

**AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT
LENOX, ON THE FIRST OF AUGUST,
1842, THE ANNIVERSARY OF
EMANCIPATION, IN THE BRITISH
WEST INDIES**

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An Address Delivered at Lenox, on the First of August, 1842, the Anniversary of Emancipation,
in the British West Indies by William E. Channing

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WILLIAM E. CHANNING

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IN THE
BRITISH WEST INDIES.
BY WILLIAM E. CHANNING.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

I have been encouraged to publish the following address by the strong expressions of sympathy with which it was received, I do not indeed suppose, that those, who listened to it with interest and who have requested its publication, accorded with me in every opinion which it contains. Such entire agreement is not to be expected among intelligent men, who judge for themselves. But I am sure, that the spirit and substance of the address met a hearty response. Several paragraphs, which I wanted strength to deliver, are now published, and for these of course I am alone responsible.

I dedicate this address to the Men and Women of Berkshire. I have found so much to delight me in the magnificent scenery of this region, in its peaceful and prosperous villages and in the rare intelligence and virtues of the friends whose hospitality I have here enjoyed, that I desire to connect this little work with this spot. I cannot soon forget the beautiful nature and the generous spirits, with which I have been privileged to commune in the Valley of the Housatonick.

Lenox, Mass., Aug. 9, 1842.

A D D R E S S .

This day is the anniversary of one of the great events of modern times, the Emancipation of the Slaves in the British West India islands. This Emancipation began Aug. 1st. 1834, but it was not completed until Aug. 21st. 1838. The event indeed has excited little attention in our country, partly because we are too much absorbed in private interests and local excitements to be alive to the triumphs of humanity at a distance, partly because a moral contagion has spread from the South through the North and deadened our sympathies with the oppressed. But West India emancipation, though received here so coldly, is yet an era in the annals of philanthropy. The greatest events do not always draw most attention at the moment. When the May flower, in the dead of winter, landed a few pilgrims, on the ice-bound, snow-buried rocks of Plymouth, the occurrence made no noise. Nobody took note of it, and yet how much has that landing done to change the face of the civilized world! Our fathers came to establish a pure church; they little thought of revolutionizing nations. The emancipation in the West Indies, whether viewed in itself, or in its immediate results, or in the spirit from which it grew, or in the light of hope which it sheds on the future, deserves to be commemorated. In some respects it stands alone in human history. I therefore invite to it your serious attention.

Perhaps I ought to begin with some apology for my appearance in this place; for I stand here unasked, uninvited. I can plead no earnest solicitation from few or many for the service I now render. I come to you simply from an impulse in my own breast; and in truth had I been solicited, I probably should not have consented to speak. Had I found

here a general desire to celebrate this day, I, should have felt, that another speaker might be enlisted in the cause, and I should have held my peace. But finding that no other voice would be raised, I was impelled to lift up my own, though too feeble for any great exertion. I trust you will accept with candor what I have been obliged to prepare in haste, and what may have little merit but that of pure intention.

I have said that I speak only from the impulse of my own mind. I am the organ of no association, the representative of no feelings but my own. But I wish it to be understood, that I speak from no sudden impulse; from no passionate zeal of a new convert; but from deliberate and long cherished conviction. In truth my attention was directed to Slavery fifty years ago, that is, before most of you were born; and the first impulse came from a venerable man, formerly of great reputation in this part of our country and in all our churches, the Rev. Dr. Hopkins, who removed more than a century ago from Great Barrington to my native town, and there bore open and strong testimony against the Slave Trade, a principal branch of the traffic of the place. I am reminded by the spot where I now stand, of another incident which may show how long I have taken an interest in this subject. More than twenty years ago, I had an earnest conversation with that noble-minded man and fervent philanthropist, Henry Sedgwick, so well and honorably known to most who hear me, on which occasion we deplored the insensibility of the North to the evils of Slavery and enquired by what means it might be removed. The circumstance which particularly gave my mind a direction to this subject, was a winter's residence in a West Indian Island more than eleven years ago. I lived there on a plantation. The piazza in which I sat and walked almost from morning to night, overlooked the negro village belonging to the estate. A few steps placed me in the midst of their huts. Here was a volume on Slavery opened always before my eyes, and how could I help learning some of its lessons. The gang on this estate, (for such is the name given to a company of slaves,) was the best on the island,

and among the best in the West Indies. The proprietor had laboured to collect the best materials for it. His gang had been his pride and boast. The fine proportions, the graceful and sometimes dignified bearing of these people, could hardly be overlooked. Unhappily misfortune had reduced the owner to bankruptcy. The estate had been mortgaged to a stranger who could not personally superintend it, and I found it under the care of a passionate and licentious manager, in whom the poor slaves found a sad contrast to the kindness of former days. They sometimes came to the house where I resided, with their mournful or indignant complaints; but were told that no redress could be found from the hands of their late master. In this case of a plantation passing into strange hands, I saw that the mildest form of slavery might at any time be changed into the worst. On returning to this country I delivered a discourse on Slavery, giving the main views which I have since communicated; and this was done, before the cry of Abolitionism was heard among us. I seem then to have a peculiar warrant for now addressing you. I am giving you not the ebullitions of new vehement feelings, but the results of long and patient reflection; not the thoughts of others, but my own independent judgments. I stand alone, I speak in the name of no party. I have no connection, but that of friendship and respect, with the opposers of Slavery in this country or abroad. Do not mix me up with other men good or bad; but listen to me as a separate witness, standing on my own ground, and desirous to express with all plainness what seems to be the truth.

On this day a few years ago, Eight Hundred Thousand human beings were set free from slavery; and to comprehend the greatness of the deliverance, a few words must first be said of the evil from which they were rescued. You must know Slavery to know Emancipation. But in a single discourse, how can I set before you the wrongs and abominations of this detestable institution? I must pass over many of its features, and will select one, which is at present vividly impressed on my mind. Different minds are impressed with different evils.