

A FAMILY DIVIDED

It was 1868, five years after the Emancipation Proclamation, three years after the end of the war that made it stick and the death of the President who wrote it.

Most of the old prewar abolitionist periodicals had ceased to publish. A few—among them the Anti-Slavery Standard—still circulated among a select list of old subscribers which included Sarah Grimké and her sister Angelina Grimké Weld, whose famous eye-witness account of American slavery had shaken the pillars of the southern Establishment and roused the northern conscience thirty years before.

In the January issue of the Standard, Angelina saw an article signed by a Professor Bowers of Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania, an institution devoted to the higher education of Negro youth. The article reported in enthusiastic terms an oration delivered “by a young man but a few years removed from the chains of servitude, whose erudition and felicity of expression would be remarkable in any student in any college ...” The name of the young man was Archibald Henry Grimké.

Angelina had never heard of him, and neither had Sarah. Both were made profoundly uneasy by the coincidence of the name, and—characteristically—Angelina decided to take direct action. On February 15, 1868, she wrote to the young man:

In a recent number of the Anti-Slavery Standard I saw a notice of a meeting at Lincoln University of a Literary Society at which a young gentleman of the name of Grimké deliver'd an address. My maiden name was Grimké. I am the youngest sister of Dr. John Grimké of So. Carolina, & as this name is a very uncommon one it has occurred to me that you had been probably the slave of one of my brothers & I feel a great desire to know all about you.

My Sister Sarah & myself have long been interested in the Anti-Slavery cause, & left Charleston nearly 40 years ago, because we could not endure to live in the midst of the oppressions of Slavery. Will you therefore be so kind as to tell us who you are, whether you have any brothers & sisters —who your parents were etc. etc. ...

Angelina showed her letter to her husband and to Sarah, but she did not ask their consent to the sending of it. All three knew what alternative answers to her questions were possible, and what Angelina stood to lose

if the worst of those possibilities materialized. She was jeopardizing her physical and mental health—if not her life—by the inquiry. But no one in that household would have dreamed of trying to dissuade Angelina from any course of action she had determined was right.

Angelina was at the time sixty-three years old, a frail, gray gentlewoman with a soft southern voice who taught English and history at Dr. Dio Lewis' boarding school for young ladies in Lexington, Massachusetts. Mr. Weld also taught at the school. Vigorous and keen even at sixty-five, he enjoyed the fame of having once been the most effective abolitionist orator in the country. It was almost forgotten—and quite hard to believe—that his wife had been equally effective and even more famous (or infamous) in her day. Wendell Phillips, who had been considered the great orator of abolitionism, said of Angelina, "She swept the cords of the human heart with a power that has never been surpassed and rarely equalled.... She won Massachusetts for abolition—and it was never lost again."

But all that was far in the past. Since the evening—just two days after her marriage—when she spoke in Pennsylvania Hall in Philadelphia and outfaced the mob that had come to burn it, Angelina had neither addressed nor attended a public meeting. It was accepted by those who knew her history that she had "shattered her nervous system" and worn out her physical strength in the service of abolition, and that the bearing of three children had completed the wreck. She lived a "half life," a long anticlimax to her brief apocalyptic career, avoiding every sort of strain or excitement at the peril of a "nervous prostration" that would put her to bed in a darkened room for weeks at a time. She had earned the right to—if not a taste for —peace.

Angelina was born in 1805, the youngest daughter of a well-to-do Charleston judge. She was in her early twenties, following the conventional course of a young lady of quality, when the preaching of a Presbyterian evangelist awoke in her a desire for a deeper commitment to the spiritual life. She left her family's fashionable Episcopalian church and began to seek salvation through good works—in the main, through efforts to alleviate the suffering of Negro slaves. In this she was probably guided by the example of her elder sister Sarah who had already turned against slavery and gone north to join the Society of Friends.

But if Angelina began by following in the footsteps of Sarah (who was twelve years older, and whom she called her "sister-mother"), she soon caught up with and passed her. During the most important years of their

adult lives—from about 1830 to 1838—it was Angelina who led and Sarah who followed—on a path that led straight into the heart of the storm.

Even before 1829, when Angelina went to Philadelphia to join Sarah in her meeting, she had become a Quaker in her own mind. She had sought out and been accepted by the only two Quakers in Charleston —two old men who met for silent worship every Sunday “in a dingy little meetinghouse on the outskirts of the city.” She had adopted the gray garb and the plain speech of the Quakers, because she felt that to do so in Charleston would indicate a protest against slavery. But the going had been hard and the results disappointing. She expected to find in the city of William Penn a richer spiritual companionship and a higher level of ethical behavior, especially on the question of slavery. “What was her amazement to find that the Religious Society of Friends, whose moral courage in rebuke of slavery had put to shame all other churches—that they had installed the ‘Negro pew’ as a permanent fixture in their house of worship!▶

* These and many other passages quoted here referring to Angelina’s history are taken from a sketch written by her husband after her death, and privately published by George E. Ellis of Boston, under the title *In Memory*. The passages quoting Wendell Phillips and Elizur Wright are taken from the same source.

Sarah had silently endured this painful contradiction between the Friends’ “witness” and their practice for the several years she had lived among them. But Angelina encouraged her to rebel. “Whenever, in city or country, they entered a church having a Negro seat (then they all had), they found their way to it,” Weld later wrote of the sisters, “and shared with the occupants the spurning thus meted out to them.”

What distressed Angelina even more was the ban on all discussion of the subject with the meeting. Slavery had become so controversial that it threatened the unity of the group, which most Friends felt had to be preserved at any cost. But she did her best to abide by the ban and other accepted rules of conduct while she undertook a course of study and meditation designed to prepare her for a “ministry” (in the Quaker sense of that term). She was advised to turn her mind inward and to seek the “peace that passeth understanding.”

But the times were not propitious for stich peace. In 1829, in the same month that Angelina came to Philadelphia, William Lloyd Garrison

published the first issue of the Liberator, with its bold declaration that “I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice ... I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD.”

Angelina may have been one of his first subscribers. At any rate, she was a regular reader by 1845, when, as Wendell Phillips said, “our cities roared with riot, when William Lloyd Garrison was dragged through the streets... and the hatred toward the abolitionists was so bitter and merciless that the friends of Lovejoy [an Illinois antislavery publicist killed by a mob] left his grave long unmarked.”

Angelina read of Garrison’s ordeal, and she read his own “Appeal”—not for mercy, but for the freedom to go on agitating. She was so moved that she sat down and wrote him a letter. It was a strong statement of support, castigating his critics, including

those high in church and state [who] secretly approve and rejoice over the violent measures [of mobs].... the ground you stand on is holy ground.... If you surrender it, the hope of the slave is extinguished and the chains of his servitude will be strengthened one-hundred-fold. But let no man take your crown, success is as certain as the rising of tomorrow’s sun ...

If persecution will abolish slavery, it will also purify the church, and who that stands between the porch and the altar, weeping over the sins of the people, would not be willing to suffer, if such immense good will be accomplished?

She waited several days and prayed for divine guidance before she “felt easy” to send the letter. Once it was committed to the post office, however, she “felt anxiety removed, and as though I had nothing more to do with it.”

Garrison printed the whole of it, without comment except to note that the writer was “the daughter of a prominent South Carolina family, a sister of the late Thomas S. Grimké [a well-known reformer in other fields than abolition and leader of the fight against nullification and secession in his state in 1830], and a member of the Philadelphia Society of Friends.”

The conservative Friends in Angelina’s meeting were outraged. Many believed that her references to “the church” were directed at her own.

Even Sarah was shocked at her flouting of the rule which required a Friend to submit any article intended for publication to the elders of his meeting. Angelina was urged to apologize publicly, and to explain that Garrison had printed her letter in the *Liberator* without her permission. She refused.

Sometime during the next few months, Mrs. Grimké wrote to Sarah and Angelina that she was making her will. Angelina, who had exhausted herself and her mother in a futile attempt to convert the latter to abolitionism, wrote back, begging that all Mrs. Grimké's slaves be included in the portions to be bequeathed to her two errant daughters. Surprisingly, Mrs. Grimké obliged. Upon her death, four more were to be added to the growing list of Grimké slaves that Angelina, Sarah, and a third sister—Mrs. Anna Frost of Philadelphia—had freed and assisted in setting themselves up in the North.

But these and similar small worthy acts were not what Angelina felt she was "being kept for." From girlhood on, she had had intimations that some great work was in store for her. That it was to be connected with the abolition of slavery she was now convinced. But just what it was to be had not yet been made clear.

During the summer of 1836, which she spent with a family of Quakers named Parker in Shrewsbury, New Jersey, she was moved to write "An Appeal to the Christian Women of the South." It was a long, reasoned argument—documented with scriptural references—urging them to act in their own interest and that of their sons, brothers, fathers, and sweethearts while there was yet time.

Elizur Wright, one of the officers of the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York, remembered years afterward that

when the storm of public indignation ... was black upon us, and we were comparatively only a handful, there appeared ... this mild, modest, soft-speaking woman, then in the prime of her beauty, delicate as lily-of-the-valley. She placed in my hands a roll of manuscript, beautifully written. ... It was like a patch of blue sky breaking through that storm cloud.

The society published the "Appeal" as a pamphlet of thirty-six pages, priced at six and a half cents a copy (four dollars for 100), and mailed quantities of them to the South. The reaction of the city of Charleston to this message from its Cassandra launched Angelina on what was to be her great work.

In Charleston and other southern cities, the "Appeal" was officially condemned by the postal authorities and publicly burned, but a mere bonfire did not appease Charlestonians. A rumor spread that Angelina intended to return to spend the winter with her mother. The mayor himself called upon Mrs. Grimké and "desired her to inform her daughter that the police had been instructed to prevent her landing... that if she should elude their vigilance and go on shore she would be arrested and imprisoned." Friends wrote Angelina, warning her that if she defied the mayor's threat she could not hope to escape personal violence at the hands of a mob.

Here, perhaps, was an opportunity for the martyrdom Angelina had told Garrison she would welcome. She was tempted to try it, "helping thus to reveal to the free states that slavery defies and tramples alike constitutions and laws, and thus outlaws itself." But she could not bring herself to expose her mother and unsympathetic siblings to the same risks, and decided not to go.

While the clamor attendant upon this semiofficial exile was still audible, it occurred to the leaders of the Anti-Slavery Society that if Angelina could bring about such repercussions by writing to the women of the South, she might do even better by speaking to the women of the North. The society sent her an official invitation to come to New York "to hold meetings in private parlors, with Christian women, on the subject of slavery."

Angelina showed the invitation to Sarah, with the comment that she felt it to be "God's call." Sarah was appalled. She begged her sister to consider: that she had never spoken in public, even in meeting, where women were as free as men to speak when the spirit moved them; that she had always had a "morbid shrinking from whatever would make her conspicuous" and she would be going among strangers, wearing the strange garb of the Quakers and speaking in their strange plain speech; that prejudice against women's speaking in public was as widespread as prejudice against abolitionism; and, finally, that if she were to act without the sanction of "the Meeting for Sufferings," her mission might be regarded as "disorderly" and she might be disowned by the Quakers.

Angelina replied that she could not in good conscience ask leave to do something she had already made up her mind to do, that it would be "a grief to me to grieve them [her fellow Friends]," and very unpleasant to be disowned, "but misery to be self-disowned." Sarah's other warnings she brushed aside, asserting that if she was indeed meant to do this

thing, strength would be granted her. "The responsibility is thrust upon me," she said. "I cannot thrust it off."

In the end, Sarah capitulated and offered to go with her. Angelina wrote to the Anti-Slavery Society in New York, accepting their invitation but declining the small salary they had offered: she and her sister would travel at their own expense.

It was at this turning point in her life that Angelina met Theodore Weld. For over a year the Lion of the West, as Garrison called him, had been engaged in a one-man crusade to win the whole territory west of the Hudson and north of the Ohio for abolitionism. But he had overstrained and finally ruined his voice. When the Grimké sisters arrived in New York City in November, 1836, Weld was presiding over an "agents' convention," training a corps of young agitators who were to be sent into the field to take up where he had had to leave off. By special permission, Angelina and Sarah were admitted to these training sessions.

Weld also did some private coaching of the sisters in advance of the first meeting at which they were to speak, a gathering of female abolitionists. In Angelina he discovered a natural talent that needed no training; instead, he helped her with advice about the logical buttressing of the truths she felt so intuitively. For Sarah he could not do much: her delivery was slow, halting, monotonous in tone. But she was a clear thinker, and did not the Book of Ecclesiastes say, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor"?

As the day of their first meeting drew closer, opposition to it grew sharper. No public announcement of the sisters' participation had been made, but rumor ran, and interest was so high it was decided to hold the meeting not in a private home but in the vestry of a Baptist church. Angry anonymous letters were dropped in the mailbox of the house where the sisters were lodging. More than one staunch male abolitionist called to advise them to default and spare the already embattled cause the ridicule to which they were exposing it. On the morning of the meeting itself, leaflets were distributed calling on the respectable community to turn out "and teach a lesson to [these] notoriety-seeking females."

The sisters went to Weld for counsel.

"Slavery is on trial," he told them. "The people of the North are the court. You are summoned as witnesses to sustain the prosecution." And

although he was fighting certain tender feelings for Angelina which he considered downright wicked in a man in his position—and would have been glad to insulate himself by putting as much distance between them as possible—he escorted her to the very door of the vestry room.

He did not, of course, attend the meeting. The presence of men, even ordained ministers, in any place where women spoke in anything but a conversational tone made an audience “promiscuous” and would have created more scandal. The all-female audience—some 300 crowded into a church vestry that accommodated 100 comfortably—were greeted by the church’s minister, who prayed for the success of their enterprise and then beat a quick retreat.

Maria Chapman (a leader in the women’s section of the abolition movement from its beginnings) introduced Angelina to the gathering. Angelina rose—and turned deathly pale. What Sarah had foreseen and dreaded was coming to pass: she was paralyzed with stage fright, unable to utter a word. She had not written out her text, and the few notes she had jotted were of no help because her eyes were swimming. All she could gasp out—too faintly to be heard beyond the first row—were some dimly remembered snatches of Scripture: “If I hold my peace, the «tone would cry out of the wall, and the beam of the timber would answer it.” Then she bowed her head and prayed.

Within moments she was answered by a sudden surge of strength. Words flooded into her mind. It was the first of a series of apparent miracles that occurred at intervals during the fifteen months that followed. The gift of tongues descended upon her. Wendell Phillips later described the scene:

It was not only the testimony of one most competent to speak, but it was the profound religious experience of one who had broken out of the charmed circle.... It was when you saw she was opening some secret record of her own experience that painful silence and breathless interest told the deep effect ... her words were making on minds that afterwards never rested in their work.

When Angelina had finished speaking, Sarah rose and added her testimony, in corroboration. She spoke poorly, but so earnestly that she was not without effectiveness. Before that first meeting was adjourned, a second was announced. It overflowed the vestry room and had to be moved into the church itself. There was a new chorus of outrage, in and out of the pulpit, but the witness of two southern women, once slave-

owners themselves, made an impact that could not be shouted down. The sluggish liberal conscience was stirring at last.

The first Female Anti-Slavery Society in America was formed, and Angelina and Sarah were appointed agents. Calls for the sisters came in from all over the city, and then the state. They spoke at first only to women, but more and more often men appeared at their meetings. At first they were asked politely to leave, but one evening in a Negro church in Poughkeepsie the sisters "felt easy" to speak to "our colored brethren on whose behalf we are laboring."

Next they responded to calls for their services in New England. Men came to the meetings in greater numbers now, and did not always leave when asked. One evening in Lynn, Massachusetts, the sisters spoke to "over a thousand people, packed into the meeting house at some danger to the joists of the flooring." There were more men than women in the crowd. "Yet the heavens did not open to rain thunderbolts on their impious heads!" the local editor remarked, with irony.

What the heavens did not do, some of the New England clergy tried to do for them. Certain clergymen whose congregations had invited the sisters threatened to resign. Sometimes when the sisters arrived at a meeting, they found the church door locked, and had to adjourn to a hall, a home, or a barn. On one occasion, small boys pelted them with apples.

One Reverend Nehemiah Adams grew so incensed that he composed a pastoral letter that was passed as a resolution by the General Association of Evangelical Clergymen, meeting in Brookfield, Massachusetts. It invited attention to

the dangers which at present seem to threaten the female character with widespread and permanent injury. When a woman assumes the place and tone of man as a public reformer, our care and protection of her seems unnecessary; we put ourselves in self-defense against her; she yields that power which God has given her for protection, and her character becomes unnatural. "

The poet John Greenleaf Whittier, who had become a devoted friend of the sisters, was moved to one of his rare satirical verses in rebuttal:

So this is all! the utmost reach
Of priestly power the mind to fetter,
When laymen think, when women preach,

A war of words, a "Pastoral Letter"!

And now came an attack from an unexpected direction. Catharine Beecher, daughter of the great Lyman, sister of Henry and of Harriet (who had yet to write her best-selling *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), wrote a cutting criticism of the Grimkes' radicalism. Angelina took time off—it must have been stolen from sleep, for she had no idle hours—to answer Miss Beecher in a series of thirteen letters, which Garrison published in the *Liberator*. She was neither gentle nor tactful. "Oh, my very soul is grieved," she wrote at the end of one, "to find a Northern woman thus 'sewing pillows under all armholes,' framing and fitting soft excuses for the slaveholder's conscience, whilst with the same pen she is professing to regard slavery as a sin. An open enemy is better than such a secret friend!"

Sarah was also writing letters to the newspapers that winter. Her series on "The Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women," which appeared in the *Boston Spectator* and later as a small book, stated her view of the case so forthrightly that fence-straddlers were forced to take sides. But those who were in opposition were not in time to damp the fire the sisters were kindling.

When the Grimkés went through New England, such was the overpowering influence with which they swept the churches that men did not remember the dogma [that women should be silent] till after they had gone. When they left, and the spell weakened, some woke to the idea that it was wrong for a woman to speak to a public assembly. The wakening of old prejudice to its combat with new convictions was a fearful storm.

In February of 1838, before the storm broke, Angelina wound up her New England tour with the most extraordinary exploit of all: she addressed the legislature of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The occasion was the presentation of some petitions to Congress asking that slavery be abolished in the District of Columbia. Ex-President John Quincy Adams, now a member of the House of Representatives, was waging a battle for the right to petition, and the New England abolitionists had labored long and hard to amass an impressive number of signatures (see "Mad Old Man from Massachusetts" in the April, 1961, *AMERICAN HERITAGE*). It occurred to Henry Stanton (who was later to marry the redoubtable feminist Elizabeth Cady) that since many of the signatures had been obtained at meetings where Angelina spoke, she

might be one of the speakers at the official presentation ceremony before the state legislature. He made the suggestion half in jest, for of course no woman had ever been heard there, and it was not likely that permission for such an innovation would be granted. But Angelina accepted the challenge.

She applied to the legislators for permission to address them not as a representative of the Anti-Slavery Society "but as a woman, as a Southerner, as a moral being." The permission was granted, and she was scheduled to speak after the last of the male abolitionists.

When she and Sarah arrived at the statehouse that day, they could hardly get up the stairs, and the legislative chamber itself was so packed that they had to walk over the tops of desks to reach their seats. All the women abolitionists had come, depending on Angelina to "do something important for women, for our country, and for the whole world." The moment was upon her, but the spirit was not stirring. She suddenly went so pale that Sarah thought she would faint.

Angelina bowed her head and prayed, but nothing happened. Her mind was still empty, except of wonder at the arrogance that had prompted her to volunteer. She was called upon by the chairman of the Committee on Petitions, and she managed to get to her feet and begin.

Her voice was so weak that the chairman could not hear her, and he interrupted to invite her to come forward and stand at his secretary's desk, which occupied a raised platform just below his own desk and which faced the chamber. Angelina obeyed.

At this point a great hissing broke out at one of the doors in the rear of the room. Opposition always had a calming effect on Angelina, and she began again, with more firmness than before. But since her back was still to the chairman, and he still could not hear her, he interrupted once more to invite her to come up to his place, which was that of the speaker of the house. By the time she and Sarah (who would not leave her) were "ensconced in the seats of the mighty," Angelina had entirely recovered her self-confidence.

Her address lasted two hours. Her voice was as strong as a man's, but toward the end the quiet was so complete that she could have been heard if she had only whispered. At adjournment time she had not covered all her points, so she asked for permission to be heard again. Permission was granted and a day set for her second appearance. Again

she spoke to a packed house, this time without hecklers. Again she did not finish, and a third hearing was arranged.

By this time public interest was so intense that the galleries of the statehouse could not begin to hold all who wanted to hear her. The Odeon Theatre was rented, and a series of six lectures by Angelina was announced.

Nothing like this had ever happened in the history of abolitionism, and news of it spread to other cities—among them Philadelphia, where Angelina was going to be married as soon as she caught her breath and quieted her overwrought nerves.

This marriage and the love affair that led up to it was the best-kept secret of its day. Theodore Weld had been “half in love” with Miss Angelina from the day he read her letter to Garrison in the *Liberator*, and his first glimpse of her in the flesh completed the conquest. But he had taken a vow—only half in earnest, but in public—never to marry “until the last slave was free.” Also, he was penniless, in broken health, and without a profession that gave him hope of being able to support a wife—least of all a wife who had been raised in the lap of southern luxury. He did his stern best to root what he regarded as this “guilty passion” out of his heart, and his apparent coldness forced Angelina to keep her own feelings concealed.

But they had kept up a correspondence all during her New England campaign. Weld wrote to both sisters, advising them on tactics and arguments, and subjecting their behavior, their characters, and their writings to the most critical scrutiny—a practice among devout persons which went by the euphemism “being faithful.” Gradually Weld’s attacks on Angelina began to reflect the depth of his feeling—in reverse. At last he went too far and she rebelled.

And yet, Brother, I think in some things you wronged me in that letter never to be forgotten, but never mind, YOU DID NOT HURT ME, even that did me good.... Be sure to keep that letter of mine which you said I ought to be ashamed of—all the rest better be destroyed. There will be no use in writing about it—WE CAN NOT UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER, and I have unintentionally said too much perhaps ...

When Theodore realized that he had wounded her, he lost control of himself. There was no way to explain his rudeness except by confessing his love. Angelina responded by declaring hers, and it was only by

keeping apart for the time being that either was able to get on with the all-important work.

They planned to be married as soon as Angelina had finished her lectures at the Odeon, i.e., in a matter of a few weeks. No one but Sarah was taken into their confidence. Angelina was, for the moment, the most talked-about woman in America, and the news that she was engaged to be married would have transformed the Odeon series into a side show, or so she feared. (Even her partisans considered that Angelina's public life had by now unfitted her forever for the role of a good wife and mother.) The lovers were so discreet that not even Whittier, who shared an office with Theodore, and Henry Stanton, who lived with him, knew what was afoot until they received their invitations to what was undoubtedly the most extraordinary wedding they would ever attend.

They and other friends and members of Theodore's family (Angelina's were invited but did not respond) gathered on the evening of May 14, 1838, in the parlor at the home of Angelina's sister, Anna Grimké Frost, who lived in Philadelphia, to hear the bride and groom speak the vows they had decided upon, and to ask—without the assistance of a minister—the blessing of God on their union. The date had been chosen to coincide with the dedication ceremonies of Pennsylvania Hall, which many out-of-town abolitionists were expected to attend. Philadelphia had been chosen for the additional reason that by Pennsylvania law a marriage was legal if the couple did no more than announce, in the presence of twelve witnesses, their intention to live together in the future as man and wife. It was not "registered" unless one of the latter was also a notary, and Weld had taken pains not to invite one: had the marriage been registered, he would have had a legal claim to all Angelina's worldly goods, including her inheritance to come, and that would have made him uncomfortable.

The evening was what Sarah called "a true love feast." Angelina and Theodore glowed like lamps and spread warmth in all directions. The guest list included black and white, rich and poor, freeborn and ex-slave, and the leaders of diverse factions in the abolition movement, meeting under truce for perhaps the last time. Garrison performed the one official act required by the state: the reading aloud of the marriage certificate. Whittier had to wait outside till that was over, lest he be disowned—as Angelina and Sarah were soon to be—for attending a non-Quaker wedding. But he was called in for the cutting of the cake, which had been baked by one of the guests, an ex-slave of Anna Grimké Frost's.

(It contained only non-slaveproduced sugar, which was not easy to come by.)

Two nights later, on May 16, the bride was scheduled to speak at Pennsylvania Hall. The program was designed to take advantage of public curiosity about lady abolitionists, principally Angelina herself. All the speakers, therefore, were to be women—except for Garrison, who had asked for a chance to apologize for the personal attack he had made on a local “gradualist” in his speech at the dedication.

Something in the temper of the neighborhood—which was near the waterfront—made the sponsors uneasy, and they called on the mayor well in advance to request protection on behalf of the “many ladies who would be present.” The mayor was shocked at such a lack of confidence in “the good sense and good manners of their fellow Philadelphians.” And indeed, as the audience began to gather, the apprehensions of the abolitionists were lulled by the appearance of so many well-dressed and apparently well-behaved gentlemen.

They had expected more women to be among them, and more of the local faithful, but by the time these arrived, all the seats had been taken. It was regrettable that so many had to be turned away, but it was good to carry the message to ears that had not already heard it. As the meeting began, a crowd was gathering in the street....

Garrison spoke first and was hissed, which angered him so that he forgot his apology and spoke more intemperately than before. When he had finished, Maria Chapman came to the podium. As if at a signal, boos and catcalls were heard from every part of the hall, and stones thrown from the street below began to shatter the windows along one side of the room.

Too late, the abolitionists realized that they had fallen into a trap. No police were anywhere to be seen. The hall was packed with blood brothers of the mob outside. Provocators were stationed at all strategic points, and the crowd was so dense that it was impossible to eject anyone. It was also impossible for any speaker to be heard. Quite possibly something—anything—might start a panic that would send people stampeding toward the exit doors, trampling and crushing; the just along with the unjust.

At this moment Angelina came forward and held up her hand for silence. The hubbub inside quieted, and she managed to make herself heard over the noise from outside.

“Men! Brothers and fathers! Mothers and daughters and sisters! What came ye out for to see? A reed shaken in the wind?”

Stones continued to strike and break the windows. Glass continued to fall in the aisle and on the stage. The mob outside continued to scream threats. But inside the hall Angelina had established her supremacy.

“What is a mob?” she asked. “What would the breaking of every window be? Any evidence that we are wrong or that slavery is a good and wholesome institution?”

“There is nothing to fear from those who would stop our mouths.... If the arm of the North had not already caused the bastille of slavery to totter, you would not hear those cries.”

From this extemporized beginning, Angelina worked her way back to the address she had planned to give. It took her over an hour to finish. When she could not make herself heard over the noise from the street, she waited for it to subside, and then went on. When stones landed on the stage or among her listeners, she made reference to them if it suited her point, or ignored them if it did not. And, at last, she called upon the audience, beginning with the women on the platform, to form in ranks of two and follow her out of the building and through the mob in the street.

It was an inspired tactic. Any attempt on the part of the abolitionist men to protect the women would probably have triggered an assault—inside or outside the hall. But the thin line of women, led by the slender, gray-gowned bride, seemed to shame the row-dies. They stepped aside and made an aisle through which Angelina walked. After her came the women, and after them the men. Even the proslavery men who had come to heckle Angelina marched out in silent sobriety. The mob was quiet until the last of them had passed. Not until the next evening did the planned outrage take place. The police were still absent when the mob returned to sack and burn Pennsylvania Hall, the sanctuary that had just been dedicated to freedom.

That was the last time Angelina Grimké Weld was heard in a public place. She retired with her husband to a small New Jersey farm to learn, under the most trying of conditions, the domestic lessons she had missed.

She and Sarah (who lived with the Welds for the rest of her life) took up the burdens of housekeeping while Theodore wrestled with the farm from spring to fall, and spent his winters in Washington as consultant and lobbyist for the abolition faction in Congress. Angelina in her middle and late thirties bore three children in five years and suffered long, painful illnesses after each of the births. She never recovered her health.

There were calls for her services during those first years, but she was never able to respond, and after a while the calls became infrequent. She did try, once or twice, to address very small, informal groups of women, but the effort was enormous and the result disappointing. The gift of tongues had been taken from her. The one task of any importance that she did undertake was helping her husband with his great documentary pamphlet, *American Slavery As It Is*, for which she and Sarah read and clipped southern newspapers and wrote moving testimonies of their own.

As the years rolled on, the Welds and Sarah became more and more occupied with the tasks of earning a living and raising the children. The movement to which they had given their best years split and split again. The Welds managed to keep friendships on both sides, mainly because of their isolation. For a while they ran a boarding school at Eagleswood, a Utopian community in New Jersey, to which many abolitionists and transcendentalists sent their children. Teaching became their principal occupation, and at the end of the Civil War Angelina and Theodore found places in Dr. Lewis' school at Fairmount, Massachusetts, one of the first schools to admit Negro students.

In the enforced quiet of this life, Angelina had found a sort of peace. Now the chance reading of an article in a newspaper threatened to shatter that peace and make demands on a strength that she no longer possessed—at least in a physical sense. Archibald Grimké's answer to her was dated February 20, 1868:

Dear Madam:

I was somewhat surprised by receiving yours of the 15th inst. I never expected to hear through the medium of a letter from "Miss Angelina Grimké" of anti-Slavery celebrity ...

I shall proceed to give you a simple sketch of my history and my connections:

I am the son of Henry Grimké, a brother of Dr. John Grimké, 8c therefore your brother.... He was married to a Miss Simons... & she died, leaving three children ... After her death he took my mother, who was his slave & his children's nurse; her name was Nancy Weston.... By my mother he had three children, viz Archibald, which is my name, Francis & John.... He told my mother that he could not free her... "but," said he, "I leave you better than free, because I leave you to be taken care of."

Mr. E. M. Grimké [Henry's son] did not do as his father commanded, and [my mother] was thrown upon the uncharitable world to struggle ... alone. By dint of hard labor she kept us from perishing by hunger ... until 1860, when Mr. E. M. Grinke married a second time ... & he wanted a boy to wait on him. He informed my mother that she should send me to his house.... Thus he kept on until she was rendered childless.... I afterwards fled from my oppressor. Frank attempted to escape but was retaken & sold....

[When] Freedom was proclaimed to all men ... the disjointed members of our little family were united ... the public schools were flung open to all. I ... went to one of them and through the intercessions [of Mrs. Pillsbury, the principal] we [he and Frank] were admitted here ... My younger bro. is at home with my mother. He cannot get a support, hence he cannot come ...

Angelina was devastated, not by the news that she had Negro nephews, but by the guilt of her brother, who had sired children and left them in bondage, and of her white nephew, who had taken advantage of the bequest to enslave and ultimately to sell his own half-brother. She suffered one of her "prostrations"—blinding headaches, double or blurred vision, periods of faintness and dizziness—so severe and protracted that she had to give up her teaching and take to her bed. But by February 29 she had composed her answer to the nephews:

Dear young friends:

I cannot express the mingled emotions with which I perused your deeply interesting and touching letter. The facts it disclosed were no surprise to me. Indeed, had I not suspected that you might be my nephews, I should probably not have addressed you ...

I will not dwell on the past: let all that go. It cannot be altered. Our work is in the present and duty calls upon us now so to use the past as to convert its curse into a blessing. I am glad you have taken the name of Grimké. It was once one of the noblest names of Carolina.... It was the

grief of my heart that during the late war, not one of the name of Grimké—neither man nor woman—was found on the side of loyalty & freedom, all bow'd down together & worshipped Slavery—"the Mother of all Abominations."

You, my young friends, now bear this once honored name. I charge you most solemnly, by your upright conduct and your life-long devotion to the eternal principles of justice and humanity and religion, to lift this name out of the dust where it now lies, and set it once more among the princes of our land.

Angelina did not let the matter rest there. As soon as she was able she set out for Oxford, Pennsylvania, to meet her nephews face to face, and to acknowledge them publicly as "the sons of my brother, Henry Grimké, and his wife, Nancy Weston Grimké." She inquired into their plans and ambitions and learned that they wanted to prepare themselves for professional careers. She offered all the financial assistance she and Sarah were capable of (which was not much at the time), and invited the boys to visit her in Fairmount. Archibald's daughter, in a memoir of her father, later described the visit:

They went... To the boys this was a great occasion, the greatest in all their lives, and cost what it might, they were determined to live up to it. They were virtually penniless, but each carried a cane, wore a high silk hat which had been made to order and boots that were custom-made. Whatever the aunts and the Welds thought, they were welcomed with wide open arms and hearts and made at home. The simplicity here soon taught them their lesson.

The boys graduated from Lincoln in 1870 with the highest honors, Frank as class valedictorian. Both returned for the master's degree. Archibald then went on to Harvard Law School and Frank to the law department of Howard University in Washington. The Welds not only helped Archibald with tuition money but also with contacts that eventually led to his establishment in a Boston law firm. Sarah made a special effort on Frank's behalf: in her late seventies she undertook a verse translation of a French work on Joan of Arc to earn a part of his tuition money.

Sarah died at the age of eighty-one in 1873, the year Frank entered Howard; Angelina lived another six years and saw Frank change his field from the law to the ministry, enter and graduate from Princeton Theological Seminary, and go to his first church, the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian in Washington. She did not live to appreciate the tribute of

Archibald's naming his first and only child Angelina Weld Grimké, in loving memory of her.

In the ministry, Frank found a vocation that fulfilled him completely. He married Charlotte Forten, a remarkable woman who had served as the only Negro teacher in the first freedmen's schools established by the Union Army on the Carolina coast. The couple had only one child, a daughter, who died young. Frank was associated with his brother in the cause of Negro advancement, but the thrust of his life was in his ministry. Four volumes of his sermons have been collected and published by Carter Woodson, whose editorial comment on the Reverend Mr. Grimké's career would have delighted both the aunts: "All who knew him were not his followers. He alienated the genuflecting, compromising, and hypocritical leaders of both races... A man of high ideals, who lived above reproach and bore an honorable name even among those who did not agree with him.... Persons who knew him well often referred to him as the Black Puritan ..."

Archibald did not find a single vocation, financial security, or much sustained personal happiness. He was intelligent, diligent, and extremely personable, but it took more than that to make a living in the law in Boston in the 1880's and 90's—if one was also a Negro. Archibald undertook a number of other tasks; some paid, others did not. He edited a Negro weekly called *The Hub*, and wrote occasional articles for the large Boston dailies. The high point of his career was his tour of duty as United States Consul to Santo Domingo (1894-98).

He served from 1903 to 1916 as president of the American Negro Academy and joined William E. B. Dubois in the Niagara Movement and in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which grew out of it.

His marriage (to a white woman) was a failure and left deep emotional scars on him and on his daughter, who was at first taken from him by her mother, then—at the age of seven—returned to him to raise. His financial situation was always so strained as to amount to genteel poverty, and until in his last years he became a member of his brother's household, he never really had a home. But his long effort was recognized—in 1919, in his seventieth year—by the award of the N.A.A.C.P.'s highest honor, the Spingarn Medal, for distinguished achievement and service to his race.

Angelina's charge was not laid on her two Negro nephews to no effect. They did indeed do honor to the Grimké name.

Sisters and Brothers, Janet Stevenson's novel on the Grimkés and their Negro nephews, was published recently by Crown. She has written two other historical novels, Weep No More and The Ardent Years, as well as studies of John James Audubon and Marian Anderson. Miss Stevenson is presently teaching English at Grambling College in Louisiana.

Janet Stevenson (April 1967)