

# The Attitude of the Society of Friends Towards Slavery

By WILLIAM A. COOPER

THIS will not attempt to be a history of human slavery, but will be confined to its relation to the Society of Friends in America. In the early history of this country the first negro slaves were said to be 20 negroes brought by Captain John Harkins in 1620 from the Coast of Guinea and landed at Jamestown, Virginia, and sold to the tobacco planters. From this beginning, the importation increased so rapidly that, in 1790, it is estimated that there were 300,000 negro slaves in the State of Virginia alone.

Slaves were very generally held, even amongst the members of the Society of Friends,—William Penn and others holding slaves. John Estaugh and Elizabeth holding at least one slave named "Primus," who is mentioned in New Jersey Archives as follows:

"Haddonfield April 26th 1773" "The day before yesterday about 5 o'clock in the afternoon a fire broke out in a shed adjoining the House of Primus Marsh an aged negroe who formerly belonged to John Estaugh and is now upwards of 90 years of age."

It may not be generally known to you that even in this good City of Camden slaves were publicly sold as late as 1762.

(From The New York Mercury, August 3, 1761)

"TO BE SOLD,

On board the Schooner 'Hannah,' lying in the River Delaware, very near Mr. Daniel Cooper's Ferry, West Jersey, opposite the City of Philadelphia, A Cargo of likely Negroes, just imported in said Schooner, directly from the Coast of Guinea."

9. Charles P. Burroughs.

(From The Pennsylvania Journal, May 27, 1762)

"Just imported from the River Gambia, in the Schooner 'Sally' Barnard Badger, Master, and to be sold at the Upper-Ferry (called Benjamin Cooper's Ferry), opposite to this City, a Parcel of likely Men and Women Slaves, with some Boys and Girls of different Ages."

(From The Pennsylvania Gazette, August 19, 1762)

"To be Sold at Robert's Ferry, commonly known by the Name of Benjamin Cooper's Ferry, Cooper's Point, New Jersey:

A Parcel of choice healthy

Young Slaves,

Men, Women, Boys and Girls.

ATTENDANCE will be given by Capt. Bruce, Master of the Sloop Hester, in which they were imported from the Windward Coast of Africa.

Being Negroes from the most established Ports of the Coast of Africa, for being good House or Plantation Slaves."

(From The Pennsylvania Gazette, August 19, 1762)

"Just imported, a Parcel of fine young Negroe Slaves, Men, Women, Boys and Girls, to be sold at Daniel Cooper's Ferry in the Jerseys, opposite Philadelphia, by

DAVID M'MURTRIE

Merchant in Water Street. Attendance will be given from Nine to Twelve in the Forenoon, and from Two to Five in the Afternoon."

(From The Pennsylvania Journal, October 28, 1762)

"To Be Sold by

JOHN IRLAND

At Reese Meredith's:

A Negro Woman, a Negro Girl about 18 Years Old, and a Negro Child about 6 Years Old, to be seen at Daniel Cooper's at the Ferry, they were sold by Execution in Barbados, not sent off for any Fault."

The first protest against holding negroes in slavery was made over 240 years ago, on the 18th day of the 2nd mo. 1688, by four German members of Germantown Meeting of Friends, by the names of Garret Hendricks, Derick up de Graeff, Francis

Daniel Pastorius and Abraham up Den Graef. These men, to their eternal credit, wrote a very strong and vigorous protest which they sent to the Dublin Monthly Meeting, who, to us a slang expression "passed the buck" by saying "We having inspected ye matter above mentioned and consider of it, we find it so weighty that we think it not expedient for us to meddle with it here, but do rather commit it to consideration of ye Quarterly Meeting; ye tenor of it being nearly related to ye truth."

The Quarterly Meeting, under date of the 4th of ye 4th mo 1688 recommended it to the Yearly Meeting, saying "This above mentioned was read in our Quarterly Meeting, and was from thence recommended to the Yearly Meeting, and the above said Derick and other two mentioned therein, to present the same to ye above said meeting, it being a thing of too great a weight for this meeting to determine."

At the Yearly Meeting held at Burlington the 5th day of the 7th mo. 1688, the following minute was made: "A paper being here presented by some German Friends Concerning the Lawfulness and Unlawfulness of Buying and Keeping Negroes, it was adjudged not to be so proper for this Meeting to give a Positive Judgment in the Case, it having so General a Relation to many other Parts, and therefore at Present they forbear it."

From this it would seem that the holding of slaves amongs the members was so common, public sentiment not having been aroused as, to the moral questions involved, that the meeting feared to take any decided action. The seeds had been planted and the agitation started, and on 7 mo. 23rd 1696 the Yearly Meeting, 8 years after the protest from the Germantown friends made the following minute, "Whereas several papers have been read, Relative to the Keeping & bringing in of Negroes which being duly considered, it is the advice of this meeting that Friends be careful not to encourage the bringing in of any more Negroes and that such that have Negroes be careful of them, bringing them to Meetings, or have Meeting with them in their families and Restrain them from loose and Lewd living, as much as in them lies, and from Rambling about on First Days or other times." This was a general form of good advice.

On 7th mo. 1711, (15 years after), is the following minute, "Likewise they declare their dissatisfaction with Friends buying and encouraging the bringing in of Negroes and advise Friends to be careful," a little stronger advice.

On 7th mo. 18th 1715, Chester Quarterly Meeting sent a strong protest against the practice of importing, buying and selling Negro Slaves, and the Meeting adopted the following minute, "That some Friends be yet in the practice of importing, buying and selling of Negro Slaves, and the sense and Judgment is that Friends should not be concerned therein, and Friends who have or keep negroes do use and treat them with humanity and a Christian Spirit." The Chester Quarterly Meeting kept up this yearly protest for some 15 years, (each year the protest getting stronger.)

On 7th mo. 17th 1730, we find this minute, "Friends ought to be very cautious of making any such Purchases for the Future It being disagreeable to the sense of this Meeting." In 1754, the Yearly Meeting prepared an Epistle of Caution and advice Concerning the Buying and Keeping of Slaves, which was a very strong plea. In 1758 (70 years after) the Meeting made a minute against Slavery and John Woolman, John Churchman, John Scarborough, John Sykes, and Daniel Stanton were appointed to visit the members of Meeting who held slaves and try to get them freed. In 1759, the Committee reported they had made some progress and were continued and reported for several years. In 1776, the Committee appointed to labour and to obtain releasement &c. reported, "That in the course of our several visits on the occasion, we have found many who are possessed of these poor Captives, manifesting a Commendable willingness to comply with the advice and Judgment of the Yearly Meeting and by writings duly executed under their respective Hands and Seals, declare freedom and Liberty to 116 of them being blacks and Mulattoes of various ages. Those in their minority to be free at 21 years for the males and females at 18 years of age."

In 1777, the Yearly Meeting reports "Yet sorrowful it is that there are some in membership with us, who notwithstanding all the advice and labour extended towards them persist in holding these poor people in Bondage and Captivity."

In the Women's Meeting records of Haddonfield Meeting under date of 8 mo. 1777, is the following, "28 slaves in the compass of Haddonfield Meeting freed, but, Jacob Jennings, Samuel Clement, William Cooper, Isaac Horner, Joseph Morgan, John Barton, Hannah Ladd, Elizabeth Mickle, not yet complied but appear uneasy on account of the Slavery of their negroes: Richard Matlack, Jacob Stokes, Marmaduke Cooper, Joseph Nicholson and Elizabeth Iredell seem not disposed to set their free."

In 3rd mo. 1777, James Cooper and John Tatum were appointed to visit those Friends within the compass of Woodbury and Haddonfield Meetings who held negroes in bondage. In the Meeting records it is recorded that the Committee reported, but with no detailed account of their report. At the home of James Cooper Griscom in Woodbury, which was formerly the home of James Cooper, is a copy of their report from which because it has considerable interest as showing the attitude of the members of Meeting at that time is quoted in part as follows:

"William Keis, had one Child which he manumitted at 11 years of age being a girl.

John Hilman, one child which he manumitted at 18 years of age being a girl.

Isaac Ward, one man which he manumitted at about 20 years of age.

Hannah Ladd, Mail & Femail who after much freedom on both sides respecting keeping them in bondage was used consented to free them, upon which a day was appointed for that purpose, but when we went, she had altered her mind, so that the Negroes' liberty could not be obtained.

David Cooper, one bound till 21 years of age, which he thought from the circumstances of the Case he would keep her the full time, being a girl.

Elizabeth Mickle, had three, not disposed to free them as she had put them away in some sort to other persons.

Hepsiba Evans, all manumitted by her when requested.

John Hinchman, Mail & Femail not disposed to free them.

Jacob Jennings, Mail & Femail appeared in good disposition & after some further conversation another day had reason to think he would manumit his.

Isaac Ellis, five, and Freed them with pleasure from all that appeared.

Samuel Clement, Mail & Femail, not disposed to free them.

Hannah Cooper, manumitted a man, being all she had.

James Kaighn ditto a lad when he arrived to ye age of 21 years.

William Cooper, a boy and girl not disposed to free them.

Joseph Morgan, a man thought best to consider of ye matter first—(worth probably \$600.)

Griffith Morgan, not at home, but his wife believed he would free his.

Isaac Horner, Mail & Femail not disposed to give them their liberty.

Elizabeth Fridle, a girl. Did not think was a people fit to be free.

Jacob Stoaks, Boy & Girl, who disapproved of keeping them as slaves, as he said, but from certain circumstances attending would not free them—

Marmaduke Cooper, several who for some reason was determined not to free them as he told us.

John Barton, a Girl & disposed to make her free, but as she was under an uncommon disorder, he was doubtful whether it would be best for her to be free—

About every phase of human character crops out in this report. Haddonfield Meeting minutes, 12 mo. 1779, reported Jacob Stoaks, Isaac Horner, Joseph Nicholzen, and Marmaduke Cooper, have not manumitted their slaves.

On 9th mo. 1780, Haddonfield Meeting disowned Marmaduke Cooper and Isaac Horner for not freeing their slaves and at the same meeting, "A Committee was appointed to extend advice and assistance to free negroes, also put a sum of money under their care for schooling of their children and Joshua Evans was granted permission for a meeting of free negroes at his home next First day at 3 in the afternoon."

There is a record in the Court House at Woodbury that Marmaduke Cooper in Tax duplicate for 1792 reported two slaves, and another record that in Dec. 1792 he freed his slaves. On 3rd mo. 1801, the estate of Marmaduke Cooper contributed \$400 to the building of Newton Meeting House. This would seem to indicate that his heirs had no resentment against the Meeting for

disowning Marmaduke. As Marmaduke freed his slaves in 1792 I thought that after doing so, he might have been reinstated a member of Meeting but can find no such record.

On 2nd mo. 1779, the committee appointed by the Yearly Meeting recommended a subscription of 100 pounds for the schooling of negro children, the buying of books, &c. This was agreed upon.

John Hunt in his Journal says, "On 2nd mo. 1779, I attended a meeting at Haddonfield appointed by Friends, for the negroes I believe not less than two hundred of them met, and John Reeves James Cooper, Benjamin Swett and William Jones all spoke to them very notably and it was a favored opportunity."

On 9th mo. 1788, Haddonfield Meeting made a minute "No negroes held in bondage amongst us." Philadelphia Yearly Meeting was not so prompt. In 1790, this minute was made, "Clear of importing, purchasing, disposing of or holding mankind as slaves, excepting in some cases where the Mistress of some Families in which slaves are held remain in membership, and husbands are not. One quarter mentions some minors held under complicated circumstances, and another that some blacks have fallen to minors, and one instance appears of a Member holding a slave, which cases are under care." "Abington Meeting requests the sense and Judgment of the Yearly Meeting, whether it is consistent with our testimony to purchase a slave and after manumitting, to take an indenture till the purchase money is fully paid—The decision being it is not a Breach of our testimony." In 1795, the Meeting was able to say "No Slaves amongst us excepting one case of a member hiring a slave of his master. Care is taken for their religious and school education."

It took 107 years of persistent and active agitation to create a sentiment amongst the members, and bring about this result, but it was the wise course of action; if more active measures were taken, it would have resulted in a separation in the Society. It is a record of which the Friends should be justly proud, as it is as far as I know the first Religious Society to remonstrate against human Slavery and the first to prohibit its members from owning slaves. The Meetings not only insisted that all slaves held by its members be freed, but they immediately took measures

to educate and help the freed slaves. Many of the members of the Meetings did not cease their efforts when their own Society was able to report *that no slaves were held amongst them*, but continued an active campaign against slavery until the Emancipation Proclamation signed by Abraham Lincoln went into effect the first day of January, 1863. This was 175 years after the first German Friends of Germantown made their protest and sowed the seeds which did not fully mature for a century and three-quarters.)

It would be impossible to enumerate, or do justice to all the members of the Society who took part in the movement, but amongst the more active workers were John Woolman, known to us all; Joshua Evans, another Jerseyman; Daniel Stanton, who, in his Journal, tells of his religious travels, 1769, and being in Newton "stopped that evening at Aquilla Jones's and had a sitting in the family where was a number of slaves, in which opportunity I took liberty to advise and caution all present;" Anthony Benezet, a French Huguenot, who, coming to Philadelphia in 1731 and joining the Society of Friends, was very active in the Anti-Slavery Movement, and for the last two years of his life was engaged in conducting a school for the instruction of colored persons; Benjamin Lay, a deformed, eccentric character, who in his enthusiasm for the cause was led to do many erratic things and to use very strong language. In one of Lay's sermons, he took for his text, "Every good tree bringeth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth evil fruit," and continued "Is there any eviler Fruit in the world than slave keeping? Anything more devilish? It is of the very nature of Hell itself and is the Belly of Hell." He visited a friend in Philadelphia, and was asked to partake of a meal, but seeing a black servant in attendance he inquired of his master, "Is this negro a slave?" Being affirmatively answered, he said, "Then I will not share with the fruits of thy unrightfulness" and immediately departed from the house. The following facts will show some of the modes he adopted, to convince the Society of Friends, and others, of the impropriety of their conduct in keeping slaves.) During the session of an annual meeting, held at Burlington in New Jersey, Lay proceeded to that city. Having previously prepared a suffi-

cient quantity of the juice of pokeberry (*Phytolacca decandra*) to fill a bladder, he contrived to conceal it within the cover of a large folio volume, the leaves of which were removed. He then put on a military coat, and belted a small sword by his side over the whole of this dress he threw his great coat, which was made in the most simple manner, and secured it upon himself with a single button. Thus equipped, he entered the meeting house and placed himself in a conspicuous situation, from which he addressed the audience in substance as follows:

"Oh, all you negro masters who are contentedly holding your fellow creatures in a state of slavery during life, we knowing the cruel sufferings those innocent captives undergo in their state of bondage, both in these North America colonies, and in the West India Islands; you must know they are not made slaves by any direct law, but are held by an arbitrary and self-interested custom, in which you participate. And especially you who profess 'to do unto all men as ye would they should do unto you'—and yet in direct opposition to every principle of reason, humanity, and religion you are forcibly retaining your fellow men, from one generation to another, in a state of unconditional servitude. You might as well throw off the plain coat as I do (here he loosened the button, and the great coat falling behind him, his wretched appearance was exhibited to his astonished audience and proceeded); "It would be as justifiable in the sight of the Almighty, who beholds and respects all nations and all colours of men with an equal regard, if you should thrust a sword through their hearts as I do through this book. He then drew his sword and pierced the bladder, sprinkling its contents over those who sat near him."\*

Isaac Tatem Hopper, born in Gloucester County, was a fearless, outspoken advocate of anti-slavery, and frequently came into conflict with his meeting and the government, but could not be silenced.

Warner Mifflin, of the Eastern Shore of Virginia, in 1777 freed 37 slaves, old and young, whom he had inherited from his father. The day that he had fixed upon for their emancipation being come, he called them one after another into his room, and

\* From "Memoir of the Lives of Benjamin Lay and Ralph Sandiford," 1 Roberts Vaux; published at Philadelphia, Pa., 1815.

this was the conversation that passed with one of them: "Well, my friend James," said he, "how old art thou?" "I am 29½ years old, Master." "Thou shouldst have been free as thy white brethren are at 21. Religion and humanity enjoin me this day to give thee thy liberty; and Justice requires me to pay thee for 8½ years' service at the rate of £21 5 shillings per annum, including in it thy food and raiment, making altogether a sum of £95 12 shillings, owing to thee. Thou hast now no master but God and the laws. Go into the next room, there thou wilt find thy late mistress and my nephew, they are engaged in writing thy manumission. May God bless thee James, be wise and industrious." James replied, "Oh, my master, why do you give me liberty? I have always had what I wanted; we have worked together in the field and eaten the same food and been clothed like you and we have gone together on foot to meeting. When we are sick, our good and tender Mistress comes to our bedside, always saying something consoling to us. Ah! my dear Master when I am free, where shall I go when I am sick?"

Lucretia Mott, of saintly memory; had a lovely personality, much grace and an apt way of replying which is shown in the following letter from Sarah Hopper Palmer, a daughter of Isaac T. Hopper, to her sister, Abby Hopper Gibbins. It also gives an insight into the feelings of the time: "About three weeks ago Lucretia Mott preached an excellent sermon. I thought one of the best I ever heard her utter. Rachel Bennett and Mary Biddle visited her on account of it. She asked what part of her discourse was offensive. They hesitated at first, but upon insisting, said they wished her not to speak of abolition either in meetings for Worship or Discipline. She told them there was more to say than had ever been heard on the subject. They told her it was inconsistent for her to attend the Convention where there was singing, and asked if there was not singing there. She replied that a person had set some of John Whittier's poetry to music and sung it, but it was more pleasing to hear than Mary Rowand or Amos Peaslee's singing." (The Amos Peaslee referred to was a minister of the Society of Friends; his discourses were delivered in a sing-song tone so common in the Society in those days).

There was a very interesting colored man, member of Moun Holly Meeting, named William Boen, who in early life was a slave, was freed and became a man of great integrity, and won the respect of all who came in contact with him; he died in 1821 in his 90th year.

There is much more that could be said on the subject, but have no desire to tax your patience.\*

\* In my researches I found several items of interest:

1790—	11,428	slaves in New Jersey
1800—	12,422	slaves in New Jersey
1810—	10,851	slaves in New Jersey
1829—	7,557	slaves in New Jersey
1830—	2,254	slaves in New Jersey
1840—	674	slaves in New Jersey
1850—	236	slaves in New Jersey