such correspondence was far from expressing any satisfaction with the practice of slaveholding, but rather was for the purpose of bearing a continued testimony against the sin of slaveholding, and attempting thereby to bear an influence for its removal.

We have seen the actions expressing the sentiments of the General Association of Massachusetts, and they in turn expressing in large share the sentiment of the local churches and ministers of Massachusetts relative to slavery. Year after year, to the very time of the Civil War, they continued to express themselves to the "evil of slavery". Their correspondence with the Old School Assembly, never officially broken, was recontinued in 1854, but was finally and officially discontinued in 1857. In 1857 the Association declared their approval of the American Home Missionary Society in refusing money to churches who contain persons holding their fellow-men

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70 Minutes, Session in Wrentham, 1851, 14
71 Minutes, Session in Yarmouth, 1853, 20
72 Minutes, Session in Fall River, 1854, 11
73 Minutes, Session in Belchertown, 1857, 8
in bondage. In the same year the American Tract Society was commended for their resolution in which they decided to publish tracts upon the evils of slavery.

Just as had Maine and Massachusetts expressed themselves in a strong and definite way upon the institution of slavery so also did the other New England States. In 1837 the General Association of New Hampshire unanimously adopted a resolution declaring that the principle of slavery was "inconsistent with natural justice, utterly at variance with the spirit and principles of the Bible, the fruitful source of wrong, suffering and sin among men, of danger to our country, and of hindrance to the progress of the gospel". It was further resolved that they regarded the free and candid discussion of slavery as adapted to good, and the promotion of the removal of slavery from the land.

In 1838 the Association adopted five resolutions upon the slavery issue:

1. We regard American slavery as a great evil and a great sin.

2. It is our duty to repeat the solemn expression of our disapprobation of it.

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74 Ibid., 12, 14
75 Minutes of the General Association of New Hampshire at Their Meeting in Claremont, 1837, 8
3. We rejoice in the emancipation of the slaves of the British West Indies. It furnishes an illustration of the practicability of the immediate emancipation of all slaves.

4. It is the duty of Northern Christians to do their utmost to influence the Southern brethren for the abolition of slavery.

5. In this work ministers should take an effective part.

An excellent statement of the sentiment of New Hampshire Congregationalists relative to the slavery issue is that contained in a letter written to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and to Christian brothers in the Southland. They began by declaring that perhaps the addressees did not quite understand the feeling relative to slavery among the Christians of the North. Because some of the Christians could not conscientiously support abolition societies it was felt by some of the Southerners that they were in favor of the institution of slavery. Moreover, because some abolitionists have used extremely harsh language toward the South, the South has concluded that all the North are enemies of the South. Both of these views, they affirmed, are false. An appeal then was made that the addressees would listen in a fair way to the views of this association.

76 Minutes, Held at New Ipswich, 1838, 6
We are distressed, they state, that you should attempt to defend slavery, although such a course is understandable, for you have been placed on the defensive by certain societies. They then declared that there is but one feeling in regard to the morality of slavery. It is that expressed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1818. An appeal was made to the South that they liberate their slaves, an appeal based both on utilitarian and Christian grounds. They concluded in these words:

We beseech you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ; by the love of humanity and righteousness; to enter into this business as we think you ought; in the removal of that curse, which was inflicted by New England's avarice, and by Old England's opposition to Colonial Remonstrance; and which is likely to prove as an Incubus upon all the energies of the Body Politic, to say nothing of its tendency to provoke High Heaven to lay prostrate the very buttresses of our Liberty.  

In 1849 an overture was received by the Association from the Union Association relative to the existence of slavery in some of the Mission churches of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The Association adopted the following resolution: "We deeply deplore the existence of slavery in any of the churches connected with our missions.

77 Minutes, Held at Francestown, 1841, 13-16
and hope that the evil may speedily be renounced and removed".

The Evangelical Consociation and Missionary Society of Congregational Churches in Rhode Island likewise gave strong expression to anti-slavery views. In 1836 they declared that slavery was a violation of the rights of man. They affirmed their conviction that these two millions ought to be immediately relieved. They declared "that the observance of Heaven's law of love, in judicious measures, and in fervent prayer, is indispensable to the termination of slavery". Sympathy was expressed for those who hold slaves, however, because they had been placed in very trying circumstances, both in "respect to the origin, present aspect, and wisest disposition of the system of slavery". In 1855 certain members of the Consociation attempted to become even more definite by declaring that we do now bear our "solemn and emphatic testimony against the system of American slavery" by refraining from "appointing a Delegate to any Ecclesiastical Body which tolerates slavery among its Ministers or Churches". This resolution lost however by a vote of 14 to 15. But one other expression has been found previous to the Civil War and that is the action taken by the

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78 Minutes, Held at Plymouth, 1849
79 Proceedings of the Evangelical Consociation and Missionary Society of Congregational Churches in Rhode Island, 1836, 1855, 1855
Consociation in 1859. They declared that there were painful indications that the African Slave trade was about to be reopened among them. It was resolved "that on this spot, where an early and effective blow was struck against the accursed traffic, we record anew our execration of it, and of that system of American Slavery out of which it springs. They also welcomed the determination of the American Tract Society of Boston to publish anti-slavery literature.

The General Convention of Vermont also expressed themselves strongly on this subject. In 1846 they declared that the system of American slavery is contrary to the spirit and the gospel of Christ, and utterly sinful in the sight of God. The laws which support it, they declared, are unrighteous, and cruelly oppressive. "The tendency of the system is, and must be, to degrade, demoralize and destroy the souls of the enslaved, and to bring divine condemnation and wrath on those who thus enslave and wrong them". Moreover, they threatened, if any of the churches associated with the General Convention deal in this sin they will be dealt with as guilty of conduct flagrantly unchristian. This is but a repetition of the action taken by the Convention four years earlier, when they had

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81 Minutes, 1859, 6, 7
82 Extracts of the Minutes of the General Convention of Vermont, Middlebury, June, 1846, 8, 9
declared that slavery is "a system of unjustifiable and enormous oppression, directly contrary to the gospel". In 1857 the Vermont Convention broke off relationships with the Old School General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church declaring as they did so that the action was taken "especially in view of that Assembly's continued complicity with slavery". They also hailed the action of the New School Assembly in their reaffirming the former action of the Presbyterian Church against slavery. In both 1857 and 1859 the anti-slavery action of the American Home Missionary Society was approved.

New Hampshire followed the same policy in regard to slavery as these other bodies. In 1837, 1838, and 1849 they declared their abhorrence of slavery, and the duty of all Christians to oppose it with all legitimate methods at their command. In 1839 a Committee was appointed to correspond with certain ecclesiastical bodies of the South on the subject of slavery. The next year the committee was discharged. In 1840 a letter

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83 Minutes, Session at Manchester, 1842, 7, 8
84 Minutes, Held at Bennington, 1857, 10, 11
85 Ibid., Also Minutes, Held at Vergennes, 1859, 11
86 Minutes of 1837, Claremont, 8; At New Ipswich, 1838, 6; At Plymouth, 1849
87 Minutes At Lyme, 1839, 5
88 Minutes, At Hampton, 1840, 5
was written to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and to all Christians generally on the subject of slavery. Within the letter they declared that while they could not conscientiously join in supporting abolition societies yet that did not mean that they were in favor of the institution. On the contrary they declared it was a curse upon the land, and every Christian ought to pray for its removal.

Although very little material is available relative to the sentiments of the Congregationalists of New York and of Connecticut yet we can safely assume that their attitudes are similar if not identical to those of the states already included within the paper. We do have the action of the Congregational Association of New York in 1855 in which they condemned the New York Tract Society for allegedly suppressing anti-slavery material in their publications. It is fair to say that the Tract Society denies this to be true, and declares that the Association seeks for the Society to turn itself into a propaganda agency for anti-slavery sentiment.

89 Minutes, at Franeestown, 1841, 13-16

90 The Tables Turned, A Letter to the Congregational Association of New York, By a Congregationalist Director, Crocker and Brewster, Boston, 1855, 18
Also, in a sketch of the rules of the Fairfield East Association, published in 1859, (a local association of Connecticut) under the section on Discipline, slaveholding is declared to be a disciplinary offense.

It is accurate to generalize that Congregationalists of New England were united in their opposition to slavery. The denomination, took a stand against the evil of slavery, its sinfulness in the sight of God, and its curse upon the moral well being of the land. Doubtless this denomination had much to do with its final overthrow. They were not united in the methods to be used. Some, probably the minority, were abolitionists. Others, usually the official voices of the larger bodies were more conservative, and quite often pronounced against the evil of radical abolitionism. These churches did what they could. They passed resolutions. They brought the matter before the southern slavemaster. They remonstrated with the denominations against allowing slave-holders in their membership. Sometimes, certain groups denied communion to those who were in any way connected with the slave system. Both the voices of abolitionism and those of the conservatives aided in its final

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Historical Sketches and Rules of Fairfield East Association and Consociation with Local Notices of the Consociated Churches, E. Hayes, New Haven, 1859, 33
overthrow. The regret is that the overthrow of slavery did not come without the necessity of the shedding of human blood. The system has been overthrown, but we have yet to achieve economic freedom, and in some ways political emancipation for the freedman.

Having presented the sentiments of New England Congregationalists in respect to slavery we have at the same time presented the feelings and thoughts of the Middle-Western Congregationalists. The majority of such Congregationalists had come from the New England states. Their sympathies are the same. When the Iowa Band, a group of twelve young men from Andover Seminary, grouped themselves together to spread the gospel in the Middlewest they first thought of spreading the good-news in the state of Missouri, but refrained from doing so because it was a slave state. Rather they went into Iowa where they could give their testimony against slavery. They did so with no uncertain sound, as one of the twelve, 92 has testified. Year after year the State Association of Iowa passed resolutions condemning slavery, as "a sin against God, a curse to the master, and a grievous wrong to the slave". Moreover they advised the withholding of fellowship from such

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92 The Iowa Band, [Written by one of Themselves] Congregational Publishing Society, Boston, 1870, 22, 99
churches as were connected with slavery.

The same is true in Wisconsin. There the Congregationalists and Presbyterians had united together in a Convention. In 1841 they declared slavery to be a sin, and advised that all connected with the system be excluded from fellowship of the churches. Year after year they passed resolutions declaring the evil of the system.

In Illinois it was the same. Beginning in 1836, and continuing, slavery was declared evil in the sight of God, and to be a violation of the rights of man. It appears to have been true that here in the Middle-West radicalism was more pronounced. The majority of Congregational pastors in Wisconsin were declared to have been abolitionists, and it is reasonable to presume that the same extended throughout the entire Middle-West.

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94 Jubilee Memorial of the Congregational Convention of Wisconsin with Sketches Historical and Biographical 1840-1890, Published by the Convention, Tracy Gibbs & Co., Madison, 1890, 12-15; Also Rev. Stephen Peet, History of the Presbyterian and Congregational and Ministers in Wisconsin, Chapman Milwaukee, 1851, 45
95 Ibid.
97 Ibid., 246
Up to now only state societies, local associations, and churches have been dealt with. This was a necessity. Until the Albany Convention of 1952 Congregationalism as a whole had not met since the Cambridge Synod of 1646-48. However, in 1842 the leaders of the Congregational Churches of both the east and the west met together. At this time they declared that Congregationalists should only support only such ministers in slave states as would preach against slavery in order that this stupendous wrong might be brought to a speedy abolition.

The slavery attitudes of a national Congregational body, a society to which we have already referred, that of the American Home Missionary Society, will be but briefly reviewed. This group, now called the Congregational Home Missionary Society, avoided the slavery issue as long as possible. The first record of the organization coming in contact with slavery and its issues is in 1837, at which time the secretary declared that the body was not organized to deal with politics, but entirely for the sake of missions. Therefore there was no reason why they should be forced to deal with the question of slavery. In 1844 a series of questions were presented to the

98 Walker, The Congregationalists, 382, 383
Society by Lewis Tappan in which it was attempted to draw out the mission on the subject: Did the Society solicit funds from slaveholders? Did it accept money from slaveholders without rebuke? Have its missionaries in slave states been instructed to preach against slaveholding? Has the Society ever refused aid to a church because that church had within it a slaveholding minister or member? In reply the secretary declared that the Society had no soliciting agents in slave states, and that only a small part of its funds came from them. He declared that the instructions to the missionaries were of a general character, and they delivered no special instruction for those living in the slave states. The Society had never refused assistance to a church on the grounds that its members held slaves, and on the other hand no church had been denied assistance because it was anti-slavery. Thus again in 1844 the American Home Missionary Society attempted to wash its hands of the slavery question.

The Society, however, which was largely dependent upon funds from the North for its support could not forever remain free from the problem, and it was finally in 1847 that the Mission took a stand. They declared slavery to be an evil and a serious hindrance to the spread of the gospel. By 1853 the

100 Home Missions on the American Frontier, 290
Society had begun to deny missionary commissions to slave-holders. The policy, however, was conservative, and it was not until 1856 that stronger action was taken. At that time the Society declared that no aid would be granted "to churches containing slave-holding members, unless it could be shown that such a relationship was justifiable for the time being, in the peculiar circumstances in which it exists". This decision was a revision in a radical direction of their former attitude. In explanation of this reversal of policy they called attention to the fact that the Society was supported by the North and the West, that the Southern churches had already largely withdrawn their support. Thus were they yielding to the pressures of those who supported their organization. Until 1861 the American Home Missionary Society continued to be the joint agency of the Congregationalists and the New School Presbyterians. At that time it became exclusively a Congregational Missionary Society.

These are the attitudes of Congregationalists leading to the period of the Civil War. It was with almost no exception

101 Home Missions and Slavery: A Reprint of Several Articles, Recently Published In the Religious Journals; With an Appendix, John A. Gray, Printer, N.Y., 1857, 3
102 Home Missions on the American Frontier, 290-292
an anti-slavery policy. It was not exclusively an abolitionist policy. Slavery was recognized as an evil. The holding of slaves was declared to be a crime against God and humanity; but the method of treating the problem was not agreed upon by all. For a time Garrisonism appeared to control the New England groups, but as we have seen, soon a more cautious attitude was developed. This more cautious position was not as to the evil of slavery, but as to the best method of eradication. Western Congregationalism continued to be largely abolitionist in sentiment.

It is hardly necessary to point out the position of Congregational churches after the war actually began. Every written record displays their utter approval of the war to preserve the Union, and to abolish forever the evil of slavery from the land. The nation was declared to working under God...
"for the preservation of our liberties as a nation, and for the complete emancipation of the African race". That such would be their attitude we can understand from their very strong anti-slavery positions previous to the war.
CHAPTER IV

ATTITUDES OF AMERICAN BAPTISTS TO SLAVERY

While opinions varied among the Presbyterians and Methodists relative to the institution of slavery, making it difficult to assign these groups to some special category or division in their thinking, yet there were certain factors which made it somewhat possible to appraise their collective mind. The General Assembly, the Synods, and the Presbyteries, spoke on behalf of the churches within their respective jurisdictions. The General Conference, and the Annual Conferences likewise spoke on behalf of the Methodist churches within their borders and territories. Thus by understanding the actions of these united assemblies, it was possible to understand the official position of these two religious bodies. Because of Baptist church polity and practice it is impossible to assign an official position to Baptist churches collectively, or to the Baptist Church, speaking in terms of the whole. Baptist Churches are completely sovereign in their own particular spheres. Local church sovereignty is guarded jealously. While Baptist churches hold a common doctrine on fundamental points, hold to common polities and practices, and voluntarily
unite for missionary purposes, social work, educational advancement, and other projects yet the individual church is within itself a complete unit, completely determining its own rules and regulations. Therefore even if it should be true that a representative national or smaller Baptist body made a pronouncement or declaration in respect to some particular social, political, or moral issue, it would not follow that all churches would fall in line, nor would submerge their individual opinions under the weight of the majority. Such a declaration at most would only be a collective opinion of the majority of some particular assembly at some particular time. It would not (because it could not) settle any particular doctrine or policy for the church. The title of this chapter is strictly accurate, "Attitudes of American Baptists to Slavery". In this section will be expressed the attitudes of individual churches, of the collective voices of associations and conventions, but only in the way in which we have designated.

Perhaps the first pronouncement against the slave trade in the colonies was made by the short-time Baptist, Roger Williams. In 1637 he uttered a protest against the enslavement of the Sequot Indians. In this declaration he does not

mention the Negro or African race, but in 1652 a statute was proclaimed which was to grant ultimate freedom to the Negroes of Providence Plantation.

There appears to have been no definite expressions on the part of Baptist leaders or churches toward Negro emancipation until well after the end of the Revolutionary War. Commenting on this fact William Warren Sweet declares there were certain reasons why this was true: "Baptists were strongest in regions where there was little slave-holding; they were committed to non-interference in civil affairs; while their all important objective at this period was the attainment of ecclesiastical freedom".

There were, however, some expressions among Baptists, relative to slavery previous to the opening of the nineteenth century. The problem troubled the Virginia Baptists more than Baptists in other sections in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Many Baptist leaders in Virginia liberated their slaves at this time. Dr. Thomas Chisman, a prominent Baptist, liberated his slaves just before the turn of the century.

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2 Ibid., (From Rhode Island Colonial Records, I, 243)
3 Ibid.
4 Sweet, 79
Robert Carter, Esquire, a member of the Virginia Executive Council, and one of the richest men in Virginia, was a Baptist who owned from six to eight hundred slaves. When he became baptized he was troubled by conscientious scruples about the lawfulness of hereditary slavery. In a letter to a friend in London, he remarked, "The toleration of slavery indicates great depravity of mind". He gradually emancipated all the slaves that he possessed.

In 1787 the lawfulness of hereditary slavery was debated in Allen's Creek, Virginia, in the Baptist Association. At that time it was declared that hereditary slavery was a breach of the divine law. A committee was appointed to bring in a plan by which slaves would be gradually emancipated, which was accordingly done. The excitement, however, caused among the churches of the Association was so great, and so many of the churches remonstrated with the Association, it was thought better to drop the whole matter.

The General Committee of Virginia Baptists, convening at Williams meeting house, in Goochland county, March 7, 1788, discussed the problem of the abolition of slavery. The matter was deemed of such importance, however, that it was set over

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until the meeting of the next year. This was done that the churches might have time to express their sentiments on the subject. When the Committee convened in Richmond the next year, the subject of slavery was discussed according to plan, and a resolution was adopted, declaring that slavery "is a violent deprivation of the rights of nature, and inconsistent with a Republican Government". It was therefore requested that every legal measure be taken "to extirpate this horrid evil from the land, and pray almighty God that our legislature, may have it in their power to proclaim the great jubilee, consistent with the principles of good policy". Certainly this is understandable language, and admits of no twisting or turning. Spencer, in his History of Kentucky Baptists asserts that is "the first religious society in the South to declare explicitly in favor of the abolition of slavery". This declaration, however, is open to question, for an action of the eighth Annual Conference (Methodist) of Virginia, (as recorded by Francis Asbury, and quoted in the chapter on Methodism and slavery), distinctly declares the evil of slavery,

6 Robert B. Semple, A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia, Published by the Author, Richmond, 1810, 79

7 J.H. Spencer, A History of Kentucky Baptists from 1769 to 1885, Including More Than 800 Biographical Sketches, 2 Volumes, J.R. Baumes, Cincinnati, c. 1885, 1, 183
advises their freedom, and passes its disapprobation on all friends who keep slaves. The passing of such unconditional disapprobation is a declaration demanding not "gradualism", but "immediatism", in the emancipation of slaves.

The Kentucky Associations at this time kept in close touch, by correspondence and representation, with the General Committee of Virginia Baptists, and so were constantly advised of all the proceedings of the latter group. Harmony of sentiment was to be expected; thus when slavery agitated the churches of Virginia it also disturbed the churches of Kentucky.

The first reference to the unlawfulness of slavery contained in the public records of Baptists in Kentucky is that found in a query sent from Rolling Fork church in Nelson county to the Salem Association, convening in the Cox's Creek church on October 3, 1789. The question was asked, "Is it lawful in the sight of God for a member of Christ's Church to keep his fellow creature in perpetual slavery?" The answer testifies to the extent of agitation and keenness of feeling on the subject, even during this early period: "The Association judge it improper to enter into so important and critical a matter, at present". The answer dissatisfied the Rolling Fork church, which promptly withdrew from the Association. Three members

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8 Ibid., 184 (Taken from Clack's Annals of Salem Association, 4)
who had voted contrary were asked to join some other church.

Other churches in the same association were troubled by the same question. The Lick Creek church became divided on the question, and was denied a seat in the Association until the problem should be solved. In 1794 the Mill Creek church sent a question to the Association on the subject of slavery, and on their refusal to answer withdrew from that body. So bitter was the battle, and so stubborn the fight, waged by such anti-slavery men as Joshua Carman, Josiah Dodge, Thomas Whitman, and others, that for a time the Association was threatened with dissolution. Joshua Carman and Josiah Dodge, because they could not influence sufficiently the Salem Association, nor even their own churches, that at Mill Creek, and Rolling Fork, withdrew and organized another church of members of various bodies who had formed anti-slavery sentiments. Spencer declares, "This was, probably, the first church of emancipators constituted in Kentucky". The Salem Association is but representative of the troubles of the other associations. In 1791 the Elkhorn Association appointed a committee to draw up a memorial to the Convention, to meet the

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
next April 3, in which the subject of religious liberty and perpetual slavery was to be discussed. The memorial was to be used in the formation of the constitution of the Association. The report, abolitionist in sentiment, was read and approved by the Convention. The action, however, met with such disapproval by many of the churches, that at the next meeting, a resolution was adopted declaring, "That the Association disapprove of the memorial which the last Association agreed to send to the Convention, on the subject of Religious Liberty and the Abolition of Slavery". Opposition to slavery was strong in every part of Kentucky, and as Spencer has asserted "was the most fruitful of mischief of all questions that agitated the Baptist churches of Kentucky from 1788 to 1820".

The Green River Association, under the leadership of such men as John H. Owen, Cornelius Duese, John Murphy, Elijah Davidson, and Carter Tarrant, was greatly influenced by the anti-slavery agitation. In the Bracken Association such men as William Hickman, John Sutton, William Buckley, Donald Holmes, George Smith, George Stokes Smith, and David Barrow, debated the anti-slavery issue. Many of the outstanding leaders of the

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12 Ibid., 184, 185
13 Ibid., 484
14 Ibid., 484
churches preached against slavery. Emancipation societies were organized. In some cases lack of tact, on the part of anti-slavery men, caused insubordination on the part of the Negro. Their sentiments of emancipationism were preached in the presence of the slaves. Naturally this caused disturbance, and the excitement became so general that in one association, the Elkhorn, a resolution was passed (1805) declaring it "improper for ministers, churches, or associations to meddle with emancipation from slavery, or any other political subject, and as such, we advise ministers and churches to have nothing to do therewith, in their religious capacities". This action alienated the emancipators, and caused them to agitate more determinedly than they had before. In 1805 William Hickman, pastor of an Elkhorn church, chose as his text, Isaiah 58:6: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to set at liberty those oppressed, and that ye break every yoke?" In his message he declared himself out of fellowship with all slaveholders, and a few days later he withdrew from the church. After one year, however, he returned to his pastorate.

Another pastor, John Sutton, broke with the Clear Creek church, and leading a minority party off, succeeded in uniting

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15 Ibid., 185
16 Ibid., 185
it with a faction of the Hillsbоро church, formed an emancipation church called "New Hope". This, according to Spencer, was the first abolition church organized in that region of the State. Great excitement prevailed everywhere over the question of slavery, and all over the state churches discussed pro and con the slavery issue. Those which agreed with emancipation schemes broke away from regular associations, and uniting with splits from other churches joined themselves together into what they termed, "The Baptized Licking-Locust Association, Friends of Humanity". This association, so organized in 1807, insisted at their first meeting that associations or confederations of churches were unscriptural, and then immediately proceeded to organize themselves into a society. In 1816 they became known as "The Association of Baptists, Friends of Humanity". At their peak in enrollment they counted twelve churches, twelve ministers, and 300 members. The Association lasted but for a few brief years, finally being dissolved in 1820.

But not only in the States of Virginia, and Kentucky, were the churches bothered by the issue of slavery, but also in Georgia, Missouri, and North and South Carolina. Even

17 Ibid., 186
18 David Benedict, A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America, Two Volumes, Manning & Laring, Boston, 1819, II, 248
before the turn of the century, the Georgia Association (1794) memorialized the State Legislature requesting that a law be passed to prevent the further operations of the African slave trade, as far as Georgia was concerned. The issue was alive in Georgia as well as in the other states; this is further evidenced by the action of the Ocmulgee Association in 1819 when in answer to a question on the subject they answered that slaves should be treated with "humanity and justice. (Eph. 6:9, Col. 4:1)" and it was recommended that members watch over each other, and if any should be found treating the slave otherwise he should be dealt with as a transgressor.

In Missouri we have the record of a church, organized in the vicinity of St. Louis, which was disturbed in its early history by the slavery question. In 1812 an "Emancipated Baptist Church" on Canteen Creek, Illinois, started a church on Cold Water Creek in Missouri. This church, composed of eighteen members, was one of the earliest anti-slavery churches in Missouri. In 1834 the church was renamed, "The Baptized Church of Christ, Friends to Humanity, on Cold Water".

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19 History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia, Compiled for The Christian Index, James P. Harrison & Co., Atlanta, Ga., 1881, 259
20 Ibid., 204
21 R.S. Douglass, History of Missouri Baptists, Western Baptist Pub. Co., Kansas City, Missouri, 1934, 49
The churches of South Carolina were also troubled by the slavery problem. In 1798 the church at Cedar Spring brought before the Association the question, "Whether or not it is agreeable to the gospel to hold negroes in Slavery". The question, rather than being answered, was held over to the next meeting, scheduled for June, 1799. The answer given is not available, but the very fact the question was brought before the Association, and the further fact, that the question was not answered immediately, but referred to future meetings, indicates the seriousness of the question and the intensity of thought in regard to it.

At the turn of the century the slave code of South Carolina forbade slaves meeting before sunrise or after sunset which of course worked against the holding of Christian meetings. In 1801 and 1802 the Charleston Association petitioned against the code, which was accordingly modified in 1803.

Of the 661 Baptists found in the 1790 census for South Carolina, 433 were without slaves. The large percentage of those without slaves lived in the back-country. Of the 228 slave-owners, twenty-one had over twenty slaves, 207 less than twenty. Many of the preachers also had slaves at this time.

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23 Ibid., 255
24 Ibid., 280-281
Slavery was the economic standard of wealth, which was judged according to the number of slaves which one possessed. That there were some wealthy Baptists at this time in South Carolina is evidenced by the fact that one Baptist owned 179 slaves, and others owned seventy-one, seventy, fifty-five, forty-nine, thirty-five, respectively.

In regard to these early years we have very little information, in respect to the slave institution. In North Carolina we do have some evidence of anti-slavery feeling. A certain early Carolina preacher, Abram Earhardt, who died in 1809, expressed in his will the desire to liberate his slaves, of which he owned a goodly number, but because he thought they would be worse off free in Africa than slaves in this country he refrained from doing so.

In 1818 a certain church in the Chowan Baptist Association asked the question, "Is it consistent with the Christian religion for a professor thereof to be engaged in purchasing Negroes with a view to sell them to speculators?" The answer which the Association delivered was strongly anti-slavery: "We believe such a practice to be at open war with the spirit of

25 Ibid.
26 Major W.A. Graham, The History of the South Fork Baptist Association, or the Baptists for One Hundred Years In Lincoln, Catawba, and Gaston Counties, North Carolina, The Journal Printing Co., Lincolnton, N.C., 1901, 16
the gospel, and shocking to all the tender feelings of our natures; we therefore answer, NO!"

In 1817 the Baptist Church at Washington, D.C., took action against a certain Samuel Smoot who had voluntarily agreed to emancipate his slaves, but then contrary to his own stipulation had sold them. A day of trial was set, and when the culprit appeared he confessed his crime, and judged for himself that he deserved exclusion from the church. The church, taking him at his word, promptly resolved unanimously "that he be excluded from the privileges and fellowship until it shall please God to restore him again to repentance".

The tender conscience of a Jeremiah Moon (first pastor of the Navy Yard Baptist Church in Washington) is recorded in his will, dated August 1, 1814. Concerning his slaves he says, "the situation of the laws at present...leaves no opportunity to say anything about that part of my family that are slaves by law. I must leave them to the mercy of my children, and hope they will do for them what is right."

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29 Ibid., 250
We have one other record of this early period, that of the action of the Philadelphia Association, taken in 1789. In response to a letter from the Church at Baltimore, the Association declared their high approval of the societies which were established for the gradual abolition of slavery, and it was recommended to the churches that similar societies be formed, and that exertion be made to attain to this very important object. This testimony of the Philadelphia Association against slavery is extremely important in Baptist annals, for the Association was and still is one of the most important societies of the country. It was the first Baptist association organized (1707), and as Newman in his History of the Baptist Churches in the United States has declared, no other agency did so much "for the solidifying and extension of the Baptist denomination in the American colonies as the Philadelphia Association".

The consensus of opinion among Baptists, in these early years...

30 Domestic Slavery Considered As a Scriptural Institution: In a Correspondence Between The Rev. Richard Fuller, of Beaufort, S.C., And The Rev. Francis Wayland of Providence, R.I., Revised and Corrected by the Authors, 5th Edition, Lewis Colby & Co., N.Y., 1847, 226

years, parallel with the thoughts of other religious groups, is anti-slavery. Because there was more reason for strong anti-slavery feeling in the areas where the institution was the stronger, the South expressed itself the more frequently. During this period there is no record of out and out approbation of the institution of slavery. On the contrary, churches, associations, and individuals, expressed themselves often as opposed to the evil of slavery. As we have already pointed out, however, many Baptists of the South, had no such conscience, and were not adverse to the holding of many slaves. Many such who held slaves, did not do so for the love of the institution, nor for the sake of gain, but because they failed to see how the lot of the slaves could be improved by their freedom. Such were sincere and honest men. It is reasonably accurate to generalize that the institution of slavery was not apologized for, and pictured as a blessing of heaven, and imagined as sanctioned by the Scriptures, until after the beginning of Northern abolitionist societies. (Perhaps these societies did not begin until it became apparent that because of the increased economic advantage of slavery, it was no longer a vanishing institution, but was here to stay.)

With the organization of these societies a period of change in thinking in respect to slavery was manifest by the
South. The result of this deviation was eventual division, and finally, war. When this is stated to be true it is not meant to blame the South for either the split or the Civil War. For while these are the results of the change in the Southern attitude, yet, as has already been suggested, the cause of the change must be laid, in part, at the door of Northern radical abolitionism. Each must share the blame for religious and political dis-union. As early as 1822 the dark clouds were sighted by the Baptist Association of Charleston, South Carolina, when at the request of several churches, the delegates to the state convention were authorized to engage that body to apply to the Governor for a day of Public Thanksgiving, one in which the people should bow in prayer and humiliation, that they might be preserved from an intended insurrection "and distress inflicted by a terrible hurricane".

A review of the literature of the period reveals the violence of the attack by the North upon the institution peculiarly Southern. The titles of such works are very revealing: The Sin of Slavery, the Guilt of the Church, and the Duty of the Ministry; The Church As It Is, the Forlorn Hope of Slavery; The Fugitive Slave Bill; or, God's Laws Paramount to

the Laws of Men; Christianity Versus Treason and Slavery, Religion Rebuking Sedition; The Bible Against Oppression; The Duty of Secession from a Corrupt Church; One More Appeal to Ministers and Churches Who Are Not Enlisted in the Struggle Against Slavery; The Brotherhood of Thieves, or, A True Picture of the American Church and Clergy; A Letter to Nathaniel Barney, of Nantucket; Come-Outerism, The Duty of Secession From a Corrupt Church; The American Churches the Bulwarks of American Slavery.

The result of the anti-slavery agitation was to make the North increasingly aware of the problem of slavery. Even though the majority of Christians never subscribed to "immediatism" (abolitionism), yet becoming aware of the problem they pressed for a solution. Churches in which abolitionist meetings were held, persuaded by much oratory, memorialized the associations that some definite action be taken in respect to the problem. In many cases this was done.

The Baptists of Vermont are a typical example. Reverend Henry Crocker, in his History of the Baptists in Vermont, states that as early as 1824 the Baptists of that state took strong anti-slavery ground. In 1837 at the Vermont Baptist

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State Convention "A Committee on Slavery" was appointed to prepare resolutions for the body. The report of the committee declared that as the ancient prophets were sent to warn the kings and nations, and to warn them against sin, so God has during the last six years (Significantly coincident with the abolitionist agitation) been arousing the mind of the nation, and of all Christendom "to the injustice and cruelty, and sin of slavery; and we cannot be workers together with God unless we throw our influence into the scale of humanity and justice". This report of the committee was adopted, printed, and sent to all the Baptist churches in the Southern states of the American Union.

The extent to which the subject was agitating the minds of the delegates at the time is evidenced by the resolution, which though tabled, is significant. It asked that because of the great place that temperance, anti-slavery, and peace, assumed in the discussions of the Convention that hereafter Thursday afternoon be vacated for all those who wish to discuss these problems of moral reform.

Three years later (1840) the committee of arrangements set aside Wednesday evening to the friends of the slave, at

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34 Ibid., 464
35 Ibid., 464
which time the delegates of the Convention and many from the surrounding area gathered together to participate in the discussion. At that time the following resolutions were introduced:

Resolved, that slavery is a violation of human rights, a sin against God, and, as connected with the Christian church a scandal on the Christian religion.

Resolved that the time has fully come to withdraw christian fellowship from those who practice this sin, or apologize for it, or in any way countenance it.

Resolved that robbery for offering is an abomination to God. Resolved, therefore, that in future we will seek channels for our contributions to the cause of benevolence, uncontaminated by the offerings of those who extort without wages.\(^{36}\)

The first resolution was adopted unanimously after thorough discussion. The majority were ready to vote in favor of the second resolution, but a few thought the time had not fully come and so a resolution was offered and adopted in its place, declaring, "that the time has fully come, when we can no longer invite slaveholders, either to our pulpits, or our communion tables, or in any other way countenance the sin of slavery". By the time these two resolutions had been adopted

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 465
the time to adjourn had come, so no further resolutions were voted. This strong action taken by the Vermont Baptist State Convention must have greatly pleased the abolitionists, and encouraged all anti-slavery radicals.

The abolitionists were still strong in the Convention of 1841, and sought, though failed, to withhold the missionary monies from both the foreign and home missionary societies.

In 1842 the Vermont Baptist Anti-Slavery Society was organized at Ludlow. The resolutions adopted by this society were very similar to all other such organizations. They declared:

We, the undersigned ministers and members of the Baptist churches in Vermont and vicinity, adopt the following sentiments:

1. That God, as the moral governor of the universe, justly claims the right to give us such laws as He, in infinite wisdom sees fit.

2. That God, in His word, has given laws for the regulation of our intercourse with Himself, and with our fellow-men.

3. That in giving us these laws, He has clearly defined man's relation to his fellowmen, and the duties growing out of this relation.

4. That this relation and these duties, as revealed to us in the Bible, render, in our view, the chattel principle of slavery a fearful infringement of human rights, and no small violation of the law of God.

37 Ibid., 465
38 Ibid., 466
5. That such being the facts we conceive that under no circumstances, whatever, can man hold the right of property in his fellowman, as he may in the soil or its products.

6. That with these views we cannot believe that slavery, in the modern acceptation of the term, ever did exist, or ever will exist, by divine right or with divine sanction.

7. That if slavery did exist anciently, by divine authority, the American slave-holder can claim no such authority; the former system can be no justification or palliation of the latter.

8. That American slavery is a fearful violation of the divine law, a gross outrage upon human rights, a plague spot upon the purity of the American church, a stain and reproach upon our national character, exposing our professions of religion and liberty to the contempt of the civil and Christian world, endangering the purity and safety of the church, and the permanency of our civil institutions, and worse than all, exposing us, as a church, and a nation, to the rebukes and judgments of God.

9. That we are called upon by our duty to man, by our professions of attachment to liberty and religion, by our piety and our patriotism, and to bring all the influence that we possess to redeem the nation and the church from its moral and political evil.

10. Believing that our relation to the Baptists of the South and the mutual relation of both them and us to the cause of Christ gives the right, and makes it our imperative duty to remonstrate with those of them who are directly or indirectly fostering this sin, and that we may labor more effectively, we agree to form ourselves into a society, and to be governed by the following Constitution.

The object of the Society was stated to be that of aiding in forming a correct abolition in the churches at home, and
also in the churches of the South. The members of the Society were to exert all their influence "for the elevation of the free colored population of our country".

The object of the Society was to be accomplished by resolutions and addresses at the Association meetings, by the propagation of abolition doctrines among the people at home, and by corresponding with the Baptist churches and the Associations of the South, helping them to become aware of the evil of the institution of slavery.

It is interesting to note that so closely was this Anti-slavery Society connected with the Vermont Baptist State Convention, that the minutes of the Society were published in connection with the minutes of the Convention.

A similar society, organized four years before, was that of the New Hampshire Baptist Anti-Slavery Society. Its first meeting, October 24, 1838, was held in Troy, New Hampshire. Resolutions strong, and clearly anti-slavery, calling for immediate action, were proclaimed. After declaring slavery to be contrary to the gospel of Christ, and morally wrong, they called for immediate emancipation, asserting that such was the only safe and practicable way "of freeing our nation

39 Ibid., 466, 467
from the shame and sin of Slavery". It was avowed that all available means would be used "for the immediate overthrow of oppression in our own land". In a hopeful voice the Society resolved, "That the signs of the times indicate the dawning of a bright and peaceful morn in the prison of the American slave". Finally they called for a united day of prayer, the fourth Monday of each month, "for the speedy and peaceful termination of Slavery".

In 1840 the Society, in a similar strain, resolved, "That the soul-destroying system of slavery should call forth the sympathies and efforts of every Christian, for its abolition". They declared the anti-slavery cause among Baptists to be "truly encouraging", and called for the united and firm cooperation of all the Baptists in the North. In the first meeting the Society had become part of the New Hampshire Anti-Slavery Society; in 1840 the Baptist Society withdrew as an auxiliary. Though the expressions are still apparently just as strong against slavery, and even the word "abolition" is used in the resolutions, which was not true for their first meeting, yet there is a suggestion of a switch toward a more

40 Proceedings of the New Hampshire Baptist State Convention, Held at Troy, October 23, 24, 1838, Printed at the Baptist Register Office, Concord, 1838
41 Ibid., 1840
conservative attitude in their withdrawal from the abolitionist New Hampshire Anti-Slavery Society. The resolution adopted at their meeting five years later lends support to this supposition, for at that time, it was declared, "we disclaim all fellowship with those who, under the anti-slavery garb, labor to disseminate fanatical and destructive principles", although then it was affirmed that the Baptist Society was endeavoring to follow a "firm and consistent course", in order that the character of true-hearted abolitionists might be sustained. They do not disown the designation "abolitionists", but avow they are the conservatives of the left wing. Two years before, the Society had quoted with great hope the little verse, "The morning light is breaking, The darkness disappears", but in 1845 the Minutes of the Anti-Slavery Society are discovered for the last time in the regular Minutes of the Baptist State Convention. This does not necessarily suggest that the Society was dissolved.

The Shaftesbury Association in the State of Vermont was also influenced by the anti-slavery agitation. In 1837 they resolved, that in the "deliberate judgment of this Association to traffic in the bodies and souls of men; to buy or sell them, 42

42 *Ibid.*, 1845
43 *Ibid.*, 1843
or to claim or hold them as property, under any pretense whatever, is sin". It involves, they decided, "a flagrant violation of the rights of man, and a bold infringement of the laws of God". They declared it to be out of harmony altogether with the spirit of the gospel of Christ. It is our duty, they proclaimed, to effect, by every moral means at our disposal "the universal emancipation of the enslaved, to break every yoke, and let the oppressed go free". (Italics his)

In 1844 American slavery was again condemned as "a great sin", and it was declared that they could no longer fellowship with those who were guilty of such a crime. They declared, in apology, that they were the "friends and lovers of union", but that they could not sacrifice the principles of "purity, justice, equity, holiness, righteousness, truth, and the favor of God", for the sake of union.

Similarly, the Hancock, Maine, Baptist Association adopted a report in 1836 declaring that in their opinion "of all the systems of iniquity that ever cursed the world, the slave system is the most abominable". They declared themselves in favor of immediate abolition. The same Association, the following year, declared themselves out of fellowship with

44 Stephen Wright, History of the Shaftsbury Baptist Association from 1781 to 1853, A.G. Johnson, Troy, N.Y., 1853, 217
45 Ibid., 228
any "under the character of Christians" who continue to hold their fellowmen in bondage.

The Washington, Maine Association with a small amount of toleration, declared that as Christians, they would have "no fellowship with those who after being duly enlightened on the subject, still advocate and practice its abomination and thus defile the church of God".

The First Baptist Church of Grafton, Massachusetts, voted in 1842, that "it is the sentiment of this church, that intemperance and slaveholding should be classed with other prominent sins, which Christians are bound not to fellowship. Therefore they decided to have no fellowship with those who were "essentially implicated in the sin of slaveholding".

The regular Baptists in Michigan likewise condemned the practice of slavery, and at nearly every meeting passed resolutions in regard to it. In 1841 slavery was declared to be "in direct opposition to the laws of God and men". In 1844 the Michigan Baptist State Convention declared themselves completely out of sympathy with the principles of slavery.

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46 Willey, Rev. Austin, *The History of the Antislavery Cause in State and Nation*, Brown Thurston, Portland, Maine, 1886, 110
47 Ibid.
48 Articles of Faith Adopted by Several Baptist Churches in Worcester County With the Covenant, Hancock & Howland, Worcester, 1842, 2
In 1845, during the year of the controversy between the Board of Foreign Missions of the Triennial Convention (Which we shall discuss later in the paper.), and the Southern Baptists, the Michigan group pledged their sympathy toward the acting Board of Foreign Missions. Coe Hayne, in the book, Baptist Trail-Makers of Michigan, asserts that Michigan Baptists were at the forefront of the anti-slavery movement. President and Mrs. A.B. Stone, of Kalamazoo College (A Baptist College), advocated abolition for many years, and preached it constantly to their students.

The Free Will Baptists, who were strong in Michigan, early adopted anti-slavery resolutions. It is stated that the most true friends of the slave, anywhere to be found, were among the Free Will Baptists of this State. According to the clerk of the Van Buren Quarterly Meeting, as written in 1853: the "Free Will Baptists are uncompromisingly and unflinchingly opposed to American slavery". "Every minister among us ... regards it as a part of his business to preach against it, and then to vote as he preaches". In spite of the positive attitude taken by the Free Will Baptists the more radical

49 George H. Waid, Centennial History of the Michigan Baptist Convention, Hallenbeck Printing Co., 1936, 22
50 Coe Hayne, Baptist Trail-Makers of Michigan, Judson Press, Philadelphia, 1936, 105, 106
51 Ibid.
abolitionists were not satisfied with the position of the group. Stephen S. Foster, in *The Brotherhood of Thieves* speaks with scorn of the Free Will Baptists, and the Quakers, who, he says, with all their professed abhorrence of slavery still patronize the institution. Moreover, he declares, "I know not of a single ecclesiastical body in the country which has excommunicated any of its members for the crime of slaveholding, since the commencement of the Anti-slavery enterprise...." To the radical abolitionist the church must not only pronounce slavery a sin, but deal with its members who committed that sin. If the church refused to do so it was itself a virtual endorser of the crime. It was the true duty of all true abolitionists to come out from such groups, and to be separate from those churches which remained in fellowship with slave-holders.

Having presented these anti-slavery testimonies of various Baptist churches, Associations, and Societies, it is necessary

52 Stephen S. Foster, *The Brotherhood of Thieves; or, A True Picture of the American Church and Clergy: A Letter to Nathaniel Barney, of Nantucket, Parker Pillsbury, Concord, N.H. 1886*, 23
53 Ibid., 33
54 Maria Weston Chapman, *Right and Wrong in Massachusetts*, Dow & Jackson's Anti-Slavery Press, Boston, 1839, 17, 22.
to point out that such declarations and resolutions do not portray a complete picture. Not all Baptists in the North were opposed to slavery. As late as the year 1834 the Reverend Doctor Bolles, of Boston, one of the secretaries of correspondence of the Baptist Triennial Convention, in an official paper said: "There is a pleasing degree of union among the multiplying thousands of Baptists throughout the land.... Our southern brethren are generally slave-holders, both ministers and people". In 1840 the Reverend Doctor Daniel Sharp of Boston, wrote,

There were undoubtedly both slave-holders and slaves in the primitive churches; I therefore for one, do not feel myself at liberty to make conditions of communion which neither Christ nor his apostles made. I do not feel myself wiser nor better than were they;... and I believe that a majority of the wisest and best men at the north hold to these sentiments. 56

The Reverend William H. Brisbane, corresponding secretary of the American and Foreign Baptist Missionary Society, himself formerly a slave owner, declared, that as a body, the Baptists of this country are still united in supporting, directly or indirectly the slave institution, and therefore all the evils connected with it. 57

56. Ibid., 407
57. Foster, 53
There were some therefore who were not opposed to slavery. There were others, who though anti-slavery in sentiment, considered it good policy, and for the sake of peace and unity, to forget the matter altogether. Probably the major part of thinking men in all religious groups were in favor of "gradualism", hoping that the future would see the destruction of the institution. The abolitionists were small in number, but very vociferous, and because of their much activity seemed to possess more power than they actually did.

The strong agitation taken by a few of the North, spoken loudly for the South to hear, produced a reaction on the part of the South. A polemical spirit was developed. Declarations, resolutions, books, and pamphlets were published showing the scriptural and historical arguments in favor of slavery. Whereas before the strongest movements for the abolition of slavery were in the South, now the whole trend among Southern churches was in support of the institution.

The Georgia Association in 1825, resolved, "That we understand the Scriptures fully to recognize the relation of Christian master and Christian servant, without the shadow of censure on the existence of such relation", though the Scriptures do give full instructions as to how such a relationship should be fulfilled.

58 Benedict, II, 207
59 History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia, 273, 274
In the same year the Charleston Association took up the subject of slavery in a memorial to the legislature, in which they urged that the religious privileges of the slaves be not restricted, "except in cases where necessity requires interposition". They declared they felt responsible for the religious instruction of those who had been placed under them. They declared they did not need the tauntings and insultings of fanatics in order to take care of their own slave problem. The Association maintained that they could never be convinced that slavery was sinful or immoral, as long as they had a Bible in their hands. The Bible, they asserted, did not make slavery a question of morals at all. Christ found slavery as an existing institution, and rather than attempting to destroy it, applied regulations in regard to it.

Again in the same year (1835) at a meeting of the clergy of Richmond, Virginia, among whom were several Baptists, a resolution was unanimously adopted opposing the "pernicious schemes of abolitionists".

The Tyger River Association gave a warning against abolitionists under the garb of strange preachers of the gospel.

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60 James G. Birney, The American Churches the Bulwarks of American Slavery, Parker Pillsbury, Concord, N.H., 1886 (Originally published in 1842), 26
61 Putnam, 15
62 Ibid., (Taken from Tyger River S. Carolina Association, Minutes, 1835)
The Goslien Baptist Association, Virginia, resolved, apparently about this same period though the date is not given, "That we consider our right and title to this property (slaves) altogether legal and bonafide, and that it is a breach of the faith pledged in the Federal Constitution for our brethren to try...to lessen the value of this property, or impair our title thereto". They viewed the movements of the abolitionists as "the torch of the incendiary, and the dagger of the midnight assassin, loosely concealed under the specious garment of humanity and religion, falsely so called".

In 1840 the East Liberty Baptist Association of Alabama condemned a "number of Northern fanatics", who had published an anti-slavery paper and forwarded it to many Baptists of the South. This paper (The Christian Reflector), they declared, "contains threats and epithets against southern Baptists abhorrent to our views and feelings". The Association resolved:

That we do deeply deplore the vitiated state of feeling possessed and cherished by a portion of the Northern Baptists, and which manifests itself in their interfering with the private, civil, and constitutional rights of southern Baptists, and by their discussion of a subject of which but few, if any, of them have any correct knowledge, never having seen a slave or a cotton-field, while many of them are flourishing on the profits of both.

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63
Foster, 56
Resolved, That we hereby express our utter detestation of the principles, accusations and threats contained in the above named paper, believing them to be a base slander when applied to Southern Baptists. 64

The Reverend Doctor R. Furman, one time President of the Baptist General Convention, in a letter to the governor of his state (South Carolina), stated, "The right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example". It is interesting to note the property of Furman, sold at action after his death: "A library of miscellaneous character, chiefly theological, twenty-seven Negroes, some of them very prime, two mules, one horse, and an old mule". 65

The books and pamphlets published in defense of the slave system were often as vitriolic and as radical as those written by the abolitionists. An example of this is the work written by Thornton Stringfellow, D.D., in which he states that slaveholders must withdraw themselves from all who teach that slaves must be free, for if we fail to do so, and to "rebuke them with all the authority which the words of our Lord Jesus Christ confer, we shall be wanting in duty to them,

64 Elder W.C. Bledsoe, History of the Liberty (East) Baptist Association of Alabama, Constitution Job Office, Atlanta, Ga., 1886, 33, 34
65 Foster, 54
to ourselves, and to the world". "The guardianship and control of the black race has been given to the white man, by God, as a sacred duty", Stringfellow maintained, and if we would secure the well-being of both races, we must be careful to discharge our obligation.

The outstanding debate among Baptists during these slavery years, and a discussion which does full justice to the arguments of both the anti and pro-slavery groups is the famous controversy which took place between Francis Wayland, and Richard Fuller. Both of these men were conservatives. Francis Wayland was opposed to abolitionism, and while he believed slavery to be wicked and destructive, yet he believed that immediate emancipation was neither wise or just. Richard Fuller, though unconvinced that slavery was a sin, and presenting with great skill the arguments pro-slavery, yet affirmed that slavery was an evil, and hoped that the time would come when the institution would be abolished. Both Doctor Wayland, and Doctor Fuller were courteous and kind throughout. In such

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65 Ibid., 105
67 A.H. Newman, 445
a generous spirit was the debate waged, so kind were the letters in tone which they wrote to one another, that for a time it looked as though the bitterness would be allayed, and separation avoided. An example of such kindness is discovered in Wayland's closing letter to Fuller: "Never before, I presume, has the defense of slavery on Christian principles been so ably conducted. Never before, I think has anything been written so admirable calculated to make a favorable impression on those who hold the opposite opinions".

The discussion began with the publication of a letter sent by Richard Fuller to the Christian Reflector (A Northern anti-slavery paper) in which he presented the cause of the slave-holders. In answer to the letter Francis Wayland made reply. With further replies and counter-replies the discussion was waged. The controversy was centered upon the proposition that slavery is not a moral evil. If it is a moral evil, stated Richard Fuller, then it is always a sin, and under every circumstance, and as such ought to be abandoned at once and without regard to the consequences. If we consider slavery to be a moral evil, the logical position is not "gradualism", but "immediatism". However, Fuller pointed out in his first letter, it is impossible to maintain successfully that such

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68 Domestic Slavery, (See footnote 30 for full title)
is true, for to do so is to come in direct conflict with the 
Scriptures, which sanctioned slavery; the Apostles did not 
condemn slavery but only the evil of the system; the evil of 
slavery, Fuller asserted, must not be confused with the system 
itself. The definition of Paley was quoted as a simple 
exploration of slavery in itself. Paley had declared, "I 
define slavery to be an obligation to labor for the benefit 
of the master, without the contract or consent of the slave". 
There is nothing within this definition, it was maintained, 
that is a moral evil. The simple question is this: "Whether 
it is necessarily, and amidst all circumstances a crime to 
hold men in a condition where they labor for another without 
their consent or contract". Fuller asserts that slavery per 
se is bondage, and nothing more.

In reply to this letter and to the later rejoinders of 
Richard Fuller, Doctor Francis Wayland wrote eight letters. 
Slavery, he asserted is not only the right "to oblige another 
to labor for our benefit, without his contract or consent", 
but also the right to use all the means necessary for the 
establishment of that right, and the perpetuity of it. More- 
over, Wayland pointed out, a moral wrong may have two meanings.

69 
Ibid., 7 

70 
Ibid., 8
It may be a violation of right, a transgression of moral law. And again it may be the guilt that is attached to that person doing the wrong. In the first of these senses slavery is a moral evil. This is true, Wayland insisted, for at least five reasons: (1) All men have a common nature. (2) Every man is endowed with an immortal soul. (3) Every human being is a fallen creature and has a right to use all his powers for knowing of the redemption that has been offered to him in Christ. (4) God has established certain temporal relationships, such as that of husband and wife, parent and child. No one has a right to interfere, nor to disturb these relationships. (5) A man possesses, as a personality, through an "immediate endowment of God" the right of liberty. The laws of states, or nations, cannot change these inalienable rights.

Wayland agrees that the holding of slaves does not necessarily involve guilt. That will depend, he explains, upon our knowledge of the moral law, upon our opportunity of knowledge, upon the mixture of truth and error with which we are taught, upon the laws of the community, which though not affecting the right or wrong of an action, may affect the degree of guilt, and upon the continued progress of light and knowledge.

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71 Ibid., 28
72 Ibid., 34-48
It is admitted that slavery was allowed in Old Testament
times, but, Wayland asserts, slavery was wrong then as it is
now. However, because God had not revealed his will, though
they were doing wrong, yet they were not guilty. Moreover,
the grant or privilege of having slaves was made to one people
only, that of the Hebrews, and it had respect to one people
only, the Canaanites.

God has seen fit, Wayland points out, to enlighten people
progressively. They are responsible for the amount of light
that has been given them. God sanctioned slavery in the Old
Testament, in the sense of permitting and regulating it, but
not in approving of it, any more than he approved of polygamy
and divorce.

Francis Wayland continued his discussion by referring to
the problem of slavery in relationship to the New Testament.
The New Testament prohibits the existence of slavery not by
forbidding it, but by inculcating such truths, the character
and value of which will eventually destroy the possibility of
such an institution. The doctrines of a God, all-holy, all-wise,
all-just; the fact that all men through creation are brethren,
that we have all been placed under one law, that "Thou shalt
love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as

73 Ibid., 51
74 Ibid., 57
thyself"; that every human being possesses a never-dying soul; the value of the human soul as seen in the death of Christ on the soul's behalf. These and kindred principles in the New Testament were such that they could have but one end, that of the destruction of such institutions as slavery. In the New Testament, precise moral enactments, or rules and regulations, were not laid down for every occasion; the principles, however, were established or revealed, which in their own time, would destroy that which was not in the spirit of such positive teaching.

It is probably true that the division between the North and the South in the Triennial Convention was definitely allayed because of these discussions. Nation-wide interest was aroused. That these debates could permanently allay the intense antagonism, and bitterness, in part engendered by the abolitionists, and in part by the Southern slave-holders themselves, was too much to expect.

Up until 1844 the Baptists of the North and South had cooperated in both foreign and home missionary work. Both groups had contributed their share in the Kingdom enterprise, through the auxiliary societies of the Triennial Convention.

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75 Ibid., 78-94
76 Ibid., 94-108
The question of slavery had been strictly taboo. In 1839-40 the Board of Foreign Missions had passed a resolution declaring their neutrality on the slavery question, and was again re-affirmed in 1843. In the Triennial Convention of 1844 Richard Fuller introduced a resolution designed to maintain unity in the national body. He asked that it be resolved that this body is "for a specific purpose defined in its constitution", that the members thereof are only to meet for that purpose, "and that cooperation in this body does not involve nor imply any concert or sympathy as to any matters foreign from the object designated as aforesaid". This resolution was finally withdrawn, to make way for the following resolution:

Whereas, There exists in various sections of our country an impression that our present organization involves the fellowship of the institution of domestic slavery, or of certain associations which are designed to oppose this institution; Resolved, That in cooperating together as members of this Convention in the work of Foreign Missions, we disclaim all action, either express or implied, whether of slavery or of antislavery, but as individuals we are perfectly free both to express and promote our own views on these subjects in a Christian manner and spirit. 79

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77 A.H. Newman, 443
78 Ibid., 444, 445
79 Ibid.
This policy of explicit neutrality was not sufficient to arrest the seeds of disorganization which had already begun to work in the national body. A short time subsequent to the Convention of 1844 a certain Indian missionary, had resigned, and it was rumored that it was a forced resignation, requested by the Foreign Board because he was a slave-holder. The matter was again forced upon the attention of the South by certain utterances made by R.E. Pattison, Home Secretary of the National Board, in which he intimated that slavery would no longer be tolerated by the Foreign Mission Society. Taking notice of these intimations a Tuscaloosa Church, member of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, inquired of that Convention: "is it proper for us, at the South, to send any more money to our brethren at the North, for missionary and other benevolent purposes, before the subject of slavery be rightly understood by both parties?" Having already received a communication from the Georgia Baptist Convention in respect to the anti-slavery action of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, the Alabama State Convention referred the whole problem to a committee. The result was the "Alabama Resolutions".

80 Ibid., 445
81 B.F. Riley, D.D., A History of the Baptists of the Southern States East of the Mississippi, American Baptist Publication Society, Phil., 1898, 203, 204
82 Ibid.
Within these resolutions it was declared that whereas slavery had become a question of morals, by a large portion of the brethren, and whereas therefore the Southerners were imputed to be living in sin, resolved that when one party within a compact is not willing to acknowledge the entire social equality of the other, and is not willing "to refrain from impeachment and annoyance", that the desirability of unity is thereby destroyed. The Alabama Resolutions then demanded that the proper authorities explicitly avow that slave-holders were eligible with non-slave-holders in all the privileges of their missionary work. Future contributions were to be stopped until a satisfactory reply was given.

The Foreign Mission Board replied that to their knowledge no slave-holder had ever requested to be a missionary, but if such a one were to "offer himself as a missionary, having slaves, and should insist on retaining them as his property, we should not appoint him". The Board declared it could not take any action which would imply approbation of slavery.

We have already suggested the anti-slavery action of the Home Mission Board. The subject of slavery was introduced for the first time in the American Baptist Home Mission Society in

23 A. H. Newman, 446, 447
84 Ibid., 447
1844, at which time a resolution was offered to the effect "that slaveholding should not debar a minister from appointment as a missionary of the society". Richard Fuller offered a substitute amendment declaring that as the constitution of the Society allowed the auxiliary societies the right of appointment and designation of funds that therefore it would be unwise as well as unconstitutional for the Society to take any action in regard to slavery. After three days of debate Fuller won by a vote of 123 to sixty-one. A committee was appointed to enquire into the advisability of change or even separation, because of the obviously diverse opinions on the subject of slavery. The following year a majority report, deciding against change, and the report of the minority, suggesting that if a change be made, (and thereby suggesting separation) the charter and name of the Society remain with the Northern Baptists was adopted.

The further action of the Home Mission Board in spite of the previous committal of neutrality in refusing to appoint James E. Reeves, as a missionary, because he was a slave-holder, completed the split. The decisions of these Boards led to the

85 Baptist Home Missions in North America, Compiled by Henry L. Morehouse, Baptist Home Mission Rooms, N.Y., 1883, 393, 394
86 Proceedings of the First Triennial Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, H.K. Ellyson, 176 Main Street, Richmond, Virginia, 21; Also Riley, 204.
formal withdrawal of the Southern State Conventions and auxiliary foreign mission societies. At the suggestion of the board of the Foreign Missionary Society of Virginia Southern Baptists were invited to meet in Convention in Augusta, Georgia, in May, 1845. Thus slavery had effected a division between the Northern and the Southern Baptists, a separation which even yet has not been unified.

The first meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention was held in the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia. The states of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, Kentucky, Louisiana, Tennessee, were represented by duly appointed delegates. At this very first session it was resolved, "that in view of the present condition of the African race...we feel it a solemn duty to furnish them with the gospel, and a suitable Christian ministry". The fact that today so many millions of our colored population are Baptist testify to the sincerity of the resolution, and that they actually carried into operation the intent of it. By 1851 the Convention was able to report that God was smiling upon their missionary endeavors, and that already great progress had been made in successfully laboring among the colored population.

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87 Proceedings, 11
88 Proceedings of 1851, 13
These sentiments of the North and the South in respect to slavery, and as illustrated in the division of the Triennial Convention remained substantially the same throughout the period leading up to the Civil War. When the political disruption actually came each Society passed resolutions giving full support to the government, according to the particular geographical location of each group. After two years of war the Southern Convention declared that the war which had been forced upon them was just and necessary. They declared their opposition to any reunion with the United States on any grounds whatsoever, and while deploring the evils of war, and "earnestly desiring peace", yet they declared they had no thought of yielding, but would give wholehearted support to the Confederate Government in all constitutional measures in order that they might secure their independence.

Similarly the Societies, and the auxiliaries of the North declared the rebellion, "as utterly causeless and inexcusable—a crime against civilization, humanity, and God—unparalleled in all the centuries".

Thus parallel with the actions of other church groups, the first strong anti-slavery sentiment began in the South; for a

89 Proceedings of 1863, 54
90 Baptist Home Missions, 401
time it flourished, and possibly threatened the very root of slavery. From the South anti-slavery feeling spread to the North, where the soil, so congenial, gave ready nourishment to the seeds of anti-slavery. No longer "gradualism", but "immediatism", was forced to the front of the public mind. This issue, tended by a small group of radicals, burned quickly into the vitals of the South. Sentiment, below the Mason-Dixon line rapidly changed, and a reactionary, defensive attitude was adopted by the Southern Baptist churches. The moderates of both the North and the South attempted to keep the issue of slavery from the Triennial Convention in order that unity might be maintained. They were successful until 1843 and 1844. At this time the wound which had been festering under a smooth skin, broke, and within two years the division had been consummated. A defensive pro-slavery attitude continued in the Southern churches. The Southern Convention refused to deal with the issue of slavery as such, but contented itself with stressing the importance of evangelization of the colored population. The Northern Society also remained free from the issue of slavery. After the Civil War had begun, both sides emphasized the righteousness and holiness of their cause, one group fighting for the right of freedom and survival, the other, (according to the religious groups) for the extirpation of slavery.
CONCLUSION

IT HAS NOT been within the purposes of this paper to deal with the attitudes of every Protestant group, but rather to present a careful study of certain representative denominations. This has been done. The attitudes of Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists, have been considered in turn.

From a casual survey of the field the impression gained is that the attitudes toward slavery are entirely geographical. During the actual period of the Civil War this was in large part true. The religious groups of the North expressed themselves as wholeheartedly in favor of the Union cause, and urged their constituents to loyally support the government. The churches of the South urged the support of the Confederacy. After a more thorough study, however, it becomes evident, and has been shown in the thesis, that the lines of thought were not always divided geographically. During the early years there was more anti-slavery agitation in the Southern states. This continued to be so until the time of Garrison, and the birth of New England Abolitionism. A reaction was developed against Northern interference which in time formed a strong Southern bloc of pro-slavery feeling and expression.
Another issue which is sometimes confused is that in regard to the forms of opposition to slavery, that is, the expression, or mold which such opposition takes. Even during the days of slavery the issue was sometimes confused. Because a church organization or individual declared himself as opposed to slavery did not identify him with the abolitionist movement. On the other hand for an individual or church group to express itself as opposed to abolitionism did not signify that it was pro-slavery. There were many forms of both anti-slavery and pro-slavery expression. There were both the radical and the conservative groups. The types of anti-slavery sentiment need not be confused. "Gradualism" declared slavery a sin, and desired, as soon as practicability allowed, to free the slaves. It saw the realistic impossibility of at once freeing all slaves. Slaves needed to be educated for freedom and into freedom. "Immediatism" not only saw the sinful nature of slavery but declared its continuance was a crime against God, and solemnly affirmed that it must be immediately abandoned. "Gradualism" claimed the more adherents. The Old School Presbyterians, the majority of Eastern Congregationalists, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and many Baptist groups were in this category. On the other hand, the Baptists and Methodists of the farming communities, and the majority of religious
groups in the middle west, were "immediatists". If a line may be drawn it must be drawn between the farm and the city, between the uneducated and the schooled, between those who saw sin and demanded its abandonment, and those who saw the practical inexpediency of doing so.

The conservatives in the pro-slavery wing were such as Richard Fuller. To him slavery was an evil but not a sin. It was a divine institution ordained by God for certain providential long-range ends, and as such had its purposes in the divine economy. He spoke with moderation and exhibited at all times a Christian spirit. Because of it he influenced many both in the South and the North. The South also produced its radicals, men such as Dr. Thornton Stringfellow. Slavery was not only ordained by God, but was established by him as a permanent institution. To attack slavery was to fight against his divine plan and purpose. He spoke with as much bitterness and rancor as did Garrison in the North. It is this type of radicalism in both the North and the South which led the country to war.

One other fact should be pointed out. Attitudes to slavery were fashioned because of economic reasons. When slavery was equally profitable to both the North and the South more anti-slavery expression was to be discovered in the South
than in the North. When economic factors changed, and the South alone found slavery to be profitable it was then the North which demanded its abolition. To the Southerners slavery was profitable therefore it should be continued. It was easy for them to discover justification on both moral and scriptural grounds. In the North slavery was no longer an economic asset. It was therefore not difficult to discover its sinfulness. Not too much credit is due to either side.

The churches were bound by vested interests. Their policies were determined by economic factors. They were shaped by the age, rather than the age being shaped by them. It was the age that determined the character of the church. With a few great exceptions politics, and economics, rather than Christ shaped her destiny.
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The thesis submitted by Lyle E. Cushman has been read and approved by three members of the Department of History.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

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