KOSSUTH ÉS WENDELL PHILLIPS

Sherwin, Oscar: Prophet of Liberty.
(The life & times of Wendell Phillips, N. York, 1958.)

I would be a soldier.' (Laughter) Men engaged in such rough work as the Abolitionists', with the majority against them, cannot always be very choice in their language; if they were, they would probably not obtain the public ear. The scholar may sit in his study, and take care that his language is not exaggerated; but the rude mass of men are not to be caught by balanced periods—they are caught by men whose words are half battles. From Luther down, the charge against every reformer has been that his tongue is too rough. Be it so. Rough instruments are used for rough work. . . ."[10]

To lift up one's voice against a system reeking with blood and cruelty was called blasphemy and infidelity. But it was the Abolitionists, insisted Phillips, who were the true friends of the Bible, because they denied that its pages were stained with any sanction of slavery. We send our Christian missionaries to the banks of the Ganges on the principle that it is our duty to care for our brother man, no matter how distant his position on the globe may be from our own. Should we not, asked Phillips, care for our brother on the other side of the Potomac?

"I do not attack the sects, but I say this—that with 40,000 Christian pulpits, 70,000 slaves have grown into 3,000,000 and that statutes so bloody have been enacted under their teaching, that those of Draco are light in comparison. Instead of the Jeffersons, the Henrys, and the men of the first era of the republic lamenting slavery as an evil, we have Calhoun declaring it a blessing, and McDuffie saying it is the corner stone of the political edifice. Mr. Webster, as far as we can judge from his last speech—(applause, hissing, and cheering alternately for five minutes,)—I was going to say, that although Mr. Webster has described what were the views of the Romans and Greeks about slavery, it would puzzle ten Philadelphia lawyers to tell what are his own. (Laughter and hissing)"[11]

The almighty dollar was at the bottom of slavery. It was not only a question of morality, but of property—an investment of one hundred million dollars. An American's logic was as clear

as the sun at noonday upon every subject in the world except one. If it related to the white man, it was lucid and bright, but the moment it touched a black man, it veered about like the needle of a compass when it comes near a mass of iron.

Daniel Webster, when speaking of Kossuth, expressed anxiety for his escape from the bloody tyranny of his pursuers, but put Douglass in the place of Kossuth escaping from a far bloodier despotism. Would he respond? Not a bit of it.

> "You love the American banner. But every sixth man under its stripes and stars is a slave . . . Patrick Henry confessed that slavery was a sin. That is all that we Abolitionists want the churches to proclaim. Let them confess themselves sinners, rather than file down their religion to their degraded practice or pervert the Bible to sustain it. Slavery is a sin, and no Constitution, no religious principle is binding that endeavors to sustain it. This is the great question of the age, that, like Aaron's rod, swallows up tariff, internal improvement, Democracy and Whiggery alike. . . .
>
> "God has given us a conscience superior to all law, and whenever a slave touches our free soil, let him be free beyond the reach of his tyrant. Remember that though you may unsettle respect for old institutions, and for law and Constitution, by refusing to obey them, you will only establish the truth, that the Bible is heavier than the statute book. Remember the words of the Indian poet—
>
> 'Alone thou wast born,
> Alone thou shalt die,
> Alone thou shalt go up to judgment!"
>
> (Applause and some hissing.)[12]

At the close of Phillips's lecture, Beecher thanked the audience—not for being gentlemanly—but for proving that Brooklyn deserves its name—the City of Churches—and that they had shown what churches can do, in freely conceding the right of liberty of speech which was denied in New York.[13]

In Boston two weeks later, at a meeting of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, an attempt was made to reenact the scenes in New York—with but partial success.[14]

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

GUEST OF THE NATION

"*Kossuth.* Tell him of American Slavery! Save Him! Save him!" cried Henry C. Wright in a letter to the *Liberator.* "His doom is sealed if he comes here. 'HERE LIES KOSSUTH—THE AMERICAN SLAVEHOLDER'—must be his epitaph, if he touches our shore. Friends of freedom in Europe and America—to the rescue!"[1]

But heedless of Abolitionist protests President Fillmore was directed to offer one of the ships of the Mediterranean squadron to convey Kossuth and his associates to the United States. The execution of the Fugitive Slave Law was now over-shadowed by the interest taken in the visit of the Hungarian patriot.

Kossuth waited a day at Staten Island in order to give the New York City fathers time to prepare a grand reception. One hundred thousand people were waiting on the Battery. Castle Garden was full to overflowing. When Kossuth landed and could be seen, a tumultuous roar broke forth. It seemed as if the shout would raise the vast roof of the reception hall.[2]

A torchlight procession in honor of Kossuth was held on the evening of his arrival and the city of New York gave him a banquet at Irving house. An imposing reception by the bar of New York and an afternoon entertainment by ladies at the Metropolitan Opera House were a fitting close to the honors showered on the Hungarian leader. It was a curious spectacle to see descendants of sober blooded Englishmen and phlegmatic Dutchmen roused to such a pitch of enthusiasm over a man whose only title to fame was that he had fought bravely and acted wisely in an unsuccessful revolution. But we were then an excitable people.[3]

A cordial reception was given Kossuth in Washington. He was presented to the President, dined at the White House, and was received by Congress. The occasion prompted Sumner to make his maiden speech. Kossuth deserved our welcome, he exclaimed. "He is grandly historic, a living Wallace—a living Tell—I had almost said a living Washington. . . ."[4]

The "Guest of the Nation" was a dignified and impressive gentleman with an Asiatic countenance—a thin, thoughtful face, full beard, and dark eyes. He held in his hand a broad brimmed soft hat, already the symbol of European revolutionists.

The keynote of hospitality thus struck in New York rang out clear and lusty in the other cities which Kossuth visited and where he gave full scope to his rare powers of picturesque eloquence. When he passed, it seemed as if every home for miles back from the railroad was deserted and that all the inhabitants had gathered along the tracks to see and hear the great Magyar. In Cincinnati alone he raised from thirty to fifty thousand dollars for the Hungarian cause.[5]

Not a word fell from Kossuth's lips regarding slavery. He would have Americans feel for the robbed, peeled, hunted Magyar while he had no word of sympathy for the Fugitive Slave. This was a bitter mortification to Phillips who was among his most ardent admirers and deeply sympathized with his poor country. But as he watched his triumphal course and saw him deliberately sacrifice the Negro to aid the Hungarian, his indignation grew hot. In vain he called on him to be "faithful and fearless."

Kossuth used to create wild enthusiasm by "Your own late glorious struggle with Mexico." But when he reached that climax in his Pittsburgh speech a dead silence fell upon the vast cheering audience.[6]

In a speech delivered at the Anti-Slavery Bazaar on December 27, 1851, Phillips condemned Kossuth's course. The speech was a criticism rather than a diatribe on a person whose chief desire, like his own, was for freedom, but whose partial advocacy of it was repellent to one who never did anything by halves.

"Senator Foote spoke truly when he said, from his seat in the Senate chamber, 'There is a great struggle going on through the world. It is between despotism and liberty. . . . No man can fail to be on one side or the other. He that is not with us is against us.' To which John P. Hale replied with such readiness, 'Exactly.' . . . . Now, wherever there is the war of ideas, every tongue takes a side. There is no neutrality. Even silence is not neutrality; but he who speaks a word of sympathy to his brother-man is on the side of humanity and progress. (Loud cheers.). . . ."[7]

Take Kossuth's speeches, added Phillips. Did they differ from those of the most pro-slavery American? Did he qualify his eulogy? Had he a word of sympathy for the oppressed? Our country was "great, glorious, and free, the land of protection for the persecuted sons of freedom among the great brotherhood of nations." This was his language.

"What! free as the land where the Bible is refused to every sixth person! Free as the land where it is a crime to teach every sixth person to read! Free as the land where, by statute, every sixth woman may be whipped at the public whippingpost! Free as the land where the murderer of the black man, if the deed is perpetrated only in presence of blacks, is secure from legal punishment! Free as the land where the fugitive dares not proclaim his name in the cities of New England, and skulks in hiding places until he can conceal himself on board a vessel, and make his way to the kind shelter of Liverpool and London!. . . ."[8]

Kossuth was a patriotic and devoted Hungarian—grant him that, said Phillips. He loved Hungary so much that his charity stopped at the banks of the Danube. He was a lover of his motherland, but, still, it was a local patriotism. Even Webster loved the whites. It is something to love one's race, and so much is patriotism. But people claimed for Kossuth that he represented the cause of liberty the world over.

"Men say, 'Why criticise Kossuth, when you have every reason to believe that, in his heart, he sympathizes with you?' Just for that reason we criticise him; because he endorses the great American lie, that to save or benefit one class, a man may righteously sacrifice the rights of another. Because, while the American world knows him to be a hater of slavery, they see him silent on that question, hear him eulogize a nation of slaveholders, to carry his point. What greater wrong can he do the slave than thus to strengthen his foes in their own good opinion of themselves? He whom tyrants hated on the other side the ocean, is the favored guest of tyrants on this side. He eats salt with the Haynaus of Washington. . . .

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori. Every heart responds to the classic patriot, and feels that it *is* indeed good and honorable to *die* for one's country, but every true man feels likewise, with old Fletcher of Saltoun, that while he 'would die to serve his country, he would not do a base act to save her.'"[9]

The protests of Phillips and Garrison were drowned in salvos of applause as Kossuth wended his way through New England.

On April 25, he arrived in Boston and was received at State House by Governor Boutwell amid cheers of the great multitude gathered to do him honor. The road was choked up with footmen, horsemen, and carriages. The streets were crammed with people. Windows were full of ladies who waved their welcome.

"Though Kossuth's welcome roars through our streets," wrote Phillips to Sumner, "I may as well sit down and answer you, more especially as your Free Soil friends have sent me no ticket of admission to the State House, not thinking it delicate perhaps to suppose me willing to look at him!"[10]

It was announced that Kossuth would speak in Faneuil Hall on April 29, Thursday evening, and that no one would be admitted to the hall who could not exhibit a Hungarian bond to the doorkeepers. When the doors opened at six o'clock the street before the hall was so packed that several ladies fainted. Kossuth was received with nine thundering cheers.[11]

When the brave Magyar left Boston on May 18, his car was adorned with flowers and flags. It bore the words "Cradle of Liberty" on each side and had a gilded eagle at each end with the name Kossuth beneath.

By the middle of June the excitement had wholly died down and the name of Kossuth was rarely heard in New York or Boston. Even Phillips and the Abolitionists neglected him.

Congress came to audit the hotel bill of the Hungarian patriot and his suite. The bill amounted to nearly $40,000 and was considered by the Senate as enormous in magnitude. The dignity of the Senate compelled them not to pry into the items. The House had no such scruples, and before passing it, examined narrowly every itemized statement.

The debate was lively and entertaining.

Mr. Jones of Tennessee (in the course of his speech on contingent expenses of the Senate)—"Now, sir, here is a bill paid to the Messrs. Brown, hotel keepers of this city, for Louis Kossuth and his suite, of $4,566.32. For that I never intend knowingly to vote, directly or indirectly."

Several voices—"Read the items."

Mr. Jones—"The items are as follows: 'To board for Governor Kossuth and suite having ten parlors and twenty-two chambers, thirteen and a half days—twenty-three persons: $3,588.00; sundries: champagne, sherry, madeira, cigars, lemonade, bar-bill, washing, . . . Then, sir, they stopped at the National Hotel about four days, and their bill was $74. being $3.08 per day for each person, when they were paying their own expenses, and something over $14. per day for each person when this government was paying their expenses.

"These are the facts, and some of the reasons why this appropriation is asked for by the Secretary of the Senate."

Mr. Freeman, "Has the money been paid?"

Mr. Jones. "It has been paid out of the $150,000 appropriated in the civil and diplomatic appropriation bill of last year.

Mr. Freeman. "Then how are you to get it back?"

(Here the hammer fell.)[12]

The centennial of the birth of Daniel O'Connell occurred on August 6, 1875. A world wide celebration was held. In Boston Phillips observed the occasion by eulogizing the Irish agitator before a vast throng at Music Hall.

"Ireland was a community impoverished by five centuries of oppression,—four millions of Catholics robbed of every acre of their native land: it was an island torn by race-hatred and religious bigotry, her priests indifferent, and her nobles hopeless or traitors. In this mass of ignorance, weakness and quarrel, one keen eye saw hidden the elements of union and strength. With rarest skill he called them forth, and marshalled them into rank. Then this one man, without birth, wealth, or office, in a land ruled by birth, wealth, and office, moulded from those unsuspected elements a power, which overawing the king, senate, and people, wrote his single will on the statute-book of the most obstinate nation in Europe. Dying, he left in Parliament a spectre, which, unless appeased, pushes Whig and Tory ministers alike from their stools.

"To show you that he never took a leaf from our American gospel of compromise, that he never filed his tongue to silence on one truth, fancying so to help another; that he never sacrificed any race to save even Ireland,—let me compare him with Kossuth, whose only merits were his eloquence and his patriotism. When Kossuth was in Faneuil Hall, he exclaimed, 'Here is a flag without a stain, a nation without a crime!' We Abolitionists appealed to him, 'O eloquent son of the Magyar, come to break chains! have you no word, no pulse-beat, for four millions of Negroes bending under a yoke ten times heavier than that of Hungary?' "

O'Connell never said anything like that, claimed Phillips. When Phillips was in Naples, he asked Sir Thomas Foxwell Buxton, a Tory, "Is O'Connell an honest man?"—"As honest a man as ever breathed," said Buxton and then told Phillips this story. When, in 1830, O'Connell entered parliament, the Anti-Slavery cause was so weak that it had only Lushington and Buxton to speak for it; and they agreed that when O'Connell spoke Buxton should cheer O'Connell and when Buxton spoke O'Connell

end