

## CHAPTER VIII

### GARRISON THE NON-RESISTANT

Oh, it is excellent  
To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous  
To use it like a giant.

—SHAKSPERE, "Measure for Measure."

It is not without reason that I am treating Garrison as primarily a non-resistant, and only secondarily as an Abolitionist; for it was only by chance that his attention was turned to the abolition of slavery, while his instinctive dislike of coercion and love of freedom were wider and earlier. They accounted for his condemnation of war, and they would have led him in his youth to take the side of liberty in any conflict which the condition of the times might have forced upon him. Garrison recognized fully the profounder claims of non-resistance and the fact that the abolition of slavery was a mere episode in its history. The coercion of man by man was the root of slavery, and it is also the root of a thousand other ills. Between nations it means war and conquest and imperialism and international misunderstandings and hatreds

## Garrison the Non-Resistant

and tariffs. Massachusetts and Boston have had the honor of leading in many campaigns for freedom. They were the first to resent the tyranny of George III. Under Garrison they were the headquarters of the anti-slavery movement. Recently we have found there the center of protest against the seizure and subjugation of the Philippines. But in every case it has been a select minority which has taken up the cause of liberty, and in every case this minority has been reviled and despised. Sam Adams was not respectable. Garrison was an "infidel" agitator. And to-day the anti-imperialists, the logical successors of Adams and Garrison in claiming freedom for all, are treated with scant courtesy. Let them possess their souls in patience. They will have their reward.

But each of these movements was but an incident in the grand march toward freedom, and Garrison saw the wider aspects of his faith. He was one of the heralds of a new instinct—the instinct that man belongs to a higher plane than that of physical violence, and that he must rise above the methods of brute force in dealing with his fellows. The evolution of the race is a mysterious thing. Whence came the ideas of association, of love of neighbor, and of love of enemies? The new seed-thoughts take root at first in a single mind or in a very few select ones, and

## Garrison the Non-Resistant

centuries pass before the stony hearts of men at large are fructified. These are real instincts, like that which sends the chick after its food before it is quite free of the egg. And the faint promise of that desire in the egg may have induced it to make an immense effort in the dark—to attempt the impossible—to break down its old environment, apparently impervious and eternal, and seek a new world of infinite possibilities. There are two sides to evolution—that usually dwelt upon, of conformity to environment—and that far more significant one of dissatisfaction with environment, determination to rise above it, and the actual effort against all nature to discover or create a new one. Life means not submission to, but mastery of, environment, and every seed is at heart a rebel. The parts of chaos were well suited to each other and to the whole. Whence came the whisper that there was something better, and the struggle of the universe to lift itself, as it were, by its own waist-band? It was an effort to do the impossible, and it succeeded. Discontent with environment is a motive power, and Garrison's instinctive aversion to coercion was a new creative principle which will yet have its preponderant part to play in the history of man. Of course, I do not mean to say that he was the first man to feel the

novel truth. It had been let loose many centuries earlier, and here and there there had always been witnesses to it; but in his own day and generation Garrison was a pioneer of non-resistance, and he was no imitator or repeater, but he felt its direct claims in his own consciousness.

And men are governed and must be governed by their feelings. We are in the habit of talking of logic as if it were superior to sentiment; but all logic starts out from sentiment, and every syllogism can be traced back to a feeling—a taste—about which it is not to be disputed. Even mathematics, the most logical of sciences, rests upon axioms, and axioms are feelings. We say that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, because we “feel” that it is; and in the same way we believe that two parallel lines can never meet, and that one and one always make two. But these are all mere feelings, and the new mathematicians are actually arguing to-day that parallel lines can meet, and that our axiomatic feelings are erroneous. Men often think that they are guided by reason, while as a matter of fact they really feel their way; and it is not a bad plan when logic leads you to some act which shocks your feelings, to use these latter as tests of logic. It is this humble, instinctive way of behaving which we call common-

sense, and common-sense is the natural corrective of logic—just as when, sailing by right ascension and declination, we see the breakers ahead, we do not hesitate to fall back on the vulgar assistance of the lead. There is no such thing as pure logic. We are always guided either by feeling or by feeling-plus-logic; and hence logic, so far from adding certainty to our conclusions, rather, by bringing in a new element, adds a new possibility of error. The chief use of logic is not to show me what to do, but to afford me a rational excuse for doing what common-sense dictates. It is not the foundation on which I build my wall, but the prop with which I shore it up when it begins to look shaky. All the good and all the evil in the world have been caused by feelings, but probably feelings-plus-logic have done more harm in the long run than undiluted feelings. Logic is relentless. The logic of Torquemada was unanswerable. Heretics were damned. They made converts who were also damned. It was better to torture and kill a few of them than to consign a large portion of the race to hell forever. Q. E. D. The argument is unassailable, but if Torquemada had consulted his heart for a moment he would have thrown the whole flimsy sophism overboard. If I may indulge in a Hibernicism I would say that it is a good thing to keep your heart

at your elbow. For the heart is the root of all, and feeling is the mother of logic, though logic often disowns its mother and endeavors to cut loose from her apron strings, ashamed apparently of its low birth. True logic should be proud of its maternal ancestor, and delight in calling in the good old lady whenever it seems to be coming to grief.

And clearly the idea that logic can independently lay down eternal truths is a fallacy, for the human race is living and growing. Our viewpoints vary and change from day to day. Our feelings are different from those of our fathers, and the logical structure which we rear upon them merely adds to the confusion. Garrison and Draco could not have argued intelligibly together because their root-feelings were different—they belonged to different epochs. Axioms alter from age to age, and the *Quod erat demonstrandum* of one period is the *Reductio ad absurdum* of the next. And the hard logic of an earlier age often survives into a new generation against whose deepest instincts it offends, and yet we persist in our allegiance to the old truth, become falsehood. There is therefore a grain of truth in the common saying that a rule of action is correct in theory but not in practice. Thus the axiom that it is best to hit a man who differs from you over the head has been fossilized and preserved by the logical insti-

## Garrison the Non-Resistant

tutions founded upon it, into the midst of a period in which men feel instinctively that other less clumsy methods of treatment are better. We owe a lot of trouble to the Q. E. D.'s. And Garrison's mistake was not that he adopted a wrong principle, but that he was ahead of his times. He believed that the declaration of the non-resistant convention would sweep over the country as the Declaration of Independence had done, only with a more profound and intense effect, as it was infinitely wider in scope. But two things are necessary to the success of a cause—not only a prophet, but also a people capable of understanding the prophet; and this audience was lacking to Garrison. He would have liked to be a leader to guide the world into the paths of peace. He had to content himself in this regard with acting as a pioneer to stake out the land which some day mankind will occupy. His immediate leadership was confined to a cause which in comparison was limited and local.

But was this non-resistance principle of Garrison's a true one? And is there any prospect that it will triumph in the future? As an axiomatic statement its final sanction must be found in the individual consciousness. Answer for yourself. Is there nothing at the bottom of your heart which suggests to you at your best moments that the exer-

## Garrison the Non-Resistant

cise of physical force against your fellows is unworthy of you? Has not the advance of civilization made men more and more skeptical of the virtues of violence? Many men, at any rate, while repudiating the claims of non-resistance, pay it the indirect compliment of worshiping or honoring supremely the men who have taught it. There can be no doubt about it—violence is played out. The use of physical force in the management of rational creatures is a survival of less enlightened times. The tendency is away from violence of all kinds. Most of the evils of the world are caused by violence. Read the history of mankind from the monuments of Assyria and Egypt down to the morning's news, and you will see that it is one long record of violence—man lifting up his hand against man and nation against nation. Murder, arson, robbery—robbery, arson, murder—it is the same old story over and over again. And to-day the dead and wounded lie all around us, not on the obvious battlefield only, but in city and town and hamlet. Visit the slums of New York or Chicago or London. See the poverty and crime and disease which come from overcrowding and enforced idleness and excessive labor side by side—the necessary consequences of monopolizing by force the natural opportunities of the earth; men and women suffering from a rigid



## Garrison the Non-Resistant

and artificial arrangement of things formed and perpetuated in the last resort by the mailed hand of society, held ever in readiness to crush the offender. The physical struggle has never ceased, disguise it as we may endeavor. Society has always been a Donnybrook Fair, and it is high time that we should be ashamed of our manners, for nothing could be more vulgar than this everlasting appeal to the cudgel.

And the way to stop is to stop! This seems such a simple remedy that men will have none of it. Yes, violence is an evil, they say; let us put it down by more violence. And we start out, each of us with his own ideas and his own weapons, and we proceed to break each other's heads again, and in so doing we are repeating the old useless conflicts of the Pharaohs. This noisy, bloody business is not the real history of the world. Its real history is the history of ideas. The real battle that counts is in the minds and hearts of men. Let us order our armies up to that plane. And at our best, I repeat it, we all feel a call to rise to that higher level. There is something degrading in the use of force against others, and we are all conscious of it at the time. It is impossible to kick anything, I do not care what, and feel human. Catch yourself *flagrante delicto* the next time and

## Garrison the Non-Resistant

arraign yourself at your own bar, and I predict that you will find yourself guilty. It is a debasing proceeding. It is not our proper method, and if our environment seems to demand it, we must hope and pray and work for a new one; and the best way to create a new one is (so far as in us lies) to behave as if it had already arrived. Overcome evil with good. That is the truly human way. Let others get the better of us in this matter of violence. Forgive them. Let by-gones be by-gones. Stop this eternal bookkeeping of offenses between you and your neighbor, and do what you can to bequeath a clean slate to posterity.

And the non-resistant is no weakling. Garrison himself is proof enough of that. The very renunciation of physical force seems to give a new and loftier power to a man. No, the strenuous man is not the soldier on horseback with saber drawn, but rather the man with folded arms who sees a new truth and utters it regardless of consequences. No one can injure the man who refuses to be hurt. You may kill him but you cannot touch the man in him. In another place I have given some examples<sup>1</sup> of the power and influence of such men even upon the savages

---

<sup>1</sup>"Tolstoy and His Message," Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York.

## Garrison the Non-Resistant

of America and Africa.<sup>1</sup> The most influential men in history have eschewed physical force as an instrument. What man of all has exerted the deepest, widest influence upon mankind? Surely Jesus Christ from whom the very term "non-resistant" is derived. And after him? Siddartha, the Buddha, who absolutely condemned all violence. What man to-day in the Russian Empire, that home of brute force, has the greatest import for the world? Leo Tolstoy, without doubt, the man who would not lift his hand to compel. And Garrison, how do you explain the fact that he, with his hands tied behind his back, was the main motive power in that movement which has dwarfed all the rest of our history?

Let us beware, however, of imitations and travesties of non-resistance. It is no colorless, negative quality, and should have no taint of timidity, no suspicion of effeminacy. Let us be quite sure that we are above violence, and not beneath it. It is far better to fight to the death than to decline the combat from cowardice, whatever may be the name behind which we mask it. A soft answer may, too, be turned into an offense, if the wrong emphasis is placed upon it. An apology

---

<sup>1</sup> De Quincey in one of his articles on "Walking Stewart," the eccentric traveller, quotes the latter to the following effect: "It was generally supposed, he said, that the civilized traveller among savages might lay his account with meeting unprovoked violence, except in so far as he carried arms for his protection. Now he had found it by much the safer plan to carry no arms."

should not come too easily. It ought to be a sort of self-punishment which will make me hesitate another time before incurring my own displeasure. I have a friend who apologizes at the least provocation—"Oh, yes, to be sure. You are quite right. I am awfully sorry;" and in five minutes he will be doing the same thing again, and rattling off the same formula. An over-issue of apologies is like an over-issue of paper dollars; it makes them altogether valueless. The superficial readiness to forgive comes under the same category. I once read a letter in which the writer apparently inflicted an injury upon the recipient. He closed it glibly as follows: "I know you will resent this, but I forgive you freely beforehand." Of course, this coin was counterfeit on its face. Forgiveness and apology, from sinned against and sinning, must represent positive sympathy with the other party, or they really become affronts. Forgiveness is a sort of self-blame, too; you blame yourself for not having forgiven before—for having to forgive at all—for taking any notice whatever of the offense, and it is the lack of universal sympathy which makes either necessary. You find yourself out of tune, like a violin, and you proceed to screw yourself up to the proper pitch. The chief use of forgiveness and apology is to the for-giver and apologizer.