CHAPTER VI

THE CRISIS OF 1836: STORM AND STRESS IN ATLANTIC PROTESTANTISM

The friction revealed in the transatlantic missions of 1835 broadened into major disruption and crisis in 1836. In each of the three major Anglo-American religious traditions—Congregational-Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist—violent and fundamental disagreement over slavery as a religious and moral issue threw into disorder all the plans for closer transatlantic evangelical union. While Americans were angered by the frank British espousal of "radical abolitionism," the greater shock was sustained by Dissenters. They were outraged at what they perceived to be the obduracy and shallow morality of leading American Protestants. Moreover, the disruption was not confined to Anglo-American relations. Within Nonconformity itself, especially among Baptists, controversy erupted over the question of whether communion with American churches should be preserved at all. Thus 1836, a critical year in the history of American anti-slavery, can also be set in an international context as a time of threatened schism in Atlantic Protestantism.

The disruptions of 1836 may be partly explained by the new tide of adverse British publicity given to the American Colonization Society and the American churches in 1835. A British edition of [the American] William Jay's Slavery in America: or An Inquiry into the Character and Tendency of the American Colonization and American Anti-Slavery Societies appeared in the summer, prepared by John Morison, the Scottish editor of the Evangelical Magazine. In his preface Morison recommended the work as an American judge's prudent and therefore especially damaging assessment of colonizationism. An introduction by the new convert, Samuel Hanson Cox, urged renewed zeal by Christian abolitionists in both countries. Laudatory reviews and impassioned letters published in Nonconformist magazines testified to the impact of the work on the writers' emotions. Reinforcing this impression was the disturbing news of George Thompson's hostile reception in the free states of the republic. While Thompson encountered opposition from the moment of his arrival in
autumn, 1834, James G. Birney wrote to Lewis Tappan that the violence increased after his collision with Frederick Augustus Cox and the British Baptist delegation. This news, often conveyed in Thompson's own detailed letters published in the Nonconformist press, deepened an impression of betrayal of the antislavery crusade by colonizationists and churchmen.

Of Dissenter publications, none was more productive of this result than the London Patriot. During 1835 the Patriot greatly expanded its treatment of American slavery, reprinting advertisements of the slave mart, descriptions of auctions, accounts of atrocities to slaves, and examples of northern persecution of abolitionists. The issue of April 29 began a new series of five major articles in which one by one the principal American churches were proved guilty of sloth, indifference, or hypocrisy in the campaign against slavery. The author was Samuel Blackwell, a Congregational merchant from Bristol who had emigrated with his seven children to New York in 1832. The family was moved by enthusiasm for America and the promise of radical reforms. Later his daughter, Elizabeth, would become the republic's first woman medical doctor, while his son, Henry Brown Blackwell, would champion women's suffrage. In 1835 Samuel Blackwell quickly threw himself into the antislavery struggle.

His series began with an analysis of the American Colonization Society, its link with the churches, and the judgment that American Protestantism indeed provided protection to slavery. The Patriot gave Blackwell's second article in May a prominent front-page display. It focused attention on the Presbyterians, contrasting their declarations against slavery with the respectful deference they showed toward Southern slaveholders. This theme was further developed in a third article that also provided readers with an account of Theordore Dwight Weld and the student secessions from Lane Seminary. Other churches were not neglected. In June Blackwell described the relation of Congregational, Episcopal, and Baptist churches to the slave institution. His final article in July was entirely devoted to Methodists who "protected" slaveholding, including in his indictment the Christian Advocate, Wesleyan University, and its president, Wilbur Fisk, then visiting in Britain.
But Blackwell also pointed out that American churches harbored some heroic abolitionists contesting the pro-slavery dominance, and he urged British churches to make every effort to hearten these minorities.

Letters to the Patriot displayed a similar preoccupation with American slavery and how Nonconformists might combat it. In June Thomas Raffles of Liverpool urged British Christians to join American abolitionists in a day of humiliation and prayer for the American sin. By November an anonymous correspondent was urging the Christian public to sign petitions to the American Congress. In the same month interest was deepened by the story of Moses Roper, an escaped Maryland slave, who was taken in tow at his arrival in Liverpool by Raffles and then passed on to Morison in London, and eventually (and ironically) deposited in the academy at Hackney under the wing of F. A. Cox. His history, A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper from American Slavery, was published in 1837 with a preface by Thomas Price.

Other Nonconformist publications displayed similar concern, often with little regard for American sensibilities. In the Baptist Magazine, for instance, Charles Stovel, the prominent London pastor, presented a list of twenty-two principles which added up to immediate emancipation with compensation to the slave. Freedom, he insisted, was a natural right: in 1776 Americans "justly claimed their freedom; and the slaves of America claim, on the same ground, their emancipation." Stovel argued that a secession of Southern states would be no tragedy, and in any case Christians were compelled to act.

These tensions, already formidable, were powerfully enhanced by George Thompson's British lectures after he returned from the United States late in 1835. Scotland was the first to feel the impact. In January, 1836 Thompson opened his campaign, speaking first in Scottish Congregational and Secession chapels, although by February he was also attracting more "respectable" support from some Church of Scotland evangelicals. Always he denounced the American churches (and the "betrayal" of the English Baptist delegation), and usually the meetings concluded with resolutions reproving American ministers.
and "professors." Accounts of these lectures reveal the frequent endorsement of Scottish dissenting clerics—we hear of "Dr. Peddie's chapel," "Dr. John Brown's chapel," "resolutions offered by Dr. John Ritchie," "Dr. Heugh in the chair," etc. Sometimes individual chapels were moved to send "affectionate expostulations" to America, as did the Congregational Mill Street Chapel, Perth, where the Rev. James Massie was beginning his radical British career. Finally, on March 1, the Glasgow Emancipation Society, "Dr. Wardlaw in the chair," adopted the Society's annual report, condemning the American conduct of Cox and Hoby, and for good measure that of Reed and Matheson as well (who were "friends of abolition," but "had furnished arguments against the cause which were triumphantly quoted by the enemies of immediate emancipation"). The Society also determined to pursue the offensive in America by publishing a comprehensive address to American ministers of religion.\textsuperscript{10}

Then in the spring Thompson carried the campaign into England. In May through an advertisement in the \textit{Patriot} he dramatically challenged Drs. Cox and Hoby to meet him in debate at Price's Baptist chapel in Devonshire Square. Both men coldly declined, but in June Thompson, holding Cox's \textit{Baptists in America} in hand, led a tumultuous audience in demanding that British Baptists repudiate the shameful compromises of their deputation to the United States in 1835.\textsuperscript{11}

These developments spurred the flood of remonstrances addressed by British Dissenting bodies to the American churches which began in the first half of 1836. The movement began with the Address of the Glasgow Emancipation Society, "Dr. Wardlaw in the chair," despatched in April, but the idea of a deluge of memorials was certainly not novel. Four months earlier a writer in the \textit{Patriot} had urged the Dissenting churches of England to "launch their remonstrant voice across the billows of the Atlantic and ring through the States of America, the death-knell of slavery."\textsuperscript{12} On April 26 the United Secession Synod, representing the largest number of Presbyterian Dissenters in Scotland, met in Glasgow to hear Thompson and draft forceful resolutions to the American churches. "The Congregational Union of Scotland meets next week,
and will, I trust, act upon the subject," a jubilant Thompson wrote to Garrison. It did so on May 5 after hearing a report on American slavery "about which our brethren appear to feel very strongly." The resolutions, drawn up by Wardlaw and addressed to all Congregational churches in the United States, urged the Americans to rouse themselves from lethargy and destroy all cruel bondage and degrading prejudice. Thomas Scales of Leeds, the official English delegate to the Scottish Congregational Union, reported on the meetings to Blackburn, the editor of the Congregational Magazine, recommending that the English Union consider similar action at its impending sessions. He did not fail to add that it would be prudent to initiate such action before hearing Thompson since "this would tell better in America." Accordingly, in May a committee, of which Andrew Reed was one, drew up a remonstrance to American Congregationalists and Presbyterians. In June Welsh Congregationalists followed suit. Though only after a year's delay, the Irish Seceders, led by John Edgar, also sent an Address to America.¹⁵

Other bodies went beyond mere expostulation. The South Devon Congregational Union in July exhorted American brethren to mount bold campaigns in their state legislatures. The London Missionary Society was pressed to accept no delegate from the United States but "true and honest abolitionists." In Baptist associations the ominous cry of no communion with slaveholders was first raised. It began in the Leicester Association, where the militant voluntaryist and abolitionist, J. P. Mursell, was a power, and a week later the Norfolk Association followed suit. From the Baptists also came Price's new Garrisonian serial publication, Slavery in America, the first issue of which (July, 1836) promised that "no effort will be spared by which the moral influence of British Christians may be made to bear on the extinction" of American slavery.¹⁷
These developments formed the background to a series of abrasive exchanges and confrontations which plagued transatlantic evangelicalism in 1836. Not all denominations were affected equally. Since the Associate Presbyterians, the American counterpart of the Scottish and Irish Seceders, were already strongly abolitionist, little friction was engendered by British remonstrances in this quarter. American Congregationalists also, having almost no Southern members, were less troubled by overseas abolitionist epistles, though they still tended to favor colonizationist solutions. But American Presbyterians were deeply agitated by British antislavery arguments, and the attendant pressures may have made some contribution to the Old School-New School schism which developed in the following year. Methodists, still somewhat detached from other Dissenters, had not participated in the transatlantic exchanges of 1834-1835, and prior to 1835 British Wesleyans, though strongly antislavery, had not forced their views on their American brothers. In 1835-1836 they did so with a resultant fragility in their transatlantic ties comparable to that among Presbyterians.
and Congregationalists. Baptists experienced major disruption. The issue of American slavery caused emotional upheaval in the Baptist Union and Missionary Society and led to British Baptists establishing relations with American Baptist abolitionists despite the strenuous objection of American denominational statesmen.

To many American Congregationalists and Presbyterians, British abolitionist agitation seemed uninformed, meddlesome, and impertinent, perversely unmindful of the constitutional impotence of the federal government to deal with slavery in the states. Calvin Stowe who was visiting London in the summer of 1836 expressed disgust with antislavery rhetoric at Exeter Hall in a letter to the Cincinnati Journal. When British abolitionists, he declared, "(with their present views and their present mode of proceeding) do any thing toward abolishing or even ameliorating American slavery we may expect to see the Duke of Wellington and Daniel O'Connell kissing each other in front of Westminster Abbey." In September some Congregational Associations in the United States, beginning with that of Vermont, began answering British remonstrances with similar but more elegantly expressed argument. More reasoned and elaborate rejoinders, however, came from two eminent Old School Presbyterians then in Britain—Robert Baird and Robert Jefferson Breckinridge.

Baird, Paris agent of the French Evangelical Society of New York, had come to Europe in 1835 and thrown himself into the task of explaining American Protestantism to Europeans—a task which led eight years later to his classic Religion in America. Already he had begun enlightening sympathetic French Protestants about American temperance and the voluntary church, descriptions that were soon to take the form of two early Baird publications. Now he attempted the more difficult labor of explaining American Protestantism's relation to slavery for the British public.

Baird's Letter to Lord Brougham, on the Subject of American Slavery was inspired by his visit to the London anniversaries in 1835 as a French delegate
to the Temperance Society. On May 15 he was present at the Antislavery Society in Exeter Hall where damaging charges were made against the American churches, not only by political radicals and the Irish Catholic, Daniel O'Connell, but also by prominent evangelicals known and venerated in the United States. Addressing his rebuttal to Brougham who had presided at the session, Baird sought to provide a systematic and comprehensive apologetic for the American Protestant record.

The Letter was a characteristic Baird essay, analytical and plausible, but cautious and conservative. To Baird's mind there were three dangers to the American union—the very rapid increase in population, the subversion of American values through large immigration from Europe, and the divisive issue of slavery. Bondage, he agreed, was a great moral evil, but its elimination could be accomplished only very gradually. Unlike parliament in Britain, the federal government in America was constitutionally limited: it had no power to effect a national emancipation, and an amendment to provide it with such authority could not be attained. Hence the only realistic course for antislavery reformers was to persuade the Southern population, partly through economic arguments but especially by religious influences. Indeed, this was the task of the American Colonization Society, and Baird thought it unfortunate that British example had inspired the formation of its rival, the American Antislavery Society. Still, Baird was hopeful of eventual success. The North was already free, and Northern Protestants were deeply committed to the cause. Now the border states were beginning to follow the North's example, and eventually even the South would yield to the demands of conscience and free her slaves.

Later in his tract Baird took the offensive and ventured to place much blame on Britain. American slavery, he charged, had been forced upon the colonies by British administrators against the wishes of the colonials themselves. British orators who nowadays invaded America to propagandize and agitate only made
emancipation more remote. The ravings of the foreigners, Thompson and O'Connell, were contemptible. Americans, he added (not altogether candidly in view of his own anonymous pieces in the Congregational Magazine), did not reciprocate by sending reformers to Britain to denounce the sinful union of church and state. A convinced gradualist, Baird warned against "fiat justitia men" who wanted to act out "the most dangerous opinion. . . that whatever ought to be done can be done." In a more conciliatory vein, Baird concluded his tract with a plea for Christian fraternity between the two nations and an end to divisive recriminations. "Both are raised up by Providence to stand together as a barrier against infidelity and superstition in the religious world, and despotism in the political. Let every tongue and every hand be employed to render our continued influence great, good, glorious!"

It is difficult to ascribe to Baird's Letter any significant influence on Dissenting opinion. Nonconformist publications generally neglected it, partly perhaps because it appeared anonymously. The Evangelical Magazine, however, granted it a major review, eight pages of denunciation for its "abject and crawling hypocrisy" as colonizationist propaganda. Baird's argument, the reviewer charged, was "an impudent and insidious attempt to bolster up the cause of American slavery, while pretending to be anxious for its removal." Nonetheless, among Americans Baird's work was prized as a storehouse of arguments. Six years later the scholarly Scottish abolitionist, James Grahame, complained in exasperation of Americans who repeatedly directed his attention to the tract. Grahame, "a devout Christian of the kirk," was also an historian who had written an account of the United States. Influenced by Jay and Birney, he was no friend to the American churches or to colonization, which he thought "a wicked scheme to perpetuate slavery." Well equipped thus, he published in 1842 Who is to Blame?, a careful reply to Baird, focusing on the absurdity of Baird's charge of British responsibility for American slavery.

One explanation for the meager notice given to Baird's defence may lie in the attention captured for a competing and more dramatic exchange. In June Wardlaw's Congregational chapel in Glasgow was the scene of the classic British antislavery debate of the decade. It took place between George Thompson
and the Baltimore Presbyterian, Robert J. Breckinridge. The debate arose from Thompson's letter to the *Patriot* in May in which, after signifying his desire to meet Cox in Exeter Hall to justify his "charges against America and American ministers," he added, "I am ready also and anxious to meet any American Clergyman, or other gentleman, in any part of Great Britain, to discuss the general question." Breckinridge, writing from Durham, accepted the challenge, and arrangements were made for a Glasgow disputation to take place over a period of five nights, June 13 to June 17, before some twelve hundred spectators willing to pay sixpence for their places. Wardlaw presided, and the rules stated that each debater was to speak for one half-hour at a time, and no interruptions or resolutions would be permitted.²⁹

The arguments on neither side were new. Thompson drew on his recent American experience to portray the cruelties of the slave system and indict the hypocrisy of the Northern churches, while Breckinridge condemned slavery as a moral evil but protested the impossibility of coercive federal reform in a "union of twenty-four republics." Above all, he insisted, British intervention in an American problem was distinctly counterproductive.³⁰ More important were the circumstances of the debate. Thompson was accusatory, the audience was violently partisan, and Breckinridge was a belligerent Kentuckian and a fervent nationalist. Accordingly, he was drawn into denying that American slavery was so atrocious as represented and counterattacking with a recital of British national sins—alcoholism, impoverishment of the lower orders, maintenance of a corrupt state church, imperialism, and the like. In brief, the disputation was a sensation and was widely reported and reprinted in newspapers throughout Britain and the United States.³¹

Nor did it end with the final speeches on June 17. For the next six weeks substantial written exchanges took place in the *Patriot* between Breckinridge, Thompson, and Robert Barnard Hall, an American abolitionist, while in several publications readers gave vent to their feelings.³² On August 1, the Glasgow
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Emancipation Society met in Dr. Heugh's chapel and after a long speech by Wardlaw, formally passed his resolution that Thompson had successfully defended his charges against American slaveholders and the American church. Breckinridge heard of this act while traveling on the Continent and angrily protested that such a resolution was contrary to the agreed conditions of the debate. From Paris he despatched a long letter to Wardlaw that was a masterpiece of invective. Breckinridge took his point of departure from Wardlaw's remark that if Americans identified any British sins comparable in magnitude to American slavery, British Christians would welcome American correction. He then presented a bill of particulars which included slavery in Africa and India, Catholicism established by law in Lower Canada, the Maynooth grant to Irish Catholics, Hindoo idolatry in India, the lack of religious instruction in British Africa, and the irreligion and ignorance of the London poor. All the British papers, he charged, were anti-American, and he rejoiced at the prospect of returning home, never more to visit Britain. In conclusion he pronounced judgment on the entire transatlantic enterprise: "It was the world, more than America, we sought to benefit. We had no purpose of attempting a revolution in Britain; nor did it enter into our conceptions that a revolution in America, of the most terrible extent, would be dictated to us. . . ."\(^34\)

This sensational letter appeared in the *Patriot* and was widely publicized. It did not improve Breckinridge's reputation in England. Many Britons seem to have been of the opinion of one correspondent that the letter was an "effusion of a man grievously disappointed and deeply mortified at the utter failure of his miserable attempt to whitewash his brethren and to bolster up a rotten cause."\(^35\) Republication in America was accompanied by varied editorial comment. Conservative newspapers hailed Breckinridge's aggressive defence of American practice, the *New York Evangelist* regretted the exchange and counselled restraint, and the *Liberator* was predictably contemptuous.\(^36\)
Only a month after this confrontation transatlantic discord over American slavery broke out in a new and unexpected denominational setting, the annual Methodist Conference which opened at Birmingham in late July, 1836. In the past Wesleyan communication with American Methodists had been maintained with some regularity and always with mutually encouraging and uncritical counsel. Unlike the bodies of evangelical Dissent, from which they still remained aloof, Wesleyans had sent no transatlantic embassies in 1834 or 1835, though more conventional fraternal visits in one direction or the other had been made three times since 1820. In these earlier relations slavery had not become an issue, although the American bishops were conscious of an increasing delicacy and had decided against sending a slaveholding representative to England in 1826. In 1832 the Liverpool Conference touched on the subject, congratulating American Methodists for endeavoring through a Liberian mission to make some reparation for the sin of slavery, and in 1834 Conference expressed hope that the recent victory in the West Indies would lead to slavery's extirpation in other lands, but the first genuine challenge came in 1835 when the Sheffield Conference made an uncompromising attack on the institution, quoting Wesley's strictures on American slavery in particular. The scriptures themselves, it told the Americans, spoke condemnation of slavery, and American Methodists were under religious obligation to lead public opinion to an act of national emancipation. The Conference also stated that it was accrediting William Lord as an official delegate to the next American conference to be held at Cincinnati in May, 1836. This Cincinnati assembly was to set the stage for the troubled Birmingham Conference two months later when shocked English Methodists for the first time measured the gulf separating them from their American brethren.

The Cincinnati Conference had momentous importance in the slavery controversy in American Methodism. Although American Methodists had long maintained a formal condemnation of slavery, the church had gradually relaxed any disciplinary proceedings against slaveholders. The denomination was vigorous in the South where by the 1840s over 25,000 Methodists—and some of
them ministers—held slaves. By the time of the Cincinnati Conference Southern members were deeply resentful of abolition pressures; some were ready even to affirm that slavery was a blessing. In the North denominational leaders and such organs as the Christian Advocate and the Methodist Magazine were shocked by the virulence of Antislavery Society propaganda and fearful of the breakup of the church and nation. In addition, more than any other denomination, Methodists were committed to the colonization scheme, making large contributions of money and manpower to its Society and the Liberian mission. Yet despite these restraints, in the 1830s Northern ministers, primarily in New England and New York, began to subscribe to the radical appeal of "immediate emancipation." By 1835 Methodist antislavery societies, encouraged by British example, were prominent in New England, and in 1836 a majority of the section's delegates to Conference were abolitionists. Not surprisingly, conservative statesmen like Nathan Bangs and Wilbur Fisk, dreading the consequences of "ultraism," deprecated English pressures. Fisk's colleague at Wesleyan, Daniel Denison Whedon, even compared George Thompson to "papery" as a menace to the republic and charged that "England has been, and still is, a GIGANTIC SLAVER." 

Confronted with crisis, conservative leaders, North and South, took the fateful decision at Cincinnati to turn aside the petitions from Northern churches and the protests of their delegates and to stifle all abolitionist agitation, a policy maintained successfully until 1844.

The manoeuvres which led to this result were precipitated by the English message, both in William Lord's fraternal address and in the official communication, read on the following day. The Conference majority showed its temper by taking the unprecedented step of declining to publish the English address and by selecting Natan Bangs, Thomas A. Morris, and William Capers, all anti-abolitionists and the last a South Carolina slaveholder, to draft a reply. It was unusually harsh. "Had you been as well acquainted with this subject as we are ...," the British Wesleyans were told, "your tone of sympathy for us would have been deeper and more pathetic." Delicate problems
of national and ecclesiastical unity had to be given primary concern, and in any case the church was energetically seeking the slave's spiritual happiness through an expanding mission. The Conference then confirmed this stand by formally condemning "modern abolitionism" and its Methodist exponents.\textsuperscript{44} The Ohio Anti-Slavery Society found the entire Conference debate useful propaganda and published portions of the English message and an account of the voting on the official reply.\textsuperscript{42}

Knowing that Lord would be making his report to the English Conference in July, Methodist abolitionists decided to carry the contest to a more sympathetic tribunal. Led by Orange Scott, the prominent abolitionist who had been censured at the late convention, eighty-nine New England Methodists signed a memorial to British Wesleyans, indicting their own church's sinful silence and pleading for English help. The memorial was published in sympathetic papers, and the Quaker Joseph Sturge and other British abolitionists were alerted to the appeal.\textsuperscript{43} The address was well timed because Scott's most respected opponent in New England, President Fisk of Wesleyan University, was to appear at the Birmingham Conference as the American delegate.

Fisk was a dignified educator and temperance advocate then traveling in Europe, much worried by the rise of abolitionism in his own New England Methodism. When he had gone abroad for his health in August, 1835, his parting message, carried in the Methodist press, had been an earnest plea to let the slavery controversy alone. "Unless this misguided and delusive course should be relinquished," he warned, "the country is ruined. And when Northern Abolitionists have accomplished their work of desolation . . . , who will there be to raise the song of triumph? None but demons below, and despots on earth.\textsuperscript{44} But in England Fisk found the controversy as heated as at home. In the\textit{Patriot} a Nonconformist clergyman, noting that Wesleyans had a "more intimate and organized" connection with America than other denominations, urged British Congregational and Baptist ministers to approach their Methodist brethren prior to the coming Conference and remind them of their
responsibilities to the slave. Even more strenuous preparations were undertaken on the eve. A week before Conference was to open, the Birmingham Baptist Missionary Society was clamorously turned into an abolition meeting, while Joseph Sturge described the heroic work of Orange Scott, the struggle in American Methodism, and the frigid reception of the British delegate in Cincinnati. Prompted by letters from America, Sturge also warned his audience that a Methodist bishop, a representative of the pro-slavery party, would arrive in their city in a few days. To make sure that the right people had the news Sturge had circulars printed and delivered to every member of the Wesleyan Conference. The publicity must have been extensive, because Fisk himself, journeying to Birmingham, was told by a stranger in his coach that an American advocate of slavery was coming to address the Conference.

When the session opened, Lord gave a tactful report of the Cincinnati decisions, stressing that the Americans were courteous though some of them "warm," but regretting that "the Conference did not take a higher stand, and at least denounce slavery, as strongly as 'abolitionism.'" In these circumstances, Fisk, the advocate of silence, had to focus his remarks on slavery. "We have no pro-slavery party in the American Conference," he rather disingenuously explained.
"There may be individuals but you must not blame the body for that." Longing
to end slavery, they differed only on methods. He himself believed that since
the federal government was powerless, "we can do nothing but by moral means."
Edgy at a question alluding to George Thompson, he curtly answered, "I am not
here to reply to Mr. Thompson." Members were not convinced. Jabez Bunting,
the president, observed proprieties, but stated that "it would have been more
gratifying" if the American Conference "had expressed, at their late session,
their official and continued disapprobation of slavery." The English were clearly
shaken at American unwillingness to reaffirm a traditional Methodist doctrine,
and when an official reply was adopted on August 12, it elaborated all the
religious arguments for abolition and insisted that American Methodists had
no Christian choice but to labor zealously for that cause.

Accounts of this Anglo-American discord among both Presbyterians and
Methodists were widely reported in the United States and delighted abolitionists.
"News from Birmingham Eng. that Dr. Fisk is uncomfortable at the Gen. Conference
of his denomination," crowed Elizur Wright to Theodore Weld. "From Glasgow
that Geo. Thompson has been declared victor over Breckinridge by a large public
meeting. Dr. Wardlaw and others fired heavy guns."

But there yet remained the upheaval among British Baptists, and this produced
probably the most serious agitation of all.

During the summer of 1835 reports of the Baptist mission in America had
spread an uneasy realization that the delegates, whatever their justification,
had given no testimony against slavery and even allowed themselves to become
identified with American colonizationists. At the thanksgiving service at their
return to England, Cox and Hoby took care to repel "with warm feelings some
assertions which had been made from ex-parte statements, that they had been
indifferent in the cause of Abolition." Nonetheless, disquiet, evident in letters
to the Patriot in the autumn, persisted and then increased greatly in the following
spring when abolitionists on both sides of the ocean mounted a frenzied campaign against the delegates. The denomination was troubled also by the memorial from the New England antislavery Baptists who had met in May, 1835 and been ignored by the British deputation. The one hundred and eighty-five signers of the memorial, C. P. Grosvenor explained in a covering letter, were all Baptist pastors who dissociated themselves from the excuses of the Triennial Convention and thanked the British Union for its "strictly proper and benevolent" letter which might still "produce a good and powerful result among our own denomination."

The Baptists in America, Cox’s and Hoby’s published report of their mission, appeared amidst these anxieties in late spring, 1836. In the preface the authors indignantly repulsed attacks made on them by the antislavery platform and press, and their chapters on the Richmond Convention and the New York anniversaries were pointed self-vindications complete with supporting affidavits from American Baptist celebrities. The Nonconformist press, the antislavery societies, and the general public took careful notice of the work which quickly passed through two editions and appeared in New York as well. Judgments differed. The Patriot presented copious extracts, and despite its strong antislavery bias, concluded that Cox had been correct in discharging his difficult responsibility. Similar conclusions were reached by the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine and the Congregational Magazine—the review in the latter journal attracting Thompson’s denunciation as a "vicious defense," and "insidious self-contradictory article." On the other hand, condemnation was the tone of the United Secession Magazine, and the Evangelical Magazine. The Eclectic Review placed blame on the Baptist Union for sending its representatives across the sea with instructions mute on the slavery issue. Embarrassed, the Baptist Magazine presented a long review, primarily extracts and exculpatory. It declined to pass censure. More militant Baptists found satisfaction in Price’s periodical, Slavery in America, which not only castigated the conduct of Cox and Hoby but added a detailed rebuttal of their book by the Rev. Thomas Willcocks of Devonport.

This agitation reached its height as the time for the annual meeting of
the Baptist Union approached. In April readers' letters in the Baptist Magazine urged the Union to discuss the American mission and requested churches to send their views to the secretary of the Union. In June Willcocks addressed a general letter to the Baptist churches of England: "Let me beseech and entreat you to preserve your honor and consistency uncontaminated, by repudiating all alliance with your American brethren, that would involve a compromise of your principles." As if in response, the radical Leicester Association one week before the opening of the Union "unfeignedly regretted" the silence of the deputation and formally declined any fellowship with "those societies in America calling themselves churches of Christ while the abomination of slavery is cherished among them." Ominously, the association also declared its opposition to receiving any future deputation from the guilty churches of America. Similar actions were taken by other regional assemblies.

The Union met in London throughout the week of June 20-24. Attendance was large, and representatives from all over the kingdom manifested a "deep and thrilling interest." Alarmed by the intensity of feeling, the chairman found it necessary to open the sessions with warnings against disorders. For several hours each day, delegates debated their relation to American Baptists, "and the extent to which it involved the English Baptists in the guilt of the slave system." Both Cox and Hoby presented long and desperate defenses of their conduct, though their performance still left many unsatisfied. There were chiefly two decisions to be made, one respecting the recent past and the other the future. For the first, a cautiously worded compromise at length emerged from the discussion. Cox and Hoby were to be thanked for the "diligence, zeal, and ability with which they prosecuted the denominational objects of their mission," but an amendment proposed by the militants, J. P. Mursell and Thomas Price, "regretted that the state of society rendered it advisable in their judgment, in order to the attainment of the more strictly denominational objects, to refrain from" condemning slavery "in public meetings, and to withhold from the Abolition Society their encouragement and support." This resolution, John Scooble of the Anti-Slavery Society wrote
Garrison, was the result of compromise to keep the Baptist Union from breaking up, and the comment of the Birmingham Philanthropist was caustic: "The Union and they have smuggled the thing up together, and with the exception of Mr. Mursell of Leicester and Mr. Price, they have all of them sacrificed truth to expediency, and principle to union." 65

The second issue concerned future policy, and it soon appeared that here the delegates were deeply divided. The more radical wished to break off all ties with the Americans at once. Moderates argued that such action was premature, since the British delegates had voluntarily withheld their witness against slavery at Richmond, and for this the American Baptists could not be held responsible. Rather, it was necessary to challenge yet again the conscience of overseas brethren, and let further fraternal communion depend on the issue of that correspondence. This advice ultimately prevailed, but the Union warned that all intercourse would cease if the Americans refused attention to the sin of slavery. "From that moment," Price told the assembly. "the Baptists of England must relinquish their connection with them." At this point he was interrupted by a shout: "Is that the sentiment of the meeting? will it go to America as such?" There were cries from all parts of the hall, "Yes, yes." 67

Even this compromise was not acceptable to all Baptists, nor did it still the controversy. During the remaining months of the year letters in the Baptist Magazine argued the respective merits of Christian forbearance or righteous condemnation, while some Baptist bodies unilaterally declined further fraternal connection with America. In July the Magazine expressed alarm at the rush toward "setting the Baptists in England at war with those in America, or dividing and shattering our interest at home." Indeed, forebodings of a split in the denomination were heard. Yet in the same month the press for more drastic action was evident when the Baptist Missionary Society met on July 19 in Birmingham. Discontented with the decision of the Union, antislavery Baptists and their allies now won approval from the meeting for a double pledge—a resolve to break communion with America and a promise to support American abolitionists. We will assist the abolitionists,
oried Mursell, the leading spirit in the resolution, "by rousing ... the 
British mind, by circulating ... relevant information, by conveying long and 
loud remonstrance, and by retiring from all union with those churches which 
refuse to hearken to our cry. (Cheers.) Let it be distinctly understood 
here, that on this account the religious intercourse between the Baptists in 
America and those in England is suspended. (Immense cheering)." Following 
this speech, the Missionary Society solemnly resolved that "No person who 
holds property in man should be allowed to remain a member of a Christian 
church." Frantically, James Hoby, whose Baptist chapel was in Birmingham, 
tried to speak against the motion but was dismissed as one who had "bowed the 
knee to the American Juggernaut."  

By the end of 1836 the emerging pattern was becoming clear. Formally, the 
more cautious policy of the Union, and not that of the Missionary Society, 
prevailed. English Baptists retained an official relation to the American 
churches, but the connection was valued now chiefly as providing an 
opportunity for communicating reproof. In September the Union forwarded its 
resolutions to Boston, together with a ringing protest against slavery and a 
demand that American Baptists work for the repeal of laws protecting the 
institution. Baron Stow, himself an antislavery cleric, wrote to London that 
the Boston Board would be equally intransigent. "Whatever communication ... 
you may choose to make to this Board, on the subject of slavery," he informed 
London, "the only reply which at present you will receive will be a disclaimer 
of jurisdiction in the case ... The Board will not even publish your 
communications upon this subject."  

Thus an impasse was reached, and British Baptists now turned to opening up 
American contacts of a different sort. In his antislavery periodical Price 
sought to define their strategy in a four-point program. At every meeting 
prayer must be offered for the slave. No letter should cross the Atlantic 
without rebuke "in strong and stirring accents" for "the crime under which our
Christian brethren in America are suffering." Wrongs done to the slave should be brought to the bar of world opinion: "If there be one nation under heaven that can bear up amidst the scorn and derision of the civilized world, that nation most surely is not America." And lastly, every effort must be made to support antislavery forces in America." By the spring of 1837 Baptist abolitionists in the United States were receiving a flood of encouraging messages from English associations. "We sympathize in your trials ...," declared one typical address, "whether arising from popular violence, or the hostile attitude of the civil power. But we know you will persevere. The voice of millions in Great Britain cheers you on to the attack."

The crisis of 1836 put an end to the most ambitious expectations entertained of the transatlantic evangelical connection. Many British Nonconformists put aside earlier uncritical admiration for the American republic, and some came even to doubt the legitimacy of its religious revivals and voluntary system. Prominent Americans too were wounded by the contention. Baird, according to his son, was permanently embittered by the criticism of his Letter, and his subsequent distrust of British evangelical partnership in the work of revitalizing world Protestantism may well date from this time. Breckinridge, departing from England, left Wardlaw a final judgment: "You do not know us. You have little sympathy with us. You do us wrong in all your thoughts ... My visit to England has opened up a new source of devotion, in gratitude to God that he permitted your ancestors to persecute ours out of it." All plans for further exchanges of delegations on a regular and continuing basis were dropped, and the American Baptist mission selected at Richmond to visit Britain in 1837 never crossed the Atlantic.

Yet the transatlantic religious connection was not moribund. The Nonconformist focus on the American religious scene and comparable American attention to the British churches became even more intense in the late 1830s
and 1840s, and all noteworthy developments were carefully recorded in extenso in the *Patriot*, the *Congregational Magazine*, the *Eclectic*, the *New York Observer*, the *New York Evangelist* and myriad other organs on both sides of the ocean. In view of the intensity of the transatlantic slavery debate, how was this possible?

Fundamentally the nineteenth-century Anglo-American evangelical culture was in the view of its exponents too primary, pervasive, and integral for any province of its workings to be ignored. A common theological discourse and a single literature of piety suffused the entire Anglo-American community; John Angell James was as well known to American evangelicals of the 1830s and 1840s as Charles Grandison Finney would be to British Protestants in the next generation. And with the improvement in ocean travel, transatlantic visits multiplied, cementing ties of friendship and correspondence, and making the presence of overseas delegates a commonplace at the anniversaries. So much was this symbiosis the case that proposals for reinstatement of regular denominational missions were again entertained by the Congregational Union—James wanted to send a new delegation to America in 1840 and Reed tried to revive interest in 1843.

For British Congregationalists and Scottish Dissenters, even the American Presbyterian schism of 1837 probably eased some tensions. On both issues in the separation—theology and slavery—evangelical Dissent felt a primary kinship to the New School. The more difficult relations with the Old School could be left primarily to evangelicals of the Scottish Establishment.

Paradoxically, even the divisive issue of slavery appeared to demand the continuance of the traffic in men and ideas. Despite the frenetic calls for "No communion with slaveholders!" in 1836, neither Methodists nor Baptists were willing to sacrifice the overseas tie and the opportunity to witness to American brethren concerning their national sin. The Wesleyan Conference continued to send its annual testimony against "manstealing." In 1838 it named Orange Scott as an official delegate from antislavery Methodists. In 1840 it even despatched Robert Newton as its representative to the American Conference and subsequently thanked him for his "unflinching reiteration and
avowal of our UNALTERED AND UNALTERABLE views and sentiments on the subject of Slavery." Baptists followed a similar course. In 1837 the Union formally expressed deep sympathy with overseas abolitionists and urged all Baptist churches in America to give them "their active and zealous co-operation." This time the message was sent directly to the press. In 1840 the Union received three Baptist antislavery activists, including C. P. Grosvenor, Elon Galusha, and Nathaniel Colver, as accredited American delegates.¹²

Finally, the dynamic culture of evangelical moral reforms bound Nonconformists and American churchmen together. Slavery proved to be a stumbling block, but the moral earnestness which fired the slavery controversy also drove the search for Protestant means by which individual and social betterment might be effected. The 1830s and 1840s constituted an age of reforms in both Britain and America, and soon Dissenters and American Protestants were consulting and laboring together for their common progress.

2. See B.M., 1836, pp. 16-20; *Evan. Mag.* 1835, pp. 326, 463, 492-494.


7. *Patriot*, June 17, p. 212; Nov. 18, p. 388.


15. Edinburgh Emancipation Society, *A Voice to the United States of America from the Metropolis of Scotland*: Being an account of various meetings held in Edinburgh on the subject of American slavery, upon the return of Mr. George Thompson, from his mission to that country, (Edinburgh, 1836).


18. *Liberator*, May 28, p. 86; August 27, 137.


Patriot, June 22, 1837, p. 159.

Price, p. 13. He wrote to Garrison announcing his publication. It was short-lived until August, 1837. (Source)

John Mckerrow, History of Succession Church (Eden 1848). Associated Phil 1811.

Letter of Aug. 30, 1836 quoted in Liberator, Nov. 12, 1836 p. 182.


Robert Baird, Letter to Lord Brougham, on the Subject of Slavery (L 1836).

Ibid., pp. 384-10-28

Ibid., pp. 5-9, 42, 33, 35-37, 44.


For Upjohn, see Josiah Quincy, Memoir of James Grahame, LL.D. (Baton, 1845).

Patriot, June 1, 1836, 205; June 15, p. 23. See also Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine 1839, pp. 145-150.

Discussion on American Slavery between George Thompson Esq., Agent of the British and Foreign Society for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the World, and Rev. Robert J. Breckenridge, Delegate from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, to the Congregational Union of England and Wales, Holden in the Rev. Dr. Wardlaw's Chapel, Glasgow, Scotland, on the Evenings of the 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th of June, 1836 [sic]

(Boston, 1836).

Ibid., p.

Ibid., pp. 5-10.


New York Evangelist, Nov. 12, 1836.

Liberator, Nov. 12, 1836.


Mathews, Slavery and Methodism. pp. 146-176, 139-144.

On Lord, see Mathews, Slavery, pp. 139-

For Cincinnati conference, see Journals of General Conference, I, 431-435; Christian Advocate, June 24, 1836, p. 175; Minutes of Conference (England) VII (1835) 616, 114.

Methodist Mag 1836???, 38-54
Minutes (England) VIII, 112-114
Journals of General Conference, I, 432-435

Price Sept 1836 pp. 49-55
8 Nov 101
42 Debate on "Modern Abolitionism" in the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church Held in Cincinnati May 1836 (Cincinnati, 1836).

Herald of Freedom, July 23, 1836, p. 81, asked for British help. 
On Orange Scott see DAB


45 Patriot, July 20, 1836, p. 279.


48 Benjamin Gregory, Side-Lights, 215

49 Fisk, Travels, 598

50 Minutes, 1836, 117-119. Price Nov 1836 pp 104-5


54. Cox and Hoby, Baptists in America, pp. iv-v; 47-8A 124, 

55. Patriot, 1836, May 9, 157
Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, 1836, 505-520


Liberator, Dec 10, 1836, 198. OK

59. Patriot, ; Letter signed by Mursell, chairman, June 13, 1836

60. Price, Slavery in America, July 1836. BM July 1836 305-20


64. Baptist Magazine, 1836, July 1, 319. Caution, moderation.
Liberator Aug 27, 1836 139 quoting British Emancipator

65. BM 1836 Sept 406-7, Oct 417-417; Slavery in America 1836, 575
Patriot, 1836, July 27, 286.
Baptist Magazine, 1836, 492-6.
Goodell, p. 495.
Price, Slavery in America, 107
Patriot, Oct 27, 1836, 434

Price, Slavery in America, Oct 1836, Nov 73-6, 77-101 By H. Castle St.

Henry Martyn Baird,

Patriot, Aug. 31, 1836, 326, Letter to Wardlaw August 20, 1836.

Minutes (England), 1840, p. 95.

Baptist Magazine, June, 1837, p. 251, 267-8
Ibid., 1840,

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