

ANTI-SLAVERY REMINISCENCES

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649017614

Anti-slavery Reminiscences by Elizabeth Buffum Chace

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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ELIZABETH BUFFUM CHACE

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CENTRAL FALLS, N. Y.
E. L. FREEMAN & SON, STATE PRINTERS.
1891.

TO MY
Beloved Son and Daughters,
I DEDICATE THIS RECORD OF A PORTION OF MY LIFE,
IN THE REMEMBRANCE OF WHICH,
AMONG MANY FAILURES AND SHORT-COMINGS,
I NOW, IN THE
EIGHTY-FIFTH YEAR OF MY AGE,
FIND THE MOST ENTIRE SATISFACTION.
AND I HOPE THAT THEY AND THEIR CHILDREN
MAY GATHER THEREFROM
SOME LESSONS OF
ADHERENCE TO PRINCIPLE AND DEVOTION TO DUTY,
AT WHATEVER COST
OF WORLDLY PROSPERITY OR ADVANCEMENT.

ANTI-SLAVERY REMINISCENCES.

MY Anti Slavery reminiscences date back to a very early period in my life. My maternal ancestor, Daniel Gould, came from England, and settled in Newport, Rhode Island, in the year 1637. He became a member of the Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers; and, marrying the daughter of John Coggeshall, the first President of the Aquidneck Colony, who was also a Quaker, the descendants of the two families, for many generations, must have constituted a large portion of the society of Friends there—the first date of the existence of said society, in its original Book of Discipline, being 1675. The town of Newport became a slave market; and I have reason to believe that these Quaker ancestors of mine, in common with other commercial citizens of that seaport, were somewhat implicated in the African

slave trade. But, the spirit of early Quakerism could not wholly sanction this terrible iniquity; and so, as early as 1727 the yearly meeting began to issue advices and remonstrances against it; the first recorded being as follows: "It is the sense of this meeting, that the importation of Negroes from their native country is not a commendable practice, and that practice is censured by this meeting." In 1760 the yearly meeting issued another advice to Friends "to keep their hands clear of this unrighteous gain of oppression," and yet without absolute prohibition. In 1773, "It is recommended to Friends, who have slaves in possession, to treat them with tenderness, impress God's fear in their minds, promote their attending places of religious worship, and give those who are young, at least, so much learning that they may be capable of reading." The same year, they also advise that "the young, and also the aged and impotent, be set free." The last record in the Book of Discipline is dated 1780, and disposes of the matter thus: "Agreed, that no friend import, or any ways purchase, dispose of, or hold mankind as slaves; but, that all those who have been held in a state of slavery, be discharged therefrom; that all those be used well

who are under friends' care, and are not in circumstances, through non-age or incapacity, to minister to their own necessities; and that they give to those who are young, such an education as becomes Christians, and encourage others in a religious and virtuous life." Thus, the New England Yearly Meeting, held in Newport, Rhode Island, abolished slavery among its members, in the year 1780, while it was still legalized by the New England States.

My grandmother, Sarah Gould, was born near the year 1737, and her father, James Coggeshall, soon after her birth, purchased a little African girl, from a slave-ship just come into port, to serve as nursemaid to the child. She remained a slave in the household, until the Friends abolished slavery among themselves in 1780, when, becoming a free woman, she established herself as a cake-maker and confectioner in the town, and lived esteemed and respected to a very old age. In my very infancy, my mother used to tell to my sisters and myself, the story of this girl, Morier, who was stolen from her home and brought up a slave in our great-grandfather's house; and of the strength of her attachment to our grandmother, whom she nursed

in infancy. My mother remembered, as a child, her frequent visits to the homestead, and the affectionate welcome which always greeted her there. But, in all this story, which made a strong impression on our minds, our gentle mother gave us no idea that she thought it was ever right to buy little girls and hold them as slaves, although it was done by her own grandfather; so that we never had any predilections in favor of slavery.

My paternal grandfather, William Buffum, of Smithfield, also a Quaker, was a member of the Rhode Island Society for the gradual abolition of slavery; which was probably organized near the time when slavery was abolished in the State.

When my father, Arnold Buffum, was a child, it was not uncommon for fugitive slaves from New York, to seek refuge in Rhode Island; although the United States Constitution guaranteed to the slaveholder, the right to recapture them in any part of the country. On one occasion, a whole family who had escaped, and been for some months in hiding, came to my grandfather's house. They were established in a farm house near the homestead, and employment was furnished to the father and the older children. In a short time, their place of

refuge was discovered, and one day, the slave-master from New York, accompanied by an officer, came riding up from Providence to arrest them. The neighbors were hastily summoned, and with the household of my grandfather, formed a human barricade, opposed to their entrance through the gates. A smart young colored laborer, who had become attached to one of the fugitive's daughters, brandished a knife before the slave catchers, and threatened to "pudding" them, if they did not depart; and the calm determination, with, perhaps, some wiser threats of the assembled and constantly increasing company of defenders, succeeded in driving them away without their prey; and the family remained without further molestation. In my childhood, my father used to tell us how, as a little boy, he stood between Pedro's knees, and listened to his tales of the sufferings of the slaves, of their capture in Africa, the miseries of the slave-ship, and of his own adventures in the escape with his family; the fond father ending by placing his hand on the curly head of his youngest child, and exclaiming, "And Pedro love Cuffie better than all his chillen, cause he be free born." And so, my father became an abolitionist in his childhood; and his detesta-