

# Maria W. Stewart

1803–1879

Born to free African American parents in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1803, Maria Miller was left an orphan at the age of five and was taken into the family of a Protestant clergyman as an indentured servant. She remained there until the age of fifteen, when she began to support herself as a domestic servant. Most of Maria's formal schooling was apparently acquired in Sabbath schools, which she attended until she was twenty, as she says in her pamphlet *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality* (1831). Sabbath schools provided basic education in reading and writing so that the students could read the Bible and keep reflective journals. As historian of rhetoric Shirley Wilson Logan has suggested, Maria may also have had access to books, including books on preaching or on rhetoric more generally, because she grew up in the house of a clergyman.<sup>1</sup> In her published work, she expresses an avid desire for education, along with grim reflections on how hard it is to obtain when one is exhausted by manual labor. Scholars now disagree about her level of literacy as a young woman, but most discount the suggestion made in a letter attached to an 1879 edition of her works (see below) that she had to dictate her early publications to a young amanuensis.

Maria married James W. Stewart in Boston in 1826, when she was twenty-three years old and he was forty-seven. At his request, she adopted his middle initial as well as his surname, and became Maria W. Stewart. James Stewart had served in the War of 1812 on three American warships and had then developed a prosperous business as an outfitter for whaling and fishing vessels. He was a leader of Boston's African American community, which was ardently activist though numbering no more than 3 percent of the population of 60,000, and with this marriage Maria Stewart was brought in contact with other important leaders of the day. One of these was the clergyman who performed the Stewarts' wedding ceremony, the Reverend Thomas Paul, one of the first leaders to form an African American Protestant church to avoid the racism that permeated the white denominations. He had founded the African Baptist Church, where he was pastor, and had located the congregation in the African Meeting House on Beacon Hill, which also housed a school for African American children and which held the first meetings of the New England Abolitionist Society in the 1830s.

Even more important to the development of Maria Stewart's thinking was another community leader, David Walker. Born free in North Carolina, he had traveled widely before settling in Boston and building a successful used clothing business. James Stewart acquired clothing from him to provide to the ships he outfitted. Walker was a passionate abolitionist and advocate for African American rights, and he embodied his views in a fiery 1829 publication, *Walker's Appeal in Four*

<sup>1</sup>Shirley Wilson Logan, "Maria W. Stewart (1803–1879)," in *With Pen and Voice: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth-Century African-American Women* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), p. 1.

*Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America.* In this extended essay, Walker attacks racist statements made by Thomas Jefferson and others, and he envisions the African American people in the United States as a distinct nation who should rise and throw off their oppressors by force just as the European American colonists did in the American Revolution. Maria Stewart cites this work several times in her own writings with deep respect. According to Maria Stewart's biographer Marilyn Richardson, her husband may have helped Walker to disseminate his work by slipping copies into the pockets of jackets Stewart provided to African American seamen, especially those who would touch at ports in slave states. The *Appeal* rapidly went through three editions and raised outrage among southern slaveholders, some of whom attempted to get the book suppressed legally. Others offered a bounty on Walker's head, and he died suddenly under mysterious circumstances in 1830, leading historians to speculate that he was murdered for this reward.

Walker's death was only one of the traumatic events that shaped Maria Stewart's future at this time. In 1829 her pastor, the Reverend Thomas Paul, died, and so did her husband James. She was left childless but with a substantial inheritance, which, however, was stripped from her by a group of unscrupulous white businessmen after two years of difficult litigation. These losses, and particularly the death of her husband, occasioned a religious crisis for Stewart, from which she emerged with a conviction that God intended her to dedicate herself to the service of her people.

Stewart's first step was to approach William Lloyd Garrison, a European American abolitionist activist, with her essay, *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality*. In it she exhorts her people to improve themselves morally and educationally and to actively resist white oppression (though she does not recommend violence, since this would go against her religious principles). She also emphasizes that African American women must be active in the community as well as in their own families to achieve these improvements for the race. While diffident about her own verbal abilities, she confesses that her duty to God drives her to deliver these lessons to her people.

Garrison was about the same age as Stewart and was a fellow admirer of Walker. In 1831 he began to publish what would become the country's most famous abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, and he encouraged Stewart by publishing excerpts from her essay in the newspaper and then by publishing the whole text separately as a pamphlet. In choosing Garrison as a publisher, Stewart focused her attention on the African American community, which made up about three-fourths of his subscribers. Ironically, however, given Stewart's feminism, he located her work in *The Liberator's* "Ladies' Department."

Stewart continued to publish occasional comments in *The Liberator* on the battle for African American rights. In 1832 Garrison published another of her works, a pamphlet of religious meditations entitled *Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart*. Not content with these opportunities to address her community in print, unusual and somewhat undecorous as they were for an early-nineteenth-century woman, Stewart began, in 1832, to give public speeches on the issues that con-

cerned her. Her first speech, "An Address, Delivered before the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society, of Boston," an African American women's group organized for self-improvement and social action, was probably given in the spring of 1832, since it was published in *The Liberator* in April of that year.

American women were not supposed to call attention to themselves in this way. As historian Barbara Welter has shown, they were supposed to focus exclusively on domestic matters, the home being their natural "sphere," and truly womanly women were expected to be too pious, pure, and submissive to male authority to want to venture outside this realm. To publish writings under one's own name was to violate these conventions, even though female authorship was not unknown in this period. But to appear on the public speakers' platform, a much more serious breach of convention, was virtually unknown—and heavily sanctioned. Initially, Stewart spoke before a presumably all-female audience, thus preserving some shreds of decorum. But in September 1832 with her second speech (included here), known as the "Lecture Delivered at the Franklin Hall," a Boston antislavery meeting place, she addressed a gender-mixed audience. She may have been the first American woman of any race to do so. One may understand the uproar that such an unconventional action could cause from noting the response when European American upper-class ladies Sarah and Angelina Grimké spoke against slavery in Massachusetts only a few years later (see p. 1045). As historian Shirley A. Yee has shown, community pride in African American women's accomplishments was later a counterforce to this social disapproval, but Stewart as a pioneer woman public speaker did not yet enjoy this supportive reaction.

Stewart persevered. In February 1833 she presented "An Address Delivered at the African Masonic Hall," again to a mixed audience. All three speeches sounded the notes first struck in her pamphlet *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality*. Although she denounced white racism and such racist schemes as sending African Americans to new colonies in Africa, she did not scruple to chastise African Americans, particularly black men, for running after trivial pursuits, for lacking in educational and professional ambition, and for avoiding the challenging task of speaking up for their people's rights. Walker had made a similar indictment of the African American community; Stewart's criticism was more religious, more feminist, and less violent. Apparently, however, hearing such trenchant words from the mouth of a woman was too much for her audience. In September 1833, exactly one year after she began her public speaking career, Stewart delivered "Mrs. Stewart's Farewell Address to Her Friends in the City of Boston" (included here). Although vigorously defending her right as a woman to speak on issues of civic concern, she announced that she would leave the speaker's platform because of the opposition she had aroused. Indeed, she would leave Boston.

Early in 1834, Stewart moved to New York City. Since she had stressed the need for better education for African Americans in all her works, it is not surprising that she sought employment as a teacher. She also collected texts of her four speeches and two pamphlets and had them published in 1835 by Garrison under the title *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart, Presented to the First African Baptist Church and Society, of the City of Boston*. Perhaps she felt that she would find sympathetic

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then publication

can you  
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pressure

readers and hearers among the congregants of her home church. Or perhaps the presentation was intended as an ironic corrective to a religious community that had been torn ever since Reverend Paul's death by dissension over how socially active it was to be, and that had driven away Maria Stewart's voice of social conscience.

Stewart never remarried and struggled with poverty for the rest of her life, after having briefly experienced middle-class life with her husband. Nevertheless, in New York she remained active on behalf of African American rights and women's rights. She joined women's organizations and attended the 1837 Women's Anti-Slavery Convention in the city. In 1850 she organized a fund raiser for *The North Star*, an abolitionist newspaper published by Frederick Douglass (p. 1061), who had escaped slavery to become one of the preeminent African American intellectuals of the nineteenth century. Although Stewart apparently lectured occasionally on the social causes important to her, she never again attempted a sustained career of public speaking.

In a later autobiographical sketch (see below), Stewart says that she left New York for Baltimore in 1852 to seek a better field for her educational efforts. She was largely unsuccessful, and she implies that controversies among the various African American religious denominations made it difficult for her to obtain pupils. When Civil War fighting approached the city in 1861, she fled to Washington, D.C., where, after again working as a teacher, she became the matron of the Freedman's Hospital (a position earlier held by noted African American activist Sojourner Truth). This institution was a sort of refugee camp for escaped and freed slaves, that provided them with food, clothing, and basic education and religious instruction in exchange for manual labor. As matron, Stewart's skills as a teacher were greatly appreciated.

In 1878 a new law enabled Stewart to claim a modest pension as the widow of a veteran of the War of 1812. She used the money in 1879 to publish *Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart*, reusing an earlier title for this new edition of the four speeches and the two pamphlets she had published in Boston, along with a collection of letters from friends, including William Lloyd Garrison, who could testify to her good works from her activist days in Boston to the present. Also included was the autobiographical sketch noted above, of her "Sufferings During the War." Evidently Stewart had been able to return to Boston for a brief visit at this time, perhaps when she collected testimony to support her claim as James Stewart's widow, and, according to Garrison's letter, she and Garrison enjoyed their reunion.

This later republication of her works suggests that Stewart remained proud of her public speaking career to the end of her life and was anxious that it should stay in the written record. Shortly after the later collection was published, she died at the Freedman's Hospital, in December 1879. *The People's Advocate*, the principal newspaper of the Washington African American community, published a glowing eulogy and many letters praising her work (including some of those printed in the 1879 *Meditations*). Soon, however, Stewart's work dropped from sight—to be recovered and revalued by contemporary scholarship.

Stewart's contribution to rhetorical theory, as her biographer and editor Marilyn Richardson argues, lies in her "original synthesis of religious, abolitionist, and fem-

inist concerns," which "places her squarely in the forefront of a black female activist and literary tradition only now beginning to be acknowledged as of integral significance to the understanding of the history of black thought and culture in America."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, says Richardson, Stewart was a "clear forerunner" not only to such noted African American women rhetors as Sojourner Truth and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (see the introduction to Part Five), but also to male African American activists such as Frederick Douglass, who began his speaking career almost ten years after Stewart's, in 1841. Moreover, as literary scholar Jean Fagan Yellin has noted, Stewart should have been acknowledged by the European American women activists who soon followed in her footsteps in Massachusetts and elsewhere. They surely knew about her work from reading *The Liberator*. But, says Yellin, racism and perhaps also social class prejudice caused them to pass her over in favor of the white and upper-class Grimké sisters<sup>3</sup> (see p. 1045).

Richardson characterizes Stewart's rhetorical style as a form of "black jeremiad" drawing heavily on announced religious inspiration and on biblical echoes and references, especially to Jeremiah and the Book of Revelations. Literary scholar Carla Peterson explains that, as in later African American social protest, religious inspiration provides an important source of authority for speakers facing powerful opposition: "Religious belief, in particular belief in God's divine protection, became a source of self-empowerment, an authorization to act in the world."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, notes Peterson, "spirituality provided a gateway to political thought and often functioned as a springboard for discussions of secular history,"<sup>5</sup> as can be seen in Stewart's many references (noted also by Richardson) to the African past and African greatness, which clearly try to connect African Americans to a proud collective legacy. Stewart's principal agenda in exhorting her African American audience to social change includes the need for education, women's activism, and vigorous resistance to white oppression. Until, perhaps, the twentieth century, few women speakers have followed Stewart's path in the complexity of their rhetorical personae.

### ***Selected Bibliography***

Marilyn Richardson's *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches* (1987) collects *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality*, "Cause for Encouragement" (one of Stewart's notes in *The Liberator*), the four Boston speeches, and the preface, letters, and autobiographical sketch from the 1879 edition of Stewart's works. Richardson's notes are very helpful. This edition is the source of our selections from Stewart. The complete text of the 1835 *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart*, including her 1832

<sup>2</sup>Marilyn Richardson, "Preface," in Maria W. Stewart, *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches*, ed. and intro. Marilyn Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. xiv.

<sup>3</sup>Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 84.

<sup>4</sup>Carla Peterson, *"Doers of the Word": African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 56.

<sup>5</sup>Peterson, p. 56.

*Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart* (religious meditations), can be found in *Spiritual Narratives*, a 1988 volume in the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers. Stewart's Franklin Hall speech is reprinted with helpful notes in Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's *Man Cannot Speak for Her, Volume II: Key Texts of the Early Feminists* (1986). This speech and the "Address Delivered before the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of Boston" can also be found, with a helpful introduction, in Shirley Wilson Logan's *With Pen and Voice: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth-Century African-American Women* (1995).

The best account of Stewart's life remains Richardson's introduction to her collection of Stewart's works (see above). Jacqueline Jones Royster helpfully locates Stewart in the context of a literate and politically active African American community in *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women* (2000). On the African American context, see also Shirley A. Yee's *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (1992). Sue E. Houchins's introduction to the *Spiritual Narratives* volume (see above) places Stewart in the Western tradition of female mystics and groups her with Jarena Lee, Julia Foote, and Virginia Broughton, African American women who felt called by God to preach. Jean Fagan Yellin situates Stewart in the context of nineteenth-century white and black women's abolitionist activism in *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (1989). Still helpful on the antifeminist ideologies against which activist women had to contend is Barbara Welter's "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," in *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1976). For more on how these ideologies affected the African American community, see James Oliver Horton's "Freedom's Yoke: Gender Conventions among Free Blacks," in *Free People of Color* (1993).

Marilyn Richardson describes Stewart's rhetorical style in the introduction to her collection of Stewart's works. Shirley Wilson Logan discusses the African cultural connections in her work in *"We Are Coming": The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women* (1999). In *"Doers of the Word": African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)* (1995), Carla Peterson analyzes Stewart's rhetorical strategies in detail and clarifies the importance of spirituality in her thinking. Also analyzing Stewart's rhetoric with a special eye to her adaptation of domestic ideologies is Laura R. Sells, "Maria W. Miller Stewart," in *Women Public Speakers in the United States, 1800-1925: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, 1993. Problems with Stewart's mix of feminine and militant personae are discussed in detail by Lora Romero in *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (1997).

is it useful to read her rhetoric  
in light of how Whately speaks  
of the status quo and the difficulties  
of arguing against it? YES!

## Lecture Delivered at the Franklin Hall<sup>1</sup>

Boston, September 21, 1832 <sup>Wow, there's a opening line!</sup>

Why sit ye here and die? If we say we will go to a foreign land, the famine and the pestilence are there, and there we shall die. If we sit here, we shall die. Come let us plead our cause before the whites: if they save us alive, we shall live—and if they kill us, we shall but die.<sup>2</sup>

Methinks I heard a spiritual interrogation—"Who shall go forward, and take off the reproach that is cast upon the people of color? Shall it be a woman?" And my heart made this reply—"If it is thy will, be it even so, Lord Jesus!"

I have heard much respecting the horrors of slavery; but may Heaven forbid that the generality of my color throughout these United States should experience any more of its horrors than to be a servant of servants, or hewers of wood and drawers of water [Joshua 9:23]! Tell us no more of southern slavery; for with few exceptions, although I may be very erroneous in my opinion, yet I consider our condition but little better than that. Yet, after all, methinks there are no chains so galling as those that bind the soul, and exclude it from the vast field of useful and scientific knowledge. O, had I received the advantages of an early education, my ideas would, ere now, have expanded far and wide; but, alas! I possess nothing but moral capability—no teachings but the teachings of the Holy Spirit.

I have asked several individuals of my sex, who transact business for themselves, if providing our girls were to give them the most satisfactory references, they would not be willing to grant them an equal opportunity with others? Their reply has been—for their own part, they had no objection; but as it was not the custom, were they to take them into their employ, they would be in danger of losing the public patronage.

And such is the powerful force of prejudice. Let our girls possess whatever amiable qualities of soul they may; let their characters be fair and spotless as innocence itself; let their natural taste and ingenuity be what they may; it is impossible for scarce an individual of them to rise above the condition of servants. Ah! why is this cruel and unfeeling distinction? Is it merely because God has made our complexion to vary? If it be, O shame to soft, relenting humanity! "Tell it not in Gath! publish it not in the streets of Askelon!" [2 Samuel 1:20]. Yet, after all, methinks were the American free people of color to turn their attention more assiduously to moral worth and intellectual improvement, this would be the result: prejudice would gradually diminish, and the whites would be compelled to say, unloose those fetters!<sup>3</sup>

Though black their skins as shades of night  
Their hearts are pure, their souls are white.

Few white persons of either sex, who are calculated for anything else, are willing to spend their lives and bury their talents in performing mean, servile labor. And such is the horrible idea that I entertain respecting a life of servitude, that if I conceived of their [sic] being no possibility of my rising above the condition of servant, I would gladly hail death as a welcome messenger. O, horrible idea, indeed! to possess noble souls aspiring after high and honorable acquirements, yet confined by the chains of ignorance and poverty to lives of continual drudgery and toil. Neither do I know of any who have enriched themselves by spending their lives as house-domestics, washing windows, shaking carpets, brushing boots, or tending upon gentlemen's tables. I can but die for expressing my sentiments: and I am as willing to die by the

Edited by Marilyn Richardson.

<sup>1</sup>Franklin Hall, at No. 16 Franklin Street in Boston, was the site of regular monthly meetings of the New England Anti-Slavery Society. [M. R.]

<sup>2</sup>Stewart employs the rhetorical structure of 2 Kings 7:3, 4. [M.R.]

<sup>3</sup>The United States census of 1830 listed a black population of 2,328,642 or 18 percent of the total U.S. population; 319,599 were free. Fifty-seven percent of all free blacks lived in the Southern states and Washington, D.C. The free black population of Massachusetts was 7,048. Peter M. Bergman, ed., *The Chronological History of the Negro in America* (New York: New American Library, 1969), p. 136. [M.R.]

body/  
whiteness

address  
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sword as the pestilence; for I am a true born American; your blood flows in my veins, and your spirit fires my breast.

I observed a piece in the *Liberator* a few months since, stating that the colonizationists had published a work respecting us, asserting that we were lazy and idle. I confute them on that point. Take us generally as a people, we are neither lazy nor idle; and considering how little we have to excite or stimulate us, I am almost astonished that there are so many industrious and ambitious ones to be found; although I acknowledge, with extreme sorrow, that there are some who never were and never will be serviceable to society. And have you not a similar class among yourselves?

Again. It was asserted that we were "a ragged set, crying for liberty." I reply to it, the whites have so long and so loudly proclaimed the theme of equal rights and privileges, that our souls have caught the flame also, ragged as we are. As far as our merit deserves, we feel a common desire to rise above the condition of servants and drudges. I have learnt, by bitter experience, that continual hard labor deadens the energies of the soul, and benumbs the faculties of the mind; the ideas become confined, the mind barren, and, like the scorching sands of Arabia, produces nothing; or like the uncultivated soil, brings forth thorns and thistles.

Again, continual and hard labor irritates our tempers and sours our dispositions; the whole system becomes worn out with toil and fatigue; nature herself becomes almost exhausted, and we care but little whether we live or die. It is true, that the free people of color throughout these United States are neither bought nor sold, nor under the lash of the cruel driver; many obtain a comfortable support; but few, if any, have an opportunity of becoming rich and independent; and the enjoyments we most pursue are as unprofitable to us as the spider's web or the floating bubbles that vanish into air. As servants, we are respected; but let us presume to aspire any higher, our employer regards us no longer. And were it not that the King eternal has declared that Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto God, I should indeed despair.

I do not consider it derogatory, my friends, for persons to live out to service. There are many whose inclination leads them to aspire no higher;

and I would highly commend the performance of almost anything for an honest livelihood; but where constitutional strength is wanting, labor of this kind, in its mildest form, is painful. And doubtless many are the prayers that have ascended to Heaven from Africa's daughters for strength to perform their work. Oh, many are the tears that have been shed for the want of that strength! Most of our color have dragged out a miserable existence of servitude from the cradle to the grave. And what literary acquirement can be made, or useful knowledge derived, from either maps, books, or charts, by those who continually drudge from Monday morning until Sunday noon? O, ye fairer sisters, whose hands are never soiled, whose nerves and muscles are never strained, go learn by experience! Had we had the opportunity that you have had, to improve our moral and mental faculties, what would have hindered our intellects from being as bright, and our manners from being as dignified as yours? Had it been our lot to have been nursed in the lap of affluence and ease, and to have basked beneath the smiles and sunshine of fortune, should we not have naturally supposed that we were never made to toil? And why are not our forms as delicate, and our constitutions as slender, as yours? Is not the workmanship as curious and complete? Have pity upon us, have pity upon us, O ye who have hearts to feel for other's woes; for the hand of God has touched us. Owing to the disadvantages under which we labor, there are many flowers among us that are

... born to bloom unseen  
And waste their fragrance on the desert air.<sup>1</sup>

My beloved brethren, as Christ has died in vain for those who will not accept his offered mercy, so will it be vain for the advocates of freedom to spend their breath in our behalf, unless with united hearts and souls you make some mighty efforts to raise your sons and daughters from the horrible state of servitude and degradation in which they are placed. It is upon you that woman depends; she can do but little besides using her influence; and it is for her sake and

<sup>1</sup>"Full many a flower is born to bloom unseen, / And waste its sweetness on the desert air" (Thomas Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," 1751) [M.R.]

in nature  
herself  
becomes  
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exhausted



yours that I have come forward and made myself a hissing and a reproach among the people [Jeremiah 29:18]; for I am also one of the wretched and miserable daughters of the descendants of fallen Africa. Do you ask, why are you wretched and miserable? I reply, look at many of the most worthy and most interesting of us doomed to spend our lives in gentlemen's kitchens. Look at our young men, smart, active and energetic, with souls filled with ambitious fire; if they look forward, alas! What are their prospects? They can be nothing but the humblest laborers, on account of their dark complexions; hence many of them lose their ambition, and become worthless.<sup>5</sup> Look at our middle-aged men, clad in their rusty plaids and coats; in winter, every cent they earn goes to buy their wood and pay their rents; the poor wives also toil beyond their strength, to help support their families. Look at our aged sires, whose heads are whitened with the frosts of seventy winters, with their old wood-saws on their backs,

<sup>5</sup>At this period in Boston, "no colored boy could be apprenticed to any trade in any shop where white men worked." See James Oliver Horton, *Black Activism in Boston 1830-1860*, doctoral dissertation, Brandeis University, 1973, p. 58. [M.R.]

Alas, what keeps us so? Prejudice, ignorance and poverty. But ah! methinks our oppression is soon to come to an end; yea, before the Majesty of heaven, our groans and cries have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [James 5:4]. As the prayers and tears of Christians will avail the finally impenitent nothing; neither will the prayers and tears of the friends of humanity avail us anything, unless we possess a spirit of virtuous emulation within our breasts. Did the pilgrims, when they first landed on these shores, quietly compose themselves and say, "The Britons have all the money and all the power, and we must continue their servants forever?" Did they sluggishly sigh and say, "Our lot is hard, the Indians own the soil, and we cannot cultivate it?" No; they first made powerful efforts to raise themselves, and then God raised up those illustrious patriots, WASHINGTON and LAFAYETTE, to assist and defend them. And, my brethren, have you made a powerful effort? Have you prayed the legislature for mercy's sake to grant you all the rights and privileges of free citizens, that your daughters may rise to that degree of respectability which true merit deserves, and your sons above the servile situations which most of them fill?

far we  
are for  
the  
future

## Mrs. Stewart's Farewell Address to Her Friends in the City of Boston

*Delivered September 21, 1833*

Is this vile world a friend to grace,  
To help me on to God?

Ah, no! For it is with great tribulation that any shall enter through the gates of the holy city [Acts 14:22].

My Respected Friends,

You have heard me observe that the shortness of time, the certainty of death, and the instability of all things here, induce me to turn my thoughts

from earth to heaven. Borne down with a heavy load of sin and shame, my conscience filled with remorse; considering the throne of God forever guiltless, and my own eternal condemnation as just, I was at last brought to accept of salvation as a free gift, in and through the merits of a crucified Redeemer.<sup>1</sup> Here I was brought to see,

the  
new  
one  
quickly  
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world

'Tis not by works of righteousness  
That our own hands have done,  
But we are saved by grace alone,  
Abounding through the Son.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Ephesians 2:8. [M.R.]

<sup>2</sup>Watts, Hymn 225, the third stanza. [M.R.]

Edited by Marilyn Richardson.

After these convictions, in imagination I found myself sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed in my right mind. For I had been like a ship tossed to and fro, in a storm at sea. Then was I glad when I realized the dangers I had escaped; and then I consecrated by soul and body, and all the powers of my mind to his service, and from that time henceforth; yea, even for evermore, amen.

I found that religion was full of benevolence; I found there was joy and peace in believing, and I felt as though I was commanded to come out from the world and be separate; to go forward and be baptized. Methought I heard a spiritual interrogation, are you able to drink of that cup that I have drank of? And to be baptized with the baptism that I have been baptized with [Matthew 20:22]? And my heart made this reply: Yea, Lord, I am able. Yet amid these bright hopes, I was filled with apprehensive fears, lest they were false. I found that sin still lurked within; it was hard for me to renounce all for Christ, when I saw my earthly prospects blasted. O, how bitter was that cup. Yet I drank it to its very dregs. It was hard for me to say, thy will be done; yet I was made to bend and kiss the rod. I was at last made willing to be anything or nothing, for my Redeemer's sake. Like many, I was anxious to retain the world in one hand, and religion in the other. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon [Matthew 6:24]," sounded in my ear, and with giant-strength, I cut off my right hand, as it were, and plucked out my right eye, and cast them from me, thinking it better to enter life halt and maimed, rather than having two hands or eyes to be cast into hell [Mark 9:43]. Thus ended these mighty conflicts, and I received this heart-cheering promise, "That neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, should be able to separate me from the love of Christ Jesus, our Lord [Romans 8:38, 39]."

And truly, I can say with St. Paul that at my conversion I came to the people in the fulness of the gospel of grace [Romans 15:29]. Having spent a few months in the city of —, previous, I saw the flourishing condition of their churches, and the progress they were making in their Sabbath Schools. I visited their Bible classes, and

heard of the union that existed in their Female Associations. On my arrival here, not finding scarce an individual who felt interested in these subjects, and but few of the whites, except Mr. Garrison, and his friend, Mr. Knapp; and hearing that those gentlemen had observed that female influence was powerful, my soul became fired with a holy zeal for your cause; every nerve and muscle in me was engaged in your behalf. I felt that I had a great work to perform; and was in haste to make a profession of my faith in Christ, that I might be about my Father's business [Luke 2:49]. Soon after I made this profession, The Spirit of God came before me, and I spake before many. When going home, reflecting on what I had said, I felt ashamed, and knew not where I should hide myself. A something said within my breast, "Press forward, I will be with thee." And my heart made this reply, Lord, if thou wilt be with me, then I will speak for thee as long as I live. And thus far I have every reason to believe that it is the divine influence of the Holy Spirit operating upon my heart that could possibly induce me to make the feeble and unworthy efforts that I have.

But to begin my subject: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, whoso is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whoso shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council. But whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire [Matthew 5:22]." For several years my heart was in continual sorrow. And I believe that the Almighty beheld from his holy habitation, the affliction wherewith I was afflicted, and heard the false misrepresentations wherewith I was misrepresented, and there was none to help. Then I cried unto the Lord in my troubles. And thus for wise and holy purposes, best known to himself, he has raised me in the midst of my enemies, to vindicate my wrongs before this people; and to reprove them for sin, as I have reasoned to them of righteousness and judgment to come. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts [Isaiah 55:9]." I believe, that for wise and holy purposes, best known to himself, he hath unloosed my tongue, and put his word into my mouth, in order to confound and put all those

↳ b.g. - transition happens here

invention as divine intervention

(ethos and issues of the  
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to shame that have rose up against me. For he hath clothed by face with steel, and lined my forehead with brass. He hath put his testimony within me, and engraven his seal on my forehead [Revelation 9:4]. And with these weapons I have indeed set the fiends of earth and hell at defiance.

What if I am a woman; is not the God of ancient times the God of these modern days? Did he not raise up Deborah, to be a mother, and a judge in Israel [Judges 4:4]? Did not queen Esther save the lives of the Jews? And Mary Magdalene first declare the resurrection of Christ from the dead? Come, said the woman of Samaria, and see a man that hath told me all things that ever I did, is not this the Christ? St. Paul declared that it was a shame for a woman to speak in public, yet our great High Priest and Advocate did not condemn the woman for a more notorious offence than this; neither will he condemn this worthless worm. The bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. Did St. Paul but know of our wrongs and deprivations, I presume he would make no objections to our pleading in public for our rights. Again; holy women ministered unto Christ and the apostles; and women of refinement in all ages, more or less, have had a voice in moral, religious and political subjects. Again; why the Almighty hath imparted unto me the power of speaking thus, I cannot tell. "And Jesus lifted up his voice and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight [Luke 10:21]."

But to convince you of the high opinion that was formed of the capacity and ability of woman by the ancients, I would refer you to "Sketches of the Fair Sex." Read to the 51st page, and you will find that several of the Northern nations imagined that women could look into futurity, and that they had about them, an inconceivable something, approaching to divinity. Perhaps that idea was only the effect of the sagacity common to the sex, and the advantages which their natural address gave them over rough and simple warriors. Perhaps, also, those barbarians, surprised at the

influence which beauty has over force, were led to ascribe to the supernatural attraction, a charm which they could not comprehend. A belief, however, that the Deity more readily communicates himself to women, has at one time or other, prevailed in every quarter of the earth; not only among the Germans and the Britons, but all the people of Scandinavia were possessed of it. Among the Greeks, women delivered the Oracles; the respect the Romans paid to the Sibyls is well known. The Jews had their prophetesses. The prediction of the Egyptian women obtained much credit at Rome, even under the Emperors. And in the most barbarous nations, all things that have the appearance of being supernatural, the mysteries of religion, the secrets of physic, and the rites of magic, were in the possession of women.

If such women as are here described have once existed, be no longer astonished then, my brethren and friends, that God at this eventful period should raise up your own females to strive, by their example both in public and private, to assist those who are endeavoring stop the strong current of prejudice that flows so profusely against us at present. No longer ridicule their efforts, it will be counted for sin. For God makes use of feeble means sometimes, to bring about his most exalted purposes.

In the 15th century, the general spirit of this period is worthy of observation. We might then have seen women preaching and mixing themselves in controversies. Women occupying the chairs of Philosophy and Justice; women writing in Greek, and studying in Hebrew. Nuns were poetesses, and women of quality Divines; and young girls who had studied Eloquence, would with the sweetest countenances and the most plaintive voices, pathetically exhort the Pope and the Christian Princes to declare war against the Turks. Women in those days devoted their leisure hours to contemplation and study: The religious spirit which has animated women in all ages, showed itself at this time. It has made them by turns, martyrs, apostles, warriors, and concluded in making them divines and scholars.

Why cannot a religious spirit animate us now? Why cannot we become divines and scholars? Although learning is somewhat requisite, yet recollect that those great apostles, Peter and James,

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were ignorant and unlearned. They were taken from the fishing boat, and made fishers of men.<sup>3</sup>

In the 13th century, a young lady of Bologne devoted herself to the study of the Latin language, and of the laws. At the age of twenty-three she pronounced a funeral oration in Latin, in the great church of Bologne. And to be admitted as an orator, she had neither need of indulgence on account of her youth or of her sex. At the age of twenty-six, she took the degree of Doctor of Laws, and began publicly to expound the Institutions of Justinian. At the age of thirty, her great reputation raised her to a chair, where she taught the law to a prodigious concourse of scholars from all nations. She joined the charms and accomplishments of a woman to all the knowledge of a man. And such was the power of her eloquence, that her beauty was only admired when her tongue was silent.

What if such women as are here described should rise among our sable race? And it is not impossible. For it is not the color of the skin that makes the man or the woman, but the principle formed in the soul. Brilliant wit will shine, come from whence it will; and genius and talent will not hide the brightness of its lustre.

But, to return to my subject; the mighty work of reformation has begun among this people. The dark clouds of ignorance are dispersing. The light of science is bursting forth. Knowledge is beginning to flow, nor will its moral influence be extinguished till its refulgent rays have spread over us from East to West, and from North to South. Thus far is this mighty work begun, but not as yet accomplished. Christians must awake from their slumbers. Religion must flourish among them before the church will be built up in its purity, or immorality be suppressed.

Yet, notwithstanding your prospects are thus fair and bright, I am about to leave you, perhaps never more to return. For I find it is no use for me as an individual to try to make myself useful among my color in this city. It was contempt for my moral and religious opinions in private that drove me thus before a public. Had experience more plainly shown me that it was the nature of man to crush his fellow, I should not have

thought it so hard. Wherefore, my respected friends, let us no longer talk of prejudice, till prejudice becomes extinct at home. Let us no longer talk of opposition, till we cease to oppose our own. For while these evils exist, to talk is like giving breath to the air, and labor to the wind. Though wealth is far more highly prized than humble merit, yet none of these things move me. Having God for my friend and portion, what have I to fear? Promotion cometh neither from the East or West, and as long as it is the will of God, I rejoice that I am as I am; for man in his best estate is altogether vanity. Men of eminence have mostly risen from obscurity; nor will I, although a female of a darker hue, and far more obscure than they, bend my head or hang my harp upon willows [Psalm 137:2]; for though poor, I will virtuous prove. And if it is the will of my heavenly Father to reduce me to penury and want, I am ready to say, amen, even so be it. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head [Matthew 8:20]."

During the short period of my Christian warfare, I have indeed had to contend against the fiery darts of the devil. And was it not that the righteous are kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto salvation, long before this I should have proved to be like the seed by the way-side. For it has actually appeared to me at different periods as though the powers of earth and hell had combined against me, to prove my overthrow. Yet amidst their dire attempts, I have found the Almighty to be "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother [Proverbs 18:24]." He never will forsake the soul that leans on him; though he chastens and corrects it, it is for the soul's best interest. "And as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him [Psalm 103:13]."

But some of you have said, "do not talk so much about religion, the people do not wish to hear you. We know these things, tell us something we do not know." If you know these things, my dear friends, and have performed them, far happier, and more prosperous would you now have been. "He that knoweth the Lord's will and obeyeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes [Luke 12:42]." Sensible of this, I have, regardless

<sup>3</sup>Matthew 4:15. [M.R.]

of the frowns and scoffs of a guilty world, plead [sic] up religion, and the pure principles of morality among you. Religion is the most glorious theme that mortals can converse upon. The older it grows, the more new beauties it displays. Earth, with its brilliant attractions, appears mean and sordid when compared to it. It is that fountain that has no end, and those that drink thereof shall never thirst; for it is, indeed, a well of water springing up in the soul unto everlasting life.

Again, those ideas of greatness which are held forth to us, are vain delusions, are airy visions which we shall never realize. All that man can say or do can never elevate us, it is a work that must be effected between God and ourselves. And how? By dropping all political discussions in our behalf, for these, in my opinion, sow the seed of discord, and strengthen the cord of prejudice.<sup>4</sup> A spirit of animosity is already risen, and unless it is quenched, a fire will burst forth and devour us, and our young will be slain by the sword. It is the sovereign will of God that our condition should be thus and so. "For he hath formed one vessel for honor, and another for dishonor [Romans 9:21]." And shall the clay say to him that hath formed it, why hast thou formed me thus? It is high time to drop political discussions, and when our day of deliverance comes, God will provide a way for us to escape, and fight his own battles.

Finally, my brethren, let us follow after godliness, and the things which make for peace. Cultivate your own minds and morals; real merit will elevate you. Pure religion will burst your fetters. Turn your attention to industry. Strive to please your employers. Lay up what you can. And remember, that in the grave, distinction withers, and the high and low are alike renowned.

But I draw to a conclusion. Long will the kind sympathy of some much loved friend, be written on the tablet of my memory, especially those kind individuals who have stood by me like pity-

ing angels, and befriended me when in the midst of difficulty; many blessings rest on them. Gratitude is all the tribute I can offer. A rich reward awaits them.

To my unconverted friends, one and all, I would say, shortly this frail tenement of mine will be dissolved and lie mouldering in ruins. O, solemn thought! Yet why should I revolt, for it is the glorious hope of a blessed immortality, beyond the grave, that has supported me thus far through this vale of tears. Who among you will strive to meet me at the right hand of Christ. For the great day of retribution is fast approaching, and who shall be able to abide his coming? You are forming characters for eternity. As you live so will you die; as death leaves you, so judgment will find you. Then shall we receive the glorious welcome, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world [Matthew 25:34]." Or, hear the heart-rending sentence, "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels [Matthew 25:41]." When thrice ten thousand years have rolled away, eternity will be but just begun. Your ideas will but just begin to expand. O, eternity, who can unfathom thine end, or comprehend thy beginning.

Dearly beloved, I have made myself contemptible in the eyes of many, that I might win some. But it has been like labor in vain. "Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God alone giveth the increase [1 Corinthians 3:6]."

To my brethren and sisters in the church, I would say, be ye clothed with the breast-plate of righteousness, having your loins girt about with truth [Ephesians 6:14], prepared to meet the Bridegroom at his coming [Matthew 25:1-13]; for blessed are those servants that are found watching.

Farewell. In a few short years from now, we shall meet in those upper regions where parting will be no more. There we shall sing and shout, and shout and sing, and make heaven's high arches ring. There we shall range in rich pastures, and partake of those living streams that never dry. O, blissful thought! Hatred and contention shall cease, and we shall join with redeemed millions in ascribing glory and honor, and riches, and power and blessing to the Lamb that was

<sup>4</sup>Here Stewart espouses the Garrisonian view opposing a political solution to the question of slavery. Garrison vowed that he would never hold office or exercise the franchise in a government that included slave-holders. The Constitution, as he saw it, was a proslavery instrument and hence not to be supported by a true abolitionist. See Quarles, *Abolitionists*, p. 43 [M.R.]

slain, and to him that sitteth upon the throne. Nor eye hath seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive of the joys that are prepared for them that love God. Thus far has my life been almost a life of complete disappointment. God had tried me as by fire. Well was I aware that if I contended boldly for his cause, I must suffer, Yet, I chose rather to suffer affliction with his people, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. And I believe that the glorious declaration was about to be made applicable to me, that was made to God's ancient covenant people by the prophet, Comfort ye,

comfort ye, my people: say unto her that her warfare is accomplished, and that her iniquities are pardoned. I believe that a rich award awaits me, if not in this world, in the world to come. O, blessed reflection. The bitterness of my soul has departed from those who endeavored to discourage and hinder me in my Christian progress; and I can now forgive my enemies, bless those who have hated me, and cheerfully pray for those who have despitely used and persecuted me.

Fare you well, farewell.

MARIA S. [sic] STEWART  
New York, April 14, 1834