

Amherst College Oct 21, 1834

To the Honorable, the Faculty of Amherst College,
Beloved Instructors;

There never was a time, when we felt more sensibly than now our need of that “wisdom which is profitable to direct”. We feel that ours is a critical situation. We cast our eyes upon our respected Instructors – we remember with gratitude their oft’ repeated kindnesses – we know that they are our guardians, and seek our welfare both for time and eternity – we are fully conscious too of their wishes and requests of us as members of College – we believe that these requests are made in love – we would not impute the slightest sinister motive, but we look again over two millions of our Countrymen – we hear the clanking of their chains. We listen to their moving pleas for deliverance – their deep-toned wailings are borne to us on every breeze; - we remember that we are the disciples of the Compassionate Saviour, who commands that “all things that we would that men should do to us, we should do others” – and our hearts are ready to burst within us. We would gladly comply with your request if we could do it consistently with the dictates of conscience, and the wants and woes of perishing millions.

Under such circumstances the College Anti Slavery Society met on the evening of the thirteenth [instant], and, after prayer and candid deliberation, resolved, without a dissenting voice, that they could not conscientiously disband themselves and relinquish, as a Society, the idea of inquiring into and praying over and discussing the sufferings and woes of a large portion of our population. – We deem it our duty here to make some remarks with regard to the formation of our Society and our success since its establishment.

The College Anti Slavery Society was formed, as you well know, at a period of great excitement. It was nearly at the same time, if not on the same week that the Colonization Society was established. Public opinion was against us. Only eight individuals had the moral courage to avow themselves abolitionists. These persons – two of whom are now in eternity – feeling that theirs was the cause of God and humanity, met in a private room for the purpose of forming themselves into an association whose object should be to do all in their power that was sanctioned by law, religion and humanity to effect the immediate abolition of slavery in our country and promote the amelioration of the condition of that unhappy class of our countrymen now held in the cruel bondage of slavery and prejudice. They prayed time and again over the subject and, though obliged to endure the scoffs and the ridicule of a crowd without, instituted a Society – finding themselves under the most solemn obligations to unite their prayers and efforts – whatever might oppose – to blot out, forever, the stain of slavery from our national character. All who joined in this purpose, with a single exception, were professors of religion. They wept and prayed together – they gave the mutual pledge, and to this day remain faithfull [sic] to their engagement. Since that time, which is more than one year, from eight we have increased to upwards of seventy members, and there are many more who perfectly accord with us in sentiment, and are ready to come out and take their stand on our side.

With respect to our measures, we are free to acknowledge that there have been some things said which the most of us have, and all of us do now sincerely regret. We doubt not that in some instances, when the ardor of youthful feeling was excited, words have been uttered which were wanting in the spirit of that Saviour whom almost all of us profess to imitate. We will not attempt to exculpate ourselves, we confess our guilt – but we cannot admit that there has existed or does still exist that alienation of feeling between us and our brethren of the opposite opinion which has been wrongly supposed. And here you will allow us to say, that while we are unanimous in expressing our satisfaction with the kind and gentlemanly treatment of our

venerable President, we were utterly astounded when we heard from his lips that such was the case. If there has been such alienation it has sprung up, not in our own bosoms, but in those of our brethren. We solemnly deny that we cherish other than the kindest feelings towards them. We are just as ready to extend to them the hand of fellowship – to mingle our petitions with theirs – to listen to their exhortations, and to make them our intimate companions as ever. Many of our best our dearest friends indeed in this Institution are the strenuous advocates of opposing principles, and we cannot believe that they will lay at our doors the sin of coldness in our Christian affections to them. No! – widely as we differ from them in some respects – we tenderly and sincerely love and esteem them.

But there is one thing more to which we feel ourselves called upon to allude, VIZ, that “the existence of our Society with retard the progress of religion in ourselves as individuals and in the College as a community. We consider this objection, if well founded, of vast importance. We certainly would be the last persons knowingly and openly to adopt a course which would tend to this result. But here again we are constrained to differ. We can truly say – and we take this opportunity to affirm, - that our principles have tended to precisely the reverse. Formerly we were continually harassed by fears that all was not right – we could not even pray for the slaves with any degree of consistency without virtually offering up Anti-Slavery prayers. This we feared to do inasmuch as the principles we openly avowed and laboriously maintained were of a different character. Many a time did there come when we were on our knees, a secret whisper to our souls that told us in language not to be misunderstood that we were wrong and that our opponents were right, that their sentiments, of “breaking every yoke and letting the oppressed go free,” were prompted by the spirit of the gospel, and would prevail just in proportion as that spirit was extended. We felt that the slave-holder must be either guilty or not guilty of sin for holding men, whose birth-right is liberty and who possess immortal minds created to be free; - if guilty, as all acknowledge, we could not & cannot now understand how it is possible he should be also guilty should he immediately cease from that sin. Duty we felt was ours – consequences, Gods – that it was sufficient for us to know his command, and not for us to inquire whether by obeying this command, we might not sacrifice some of our own interests. Thus were our minds agitated between cowardice & conscience until we summoned the courage (and it required much) to unite our efforts & influence on the unpopular side, and subscribe heartily to that noble sentiment

“Fiat Justitia, ruat Coelum”. A sentiment which we believe every page of God’s word fully & clearly maintains. Now there is not a subject over which we can pray with more fervency & humility – with more calmness & satisfaction, than this. We have not a doubt that our principles are such as God himself approves – we have not a fear but that so far as they are concerned, we can stand this day before our Judge and give up our recount – we feel ready to do so*. Our principles are the result, at least with those of us who have an interest at the throne of grace, of deliberate, full, long, continued examination & prayer.

Such being the case we again say, and we solemnly appeal to Him who knows our hearts, whether or not we are sincere, that our principles & the existence of our fraternity have been highly beneficial to ourselves. They have fanned & kept alive the flame of benevolence & sympathy for every oppressed and degraded people, they have expanded our hearts, have given us a disposition to inquire into the wants & woes of a world and attempt something, however feebly, for the alleviation of these wants & woes.

And now, in conclusion, we cannot forbear to entreat you in the language of supplicants, not to require of us to disband our Society. Many of us are expecting to be missionaries and our

hearts throb with emotions of the deepest sorrow, at the thought of relinquishing our exertions, as a fraternity, for the bleeding African. We feel assured that our cause is the cause of God – the cause of humanity – the cause of the bible. At least permit us to hold, as a Society, our usual monthly concert for prayer which has been established & kept up with interest wherever Anti Slavery Societies exist. But if you think the good of the College requires that our body should be dissolved, we pray you to do the work yourselves. Should such be your course with us, we hope to exercise all becoming submission, we will be the very last persons to offer resistance; but – we say it with the kindest feelings – we cannot – No! we cannot be our own destroyer – we cannot inflict the suicidal blow; the objects of our Society are too deeply interwoven with our hearts for this, we fear that the pure spirit of our lamented Fiske, to whose heart the cause of the suffering slave was knit with more than human ties, and who presided so recently over our meetings, would frown. No! We cannot do it – it will be sundering heart-strings – Ask us to abandon any of our literary Societies, if you please, but do not ask us to relinquish that over which we love to pray and for whose object we love to labor.

Very respectfully yours,
In behalf of the Anti-Slavery Society,
John E. Farwell Leander Thompson
Henry G. Pendleton Joseph Haven Jr.
 William George Howard
 Ezra Adams, Jr.

*P.S. Said the pious and lamented President Storrs, as he signed, with his hand quivering in death, a declaration of Anti-Slavery sentiments, “these principles are eternal truths and cannot be shaken, I wish to give them my dying testimony”.

To the Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society in Amherst College
Gentlemen,

Our Answer to your very respectful memorial, has been delayed much longer than we intended, on account of the great pressure of business, & because we thought it, on every account, entitled to serious & deliberate consideration. To have had our views essentially changed & our fears removed in regard to the continuance & vigorous action of your association in College, would have given us great pleasure. But after anxiously looking at the subject on all sides, our convictions remain the same that they were, when I addressed your Society more than a month ago. We still believe that your own best good, & the permanent interests of the Institution would be promoted by the voluntary disbanding of the Society.

But as it seems you cannot conscientiously take this step, & our taking it for you would be so afflictive, we have concluded to let your association remain for the present, under the following regulations.

1st To meet as a Society if you see fit, once a month, as you have been accustomed to do, chiefly for prayer, & to hold no other meetings.

2nd To receive such new members at your option, as may wish to join you without solicitation.

3rd It is understood, that discussions & formal addresses before the Society, will hereafter be entirely discontinued.

4th It is also understood, that neither the Society nor individual members of it, will correspond with Editors of news-papers or other persons, so as to bring it in any way before the public.

The great object of these conditions is, to guard against those Evils internal & external, which we are fully persuaded would result from frequent meetings, earnest discussions, & news-paper notoriety. At the same time, the Faculty wish it to be explicitly understood, that they do not intend to interfere in the slightest degree, with your private opinion on the subject of slavery, with your avowal of them as individuals, just as you hold & freely express your opinion on all other subjects. Nor will either you or the friends of Colonization find any difficulty in bringing the great questions concerning slavery before us for debate, in the regular order of College Exercises, provided they can be discussed, as we presume they will be, with that perfect good temper which is essential to such a community as ours.

We are willing, gentlemen, to [Resolve] that under the foregoing regulations, we may permit your Society to remain; but it must be understood, that we cannot excuse ourselves from the duty of disbanding it, if at any future time, if we should find its longer existence, in any way decidedly hostile to the great interests of the Seminary which is committed to our care. In conclusion let me add that the very gentlemanly & Christian tone of your memorial, is regarded by the Faculty as the best possible guarantee, that this communication will be received with the same kind feelings by which it is dictated.

Done by the unanimous vote of the Faculty.
Amherst College
Nov. 26, 1834

Amherst College Jan 7 1835
Respected Instructors,

The members of the College Anti-Slavery Society have twice convened to examine and discuss the several conditions of existence offered them in your recent document, which, we are happy to acknowledge, evinced throughout a high tone of Christian feeling, and an affectionate interest in our welfare.

After a serious and candid examination, however, of the specific restrictions which your letter contains, depriving us, as they evidently do, of all that gives a value to any association; the Society has felt itself under an imperious obligation to decline an acquiescence in the proposals you have made. And accordingly, at our last meeting, the following resolution was unanimously adapted. – “Resolved: that this Society, on due and careful deliberation, are convinced that their duty as men and Christians forbids a compliance with the conditions of existence submitted in the document lately received from their respected instructors.”

The proceedings of the Society in regard to this matter, together with the foregoing resolution, the undersigned have been appointed to communicate to your body.

With sentiments of esteem
We are, Gentlemen, your obot. Servants
William George Howard
David Andrews
Edward C. Pritchett

To the Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society in Amherst College
Gentlemen,

Your late communication which has just been put into my hands, I laid before the faculty last evening. We are happy to find in it, the same excellent spirit, which pervaded your memorial of an earlier date. Our reply to that memorial, was dictated by a deep & solemn sense of our public responsibilities, & by the kindest feelings toward every member of your Society. Subsequent enquiries & reflections have strengthened the convictions, upon which that reply was based. We fully accord with the opinion recently expressed by the whole body of students in the Andover Theological Seminary, that in the present agitated state of the public mind, it is inexpedient to keep up any organization, under the name of Anti-Slavery, Colonization, or the like, at our Literary & Theological Institutions. This, we believe, is coming to be more & more the settled judgment of the enlightened & pious friends of these Institutions, throughout the country. Indeed we are not aware, that such a society as your now exists, in any respectable College but our own, in the land.

You inform us, that on due and careful deliberation; your Society cannot comply with the conditions of existence; specified in our last communication. Now, as we on our part, cannot consistently with our sense of duty, modify or amend those conditions, the case is perfectly plain. You would not ask us to violate our trust, or our consciences. As you cannot comply, your Society must cease to exist, just as the Colonization Society has done already.

Toward you, Gentlemen, & all those who you represent, we entertain the kindest personal regard, which our confidence in your good principles & good judgment [?], will not be for a moment interrupted, or diminished.

In behalf & by vote of the Faculty,
Dr. Humphrey, Pres.

Communication to the Anti-Slavery Society, Feb 19 [or 17?], 1835