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Elizabeth Buffum Chace Address, 1889

*This address was reprinted in *The Woman's Journal*, a weekly newspaper devoted to the interests of women. In her address Chace discusses the important role of women in the anti-slavery movement. She names national figures, but also points out the work of Rhode Island women. She finishes by creating a connection between the abolition movement of the recent past to the suffrage movement of the present.*

Address of Mrs. Chace

Mrs. Elizabeth B. Chace, at the recent woman suffrage reception and supper, in Providence, R.I., made the following response to the toast, "The Antislavery Women":

After the long night of slavery which earth's toiling millions had suffered for ages, and after the philanthropy of later times had sought for many years to devise some method for the amelioration and gradual removal of the terrible evil, it was Elizabeth Heytick, a woman of England, when human slavery was still supported in its West Indian Islands, who first declared that immediate and entire emancipation was the only remedy. Her pamphlet, published in 1825, was followed within a few years by the earnest cry of Wm. Lloyd Garrison in this country for the immediate and unconditional abolition of slavery in our own land. This cry, accompanied by details of the horrors of this cruel system, awakened in the best womanhood of this nation an enthusiasm and energy such as the battle for our own freedom from British rule had scarcely excited. Women whose lives had hitherto been spent in the quiet seclusion of private life, or in the performance of such industries as were then open to their sex, were inspired with an irresistible sense of duty to lift up their voices in earnest demand of this guilty nation that it should "let the oppressed go free." The public sentiment of the Northern States was corrupted by their commercial relations, their political associations, and their religious fellowship with the people of the South. Added to these were the common objections to the public speaking of women. It is impossible for this generation to realize the privations and sufferings which these noble women endured in their advocacy of the cause of the slave. Social ostracism, persecution, slander, insult assailed them on every side. But they went bravely on, sustained by a high and holy purpose whose call they could not disobey.

Among the earliest and most remarkable of these devoted women were the sisters Grimké of South Carolina, who, born to an inheritance of wealth in slaves, renounced all ownership in human beings,

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left their family and home, came North, and sought to arouse in the people here a determination to withdraw their support and fellowship from this great iniquity. Abby Kelley, a beautiful New England girl, gave herself, her time, and all that she possessed to the same great work of awakening the Northern conscience to a sense of its guilt. Lucretia Mott, whose Quaker training as a preacher made her especially impressive as a public speaker, Maria Chapman, whose pen was ever active, Lucy Stone, who brought her youth and her college education into this unselfish service, and other women are all worthy of the high place their names will fill in the future history of that Revolutionary period.

But, passing over these, in whose behalf there is not time now to speak in fitting words, I wish to remind you of the great army of women throughout the Northern States who enlisted under the anti-slavery banner, and in a quiet, unappreciated, but effective way did noble service to the cause, despite loss of reputation in society, in the church, and sometimes in their own families, so strong and bitter was the pro-slavery spirit of that day! These women opened their doors to the despised and condemned advocates of the slave, who had no salaries for their maintenance; they protected them from mob violence by their presence around them in the crowded streets, when the angry multitude were ready to shed their blood for speaking in the slave's behalf. They sheltered the fugitive slave, protected, warmed, fed and clothed him, and sent him with their blessing on his journey to the land of safety. They broke down the bars of custom and prejudice which excluded men and women from all decent treatment on account of the color of their skin; they gave up luxuries, rest, recreation, worked day and night for fairs, decorated their rooms with pictures of the kneeling slave and the flying fugitive, stamped them on their work-bags, their pin-cushions, and the contribution-boxes they kept on their center-tables; while the mothers among them sung anti-slavery songs to the infants in their arms, and carried the image of the slave-mother robbed of her children, ever in their hearts. Of such women was Helen Garrison, the young wife of the great reformer; when her husband was dragged through the streets of Boston, with a halter round his neck, by a mob of "gentlemen of property and standing," who were thirsting for his blood, this heroic young woman, beholding the sight, instead of bemoaning his daring or bewailing her own unhappy condition, was heard to exclaim, "I'm sure my husband will not desert his principles."

I have in my mind some women here in Rhode Island, whose names are unknown to fame, but on whose private record stands a history, worthy to be written in letters of gold, as the friends of humanity, in a sense of which the Rhode Island women of this generation have no knowledge or conception. In those dark days, when to speak an anti-slavery word, or do an anti-slavery deed, meant odium if not peril, these woman, then young cherished, talented, refined, stood always by the right, through experiences worthy of the age of martyrdom. The six Sisson sisters, of Pawtucket (for I must mention some names), the Browns, of East Greenwich, daughters of a man who bore worthily the name of the hero of Harper's Ferry, the Burgess sisters of Little Compton, the wives of two of the prominent abolitionists of Providence, Anna Fairbanks and Sophia Hanes, the daughters of Williams Chace, of Pleasant Valley, Elizabeth Brown, a young colored teacher of this city, whom the others that knew her took by the hand as a worth co-laborer, Amarancy Paine, Susan R. Harris, Caroline Ashley,

Hannah Shove, and others whose names I fail to recall, must never be forgotten in the record made by Rhode Island in this great struggle for human freedom, and it was to these women a liberal education. It placed them among the forerunners and the pioneers in the world-wide movement for the enfranchisement of women, to which the anti-slavery agitation opened the pathway, and made it smoother for us to walk in than had been their own painful journey. Most of these women have passed away from this life, but those who remain may be found in the woman suffrage ranks.

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