

Excerpt from *Letters to Catharine E. Beecher in reply to an Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism* by Angelina Grimké

The great fundamental principle of Abolitionists is that man cannot rightfully hold his fellow man as property. Therefore, we affirm that every slaveholder is a man-stealer; a man, is a man, and as a man he has inalienable rights he cannot rightfully be reduced to slavery. Our principle is that no circumstances can ever justify a man in holding his fellow man as property.

We hold that all the slaveholding laws violate the fundamental principle of the Constitution of the United States. So far from thinking that a slaveholder is bound by the immoral and unconstitutional laws of the southern states, we hold that he is solemnly bound as a man, as an American, to break them, and that immediately and openly. Every slaveholder is bound to cease to do evil now, to emancipate his slaves now.

Dost thou ask what I mean by emancipation? I will explain myself in a few words. 1. It is to reject with indignation the wild and guilty fantasy that man can hold property in man. 2. To pay the laborer his hire, for he is worthy of it. 3. No longer to deny him the right of marriage, but to “let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband,” as saith the apostle. 4. To let parents have their own children, for they are the gift of the Lord to them, and no one else has any right to them. 5. No longer to withhold the advantages of education and the privilege of reading the Bible. 6. To put the slave under the protection of equitable laws.

Now, why should not all this be done immediately! Which of these things is to be done next year, and which the year after! and so on. Our immediate emancipation means, doing justice and loving mercy to-day—and this is what we call upon every slaveholder to do. I have seen too much of slavery to be a gradualist. I say [the slaveholder] is able to let the oppressed go free. Oh, my very soul is grieved to find a northern woman thus “sewing pillows under all armholes,”\* framing and fitting soft excuses for the slaveholder’s conscience, while with the same pen she is professing to regard slavery as a sin.

With regard to the connection between the North and the South, I shall say but little. I deny the charge that abolitionists are endeavoring to convince their fellow citizens of the faults of another community. Not at all. We are spreading out the horrors of slavery before Northerners, in order to show them their own sin in sustaining such a system of complicated wrong and suffering. It is because we are politically, commercially, and socially connected with our southern brethren, that we urge our doctrines upon those of the free states.

As soon as we rectify public opinion at the North, then I for one, will promise to go down into the midst of slaveholders themselves to promulgate our doctrines in the land of the slave. But how can we go now, when northern pulpits and meeting-houses are closed, and northern Governors are declaring that “the discussion of the subject of slavery ought to be made an offence indictable at common law,” and northern women are writing books to paralyse the efforts of southern women, who have come up from the South to entreat their northern sisters to exert their influence in behalf of the slave. To my own mind, the exasperation of the North at the discussion of slavery is an undeniable proof of her guilt.

Thou askest very gravely, why James C. Birney [an abolitionist] did not go quietly into the southern States, and collect facts? Indeed! Why should he go to the South to collect facts, when he had lived there forty years? Thou mayest with just as much propriety ask me, why I do not go to the South to collect facts. The answer to both questions is obvious: We have lived at the South, as integral parts of the system of slavery, and therefore we know from practical observation and sad experience, quite enough about it already.

**Source**

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