CHAPTER 9

"ICONOCLASM HAS HAD ITS DAY": ABOLITIONISTS AND FREEDMEN IN SOUTH CAROLINA

BY WILLIE LEE ROSE

WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON was much troubled by the action of his old friend James Miller McKim. In January of 1862, McKim had suddenly asked to be released from his duties as Corresponding Secretary of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, an organization which he had served with credit for many years. Less than ten months following the outbreak of the Civil War, and with emancipation as yet no more acknowledged as a war aim than it had been the day Fort Sumter was fired upon, one of the country's most useful and outspoken abolitionists was saying that abolition work as it had been conducted for the past thirty years was no longer necessary, and that if the organized antislavery movement could not adjust to the new needs of the day, it ought to disband. In May, at the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Garrison, as President, rose to the occasion. He asked McKim to explain himself.[1]

There could be no reasonable doubt of the Pennsylvania abolitionist's sincere dedication to the cause of the slave. In his youth, while still a theological student, McKim had happened one day into a barber shop in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where he picked up a copy of a new journal called *The Liberator*; in that moment he dis-

[1] *The Liberator*, May 9 and 16, 1862.

covered the purpose of his life. In the service of the antislavery movement he had occupied, according to William Still, a companion-in-arms who knew him well, "a position of influence, labor and usefulness, scarcely second to Garrison." In 1833, as representative of the otherwise all-Negro organization of abolitionists in Carlisle, the young Presbyterian minister went to Philadelphia to attend the signal meeting which launched the American Anti-Slavery Society. At the age of twenty-three, McKim had been the youngest delegate present. In a short time he had given up his ministry, as many another convinced abolitionist had done, to devote himself entirely to abolition work, serving first as one of Theodore Dwight Weld's famous band of antislavery apostles, later as a fearless member of the Pennsylvania Vigilance Committee, then as editor of the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, and continuously as a hard-working officer of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. There were no important abolitionists of the day who were not McKim's friends, and the runaway slave crossing Pennsylvania would probably have heard of him as a man who would run risks in his behalf. McKim had been one of the select party who went to Harpers Ferry to escort John Brown's body back to his home in the North.[2] There was small wonder that Garrison would want to know what moved McKim to sever his connection with a movement he had served so loyally for nearly thirty years.

McKim had made it clear at the time of his resignation that he was not abandoning the slave. It appeared certain to him, however, that despite inaction on the part of the government, emancipation was already as-

[2] William Still, *The Underground Rail Road* (Philadelphia, 1872), pp. 665-67; *Proceedings of the American Anti-Slavery Society at its Third Decade, Held in the City of Philadelphia, Dec. 3d and 4th, 1863* (New York, 1864), pp. 82-83; Ira V. Brown, "Miller McKim and Pennsylvania Abolitionism," in *Pennsylvania History*, XXX (January 1863), 56-72.

sured as an important result of the war. In a letter to the editor of the *Anti-Slavery Standard* he outlined his new position. "Iconoclasm has had its day," he wrote. More was now needed than "the old anti-slavery routine," of sending lecturers about, as abolitionists were fond of phrasing it, to educate the public mind and conscience. New methods were required. "For the battering-ram we must substitute the hod and trowel; taking care, however, not to 'daub with untempered mortar.' We have passed through the *pulling-down* stage of our movement; the *building-up*—the constructive part—remains to be accomplished." In direct reply to Garrison's question, McKim explained that he now wished to devote his primary efforts to the slaves whom the progress of the war was releasing in ever growing numbers.[3] His action introduced into the councils of the abolition movement a question which was to prove its divisive effect in the course of the succeeding decade. Even after emancipation there was a legitimate point of difference among friends of the freedmen as to whether pressure could be more effectively applied to remove injustices from law or to assist the Negro in grasping his own boot-straps, by providing him with an education. In the early years of the war the question was especially ticklish, because escaping Negroes were not yet free men.

From the very beginning of hostilities the refugee slave had made his appearance, sometimes alone, sometimes in small groups, but ever informed by an instinct that he would not be remanded to his master. There were times when the fugitive's faith proved to be ill-founded, but no matter what was done about him, he always presented a problem to the Federal authorities, who could not call him "free," but did not want to call him a slave. The question first arose in critical proportions, however, in the fall of 1861, on the Sea Islands of

[3] McKim to Oliver Johnson, January 22, 1862, in New York *Anti-Slavery Standard*, May 3, 1862; *The Liberator*, May 16, 1862.

South Carolina, where the fugitives were not black slaves at all, but rather their white masters. In order to strengthen the blockade of the Southern coast, Federal authorities had determined upon seizing a deep-water port on the South Atlantic, a safe harbor where the blockade ships could ride out storms and be supplied. On November 7, the United States forces seized Port Royal Sound for these purposes, a waterway which forked deeply into the fertile cotton and rice country between Charleston and Savannah. Rich in history from the sixteenth century, this semitropical region was the source of the finest cotton in the world, the home of as old and entrenched an aristocracy as the country possessed, and a land where Negro slaves comprised nearly 83 percent of the entire population.[4]

The Sea Island region had been, before the Civil War, a remote, provincial district of live-oaks and Spanish moss, where life was as slow and orderly as the tides which rose and fell in the quiet back-waters, while Beaufort, the only town on the islands, was notable not at all for its commerce, but for the aristocratic cotton lords and "rice birds" who gathered there in summer. In the overthrow of the old order which resulted from the Federal occupation of the islands, there was ample demonstration of the disorderliness of the historical process; for the United States government was abruptly confronted with a battery of Reconstruction problems before the Civil War had well begun. The white inhabitants fled almost to a man, but Negro slaves, to the number of approximately ten thousand, had stubbornly refused to join their masters' hasty retreat to the interior. They remained instead to greet the invaders and enjoy their sudden liberty, which if not official, was at the least a remission of bondage.

[4] For a fuller treatment of the origins of the Port Royal movement than is given in the paragraphs below see Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction; The Port Royal Experiment* (Indianapolis and New York, 1964), pp. 3-31.

In the first few months, however, the new condition was, to outward appearances, a mixed blessing: the Negroes were stranded in the fall before the issue of winter clothing, with their plantation provisions subject to ruthless seizure by the Federal armies, without doctors or ministers, and generally speaking, without experience or power to care for themselves. Many slaves flocked toward the army camps looking for help and work, but they were abused by the unsympathetic soldiers as often as they were assisted. In any event, the wants of ten thousand semifree people far exceeded the resources available to military officials, and there was a compelling need as well for a means of social control and civil organization to replace the old order which had been so suddenly swept away. The situation which became desperate in the course of the winter would surely become worse by another year if the Negroes were not organized and set to work on a new cotton crop.

It was a lucky circumstance for the Sea Islanders that their masters in their flight had also abandoned several million dollars worth of long-staple cotton. Because the confiscation of this cotton fell to the Treasury Department, it was Salmon P. Chase, the most radical member of Lincoln's original Cabinet, who had the first opportunity to direct and organize the means to assist the late slaves. The Secretary was interested and sympathetic. As a result of the investigations of Edward L. Pierce, a young abolitionist and personal friend whom Chase sent to the islands on an official visit, the Treasury Department lent sanction and support to the organization of several privately supported benevolent societies in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Their purpose was to send ministers, teachers, and labor superintendents to the islands.[5] The collective efforts of these freedmen's

[5] For Pierce's reports see, Edward L. Pierce to Salmon P. Chase, February 3, 1862, and same to same, June 2, 1862, in Frank Moore, ed., *The Rebellion Record* (New York, 1866), Supplement to Vol. I, pp. 302-23.

aid societies (although the word "freedmen" was studiously avoided at first) came to be known in the North in the second year of the war as "the Port Royal Experiment." From this first large-scale endeavor, launched in the spring of 1862, grew all the freedmen's aid activities which developed during the war and Reconstruction periods.

This was the work which had eclipsed the "old methods" of the antislavery crusade in the affections of Miller McKim, the challenge to what he called the "building-up" phase of the abolition movement. The failure of many of his fellows to succumb to its appeal, however, was not astonishing; for in the beginning the backers of the Port Royal Experiment were inclined to state their aims very modestly, revealing only part of the ultimate purpose of their movement. While they eagerly pressed before the public the goals of feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, supplying clothes, sending ministers, teachers, and doctors, they were hesitant to reveal the full scope of their intentions. The leaders of the Boston Educational Commission pointed out quite simply that if the Negroes were worse off as a result of the Northern invasion, Northern citizens would stand convicted of "that spurious philanthropy" which Southerners had so often charged upon them. Men of good will might hope to do more for the Negroes than their masters had ever done, but they ought to begin, at the least, by doing for the Negroes those essential things which "their masters did not and could not omit to do."[6] Such reticence resulted undoubtedly from considerations of policy, from an attempt to establish the broadest possible basis of support, but many an old-time abolitionist had learned to distrust "policy" as a mask for hedging on emancipation. Too often "policy" had turned out to be another name for "expediency."

[6] *Address to the Public by the Committee of Correspondence of the Educational Commission* (Boston, n.d., but c. March 1862).

It is a practical certainty that simple relief measures could never have shaken the loyalty of a man like Miller McKim to the "old methods" of the antislavery crusade. The real aims of the Port Royal movement were quickly understood by the trusty abolitionists who participated in its organization, and by those who joined it soon thereafter, to be nothing short of creating on the Sea Islands a model for the regeneration of Southern Society, a model which would include the education and rehabilitation of the slave, and a conclusive demonstration of his capacity for freedom. Without tried and true abolitionists in the movement, reasoned McKim, "untempered mortar" might be applied, and the pattern of reconstruction which developed on the islands might not embody true antislavery principles. McKim regarded Port Royal as offering the most promising field now open to abolitionists.

In shaping his plans Edward Pierce had had the benefit of previous experience with refugee Negroes during his tour of duty as a soldier at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, in the first year of the war. He had already seen enough to feel sure that the Negroes would be dependable allies for the Northern war effort, and that they would be especially eager to learn to read. Even before his departure for the Sea Islands on his commission from Secretary Chase he had conceived a broad approach to his Port Royal assignment. On a cold January morning before his departure, he walked over Beacon Hill with the Reverend Mr. Jacob M. Manning, opening to him "his far-reaching plans" and requesting assistance of the Boston minister in securing teachers and funds for their support.[7]

[7] Jacob M. Manning to Edward A. Atkinson, October 18, 1862, Atkinson MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society; [Edward L. Pierce], "The Contrabands at Fortress Monroe," *Atlantic Monthly*, VII (November 1861), 626-40.

The scope of these plans is roughly indicated in the first report which resulted from Pierce's Sea Island visit. He recommended to Secretary Chase that the government avoid the simple but expedient course of leasing the island acres to private parties, but should itself undertake the culture of cotton, providing able and disinterested supervisors for the Negro laborers, and paying wages to the workers from the start. Pierce's plan included provision for teachers for the children, and missionaries to advise adults in their new responsibilities: *to inculcate* "practical virtues," "faithful labor," and "clean and healthful habits." But this was to be only the beginning. "The plan proposed is, of course," wrote Pierce, "not presented as an ultimate result: far from it. It contemplates a paternal discipline [only] for the time being . . . with the prospect of better things in the future." As soon as the Negroes should "show themselves fitted for all the privileges of citizens," they were to be "dismissed from the system and allowed to follow any employment they please, and where they please." Most particularly, they should be given liberty and encouragement, advised Pierce, to become landowners in their own right.[8] Although Pierce did not state it, the assumption was implicit that land would be made available to the Negroes (whose subsequent freedom was also assumed) through the confiscation and sale of the estates of their late masters, the fugitive Sea Island planters. While he raised no hope for a large immediate Federal revenue from the islands, Pierce thought the government would cover the expenses incurred in the undertaking, and would accomplish a goal of incalculable importance to the war effort, through "the inauguration [on the islands] of a beneficent system which will settle a great social question, insure the sympathies of foreign nations, now

[8] Pierce to Chase, February 3, 1862, in Moore, ed., *Rebellion Record*, Supplement to Vol. I, pp. 310-12.

wielded against us, and advance the civilization of the age."[9]

Settling that "great social question" once and for all was undoubtedly the most appealing aspect of the work for abolitionists like McKim, for it was one which they had been obliged to confront at every turn during the thirty-year history of their movement, a question leveled at them almost as often by citizens who were otherwise favorably disposed to emancipation as by outright enemies. That question usually assumed one of several provoking forms: Would the Negroes if emancipated work voluntarily for a living? Or would they constitute a dependent element in a free society, living forever upon the charity of the white North? Would they fail, without slavery as a means of social control, in the great competition of life? Would they, as some suggested, become *extinct*? With good antislavery leadership the Negroes at Port Royal might silence such questions forever and give an inestimable boost to the progress of public opinion on the emancipation question. The government would welcome the information which would surely result from such an undertaking, for the problem of a new status for the slave would become greater with each passing month. A radical observer of the Washington scene was enthusiastic about the possibilities. "The active and acting abolitionists ought to concentrate all their efforts" at Port Royal, wrote Adam Gurowski. "The success of a productive colony there would serve as a womb for the emancipation at large."[10]

Organized abolition was by no means of one opinion on the question. Garrison remained unconvinced. His reservations about the new "experiment" were undoubtedly shared by many of his fellows who saw in it a threat to the Anti-Slavery Society and its work. In the May

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 311.

[10] Adam Gurowski, *Diary from March 4, 1861 to November 12, 1862* (Boston, 1862), p. 147.

meeting when the matter first came before the Society, Wendell Phillips voiced the views of those who acknowledged no problem: "I ask nothing more for the negro than I ask for the Irishman or German who comes to our shores. I thank the benevolent men who are laboring at Port Royal—all right!—but the blacks do not need them. They are not objects of charity. They only ask this nation—'Take your yoke off our necks.'" Phillips assured his fellow abolitionists that the newly released bondsman needed no assistance whatever, only a modicum of justice, and not an ounce of mercy. "They ask their hands—nothing more; they will accomplish books, and education, and work." In debate Phillips frequently overstated his case for calculated effect, and there is some reason to believe that he was more aware of the requirements of the situation on the islands than he was ready to admit. But his unwillingness to identify organized antislavery with the freedmen's aid movement remained remarkably constant over the years.[11] There were other abolitionists who steered clear of the Port Royal work, as they were frank to say, from a dread of damaging publicity. "I feel sure," warned one unidentified albeit "tried and trusty" friend of the slave, "that, while you will benefit individuals, you will, in the broad careless views which the world will take, exhibit a most disastrous failure, and furnish a very good argument against any method of emancipation."[12]

McKim did not take this despairing view. Although he did not sever his connection with the Anti-Slavery

[11] Speech of Wendell Phillips at the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, May 6, 1862, in *The Liberator*, May 16, 1862. Phillips had exerted his influence with Charles Sumner as early as December to gain a hearing for a friend who requested government aid to schools for the Sea Islanders. Phillips to Sumner, December 20, 1861, Sumner MSS, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

[12] An unidentified abolitionist, quoted in the *Annual Report of the New York National Freedmen's Aid Society* (New York, 1866), p. 10.

Society, his heart really belonged to the freedmen's aid movement. Within a few weeks following the May meeting of the Society, he was in South Carolina surveying what was already being done there and making notes as to how the work could be used to promote abolition. Those of his fellows who did not follow him into the new work were probably most influenced by the action of Garrison, and their leader's frank reminder that emancipation was not yet accomplished. The work of education was not the same thing. "It is a *popular* work," Garrison declared, "as compared with ours, and we may safely leave it to the support of the community at large, giving it all the incidental help in our power, but not making it our special work."[13]

The question will not down whether Garrison rejected the new movement simply because it *was* popular. Much has been written recently portraying the abolitionist as an intellectual reformer who set himself in resolute opposition to all organized social institutions. In his important book, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life,* Stanley Elkins describes the anti-institutionalism of the New England abolitionists who marched behind Garrison's banner. The more strident of these Garrisonians richly earned their unpopularity by denouncing the most cherished institutions of their fellow Americans, the churches and the United States Constitution, both sullied by compromises with slavery. This anti-institutional abolitionist was apt, according to Elkins' analysis, to content himself with denunciation; he considered no means of using church or state to improve the lot of the slave while he was working toward the ultimate goal of the extinction of slavery. Taking a moral and emotional stand, this same abolitionist called for root-and-branch measures, "a total solution. Destroy the evil, he cries; root it up,

[13] *The Liberator,* May 10, 1862; *An Address Delivered by J. Miller McKim in Sansom Hall, July 9, 1862* (Philadelphia, 1862), p. 4.

wipe it out."[14] For such a reformer the light of the moral issue was so blinding that the social problem was scarcely discernible.

The presence of such attitudes in the ranks of abolitionists, goes a long way to explain the suspicion which certain of the veterans expressed toward the freedmen's aid movement, particularly in its initial phase. Why, they might well ask, should they labor to prepare the slave, in the words of Edward Pierce, "for all the privileges of [American] citizens?"[15] Implicit in the assumption of such a task was the acknowledgement that the slave *required* assistance, the admission that striking off the fetters did not in itself make of a slave a truly free man, and the recognition that there might still be a social problem remaining after the nation's conscience had purged its guilt and thrown off its peculiarly abominable institution.[16]

McKim's "battering-ram" and "hod and trowel" symbolically represent a recurring division among American reformers, and anti-institutionalism is a persistent streak in the intellectual's attitude toward entrenched social evil. In a penetrating article on the contemporary struggle for civil rights for American Negroes, Benjamin DeMott observes that many of the best friends of the movement are less than enthusiastic about the "Domestic Peace Corps" and similar organizations at work among the culturally deprived young people of Harlem. Mr. DeMott assigns this coolness to the endemic impatience

[14] Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery, A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago, 1959), pp. 161, 163-64, 175-76. Other writers have applied the concepts of guilt and aggression to individual abolitionists, but Elkins has made the more general application of these ideas to the antislavery movement.

[15] Report of Edward L. Pierce to Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, February 3, 1862, in Moore, ed., *Rebellion Record*, Supplement to Vol. I, p. 311.

[16] For an interesting contemporary application of Elkins' analysis, see Benjamin DeMott, "Project for Another Country," in *American Scholar*, Vol. 32, no. 3 (Summer 1962), pp. 455-57.

and suspicion of liberals with any means of attack upon second-class citizenship which suggests, even by implication, present needs or shortcomings of colored citizens. Social work, operating through the cooperation and support of the churches, civic groups, and the government, pales in comparison with the militant call for right and justice, the regeneration of the heart. Men still feel they must make a choice between movements which should be twin efforts. Even now it comes more naturally to most liberals to ascribe the total problem to "white man's viciousness, the assigned cause of the crippling frame of injustice in which the American Negro lives." Harder by far to face is the concomitant struggle to erase the effects of that frame of injustice. Mr. DeMott takes his departure from Elkins' description of the abolitionist, and sees in the present-day prophets of the apocalypse, those who warn us, in the words of James Baldwin, that it will be ". . . no more water, the fire next time," the spiritual descendants of William Lloyd Garrison and his followers of over a hundred years ago.

Those who have identified and helped to explain the anti-institutional bent in American reform movements have served scholarship well and have brought insight to bear upon important personalities who have been alternately blamed and praised, but little understood. On the other hand, it should be recognized that the abolitionists were often much divided among themselves as to their wisest strategy on questions involving the churches and the government. Numbers of abolitionists always subscribed to church-related emancipation activities, and the coming of civil war stimulated among nearly all of them a willingness to abandon previous hostile attitudes in favor of cooperation in the war effort, hoping thereby to influence public policy on the slavery issue.

While there were those who continued to prefer the "battering-ram" to the "hod and trowel," there were

also those who, like McKim, undertook constructive work within an institutional framework. There is some danger that the builders may be overlooked because the iconoclasts had such shocking things to say, and said them so loudly. There is some danger that when the anti-institutional studies are incorporated into the general literature of the period that they may be made to cover too much ground, perhaps more ground than the authors intended.

This would occur not only as a result of a continuing overemphasis on the more strident reformers, but also from a tendency of recent scholarship to define the abolition movement narrowly, either by excluding adherents after the 1830's, as David Donald has done in his essay "Toward a Reconsideration of Abolitionists," or concentrating, as Stanley Elkins has done, on the New England branch of the movement, with its close intellectual ties to Transcendentalism.[17] Although any reasonable and clearly stated definition may be used for purposes of study, it would appear that if one is primarily concerned with the effects of the antislavery movement on the Civil War, and its outcome for American Negroes, then there is much to be said for including in the ranks of the abolitionists all those who were, before the beginning of the Civil War, uncompromising adherents of immediate and unconditional emancipation. Otherwise one is left without a name for individuals who became hearty exponents of emancipation after 1840, as a consequence of what they deemed aggressive acts of the Slave Power, or as a result of the Fugitive Slave Law and the struggle for Free Soil in Kansas, or simply because they were born too late to have had any political convictions whatever in the 1830's. Among these

[17] See Elkins, *Slavery*, pp. 164-75, for an analysis which focuses on the New England Transcendentalists; David Donald, in "Toward a Reconsideration of Abolitionists," in *Lincoln Reconsidered* (Vintage Paperback edn., New York, 1956), pp. 19-36, limits his study to those who became abolitionist before 1840.

younger recruits to the freedmen's aid movement the anti-institutional attitudes of the veterans of the battles of the 1830's are hardly discernible.[18] The antislavery movement had become a much broader stream by 1860 than could be contained in the old channel cut by those earliest pioneers in the cause of the slave.

Just how broad this stream was may be seen in the varied responses of antislavery adherents to the opportunities which opened so early at Port Royal. The wartime movement to aid escaping slaves in their adjustment to the free life had, in addition to the simple ones of relief and education, and the greater one of providing a model for Southern reconstruction, two other objectives: to use the successes of ex-slaves to promote emancipation support, and to use the information gained in such a social experiment to guide the government in further steps. This work originated on the Sea Islands, was carried on most intensively there, and can be understood and studied only as a logical projection of the antislavery movement.

While it is clear that the officers and leading supporters of the freedmen's movement were strongly antislavery, it cannot be contended on the other hand that the movement was exclusively abolitionist in backing, especially if the term is to be construed narrowly. Henry Lee Swint analyzed a group of 135 supporters of freedmen's work, and determined that 66 of the number had been outstanding enough in the abolition movement to merit a comment to that effect in the biographical dictionaries. This does not inform us about the others, but

[18] The social experiment at Port Royal was based from the beginning on a cooperation between private organizations and the government, and the freedmen's organizations were much assisted by the churches of the North. Once at work among the freed Negroes the Northern teacher frequently discovered that much could be gained by making the new concepts of freedom and responsibility relevant to the established religious life of the late slaves.

it is plain that the lists of the standing committees of the freedmen's aid societies included the names of those same distinguished jurists, ministers, and philanthropic men of affairs who supported many another good cause of the day.[19] How many of these men, and others less well known than they, had been before the war sympathetic to the antislavery movement is difficult to determine, for solid information on the less vocal early emancipationists is hard to come by. It is doubtful that many individuals who had no prior commitment to the antislavery movement would have identified themselves with freedmen's work so early as 1862. Yet the presence of certain individuals on these freedmen's commissions was enough to set Wendell Phillips' teeth on edge, and confirm his worst fears. Stephen Colwell, for example, of the Philadelphia organization, had written much in behalf of emancipation, but he usually emphasized the economic necessity of the measure, and he had been at one time an advocate of colonization. There were undoubtedly others who would not have received a clean bill of health from a Garrison or a Phillips.

When this is admitted, however, the fact remains that the pioneering work for freedmen's education was primarily supported by abolitionists, and the numbers of abolitionists involved increased as the war progressed. Even if one adopts the most stringent of definitions as to who was an abolitionist, dismissing adherents to the cause after 1840, there was a healthy leavening, even from the beginning, of what one of McKim's corre-

[19] Henry Lee Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South* (Nashville, 1941), p. 27; for lists of the original officers, consult *Circular of the Port Royal Relief Committee*, March 17, 1862 (Philadelphia, 1862); *First Annual Report of the Educational Commission for Freedmen, May, 1863* (Boston, 1863), p. 4; *A History of the American Missionary Association; Its Churches and Educational Institutions among the Freedmen, Indians and Chinese* (New York, 1874), p. 13; *The National Freedman*, Vol. I, no. 1 (February 1, 1865), p. 40.

spondents was pleased to call "the true West Point" of the war, "the graduates of the Antislavery school."[20]

Among the first to recognize the new opportunities and responsibilities was Lewis Tappan, of New York, who had sent a missionary to the "contrabands" at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, even before the larger field opened at Port Royal. Cooperating closely with Tappan in organizing the earliest work of the American Missionary Association on the Sea Islands were two redoubtable veterans, Simeon Jocelyn and George Whipple. These same men helped launch the nonsectarian New York National Freedmen's Aid Society. In Boston the Educational Commission had the support of a number of distinguished abolitionists of purest 1830's vintage, including, among others, George B. Emerson and Henry Ingersoll Bowditch. Numbered among the enthusiastic supporters of the new work were John Greenleaf Whittier, Maria Weston Chapman, David Lee Child and his wife, Lydia Maria. Mrs. Chapman clearly regarded the freedmen's work as an extension of abolition. "From the high historic point of view, was ever progress so swift?—But thirty years from the start, and you are organizing the leading slave state in Freedom." In Philadelphia the Unitarian minister William H. Furness and his son Horace, were active. Francis George Shaw and William Cullen Bryant were outstanding officers in the New York association. Many others joined the movement before the war was over.[21] When one reads the hearty letters from notable abolitionists to the or-

[20] William Morris Davis to J. Miller McKim, November 30, 1862, James Miller McKim Papers in the Antislavery Collection at Cornell University.

[21] See *supra*, n. 19, manuscript history of the American Missionary Association in the Educational Division of the archives of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, United States Archives; Lydia M. Child to William Endicott, March 2, 1862, and Edward Atkinson to Edward Philbrick, April 23, 1862, and Maria Weston Chapman to Edward Atkinson (n.d., but c. March, 1862), all in the Edward Atkinson MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.

ganizers of the work, it is difficult to escape the notion that these individuals would have been more prominently placed in the associations if the directors of the freedmen's movement had not been behaving like sensible fellow-travelers, keeping the most conspicuous of the abolitionists out of the limelight. The full strength of abolitionist influence upon the enterprise, however, is not revealed in the lists of officers. There were also those who took to the field.

A sardonic reporter from the New York *Herald* gave the following highly colored account of the arrival at Port Royal in early March of the first teachers and superintendents. There had been rumors, he reported sagely, of a missionary invasion of the islands. All doubts of these rumors vanished with the appearance at the landing in Beaufort of a number of "light-haired, long-whiskered, spectacled individuals, with umbrellas in one hand and a mysteriously covered package, suggestive of tracts, in the other, followed by several ladies, prim and antiquated, and of a general Bostonian style. . . ." These were just such ladies, observed the reporter, as one might meet at "William Lloyd Garrison's soirees or at Wendell Phillips' sermons." The *Times* reporter, who was also delighted to have fresh copy, declared authoritatively that these newcomers were "mostly Abolitionists, of the most violent kind. . . ."[22] Wendell Phillips and other veteran agitators who took no part in the movement must have experienced a sour amusement to note how swiftly these allegations were refuted by certain prominent officers of the aid societies.[23]

The reporters were obviously at more pains to be amusing than accurate, but they had still come nearer to the truth than those who disclaimed, by implication,

[22] New York *Herald*, March 22, 1862; New York *Times*, March 21, 1862.

[23] Judge J. W. Edmonds, President of the New York National Freedmen's Relief Association, in New York *Times*, March 24, 1862.

any connection with abolitionism. Nor were they far from the mark in supposing that certain of the "evangels" newly arrived had been involved in practically every good cause going, Sabbatarianism perhaps, temperance, tract distribution, and the Magdalen movement, as well as abolition. Such a network of good works was characteristic of the evangelical abolitionists. One bemused observer of the embarkation of the party in New York likened the group to "the adjournment of a John Brown meeting," or "the fag-end of a broken-down" phalanx. An uneasy young volunteer from Boston looked around at his fellows, and concluded that he had joined "a rather motley-looking set." He began to wonder how successful some of them would be at raising cotton.[24] These observations were not without some foundation, but it was still a mistake for the reporters to convey the impression that the majority of the party which Pierce brought to the islands were evangelicals looking for new fields to conquer, or for that matter to conclude that more than a few had been recruited from the lunatic fringe. The most extreme of the pacifist groups had been eliminated as a result of their unwillingness to sign the oath of allegiance (as well as by Pierce's judgment that a military post was a bad place for them to be). Otherwise there were representatives among the missionaries of all the major divisions in the abolition movement, some from the East, some from the West, some who regarded themselves as being Garrisonian and others who had continued to work within the churches to accomplish their ends.

The youth of most of the party precluded an early espousal of abolition, but many, probably the majority, of the young people came from abolition families. Edward Philbrick and Charles Follen, whose father had lost

[24] Sarah Forbes Hughes, ed. *Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes* (Boston and New York, 1899), I, 295-96; Elizabeth Ware Pearson, ed. *Letters from Port Royal* (Boston, 1906), p. 2.

his professorship at Harvard for his antislavery views, were both sons of Boston abolitionists. Samuel Phillips was a nephew of Wendell Phillips. Such connections multiplied shortly, for antislavery families began to gather on the islands. Men wrote home for their wives and sisters to come and teach, marriages took place, and homes began to be established by the Northerners in the deserted plantation houses of the old regime. When Lydia M. Child asked the Boston Commission to register her as a member and accept her contribution, she ventured a little advice as well. No one should be sent South, she urged, who had ever been "suspected of a pro-slavery bias," for such "habits of thought" would prevent them from gaining the confidence of the Negroes.[25] Mrs. Child ought not to have worried, for, with very few exceptions, the missionaries would have suited her requirements on the point.

James Miller McKim himself had most to do with the selection of the individuals sent South from Philadelphia, and his applicants were carefully screened. When it was determined that a nonprofit store should be opened for the Sea Islanders, McKim looked for more than probity in the man he would send as the manager. John Hunn, McKim reported at last, was "the right sort of person." This Delaware farmer had earned his laurels in the service of fugitive slaves and had paid heavy fines in Roger Taney's court as a result. Hunn was "an abolitionist of the out and out Quaker stamp, and withal a liberal minded and genial hearted man."[26] McKim offered these assurances to Laura M. Towne, who was representing the Philadelphia organization on the

[25] L. M. Child to Edward Atkinson, March 2, 1862, and M. W. Chapman to Edward Atkinson (n.d., but c. March 1862), Atkinson MSS; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, pp. 43-45, 48-54.

[26] J. M. McKim to Laura Towne, October 2, 1862, Towne MSS, Penn Community Center, St. Helena Island, South Carolina. These manuscripts will be removed shortly to the Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, N.C.

islands, because he knew her to be a woman who could tolerate no milk-and-water abolitionism. As an early arrival among the missionaries, Miss Towne had been exposed to the cautious phase of the Port Royal Experiment, and had not liked it. She complained that the original leaders of the movement had been too much concerned about not arousing the ire of the military officers, whose prejudices were all too evident. These leaders had been silent, she charged, about "the benevolence of their plans, or the justice of them, and merely insist upon the immediate expediency. . . ." The lady saw that in all truth the missionaries were gaining nothing, for the army recognized their purposes anyway. "We have the odium of out-and-out abolitionists, why not take the credit? Why not be so confident and freely daring as to secure respect?" She wished all her fellows would "say out loud quietly, respectfully, firmly, 'We have come to do anti-slavery work, and we think it noble work and we mean to do it earnestly.' "[27]

No matter whether they came from the Garrisonian wing of the abolition movement, or from the Western and evangelical wing, the missionaries regarded themselves as "evangels of civilization," Northern style. They revealed their connections with the antislavery crusade not only in the surveillance they kept each over the purity of others' convictions, in the traces in their motivation of a sense of social sin and expiation, but in their internal conflicts as well. The perspicacious reporter for the *Herald* again piped sarcastically about the "jealousies, reproaches and recriminations" abounding among the evangels, trials which had beset Dickens' famous do-gooders, and made the lives of the "Chadbands, Stiggenses, Mrs. Jellyby's and Mrs. Pardiggles a burthen to them."[28] Again he overshot the mark, but he had seen

[27] Diary entry of April 17, 1862 in Rupert Sargent Holland, ed. *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne* (Cambridge, 1912), pp. 8-9.
[28] New York *Herald*, March 22, 1862.

something nevertheless. The long-standing hostility between the evangelical abolitionists of New York City, with their Western following, and the American Anti-Slavery Society was now reflected in the not always polite feuding which sprang up between the New York delegation on one hand and the Boston-Philadelphia missionaries on the other. The latter were generally inclined to distrust the frequent and fervent religious expressions of the former, and the evangelists were distrustful of the cool and practical young New England labor superintendents who were so absorbed in proving the free labor thesis. Unfortunately, the role of supervisors of labor planted the superintendents in a situation which was dangerously suggestive of that of the fugitive planters. Those missionaries who were most serious about demonstrating to a dubious Northern public the superior economics of wage labor were occasionally severe in their management to a degree which deserved criticism. The evangelicals accused some of these men of being "not genuinely" antislavery, an opinion sometimes bolstered by others whose abolitionism was not of religious foundations. On the other hand those evangelicals who went directly into the supervision of labor frequently found themselves ill-suited to raising cotton. "I don't believe in putting Reverends in places where prompt business men are required," complained Edward Philbrick, a successful superintendent of Boston origins, "Some of them don't get through morning prayers and get about their business until nearly noon, and then depend entirely upon their black drivers for their information in regard to plantation matters."[29]

In the early months of the Sea Island enterprise, before the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, those

[29] Mrs. A. Mansfield French, *Slavery in South Carolina and the Ex-Slaves; or The Port Royal Mission* (New York, 1862), pp. 222-23; Edward Philbrick to [?], December 26, 1862, in Pearson, ed. *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 124; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, pp. 219-22.

who went to work at the "building-up" stage of the abolition movement were obliged to do so in the knowledge that the house of bondage was not quite torn down. As a result, much of the publicity they gave to their efforts centered around the condition of the late slave population: the willingness of the Negroes to work without coercion, their extreme eagerness to learn to read and write, their sympathy with the Union war effort, and their desire to improve their own standard of living. When McKim returned from his extended visit to the islands in June, he addressed a large meeting in Philadelphia, emphasizing all these points, but laying particular stress on the practical economic benefits which would ultimately accrue to Northern manufacturing as a result of emancipation. The discovery that the ten thousand Sea Island Negroes were anxious to buy with their wages such creature comforts as "pots, kettles, pans, brushes, brooms, knives, forks, spoons, soap, candles, combs, Yankee clocks," caused McKim to call special attention to *"the enlarged market for Northern manufactures that will be created by an enlarged area of freedom."* The ten thousand Sea Islanders might not alone influence Northern business interests to an astonishing degree, but the release of four million Southern slaves provided "an overwhelming economical argument" in favor of "pushing this Port Royal experiment to its logical conclusion."[80] Such arguments for emancipation were by no means regarded as cynical, and were freely urged by missionaries who might have preferred to see emancipation come about as a result of higher motives than profit.

The economic arguments presented few complications, but in several important areas of their early publicity the evangels were troubled in these first months by a variant of the problem which had deterred many of

[80] James Miller McKim, *An Address Delivered at Sansom Hall, July 9th, 1862* (Philadelphia, 1862), pp. 21-22.

their antislavery friends from joining them at the outset. How could they maintain on the one side that slavery was an utterly destructive institution, and on the other that its victims were ready to adjust to full freedom in one short step?

Nobody involved in the work at Port Royal advocated gradualism, but the confusion in the missionary accounts shows that they suffered disadvantages in informing the public about the condition in which they found the Negroes. For the first time men and women of their conviction were getting a good close look, unsupervised, at the peculiar institution. Rare was the man who had a kind word to say publicly for the slave housing, which was in general very poor indeed, for the physical condition of the Negroes, which was not good, for the food they were accustomed to eat, which was, except when implemented by their own efforts, inadequate. No missionary approved the primitive way work was done in a land where men were cheaper than machines. Generalizations about family relations, however, and qualities of character such as independence, truthfulness, reliability, were considerably more confused. When a missionary wished to emphasize smartly the debilitating effects of living forever without freedom or responsibility, he might go very far toward presenting a hopeless picture.[31] It was well enough to stress the fact that the slaves of the islands had suffered a harsher regime than almost any other slaves had known, and that their isolation had kept them in exceptionally deep ignorance and superstition. The missionaries needed, however, some

[31] In the interest of emphasizing the economic advantages of emancipation to the North, one missionary came close to portraying the future freedman as a showy spendthrift: "The Colored, in freedom, will not hoard, but spend money. They will dress, and ride, in good style. The table and house, will be secondary, usually. Imagine the brisk trade. . . ." Mrs. A. M. French, *Slavery in South Carolina and the Ex-Slaves; or The Port Royal Mission* (New York, 1862), p. 308.

further argument for freedom in order to resolve the conflict inherent in maintaining the devastating effects of bondage while urging the readiness of its victims to carry on as free men.

The way around the dilemma appeared from a quarter to which Garrisonian abolitionists were infrequently accustomed to look. The "evangels" came to rely upon the prompt and saving effects of the free institutions of the North to raise the slave to real freedom. One young teacher recalled with approval John Adams' maxim that "civil society must be built up on the four corner-stones of the church, the school-house, the militia, and the town-meeting," and declared that any plan for "the great work of the admission of four million negroes to our civil society, and the establishment of their social rights" which did not take these institutions into account would fail.[32] To build a new New England in the South seemed well worth the striving. To gain these ends the missionaries were willing to compromise. They accepted every available assistance from the United States government, which was showing some healthy signs of repentance, but was as yet unshriven from complicity in the "vast national sin," as abolitionists liked to phrase it. The evangels even placed that far from antislavery institution, the army, in the service of the good cause. While still maintaining a stiff criticism of proslavery officers, and the callous impressment of Negro soldiers, the evangels became good recruiters, persuading the colored Islanders that enlistment would be very likely to assure them of their personal liberty, and in the long run help their whole race.[33]

The most exalted role of all, however, was reserved for "the earliest and dearest institution of New England,

[32] [William Channing Gannett and Edward Everett Hale], "The Education of the Freedmen," *North American Review*, 101 (October 1865), 528.

[33] Speech of James A. Strong, in Beaufort, S.C. *Free South*, January 23, 1864; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, pp. 148, 187-88.

the free school. . . ." This was to be the agency which would redeem first the Negro and then the poor whites of the South. The eagerness of colored children to learn, and the hunger of the adults who were "fighting with their letters" so as not to be "made ashamed" by their children, pulled the heartstrings of the Yankee schoolmarm as no other aspect of her work could do.[34] The teachers never missed an opportunity to affirm the equal learning ability of Negro children, and by the time the war was over there were schools on the islands which visitors compared favorably with good Northern schools. Long after other aspects of the freedmen's work lost public appeal, that of education remained attractive to many Northerners. Long after the nonsectarian freedmen's aid organizations had withered away, the interest in freedmen's education which was safely institutionalized in the churches and the American Missionary Association bore fruit in Negro colleges, making an important contribution to the steady increase in able leadership for Southern Negroes.

By all the reasonable standards which might have been applied, the Port Royal Experiment accomplished its purposes. The leaders did exert much influence upon Federal policy, an example was set for the broader Reconstruction, and the freedmen demonstrated beyond question their willing and able response to freedom. Within three years, reported a proud supporter of the movement, the "imbruted slaves" of the islands were living "as orderly communities of freemen. Under a system of elementary instruction improvised for their benefit, blank ignorance has given place to comparative intelligence, chattel slaves have become landed proprietors, black men tilling the soil on their own account. . . ."[35] These things could not have been accom-

[34] From the Annual Report of the Teachers' Committee, in *Freedmen's Record*, April 1865, p. 56.

[35] *Freedmen's Record*, I (May 1865), 81.

plished so swiftly, however, without the assistance of the antislavery men and women who devoted themselves to the "building-up" phase of their movement. It was not their fault that the true lessons of the Experiment were not well understood or followed by the government or by the people of the North.

William Lloyd Garrison had said the movement was "popular." Unfortunately for the Negro and for the nation, the freedmen's movement never became so popular as to justify the Liberator's faintly belittling praise. Had it not been for abolitionists like McKim and strong antislavery men who picked up "the hod and trowel," it is doubtful if "the support of the community at large" would have proved reliable. Real interest in the work of education flared spectacularly for a few short years following the war, but with the exception of church-supported endeavors, it vanished as abruptly as the most brilliant fireworks display will do. Within a decade of the end of the war secular interest was nearly extinct. In early 1862 when the question of freedmen's work had first come up, Garrison had no way of knowing that by 1865 he too would bid farewell to organized abolition, retiring from the Presidency of the American Anti-Slavery Society, on the grounds that "to-day it is popular to be President of the American Anti-Slavery Society."[86] He took up freedmen's aid work!

The tough old veteran recognized that even though the last rotten egg had been thrown at an abolitionist in the North, there was still much antislavery work to be done in the little country hamlets of the South. He undoubtedly knew that many a Yankee "nigger-teacher" enjoyed a local popularity among the whites which was roughly equal to his own back in Boston, in the days when he had denounced the United States Constitution as a compact with hell. Although he became an impor-

[86] John L. Thomas, *The Liberator; William Lloyd Garrison* (Boston, 1963), p. 435.

tant force in the freedmen's movement in the years immediately following the war, Garrison had already missed a chance to lend his name to one of the most interesting social experiments ever undertaken in the country.

No one can say that he was wrong. He had held the "battering-ram" until slavery was overthrown, and then turned promptly to the new work. Entrenched social wrong will always require the services of iconoclasts as well as builders. But posterity may regret that for the American reformer of a hundred years ago the cause of the freedman never equalled the cause of the slave, that the work of "building-up" never commanded an enduring loyalty.