

THE TEST OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

AS THE Anglo-Saxons have debated they have hammered out the rules of social controversy. Their freedoms and liberties have been a chief desideratum of periods of conflict. The political and religious controversies of the seventeenth century settled nothing so much as that Englishmen should have freedom in controversy: of speech, of press, of petition. In every succeeding era of unusually intense debate of vital issues the rules have been redefined, most often strengthened. The era of our struggle for American Independence produced the Virginia Bill of Rights and, finally, the first ten Amendments to the Constitution.

The slavery controversy of the middle of the nineteenth century tested the rules again and established important precedents. Elijah Lovejoy is celebrated today more as a martyr to the freedom of the press than to the cause of abolitionism. John Quincy Adams' battle against the "Gag Rule" was the greatest fight ever fought in America for the right of petition. As freedom of the press and the right of petition were endangered in the heat of the anti-slavery conflict so was academic freedom in colleges. The threat came not from government but from the conservative influences — chiefly business influences — which then, and so often later, have controlled that peculiar American academic phenomenon, the unacademic "Board of Trustees." Most college students of those days seem to have been immature and callow and more likely to lead a cow into the chapel than to insist on discussing great economic, social and political issues. The faculty was likely to center attention pretty much on Greece and Rome and the After-Life. It is not surprising that the great test should have come at Lane Seminary, for there was gathered an unusually mature and serious-minded group of students, led by a genius and inspired by the greatest preacher of the day.

Theodore Weld's zeal for anti-slavery may be traced to the in-

fluence of the eccentric Scotchman, Charles Stuart, just as his piety grew from his contact with Finney. Stuart, born in Jamaica, where he saw slavery at first hand, was a bachelor school teacher in Utica where Weld as a youngster first met him. They served together in Finney's "Holy Band"; Weld was attracted by Stuart's stern and unwavering piety; Stuart saw in Weld the promise of great intellectual and oratorical powers which might be of much service in the reform causes. The close friendship which resulted made of Weld an anti-slavery advocate fully as devoted and much abler than Stuart; the influence of Stuart in the history of American anti-slavery was chiefly felt through Weld.¹ Weld, as we have seen, cooperated with the Tappans in 1831 in preparing the way for the foundation of the American Anti-Slavery Society. In his Southern tour he had privately and discreetly discussed the slave problem with Robinson, Allan, Thome, James G. Birney and others. Before coming to Cincinnati he may have conferred with Arthur Tappan on the importance of converting all these "glorious, good fellows" at Lane to the cause.² He had been invited to the organization meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society at Philadelphia in December, 1833, but had been unable to attend. At that meeting he had been appointed one of the first group of four agents of the society.³

The auspices seemed very favorable. Weld's influence among his fellows was so overwhelming that anything which he sponsored would be likely to be unanimously accepted. "In the estimation of the class," wrote Dr. Beecher in his *Autobiography*, "he [Weld] was president. He took the lead of the whole institution. . . . They thought he was a god."⁴ The Oneidas at Lane had been under his influence at Whitesboro and as Finneyites were predisposed to any thoroughgoing, benevolent movement. Western Reserve College, Rochester, New York City, and especially the Oneida Institute under Beriah Green furnished stirring and well-known precedents.

From June, 1833, to February, 1834, Weld worked individually among the students to complete the preparation for a final

¹Barnes, *Op. Cit.*, 13-15, and Barnes and Dumond, *Op. Cit.*, I, xx, 42-44, and 48-49.

²Charles Beecher, *Autobiography . . . of Lyman Beecher*, II, 314.

³Barnes and Dumond, *Op. Cit.*, I, 121.

⁴Vol. II, 321.

public discussion. The result was that, despite the fact that a colonization society had existed in the seminary from the time of its founding, there was really no opposition worthy of the name. The eighteen evening meetings devoted to the slavery question constituted an anti-slavery revival rather than a debate. The high emotional tone was stimulated by the relation of "experiences" and by the fervid oratory of the revivalist-reformer, Weld.

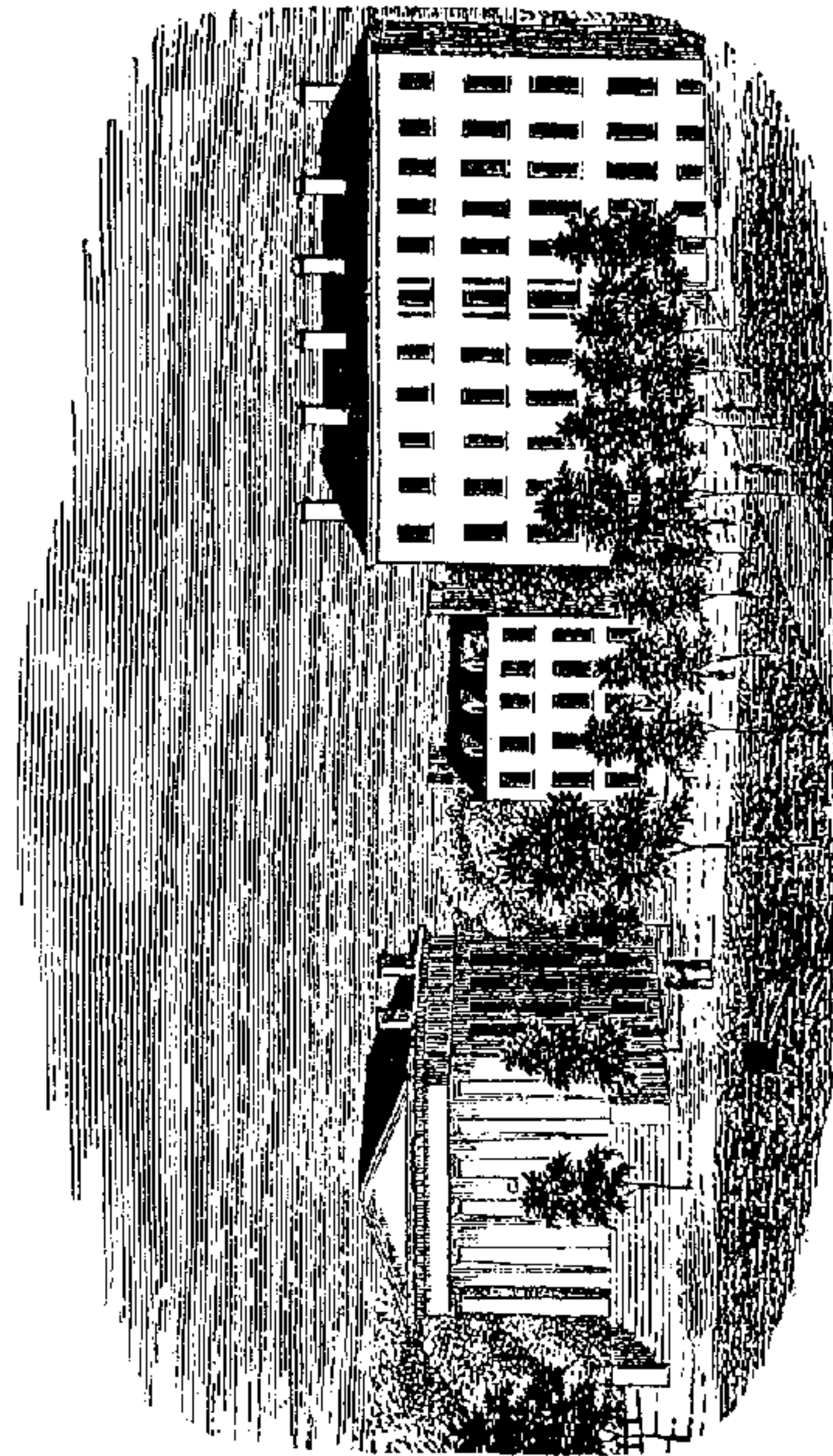
Apparently all the students and all but one of the faculty (Biggs) attended at some time. Beecher, an exponent of compromise and Christian forbearance, somewhat grudgingly granted permission for the meetings. He not only attended some of the discussion, however, but had a written statement of his views, drafted by Catharine Beecher, read to the students. Professor Thomas J. Biggs insisted from the beginning that it was unwise to allow debate on such a dangerous question.⁵

The students were supposed to prepare themselves for the discussion by reading the *African Repository* and other publications of the American Colonization Society as well as the various documents published by the American Anti-Slavery Society. An agent of the former society who had visited Liberia described conditions as he observed them. But the students themselves seem to have occupied most of the time — especially those from the South.

Weld opened the debate with a series of four powerful lectures in favor of immediate emancipation.⁶ Then came the eye-witnesses: "Nearly half of the seventeen speakers [who described the condition of the slaves]," wrote Stanton, "were the sons of

⁵It is quite clear that Miss Beecher did not present this statement in person, Barnes' statement to the contrary notwithstanding (*Op. Cit.*, 66-67). See Huntington Lyman's letter of Mar. 4, 1834, in the *Emancipator*, Mar. 25, 1834, and H. B. Stanton's letter of Mar. 10, 1834, in the *New York Evangelist*, Mar. 22, 1834, reprinted in the *Emancipator*, Mar. 25, 1834. The latter is the best account of the debates and is largely followed in the subsequent sketch. See also, however, Augustus Wattle's letter of Mar. 6, 1834 in the *Emancipator*, Apr. 22, 1834. On Biggs' attitude see Biggs to Vail, July 23, 1834 (Lane MSS).

⁶"The first speaker occupied nearly two evenings in presenting facts concerning slavery and immediate emancipation, gathered from various authentic documents. Conclusions and inferences were then drawn from these facts, and arguments founded upon them favorable to immediate abolition, during the next two evenings." This is Stanton's statement. This speaker could have been none other than Weld. It will be noted that he is not called a Southerner, which was always done when there was any slight basis for so doing. The data used must have been the nucleus of the material which was later published in 1839 as *American Slavery As It is*.



LANE SEMINARY

[From Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio* (Cincinnati—1818)]

slave-holders: one had been a slave-holder himself; one had till recently been a slave; and the residue were residents of, or had recently traveled or lived in slave states." They narrated in gruesome detail all of the atrocity stories which later became so familiar to the people of the North. James Thome described the evils of the "peculiar institution" as he had seen it in Kentucky. Huntington Lyman, a Connecticut Yankee⁷ who had spent some time in Louisiana, developed the "horrid character" of slavery in that region, telling how the Negroes were often professedly worked to death. James Bradley related the story of his own life, telling how he was brought as a child from Africa on a slave ship and sold to a planter of South Carolina who later moved to Arkansas Territory. There his master died and the slave was allowed to work out to buy his freedom. So, in 1833, despite inadequate preparation he was admitted into the academic department of Lane Seminary. Besides giving his autobiography, Stanton reported that this "shrewd and intelligent black . . . withered and scorched" the pro-slavery arguments "under a sun of sarcastic argumentation for nearly an hour."⁸

After the first nine evenings of debate a vote was taken on the question: "Ought the people of the slave-holding states to abolish slavery immediately?" All voted in the affirmative "except four or five, who excused themselves from voting at all on the ground that they had not made up their opinion. Every friend of the cause rendered a hearty tribute of thanksgiving to God for the glorious issue."

It is clear from the way in which the question was stated that Weld and his associates had no intention of fomenting slave insurrections nor of emancipating the slave through Federal action. Indeed, Stanton declared his belief that the meetings had demonstrated the effectiveness of moral suasion in bringing the South to voluntary emancipation. He felt that it had been irrefutably proved "that southern minds trained and educated amidst all the prejudices of a slave-holding community, can, with the blessing of God, be reached and influenced by facts and

⁷He was born in East Haddam, Connecticut, on April 25, 1809. His portrait (in Oberlin College Alumni Records) shows a typical puritan type. Barnes calls him "Lyman of Louisiana," following the statement in the *Emancipator*, as if he were a native of the South (*Op. Cit.*, 67 and 68).

⁸Further data on Bradley's life will be found in the *Oasis* (edited by Lydia Marie Child, Boston—1834), 106-112, and the *Emancipator*, Nov. 4, 1834.

arguments, as easy as any other class of our citizens." It was their plan evidently to abolish slavery by appealing to slave-holders through a nation-wide anti-slavery "revival."

The remaining nine anti-slavery meetings were devoted to discussion of the claims of the colonization movement. All but one of the students present voted "No" to the question which was finally put: "Are the doctrines, tendencies, and measures of the American Colonization Society, and the influence of its principal supporters, such as to render it worthy of the patronage of the Christian public?" The students then formed an anti-slavery society devoted to the "immediate emancipation of the whole colored race within the United States," an end which was to be attained "Not by instigating the slaves to rebellion"; "Not by advocating an interposition of force on the part of the free states"; "Not by advocating congressional interference with the constitutional powers of the States"; but by "approaching the minds of slave holders [with] the truth, in the spirit of the Gospel." The chief offices of the society were given to the young men from south of the river in order to give special prominence to their participation: Allan was president; Robinson, vice-president; even James Bradley was listed among the "Managers."⁹

The students proceeded immediately to make practical application of these anti-slavery principles thus professed. Several of them went out lecturing in behalf of the cause. Thome spoke at the anniversary meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York in May, describing in detail the licentiousness in the South which, he said, was the result of slavery. Stanton also spoke and, in the same month, contributed a 5½-column article on the Internal Slave Trade to the Rochester *Rights of Man*. In mid-June he delivered an anti-slavery lecture in the Rochester First Presbyterian Church.¹⁰ Others went to work "elevating the colored people in Cincinnati." They established a lyceum especially for the Negroes in which regular lectures were given "on grammar, geography, arithmetic, natural philosophy, etc." A circulating library, a regular evening school, three Sabbath Schools, Bible classes for adults and two day schools for boys were begun. Later a "select female school" was established, and

other special classes for girls were organized and taught by four volunteers from New York (called "The Sisters"), whose expenses were paid by Lewis Tappan. In this they were assisted by Maria (or Mary Ann) Fletcher, the daughter of Nathan P. Fletcher of Oberlin. Miss Fletcher went to Cincinnati to study in Catharine Beecher's "Western Female Institute," but at the time that she undertook this work she had left the school and was living in the home of Asa Mahan.¹¹ "About 200 [Negroes] attend school daily," wrote Augustus Wattles in July, "besides Sabbath and evening schools, and lectures are well attended."¹² The students and "the Sisters" also visited among the blacks and mingled with them socially, thus greatly shocking color-conscious Cincinnati. A group of Negroes of both sexes were even invited into the Seminary buildings, having expressed a desire "to see the institution."¹³

The members of the Board of Trustees were mostly solid Cincinnati business men and they found these activities of the students very disturbing. Race feeling was strong in the city; the riots of five years before had not been forgotten. Besides, the merchants, manufacturers and bankers of Cincinnati did about as much business in Kentucky and further south as in Ohio. Clearly they could not afford to have their names associated with an institution which was so publicly identified with abolitionism.¹⁴

⁹Theodore Weld in a letter from Lane Seminary dated Mar. 18, 1834, quoted from the *New York Evangelist* in the *Ohio Observer*, May 1, 1834,—also quoted in Barnes and Dumond, *Op. Cit.*, I, 132-135; S. Wells et al. to Weld in *Ibid.*, I, 178 et seq., and note on page 178; *Ibid.*, I, 194 and 215; John J. Shepherd and Maria (or Mary Ann) Fletcher to N. P. Fletcher, Cincinnati, Dec. 15, 1834 (Treas. Off., File H). On Maria Fletcher see also Esther and J. J. Shepherd to Fayette Shepherd, Nov. [26, 1834] (Shepherd MSS).

¹²Letter dated July 3, 1834, in *Emancipator*, Aug. 26, 1834.

¹³H. B. Stanton [and James Mott] to J. A. Thome, Sept. 11, 1834 (O. C. Lib. Misc. MSS).

¹⁴Seven of the board were ministers (Rev. James Callaher from Tennessee, Rev. F. V. Vail, Rev. A. Mahan, Rev. Benjamin Graves, Rev. R. H. Bishop, Rev. Daniel Hayden and Rev. Samuel Crothers), but three were lawyers (N. Wright, I. G. Burnet, George W. Neff); two were general merchants (William W. Green and Daniel Corwin); two were lumber merchants (Stephen Burrows and J. C. Tunis); one was a druggist (Robert Boal); one a grocer (John H. Groesbeck); one a bank cashier (Augustus Moore); one a physician (Dr. James Warren); one the captain of a river boat (Capt. Robert Wallace), and three were manufacturers (James Melindy, a maker of "winnowing machines," William Holyoke, a coachmaker, and William Schillinger, a cooper). It has been impossible to determine the occupations of three: Daniel Wurtz, D. W. Fairbank and John Baker. Dr. Walter Rogers gathered this information for the author from *Directory of 1829 Cincinnati* (Cincinnati—1829); *Cincinnati Directory for the Year 1834* (Cin-

⁹Printed in many periodicals, also as an extra of the *Standard*.

¹⁰*Emancipator*, May 13, 1834; *Vermont Chronicle*, May 16, 1834; *Rights of Man*, May 24, 1834, and *Rochester Daily Democrat*, June 16, 1834.

President Beecher considered these student activities unwise and harmful to the institution but hoped to prevent any clash between the shocked townsmen and the zealous students. "If we and our friends do not amplify the evil," he wrote in June of 1834, "by too much alarm, impatience, and attempt at regulation the evil will subside and pass away."¹⁵ Professor Calvin E. Stowe, Beecher's son-in-law, supported him in this position. Professor John Morgan of the academic department of the Seminary was an anti-slavery man and sympathized with the students. In the summer Beecher went East to raise funds and rouse the people of Boston against the Catholics. (A mob burned one monastery.)¹⁶ Stowe and Morgan were also out of town during the vacation, leaving only one member of the faculty on the ground. This was the Rev. Thomas J. Biggs, Professor of Church History and Church Polity, a man who was exceedingly unpopular with Weld and his fellow-students, so unpopular, indeed, that they had attempted to secure his dismissal from the institution.

The first important outside reaction against these activities at the seminary came in an editorial in the Cincinnati periodical, the *Western Monthly Magazine*, in its May issue. In it, James Hall, the editor, himself not yet forty-one years of age, denounced the meddling in such serious matters of "minors, who are at school." Elaborating, he wrote: "We have seen boys at school wearing paper caps, flourishing wooden swords, and fancying themselves, for the moment, endued with the prowess of Hector and Achilles — . . . but this is the first instance, that we have ever known, of a set of young gentlemen at school, dreaming themselves into full-grown patriots, and setting seriously to work, to organize a wide-spread revolution; to alter the constitution of their country; to upset the internal policy of a dozen independent states; and to elevate a whole race of human beings in the scale of moral dignity."¹⁷ In a scorching reply, Weld (thirty years old) pointed out that nine students in the Theolog-

cincinnati-1834); David H. Sheffer, *Cincinnati Directory for 1840* (Cincinnati-1840); Charles Theodore Greve, *The Centennial History of Cincinnati* (Chicago-1901) 2 vols., and *History of Cincinnati and Hamilton County* (Cincinnati-1894).

¹⁵Beecher, *Op. Cit.*, II, 326.

¹⁶Roy Billington, *The Protestant Crusade* (N. Y.-1938), 73-74.

¹⁷"Education and Slavery," *Western Monthly Magazine*, II, 266-273 (May, 1834).

ical Department were between thirty and thirty-five and thirty were over twenty-six years old, and charged Hall with trying to raise the mob.¹⁸

With Beecher, Stowe and Morgan away, the trustees went to work to assuage the rising fury of popular condemnation. Biggs acted as prosecutor. In a letter to Vail written in July, Biggs intimated that he intended to take action. He wrote: "We are a reproach and a loathing in the land. . . . That the offensive thing must be expurgated from the institution is my firm conviction. My firm conviction also it was, that we *never should have permitted* the subject to be introduced within the precincts of the Seminary. I yielded my opinion — and said but little. I now feel it my duty to speak out — be the consequences what they may! The position I take is, that the thing itself must be cleared away, and that the Seminary must regain its original ground of *non-committal* on these subjects."¹⁹ On August 9, 1834, Professor Biggs appeared at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Trustees especially called "to consider the proceedings of the students in relation to the subject of slavery."²⁰ A special subcommittee was appointed to determine what action ought to be taken.

Beecher and Vail counselled caution and moderation, but Biggs and some of the trustees had other plans. On August 18 Biggs again aired his views to President Beecher:

"I am favoured today with the letter jointly from yourself and Dr. Vail, its contents I have read and reperused with deep interest, . . . and my only regret is that I cannot, in view of facts, *present and past*, persuade my mind into sympathy with yours. The evils which I feel and apprehend seem to me to call for anything rather than *narcotics*. . . . Oneida men or any other kind of men, beyond this I regard not."

He continued:

"The public here is calling for some manifesto on the subject from the Trustees. They are not satisfied — and they demand to know whether they are rightly informed, when they hear, that on the borders of all the western & southern slavery, there is

¹⁸Weld's letter was printed in the *Cincinnati Journal*, May 30, 1834, and was reprinted in Barnes and Dumond, *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld*, I, 136-15.

¹⁹Biggs to Vail, July 23, 1834 (Lane MSS).

²⁰Lane Seminary Trustees, MS Minutes, Aug. 9, 1834.

located at Walnut Hills a concern intended to be the great Laboratory and depot for everything [conceived?] and half-wrought, in New York & elsewhere, by *soi-dissant* abolitionists. The Trustees feel themselves called upon to furnish something to correct and allay this (not unreasonably) excited state of feeling. We have among us, as all know, the Master Spirit of Abolitionism, we have it here in its sublimated state — it has already inflated and intoxicated nearly all our students — the exhilarations make them soar above all our heads, and the principle is now pretty well settled that the one whose head has most capacity for this empyrical gas, why, he's the Model, and the best theologian, and best anything else you please. It is now believed to be time to settle the question, 'Who shall govern?' Students? or faculty in concurrence with Trustees?"²¹

The Executive Committee of the trustees "cracked down." The report of the special sub-committee was first received and discussed at a meeting of the Committee on August 16 and adopted at an adjourned meeting on the 20th and ordered to be published. The report argued that "education must be completed before the young are fitted to engage in the collisions of active life," that, therefore, "no associations or Societies among the students ought to be allowed in [the] Seminary except such as have for their immediate object improvement in the prescribed course of studies." Discussion of subjects likely to distract attention from the regular studies should be discouraged at all times, particularly if these subjects were "matter of public interest and popular excitement." The committee recommended that the anti-slavery society should, therefore, be abolished and urged the trustees to adopt rules "discouraging and discouraging by all suitable means such discussions and conduct among the students as are calculated to divert their attention from their studies, excite party animosities, stir up evil passions

²¹The letter is in the Lane MSS. It, of course, makes quite untenable Barnes' theory (*Antislavery Impulse*, 70-71) that Beecher changed his mind during the summer following the adoption of resolutions by a convention of college executives in New York, and that he instigated the trustees' proceedings by letter. The only supporting evidence, anyway, was in Mahan's reminiscences written forty-seven years later (*Autobiography* [London—1882], 179) and a rumor reported at second hand in the *Friend of Man*, Sept. 15, 1836. Besides, the decision of the Executive Committee of the Lane Trustees on Aug. 20 to postpone definite action until the return of Beecher very definitely implies that they were not sure of the position he would take.

amongst themselves, or in the community, or involve themselves with the political concerns of the country." Final action by the whole body of trustees was postponed because of the absence of President Beecher, and as being unnecessary "as the adoption [and publication] of the foregoing resolution will sufficiently indicate to the students the course which the Trustees are determined to pursue." To make their attitude doubly clear the Executive Committee summarily dismissed Professor John Morgan of the academic department of the Seminary who had taken the side of the students and considered the expulsion of Theodore Weld and of William T. Allan, the president of the anti-slavery society.²²

The students in the first class at Lane Seminary were not children to be beaten into submission to the pussy-footing tactics of their elders. Early in September one of their number wrote of the committee's report: "It is a document worthy of the ninth century and would do honor to Nicholas!" They hoped that Beecher would take a firm stand when he returned from the East, but they were prepared for action. "We all intend to wait patiently & see the result of the recommendation of the Exec. committee," wrote Henry Stanton to the absent Thome. "If the law requiring us to disband the Anti-Slavery Society, is passed, we shall take a dismissal from the Seminary. We shall not stay & break any laws, but shall go quietly, & publish to the world the reasons for thus going, together with the history of the Anti-Slavery cause & movements in Lane Seminary. We shall spread the whole matter before the public, & I trust tell a story that will make some ears tingle. A glorious spirit pervades the institution on this subject. A few, . . . will probably truckle — but the residue, to a single man, will not only have their names, but their bodies cast out as evil, before they will hazard for one moment the cause of the oppressed, or yield an inch to the assaults of a corrupt & persecuting public sentiment, or swerve one hair from the great principles which have been the basis of all our operations in regard to Slavery & Colonization. No never — never! If the laws pass, the theological class will probably all go in a body *somewhere* & pursue our studies. We can have money

²²Lane Seminary Trustees, MS Minutes; Asa Mahan, *Autobiography*, 176-180; G. H. Barnes, *Antislavery Impulse*, 70 et seq.; Barnes and Dunton, *Op. Cit.*, I, 137 et seq.; etc.

enough to hire good teachers — perhaps Stowe will go with us — Morgan certainly will if we need him. Weld will teach the theology — perhaps! But all these matters are to be settled in full council. Our plan is to have every student here at the commencement of the term & then act together.”²³

On the 10th of October the full Board of Trustees, without waiting for Beecher, ratified the action of the Executive Committee taken on August 20. Fourteen voted aye and only three in the negative: Mahan and two of the elders of his church, William Holyoke and John Melindy. Two peremptory orders were also adopted and issued: dissolving the anti-slavery and colonization societies in the seminary as “tending to enlist the students in controversies foreign to their studies, and to stir up among themselves and in the community, unfriendly feelings and useless hostilities,” and delegating to the Executive Committee unlimited authority “to dismiss any student from the Seminary, when they shall think it necessary to do so.”²⁴

The trustees undertook to explain their attitude on the question of discussion of the slavery issue in general: “The Board consider that the location of the Seminary in the vicinity of a large city & on the borders of a slave holding state, calls for some peculiar cautionary measures in its government; & that the present state of public sentiment on some exciting topics, requires restraints to be imposed, which under other circumstances might be entirely unnecessary. . . . The proceedings of the students have produced the impression in the community that the Seminary is deeply implicated with one particular party on the slavery question; & unless the impression can be removed the prosperity of the Institution will be much retarded, & its usefulness generally diminished.”²⁵

“Parents and guardians,” rejoiced the *Cincinnati Journal* editorially, “may now send their sons and wards to Lane Seminary, with a perfect confidence, that the proper business of a theological school will occupy their minds; and that the discussion and decision of abstract questions, will not turn them aside from the path of duty. . . . There may be room enough in the wide world, for abolitionism and perfectionism, and many other isms; but

²³H. B. Stanton to J. A. Thome, Sept. 11, 1834 (O. C. Lib. Misc. MSS).

²⁴MS Minutes, Mahan, *Op. Cit.*, 179; the *New York Evangelist*, Nov. 1, 1834.

²⁵MS Minutes, Oct. 10, 1834.

a school, to prepare pious youth for preaching the gospel, has not legitimate place for these.”²⁶

There is some possibility that if the trustees had been willing to wait for Beecher's return from the East the difficulties could have been patched up. Certainly the President was ready to do everything in his power to keep in the Seminary the group of brilliant young men of whom he was so justly proud. Just two days before the Board took the final action he wrote to Weld from Frederick: “They are a set of glorious good fellows, whom I would not . . . exchange for any others. I was glad to hear that to the question what you meant to do, you replied it would be soon enough to decide when you saw what the trustees had done. I hope you will be patient & take no course till after my return.”²⁷ But when he came back to Cincinnati Beecher made the mistake of trying to explain away the action of the trustees. The faculty issued on October 13 a statement, signed by Professors Biggs and Stowe and President Beecher, in which they declared that they saw “nothing in the regulations which is not common law in all well regulated institutions.” They insisted on the other hand that they approved of “& will always protect & encourage in this institution free inquiry & thorough discussion for the acquisition of knowledge & the discipline of mind,” and “also of voluntary associations of the students for the above objects according to the usages of all literary Institutions & theological Seminaries,” and regarded “with favor voluntary associations of students, disposed to act upon the community in the form of Sabbath Schools, Tract, Foreign Missions & Temperance, & other benevolent labors, in subordination to the great ends of the Institution, of which in all instances the Faculty as the immediate guardians of the Institution must be judges.”²⁸ To the students this seemed but “words, *Words*, WORDS.” It appeared remarkable to many persons that the professors should see nothing in vesting a committee of the trustees with arbitrary power of expulsion which would “interfere with the appropriate duties of the Faculty or the *rights of students*.”²⁹ The students regarded

²⁶*Cincinnati Journal*, Oct. 10, 1834.

²⁷Lyman Beecher to Weld, Oct. 8, 1834, Barnes and Dumond, *Op. Cit.*, I, 170-

173.

²⁸MS Minutes.

²⁹*New York Evangelist*, Nov. 8, 1834.

the statement as little less than an endorsement of the trustees' action by the faculty.

On October 15 twenty-eight students presented a joint request for dismissal. Huntington Lyman headed this list which also included Steele, Robert and Henry Stanton, Amos Dresser, Bradley (the Negro), and Hiram Wilson. The next day eleven others, Wattles, Thome, Allan, Whipple, etc., followed suit. Weld submitted an independent "resignation" on the 17th.³⁰

Before the formal enactment of the new rules by the trustees the anti-slavery leaders among the students were preparing the story which was to "make some ears tingle." Lyman wrote to Thome on the 4th of October: "Weld has been engaged for several days in arranging and pasting in some facts upon the subject of Abolition so as to be ready for an emergency."³¹ He continued: "Several of us have a plan which we wish to submit for your consideration and to invite your cooperation. It is to procure a place where we can study. Get profess Stowe or some one else to mark out for us a course of study. Then to adopt our rules and have our regular recitations and debates and mutual improvements and bone down to study. . . . We shall in that case have the best part of the class with us. There will be Benton & Wells, Streeter, Weed, Stanton, Alvord, Whipple, & Lyman, to which let us add Thome & Hopkins and nothing is wanting to make it a most desirable band. The expenses would be much less than at the Sem and if I am not mistaken the profit would be much greater."

President Beecher worked desperately to save the school. Soon after his return he persuaded the Executive Committee to withdraw their resolution to dismiss Weld and Allan, and early in November he secured a repeal of all of the most objectionable measures which had been adopted by the trustees. But it was too late; the majority of the students had already withdrawn from Walnut Hills and established themselves at Cumminsville, some miles from the city. In December they issued a fiery attack on the action of the authorities at Lane and a defense of their own actions. The kernel of it is, of course, an apotheosis of the right of free speech in literary institutions: "Free discussion being a duty is consequently a right, and as such, is inherent and in-

³⁰These documents are in the Lane MSS.

³¹H. Lyman to Thome, Oct. 4, 1834 (O. C. Lib. Misc., MSS).

alienable. It is *our* right. It *was* before we entered Lane Seminary: privileges we might and did relinquish; advantages we might and did receive. But this *right* the institution 'could neither give nor take away.' Theological Institutions must of course recognize this immutable principle. Proscription of free discussion is sacrilegious. It is boring out the eyes of the soul. It is the robbery of mind. It is the burial of truth. If Institutions cannot stand upon this broad footing, let them fall. Better, infinitely better, that the mob demolish every building or the incendiary wrap them in flames; and the young men be sent home to ask their fathers 'what is truth?'—to question nature's million voices—her forests and her hoary mountains 'what is truth?' than that our theological seminaries should become Bastilles, our theological students, thinkers by *permission*, and the right of free discussion tamed down into a soulless thing of gracious, condescending sufferance." This appeal and the history of the whole controversy was copied in the press throughout the country. The *New York Evangelist* and similar religious papers ran column after column regarding it. The anti-slavery press also gave it much space. Perhaps this publicity may have had some influence in making the "Rebels" (as they were now called) adamant against all the appeals of Beecher and others to return.³²

The press was, naturally, sharply divided in its attitude. The conservative *Vermont Chronicle* said: "We can only remark at present, that the principles asserted in the Declaration of the Faculty are those which must be adhered to in all such institutions." The reaction of the *Emancipator* was what was to be expected: "Better that the brick and mortar of Lane Seminary should be scattered to the winds . . . than that the principle should be recognized, that truth is not to be told, nor sin rebuked, nor the rights of bleeding humanity plead for, for fear of a mob."³³

The friends of the Seminary were also divided. Robert Hamilton Bishop of Miami University, a trustee of Lane who was unable to be present at the meetings, fully approved the rules by letter.³⁴

³²This was, of course, the famous *Statement of the Reasons which Induced the Students of Lane Seminary, to Dissolve Their Connection with That Institution* (Cincinnati—1834).

³³*Vermont Chronicle*, Nov. 7 and 14, 1834; *Emancipator*, Nov. 11, 1834.

³⁴This is perhaps odd, in view of Bishop's later liberal record at Miami. The letter (to Nathaniel Wright, Sept. 16, 1834) is in the Lane MSS.

But the Rev. Dyer Burgess, of the anti-slavery Chillicothe Presbytery, denounced their action and subsequently refused to pay his subscriptions.³⁵ George Avery of Rochester immediately resigned his financial agency and cancelled his subscription. The next summer he wrote to Vail: "I look upon the conduct of the Trustees as arbitrary, tyrannical & wicked & that of the faculty as indicating a great want of confidence in God, as time-serving, as governed entirely too much by a desire to please *Men* rather than *God*, in a word as leaving the high and consecrated ground of strait-forward & unbending obedience to God for the low grounds, the fogs & quicksands of worldly wisdom & time-serving expediency."³⁶ Of course, the Tappans were much disappointed. They kept their promises to the Seminary but had no hesitation in expressing their lack of interest in the school after this. A few years later Arthur Tappan wrote to Beecher: "I thank you for the particulars respecting your Seminary and regret that I cannot feel any sympathy in the happiness you express in its present and anticipated prosperity."³⁷

It has sometimes been suggested that the Rebels' grievances had all been redressed and that there was little excuse for their refusing to re-enroll in the Seminary. The promises and protestations of President Beecher do not coincide very well, however, with an address which he delivered at Miami University in the following September. It contains sarcasms at the expense of the rebellious students which might have been copied from James Hall's *Western Monthly Magazine*, and restates in specific terms the Lane trustees' opposition to student discussion of controversial public issues. The "seats of science," he declared, "should be retreats from the responsibilities and toils of life — a neutral territory, respected alike by contending parties," and he was "convinced that the heat of passion, and the shock of battle can never be united with the quietness of mind, and continuity of attention, and power of heart, indispensable to mental discipline and successful study."³⁸

The students were somewhat dispersed. Two went to Auburn Seminary and four to the Yale Divinity School. James H. Scott

³⁵Burgess to Vail, Nov. 29, 1834 (Lane MSS).

³⁶Avery to Vail, Nov. 17, 1834, and Aug. 15, 1835 (Lane MSS).

³⁷Tappan to Beecher, Jan. 20, 1838 (Lane MSS).

³⁸Lyman Beecher, *Address . . . Miami University, Sept. 29, 1835* (Cincinnati—1835), 39-40. Italics are his.

and Joseph D. Gould went to the Western Theological Seminary at Allegheny Town. Andrew Benton went to Miami.³⁹ Two (Robert L. Stanton and Charles Sexton) ate humble-pie in late October, 1834, and asked for re-admission.⁴⁰ Two others (Alexander Duncan, an Oneida, and John A. Tiffany) apparently followed suit at a later date. H. H. Spalding, later the Oregon missionary, and two or three others, had apparently opposed Weld from the beginning and, naturally, continued as members of the institution.⁴¹

But the nucleus of Oneidas and leaders in the anti-slavery work kept together and established at nearby Cumminsville an informal seminary of their own. Here, from about the first of November on, they studied their favorite subjects, listened to a few lectures on physiology from Dr. Gamaliel Bailey, later editor of the *National Era*, and commuted into Cincinnati to continue their benevolent work among the Negroes. Here they were joined for a while by Theodore J. Keep, who had come out from Auburn Seminary intending to enroll at Lane, and by three more Oneidas: James Parker, William Smith and Benjamin Foltz.⁴² Foltz kept a diary which gives some idea of the pious atmosphere which surrounded these zealots in their retreat. He arrived at Cincinnati on September 27, having come by way of Buffalo and Lake Erie to Huron then south to Norwalk and through Columbus and Springfield. The next day was Sunday: "Saw brethren beloved in colored Sabbath School. Heard Br. Mahan preach." He went to Cumminsville on November 1. One day he chopped wood for a widow — "I did it cheerfully. Felt that I did it for her Savior & my Savior." A few days later he "Visited six families to tell of Jesus . . . and distribute tracts." Another time—"Rose very early and devoted all my time

³⁹Biographical catalogues of Yale Divinity School, Auburn Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary. Scott mentions Gould in a letter to Samuel Dickinson (Jan. 12, 1835) in the Lane MSS. Those who went to Auburn were Calvin Waterbury and Henry Cherry, and to Yale: Charles P. Bush, Amasa C. Frissell, Zerah K. Hawley, and Giles Waldo. Of these eight only two had been Oneidas. On Benton, see Barnes and Dumond, *Op. Cit.*, I, 185.

⁴⁰Their request, dated Oct. 21, 1834, is in the Lane MSS.

⁴¹It is not certain that Duncan was associated with the Rebels at all, but Tiffany's name appears among those asking for dismissal on Oct. 15, 1834 (MS in Lane Collection). See also the Lane Theological Seminary, *General Catalogue* (Cincinnati—1881).

⁴²Auburn Seminary, *General Biographical Catalogue*, 60; Oneida Institute, *Sketch of the Conditions and Prosperity of the Oneida Institute* (Utica—1837), 17, and Barnes and Dumond, *Op. Cit.*, 184, 185, and 193.

to reading and Prayer." The next evening—"A Person in whose family I had Visited and Prayed called to see me on the subject of Religion, Poor Man was in Liquor." On February 22, 1835, "Past 12 o'clock Night, rose and read 2 of dear Mr. Whitefields sermons."⁴³ The work with the Negroes in the city was carried on with increasing success. The Sisters—Phebe Mathews, Emeline Bishop, Lucy Wright and Maria Fletcher—continued to cooperate in the teaching.⁴⁴ But this halcyon life could not well be permanent; it was not indeed quite satisfactory. There was need of haste to complete their theological education. But where should they go? to Auburn? to Andover?

⁴³Diary, 1834-1835, in the Foltz MSS, Oberlin College Library.

⁴⁴Letters from the Rebels to Weld, Dec. 15, 1834, and Jan. 8, 1835, in Barnes and Dumond, *Op. Cit.*, I. 178-194.

CHAPTER XIV

*THE GUARANTEE OF ACADEMIC
FREEDOM*

IN THE autumn of 1834 the Oberlin Collegiate Institute was tottering, optimistic official pronouncements to the contrary notwithstanding. Old debts were unpaid and few funds were forthcoming for the additional buildings and other necessary equipment. The school had no president and no sufficient teaching staff. In October the Honorable Henry Brown, founder of Brownhelm, resigned as president of the Board of Trustees; he had been the most prominent local man identified with Oberlin.

To take his place Rev. John Keep, now of Cleveland, was appointed, and presided over a meeting on January 1, 1835. Keep, as we have seen, had preached for many years at Blandford, Massachusetts, and, after that, at Homer, New York. While at Homer he had come under the influence of Finney. Besides being a new-measures man he was also an earnest advocate of "female education" and of total abstinence, and a friend of the colored race. Like John Jay Shepherd, he heard the "Macedonian Cry" and went from New York to the Connecticut Western Reserve to help pour onto the "moral putrefaction" of the West the "savory influence of the gospel." In 1833 he left Homer to become pastor of the Stone (now the First) Presbyterian Church in Cleveland, and two years later organized a church in "Ohio City" (the west end of Cleveland) which later became the First Congregational Church of Cleveland, West Side. While still at Blandford, Rev. Mr. Keep had founded a free school for colored people; he had always been an active supporter of the American Colonization Society and had refused an appointment as agent for that organization in 1833. By 1834, however, when he entered the work at Oberlin, he had accepted immediate emanci-