



***CATHARINE  
ESTHER  
BEECHER***

***AN ESSAY  
ON SLAVERY AND  
ABOLITIONISM***

**Catharine Esther Beecher**

# **An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism**

**With reference to the duty of American females**

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# PREFACE

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THE following are the circumstances which occasioned the succeeding pages. A gentleman and a friend, requested the writer to assign reasons why he should not join the Abolition Society. While preparing a reply to this request, Miss GRIMKÉ's Address was presented, and the information communicated, of her intention to visit the North, for the purpose of using her influence among northern ladies to induce them to unite with Abolition Societies. The writer then began a private letter to Miss Grimké as a personal friend. But by the wishes and advice of others, these two efforts were finally combined in the following Essay, to be presented to the public.

The honoured and beloved name which that lady bears, so associated as it is at the South, North, and West, with all that is elegant in a scholar, refined in a gentleman, and elevated in a Christian,—the respectable sect with which she is connected,—the interesting effusions of her pen,—and her own intellectual and moral worth, must secure respect for her opinions and much personal influence. This seems to be a sufficient apology for presenting to the public some considerations in connexion with her name; considerations which may exhibit in another aspect the cause she advocates, and which it may be appropriate to consider. As such, they are respectfully commended to the public, and especially to that portion of it for which they are particularly designed.

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# ESSAY ON SLAVERY AND ABOLITIONISM.

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ADDRESSED TO MISS A. D. GRIMKÉ.

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MY DEAR FRIEND,

Your public address to Christian females at the South has reached me, and I have been urged to aid in circulating it at the North. I have also been informed, that you contemplate a tour, during the ensuing year, for the purpose of exerting your influence to form Abolition Societies among ladies of the non-slave-holding States.

Our acquaintance and friendship give me a claim to your private ear; but there are reasons why it seems more desirable to address you, who now stand before the public as an advocate of Abolition measures, in a more public manner.

The object I have in view, is to present some reasons why it seems unwise and inexpedient for ladies of the non-slave-holding States to unite themselves in Abolition Societies; and thus, at the same time, to exhibit the inexpediency of the course you propose to adopt.

I would first remark, that your public address leads me to infer, that you are not sufficiently informed in regard to the feelings and opinions of Christian females at the North. Your remarks seem to assume, that the *principles* held by Abolitionists on the subject of slavery, are peculiar to them,

and are not generally adopted by those at the North who oppose their *measures*. In this you are not correctly informed. In the sense in which Abolitionists explain the terms they employ, there is little, if any, difference between them and most northern persons. Especially is this true of northern persons of religious principles. I know not where to look for northern Christians, who would deny that every slave-holder is bound to treat his slaves exactly as he would claim that his own children ought to be treated in similar circumstances; that the holding of our fellow men as property, or the withholding any of the rights of freedom, for mere purposes of gain, is a sin, and ought to be immediately abandoned; and that where the laws are such, that a slave-holder cannot *legally* emancipate his slaves, without throwing them into worse bondage, he is bound to use all his influence to alter those laws, and, in the meantime, to treat his slaves, as nearly as he can, *as if* they were free.

I do not suppose there is one person in a thousand, at the North, who would dissent from these principles. They would only differ in the use of terms, and call this the doctrine of *gradual emancipation*, while Abolitionists would call it the doctrine of *immediate emancipation*.

As this is the state of public opinion at the North, there is no necessity for using any influence with northern ladies, in order that they may adopt your *principles* on the subject of slavery; for they hold them in common with yourself, and it would seem unwise, and might prove irritating, to approach them as if they held opposite sentiments.

In regard to the duty of making efforts to bring the people of the Southern States to adopt these principles, and act on them, it is entirely another matter. On this point you would find a large majority opposed to your views. Most persons in the non-slave-holding States have considered the matter of Southern slavery, as one in which they were no more called to interfere, than in the abolition of the press-gang system in England, or the tythe system of Ireland. Public opinion may have been wrong on this point, and yet have been right on all those great principles of rectitude and justice relating to slavery, which Abolitionists claim as their *distinctive* peculiarities.

The distinctive peculiarity of the Abolition Society is this: it is a voluntary association in one section of the country, designed to awaken public sentiment against a moral evil existing in another section of the country, and the principal point of effort seems to be, to enlarge the numbers of this association as a means of influencing public sentiment. The principal object of your proposed tour, I suppose, is to present facts, arguments, and persuasions to influence northern ladies to enrol themselves as members of this association.

I will therefore proceed to present some of the reasons which may be brought against such a measure as the one you would urge.

In the first place, the main principle of action in that society rests wholly on a false deduction from past experience. Experience has shown, that when certain moral evils exist in a community, efforts to awaken public sentiment against such practices, and combinations for the

exercise of personal influence and example, have in various cases tended to rectify these evils. Thus in respect to intemperance;—the collecting of facts, the labours of public lecturers and the distribution of publications, have had much effect in diminishing the evil. So in reference to the slave-trade and slavery in England. The English nation possessed the power of regulating their own trade, and of giving liberty to every slave in their dominions; and yet they were entirely unmindful of their duty on this subject. Clarkson, Wilberforce, and their coadjutors, commenced a system of operations to arouse and influence public sentiment, and they succeeded in securing the suppression of the slave trade, and the gradual abolition of slavery in the English colonies. In both these cases, the effort was to enlighten and direct public sentiment in a community, of which the actors were a portion, in order to lead them to rectify an evil existing among THEMSELVES, which was entirely under their control.

From the success of such efforts, the Abolitionists of this country have drawn inferences, which appear to be not only illogical, but false. Because individuals in *their own* community have aroused their fellow citizens to correct their own evils, therefore they infer that attempts to convince their fellow-citizens of the faults of *another* community will lead that community to forsake their evil practices. An example will more clearly illustrate the case. Suppose two rival cities, which have always been in competition, and always jealous of each other's reputation and prosperity. Certain individuals in one of these cities become convinced, that the sin of intemperance is

destroying their prosperity and domestic happiness. They proceed to collect facts, they arrange statistics, they call public meetings, they form voluntary associations, they use arguments, entreaties and personal example, and by these means they arrest the evil.

Suppose another set of men, in this same community, become convinced that certain practices in trade and business in the rival city, are dishonest, and have an oppressive bearing on certain classes in that city, and are injurious to the interests of general commerce. Suppose also, that these are practices, which, by those who allow them, are considered as honourable and right. Those who are convinced of their immorality, wish to alter the opinions and the practices of the citizens of their rival city, and to do this, they commence the collection of facts, that exhibit the tendencies of these practices and the evils they have engendered. But instead of going among the community in which the evils exist, and endeavouring to convince and persuade them, they proceed to form voluntary associations among their neighbours at home, and spend their time, money and efforts to convince their fellow citizens that the inhabitants of their rival city are guilty of a great sin. They also publish papers and tracts and send out agents, not to the guilty city, but to all the neighbouring towns and villages, to convince them of the sins of the city in their vicinity. And they claim that they shall succeed in making that city break off its sins, by these measures, because other men succeeded in banishing intemperance by labouring among their own friends and fellow citizens. Is not this example exactly parallel with the exertions of the