THE REV. JOHN HANKIN, EARLY ABOLITIONIST

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Degree of Master of Arts

BY

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CHAPTER I

THE ANCESTRY AND EARLY CAREER OF JOHN RANKIN

The ancestors of the Rev. John Rankin were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians whose lineage can be traced directly to Scotland during the religious persecutions of the seventeenth century. His great, great grandfather, William Rankin, was compelled to flee from Scotland during that period after his two brothers had been killed because of their religious belief. He made his escape into Derry county, Ireland, in 1689. John, his second son, was born there and was married to Jane McElwee. Thomas, the older of the two sons of John, and the grandfather of the Rev. John Rankin, was born in Ireland in 1724. At the age of three years he accompanied his father to America, landing at Philadelphia. Thomas was reared near Carlisle, Pennsylvania, before the Revolutionary War. He married Mary Clendenen, who was likewise a Scotch Presbyterian. Being intensely patriotic, he served in the Revolution and later sold his farm for worthless Continental money, a circumstance which left him in poverty. After this misfortune, he emigrated to the new Southwest and settled in eastern Tennessee in 1784. He made a home there in what was later called Jefferson County.

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1History of John Rankin's Ancestors, 1 (a typed manuscript loaned me by R. C. Rankin, of Ripley, April 11, 1935.

2Ibid.

3Ritotie, Rev. Andrew, The Soldier, the Battle, and the Victory.

4History of John Rankin's Ancestors, 1.
He had six sons, the four older of whom had served with him in the Revolution. The five older, moreover, became elders in the Presbyterian Church. Richard, the second son of Thomas and a veteran of the Revolution, was the father of the Rev. John Rankin. He married Isabella Steele and came to Tennessee with his father. Eleven sons were born of this union, four of whom served in the War of 1812. One of these four, together with three others, became Presbyterian ministers. ⁵

Such were the ancestors of the Rev. John Rankin. Four generations of loyal Presbyterians proceeded him. All had been true to the faith. Many were ministers of the gospel. We have noted above that many of his predecessors were men of action—loyal citizens who fought bravely for their country in her early wars. ⁶ Thus patriotism was a heritage and a tradition which John was to receive. Because of his father's strong religious inclination, John was reared in a strict Christian home. ⁷ His call to the ministry would seem, therefore, to be the natural result of heredity and training. Not only did he continue the work of his forefathers, but he gave it a more humanitarian turn by seeking to aid a miserable, enslaved people. Let us now note his early years and follow the forces which were to mould his life.

⁵History of John Rankin's Ancestors, 2; Howe, Historical Collections of Ohio, I, 338.

⁶Supra, 1.

⁷Ritchie, op. cit., 10; infra, 3.
Richard Rankin secured one thousand acres of unbroken wilderness land, after he came from Pennsylvania with his father in 1784. He built a log cabin and a blacksmith shop on this rough land. This was the home in which he reared his family of eleven sons. The Indians often interrupted his work on the frontier farm and made it difficult to secure adequate food for his large family. The daily toil was great, yet Richard always found time to teach his children the Christian story. He attended church regularly both in summer and winter, even though the little structure was seven miles from his home. His wife Isabella was a faithful Christian mother. Such was the home into which John Rankin was born in Jefferson county, east Tennessee, on the fourth day of February, 1793.

John, who was a strong, healthy boy, spent his early days in the usual play and work of the frontier farm. He helped his mother with household duties at a very early age. When he grew older, he helped his father with the farm work and continued to do so until he was twenty years of age. He was able to secure only a small amount of formal education in his boyhood days. He spent a few months attending the district school, which was two miles from his home, but this training was irregular and of short duration. His parents helped

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8 Ritchie, op. cit., 9.
9 Ibid.
10 Leggett, J. C., Rev. John Rankin, 6.
11 Ibid., 11.
him master the rudiments of reading and writing. As other books were scarce, he learned to quote extensively from the Bible, which he read and studied daily under his parents' guidance. He tried to improve his manner of expression by writing numerous essays, a practice which gave him great pleasure. He liked to practice speaking, for he had a great desire to excel in this oratorical art.

At the early age of seven John had begun to have individual, secret prayer and desired to possess the religious spirit of his parents. For many years, however, he neglected to confess publicly and as a result "was left to doubts and darkness." He was especially troubled over the doctrines of the sovereignty of God and of predestination. Consequently, he even feared to read the ninth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Many years passed in which he struggled with doubts and fears, but he caught occasional "glimpses of the sunlight of God's countenance--sufficient to lead him to connect with the church and to prosecute his education with a view of preaching the gospel."

Many difficulties faced him in this desire to prepare for the ministry. His father could give him but little financial

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12 Leggett, J. C., Rev. John Rankin, 6.
13 Ritchie, op. cit., 11.
14 Ibid., 12.
15 Ibid., 13.
aid on account of his large family and very limited income.\textsuperscript{16} John determined to make the attempt and at the age of seventeen began to prepare for a higher education. He entered upon his studies under the Rev. James Henderson, pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Dandridge, Tennessee. He progressed rapidly and was soon able to enter Washington College, at Jonesborough. This institution was presided over by the Rev. Dr. Samuel Doak.\textsuperscript{17} He began his academic career by studying very diligently, for, in his own words, he feared "that his first term would be his last."\textsuperscript{18} During this period his brother David was killed in the Battle of Horse Shoe, and his family was greatly distressed. John's father received the pay and allowance due his son from the government and used it to help John complete his education.\textsuperscript{19}

Before the government money had been completely used for his educational expenses, he was married to Miss Jean Lowry, granddaughter of Mr. Doak. She was not only to comfort and encourage him, but also to provide the means for his further education.\textsuperscript{20} It is interesting to know that John made the shoes which he wore at his wedding, and that his fiancee tailored his marriage coat. They were married on January 2, 1814, "and, as a result, his parents were relieved from any further

\textsuperscript{16}Ritchie, \textit{op. cit.}, 12.
\textsuperscript{17}Leggett, \textit{op. cit.}
\textsuperscript{18}Ritchie, \textit{op. cit.}, 13.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 12.
expense on his account. He graduated from the college the same year, but went on with his theological studies under Dr. Doak. In 1816 he was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Abington, Virginia.

His marriage seemed to be perfect, and it certainly was prolific. Thirteen children were born, nine sons and four daughters, all of whom lived to be the heads of families. One of the sons said that he was grown and out in the world before he realized that variance could ever exist between husband and wife. He believed that his parents' lives had been perfectly adjusted; the two had seemed to become one flesh and one mind. Harmony always seemed to prevail within the family, and one parent never criticized the other. John Rankin's ministerial and literary success must have been due in part, at least, to the comforting and sustaining felicity of his domestic life.

During one of his first sermons he tried to speak in an extemporaneous manner and thought that he had done very well. Concluding that this simple plan would make preaching very easy, he tried it a second time, but failed utterly. The next Sunday he attempted to preach from full notes, but soon lost his place and had to go on without them. His next attempt was to memorize his sermon completely. This plan likewise failed when he forgot the exact words and grew so excited

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21 Ritchie, op. cit.
22 Leggett, op. cit.
23 Ibid., 7.
24 Ibid.
25 Ritchie, op. cit., 15.
that he could not even see his congregation. He managed to keep speaking, however, and finally stumbled through to the end. Strangely enough, this incident increased his self-confidence. At length after much hard work and diligent practice, he became a very powerful, efficient, and persuasive speaker. 26

Mr. Rankin preached in the Presbyterian churches of Jefferson County for about a year. He was a popular minister; he and his young wife became the leaders of church and educational work of the community. 27 He had been brought up practically from his cradle as a Rechabite in temperance and as an abolitionist. There was an abolition society in Jefferson County as early as 1814, and as a student Rankin had joined the organization. 28 He hated the institution of slavery and felt strongly that it was wrong and sinful. 29 As Liggett puts it in his sketch, "Imbued with the love of liberty, and hating in his soul the system of African slavery, Mr. Rankin determined to remove from its contaminating and enervating influences." 30

As a result of this feeling against slavery, he made ready to leave the South. He chose Ohio as his future home, a state kept free of slavery by the famous Northwest Ordinance. 31

26Ritchie, op. cit., 16.
27Liggett, op. cit., 27.
28Howe, op. cit., 338; Adams, Alice D., Neglected Period of Anti-Slavery in America, 61; Genius of Universal Emancipation, 4th Month, 1822, I, No. 10, 151.
29Ritchie, op. cit., 17.
30Liggett, op. cit., 7.
31Ibid.
In the autumn of 1817 he set forth with his wife and infant son, Adam Lowry, in a two-wheeled carriage drawn by a single horse. A few articles of clothing and seventy dollars in cash completed their worldly possessions. Such a journey was considered both long and dangerous in that early time. His father rode with them for some distance, and they parted in great sorrow, for as John said they expected "to meet no more on this earth." 32

John later declared that their northward journey was both rough and dangerous. It led through the Cumberland Mountains, which are not particularly high, yet must have proved difficult of ascent in such a primitive conveyance. Mr. Rankin says, "our carriage being heavily loaded we could travel but a short distance in a day. In this mountain wilderness the axletree of our carriage broke in two pieces, and I had to leave my wife and child by the roadside, and carry it back some miles to a black-smith shop to get it repaired." 33 They spent many weary days on the road, but never traveled on Sunday. They finally reached Lexington, Kentucky, where Mr. Rankin preached in a Presbyterian church. They had friends in Lexington who treated them kindly and helped them on their way. Their next stop of any duration was at Paris, Kentucky. Here they were urged by the Rev. John Lyle to preach to the congregation of Concord, which was nearby. He accepted the invitation and

32 Ritchie, op. cit., 18.
33 Ibid., 18.
continued to serve that congregation until the following spring.

The winter proved difficult, for his parish had over two hundred members, with three different charges at which to preach. He said that he found it something of a task to preach to the same people each Sunday on a different subject. He found a good text to be an essential foundation for every sermon, as he "never had talent to make a sermon out of nothing." He did not write his sermons out, but wrote essays and compositions to facilitate his thinking and his ability to preach the gospel easily and well. By the coming of spring he and his congregations had become attached to each other, and he consented to remained as their pastor. He preached at Concord and Cane Ridge Presbyterian churches in Nicholas and Bourbon counties for four years.

A former minister of the Concord Presbyterian Church, Barton Stone, founder of the New Light faith, offered Mr. Rankin much competition during his early ministry. He had drawn many members from the church when he left, and others continued to leave. Mr. Rankin determined to stop this exodus of his members and entered into the battle with his rival with much spirit. Mr. Stone denied the doctrine of God's existence in three persons, that of household immersion, and other Presbyterian tenets. Mr. Rankin had to combat him with the Bible alone, as he had no library. He was successful in his efforts, however, for he held his members and even added to their numbers.

34Ritchie, op. cit., 19.
36Howe, op. cit.
37Ritchie, op. cit., 21.
The real beginning of Mr. Rankin's anti-slavery activities dates from his residence in Kentucky. In 1817 a majority of the people in his section were opposed to slavery. He often preached against slavery during his ministry there, but was never molested. He says of this period, "I preached against slavery in some of the most prominent parts of the State, and was known as an abolitionist as far as I was known, and I spoke against slavery in families of wealthy slaveholders, and I never had an insult offered." He also began to write articles against slavery and soon became the leader of the anti-slavery movement in Nicholas county. He founded an anti-slavery society at Carlisle in 1818, and during the next three years he organized at Concord and other places nearby several societies auxiliary to the Kentucky Abolition Society, which had been established in 1807. In October, 1821, he, with other leaders of the Society, founded the "Abolition Intelligencer and Missionary Magazine," a publication of the Society to further their efforts against slavery. In this manner Mr. Rankin began a long and glorious career of speaking, writing, and organizing opposition to the institution of slavery.

38 Leggett, op. cit., 8.
39 Ritchie, op. cit., 22.
40 Rankin, Rev. John, Short Memoir of Samuel Donnelly, 20.
41 Appleton, Cyclopædia of Am. Biography, V, 180.
42 Birney, Wm. James G. Birney and His Times, 169; Genus of Universal Emancipation, 4th Month, 1822, I, No. 10, 156; Ibid. 3d Month, 1822, I, No. 9, 145; Adams, op. cit., 61.
43 Genus of Universal Emancipation, 3d Month, 1822, I, No. 9, 145.
44 Leggett, op. cit., 8.
With the admission of Missouri as a slave state in 1820, the issue of slavery became more sectional. Kentucky now began to favor it rather strongly, and Mr. Rankin's position as an abolitionist in a slave state would ever become more difficult. Moreover, three children had been added to his family during his residence in Kentucky, and he did not mean to rear them in the environment of slavery. Consequently, he determined to move on to a free state, as had been his original intention. 45

Nearly all of the families in his Concord congregation felt as he did about slavery. A great number of them sold their Kentucky farms and moved into the free state of Indiana. 46 These members were led by Samuel Donnell, an abolitionist elder of the Concord Church, and settled in Decatur county, where Donnell founded a Presbyterian church which always worked against slavery. 47 It eventually united with the Free Presbyterian Church which Mr. Rankin established in Ripley, Ohio, from membership in which slaveholders were excluded. 48

Mr. Rankin accepted a call from the Presbyterian church in Ripley, where he arrived in January, 1822. He settled his family in a home on Front Street and immediately entered upon

45Ritchie, op. cit., 25.
46Ibid.
47Rankin, Short Memoir of Samuel Donnell, 24.
48Ibid., 27.
his ministerial duties. He was pastor not only of the church in Ripley but also of the congregation on Straight Creek, seven miles west of Ripley. 49 He served the Ripley community as pastor for forty-four consecutive years both as a religious leader and as a powerful factor in the movement to emancipate the slaves. 50


50 Ibid.
CHAPTER II

THE REV. JOHN RANKIN'S EARLY WORK IN RIPLEY

Mr. Rankin took up his new work in Ripley with great enthusiasm. The town presented a difficult field to the young minister, who saw evidences of wickedness on every hand, "frollicking, dancing, drinking, and ball-playing being favorite pastimes."\(^1\) To the excessive merry-making and the drinking he attributed the petty thievery that went on. He attacked these evils from the pulpit and preached to the people from the text, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise." He pointed out that their families were in dire want as a result of their drunkenness and idleness.\(^2\) He further declared that men who spent their time in playing ball and drinking must live off of honest people, and that stealing was undeniably going on. "This put an end to ball-alley in Ripley."\(^3\)

During the communion season Mr. Rankin became discouraged on account of the seeming coldness of his congregation. Finally one evening he got a large number of young men to church and told them that God had been knocking at their hearts in vain. He called their attention to the fact that some of the most wicked men in the town had recently died, and reminded them that the sinful must perish. His appeal produced a marked

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\(^1\)Ritchie, op. cit., 26.

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Ibid.
effect, for many were converted. Large numbers came to the meetings, prayed, and were saved. The whole town seemed to have been impressed. As Mr. Rankin told his biographer, Mr. Ritchie:

"Infidels came to church and seemed to hear with intense interest, and after (a) few weeks he had communion during which thirty were added to church on profession of their faith. The work continued, and after some weeks, at a subsequent communion, twenty more were added. It was a conversion of sinners rather than a revival in the church. The work appeared in a peculiar sense, the work of the Lord, and the result was very evident in the improved morality of the town."  

On December 2, 1823, Mr. Rankin received a letter which was to influence greatly the remainder of his life. It was from his brother Thomas, a merchant at Middlebrook, Virginia, saying that he had purchased a negro slave. Mr. Rankin was deeply moved by this information, and his hatred of slavery caused him to act immediately. In 1824 he wrote a series of letters to his brother, in which he attacked slavery from many angles; but instead of mailing them directly to his brother, he first published them in the Castigator, a local newspaper, edited by David Ammen. He then sent the newspapers in which the letters appeared to his brother. Influenced by friends and the desire to strike at slavery, he later revised and added to the letters, which were issued in book form in 1826, his

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4Ritchie, op. cit., 8.
5Ibid., 28.
6Ibid., 29.
7Ibid.
friend Amenn again being the printer. One thousand of the small books were printed in this year, but only a few were bound at a time on account of the expense. The actual printing cost eighty dollars, which Mr. Rankin paid by permitting Mr. Amenn occupy a part of his large house on Front Street.

The book was fairly well received both in Ohio and Kentucky when first published. In one instance a bookseller in the neighboring town of Maysville, Kentucky, whose name was Cox, supplied his store several times with the book. These letters were among the first clearly defined antislavery views printed west of the Appalachian Mountains. In fact, they may have been the very first set forth in book form.

Mr. Rankin's book was widely discussed in the river counties adjacent to Ripley. The southern section of Ohio had been settled largely by natives of Virginia, who knew slavery and hated it. Most of these early settlers had left the Old Dominion to find new homes on free soil in order to get away from slavery. Many local anti-slavery societies were founded in southwestern Ohio in the late 1820s. There is no doubt but that Rankin's Letters exerted a great influence towards

8Rankin, John, Letters on Slavery, 11, 111.
9Ritchie, op. cit.
10Ibid., 30.
11Leggett, op. cit., 10. The first anti-slavery newspaper, the Philanthropist, was published at Mt. Pleasant, Jefferson county, Ohio, in 1820 by Charles Osborne. Benjamin Lundy, the Quaker abolitionist, published his Genius of Universal Emancipation at Mt. Pleasant in 1821, which he soon removed to Jonesborough, Tenn.
the formation of these societies. Mr. Rankin's own activity in connection with their organization will be fully considered in a subsequent chapter. For the present the statement of Professor Albert Bushnell Hart must suffice that Rankin's series of letters became a sort of textbook for the early abolitionists.

One year after their publication the Chillicothe Presbytery passed the famous anti-slavery resolutions which constitute the first official action, so far as known, taken by any religious body. This action started the controversy over slavery which eventually divided the Presbyterian sect into separate schools in 1838. The sequence of events suggests that Rankin's book was influential in producing the action taken by the Chillicothe Presbytery, although we are not certain of its direct effect. Mr. Rankin continued his agitation within the synods of his church and was a powerful factor in bringing that body to take its stand finally against the system of African slavery.

Rankin's letters must have become widely disseminated within a short time after their publication, for we know that a copy of them fell into the hands of the Rev. Samuel J. May

14 Post, 24-34.
15 Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 159.
16 Leggett, op. cit., 10.
17 Hart, op. cit., 214.
18 Leggett, op. cit., ibid.
19 Ibid.
about 1825, who was then living in Brooklyn, Connecticut. We cannot be sure just when Garrison first became acquainted with the *Letters on Slavery*, but he printed them in the second volume of the *Liberator* in 1832. Garrison characterized them as being "among the most faithful and thrilling productions we have read on the subject of slavery." His printing of the *Letters* marked the beginning of a personal acquaintance and friendship between him and Rankin. Many times in later years Garrison acknowledged himself indebted to Rankin for abolitionist inspiration. On the fly-leaf of a copy of his writings which the famous New England abolitionist sent to his friend in Ripley the following inscription appears:

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Rev. John Rankin.

With the profound regards and loving veneration of his anti-slavery disciple and humble co-worker in the cause of emancipation,

Wm. Lloyd Garrison
Cincinnati, April 20, 1853.
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21 *Life of Garrison*, by His Children, I, 305.

22 Ibid.

23 Siebert, op. cit.

24 Taken from a photograph of the original owned by Mrs. Frank Nixon of Ironton, Ohio, in Siebert Collection of Underground Material for Ohio, Vol. II.
CHAPTER III

RANKIN'S CONNECTION WITH THE ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT

We have said above that Mr. Rankin was reared from infancy as an abolitionist. This statement is true, but we must remember that there were various degrees of abolition, especially in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Originally the word meant a gradual emancipation by any one of the many plans advanced by anti-slavery men. The idea of immediate abolition developed rather slowly, for it seemed a radical demand to most people. In fact, the first demand for immediate emancipation appears not to have been formulated before 1814.¹ No record seems to exist of anyone stating this view before that year. Birney dates Charles Osborne and the Rev. George Bourne as advocates of immediate abolition from 1814, and he places John Rankin and Benjamin Lundy second on the list in 1815.²

The Rev. A. T. Rankin, a younger son of John, once declared that his father never believed in gradual emancipation. This statement was made in retrospect, however, in 1883, when he was striving to assure his father's place in the history of the abolition cause. It was an overstatement, for the evidence shows that the Rev. John Rankin originally favored a

¹Birney, Wm., op. cit., 189.
²Ibid.
³Rankin, A. T., Truth Vindicated and Slander Repelled, (a pamphlet), 10.
gradual, peaceful emancipation. We know that in his early life he hoped to Christianize slaveholders, have them recognize their sin, and thereby terminate the institution of slavery. He held this view during his student days and even preached it for a time in Kentucky. But as slavery moved westward into the Mississippi Valley, and then rapidly across into the territories beyond, becoming ever more powerful and dominant as it was accepted by the South as "a positive good," and was protected by law and defended from the pulpit, Mr. Rankin realized the hopelessness of his earlier view.

His next plan was practically a call for immediate emancipation: he would have the federal government buy all the slaves after their value had been fairly determined by a commission and free them upon purchase. He wrote many articles in support of this plan, but he was greeted with laughter. It might have been better to have followed his plan and thus averted sectional hatred and civil war; but his was an Utopian dream in the early years of the new century. Later he saw the coming struggle, as did many others, and in 1850 he predicted that slavery would only be ended by the sword.

In general, authorities agree that Mr. Rankin advocated

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4Leggett, op. cit., 11.
5Wilson, Henry, Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America, I, 149.
6Commercial Tribune, (Cincinnati, O.), Feb. 18, 1900.
7Leggett, op. cit., 12.
8Ibid.
immediate abolition in 1815. Even before he left Tennessee we have direct evidence of this fact. He persuaded Dr. Doak to free his slaves, probably about 1816.  Although Mr. Rankin was widely known in Kentucky as an abolitionist, this does not necessarily mean that he spoke in favor of immediate emancipation. During his early residence in this state he still hoped to see the slaves freed voluntarily by their owners. But, as we have seen, he soon gave up this view and urged unconditional and immediate emancipation from the pulpit by 1815. The following evidence shows rather conclusively that he was an exponent of immediate emancipation during his work in Kentucky. While making an address at the anniversary meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in May, 1839, Mr. Rankin said:

I rejoice in the triumph of the principles of immediate emancipation because . . . . I was a member of an anti-slavery society in Kentucky twenty years ago on the same principle as this. This doctrine of immediate emancipation is said to be new, but societies were formed all over the country twenty years ago, and many members of these societies advocated this same doctrine.

After coming to Ohio, Mr. Rankin became a leader of the

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9 Birney, op. cit., 169; Adams, op. cit., 61.
10 Birney, op. cit.
12 Leggett, op. cit., 12.
13 Birney, op. cit., 170.
abolition movement, which got an early start in the state.\textsuperscript{14} He wrote many articles against slavery in 1822, which were published in the Castigator, a Ripley newspaper. During the next two years he wrote his Letters on Slavery.\textsuperscript{15} This book, which was put through several editions by the American Anti-Slavery Society, together with his other writings, gave him a national reputation. By 1830 his publications could be classed with those of Duncan, Bourne, and Stroud on the subject as having the largest circulation.\textsuperscript{16} Western writers of this period often called him "the father of abolitionism," while it was not uncommon in the 1830's to hear him spoken of as the "Martin Luther" of the cause. Birney states that Rankin and Lundy were the two strongest figures on the side of immediate emancipation before the time of Garrison.\textsuperscript{17}

Some writers begin their discussion of abolitionist activity with the work of Garrison in 1829, when he announced himself to be an exponent of immediate emancipation. We know, however, that he believed in gradual emancipation before that date from his address of July 4, 1829, in Park Street Church, Boston.\textsuperscript{18} In that address he said, "the emancipation of all the slaves of this generation is most assuredly out of the question."\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{14}Adams, op. cit., 61.
\textsuperscript{15}Leggett, op. cit., 12.
\textsuperscript{16}Birney, op. cit., 170.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 169.
\textsuperscript{18}Life of Garrison, op. cit., I, 127-137.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 135.
But in the following month, when he met Lundy in Baltimore to begin their joint publication of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Garrison first stated his demand for immediate and unconditional emancipation. We have noted above that Rankin believed in this doctrine as early as 1815, and that he advocated it in southern Ohio in the early twenties before Garrison had been converted from gradual emancipation. Rankin may not have used the expression "immediate and unconditional emancipation," but he surely believed in it and was expounding it by 1822. In the following year his famous *Letters on Slavery* appeared. A brief examination of these will disclose his matured principles. In the preface of his little book he states that the safety of our government and the happiness of our people depend upon the extermination of slavery, and that every citizen must help the evil which threatens national ruin:

> Let all the friends of justice and suffering humanity do what little they can, in their several circles, and according to their various stations, capacities, and opportunities; and all their little streams of exertion will in process of time, flow together, and constitute a mighty river that shall sweep a way the yoke of oppression, and purge our nation from the abomination of slavery.

Such a statement would come only from one who desired to end slavery immediately. At the end of his thirteenth letter Rankin says:

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20 *Life of Garrison, op. cit.*, I, 140.


There is no divine permission for enslaving the Africans, and therefore the command is as obligatory upon their enslavers as it was upon the emancipating Israelites. Hence, every slaveholder is commanded to break the yoke of bondage, and 'To let the oppressed go free.'

There is no argument for delay in this passage. In compliance with the command the sin is to be eradicated.

Apart from the fact that Rankin antedated Garrison by fourteen years in arriving at the principle of immediate emancipation, these two abolitionists differed widely in their attitude toward the church. Garrison held that the church as an institution supported slavery. Although he often quoted the Bible against slaveholding, he took the stand that the churches had deteriorated until American Christianity had become the main pillar of slavery in the United States. He once said in the Liberator, "Considering their influence and the force of their example, undoubtedly the worst enemies of the people of color are professors of religion." He also said that Christian ministers preached and professed the terrible oppression of bondage and lacked the moral power to stand against the institution of slavery. Such statements were true of the churches in the South and, it must be confessed, of many in the North; but north of Mason and Dixon's line there were not a few individual churches which were op-

23 Rankin, John, Letters on Slavery, 200.

24 Life of Garrison, op. cit., I, 477, 479.

25 Ibid., I, 265.

26 Ibid., I, 480.
posed to slavery and not a few clergymen who preached against the evil and were otherwise active in promoting the cause of abolition. In the 1830's and later some denominations split on the slavery question, the anti-slavery element forming denominations and congregations of their own. Such were the Wesleyan Methodists and the Free Presbyterians, to mention only two of the new sects. Rankin was himself, as we have seen, a Christian minister and an active abolitionist for forty years. In southern Ohio were other clergymen of his denomination who supported the cause unflinchingly in word and deed, namely, James Gilliland, Samuel Crothers, John B. Mahan, and others.

Mr. Rankin and his sons served as delegates from the Ripley Anti-Slavery Society to the convention held at Zanesville in April, 1835, for the purpose of forming a state society. This convention resulted largely from the untiring efforts of that dynamic abolitionist, Benjamin Weld. He had spent the previous year in speaking over the state and founding local societies in practically every county. The convention met first in Zanesville, was driven across the Muskingum River to Putnam by its enemies, and finally called back to Zanesville. There were present about one hundred and ten delegates from

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27 Barnes, Gilbert H., The Anti-Slavery Impulse, 83; Birney, op. cit., 166; Ritchie, op. cit., 35.

28 Barnes, op. cit., 83.
twenty-five counties, representing the many societies of the state. Mr. Rankin and his sons occupied seats of honor as representatives of the older abolitionists. Professor Hart states that the father was one of the leaders of the convention.

James G. Birney came from his residence in Kentucky with the delegation from Hamilton County, Ohio. Other prominent members of the convention were Weld, Samuel Crothers, Elizur Wright, and a group of seceders from Lane Seminary at Cincinnati. Most of the delegates were Weld's own converts of the past year. The convention pledged itself to the principles of the American Anti-Slavery Society, which had been organized in New York City in 1833, not merely to free the slaves but also to protect them by laws appropriate to their condition. The delegates gave their allegiance to the cause of emancipation and thereby formally organized the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society.

Rankin had his first experience with a mob while attending this convention, but it was by no means his last. In the course of a walk to the home of a friend in Zanesville one evening he was beset by a band of roughs and made the target for a shower of rotten eggs, one of which struck him on the shoulder, and a gosling fell out. Later in life, after facing

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30 Barnes, op. cit.
32 Hart, A. B., op. cit.
33 Barnes, op. cit., 83.
34 Ritchie, op. cit., 36.
more than twenty mobs, he declared, "The aspect of a fierce mob is terrible." 35

On his way home from the Zanesville convention Rankin stopped at Chillicothe and preached twice to a colored congregation. 36 During the evening service people outside threw stones in and injured a few members of the congregation.

After the sermon was over Rankin was attacked by the gathering crowd, but was afforded protection by abolitionist friends. 37 He said that the mob consisted of the rabble of the town, who had been told that the abolitionists favored inter-marriage between poor whites and negroes in order to provide a greater number of servants. This was mere propaganda, of course. Rankin himself always opposed amalgamation of the races.

In 1854 Garrison had gone so far in his denunciation of slavery that he burned the Constitution of the United States at an open-air celebration of the abolitionists at Framingham, Massachusetts, as "a covenant with death and an agreement with hell." 39 Rankin's hatred of slavery was no doubt as deep as Garrison's, but he evidenced no desire to destroy the government in order to end the evil it sanctioned. He stated in his Letters that slavery must be ended by fair discussion and other lawful means. 40

35 Howe, op. cit., I, 338; Cyclopaedia of Am. Biography, V, 180.
36 Ritchie, op. cit., 36.
37 Ritchie, op. cit., 38.
38 Hart, A. B., op. cit., 216.
40 Rankin, John, Letters on Slavery, v. One might ask if the Underground Railroad was a lawful means?
In 1836, the year after his return from the convention which organized the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, Rankin became a traveling lecturer for the American Anti-Slavery Society. His first appearance in this capacity was in a Methodist Church near Mowrystown, Highland County, Ohio, twenty-five miles north of Ripley. His audience was small but attentive, and, though some mob spirit developed in the village, no violence was offered him. He next lectured at Williamsburg, Claymont County, where the local Presbyterian minister opposed his views, saying that they would lead to bloodshed and war. Rankin gave his address to a quiet audience, but he was attacked by a young man while returning alone from the church and struck on the neck with a club. However, he was saved from injury by the collars of three heavy coats which he wore turned up to keep out the severe cold. The lecture must have been effective, for the locality soon became a strong abolition center.

Rankin traveled from Williamsburg to Goshen, a small village in the same county, where a friendly Presbyterian minister opened his church for the lecture. Here an anti-slavery society was formed which were long carried on Underground Railroad operations. Rankin next lectured in Batavia, the seat of Claymont County, where anti-slavery principles were

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41 Ritchie, op. cit., 40.  
42 Ibid., 39.  
43 Ibid., 40.  
44 Ibid.  
45 Ibid., 41.
somewhat popular. While speaking one night at a church two miles from the town, some young men threw eggs and rocks through a window at him. This attack did not disturb the speaker, but his audience became frightened and fled. This was the only time that Mr. Rankin was not heard through to the end of his address. 46

In Clermont county Mr. Rankin lectured and preached in a Baptist and a Presbyterian Church near New Richmond, where he was well received, his Letters having been widely read in that community with evident influence. Anti-slavery principles were prevalent there. 47 He was later invited to deliver a lecture at Felicity, in the same county, where his brother, Alexander T. Rankin, was pastor of the Presbyterian Church. 48 He made an appointment for an evening during the meeting of the Cincinnati Presbytery at Felicity, but the elders refused to open the church for his address. The people were much aroused by this action, for Mr. Rankin had promoted the erection of the church. 49 The Methodists magnanimously offered him the use of their pulpit, and a huge crowd, including most of the members of the Presbytery, turned out to hear him speak. The effectiveness of his effort is manifested by the fact that sixty names were placed on the roll of the anti-slavery society formed immediately after the lecture. 50

46 Ritchie, op. cit., 42.
47 Ibid., 43.
48 Ibid., 44.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
Mr. Rankin also lectured in the Presbyterian Church at West Union, the seat of Adams County, and there founded a large anti-slavery society. The local minister, however, gave the organization no support and it eventually ceased to exist. Later that part of the county became strongly pro-slavery. At a meeting of the Ripley Presbytery at West Union the tails of the horses of a number of the ministers were closely shaved, evidently to show the disapproval of the anti-slavery sentiments of the owners of the animals on the part of the miscreants committing the outrage. It happened, however, that Mr. Rankin's horse escaped the shearing, for it was safely locked in a stable.

Shortly after this Presbytery meeting a large anti-slavery gathering was held in a grove outside of Winchester, a neighboring village in Adams County. A mob soon collected, beating drums so loudly as to drown out the speakers. Mr. Rankin spoke during the program, but was rudely interrupted by a man greatly under the influence of liquor, who forced his way to the front and tried to strike him with a club. The speaker was saved from possible injury by the timely intervention of a friend, who warned the drunken man that he would have more than one strike. This ended the attack. After the meeting

51Ritchie, op. cit., 45.
52Ibid.
53Ibid., 46.
54Ibid., 47.
a large number of the disturbing element reposed in a drunken slumber on the ground. As Mr. Rankin rode past a tavern that night on his way from Winchester, he was made the target for a deluge of eggs, but the speed of his horse saved him from contamination. 55

On the day following the difficulties at Winchester a meeting was held at Decatur, Brown county. 56 A mob of pro-slavery men gathered there and threatened violence, but the abolitionists were prepared to defend themselves, being well armed. Hence no trouble occurred. The best citizens of Decatur and the surrounding country were abolitionists, as staunch as any in the state, and remained loyal to the anti-slavery cause. 57

At Withamsville, Clermont county, between Georgetown and Cincinnati, Mr. Rankin spoke in a schoolhouse before an audience consisting mostly of young rowdies. He had great difficulty in holding their attention, but was able to maintain a fair degree of order as long as he could look the worst of them in the face. Finally they turned their backs and misbehaved openly, but he managed to finish his address. As he left with a friend to go to his lodging place, curses and threats were hurled at him. The rowdies soon followed the speaker and his

55 Ritchie, op. cit.
56 Ibid., 47.
57 Ibid.
companion and threw fire-brands from the church stove at them. Mr. Rankin was struck on the shoulder by a burning missile, but received no injury. He said that after all his arguments to show that all men ought to be free, he was at times tempted to believe that there were men of his own race who "did not seem fit to be free." 58

Mr. Rankin found that he could often accomplish more for the abolition cause by preaching than by lecturing:

A solemn discourse founded on the Scriptures had an authority, and a divine sanction, that a mere lecture could not have, and there was less danger of disturbance by mobs. I adopted the plan of preaching and mingling the subject of slavery with other gospel subjects. In this way I could bring my hearers to view faith in the light of eternity.

He traveled to Springdale at the request of the Rev. A. Aten, the Presbyterian minister there, who desired his people to hear Mr. Rankin's anti-slavery views, as several able men had previously lectured to them on abolition with little success. He preached on Friday and Saturday preceding the communion service without mentioning slavery. On Sunday morning he preached on humility and benevolence, administered the communion, and announced that he would present the Biblical teachings on slavery that evening. The evening service was attended by a large congregation, before which he denounced the view that the Scriptures sanctioned slavery and showed that they condemned all forms of oppression, of which slavery

58Ritchie, op. cit., 48-50.
59Ibid., 50.
was the worst. On Monday he gave a regular sermon, followed in the evening by an anti-slavery lecture which resulted in the organization of a society of sixty members. 60

Mr. Rankin said that he often invited many persons who were not anti-slavery sympathizers to come and hear his speeches and could usually get them to agree with him, at least in sentiment. His method was to begin by declaring his belief in the immortal opening words of the Declaration of Independence, which all believed. He next stated that he believed God had created all men of one blood, which was usually accepted on Biblical grounds. His last general point was that all men should either do their own work or else pay those who did it for them. This proposition was also well received. He concluded with the statement that these three fundamental principles embodied all the beliefs of the abolitionists, which could be summed up in the sentence that all men possessed the same rights, regardless of color. 61

Mr. Rankin felt that he had failed but once in all his speaking to convey the conviction that he spoke the truth. Often, however, people would not believe that he taught abolition, because they could not see much similarity between his views and those of James G. Birney. Yet they felt that his arguments were sound and usually agreed that he exposed the evils of slavery and made them apparent to all. 62

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60 Ritchie, op. cit., 53.
61 Ibid., 52.
62 Ibid.
Mr. Rankin lectured for the American Anti-Slavery Society during six months of the year 1836. The work was very strenuous and exposed him constantly to the rigors of the weather. He caught a severe cold and had to give up speaking before his full year of service had expired. His affliction was accompanied by a deep cough which incapacitated for many months and made him almost despair of recovery, but he regained his health in time and continued his work for emancipation.

Many years later Mr. Rankin received an invitation from a Mr. John Rankin, of Chester county, Pennsylvania, to come and speak against slavery. He accepted the invitation, was paid his traveling expenses, and reached his destination after a pleasant journey. He stayed at the home of his host and began to lecture, although the majority of the Presbyterian ministers of the county opposed him vigorously and kept their churches closed to him. His host opened the doors of his church for the lectures and even secured other places for his appearance. Mr. Rankin spoke in churches, schoolhouses, the open air, and once in a barn, before a special hall was erected for his use. This structure was provided chiefly by the efforts of a group of Hicksite Quakers, who favored the anti-slavery movement. He delivered more than forty lectures in Chester and Lancaster counties, and once faced a mob without suffering any injury. He did much to advance the cause of abolition in that region, which later joined his Free Pres-

63 Ritchie, op. cit., 52, 54.
byterian Church. 64

In the sermon which Mr. Rankin considered to be his most effective one against slavery, he stated that no man could love his neighbor as himself and yet hold him in a position in which he would not himself be held. Slavery was wholly inconsistent with the law of love, which, if obeyed, would immediately banish all slavery and oppression from the world. He said that many persons would not permit the colored man to sit in their homes or their churches, merely because he was of dark skin and poor in worldly wealth. Yet Christ had never despised a single human being. The proud heart would never reach heaven, for pride had no place there. "The holy angels, of higher nature than we are, condescend to attend to the lowest of our race." 65

64 Ritchie, op. cit., 55.
65 Ibid., 66, 71.
CHAPTER IV

MR. RANKIN'S UNDERGROUND RAILROAD WORK

For more than thirty years Mr. Rankin's home was on top of the high hill immediately behind the village of Ripley.\(^1\) His house was a small story and a half brick, with the garret sloping to the rear, and was in full view of the Kentucky shore. At night a lantern hung in one of the windows to serve as a beacon to fugitive slaves who were ready to cross, or were crossing, the Ohio River.\(^2\) Ripley was one of the first towns in southern Ohio to receive the runaways, and Mr. Rankin's home was the initial "station" in Brown county, having become so as early as 1825. Mr. Rankin and his sons continued to engage in this hazardous service until the Civil War put an end to it. One of the sons, Captain R. C. Rankin, who was a conductor of fugitives from station to station, estimated that more than two thousand of them passed through Ripley from 1830 to 1865.\(^3\)

The father stated that there was no formal organization of the men who engaged in this work, but that they acted from a sense of humanity and justice. All operators were faithful and worked in secret; there were no betrayals. The slaves

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\(^1\)Howe, op. cit., II, 338; Ritchie, op. cit., 98.
\(^2\)Hist. of Brown County, Ohio, 443; Ritchie, op. cit., 98.
\(^3\)Interview with Capt. R. C. Rankin by W. H. Siebert, Ripley, O., April 8, 1892 (in Siebert Collection of U. G. R. R. Material for Ohio, II.)
early learned that Mr. Rankin was an abolitionist and made their way clandestinely to his house on the hill after crossing the river. They were hidden in the house, barn or other nearby buildings until they could be sent on to the homes of other anti-slavery men farther north in the county. Mr. Rankin's nine sons traveled the routes with the fugitives to Redoak, then northeast to Decatur, then more directly north to Winchester, in the northwestern part of Adams County, or they passed through Redoak and Russellville to Macon, where they veered a little north of west to Sardinia. Safety, not speed, was the rule in these trips, which were made at night in wagons, on horseback, or even on foot. Mr. Rankin once had twelve escaped slaves on his property at the same time and saw to it that they passed on in safety. He declared that not one fugitive was ever apprehended while under his care. 4

After 1830 Mr. Rankin's notoriety as an abolitionist spread into the South, and he was especially hated in Kentucky, where the slaveholders felt very bitter toward him and the other vigorous abolitionists of Brown county. In 1838 certain masters of Kentucky offered a reward of $2,500 for the assassination or abduction of Mr. Rankin and Dr. Alexander Campbell of Ripley and the Rev. John B. Mahan and Dr. Isaac Beck of Sardinia. These men were the most prominent leaders

of the abolition movement in Brown county, and their lives were in constant danger. 5 In the same year Mr. Mahan was arrested and taken to Mason county, Kentucky, to stand trial for having gone there, as was alleged, and aided a slave to escape to Sardinia by means of the Underground Railroad. The case aroused great interest among the anti-slavery people of southern Ohio, and Governor Vance was severely criticized for extraditing Mahan to Kentucky. After spending more than ten weeks in jail, the prisoner was tried and found entirely innocent of the charge. He was ably defended by lawyers sent by his fellow-abolitionists of Brown county and by the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society. The owner of the fugitive sued Mahan in civil court, and he was later forced to pay damages in the sum of $1,600. Mr. Rankin's home was often searched by slave-hunters and his wife and children were threatened, but never was a fugitive found there, although some had narrow escapes. His stalwart sons and the young men of the village were always able to spirit them away and more than equal the bravado of the slavehunters. 5

Those persons at Ripley who aided the Rankin family in Underground Railroad work were: Dr. Alexander Campbell, Dr. Alfred Beasley, James, Theodore and Thomas McCague, Kenneth McCoy, and John Porter. These men either supplied food and

5Hist. of Brown Count., Ohio, 315; Trial of John B. Mahan for Felony, 12, '98, 81 (In Siebert Collection), II; Letter from Dr. Isaac Beck, Dec. 28, 1892; Philanthropist, I, no. 48, Dec. 26, 1892; Howe, op. cit., II, 339; Ritchie, op. cit., 111.
horses, acted as guides, or helped to conceal the fugitives. During the early years of the Underground system the runaways were taken from the home of Mr. Rankin to that of the Rev. John B. Mahan at Sardina, a distance of about twenty-one miles to the north. In later years, after the work had become more popular, they were not conveyed such a long distance. Most of them were conducted only four miles and hidden in the Redoak Presbyterian Church, whose pastor was another noted abolitionist, the Rev. James Gilliland. In this neighborhood William Baird, Washington Campbell, William Dunlap, Gordon Hopkins, William and James McCoy, Thomas Salisbury, and John Shepherd were always ready to feed, secrete, and forward the fugitives. The western route ran on through Russellville and Sardina, by way of the Huggins community, to Euford. Thence it passed through Lynchburg, Highland county, where John Hunter, a Presbyterian elder, maintained a station, to Hillsboro, where Colonel Keys and John Nelson extended hospitality to the guides and fugitives. From Hillsboro the route extended to the farm of the Rodgers brothers, near Greenfield, or to Wilmington, via the Quaker settlement at Martinsville. The eastern route from Ripley led through Redoak and Decatur to Winchester, Adams county.⁶

According to local tradition and numerous writers, the

⁶Interview with Capt. R. C. Rankin by W. H. Siebert; letter from Mr. Isaac Beck, Dec. 14, 1892. (Both of these are in the Siebert Collection of Underground Materials relating to Ohio, II.)
name "Underground Railroad" originated in an incident which occurred at Ripley. In 1831 a fugitive from Kentucky, by the name of Tile Davis, reached the Ohio River opposite Ripley, with his master in close pursuit. He plunged into the water, swam across, and left no trace. The master was somewhat declared in finding a skiff and rowing across, and when he landed on the Ripley made a careful but fruitless search. To some of the villagers he declared, to their amusement, that his "nigger must have gone off on an underground road." At that very time the fugitive was probably eating a hearty meal at the Rankin home. The story of this incident was often repeated, and, with the advent of steam railroads, the apt name became "Underground Railroad." The origin of the name has been explained by similar incidents in other parts of the country. Professor Siebert says:

These anecdotes are hardly more than traditions, affording a fair general explanation of the way the Underground Railroad got its name; but they cannot be trusted in the details of time, place and occasion. Whatever the manner and date of its suggestion, the designation was generally accepted as an apt title for a mysterious means of transporting fugitive slaves to Canada.7

To Mr. Ritchie, who published the biography of Mr. Rankin in 1869 under the title, The Soldier, the Battle, and the Victor, that gentleman narrated some escapes of slaves which had come under his own observation, and which are typical of

7Siebert, Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom, 45-6; "Men Who Worked on the Underground Railroad in Ohio," in Cincinnati Commercial-Tribune, Feb. 18, 1900 (Siebert Collection, IL)
hundreds of others reported by operators of the Underground Railroad. The mother of a slave family near Dover, Kentucky, determined to free her husband and children. She first sent her husband across the river, and in due course he reached Canada. She then fled with her baby by the same route to Rankin's and was sent on to join her husband. Four years later she returned for the purpose of abducting her six other children, who were still held by her master. She disguised herself as a man, crossed to Dover, and the first night thereafter came away with four of the children. On her way to the river she hid for a day in a field, where there was green corn to eat and where the little party was in constant danger of discovery. At night they crossed the Ohio and were concealed just outside of Ripley by friends of Mr. Rankin. When their master arrived at the village, the fugitives were spirited to the house on the hill and from there northward before he could locate them.  

One night seven slaves came to the Rankin home from Kentucky and were hidden away. Early next morning the slave-hunters were riding through the streets of Ripley. An abolitionist neighbor had seen the slaves at Rankin's but would not reveal the fact, although one of the pursuers offered him $1,000 to do so. They were soon passed on to "the promised land."  

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8Ritchie, op. cit., 103.
9Ibid., 104.
A young fugitive came to Mr. Rankin in great haste one evening, and told him that he had avoided being taken by twenty men on horseback by hiding in a wheat field. The horses had nearly trampled him. He further said that Kentuckians represented the Ohio abolitionists as being in the habit of selling fugitives into worse servitude than that from which they fled. He felt that his condition could not be worse, for he had been sold to go to the far South. He was sent on to the next station after expressing his gratitude to the Rankins for their great kindness.

Ripley has long been associated with the dramatic scene depicted in Harriet Beecher Stowe's immortal story of Uncle Tom's Cabin, in which Eliza Harris, with her child in her arms, crosses the river on cakes of floating ice. The true story of Eliza's adventure, as related by Mr. Rankin, is less dramatic than that told by Mrs. Stowe, but gave her the incident which her imagination was able to improve upon. Captain R. C. Rankin, a son of Mr. Rankin, tells us that the Rev. Dr. Lyman Beecher and his family, including Mrs. Stowe, the living at Cincinnati, were on friendly terms with the Rankins and often visited in their home. During a meeting of the Cincinnati Synod at Ripley Mrs. Stowe, her husband, and her father were guests of the Rankins and heard the story of the escape of the young negro woman and her child across the frozen river. The oldest inhabitants of Ripley still give

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10 Ritchie, op. cit., 104-5.
versions of the story, and the Rankin house on the hill is known over much of southern Ohio as the "Liza house."

The following details come from the pen of the Rev. John Rankin and must be regarded therefore as authentic. A black woman, who lived just across the river from Ripley, was cruelly treated by her mistress and decided to attempt to escape to Canada. She took her infant in her arms, ran to the bank of the river, and sought aid from a Scotchman who lived nearby. He was a drunkard, but was kind enough to direct her to the Rankin house, where he said she would find safe refuge. It was late winter and the river was frozen over solidly, but a recent thaw threatened to break up the ice. It was night, and water was running over the ice; but she did not hesitate and carried her child safely to the Ohio shore. She made her way to the Rankin home, entered, built a fire, and dried her clothes. She then aroused the sons of Mr. Rankin, who took her two miles farther before daylight. By that time the ice had broken up in the river, and it was no longer possible to cross except by boat. Her pursuers followed the next day and thought she had drowned until they discovered a piece of her child's clothing on the Ohio side of the river. The fugitives were forwarded to the Greenfield neighborhood, where they had to remain. The woman's husband (George Harris, in Mrs. Stowe's novel) followed her in a few weeks and, with the aid of the Rankins, reached the Greenfield neighborhood in
search of her. Some young men had gone ahead to tell her of her husband's coming, but she mistook them for slavehunters and fled with her child during a cold night. She had to seek shelter and fortunately fell into the hands of friends. She was soon re-united with her husband, to her great joy, and they remained at Greenfield until spring. They reached Canada in the early summer. 11

Earle in August, 1885, Professor Siebert visited Windsor, Ontario, and held interviews with John Reed, Horace Washington, and other fugitive slaves from Kentucky, who testified that they had been concealed, fed, clothed, and guided on their way to freedom by Mr. Rankin and his sons, who had also aided many of their friends to escape to Canada. Mr. Rankin has himself said of his Underground work:

My house has been the door of freedom to many human beings, but while there was a hazard of life and property, there was much happiness in giving safety to the trembling fugitives. They were all children of God by creation, and some of them I believe were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. 12

11 Ritchie, op. cit., 105-7.
12 Ibid., 111.
CHAPTER V

MR. RANKIN'S RELIGIOUS AND EDUCATIONAL WORK

Mr. Rankin was a missionary in southern Ohio, as well as the pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Ripley and a crusader in the anti-slavery movement. He labored incessantly to spread the doctrines of his denomination in his neighborhood, and the Presbyterian societies at Decatur, Russellville, Sardina, Buford, Huntington, Winchester, Felicity, and Cedron owe their origin to this efforts. After establishing these churches, he had the satisfaction of seeing them grow through the years to become strong centers of the Covenant faith.¹

Mr. Rankin worked diligently within the presbyteries and synods of his denomination to secure a more vigorous opposition to slavery. As early as 1818 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church had adopted resolutions denouncing slavery as "utterly inconsistent with the law of God which requires us to love our neighbors as ourselves," and had called for exertion "to effect a total abolition of slavery." These resolutions demanded further that the slaveholders within the church take steps toward emancipation, under penalty of rigorous church discipline. In practice, however, these resolutions remained a dead letter and were defied openly throughout the South. Mr. Rankin sought in vain to have them enforced with-

¹Leggett, Rev. John Rankin, 14.
in his synod. In the great division over doctrine which occurred in 1836 Mr. Rankin and his Presbytery followed the "New School" or "Constitutional" Presbyterian Church as being the more progressive. The Assembly of the "Old School" permitted the anti-slavery resolutions to lie unnoticed, and they were never enforced within its jurisdiction. The Assembly of the "New School," however, discussed the resolutions fully, and the advocates of slavery therein were allowed free expression. In 1839 this Assembly passed a resolution referring the whole subject of slavery to "the lower judicatures," that is, to the synods, presbyteries, and sessions throughout the country.2

Mr. Rankin interpreted this resolution as a victory for the slaveholders within the "New School," and the Ripley Presbytery refused to send delegates to its meetings. As a result the Presbytery was called before the Synod of Cincinnati, where Mr. Rankin defended its action and won complete vindication and acquittal. The matter reached the more conservative ears of the Assembly of the "New School" in 1840, and the proceedings of the Cincinnati Synod were therein condemned. The Assembly further demanded that the Ripley Presbytery cease its agitation against the referendum of the slavery resolution.

2Barnes, Albert, Church and Slavery, 49, 54-6, 67, 72; Thompson, Robert E., Hist. of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States, 135; Leggett, op. cit., 12.
The Ripley Presbytery replied that it would not license or ordain slaveholders or anyone who justified slavery, nor "receive to the church any slave-holder, nor invite members of other churches who are slave-holders to commune with them; and that it will hold no fellowship with any other ecclesiastical body that tolerates slave-holding."

As a result of this declaration the Ripley Presbytery was formally censured by the Cincinnati Synod. As the members of the Presbytery heard this condemnation of their action at the meeting of the synod, they arose in turn and asked to have their names stricken from its roll. Mr. Rankin issued a call for a convention of the members of the Ripley Presbytery, which met early in 1845. He preached an eloquent sermon on the text, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins," and a new organization was formed with great enthusiasm. The new body was called "The Free Presbyterian Church of America," and specifically excluded all slaveholders from membership. Many other congregations from the two older divisions joined the movement, and Mr. Rankin perfected a synod of more than fifty churches. It maintained an active existence until the Civil War, with five presbyteries extending from eastern Pennsylvania as far west as Iowa. This new church exerted much influence on the older divisions and especially challenged the "New School," in which the anti-slavery

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3Ritchie, op. cit., 115; "The Ripley Presbytery against Pro-Slavery Ministers," in Oberlin Evangelist, Sept. 23, 1840 (Siebert Collection, Ohio, II.).
feeling grew much stronger. The slave-holding element of the "New School" Assembly seceded just before the Civil War, which paved the way for the reunion of the Free Church with that school. The "New School" Assembly pledged its hostility to slavery and welcomed Mr. Rankin and his insurgents back into the larger organization to oppose the evils of slavery and rebellion.  

While leading the Free Presbyterian Church in a general attack upon the institution of slavery, Mr. Rankin experienced difficulties with his own congregation at Ripley. A division occurred, and a part of the members withdrew to form a new organization. Mr. Rankin was asked to serve as pastor by the withdrawing members, who built a new house of worship in 1845. He was moderate during the differences within his church, but was faithful to the seceding group. The two churches remained separate until his retirement from his pulpit in 1866. He had spent forty-four years as an active clergyman in Ripley. During his later years he preached for a short time in Central Illinois and later at Linden, Kansas. In his eighty-seventh year he returned to Ripley, where he delivered a farewell sermon to the strongly re-united and enthusiastic congregation of the First Presbyterian Church, which owed so much to his past efforts. 

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5Leggett, op. cit., 8; Ritchie, op. cit., 119; Siebert Collection, Ohio, II.
Mr. Rankin was deeply interested in education, as well as in religious and anti-slavery work. About 1830 the citizens of Ripley had organized an institution of learning and chartered it under the name of "The Ripley College. Mr. Rankin served as its only president and gave much time and effort to advance its interests. It flourished for a short time and drew young men from many parts of Ohio. Ulysses S. Grant, then a youth at the neighboring village of Georgetown, spent a term in the college in preparation for West Point. The institution soon failed for lack of endowment, but it continued to serve as an academy under the guidance of Mr. Rankin for many years. By 1846 he had an assistant, and forty pupils were then enrolled in the academy, part of them being colored. The principles of freedom and abolition were naturally emphasized in the school. Mr. Rankin even started a Female Seminary on his farm, but this also declined after a brief existence. His home was frequently full of students, both white and black. He taught theology and the classical subjects during his long residence at Ripley and prepared two of his sons and a number of local men for the ministry.  

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CHAPTER VI

THE WRITINGS OF JOHN RANKIN

In the preceding chapters Mr. Rankin's Letters on Slavery have been mentioned many times. They placed him in the front rank of early anti-slavery men and became one of the standard works of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society and was used by abolitionists far and wide as a source of information and inspiration. We shall now examine these Letters more closely to see what are their significant statements about slavery.

In the first letter to his brother Mr. Rankin expressed his extreme hatred of that institution and discussed the reasons for the prejudice against the negro. He found the main cause of this prejudice to be the color of the African, which had resulted from centuries of exposure to an equatorial sun. Further, the race had been degraded on account of its presumed inferiority of intellect, and it had been denied the opportunities of an education. In his second letter Mr. Rankin attempted to prove that the negro had not been created for slavery. He was a human being and therefore desired to acquire knowledge, liberty, property, and a reputation. All men desired to be free, for "all the feelings of humanity" were "strongly opposed to being enslaved." Nothing "but the strong arm of power" could "make men submit to the yoke of bondage." ¹

¹Hart, A. B., op. cit., 159; Birney, op. cit., 170; Rankin, John, Letters on Slavery, 7, 18, 28, 54. These letters were originally intended for his brother Thomas, a merchant of Middlebrook, Va., who had bought a slave: Letters, i.
In the third letter the evils resulting from the slaves' being kept in ignorance are pointed out, as also is the tyranny practiced by many slaveholders. In the succeeding several letters the specific results arising from the system of servitude are listed. Mr. Rankin finds that slavery is "opposed to domestic peace," because the slaves are reared without moral instruction, and often their intemperance, falsehood, and dishonesty affect the families of their masters. Slavery promotes idleness on the part of slaveholding families, who are unwilling to work unless forced to by necessity. It is conducive to vice among the free inhabitants of the slave states. Immorality follows idleness, and the master's children are taught obscenity by the slave children, with whom they often play. In many instances the master and his family are overcome by the great temptations surrounding them and are carried to ruin. The gain from slavery often leads to gambling, intemperance, and other forms of indulgence. Slavery weakened the bodies of the slave-owning class, for whom lack of exercise is dangerous, just as excessive toil is for their slaves. Eventually slavery must tend to poverty, because the plantations are large estates, and the poor people can never own their farms. The children of slaveholders, reared in idleness and luxury, often squander the richest estates and fortunes left to them. Mr. Rankin truly says that enslaved persons have not the same motive to industry which influences those who are free, when they labor for themselves, and consequently, they are not equal in the performance of labor, to an equal number of free men. Hence, not only
the poverty of individuals, but also that of the state must become so numerous, that there is not land enough for them to cultivate, extreme indigence must soon be the consequence, both to the state, and to individuals.

Slavery usually results in ignorance, for persons reared in idleness and ease will seldom attempt the exertion necessary to gain a liberal education. The sons and daughters of slaveholders often will not submit to the regulations of a well-governed college and are frequently expelled for gambling, bad habits, and violent tempers. "Slavery weakens every state in which it exists." The slaveholders secure great wealth, and the poor whites are consequently forced far down in the social scale. The latter often leave the slave state in order to seek a new start in life and equal opportunity among free workers. Even many of the better citizens of the slave states grow tired of the evils connected with the institution of servitude and move to a free state to rear their children in freedom and industry. 3

Slavery cultivates a spirit of cruelty. The slaves are greatly lacking in moral instruction, are often vicious, and hence draw punishment and suffering upon themselves. The vicious slave laws allow these poor creatures to be tortured according to the dictates of their masters' passions. Slavery promotes tyranny. It is opposed to the fundamental part of the Declaration of

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2 Rankin, John, Letters on Slavery, 40-4, 119-21, 123-7.
3 Ibid., 127-9.
Independence which declares that 'all men are created equal and are endowed with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' These principles are absolutely denied by the slaveholding states. They practically declare that all men are not created equal, that liberty is not an inalienable right, and that a certain class of people have not a right to pursue their own happiness. They do it all their constitutions, create distinctions among men—some (of whom) they forever consign to the service of others.⁴

In his tenth letter Mr. Rankin explains that slaves were originally free, were not enslaved for crime, and hence must have been unjustly enslaved. They were either stolen, or taken by violence, and sold into bondage. Hence they should be free:

Property, that is stolen or taken by unjust violence, though it pass through a thousand hands by honest purchase, still belongs to the original owner; and to him, according to the plainest principles of justice, it must revert. The right to freedom belongs to the Africans, and therefore it is as unjust to hold it from its right owner.⁵

It is unjust to make a slave of the negro, even though the state sanctions such oppression. The man who would take away the liberty of another merely because the state permits him, would probably take the property of another if the opportunity should arise. "The man who will be just no farther than the state compels him, is a rogue in heart."⁶

Mr. Rankin could see nothing but injustice and cruelty in slavery. It made an innocent man the property of another and often deprived him of the comforts of life and subjected

⁴Rankin, John, Letters on Slavery, 132, 97, 133-4.
⁵Ibid., 138-9.
⁶Ibid., 142.
him to untold suffering. "The truth is," writes the Presbyterian abolitionist, "when once a man is made the property of another, and thus put completely under his control, it is impossible to enact laws that will protect either his life or his limbs."

In the last part of his Letters Mr. Rankin considers the various pro-slavery arguments which certain persons derive from the Bible and refutes them all. He states that the slaves of Abraham were voluntary subjects for temporary use only. Much of the slavery permitted by Mosaic institutions was for the punishment of idolatry, and the "hired servants" were not perpetual slaves. Mr. Rankin not only finds no divine sanction for slavery, but on the contrary, quotes from the Bible in condemnation of it: "He that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in hand, he shall surely be put to death." (Exod. XXI, 16.)

Mr. Rankin was also the author of a large number of articles and pamphlets against slavery. One of these—"An Address to the Churches in relation to Slavery"—was read by him at the first anniversary of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, which was held at Medina, Ohio, in 1836. He appealed to the Christian Church to oppose involuntary servitude because it had no scriptural basis. As he had previously done in his Letters, he maintained that servitude in Israel was voluntary

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7 Rankin, John, Letters on Slavery, 60, 109.

8 Ibid., 158, 198.
and non-permanent. He said that the Biblical slave was similar to an apprentice in America and was accepted as a member of his master’s family. He set forth the many evils resulting from slavery and declared it to be a direct violation of the law of love.  

Mr. Rankin wanted all the various denominations of Christians to exclude from church fellowship all who persevere in holding slaves, under any pretext whatsoever; and let all the gospel ministers lift up their voices against slavery, and bring the lightnings and thunderings of Sinai to bear upon it, and it will wither and die like the mown grass beneath the scorching sun, and will disappear like midnight darkness before the rising sun of the day. 

Of course, Mr. Rankin’s desire for unanimity among the denominations on the slavery question was not fulfilled to any considerable degree, and if it had been it will be agreed that the influence he predicted they would exert was far beyond attainment.

Two years later he gave another address, this time before the third anniversary meeting of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, at Granville, on May 30, 1838. This was entitled "An Address to the Churches on Prejudice against People of Color." Here again he employed the arguments he had already used in his Letters: All men were made of one blood, and climatic conditions had changed the African to a dark hue. Even if a permanent difference existed in the color of the skin it was

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9 Rankin John, Address to the Churches in relation to Slavery, (pamphlet), 1-5.

10 Ibid., 8.
"but the dress which God has thrown over the human frame."

Prejudice against the negro was a serious crime, for it brought oppression and ruin upon an innocent people. He argued that America was inconsistent in sending missionaries abroad each year to convert heathen peoples, while a thousand heathen were made at home for every ten converted abroad. He could but weep while recording the painful and shameful fact. If only he could persuade his Christian brethren of all denominations "to make immediate and persevering efforts to abolish a prejudice that involves millions in utter ruin."\textsuperscript{11}

Mr. Rankin was the founder of the American Reform Society, which was later known as the Western Tract and Book Society. Such an organization, he thought, would aid in combating the increasing power of slavery, and for many months he worked among his abolition friends to perfect it. Finally he issued a call for a meeting to organize the society, which should publish the truth about that "dominating system of oppression so powerful in the land." The meeting was held in the Vine Street Congregational Church, in Cincinnati, on December 16, 1851, and Mr. Rankin was chosen president. The society found it difficult to raise money for its work, for many churches feared to support it. In as much as agents to promote the objects of the society were difficult to get, Mr. Rankin did practically all of the work himself. For a number

\textsuperscript{11}Rankin, John, "Address to the Churches on Prejudice against People of Color," in Report of the Third Anniversary of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, 30, 35, 38.
of years he was re-elected its president, and its success was largely due to his efforts. The society became widely known for its anti-slavery and religious work and did much to prepare the people of the Middle West for the final breaking of the bonds of slavery.

Mr. Rankin wrote a number of tracts for the society, which were widely circulated. The one entitled, "The Duty of Voting for Righteous men for Office," is preserved in the Oberlin College Library. Therein he argues that it is clearly the will of Christ for all men to vote, and that they must elect good men in order to fulfill the ordinances of God. Wicked men pervert justice and bring calamity upon the people, even as they did in passing the Fugitive Slave Law. He blamed slavery upon the cruel laws made by men irresponsible to their public trust. "Voting for wicked men endangers our republican institutions," and leads to oppression of the people. Mr. Rankin felt sure that the nation could be reformed, slavery abolished, and the best interests of all the people secured if good men were elected to office.

Several more of Mr. Rankin's publications may be mentioned. One of these is A Short Memoir of Samuel Donnell, which is a brief account of the life and work of a fellow-Presbyterian abolitionist of Kentucky and Indiana. Another gives the reasons for the withdrawal of a large number of

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12 Ritchie, op. cit., 75-7.
13 Ibid., 92.
students and several members of the faculty from Lane Seminary in 1835, because they were forbidden to discuss slavery. It is entitled A Review of the Statement of the Faculty of Lane Seminary. Of his religious writings in print the most important is A Present to Families, which is a short treatise dealing with the duties of parents and children in the church and the meaning of the covenant of grace.
CHAPTER VII

MR. RANKIN'S PLACE IN THE ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT

One of the reasons why Mr. Rankin's leadership in the early abolition movement has not been more widely recognized is that Andrew Ritchie's biography of him omits his name from its title, which gives no hint of his identity or the causes for which he labored. This title—The Soldier, the Battle, and the Victory—is an admirable example of what a title should not be. Thus the extent of his services have been overlooked by many writers who have dealt with the anti-slavery movement. Even those writers who have mentioned him are unfamiliar with anything like the full measure of his services to the cause. We may give a few examples. In 1867 the Rev. Samuel J. May published his book entitled Some Recollections of Our Anti-Slavery Conflict. In this volume he devotes only one paragraph to Mr. Rankin,¹ which states that he

"was a Presbyterian minister in Kentucky, where, in 1825, having heard that his brother, Mr. Thomas Rankin, of Virginia, had become a slaveholder, he addressed to him a series of very earnest and impressive letters in remonstrance. They were published first in a periodical called the Castigator, and afterwards went through several editions in pamphlet form. He denounced 'slavery as a never-failing fountain of the grossest immoralities, and one of the deepest sources of human misery.' He insisted that 'the safety of our government and the happiness of its subjects depended upon the extermination of this evil.' We New England Abolitionists, in the early days of our warfare, made great use of Mr. Rankin's volume as a depository of well-attested facts, justifying the strongest condemnation, we could utter, of

¹P. 10.
the system of oppression that had become established in our country and sanctioned by our government.

Mr. May says nothing about Mr. Rankin's work in estab-
lishing anti-slavery societies in southern Ohio, or of his per-
sistent agitation of the abolition cause in the Presbyterian
Church, or of his participation in the organization and later
meetings of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, or of his labors
in southeastern Pennsylvania, etc. All of these matters
would probably have been referred to by him if he had known
about them.

In his volume The History of the Anti-Slavery Cause in
State and Nation, published in 1886, the Rev. Austin Willey
only gives a sentence to Mr. Rankin, as follows: 2 "The same
[anti-slavery] sentiment existed in Kentucky and Tennessee,
the work of Rev. John Rankin, although he was compelled to
move over into Ohio."

Professor Gilbert H. Barnes in his book The Anti-slavery
Impulse, 1830-1844, issued in 1933, devotes two paragraphs to
an account of the organization of the Ohio State Anti-Slavery
Society at Zanesville in 1835, in which he says: "From Ober-
lin and the Negro schools in Cincinnati came the Lane rebels,
Quakers and old-time abolitionists, John Rankin and his sons
among them, occupying the seats of honor; but most of the del-
egates were Weld's own converts of that year." 3

2 p. 28.

3 p. 83.
Professor Theodore C. Smith refers only twice to Mr. Rankin in his *Liberty and Free Soil Parties*. On page 9 he says:

*It must always be remembered that Western abolitionism had an independent beginning; but while credit for independent action must be given to President Storrs of Western Reserve College; to Asa Mahan, John Rankin, Elizur Wright, Jr., Beriah Green, Theodore D. Weld, and Samuel Crothers in Ohio; to Charles Osborne in Indiana; and to James G. Birney in Kentucky, nevertheless the establishment of the *Liberator* gave the abolition cause its first real impetus in the West as well as in the East.*

Speaking of the effect of the *Fugitive Slave Law of 1850* in Ohio, Professor Smith says on page 227:

*In Highland County a meeting, managed by Mr. [Salmon P.] Chase and the old-time abolitionists, John Rankin and Samuel Crothers, resolved that 'Disobedience to the enactment is obedience to God.'*5

To the above citations I shall add but one more, namely the references in Professor Albert Bushnell Hart's *Slavery and Abolition, 1831-1841*. On page 159 Professor Hart tells us that Mr. Rankin "preached and wrote against slavery in Kentucky and then settled in Ohio, where he published a volume of *Letters on Slavery*, which became a sort of textbook for abolitionists."

On page 193 he refers to the organization of the Ohio State Anti-Slavery Society as follows:

*Some of the pre-existing Ohio anti-slavery societies, in April, 1835, joined in forming a state society, in which the leaders were Samuel Crothers, John Rankin, and others from the slave states, Elizur Wright, a professor in the Congregational Western Reserve College, and a group of the Lane Seminary seceders.*

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5From *The National Era*, Dec. 5, 1850.
On page 214 Professor Hart speaks briefly of the breaking off of a small branch of the Presbyterian Church under the leadership of Mr. Rankin, because the "New School" relegated the consideration of the slavery question to the local presbyteries, and the formation by the anti-slavery branch of the Free Presbyterian Church, "with a few thousand adherents, who made it a tenet that no slaveholder should be admitted to membership."

From the above references to John Rankin's work, which are representative of others that might be drawn from the general treatises dealing with the anti-slavery movement, one would not gain an adequate idea of Mr. Rankin's leadership in the Middle West, or of the variety and extent of his activities, including the Underground labors of himself and his family. Mr. Rankin was one of the early operators of the secret system of aiding fugitive slaves in Ohio, and it is exceedingly doubtful that any household along the Kentucky border forwarded more fugitives to Canada than his. This system had a continuous development in Ohio until its termination by the Civil War, and, although it was secret, it inevitably received much publicity in certain localities and through the public press by reason of the capture of occasional runaways and the arrest and trial of some unfortunate Underground operator who was detected at his illegal proceedings. In many communities such publicity made new converts to the abolition cause, and slavehunting had a more pronounced effect among right-thinking men.
The best estimate of Mr. Rankin's work as an abolitionist is given by William Birney in his James G. Birney and His Times in telling of the anti-slavery convention at Zanesville, in April, 1835. Mr. Birney names the veterans who were delegates to the convention and "had fought the battles of immediate abolition in Ohio for more than ten years," among them John B. Mahan of Brown county, a tall, swarthy man who was a farmer and local Methodist preacher, and from about 1820 had been "one of the most active friends of fugitive negroes." . . . "He knew reliable friends in the counties adjoining his own to whom he could confide fugitives." As early as 1826 he and his associates had formed a close connection with Levi Coffin and other Quakers in Wayne county, Indiana. They had established an earlier one with western New York "in order to baffle the slave-catchers who were stationed at Detroit; and, after 1826, the recapture of a fugitive negro who could cross the Ohio River and get five miles north of it, was a rare occurrence . . ."

Mr. Birney next speaks of the Rev. Samuel Crothers, a Presbyterian minister who had been raised in Kentucky, but had left that state in 1810, when he was twenty-eight years old. After a decade's service in Ross county as a pastor, he was in charge of the Presbyterian Church at Greenfield, Highland county, for thirty-six years, and in that part of Ohio exerted great religious, moral, and political influence.
From the beginning of his work in the state "he was known as an immediate abolitionist, in full sympathy with Gilliland, Burgess, Rankin, and the Dickeys." Fifteen letters by him were published between 1827 and 1831 and republished in the year last named under the title "An Appeal to Patriots and Christians in Behalf of the Enslaved Africans." Early in 1835 Dr. Crothers published five letters which by their logic, wit, and sarcasm completely demolished the plea of President Young of Centre College for gradual emancipation.

At length Mr. Birney comes to John Rankin, whom he characterizes as "the most noted abolitionist" in the Zanesville convention. He further states that his services to the anti-slavery cause were "very great," that "many Western men" called him 'the father of abolitionism', and that "it was not an uncommon thing in the thirties to hear him called 'the Martin Luther' of the cause. He adds that in 1827 Mr. Rankin "was one of the five most prominent advocates in this country of immediate abolition. He was also one of the earliest. Charles Osborn and Rev. George Bourne date as abolitionists from 1814, John Rankin and Benjamin Lundy from 1815, and Rev. James Duncan from about 1820. Of the many thousands who joined the modern anti-slavery movement within the first twelve years after its revival at the close of the war of 1812, these five names have been most familiar to abolitionists, and the two brightest are those of Lundy and Rankin." Mr. Birney says that Mr. Rankin's influence "in Ohio and Kentucky was powerful." He might have added that through his Letters on Slavery he furnished aboli-
tionists, both East and West, many strong arguments in support of their cause. However, he does say that in 1830 and several years before "the abolition books of largest circulation in the United States were those by Rankin, Bourne, Duncan, and Stroud," that several editions of Rankin's Letters were issued by the American Anti-Slavery Society, for which Rankin was a traveling lecturer in 1836 and one of its Ohio managers at a later date. In the light of the above facts given by Mr. Birney, and of Rankin's anti-slavery work within the Presbyterian Church, which Mr. Birney overlooks, it is not too much to say that Mr. Rankin prepared the way more than any other early abolitionist, with the possible exception of Benjamin Lundy, for the more aggressive work of William Lloyd Garrison.

Like many other anti-slavery men, Mr. Rankin differed from Garrison in supporting party action for the overthrow of the national evil. He helped to found the Liberty Party in Ohio and later joined the Free Soil movement. He became a Republican soon after the birth of that party and was an active supporter of President Lincoln. He lived to see slavery swept away on the bloody battle-fields of the Civil War and rejoiced in its overthrow.

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5Birney, Wm., James G. Birney and His Times, 166-171.

6Rankin, A. T., Truth Vindicated and Slander Repelled, 7.
Mr. Chambers Baird, of Ripley, has characterized the work and place of Mr. Rankin among the advocates of abolition in the following sonnet:

Grand pioneer in Freedom's holy cause,
   The praise and honor thine, who battled long,
   And didst assail the citadel of wrong
With dauntless faith, and courage without pause,
Despite the throttling power of evil laws
   That made the bondsman's shackles doubly strong,
   And would make freemen slaves in common throng,
Whilst cowards gave assent and meek applause.

Dear Hero of our age, they work is o'er,
   Thou canst and needst no more they warfare wage,
   In peace and joy thou sawst they latest sun;
   Thou hast the victor's crown for evermore,
   And leav'st to us for blessed heritage
   The faith well-kept, and good fight fought— and won."

7Written in May, 1892.
CHAPTER VIII

THE MONUMENT TO MR. RANKIN AT RIPLEY;
HIS CHARACTERISTICS; HIS SONS.

The sonnet by Mr. Baird, quoted at the close of the preceding chapter, was delivered on May 5, 1892, on the occasion of the dedication of the bronze, portrait bust of Mr. Rankin and the granite monument on which it stands in Maplewood Cemetery, Ripley, where the noted abolitionist reposes. Mr. Rankin died on March 18, 1886, at Ironton, Ohio, at the age of ninety-three years. The dedicatory service was held therefore a little more than six years later. The bust was modeled by Mrs. Ellen Rankin Copp, a granddaughter of the abolition leader. The exercises consisted of Scripture reading and song and several addresses in the First Presbyterian Church, after which Mr. J. C. Leggett, a local historian gave an oration on the life and character of Mr. Rankin at his grave and unveiled the bust. On the monument is carved:

John Rankin
1793-1886
Jean Lowry, His Wife,
1795-1878.
Freedom's Heroes. 1

Mr. Rankin had received calls from numerous churches

1Ripley Bee, May 12, 1892; Leggett, op. cit., 15.
which would have paid him higher salaries, including large congregations in Philadelphia and New York City, but he was not ambitious for such preferment. He also refused the degree of Doctor of Divinity, saying that it would increase neither his usefulness nor his reputation. Such was his simple and unpretentious character. 2

Mr. Rankin was slightly below the average stature, erect in bearing, and neat in dress, with a clean-shaven face and high, broad forehead and large, keen eyes. He was distinctly of the intellectual type and bore a kindly expression. He often wore a white stock, which was tied in a single knot. He was genial, fond of children, and liked to entertain guests, but he permitted no alcoholic beverages in his house, being himself a total abstainer. He opposed dancing and all his life objected to fraternal organizations. His preaching was usually extemporaneous, his convictions honest and earnest, his logic effective, and his voice clear, with excellent intonation. 3

His wife, Jean Lowry Rankin, shared his joys and sorrows for sixty-three years and took part as far as her domestic cares permitted in his church work and his anti-slavery labors. She was always in charge at home and was in danger of calls by slavehunters while her husband was away on his speaking trips. 4

2Leggett, op. cit., 14.

3Ibid., 15; reminiscences of Chambers Baird, Esq., of Ripley.

4Leggett, op. cit., 16.
Six of their eight living sons were in the Union army during the Civil War, as was also an orphan grandson who lived with the family. The Rev. A. L. Rankin served as chaplain of the 113th Illinois Regiment. R. C. Rankin was a captain of the 7th Ohio Volunteer Corps and served for four years with distinction, rendering special service in the pursuit of John Morgan and other guerillas. The Rev. S. G. W. Rankin was connected with the Christian Commission. John T. Rankin served with the 116th Illinois Regiment. Dr. A. C. Rankin was an assistant surgeon in the 74th Illinois Regiment. William A. Rankin served as a staff officer throughout the war, first with Colonel Le Grange's Brigade of Cavalry, then with General McCook, and finally with General Wilson in Georgia. John C. Rankin, the grandson, served during the war in Company E of the 7th Ohio Volunteer Corps under Captain R. C. Rankin. It should be added that the Rev. A. T. Rankin and Thomas Rankin took part in the pursuit of Morgan through Ohio and Indiana. 5

Three of the sons followed their father in the ministry of the Presbyterian Church. The Rev. Samuel W. Rankin was for many years a pastor in Hartford, Connecticut. The Rev. Arthur T. Rankin preached in Greensburgh, Indiana, while the Rev. A. L. Rankin held various charges in California. 6

6 Leggett, op. cit., 2.
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