

Letter from Wendell Phillips.
 London, June, 1840.

DEAR JONSON:—The World's Convention has ended—or rather there has been no World's Convention, properly so called. We have sat ten days, and had, by the kind hospitality of the English friends, many opportunities of meeting, besides the daily sessions of the Convention. The cordiality and kindness of the friends here has been unbounded. We shall all be ever grateful for the opportunity they have given us of meeting, under such favorable circumstances, with many whose names have been long familiar and dear to us.

The meetings here have many points to distinguish them from the same assemblies at home. For instance, all the morning papers report our proceedings, and there exists no prejudice against being called an abolitionist: on the contrary, men seem to struggle for the honor of being known as such. Among the spectators, we had Lady Byron, (who, by the by, took her seat one day by the side of our friend Remond, and entered quite familiarly into conversation with him.) Mrs. Jamieson, Mrs. Opie, Elizabeth Fry, the Countess of Brunswick, &c. Then among our members and speakers, O'Connell spoke almost every day—Bowring, Campbell, Lushington, Buxton, Sir Eardley Wilmot, Isambert, one of the French Deputies, &c. &c. Brougham excused himself from attending on account of illness. At the public meeting, (anniversary of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society,) in Exeter Hall, which followed the Convention, I noticed at least one colored man mingled in with the audience; and just behind an English Duchess, not six feet from our Royal Chairman, the Duke of Sussex, crowded in among members of Parliament, &c. sat two colored men: yet there were, I do assure you, no symptoms of a mob. Indeed, though Remond stepped from just behind O'Connell, and followed him in a most beautiful and happy speech—much applauded—the audience received it with Christian meekness—not having the fears of a Philadelphia public before their eyes. So much for the colorphobia.

The Convention has taken some steps calculated to tell on the American public. Their resolutions, urging it as a duty incumbent on churches not to hold fellowship with slaveholders, will, I trust, secure the deep attention of every American Christian—especially as we had many of the best known and most influential clergy of England among our members. They were drawn by a committee on which was J. Angell James; spoken to by J. Burnet, a leader of the Dissenters, and most of the clergy present, and assented to even by Dr. Cox.

The opportunity we have had of full communion with the English friends has enabled us to point out the ways in which they may be most useful to the cause in America, by religious and literary influence. We have declared independence, you know, of Queens and Parliaments; but every abolitionist must rejoice that we are still vassals to the genius of the mother country—that the power rests with her Religion and Literature to draw round the conscience of the slaveholder, like the Roman herald of old, a magic circle, and say, 'thence thou shalt not pass till the spell be broken by the shout of emancipated man.' All this we have urged upon them, and they are pledged to use this mighty weapon in our aid. Their Reviews, which float where an anti-slavery tract would be scouted, will come, I trust, bearing healing on their wings.

And now for the other side of the picture.

You will recollect, that the friends were requested to assemble here a few days previous to the opening of the Convention, for the purpose of consultation, &c. Many did so from Ireland and Scotland, as well as the United States, and were surprised to find they received no intimation of any wish for their presence at the meetings of the Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. Though they met us constantly at the tea parties held in the Anti-Slavery Rooms, and were known to be arranging the details of the Convention, still no advice was asked of any one not a member of the Committee. The first order issued was for us to deposit our credentials with their Secretary and receive tickets, without which no one would be admitted into the hall. We did so, thinking it a mere form, and that, of course, the Convention would raise a committee of its own body to inspect credentials and make out a roll. But, it chanced that there were women's names on the Massachusetts list—to them a ticket of membership was refused. A deputation from the Committee waited on us to let us know the determination of that body, which I copy:

'A letter having been read, addressed to the Secretary, dated Boston, 24th April, signed by Francis Jackson, President, and W. L. Garrison, Corresponding Secretary of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, stating that several ladies have been appointed as delegates to the approaching Convention, it was unanimously

Resolved, That the Committee, in the original summons of the Convention, did not contemplate, collectively or individually, the admission of ladies.

That at a subsequent period, in the letter of the 15th of February, extensively circulated on both sides of the Atlantic, the invitation is addressed to gentlemen exclusively.

That the subject having been brought seriously and deliberately before this Committee on the 15th of May, it was unanimously determined that ladies were inadmissible as delegates, and it is now again resolved, without a single dissentient voice, that this opinion be confirmed and respectfully communicated to the parties in question.

W. D. CREWDSON, Chairman.

We told them we could not submit to their determination—that we had come to a Convention which would, of course, settle the qualifications of its own members. They assured us we had mistaken the nature of the meeting. It might have been called 'by a poetical license a World's Convention,' but was in fact only a Conference with the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and, as such, they should settle who were to be admitted as members.

We replied, it would be our duty to bring that question before the Convention. (By 'we' and 'us' I mean the Massachusetts and Pennsylvania delegation. Of the New-York friends, some stood aloof—more joined with the Committee and argued their cause most stoutly.) It was confessed by more than one that letters had been received from America on this point; and they, with other things, were the occasion, no doubt, of those explanatory papers sent to the United States, in which it was insinuated rather than expressed, that membership would be limited to gentlemen. Prof. Adam and myself waited on the Committee, stating our surprise that all having been requested to come early, no one had been invited to sit with the Committee, and protesting against their assumption of power to settle the terms of membership. They heard us very kindly about fifteen minutes. We were then, on the motion of J. Sturge, politely requested to retire and leave them to deliberate on what we had said.

In this state of things, the Convention met—amid earnest requests to us on all sides to avoid outraging English feeling and bringing division into so noble a body. Reverend Divines thought it duty to intercede with us personally, and eminent abolitionists painted in glowing colors the ruin which impended:—all persisted in giving an exclusively English character to the meeting, and interpreting the terms of their invitation by English usages; while we allowed this would be right had we come to an English meeting—but wholly refused to have a World's Convention measured by an English yardstick.

The Convention opened. Clarkson took the Chair, led in by two gentlemen. The feeble old man seemed hardly able to bear the scene. But his mind was clear as when he paused by the way-side and took that resolve which has revolutionized a world. He addressed us most appropriately. The holy and chastened feeling, the expression of deep seriousness, which pervaded the audience during his presence, gave it more the aspect of an abolition gathering with us; for I think there is more clapping and excitement—more notice of distinguished men—more similarity to common meetings for political and other purposes,

and less of devoted seriousness here, than in the anti-slavery assemblies with us.

Had we known then, however, what afterwards came to our knowledge in regard to Clarkson's speech, there had been no feeling in the meeting but the deepest indignation. We have it on his own authority, that after his arrival in London at sunset until 11 P. M., he was waited on by three successive deputations from the London Committee to see the speech which, from fear of excitement from the scene, he had thought prudent to have in writing—and finding that near one third of it related to India, they urged and urged him, till the old man was persuaded to omit it—a proof, this urgency of theirs, of what no member of this Convention will need any evidence, of the hostility which lurks in the London Committee against, I will not say the British India scheme, but at least against its being fairly and fully submitted to the Convention. Yes, the question, which, next to the moral means, brings with it the brightest ray of hope to the slave, was kept sedulously back, and carefully excluded from the place and space which its importance demanded. And this conduct in regard to Thomas Clarkson—this reducing the meeting to pupillage—how deeply insulting, how degrading to the body which has assembled at their call!

After Clarkson left the Chair, the honor was conceded to me by the friends, of moving for a committee on the roll. My motion was so worded as to present the right of the Convention to make up its own roll, and also requiring them to receive all persons delegated. Prof. Adam seconded the motion. We received unexpected support and powerful aid from Bowring and Mr. Ashurst; but, after a stormy debate of several hours, during which we were urged by almost every speaker to withdraw the motion, the vote was taken and carried by nine-tenths against us. Stanton voted with us, though he took no part in the debate. All the members of the British India Committee voted with us, among whom were our staunch and kind friends the Peases. Some of the speakers denied the right of the Convention to meddle with the question who should be members! Others insisted on the exclusion of the women. The amendment, which was passed instead of our original motion, settled only that women should not be members. Yet, while by the very fact of passing such a vote, the Convention impliedly admitted their own right to make up their roll, they never resumed the subject, nor decided the point, but tacitly accepted the roll made for them by the Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.

This was the first great error, if I may use so slight a word: refusing to allow Massachusetts to say by whom she should be represented, and sitting down a mere Conference, under the shadow of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. This last may seem a mere form, but from it, as Lord Clarendon says, 'many and tall branches of mischief did grow.' Some of us took it into deliberation whether we had a right to remain in such a body, none doubting that had its character been previously known, we never should have been sent to such an one. But, seeing it right to enter, in order to bear our testimony, not knowing but that we might make it what it ought to be, and successfully assert the right of all delegates to their seats, we came to the conclusion that it was best, under all the circumstances, to remain.

One little circumstance I will mention, further to illustrate what I consider a prominent fault of the meeting—its timidity. Bradburn was alluding to the manner in which British abolitionists deserted their principles, on our side the Atlantic, when, much, I confess to my surprise, (for not personally knowing them, I had not dreamed they could be members of the Convention,) up started Doctors Hoby and Cox, and demanded to be heard—and up sprung many others deprecating personalities. My first feeling was that I could not be exactly in the right place, finding them on the same platform. Dr. Cox indeed made a frank avowal of a change of opinion, when the church resolutions were under discussion,—stating that he went with them, thought slavery a sin in all cases, &c. Hoby, I suppose, stands about where he did; and the meeting which deprecated discussion for fear of division among such brethren as he, was not the World's Convention which Massachusetts, at least, anticipated.

A day or two after, Garrison, Rogers, and the rest arrived. They refused to enter the Convention, and were permitted almost unnoticed to occupy seats in the gallery, though to be sure the Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society did by letter (in my opinion wholly without authority—what had they to do with our members after the Convention had assembled?) request them to sit with us. They saw it, however, to be duty to decline. As Mr. Garrison's credentials from the American Society had with them two resolutions expressive of that Society's views and feelings in regard to the Convention, I placed them before the Business Committee, desiring to have them read. They refused, alledging that they were technically credentials, and as such, should be submitted to the Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. This I denied; but, to avoid the difficulty, I offered to omit the resolution appointing delegates, and read only the other two. They thought this could not properly be done. I then stated my determination to offer them to the meeting on my individual responsibility. In attempting to do so, (I will not go into detail of circumstances,) I was stopped by what others as well as myself thought an unparliamentary construction of the rules of order,—but, at any rate, a most partial and unequal one, when others were permitted to speak on subjects not before the meeting, and entirely out of technical order, again and again, without interruption. There were several cases in which we thought the rules of order were somewhat construed by the subject expected to be brought forward, and at least they were more strictly enforced on some subjects than others.

The last day of the Convention, Prof. Adam, (who if any one here deserves more praise than another, has stood foremost in a steady, fearless, and clear-sighted course from the first,) Bradburn, Miller, Mott, Lester, Winslow and myself offered a protest against the London Committee assuming to organize the Convention—against the Convention's excluding the women—and against the partial manner in which the rules of order had been enforced.

After the Protest was read, we moved that it be part of the Records. Whereupon, Colver moved, and John Scoble seconded an amendment, 'that it be laid on the table,' which was finally carried by a good majority; thus putting a climax to assumption on one side, and undue submission on the other to the control of a self-constituted Committee, by setting an example, unprecedented, at least in abolition annals, of refusing to receive a protest.

One circumstance I will add. The Anti-Slavery Reporter had called James Mott 'a member of the Society of Friends.' The next number, which contained the official roll and report of our meeting, had this note affixed to his name: 'Erroneously stated in a former number to be a member of the Society of Friends.' They had found out in the interim that he was a 'Hicksite'—and so this bantling of the British and Foreign Association became the organ of the Orthodox-Quaker antipathy, and was made to settle that 'Hicksites' were not Friends, though they were denied the right to decide who were members of their own body.

Indeed, the meeting has been in many respects a failure. It was not conceived in the right spirit, nor carried out with proper freedom. It deserted, in the outset, the broad anti-slavery platform. It shrunk, at every step, from that fearlessness of decision, and disregard of men, when in the way of principles, which had hitherto marked the cause. The friends here,—with all respect I say it,—have come heartily up to anti-slavery truth; but that being somewhat popular, has not called them to stem the tide—to shock old prejudices—to disregard long established customs—to care nothing for division, when it is only severing chaff from wheat. This has not been necessary for

the last twenty years, and now they shrink from unfinching adherence to principles which run counter to received habits. They have little of that spirit which parson Taylor describes as 'hewing to the line, though the chips fly in our faces.' They are not ready for unpopular reform. They will now, I think, take sides in our disputes, which, when I was in London before, and now, also, I have observed a hesitation in doing; and they will take sides, most of them, with the new organization. I except the Scottish and the Irish Friends. However Erin may be oppressed, her sons carry fearless hearts and free tongues; and Scotland beats yet with all the zeal and true-heartedness, which we have all along given in our thoughts to the land of Clarkson and Wilberforce. As in old covenanting times, the fire which has gone out here in this generation, burns still among her hills.

Massachusetts, indeed, would have been surprised at the aspect of an anti-slavery meeting, which thundered its plaudits when O'Connell or Campbell entered or retired, but hushed down every allusion to our Clarkson, while he sat unnoticed in the gallery; and received with faint, cold cheers, every expression, (and they were frequent,) which Americans poured out of gratitude to Thompson. And you will hardly believe me when I say, that abolitionists could meet in Exeter Hall to hear of American slavery, and place on their list of speakers the names of Stanton and Birney, and forget that man sitting silent beside them, to whom it was owing that Birney and Stanton, as abolitionists, had a being—indeed that there was any thing like American abolition at all. Garrison was not asked to speak in Exeter Hall. One who sat by me was reproved for calling for him. Do you want any other index of its abolitionism? I was almost startled to hear Stanton announced there as Secretary of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. We had been battling for a fortnight with the domineering, exclusive, narrow spirit of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and in spite of myself, my mind could not but associate them together. Further thought only strengthens the resemblance.

How utterly outrageous the transfer of the Emancipator! For such an act men deserve to forfeit all the confidence of their anti-slavery brethren. Their conduct before I left might claim, perhaps, with some, the doubtful merit of being equivocal; so that honest minds might differ in their judgment of it, though my own was clear; but the last utter breach of faith—mere swindling—using power where they knew they had no right—plainly outgiving the purpose for which they were appointed—deserves to bankrupt their character as abolitionists. Had I been with you, though, I might see it to be only of a piece with all the rest. I am glad the cause is rid of such men; if we cannot go on without them, let us sink honorably together, with the right to say, as Francis did—'We have lost all but our honor.'

In conclusion, remember us to all with you, whom we are with in heart. Circumstances, we think, make it our duty to remain on this side the water another winter. I assure you it is with deep regret we make up our minds to do so. You will believe us when we say, we had rather be with you, and enjoy the privilege of sharing your labors, relieving you and friend Collins of something of that burden—or trying to, at least—which you have borne up so nobly amid desertion and treachery. Yours, affectionately,

WENDELL PHILLIPS.