



Black Life, History,  
and Culture

---

The Anti-Slavery Movement Prior to the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade (1641-1808)

Author(s): Lorenzo Dow Turner

Source: *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Oct., 1929), pp. 373-402

Published by: [Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Inc.](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2714190)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2714190>

Accessed: 20/08/2011 13:33

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Negro History*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## CHAPTER I

# THE ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT PRIOR TO THE ABOLITION OF THE AFRICAN SLAVE-TRADE (1641-1808)

### I. MORAL AND RELIGIOUS ARGUMENTS

#### *A. The Puritans and the Quakers*

Prior to January 1, 1808, when the Slave-Trade Act prohibiting the importation of slaves into the United States became effective, opposition to slavery as recorded in the literature of America was based most often upon moral and religious grounds. It appeared first in the writings of the Puritans and the Quakers.

The majority of the Puritans who showed interest in the welfare of the slave were concerned primarily with his moral and religious instruction. Consequently, seeing in slavery a hindrance to this instruction, they opposed slavery. Few of them, however, appear to have foreseen any very serious consequences that might result from the continuance of such a system, and none of them effected any permanent plan for abolishing it.<sup>1</sup> John Eliot, one of the authors of the *Bay*

<sup>1</sup> Between 1641 and 1652 statutes were enacted by the Puritans to limit Negro slavery in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, but they were not long enforced. See A. B. Hart, *Slavery and Abolition*, pp. 50-51. The Massachusetts "Body of Liberties" (1641), compiled chiefly by Nathaniel Ward, contained a provision to the effect that there should "never be any bond slaverie, villinage or captivitie amongst us unles it be lawful captives taken in just warres, and such strangers as willingly selle themselves or are sold to us." See *Old South Leaflets*, VII, 273. An attempt was made to enforce this regulation, for in 1646 the General Court ordered that certain Negroes unlawfully brought from Africa be returned at the charge of the country, and that a letter be sent with them expressing the indignation of the Court. See *Records of the Massachusetts Bay Colony*, II, 168. In 1652 a statute was enacted in Rhode Island limiting the period during which Negroes might be held in slavery. The commissioners of Providence and Warwick ordered that no man, black or white, should be forced "to serve any man or his assignnes longer than ten yeares, or untill they come to bee twentie, from the time of their cominge within the liberties of this Collonie. . . . And that man that will not let them goe free, or shall sell them away elsewhere, to that end that they may bee enslaved to others for a long time, hee or they shall forfeit to the Collonie forty pounds." See *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island*, I, 243. By the beginning of the eighteenth century,

*Psalm Book*, lamented the fact that the Negroes were used as if they were horses or oxen, and considered it a prodigy "that any wearing the name of Christians, should so much have the heart of Devils in them, as to prevent and hinder the Instructions of the poor Blackamoors, and confine the Souls of their miserable Slaves to a destroying ignorance, meerly for fear of thereby loosing the benefit of their Vassalage."<sup>2</sup> He offered to meet the slaves once a week for instruction, but he did not live to make much progress in the undertaking.<sup>2</sup> Cotton Mather's views on slavery were practically the same as Eliot's. In 1706 he wrote an essay entitled "The Negro Christianized," a copy of which was to be placed in every family of New England owning a Negro; and many copies were to be sent to the West Indies.<sup>3</sup> Four years later, in an essay entitled "On Doing Good in our Domestic Relations," he expressed the belief that God had brought the Negroes to America for a good purpose:

"What if they should be the elect of God, fetched from Africa and the Indies that, by means of their situation, they may be brought home to the Shepherd of Souls?"<sup>4</sup>

He said that the Americans could not pretend to Christianity until they did more to Christianize their slaves; and he hoped that an act might be obtained from the British Parliament for the Christianizing of the slaves in the plantations. Yet, in the meantime, the slave-trade, said he, was a spectacle that shocked humanity:

"The harmless natives basely they trepan,  
And barter baubles for the souls of men;  
The wretches they to Christian climes bring o'er,  
To serve worse heathens than they did before."<sup>5</sup>

A better example from the Puritans of the moral and religious argument and the first really significant one in the

---

however, this law was no longer enforced.—DuBois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Mather, *The Life and Death of the Renown'd Mr. John Eliot*, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> *Diary of Cotton Mather*, in *Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll.*, 7th Ser., VII, Part I, 565.

<sup>4</sup> Mather, *Essays to Do Good*, p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

history of the anti-slavery movement in America was Judge Samuel Sewall's pamphlet "The Selling of Joseph," published June 24, 1700. Sewall had long intended to write something against the slave-trade. A visit from a friend who showed him a petition he intended to present to the General Court for the freeing of a Negro and his wife unjustly held in bondage was said to be in part the occasion of his writing "The Selling of Joseph." Here his opposition to slavery was considerably in advance of any that had appeared previously in American literature. He referred to temptations that confronted masters "to connive at the Fornication of their Slaves; lest they should be obliged to find them Wives or pay their Fines," and said it was "most lamentable to think, how in taking Negroes out of Africa, and selling them here, That which God has joynd together men do boldly rend asunder; Men from their Country, Husbands from their Wives, Parents from their children."<sup>6</sup> He answered most of the pro-slavery arguments based upon passages from the Scriptures; and in reply to the argument that the opportunity which the Negro in America had of becoming a Christian justified his being brought from Africa, he said that evil must not be done in order that good might result from it.<sup>7</sup> In 1705 he made inquiry of the Athenian Society "Whether trading for Negroes, i.e., carrying them out of their own country into perpetual slavery, be in itself unlawful, and especially contrary to the great Law of Christianity."<sup>8</sup> Sewall's moral and religious argument anticipated that of the latter eighteenth century writers, for it called attention to the detrimental effect of slavery upon the master as well as upon the slave.

The anti-slavery arguments of the Quakers during this period were also based most often upon moral and religious grounds, but they revealed a more democratic spirit than those of the Puritans, for they embodied the doctrine of

<sup>6</sup> Sewall, "The Selling of Joseph," in *Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll.*, 5th Ser., VI, 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>8</sup> "Letter-Book of Samuel Sewall," in *Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll.*, 6th Ser., I, 322.

human brotherhood and frequently contained definite plans for the emancipation of the slaves.<sup>9</sup> The often cited John Woolman (1720-1772) was by no means the earliest of the Quakers in America who opposed slavery. In 1688 German Quakers in Germantown, Pennsylvania, issued a protest against slavery.<sup>10</sup> The work of George Keith, John Hepburn, Ralph Sandiford, Benjamin Lay, and others antedates Woolman's and that of Anthony Benezet exerted a greater influence upon the general anti-slavery movement in America than his;<sup>11</sup> but Woolman was the most important of the Quakers who won a place in the American literature of this period. As a traveling preacher he spent the greater part of his life in advocating the cause of the poor and oppressed. This humanitarian spirit was manifested throughout his works, yet there was no bitterness shown toward his opponents. In his twenty-third year while employed at Mount Holly, New Jersey, he was asked by his employer, who had sold a slave, to write a bill of sale. The request was sudden and came from one who employed him by the year; consequently, he wrote it, but told his employer that he believed "slave-keeping to be a practice inconsistent with the Christian religion."<sup>12</sup> He afterwards refused to comply with similar requests. In "Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes" (1754), he said that all nations were of one blood:

"To consider mankind otherwise than brethren, to think favours are peculiar to one nation, and exclude others, plainly supposes a darkness in the understanding: for as God's love is universal, so where the mind is sufficiently influenced by it, it begets a likeness of itself, and the heart is enlarged towards all men."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See below, p. 396.

<sup>10</sup> See Hart, *American History Told by Contemporaries*, II, 291-293.

<sup>11</sup> For an account of the activities of the Quakers in the anti-slavery movement in America during this period, see Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade* (1808), I, 108-156. For an excellent account of Benezet, see also C. G. Woodson, "Anthony Benezet," in the *Journal of Negro History*, II, 37-50.

<sup>12</sup> "The Life and Travels of John Woolman," in *Works*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>13</sup> Woolman, "Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes," in *Works*, pp. 258-260.

Masters, he contended, were not competent to be the owners of men, for the human mind was not naturally fortified with that firmness in wisdom and goodness necessary to an independent ruler. Furthermore,

“Placing on men the ignominious title slave . . . tends gradually to fix a notion in the mind, that they are a sort of people below us in nature, and leads us to consider them as such in all our conclusions about them.”<sup>14</sup>

Woolman could conceive of the enslavement of persons guilty of such crimes as would unfit them to be at liberty; yet the children of such persons, he thought, ought not to be enslaved because their parents sinned.<sup>15</sup> With such arguments he attacked the evils of slavery without antagonizing the slaveholder or losing the respect and sympathy of any of his contemporaries. He told the slaveholder that his wicked speculations in human lives should be stopped, and he was received hospitably by him. He persuaded many of his own group, the Friends, to desist from holding slaves, even though to do so was detrimental to their own interests. The success of the emancipation movement among the Quakers who in the Middle and Northern States had freed practically all of their slaves before the close of the Revolutionary War, is said to have been due very largely to his influence.<sup>16</sup>

### *B. Latter Eighteenth Century Writers*

Like the Puritans and the Quakers, writers of the latter eighteenth century made frequent use of the moral and religious argument, but they were more severe in their condemnation of slavery and dwelt more at length upon its demoralizing effect upon the slaveholder and the slave.

By this time, because of the growing complexity of the slave problem due to the rapid increase in the number of slaves, the question of the effect of slavery upon the morals of the master and the slave was one of graver concern to

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 296-297.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>16</sup> Locke, *Anti-Slavery in America, 1619-1808*, pp. 30-36.

anti-slavery writers than in the colonial period, and accordingly received more detailed treatment. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, issued at Paris in 1784 and at Philadelphia in 1788, Thomas Jefferson spoke of the commerce between master and slave as a "perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other."<sup>17</sup> He lamented the fact that the children of masters saw this and learned to imitate it. "The man must be a prodigy," said he, "who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances. . . . Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever!"<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Franklin, Sarah Wentworth Morton, and Timothy Dwight were also greatly alarmed over these conditions. In "An Address to the Public; from the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes unlawfully held in Bondage" (1789), Franklin said that slavery was such an "atrocious debasement of human nature" that its very extirpation, if not performed with solicitous care, might open a source of serious evils, for

"The unhappy man, who has long been treated as a brute animal, too frequently sinks beneath the common standard of the human species. The galling chains, that bind his body, do also fetter his intellectual faculties, and impair the social affections of his heart . . . reason and conscience have but little influence over his conduct, because he is chiefly governed by the passion of fear."<sup>18</sup>

In Mrs. Morton's novel entitled *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), one of the characters (Harrington) noticed on his tour through the United States that those inhabitants "accustomed to a habit of domineering over their slaves" were "haughtier, more tenacious of honour," and more aristocratic in temper<sup>19</sup> than those where slavery did not exist; but he anticipated the happy time when the sighs of the slave should "no longer expire in the air of freedom."<sup>20</sup> Probably

<sup>17</sup> Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, pp. 172-174.

<sup>18</sup> Franklin, *Works*, ed. Sparks, II, 515-516.

<sup>19</sup> Morton, *The Power of Sympathy*, II, 74.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

the most bitter attack upon slavery on moral grounds to be found in the poetry of the period was made by Timothy Dwight in *Greenfield Hill* (1794), in which he stressed the immoral effect of slavery upon the African youth, who

“Thus, shut from honour’s path . . . turns to shame,  
And filches the small good, he cannot claim.  
To sour, and stupid, sinks his active mind;  
Finds joy in drink, he cannot elsewhere find;

. . . . .  
Sees from himself his sole redress must flow,  
And makes revenge the balsam of his woe.

“Thus slavery’s blast bids sense and virtue die;  
Thus lower’d to dust the sons of Afric lie.

. . . . .  
“O thou chief curse, since curses here began;  
First guilt, first woe, first infamy of man;  
Thou spot of hell, deep smirch’d on human kind,  
The uncur’d gangrene of the reasoning mind;  
Alike in church, in state, and household all,  
Supreme memorial of the world’s dread fall;  
O slavery! laurel of the infernal mind,  
Proud Satan’s triumph over lost mankind!”<sup>21</sup>

The literature of this period contained also a great many anti-slavery arguments based upon religious grounds. Many of these were replies to the argument that slavery was not forbidden in the Scriptures; some pointed to the teachings of Christ as the strongest possible argument against slavery;<sup>22</sup> and others were directed definitely toward the religion of the slaveholders. Thomas Paine, in 1775, said that Africans would be filled with abhorrence of Christians and be led to think that the Christian religion would make them more inhuman savages if they embraced it.<sup>23</sup> In a novel by Mrs. Susanna Rowson, called *The Inquisitor; or, Invisible Rambler* (1794), the leading character possessed a ring which, when on his finger, rendered him invisible, so that he could visit at will habitations of vice and luxury and give aid and

<sup>21</sup> Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>22</sup> Rush, *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America upon Slave-Keeping* (pub. 1773), pp. 2-3.

<sup>23</sup> Paine, “African Slavery in America,” in *Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Conway, I, 6, 7.



protection to persons in distress. Among those for whom he had great sympathy was the slave. After describing a scene in Africa where a native was stolen by the European slave-trader, he followed the enslaved African to the West Indies; saw him in his suffering there until age, sickness, and bitter grief were his only companions. The slave died, and was thrown into a grave "without one tear of effecton or regret being shed upon his bier." But his soul, said the narrator, "shall appear white and spotless at the throne of Grace, to confound the man who called himself a Christian, and yet betrayed a fellow-creature into bondage."<sup>24</sup>

An effective attack upon the religion of the slaveholder, extremely ironical in method and apparently in imitation of Swift's "A Modest Proposal," was John Trumbull's eighth essay in "The Correspondent," published in the *Connecticut Journal and New Haven Post-Boy* on July 6, 1770.<sup>25</sup> Trumbull began by saying that since the whole world was the property of the righteous, the Africans, being infidels and heretics, might rightly be considered lawful plunder. He spoke of the boundless charity and benevolence of the Americans who, with no other end in view than to bring "those poor creatures" within hearing of the gospel, spared no expense of time or money, and endured the greatest fatigues of body and trouble of conscience in carrying on this "pious design"; and asked if the Africans were not, therefore, bound by the ties of gratitude to devote their whole lives to the service of their enslavers as the only reward that could be adequate to such superabundant charity. He was aware that some persons doubted whether the sole purpose of Americans in enslaving Africans was to teach them the principles of Christianity, but he was able to prove that this was their purpose by the many instances of learned, pious Negroes; for, said he:

"I myself have heard of no less than three, who know half the letters of the alphabet, and have made considerable advances

<sup>24</sup> Rowson, *The Inquisitor; or, Invisible Rambler*, p. 90.

<sup>25</sup> See Documents, pp. 493 ff., for a reprint of the entire essay.

in the Lord's prayer and catechism. In general, I confess they are scarcely so learned; which deficiency we do not charge to the fault of any one, but have the good nature to attribute it merely to their natural stupidity, and dullness of intellect."<sup>26</sup>

He called attention to many other nations in the world whom Americans had equal right to enslave, and who stood in as much need of Christianity as the Africans, and suggested, in particular, that the Turks and Papists should thus be transformed into Christians:

"I propose at first and by way of trial, in this laudable scheme, that two vessels be sent, one to Rome, and the other to Constantinople, to fetch off the Pope and the Grand Signior; I make no doubt but the public, convinced of the legality of the thing, and filled to the brim with the charitable design of enslaving infidels, will readily engage in such an enterprise. For my part, would my circumstances permit, I would be ready to lead in the adventure, and should promise myself certain success, with the assistance of a select company of seamen concerned in the African trade. But at present, I can only show my zeal, by promising when the affair is concluded and the captives brought ashore, to set apart several hours in every day, when their masters can spare them, for instructing the Pope in his creed, and teaching the Grand Signior to say his catechism."<sup>26</sup>

## II. ARGUMENTS BASED UPON NATURAL AND INALIENABLE RIGHTS

In American literature as early as 1700 the theory that all men were born free and had equal rights was used in reference to the African slave.<sup>27</sup> Samuel Sewall contended that "all Men, as they are the Sons of Adam, are Coheirs, and have equal Right unto Liberty, and all other outward Comforts of Life"; that Joseph was "rightfully no more a Slave to his Brethren, than they were to him"; and that they had "no more Authority to *Sell* him, than they had to *Slay* him."<sup>28</sup> It was not until the latter part of the eighteenth

<sup>26</sup> Trumbull, "The Correspondent, No. 8," in the *Connecticut Journal and New Haven Post-Boy*, July 6, 1770.

<sup>27</sup> For an account of the beginnings of this doctrine among English-speaking peoples in the seventeenth century and of the extent to which the writings of John Locke influenced eighteenth century authors, including Americans, in their use of it, see Charles A. Beard, *The Economic Basis of Politics*, pp. 82-85; Harold J. Laski, *Political Thought in England from Locke to Bentham*, pp. 29-76; and D. G. Ritchie, *Natural Rights*, pp. 3-19.

<sup>28</sup> Sewall, "The Selling of Joseph," in the *Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll.*, 5th Ser., VI, 16-17.

century, however, that opposition to slavery based upon the theory of the natural and inalienable rights of man found fullest expression in American literature. During the period of the American Revolution, when all loyal Americans were asserting their own rights against the claims of England, this doctrine became a convenient means of advancing the cause of freedom generally. The more liberal-minded writers applied it without distinction as to race or condition; whereas others allowed considerations of expediency to determine the nature and extent of their defense and practical application of the theory.<sup>29</sup> In 1764 James Otis contended that by the law of nature all men, whether white or black, were born free; and inquired whether any logical inference in favor of slavery could be drawn from a flat nose and a long or short face.<sup>30</sup> Thomas Paine, in 1775, argued that inasmuch as the Africans were not convicted of forfeiting freedom, they had a "natural, perfect right to it"; and he entreated the Americans to consider with what "consistency or decency" they complained so loudly of attempts to enslave them, while they held so many hundred thousands in slavery and annually enslaved more "without any pretence of authority, or claim upon them."<sup>31</sup> Again, in 1807, in William Dunlap's play entitled *The Father of an Only Child*,<sup>32</sup> this

<sup>29</sup> Patrick Henry, for instance, thought it was amazing that at a time when the rights of humanity were defined with precision, in a country above all others fond of liberty, there should be so many men (including himself) holding slaves. "I am drawn along," said he, "by the general inconvenience of living without them. I will not, I cannot justify it. However culpable my conduct, I will so far pay my devoir to virtue, as to own the excellence and rectitude of her precepts, and to lament my own want of conformity to them."—"Letter of Patrick Henry of Virginia, to Robert Pleasants, of the Society of Friends" (1773), in L. M. Child, *The Evils of Slavery and the Cure of Slavery*, p. 3. Thomas Jefferson also advanced the theory of natural rights, but remained an owner of slaves until his death. In 1785, however, he gloried in the fact that in Virginia young men were coming into office who had "sucked in the principles of liberty, as it were, with their mother's milk," and said that it was to them that he looked with anxiety to turn the fate of slavery. See Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. Washington, I, 377.

<sup>30</sup> Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> Paine, *Writings*, ed. Conway, I, 6, 7.

<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that the anti-slavery speech here concerning the hero did

kind of sentiment found expression in a description of Colonel Campbell, the hero, who, on his estate in Virginia, said one of the characters, "liberated all those unhappy Africans, who had been doomed by his predecessors to a hopeless life of slavery. He not only liberated, but protected, and placed them in the way, and with the means, of becoming useful to themselves and to others. 'No,' said my gallant colonel, 'it never shall be said that I shed the blood of my English brethren for a theoretic principle, which I violate myself in practice.'"<sup>33</sup> But the strongest of these arguments based upon the theory of the natural rights of man was made by Joel Barlow in *The Columbiad* (1807).<sup>34</sup> After dwelling somewhat at length upon the peace America enjoyed as a result of her "victories, virtues, wisdom, weal," the author had Atlas, the guardian of "old Afric's clime," inquire of his brother Hesper, guardian of the Western Continent, why the African tribes were enslaved. He censured Hesper's proud sons for preaching faith, justice, liberty, and the rights of man, without practicing these virtues, and urged that the rights of man be asserted:

"Prove plain and clear how nature's hand of old  
 Cast all men equal in her human mould!  
 Their fibres, feelings, reasoning powers the same,  
 Like wants await them, like desires inflame.  
 . . . . .  
 Equality of Right is nature's plan;  
 And following nature is the march of man.  
 Whene'er he deviates in the least degree,  
 When, free himself, he would be more than free,  
 The baseless column, rear'd to bear his bust,  
 Falls as he mounts, and whelms him in the dust."<sup>35</sup>

Many minor writers of the latter eighteenth century were also ardent advocates of this theory. Much in the manner of the authors already discussed, but with less effectiveness,

---

not appear in the earliest edition of this play, called *The Father, or American Shandyism* (1789).

<sup>33</sup> Dunlap, *The Father of an Only Child*, p. 44.

<sup>34</sup> The first edition of this poem, entitled *The Vision of Columbus* (1787), did not contain this appeal for the slave.

<sup>35</sup> Barlow, *The Columbiad* (ed. 1809), Book VIII, pp. 258-264.

they called attention to the inconsistency between the love of liberty which prevailed in America and the practice on the part of many persons of enslaving the African,<sup>36</sup> and contended that the quality of his hair, the color of his skin, and the uncultivated state in which he lived were not sufficient warrant for his being made a slave.<sup>37</sup> George Buchanan argued that God created men after his own image and granted them liberty and independence, and that if varieties were found in their "structure and colour," these were to be attributed to the nature of their diet and habits and to the soil and climate of the land they inhabited, and served as "flimsy pretexts" for enslaving them.<sup>38</sup> Using the same argument that Thomas Paine had used in 1775, Enos Hitchcock in 1790 and Jonathan Edwards<sup>39</sup> in 1791 contended that Americans had no right to deprive the Africans either of their liberty or of their lives, for, neither had God given them this right nor had the Africans by their own voluntary conduct forfeited their liberty or their lives.<sup>40</sup> In 1791 also Benjamin Banneker, the Negro astronomer, sent to Thomas Jefferson a copy of his Almanac, in which was enclosed a letter entitled "An Appeal on Behalf of the African Race." Here, after calling Jefferson's attention to the doctrine that "all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," he asked how Jefferson could detain "by fraud and violence" so many Negroes "under groaning captivity and cruel oppression"

<sup>36</sup> Othello, "Essay on Negro Slavery" (1788), in the *American Museum*, IV, 414-415.

<sup>37</sup> Enos Hitchcock, *Memoirs of the Bloomgrove Family* (pub. 1790), II, 233-235.

<sup>38</sup> Buchanan, "An Oration upon the Moral and Political Evil of Slavery" (1791), p. 7, in W. F. Poole, *Anti-Slavery Opinions Before the Year 1800*.

<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Edwards was born in 1745 and died in 1801. He should not be confused with the author of *The Freedom of the Will*, who died in 1758.

<sup>40</sup> Hitchcock, *op. cit.*, 240; Edwards, *The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave-Trade*, p. 5.

and be found guilty of "that most criminal act" which he himself professedly detested in others.<sup>41</sup>

More in the spirit of defiance than Banneker, Hitchcock, Buchanan, or Edwards, the author of an anonymous poem entitled *The American in Algiers, or the Patriot of Seventy-Six in Captivity* (1797), asserted that the unmerited wrongs of the slave would proclaim with shame America's "boasted rights, and prove them but a name."<sup>42</sup> Then addressing the Fathers of the American republic, inquiring whence they obtained the right to enslave Africans, he related his own sufferings at the hands of slave owners and concluded the passage with the following impassioned lines :

"Eternal God! and is this freedom's land,  
Where whip is law, and mis'ries' wings expand?  
Are these the men who spurn'd despotic pow'r?  
And drench'd their swords in haughty Albion's gore?  
Freedom, avaunt! your sweets I'll never crave,  
If this is Liberty, oh! let me be a slave."<sup>43</sup>

### III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ARGUMENTS

The institution of slavery touched life in so many different ways that early in the literature of America there appeared a great variety of arguments against its continuance. During the eighteenth century the abolition of slavery was regarded by many writers as a social and economic necessity.<sup>44</sup> One condition that disturbed them was the high cost

<sup>41</sup> Banneker, "An Appeal on Behalf of the African Race," in *The Negro's Friend*, No. 17, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *The American in Algiers*, p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>44</sup> As early as 1624, five years after slavery was introduced into Virginia, opposition to American slavery on social and economic grounds was made in Sweden by William Usselinx, a native of Antwerp. In a proposition to King Gustavus Adolphus for the establishment of the Swedish Trading Company, Usselinx urged that slaves be not introduced into the Swedish colonies, "because they cost much, work reluctantly, require nothing from mechanics, as they go almost without clothes, and through ill-treatment soon die"; whereas the people from different parts of Europe, being free, intelligent, and industrious, have wives and children and require all kinds of merchandise and mechanics.—J. J. Mickley, "Some Account of William Usselinx and Peter Minuit," in *Hist. and Biog. Papers of the Del. Hist. Soc.*, I, No. III, 10-11.

of slave labor. Slave labor, they said, made slaves unwilling workmen.<sup>45</sup> The slaves had no inducement to be industrious, because they had no prospect of being other than slaves during life.<sup>46</sup> Free labor, on the other hand, was a stimulus to industry and made workmen careful of their apparel and their instruments of husbandry.<sup>47</sup> The argument that America might compete with Great Britain in cheapness of manufactures Franklin considered untenable. In 1751 he said:

“Interest of money is in the colonies from six to ten per cent. Slaves, one with another, cost thirty pounds sterling per head. Reckon then the interest of the first purchase of a slave, the insurance or risk on his life, his clothing and diet, expenses in his sickness and loss of time, loss by his neglect of business, . . . expense of a driver to keep him at work, and his pilfering from time to time, . . . and compare the whole amount with the wages of a manufacturer of iron or wool in England, you will see that labor is much cheaper there than it ever can be by negroes here.”<sup>48</sup>

Slave labor also worked a hardship upon the white people. It made them “proud and disdainful of work,”<sup>49</sup> because they feared that to do the work commonly assigned to slaves would “make them look like slaves.”<sup>50</sup> Franklin contended that the importation of Negroes deprived the poor whites of employment, while a few families acquired enormous wealth, which they spent on foreign luxuries and in educating their children in the habit of those luxuries; consequently, the same income was needed for the support of one that might maintain one hundred.<sup>51</sup> Thomas Jefferson was

<sup>45</sup> Sewall, “The Selling of Joseph” (1700), in the *Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll.*, 5th Ser., VI, 17; Jonathan Boucher, *A View of the Causes and Consequences of the American Revolution* (1797), pp. 38-39.

<sup>46</sup> Woolman, *Works* (ed. 1774), p. 58.

<sup>47</sup> Buchanan, “An Oration upon the Moral and Political Evil of Slavery” (1791), p. 16, in W. F. Poole, *Anti-Slavery Opinions Before the Year 1800*.

<sup>48</sup> Franklin, “Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind and the Peopling of Countries,” in *Works*, ed. Bigelow, II, 227.

<sup>49</sup> Byrd, “Letter to General Oglethorpe” (1736). See *Writings of Colonel William Byrd*, ed. Bassett, p. lxxxv.

<sup>50</sup> Byrd, “Letter to Lord Egmont” (1736), in the *American Historical Review*, I, 89.

<sup>51</sup> Franklin, *op. cit.*, 228-229.

convinced that in a warm climate no man would labor for himself who could make another labor for him. "This is so true," said he, "that of the proprietors of slaves a very small proportion indeed are ever seen to labour. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God?"<sup>52</sup> Thomas Branagan, in 1805, said that in the South, where one citizen by "fraud or force" had gained the sovereignty over a thousand slaves and sent his "imperial commands over as many acres of land," fifty poor whites were in low circumstances; the consequence being that a few of the citizens were furnished with the means of corruption and the many were put into such a condition that they could not avoid being corrupted.<sup>53</sup>

Some attention was also given by these early anti-slavery writers to the question of the effect of slavery upon the growth of population. Franklin said that the birth rate among slave-holders and slaves was small, because the former, not laboring were enfeebled, and, therefore, not so generally prolific; whereas the latter, overworked and ill-fed, were soon broken in health, the result being that there were more deaths among them than births.<sup>54</sup> Gilbert Imlay, in 1793, attributed to slavery the tardiness with which the population of the South increased, and suggested, as a means of improving the economic status of the South, that the slaves be attached to the land of their respective masters for a certain number of years as tenants. Afterwards they should be at liberty to change their positions as their circumstances or pleasure might direct. This method, he said, would benefit the slaves by enabling them to educate their children and acquire property. It would also be of great advantage to the state, especially a state like Virginia, where, as a result of the parcelling out of immense waste

<sup>52</sup> Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, p. 173.

<sup>53</sup> Branagan, *Avenia*, Notes (ed. 1810), p. 125.

<sup>54</sup> Franklin, *op. cit.*, 234.



tracts of land into little farms, the low country, which had been impoverished by the "pernicious cultivation of tobacco, would become fertilized, and restored to its pristine fecundity."<sup>56</sup>

Though not greatly elaborated upon at this time, nor used with great frequency, these social and economic arguments at least suggested the character which this kind of opposition was to assume in the periods to follow; for the question of the effect of slavery upon agriculture, commerce, manufactures, accumulation of wealth, living conditions, growth of population, and so forth, which in the years immediately preceding the Civil War assumed such great importance, had its beginning in this period.

#### IV. SENTIMENTAL ARGUMENTS

Many writers opposed slavery out of sheer sympathy for the slave. Indications of this humanitarian spirit were observed in connection with moral and religious arguments from the first appearance of anti-slavery sentiment in American literature. During the latter part of the eighteenth century, however, as American authors came more and more under the influence of the sentimentalism of European writers, this spirit became more prevalent, and between 1770 and 1800 colored much of the anti-slavery literature of America. Opposition to slavery on purely sentimental grounds was not, in the strict sense of the term, argument, for it was generally devoid of the intellectual element; yet, what it lacked in this respect, it more than supplied in its strong emotional appeal, and thus became an effective means of promoting the anti-slavery cause. These sentimental appeals for the slave fell into two general classes: those mild in tone with no suggestion of malice or bitterness toward the slaveholder, and those written in a spirit of defiance, and partaking of the nature of bitter invective.

Several of the milder appeals for the slave were utter-

<sup>56</sup> Imlay, *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America*, pp. 203-204.

ances of the Negroes themselves who had had kind masters.<sup>56</sup> For instance, in her poem entitled "To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth" (1773), Phillis Wheatley, the Negro poetess, explained the source of her love of freedom without any manifestation of ill-will toward those responsible for her being made a slave:

"Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,  
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,  
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,  
By feeling hearts alone best understood,  
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate  
Was snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy seat:  
What pangs excruciating must molest,  
What sorrows labour in my parents' breast?  
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd  
That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd:  
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray  
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?"<sup>57</sup>

The same was true of the author of an anonymous poem entitled "A Poetical Epistle to the Enslaved Africans" (1790). This author wrote "in the character of an ancient Negro," born a slave but later liberated, and showed deep sympathy for the slaves; but he urged them to use no violence in their efforts to gain freedom:

"Be patient, humble, diligent, and true,  
In hope of coming freedom, as you can—  
Commend your righteous cause to God and Man.

Meanwhile—in silence let us wait the hour  
That shall to civil-life our Race restore—  
To God let Afric's dusky Sons sing praise,  
His works are marvelous and just his ways."<sup>58</sup>

Of the other sentimental appeals of this class—some of which, such as John Woolman's essay "On Loving our Neighbors,"<sup>59</sup> described rather touchingly the condition of

<sup>56</sup> Jupiter Hammon, a slave poet who had been treated kindly by his master, delivered "An Address to the Negroes of the State of New York" (1787), in which he expressed keen sympathy for the younger slaves, whom he longed to see freed, but showed little concern about his own freedom.

<sup>57</sup> Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects*, p. 74.

<sup>58</sup> *A Poetical Epistle to the Enslaved Africans*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>59</sup> See Woolman, *Works* (ed. 1774), p. 398.

the slave—probably the strongest from an emotional point of view appeared in John Murdock's comedy, *The Triumph of Love; or, Happy Reconciliation* (1795); in Sarah W. Morton's poem *Beacon Hill* (1797); and in Henry Sherburne's novel, *The Oriental Philanthropist* (1800). In *The Triumph of Love*, one of the earliest American plays containing anti-slavery sentiment, Sambo, a slave belonging to George Friendly, soliloquized upon his condition and the uncertainty of his fate should his kind master die, remarking that "the great somebody above" did not so order things. His master overheard the soliloquy, and was made to realize, as he had never done before, the great injustice of slavery:

"Be softened as thou wilt, still, slavery, thy condition is hard. The untutored, pathetic soliloquy of that honest creature, has more sensibly affected me, than all I have read, or thought, on that barbarous, iniquitous slave-trade. . . . It is cruel. It is unjust, for one creature to hold another in a state of bondage for life. Sambo, thou shalt be free."<sup>60</sup>

He accordingly gave Sambo his freedom, allowing him either to remain in his own employ upon a salary or to go where he might be happy. In *Beacon Hill* Mrs. Morton extolled the work of the several states and their commanding officers in the Revolutionary War, but inquired of Carolina how she could contend for freedom without heeding the scourge that inflicted suffering upon her shackled slave. She further inquired:

"What boots the fleecy field, and ricy mead,  
If mid their bloom the culturing captive bleed!  
Or what avails, that many a sumptuous dome  
To every traveller yields a generous home,  
If the rich banquet, and costly cheer  
Are fan'd by sighs, and moisten'd with a tear!"<sup>61</sup>

Henry Sherburne's *The Oriental Philanthropist* revealed even greater sympathy for the slave than *The Triumph of Love* or *Beacon Hill*, for the hero, the Chinese Prince Nytan, visited the home of a rich Turk who owned African slaves, persuaded him to free his slaves, and offered him a supply

<sup>60</sup> Murdock, *The Triumph of Love*, p. 52.

<sup>61</sup> Morton, *Beacon Hill*, p. 35.

of money to defray the expense of their journey back to their native land. To a remark of one of the slaves that his sovereign in Africa was an enemy of every species of slavery, and that God would avenge slavery by a dreadful punishment, Prince Nytan replied:

“Yes, . . . . the emancipation of the human race from every species of slavery is not far distant. The mists of ignorance are fast dispersing. You, Zaddquin, shall carry a letter from me to your sovereign. He is the friend of humanity, and will become an instrument of much good in the African world.”<sup>62</sup>

The authors of sentimental arguments of the second class did not stop with a mere expression of sympathy for the slave, but assumed a more defiant attitude, many of them employing the most bitter invective against slavery and the slave-trade.

Some of these writers exposed the cruelties that the slave suffered in America and the West Indies at the hands of overseers or other persons placed over him; as, for example, Robert Munford, in a poem entitled “A Letter from the Devil to his Son” (1798), and St. John Crèvecoeur, in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782).<sup>63</sup> In Munford’s poem the intimation was that more sympathy was shown the slave in hell than on earth. Satan, pleased with the evil deeds of his son, promised to give him a position in hell. He, accordingly, summoned his crew to inquire what position best suited his son’s abilities. A Negro offered the suggestion that he be not made an overseer,

“For dat man, he been killey me.”

Whereupon Satan decided to build another hell for his son to govern, noting meanwhile, with respect to the slave, that

“His back, his head, his meagre face,  
Drew pity from the hellish race;  
A murmur ran from shore to shore,  
And hell was instant in a roar.”<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Sherburne, *The Oriental Philanthropist*, pp. 163-164.

<sup>63</sup> Philip Freneau did likewise in his poem “To Sir Toby” (1792). See *Poems*, ed. Pattee, II, 258-260.

<sup>64</sup> Munford, “A Letter from the Devil to his Son,” in *Plays and Poems*, p. 194.

Crèvecoeur gave a more horrible picture of slavery than this. After a severe arraignment of the people of the South for their treatment of the slave, he described a scene he had witnessed in the South in which a slave, who had been accused of killing an overseer, was suspended from a tree in a cage and left there to be tortured to death by the birds of prey:

“I shudder when I recollect that the birds had already picked out his eyes; his cheek bones were bare; his arms had been attacked in several places, and his body seemed covered with a multitude of wounds. From the edges of the hollow sockets and from the lacerations with which he was disfigured, the blood slowly dropped, and tinged the ground beneath.”<sup>65</sup>

Then he related the brief conversation which took place between himself and the slave when he gave the latter water to drink:

“‘Tankè, you whitè man, tankè you, putè some poison and give me.’

“‘How long have you been hanging there?’ I asked.

“‘Two days, and me no die; the birds, the birds; aaah me!’

“‘Oppressed with the reflections which this shocking spectacle afforded me, I mustered strength enough to walk away, and soon reached the house at which I intended to dine.’”<sup>66</sup>

More often, however, the sentimental arguments of this second class dealt more specifically with the slave-trade, the source of the evil, and demanded the most severe punishment imaginable for those engaged therein.<sup>67</sup> In *The Beauties of Santa Cruz* (1776), in which ten stanzas (70-79) were devoted to the subject of slavery, Philip Freneau made a bitter attack upon this traffic. Beginning with an appeal to the sympathy of the reader, his lines quickly assumed the nature of an invective against greed for gold at the sacrifice of the lives of human beings:

“See yonder slave that slowly bends his way,  
With years, and pain, and ceaseless toil opprest,

<sup>65</sup> Crèvecoeur, “Thoughts on Slavery,” in *Letters from an American Farmer*, pp. 233-235.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>67</sup> See Gilbert Imlay, *The Emigrants; or The History of an Expatriated Family* (1793), I, 136-138.

Though no complaining words his woes betray,  
The eye dejected proves the heart distress.

“Perhaps in chains he left his native shore  
Perhaps he left a helpless offspring there,  
Perhaps a wife, that he must see no more,  
Perhaps a father, who his love did share.

“Curs’d be the ship that brought him o’er the main,  
And curs’d the hands who from his country tore,  
May she be stranded, ne’er to float again,  
May they be shipwreck’d on some hostile shore.”<sup>68</sup>

Royall Tyler’s opposition to the slave-trade was of the same nature as Freneau’s. In *The Algerine Captive* (1797), the narrator, Dr. Updike Underhill, after a series of adventures in America and England, became a surgeon on a ship bound for Africa, where slaves were to be secured and conveyed to the British West Indies and South Carolina. The narrator was shocked to hear men talk of purchasing human beings as if they were so many head of cattle or swine. But when, said he,

“I suffered my imagination to rove to the habitation of these victims to this infamous, cruel commerce, and fancied that I saw . . . the fond husband torn from the embraces of his beloved wife, the mother from her babes . . . and all the tender, endearing ties of natural affection rended by the hand of avaricious violence, my heart sunk within me. I execrated myself for even the involuntary part I bore in this execrable traffic: I thought of my native land, and blushed . . . .

“I cannot even now reflect on this transaction without shuddering. I have deplored my conduct with tears of anguish; and I pray a merciful God . . . that the miseries, the insults, and cruel woundings I afterwards received when a slave myself,<sup>69</sup> may expiate for the inhumanity<sup>70</sup> I was necessitated to exercise toward my brethren of the human race.”<sup>71</sup>

The two most effective attacks upon the slave-trade of all those made during this period were made by Thomas Branagan in 1805, when he published at Philadelphia two epics entitled *Avenia; or a Tragical Poem* and *The Peniten-*

<sup>68</sup> Freneau, “The Beauties of Santa Cruz,” in *Poems*, ed. Pattee, I, 262-263.

<sup>69</sup> He was later enslaved by the Algerines.

<sup>70</sup> As a surgeon he had to inspect the bodies of the slaves.

<sup>71</sup> Tyler, *The Algerine Captive*, pp. 98-101.

*tial Tyrant; or Slave Trader Reformed.* Branagan had already been employed on vessels engaged in the slave-trade and had served as overseer on a plantation in Antigua. These poems, written in the heroic couplet, depicted slavery in its worst form. They contained a frontispiece intended to contrast slavery with liberty. The Goddess of Liberty was seated before her temple, viewing with sad countenance a group of African slaves, "in order to demonstrate," said the author, "the hypocrisy and villainy of professing to be votaries of liberty, while at the same time, we encourage or countenance, the most ignoble slavery."<sup>72</sup> In *Avenia* were described the bloody struggles in Africa between the natives and the Christian slave-traders, culminating in the capture, importation, and preparation for the sale of those Africans who were neither killed in battle nor drowned in their passage over the sea. *Avenia*, the heroine, attacked by one of the planters and grieved by the constant thought of the fate of her husband and of her own condition, ascended a high rock and committed suicide by plunging into the sea. The intensity of the author's feeling regarding such events as he described was shown in the following lines:

"Give ear ye tyrants, distant nations hear,  
And learn the judgments of high heaven to fear,  
Your children yet unborn shall blush to see,  
Their predecessors' guilt and villany,  
Their impious thirst for gold, while fierce in arms,  
Their cruel breasts no tender pity warms;  
Should heathens but one virtuous Christian find,  
Name but the slave-trade; they will curse your kind."<sup>73</sup>

In *The Penitential Tyrant*, after contrasting the luxury and pleasures of the idle rich with the sufferings of the slaves, and describing a vision in which the unhappy slaves rose before his view, charging him with being negligent in exhibiting their wrongs, the author confessed his guilt—he had been a slave-trader and overseer himself—became a real Christian, and urged his readers to live in truth the Christian life.

<sup>72</sup> Branagan, *The Penitential Tyrant*, p. iii; *Avenia* (ed. 1810), p. ii.

<sup>73</sup> Branagan, *Avenia; or a Tragical Poem* (ed. 1810), p. 205.

Branagan was fully aware of his short-comings as a writer of verse, but felt that he was justified in publishing these poems because of the worthy cause they defended. Appearing just before the prohibition of the African slave-trade by Congressional action, *Avenia* and *The Penitential Tyrant* must have done much by way of influencing the public sentiment of the time. On May 11, 1805, Thomas Jefferson, then President of the United States, in a letter to Dr. George Logan, wrote as follows of having received a letter from Thomas Branagan asking for his subscription to *Avenia*:

“The cause in which he [Branagan] embarks is so holy, the sentiments he expresses in his letter so friendly that it is highly painful to me to hesitate on a compliance which appears so small. But that is not its true character, and it would be injurious even to his views, for me to commit myself on paper by answering his letter. I have most carefully avoided every public act or manifestation on that subject.”<sup>74</sup>

On December 12, 1805, the same year in which *Avenia* and *The Penitential Tyrant* appeared, Senator Bradley of Vermont gave notice of a bill to prohibit the introduction of slaves after 1808.<sup>75</sup> On December 2, 1806, Jefferson himself, in his message to Congress, urged his fellow-citizens to interpose their authority constitutionally “to withdraw the citizens of the United States from all further participation in those violations of human rights which have been so long continued on the unoffending inhabitants of Africa, and which the morality, the reputation, and the best interests of our country, have long been eager to proscribe.”<sup>76</sup> A bill was subsequently passed, becoming on March 2, 1807, the “Act to prohibit the importation of Slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States, from and after the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eight.”<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. Ford, X, 141.

<sup>75</sup> DuBois, *Suppression of the African Slave-trade*, p. 105.

<sup>76</sup> Jefferson, *op. cit.*, 315-316.

<sup>77</sup> DuBois, *op. cit.*, p. 108.



V. PLANS FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF THE SLAVE<sup>78</sup>

The first definite plans for the emancipation of the slaves in America originated during the early part of the eighteenth century among the Quakers, who in the Middle and Northern States had freed practically all of their slaves before the close of the Revolutionary War, and who continued thereafter to exert an important influence upon the emancipation movement in America.<sup>79</sup> So far as American literature is concerned, however, it was not until the latter part of the eighteenth century that elaborate schemes for emancipation began to appear.<sup>80</sup> Nearly all of these called for

<sup>78</sup> For a detailed account of the plans initiated before 1808 for the emancipation of the slaves, see M. S. Locke, *Anti-Slavery in America, 1619-1808*.

<sup>79</sup> As early as 1714 and 1737 John Hepburn and Benjamin Lay published respectively definite plans for the emancipation of the slaves. The plan published by Hepburn provided that those Negroes whose freedom masters would grant be returned to Africa; that money be raised for this purpose; and that those not desiring their freedom be retained in America as slaves. Lay's plan provided that the slaves be first educated and then set free. See M. S. Locke, *Anti-Slavery in America, 1619-1808*, pp. 30-31. Anthony Benezet urged that further importation of slaves be prohibited; that those already in America, after serving as "long as may appear to be equitable," be declared free, be enrolled in the county courts, and be compelled to live "a certain number of years within the said county under the care of the overseers of the poor"; that the children be given instruction; and that a small tract of land be assigned to every family of Negroes, who should be compelled to live upon and improve it. See Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (ed. 1771), pp. 140-141. John Woolman, the most important of the Quakers who won a place in the American literature of this period, offered no definite scheme of emancipation, but saw no insurmountable difficulties in the way of attaining it. See Woolman, "Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes" (1754), in *Works*, p. 324. For a detailed account of the part played by the Quakers in the emancipation of the slaves, see S. B. Weeks, *Southern Quakers and Slavery*, pp. 198-244.

<sup>80</sup> This interest in emancipation was greatly stimulated by the formation of anti-slavery societies between 1775 and the close of the century. The first anti-slavery society was formed on April 14, 1775, in Philadelphia. It was called "The Society for the Relief of Free Negroes unlawfully held in Bondage." With its reorganization in 1787, the "Abolition of Slavery," as well as the "Relief of Free Negroes," was included in its program, and Benjamin Franklin was chosen president. Similar societies were formed between 1775 and 1792 in New York, Delaware, Maryland, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Virginia, and New Jersey. See W. F. Poole, *Anti-Slavery Opinions before the Year 1800*, pp. 42-51.

gradual emancipation. There were very few advocates of immediatism during this period.

The belief that the Negro would be unable to care for himself if freed and the fear lest immediate emancipation would work too great a hardship upon the master led many writers to advocate gradual in preference to immediate emancipation.<sup>81</sup> This belief was more fully expressed in the works of Thomas Jefferson than in those of any other writer of the period. He was doubtful of the Negro's ability to care for himself if freed. "This unfortunate difference of color," he said, "and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people."<sup>82</sup> Yet on several occasions, he publicly advocated emancipation. While a member of the legislature of Virginia, which he entered in 1769, he proposed an act permitting masters to free their slaves, but his effort was unsuccessful.<sup>83</sup> The original draft of the Declaration of Independence contained a bitter arraignment of the King of Great Britain for not prohibiting the slave-trade:

" . . . Determined to keep open market where men should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every attempt to prohibit or restrain this execrable commerce; and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them by murdering the people on whom he has also obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another."<sup>84</sup>

Jefferson said that this clause was removed from the original draft "in compliance to South Carolina and Georgia, who had never attempted to restrain the importation of slaves,

<sup>81</sup> John Woolman, in 1754, answered the argument that if slaves were freed they could not care for themselves properly, by saying that "to deny people the privilege of human creatures, on the supposition that, being free, many of them would be troublesome, is to mix the condition of good and bad men together, and treat the whole as the worst of them deserve."—"Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes," in *Works*, p. 324.

<sup>82</sup> Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, p. 154.

<sup>83</sup> Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. Washington, I, 3.

<sup>84</sup> *The Papers of James Madison*, I, 24.

and who on the contrary still wished to continue it.”<sup>85</sup> He said that certain Northerners also “felt a little tender under those censures,” for though their people had very few slaves themselves, yet they had been pretty considerable carriers of them to others.<sup>85</sup> Shortly after this, in 1778, a bill which he introduced in the legislature to prevent the further importation of slaves into Virginia was passed without opposition.<sup>86</sup> Seven years later he expressed the desire that a way might be prepared for total emancipation “with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation.”<sup>87</sup> To the question of what should be done with the Negro when freed Jefferson also gave considerable thought. In a letter from Paris to Dr. Edward Bancroft, dated January 26, 1789, he said that on his return to America he would endeavor to import as many Germans as he had grown slaves:

“I will settle them and my slaves, on farms of fifty acres each, intermingled, and place all on the footing of the Metayers . . . of Europe. Their children shall be brought up, as others are, in habits of property and foresight, and I have no doubt but that they will be good citizens.”<sup>88</sup>

He also advocated that all slaves born after a given day should be freed and educated, and after a given age sent out of the country. “This,” he said, “would give time for a gradual extinction of that species of labour and substitution of another, and lessen the shock which an operation so fundamental cannot fail to produce.”<sup>89</sup> The West Indies or Africa, he thought, would be a desirable location for the liberated slaves.<sup>90</sup> Finally, in December, 1806, as President of the United States, Jefferson recommended to Congress the prohibition of the African slave-trade. Shortly after, a law to that effect was passed which became operative on January 1, 1808.

A great many other advocates of gradual emancipation, whose plans appeared in the literature of America before

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>86</sup> Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. Washington, I, 38.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>88</sup> Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. Ford, V, 448.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, XI, 418.

<sup>90</sup> Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. Washington, IV, 421.

1808, unlike Jefferson, had genuine faith in the Negro's ability to care for himself if freed and contemplated no disastrous results from emancipation either for the master or the slaves, provided the slaves were first prepared for freedom through training and experience;<sup>91</sup> and they included in their plans specific suggestions as to how this training and experience might be given. Thomas Paine, who has been called "the first American abolitionist,"<sup>92</sup> and Benjamin Rush suggested that those Negroes in America who, from vices of slavery or from age and infirmities, were unfit to be freed should remain the property of those with whom they grew old and from whom they contracted vices; but that the young Negroes should be taught to read and write, instructed in some business, paid for their labor, and after a limited time liberated.<sup>93</sup> William Dunlap, the dramatist, went further in his advocacy of gradual emancipation than the authors just mentioned, for he put his theories into practice. After his father's death he actually liberated the family slaves, some of whom he afterwards hired as servants,<sup>94</sup> and became an active member of the Manumission Society and a trustee of the free school for African children, founded in 1789 by the same society.<sup>95</sup> He was also a deputy to the convention of the abolition societies of the several states which met at Philadelphia in 1797. Even though Dunlap liberated his own slaves, he was doubtful as to the expediency of sudden abolition; but, said he, "this subject is

<sup>91</sup>Franklin, "An Address to the Public; from the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes unlawfully held in Bondage" (1789), in *Works*, ed. Sparks, II, 515-516.

<sup>92</sup>See *Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Conway, I, 2. This designation, based upon the assumption that Paine was the first person in America to offer a definite scheme of emancipation, is hardly justifiable when one considers the work of Hepburn, Lay, Benezet, and Rush, all of whom before 1775, the year in which Paine's plan appeared, had offered plans for the liberation of the slaves. See above p. 395.

<sup>93</sup>Rush, *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America upon Slave-Keeping* (1773), pp. 18-20; Paine, "African Slavery in America" (1775), in *Writings*, ed. Conway, I, 8.

<sup>94</sup>In Dunlap's play, *The Father of an Only Child* (1807), the hero, Colonel Campbell, liberated his slaves and furnished them with the means of "becoming useful to themselves and to others." See above, p. 383.

<sup>95</sup>O. S. Coad, *William Dunlap*, p. 23.

better understood now, and colonization societies are superseding the abolitionists, who are to be blessed for beginning the good work.'<sup>96</sup>

These advocates of gradual abolition during this period were far more numerous than those of immediatism. Of the comparatively few appeals for immediate emancipation that appeared in the literature of the period that by Theodore Dwight, in *An Oration* (1794) delivered before "The Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom and the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Holden in Bondage," and that by Hugh H. Brackenridge, in his novel entitled *Modern Chivalry* (1792), were the most significant. Dwight made a strong plea for immediate emancipation by governmental action, and expressed the belief that the master would not experience any disadvantage in obtaining from the government the value of the slave.<sup>97</sup> Brackenridge's plea for immediate emancipation took the form of a bitter satire on a law passed in Pennsylvania in 1780 for the gradual abolition of slavery. The hero, Captain Farrago, having lost his servant, Teague O'Regan, who had become an actor, considered purchasing a Negro in his place. Before doing so, he conversed with a Quaker on the subject of slavery. Much in the manner of Swift, the author put into the mouth of the Captain many of the pro-slavery arguments of the time, and gave himself, in the chapter that followed, the remainder of these. Both passages were highly ironical and so skilfully handled that, taken together, they formed probably the most bitter satire of the period on Negro slavery. The Captain began with the argument that force governed all things; the strong man had as much right to invade the liberty of the African as he had to invade the liberty of a horse or an ox; the natural rights of men were resolvable into power on the one hand and weakness on the other. "I should think myself justifiable," said he, "in making any man a slave to answer my purpose, provided, I treated him well while he was such."<sup>98</sup> Some persons were by nature fitted only to be

<sup>96</sup> Dunlap, *A History of the American Theater*, p. 170.

<sup>97</sup> Dwight, *An Oration*, pp. 8, 22.

<sup>98</sup> Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry* (ed. 1815), I, Book IV, 140.

slaves; others to be masters. As it was difficult to determine a priori who were intended for slavery and who for freedom, the rule should be "catch, who catch can,"<sup>99</sup> and every man should have a slave who can get one. It was not of so much consequence who the slave was as it was that there should be one.

This irony was continued with even greater effect by the author himself, who satirized the attitude of the churches and the courts toward slavery. He said that there was no religious denomination, "except the fanatical people called Quakers," that went so far as to insist that its members should not hold slaves.<sup>100</sup> It could not, therefore, be a matter of conscience. He approved of gradual abolition of slavery, for "numbers being embarked in this trade, it must ruin them all at once to desist from it; just as it would greatly inconvenience thieves and cut-throats, who have run risks in acquiring skill in their profession, to be obliged all at once to desist from this and apply themselves to industry in other ways for a livelihood."<sup>101</sup> The author feared that some young lawyers in the courts, knowing that it was established by the constitution of the state that all men were born equally free and independent, might show the illegality of gradual abolition. But he hesitated to say more on this topic, lest he should "furnish hints to pettifoggers," who might make ill use of their information.<sup>102</sup>

A backward glance at the anti-slavery literature in America prior to 1808, as discussed in this chapter, will reveal the fact that sentiment against slavery during this period had a gradual and consistent growth. At every stage in its development it reflected the prevailing spirit of the time. Though many writers began early and continued throughout the period to look upon slavery as a great social and economic danger, the principal arguments against slavery from the time of the Puritans until the latter part of the eight-

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-147.

eenth century were based upon moral and religious grounds. American literature itself at this time was essentially didactic and religious. The Puritans, being concerned primarily with the moral and religious instruction of the slave, offered no permanent plan for universal emancipation; yet, one of their productions, Samuel Sewall's pamphlet, *The Selling of Joseph*, became really significant in the history of anti-slavery literature. The Quakers, on the other hand, were interested not only in the slave's moral and religious welfare, but also in his being accorded every privilege of an American citizen; and with this end in view, they liberated their own slaves and urged others to follow their example. With the formation of anti-slavery societies between 1775 and the close of the century, the efforts of the abolitionists were united and the production of anti-slavery literature was greatly stimulated. Up to this time the chief forms through which this sentiment had been expressed were poetry and the essay. Now the novel and drama supplemented these, giving to the opponents of slavery additional means with which to disseminate their ideas. From the latter part of the eighteenth century until the abolition of the slave-trade in 1807 by Congressional action, many arguments against slavery were strongly colored by the political philosophy of the time. These were based upon the theory of the natural and inalienable rights of man. During the latter part of the eighteenth century also, with the spread of sentimentalism in literature, American authors were given an additional weapon with which to combat the evil and they made effective use of it in advancing the cause of abolition. With few exceptions, plans for the emancipation of the slaves during the first period provided for gradual emancipation. Many of these also included suggestions for colonizing the freed Negroes in Africa, the West Indies, or elsewhere. There was little opposition at this time to colonization.<sup>108</sup> Of the appeals for immediate emancipation, that of Hugh H. Brackenridge in *Modern Chivalry* was the most significant.

<sup>108</sup> Gilbert Imlay, in *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America* (1793), p. 203, opposed the colonization of Negroes.