

**PROCEEDINGS AT THE PUBLIC  
BREAKFAST HELD IN HONOUR OF  
WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON, ESQ.  
OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, IN ST.  
JAMES'S HALL, LONDON, ON  
SATURDAY, JUNE 29TH, 1867**

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Proceedings at the Public Breakfast Held in Honour of William Lloyd Garrison, Esq. Of Boston, Massachusetts, in St. James's Hall, London, on Saturday, June 29th, 1867 by F. W. Chesson

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**F. W. CHESSON**

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REVISED BY THE SPEAKERS;  
WITH  
AN INTRODUCTION BY F. W. CHESSON,  
AND OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE publication, in a permanent form, of the proceedings of the social meeting at which Mr. Garrison was entertained by his friends in this metropolis needs no justification. Even those who expressed their dissent from the speeches, and sought to detract from the homage which was paid to the great anti-slavery leader, acknowledged "the brilliant" success of the demonstration. The English friends and colleagues of Mr. Garrison—those who had laboured with him, although at a distance, through good report and through evil report—determined that he should receive at their hands a mark of their admiration and respect, which he, and his children after him, would value as one of the crowning honours of his life. How successfully that design was realized is known to every reader of the public press. It was realized both in the number and in the intellectual and moral character of the audience; it was equally realized in the admirable quality of the speeches which were delivered on the occasion. It sometimes happens that a meeting fails to accomplish the objects which its promoters have in view, not from any lack of attention or sympathy on the part of the hearers, but from the inefficiency of the advocates. No one who took

part in the Garrison breakfast need reproach himself on this score. On the contrary, the spoken words which are recorded in these pages will be read with as much pleasure as they were listened to by the assembly which gathered in St. James's Hall. Although the voice, the manner, the presence of the speaker be wanting, these printed words will be found to contain much that is chaste and eloquent in language, elevated in thought, and generous in passion. Eloquence when perverted is a dangerous gift; and the more dangerous because, as in the lamentable case of Daniel Webster, it is impossible to withhold a feeling of admiration for the genius of the orator, even when he is exalting falsehood and oppression. But that oratory which is inspired by a desire to promote the good of mankind, to strike at the roots of tyrannical power, or to set forth the lessons which are taught in the careers of disinterested and heroic men, will have a place in history when the great speeches of unscrupulous orators are forgotten. "Nothing can be lasting that is counterfeit" is a classic apophthegm; and eloquence without the inspiration of truth is a counterfeit which men cease to value as soon as they awake to the deception which has been practised upon them.

The proceedings of the Garrison breakfast did not escape sharp criticism; but it was criticism of a kind that always misses its aim. There always will be differences of opinion, and so long as an opponent manifests a desire to be fair, he is entitled to respect. No one, for example, can reasonably quarrel with the writer who puts the question, "Shall we crown our fanatics?" or, if the interrogator honestly believes that an answer should be returned in the negative, complain



if he endeavours to convince his readers that he is right. This is a subject upon which every man can judge for himself; and, as for the issue, we know that, if the so-called "fanatic" has really earned the laurel wreath, he is sooner or later sure to be crowned, in spite of the protests of worldly-wise logicians. But we have to do with less abstract criticism than this. The *Times* objects that the meeting was a "paean of triumph over a prostrate foe, and over battle-fields covered with slain." If the war with Abyssinia prove successful we shall not find the *Times* employing language of this kind towards those who will then raise exultant shouts over the downfall of Theodorus; and yet the prisoners at Magdala and Debra Tabor do not number twenty souls, while the American war transformed four millions of captives into free men. If it be true that Mr. Garrison and his associates rejoiced in the defeat of the South, it is not the less true that they are wholly free from the imputation of having sought to abolish slavery by the slaughter of armed hosts and the desolation of their country. It was the South that elected to decide the issue by the arbitrament of the sword; and it was not until the Northern abolitionists saw how terribly she was in earnest that they, as good and loyal citizens, also took up the sword. To sympathize with a good cause when it has vanquished its adversaries on the battle-field, which they themselves have chosen for the final contest between light and darkness, certainly does not merit censure, or imply a want of generous feeling. The *Times* should have reserved its rebuke for those who prematurely exulted over the defeat of the Federal armies, and who encouraged the slaveholders, by material aid and moral support, to prosecute a war which could only

end in their destruction. Another surprising statement is also made. We are told that Mr. Garrison did not abolish negro slavery—that, it is said, was the work of General Grant, and of the northern battalions. Cicero makes a fine distinction which meets the case, when he remarks that “Themistocles’ victory was only a service to the commonwealth once, but Solon’s counsel will be so for ever.” Mr. Garrison not only proclaimed a doctrine, but for thirty-five years he was engaged in educating a nation. The sentiment which the New Englanders carried into the war was a sentiment which originated in his breast, and found earliest utterance on his lips. It was he who imparted to loyal statesmen and generals that moral purpose which first armed the blacks; then gave freedom to the slaves in the rebel States; and ultimately emancipated the whole race. Undoubtedly, if Mr. Garrison had never been born, somebody else would have performed the same mission. It is also possible that, if Milton had never lived, some other person might have written either “Paradise Lost” or a poem similar in plan and equally transcendent in genius. But to Mr. Garrison, as to John Milton, belongs the credit of his own personal achievements; and, while it is probable that the fruits of General Grant’s decisive campaign will be more enduring than Themistocles’ victory, this result will be mainly due to the fact that Mr. Garrison’s “counsel” will for all time to come animate the policy of the Republic towards all the races over which she wields the sceptre of dominion.

Another class of critics professes to have made a notable discovery. They allege that the great majority of the ladies and gentlemen who assembled to pay respect to Mr. Garrison

did nothing for the cause of emancipation when their co-operation might have been useful. If this statement were well founded, the cavillers should have remembered that even a tardy homage to a good man or a just principle is not dishonourable, while there is no honour at all in maintaining an ignoble silence after the moral perception has once been quickened. But the allegation is not true. It is scarcely too much to affirm that every individual in the assembly had rendered, each according to his means and opportunities, a substantial service to the now triumphant cause of the negro. There were many who had won deserved renown in the struggle which was fought more than a generation ago in our own colonies; and there was also a far larger representation of those who, during the darkest days of the civil war in America, never faltered in the active expression of their sympathy with the great Republic. But enough has been said on this subject. The names themselves bear eloquent testimony to the fact which has been stated.

There is one class of Mr. Garrison's detractors who have established so peculiar a claim to be remembered, that, in common justice, they cannot be overlooked. To the honour of the religious portion of the press of this country it has, with only one exception, either cordially joined in the tribute to Mr. Garrison or abstained from unfriendly comment. Nothing in the world is easier than to dub a man "an infidel," and yet there was a time when this charge, although made by the authors of the pestilential heresy that slavery is a Divine institution, inflicted on Mr. Garrison a species of moral martyrdom. The pro-slavery church in America, utterly oblivious to its own practical disbelief in the law of