THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON:

REFORMER AND MAN OF LETTERS

By

SISTER THOMAS CATHERINE BRENNAN, O. P.

A THESIS

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Michigan
State University of Agriculture and Applied Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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AN ABSTRACT

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THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON: REFORMER AND MAN OF LETTERS

This thesis is limited to Thomas Wentworth Higginson's career as a man of letters and as a reformer in the anti-slavery and woman suffrage movements. Divided into five chapters with a preface and bibliography, the study includes Higginson's political views, his anti-slavery activities, his service in the Civil War, his woman suffrage activities, and his writings on these subjects.

Chapter I, the "Introduction" indicates the approach used in this study by stressing the integral relationship which existed between Higginson's life as a reformer and his life as a man of letters.

Chapter II, "The Minister and the Slaves," discusses Higginson's political views as a Republican and as an ardent abolitionist, his anti-slavery activities connected with the fugitive slave rescues, the Kansas emigration, the John Brown affair, and his liberal views as expressed in speeches and sermons published in the Liberator. The chapter concludes with Higginson's change of heart toward disunion after the secession of the south and the attack on Fort Sumter.

Chapter III, "The Soldier and His Regiment," recounts Higginson's military career as colonel of a regiment of Negro freed men in South Carolina. His Civil War memoir, Army Life in a Black Regiment depicts his impressions of the Negroes and his opinion of the status of the freed slaves. This book and his work as State historian of Massachusetts, together with several essays related to this period are the subject of this chapter.

Chapter IV, "The Colonel and the Ladies," describes Higginson's activities at woman suffrage conventions, his social theory of American democracy as expressed in the women's magazines, Woman's Journal and Harper's Bazar, his literary criticism of the new school of local color writers among whom were several women, his assistance as literary advisor of Harriet Prescott, Helen Hunt Jackson, and Emily Dickinson, his biographies of Lydia Maria Child, Una Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, and Julia Ward Howe. His fiction, Malbone and a few short stories, portray feminine types, and his essays for the Atlantic Monthly set up an ideal of womanhood and suggestions for reform in dress and the health habits of women.

Investigation of these phases of Higginson's career has borne out the reputation he holds as a writer of high literary quality and as a reformer of high romantic idealism.

PREFACE

My first acknowledgment is to Mother Mary Gerald Barry, O.P., Prioress General of the Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Dominic, Adrian, Michigan. Because of Mother Gerald I have had this opportunity of pursuing graduate study at Michigan State University and of investigating this dissertation topic.

Next, I would like to express my special indebtedness to Dr. Claude M. Newlin, the head of my committee and my major professor. Dr. Newlin suggested this topic and has directed it with his characteristic kindness, personal consideration, and constructive criticism. It has been both a pleasure and a privilege to have studied under Dr. Newlin and to have shared in the breadth and depth of his scholarship.

I am also grateful to Dr. David C. Mead for his valuable criticisms of my manuscript and for his kindly interest in this subject. I wish also to thank Dr. Lawrence Babb and Dr. William Heist, the other members of my committee, and Dr. Russel B. Nye, Head of the English Department.

I am very grateful to Dr. Benjamin B. Hickok, of the Communication Skills Department at Michigan State University, for so generously permitting me to use his microfilm of the correspondence concerning John Brown in the Higginson Collection in the Boston Public Library.

A particular and large measure of my gratitude belongs to Sister Matthew Ann and the Sisters at Resurrection Convent for their encouragement and countless acts of kindness which have assisted me in bringing this work to completion.

Finally, I would like to thank the library staff at Michigan State University for placing materials at my disposal.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Wentworth Higginson was born of Puritan stock in Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 22, 1823. He graduated from Harvard in 1841, was schoolmaster for two years, then decided to enter the ministry. He attended Harvard Divinity School and was strongly inclined toward the most liberal wing of Unitarianism. He accepted the pastorate of the First Religious Society (Unitarian) of Newburyport, Massachusetts, and immediately devoted himself to reform measures in an ultra-conservative parish. His ardent abolitionist views cost him his pulpit in 1848. With his wife, Mary Channing Higginson, he moved to Worcester, Massachusetts, to take charge of a secularized Free Church. Here he found himself in the midst of seething reform activities. In the meantime, he wrote poetry, essays, and biographical sketches of such literary quality that he achieved, early in life, the reputation of a man of letters. The attraction of reform and literature were so strong that in 1861, after fifteen years of service as a minister, he resigned to devote himself to a profession of writing and lecturing.

Circumstances, however, and his own active temperament forced him to take part in the Civil War. He was offered and accepted the colonelcy of a regiment of Negro freed men in 1862 which he commanded for two years until an injury caused him to retire from military service in 1864.

He returned to civilian life and lived at Newport, Rhode Island, where his wife, an arthritic invalid, had moved during his absence. His literary life at Newport was stimulated by his contact with literary figures and reform leaders with whom he associated.

His wife died in 1877 and he went abroad for a few months. In 1878 he returned to Cambridge and in 1879 married Mary Thacher. They had two children, one of whom died in infancy. For the remainder of his life, Higginson earned his living by writing and lecturing. He died in 1911.

This brief factual biography of Higginson tells very little of the spirit of the man who wrote in 1846,

> A pure earnest aim is not enough. Intellectual as well as moral armor must be bright for I know I shall have to sustain a warfare. . . . An aesthetic life--how beautiful--but the life of a Reformer, a People's Guide, 'battling for right'--glorious, but Oh, how hard![1]

Although such idealism may be unquestionably attributed to youth, nevertheless, the strong attraction of the life of a reformer and of a littérateur set a high goal which demanded much by way of idealism, optimism, and courage.

As a reformer, Higginson played a minor role in the great issues pressing upon the turbulent nineteenth century. Always a liberal in his convictions, he followed the inaugurators of reforms and assisted them materially by assuming local leadership in the cities where he lived. His influence, however, should not be underestimated, for in many instances, especially in the woman suffrage movement, he was a pioneer whose signature and presence gave the weight of respectability

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[1]Mary Thacher Higginson, Thomas Wentworth Higginson: The Story of His Life (Boston, 1914), p. 71.

to otherwise "radical" measures.

As a reformer it was impossible for Higginson to limit himself to one or two movements. A whole network of social problems, which seemed to hinge upon one another, opened before him, and as he interested himself in one he found himself enmeshed in the others. As a result he became involved in most of the issues. He supported Horace Mann's public school system and was, most of his life, on one or another board of education. His lyceum lectures, as part of adult education, were popular and stimulating. He advocated public libraries and was instrumental in setting up local libraries where he lived, even contributing a collection of almost a thousand books to the Boston Public Library. He was among the early supporters of physical education and gymnasiums for both young men and women. He often attributed his long and healthy life to the fact that he took regular physical exercise when a young man. He advocated labor unions and improved working conditions for men and women. He was one of the leaders in the temperance movement, frequently holding office and lecturing at conventions. He insisted that his return to health after his injury in the Civil War was due to the fact that he never indulged in strong drink.

He was also averse to tobacco. He was an early apostle of prison reform and a helper of the social outcast, the discharged prisoner. He was among the strongest supporters of the Free Church movement--one of the radical outgrowths of Unitarianism, and he became interested in spiritualism through his membership in the Radical Club. These many interests indicate a very full life and one can readily understand Higginson's remark that he never knew a moment of boredom.

The two reforms, however, which occupied the largest portion of his life were abolition and woman suffrage. The appeal of the former which smote his conscience and his heart very early in life was simple. As he said many times, once grant that one man cannot hold another man as property and the argument is won. The appeal went far deeper however. Higginson came to know personally and to revere several Negro leaders, among whom were fugitives from the South and freed men from the North, such as Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. His position as a colonel of a Negro regiment of freed slaves was one of the greatest joys of his life. His enthusiasm and pride in these men was genuine and in many respects almost paternal. This is evident in his best work, Army Life in a Black Regiment.

The women's rights movement he accepted as a challenge to American democracy. For sixty years he spent himself, gallantly fighting on the lecture platform and in his writings for "the other half of the population." His advocacy of women's rights, however, was not limited to woman suffrage only. He expected that with the right to vote, woman's sphere would be broadened socially, educationally, industrially, and politically. Although he did not live to see the fulfillment of the woman suffrage movement in the passage of the nineteenth amendment, he frequently prophesied its coming for he recognized that the status of women in American society had long passed its "chrysalis" stage. For this reason he encouraged the rising group of authoresses, and brought before the public the achievements of women, however great or small. And, as a man of letters, he found at hand ample source material both propagandistic and artistic in these two movements.

Two phases of Higginson's literary career have been thoroughly investigated in earlier dissertations. One by Howard Hintz[2] is a general survey of Higginson's life and work in the light of Emersonian idealism. Hintz points out that Higginson's optimism and noble aims were largely inspired in his youth by the older transcendentalists, especially Emerson, and that Higginson represented these qualities, although in somewhat diluted form with the passing of years, well into the twentieth century. Higginson's position as a literary critic has also been discussed in a more recent study.[3]

It is the purpose of this thesis, however, to examine the relationship between Higginson's reform activities in the anti-slavery and woman suffrage movements and his literary career. Although much of his writing is necessarily of a propagandistic nature, a considerable amount of it is of real literary value. The study has been eminently revealing and rewarding, for behind the façade of Higginson's graceful and genteel style is a man of action. The mildness of his manner and of his writing is deceiving. Even Cheerful Yesterdays, his autobiography, is so self-effacing that it does not bring to the fore emphatically enough the natural vigor and vitality of the man. It is hoped the following discussion will rectify this impression, for Higginson's life was stimulating in its courage, fearlessness, and nobility of purpose.

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[2]Howard W. Hintz, Thomas Wentworth Higginson: Disciple of the Newness (Unpublished doctoral dissertation: New York University, 1937).

[3]Edgar Lindsley McCormick, Thomas Wentworth Higginson as a Literary Critic (Unpublished doctoral dissertation: University of Michigan, 1950).

It must also be kept in mind, while examining his writings, that Higginson did not regard a literary career as the highest aim in life. His passionate fondness for literature and for writing was second to his humanitarianism. It is with this idea that he concluded his autobiography.

> The high-water mark of earthly endeavor is not to be found in the pure love of science or art or literature, since these do not, at their utmost, include all the interests of man, . . . but it lies in aims so far-reaching that they exclude all petty personalities--in aims such as are expressed in George Eliot's 'choir invisible,' or in the sublime prayer of the French iconoclast, Proudhon, 'Let my memory perish, if only humanity may be free.'[4]

As a man of letters, therefore, Higginson's life was inextricably bound up with his times. The ephemeral content of his work is perhaps one reason for the sudden decline of his reputation immediately after his death in 1911. Another reason is that, like most overly-active men, Higginson scattered his energies. He spoke of this as a fault in Theodore Parker and quoted from Goethe, "Strive constantly to concentrate thyself, never dissipate your powers; incessant activity, of whatever kind, leads to bankruptcy."[5] Although neither Parker nor Higginson could be accused of bankruptcy, nevertheless Higginson today is considered second rate as a writer. Perhaps concentration in one or two fields might have given him a lasting name. Higginson himself realized this, for he says of his activities in his autobiography, "Such versatility makes life very enjoyable, but perhaps not so really useful or successful as a career like that of my

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[4]Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Cheerful Yesterdays, I, The Works of Thomas Wentworth Higginson (Boston, 1900), p. 364.

[5]"Theodore Parker," Contemporaries, II, The Works of Thomas Wentworth Higginson (Boston, 1900), p. 41.

contemporary, Francis Parkman, "--a specialist before the days of specialism.[6] He did not, however, regret his course.

> To adopt a different method, as I did, is to put one's self too much in the position of a celebrated horse once owned by a friend of mine,--a horse which had never won a race, but which was prized as having gained a second place in more races than any other horse in America.[7]

Neither did Higginson have the happy faculty, as Bliss Perry points out, "like Julia Ward Howe, to win fame by one ecstatic lyric, or, like Wasson and Ellery Channing to be remembered by one famous line."[8] Yet he achieved a high excellence in his prose and constantly maintained it at a level which neither improved nor declined with the passage of years. His style was graceful and flowing, and he possessed the ability to touch delicately and lightly the finest aspects of life. Charles F. Thwing states that Higginson's style possessed two qualities--fineness and fire.

> These two elements are characteristic. It is, however, rather fineness than fire that dominates. . . . Fineness of thinking, fineness of feeling, fineness of appreciation ever seem to me to belong to him, and therefore to form, or to give at least atmosphere to his writing. . . . Fire belongs more to his understanding of movements.[9]

Both these elements are obvious in his contributions to the Atlantic Monthly. It will be noticed in the course of this study that much of his best work was published in the Atlantic Monthly during the first ten years of its existence, although his bibliography reveals that he wrote for nearly seventy journals during his prolific career. It will also be noticed that many of his early contributions

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[6]Cheerful Yesterdays, p. 183.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Bliss Perry, "The Colonel's Quality," The Praise of Folly and Other Papers (Boston, 1923), p. 75.

[9]Charles Franklin Thwing, "Thomas Wentworth Higginson," Friends of Men (New York, 1933), p. 123.

to the Atlantic Monthly are reformatory in content. A glance at the background of the magazine will perhaps explain Higginson's policy.

Higginson began publishing poetry, sermons and lectures as early as 1843. These, together with his personal acquaintanceship with the literary figures of Boston and Concord, gave him, by 1852, an assured literary prestige. When Francis H. Underwood, in 1853, looked for superior writers as contributors to his new literary project, a "literary and anti-slavery" magazine, Higginson was invited to contribute articles. Underwood had succeeded in persuading J. P. Jewett & Co. to stand behind him in establishing the new magazine which would unite "the strongest forces of expression in the joined causes of letters and reform."[10] J. P. Jewett & Co. had proved that they were unafraid of alienating their Southern customers by publishing Uncle Tom's Cabin and they agreed to cooperate in Underwood's project. After having obtained an immediate and cordial response from the outstanding New England writers, Underwood was disappointed in the sudden financial failure of the Jewett firm in the fall of 1853.

As literary adviser for Phillips, Sampson & Co., Underwood interested them in his project and with his former correspondents (Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, Cabot, and Motley) as his counsel, he began, in 1857, the Atlantic Monthly with Lowell as editor-in-chief.

The relation of the Atlantic Monthly to the reform movements of the day would be an interesting study in itself. Louis J. Budd states:

> The contents of the early Atlantic were, of course, chiefly literary. Still, from its birth, aligned with

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[10] M. A. DeWolfe Howe, The Atlantic Monthly and its Makers (Boston, 1919), p. 16.

> the rising Republican party through both editors and owners, it devoted substantial attention to contemporary affairs; James Russell Lowell, the first editor, penned political polemics for this new organ of 'Literature, Art, and Politics.' During the 1860's James T. Fields, moving with the main trend, further widened the periodical's coverage, and after the Civil War had enshrined the Republican party in the hearts of the New England intelligentsia. The Atlantic favored openly the triumphant antislavery legions of Lincoln, Grant, and Charles Sumner.[11]

Higginson's part in the early policies of the magazine could also be the subject for a separate study, for Higginson was intimate with both Lowell and Fields. Lowell himself has been described as "so true and spirited a patriot that no fear of consequences withheld him from open identification with the heterodox cause of anti-slavery,"[12] although Higginson found him reticent about publishing his "Ought Women to Learn the Alphabet?" because of his conservative attitude toward woman suffrage. Within Lowell's editorship, (1857-1861), however, Higginson published his essays on physical education: "Saints and their Bodies," (March, 1858); "Gymnastics," (March, 1861); on slavery: "Maroons of Jamaica," (February, 1860); "Maroons of Surinam" (May, 1860); "Denmark Vesey," (June, 1861); "Nat Turner's Insurrection," (August, 1861); on education: "Murder of the Innocents," (September, 1859). During Field's editorship (1861-1871), he published essays on physical education: "Health of Our Girls," (June, 1862); on smoking: "A New Counterblast," (December, 1861), and his Civil War papers discussed below.

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[11]Louis J. Budd, "Howells, the Atlantic Monthly, and Republicanism," American Literature, XXIV (May, 1952), p. 138.

[12]Howe, op. cit., p. 28.

Fields was editor of the Atlantic throughout the Civil War, and in accepting and publishing Higginson's war essays, he carried on the definite anti-slavery character of the magazine. Higginson says of his friendship with Fields, "I happened to be one of his favorites, . . . and /he/ was the only editor I have ever encountered whose judgment I could move for an instant by any cajoling; editors being, as a rule, a race made of adamant, as they should be."[13] James Austin says of Higginson's contributions during Fields's management:

> Higginson's part in the Atlantic is not to be passed over lightly. Though he is often overshadowed by the illustrious poets and essayists who were his colleagues, he had more to do with the serious prose style that was a chief characteristic of the magazine than any other writer between the resignation of Lowell and the appointment of Howells. This included the war period, wherein Higginson's matter as well as manner was authoritative Atlantic Monthly policy.[14]

The literary prestige of the journal from its beginnings and the fact that Higginson could boast that he "wrote more largely for the first twenty volumes of the magazine than any other contributor except Lowell and Holmes,"[15] indicates the stature of his reputation at this time. The fact that most of his contributions dealt with timely subjects shows that the reform element played a large part in his literary career. This is not to imply, however, that his work for the Atlantic Monthly was limited to reform topics or that his articles on reform were not sent to other leading journals. A glance at the bibliography

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[13]Cheerful Yesterdays, p. 186.

[14]James C. Austin, Fields of the Atlantic Monthly, (San Marino, 1953), p. 248.

[15]Cheerful Yesterdays, p. 186.

will show that he had a wide outlet for his ideas on the issues of the day.

Higginson's exact and methodical habits have made this study easier than was at first anticipated. He collected all his signed articles into book form, sometimes reprinting the same article in two or three volumes. Frequently articles by him appeared in different magazines within a year or two of one another, saying substantially the same thing, for he had the public speaker's habit of repeating himself without apparently diminishing the interest of his audience in the manner or matter of his topics. He also preserved carefully all letters which he received from great or minor figures of his day with an uncanny foresight as to their historical and antiquarian value. And he took a certain amount of well-deserved satisfaction in reprinting in facsimile some of these letters in his volumes and in displaying his knowledge of the personal habits and eccentricities of notables by writing interesting and amusing reminiscences of them. It has been interesting to meet these men and women through the eyes of a contemporary, for Higginson is said to have known "everyone."

Among these contemporaries were his friends, Emerson, Holmes, Longfellow, and Lowell, who exerted a strong influence on him and whose finest essence his own life emphasized. He drew from them an idealism and optimism which pervades his writings and is evident in such titles as Cheerful Yesterdays and "The Sunny Side of the Transcendental Period." But for this optimism, Hellman asserts,

> this American faith in moulding the living material of his own day into the finer forms inherent in his country's institutions, Emerson, the most influential of our essayists would have had a lesser hold on the minds of his fellow citizens; and the value of Higginson comes from a similar happy endowment.[16]

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[16]George S. Hellman, "Later Essayists," Cambridge History of American Literature (New York, 1931), III, Part II, p. 118.

CHAPTER II

THE MINISTER AND THE SLAVES

A. Political Views and Anti-Slavery Activities (1843-1861)

As a young man of twenty in 1843, Thomas Wentworth Higginson "had got the excitement of the great Abolition conventions"[1] which he attended several times. Shortly after, he understood "the run of slavery argumentation" and could "talk abolitionism pretty well."[2] Within the year, Higginson decided that he was destined to live an earnest, independent life, and wrote to his fiancée, Mary Channing, of his decision to be a reformer. "Setting out, as I do, with an entire resolution never to be intimidated into shutting either my eyes or my mouth, it is proper to consider the chance of my falling out with the world."[3] He knew that reformers such as Emerson, Alcott, and Mrs. Lydia Maria Child were considered fanatics and branded as unsafe by conservatives. By 1846, he recorded that he had enrolled himself in the ranks of the American Non-Jurors or Disunion Abolitionists. He was determined "not only not to vote for any officer who must take the oath to support the U. S. Constitution, but also to use whatever means may lie in my power to promote the Dissolution of the Union."[4]

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[1] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, p. 60.

[2] Ibid., p. 61.

[3] Ibid., p. 68.

[4] Ibid., p. 78.

Significantly, the title of his graduation oration from Harvard Divinity School in 1847 was "Relation of the Clergy to Reform."[5] At his ordination in Newburyport, James Freeman Clarke "exhorted his young brother to speak scathing words of rebuke against the sin of slavery,"[6] advice which he readily followed. At Newburyport, however, he found himself in one of the most conservative and anti-abolitionist of parishes. By profession, Higginson says, he found himself associated with all that was most reputable in the town; but, by temperament, he was inclined toward that which was most radical--toward the "Come-Outers" and those who belonged to the "Sisterhood of Reforms."[7] He spoke at anti-slavery and temperance meetings and, in 1848, accepted the nomination of the Free Soil Party for Congress. He was defeated and lost his parish because of his anti-slavery views.

For two years Higginson remained in Newburyport without a parish and entered into politics. One of his attempts, as he wrote to his friend, Samuel Longfellow, was "to bring back the Free-Soil party to self-control and consistency from the more fascinating paths of coalition and conquest"--at which he failed. The other was "to induce Massachusetts to follow the example of Maine and either have laws that can do something, or none at all, in the way of checking liquor traffic."[8] Woman suffrage also came in for an early share of his activities. But his growing interest was the slavery reform. During his stay at Newburyport, he began to meet the older abolitionists, Charles Sumner, Lucy Stone,

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 85.

[7] Cheerful Yesterdays, p. 119.

[8] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, pp. 90-91.

Whittier, Thoreau, and Emerson.

When the Fugitive Slave Law broke upon the nation in 1850, Higginson indignantly took up arms in earnest and entered into the slavery reform as a moral crusader. He had to wait, however, for an opportunity to act and followed approvingly the newspaper account of the dramatic rescue of the fugitive, "Shadrach," who was literally whisked away from the court by a group of negroes and rushed to Canada and freedom by white sympathizers.

To enter more fully into such activities, Higginson joined Theodore Parker's Vigilance Committee in Boston. The opportunity for excitement came in April, 1851, when he received word to report to the office of the Liberator for a meeting regarding the kidnapping of the Negro youth, Thomas Sims. The members of the Vigilance Committee, Higginson says, though personally admirable, were, on the whole, "unfit to undertake any positive action in the direction of forcible resistance to authorities."[9] Half of them were non-resistants like their leader Garrison; the other half were "political Abolitionists," or Free-Soilers who were opposed to any violation of the law. The only ones to be relied upon were a few, like himself, "whose temperament prevailed over the restrictions of non-resistance on the one side, and of politics on the other."[10]

Thomas Sims was held in the court House in Boston under trumped-up charges and a heavy guard. Higginson tried to assist him by consulting Ellis Gray Loring, an abolitionist lawyer, about the wild scheme of filching the official record of the Southern court which was lying invitingly among the lawyers' papers. He also wrote to an old classmate,

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[9]Cheerful Yesterdays, p. 139.

[10]Ibid., p. 140.

Charles Devens, then United States marshall, imploring him to resign rather than to be the instrument of sending a man into bondage. An excerpt from his letter illustrates his sincerity.

> For myself there is something in the thought of assisting to return to slavery a man guilty of no crime but a colored skin /at which/ every thought of my nature rebels in . . . horror. I think not now of the escaped slave, though he has all sympathies, but of the free men and women who are destined to suffer for this act. And I almost feel as if the nation of which we have boasted were sunk in dust forever, now that justice and humanity are gone; and as if the nineteenth century were the darkest of all ages.[11]

Devens, however, replied courteously that he reserved his decision.

Higginson also made a vigorous speech in Tremont Temple urging instant action which excited the crowd "to the verge of revolution,"[12] but was effectively opposed by a lawyer, Charles Mayo Ellis, who protested against its tone.[13]

Finally, Higginson, with about four or five others, formed a desperate plan of rescue. Sims was confined in the Court House in a third floor room without grating at the window. A Negro clergyman of Boston, Mr. Grimes, agreed to visit Sims and arrange to have him jump from a window to mattresses placed below and thence to escape in a carriage waiting for him. As Higginson and a friend walked through the Court Square the evening of the proposed rescue, they were dismayed to find men busily fitting iron bars across the window. Their plan was frustrated.

A hurried meeting was held in Theodore Parker's study, where plans were discussed for pirating the boat on which Sims was to be placed.

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[11] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, pp. 111-112.

[12] Cheerful Yesterdays, p. 142.

[13] Ibid., p. 143.

The uncertainty of the project, however, caused the would-be rescuers to abandon the idea. Thomas Sims was returned to Savannah and publicly whipped.

The abolitionists, especially Higginson, were left with the strong impression of the great want of preparation, on their part, for this revolutionary work.[14] By their defiance of the law in their attempt to rescue Sims they were also left with the strange feeling of being outside the pale of established institutions. In formulating plans, Higginson said of those days, one was "obliged to lower one's voice and conceal one's purposes; to see law and order, police and military, on the wrong side, and find good citizenship a sin and bad citizenship a duty."[15]

Higginson's part in the Sims incident gave him enough publicity to bring him to the notice of the Abolition element in Worcester, Massachusetts. He was invited to take charge of the Worcester Free Church, an organization which had sprung up under the influence of Theodore Parker's Boston Society--its prototype. This organization suited Higginson because of its secular nature, with no church membership or communion service. It resembled, he says, "the ethical societies of the present day, with a shade more of specifically religious aspect."[16] He wrote to a friend that his motives in accepting the Worcester parish were that the radicalism was like that of Lynn, a strongly abolitionist town, but "more varied, more cultivated, and more balanced by an opposing

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[14] Ibid., p. 144.

[15] Ibid., p. 145.

[16] Ibid., p. 131.