

MILLER McKIM AND PENNSYLVANIA ABOLITIONISM

BY IRA V. BROWN*

JUSTLY famous is the old Pennsylvania Abolition Society, founded in 1775 and, oddly enough, still going; its story has been written a number of times. Somewhat neglected, however, has been the history of Garrisonian abolitionism in this state, which found expression in the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1837 and disbanded in 1871. A useful avenue for approaching this subject is through the life of James Miller McKim (1810-1874). In 1833 he attended the convention which founded the American Anti-Slavery Society, and he worked for several years as one of its traveling agents. For over twenty years (1840-1862) he was a paid employee of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, serving essentially as its executive secretary and directing its day-to-day operations. For him the cause of the Negro was not a part-time hobby but a full-time vocation. It was, indeed, his bread and butter.

Generally known simply as "Miller McKim," he was born on a farm near Carlisle, Pennsylvania, on November 14, 1810. Second of the eight children of James and Catherine Miller McKim, he was of Scotch-Irish descent on his father's side and German on his mother's.¹ He was graduated from Dickinson College with the class of 1828. After studying medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, he underwent a religious conversion and decided to prepare for the ministry. He enrolled at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1831 and at Andover in 1832, but his studies were interrupted by the death of both his parents and his older brother

*Dr. Brown is professor of American history at the Pennsylvania State University and the author of various articles on the antislavery movement, including the paper, "Garrisonian Abolitionism in Pennsylvania," which he read at the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association in Allentown, October 19. He recently edited an edition of selected papers of Joseph Priestley.

¹In *Memoriam: Sarah A. McKim, 1813-1891* (New York, 1891), gives genealogical data for both McKim and his wife Sarah.

in rapid succession. He completed his theological preparation with the Reverend George Duffield, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Carlisle, who was soon to become a leader in the New School branch of his denomination.² The conservatively inclined presbytery of Carlisle denied McKim ordination and finally ousted Duffield from his pastorate. McKim was ordained by the presbytery of Wilmington, Delaware, in 1835. For a while he intended to go into foreign mission work, but even before his ordination he had become involved in the crusade against slavery.

A colored barber in Carlisle, John Peck by name, seems to have laid the groundwork for this development. Peck was an early subscriber to William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, and McKim first read this famous abolition journal in Peck's barber shop about 1832. He was immediately impressed by "its vigor of style and the boldness of its argument." Expatriation was then greatly in vogue as a possible solution to the slavery problem, and McKim fell into argument with the barber about its merits. Peck also lent him Garrison's important pamphlet, *Thoughts on African Colonization* (published in 1832), and McKim attributed his conversion to abolitionism mainly to the influence of this work.³

The following year one of his Andover Seminary friends, Daniel E. Jewett, called McKim's attention to the plans for forming a national antislavery society and urged him to attend the forthcoming convention to be held in Philadelphia for this purpose. "How do you know, my brother," Jewett wrote, "that this may not be the work to which you have, unconsciously, dedicated yourself?"⁴ The abolitionists of Carlisle, all of whom were Negroes except McKim, designated him as their representative. At age twenty-three he was the youngest of the sixty-some delegates from ten of the free states who attended this momentous meeting where the American Anti-Slavery Society was founded. The convention met in the Adelphi Building, on Fifth Street below Walnut, December 4-6, 1833. McKim's part in the proceedings, as befitted

² The best source of information on McKim's education is the excellent collection of his letters and papers at the New York Public Library. Other McKim letters may be found in the Samuel J. May Collection at Cornell University and in the Antislavery Collections of the Boston Public Library.

³ *Proceedings of the American Anti-Slavery Society at its Third Decade, Held in the City of Philadelphia, Dec. 3d and 4th, 1863* (New York, 1864), 31-33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

his youth, was a silent one, but the occasion made a deep impression on him, and it was here that he met a number of the reformers with whom he was to work closely during the next thirty years.

Almost a third of the delegates were Pennsylvanians. Included among these were several members of the old and conservative Pennsylvania Abolition Society, like Edwin P. Atlee and Thomas Shipley, as well as men who were to dominate the new and more radical Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society during the next generation, like James Mott, Robert Purvis, and Thomas Whitson. Roberts Vaux having turned down a special invitation to serve as presiding officer of the convention, Beriah Green was appointed instead. Lewis Tappan and John Greenleaf Whittier served as secretaries. Other prominent delegates were William Lloyd Garrison, Samuel J. May, and Elizur Wright, Jr. Women were not officially admitted as delegates, but Lucretia Mott set an important precedent for the cause of women's rights as well as abolitionism by making a speech, which was very favorably received.⁵

The convention adopted a constitution which declared that the society's object would be "the entire abolition of slavery in the United States." While admitting that each state had exclusive jurisdiction over slavery within its own borders, the society would attempt to convince citizens throughout the country that slavery was "a heinous crime in the sight of God" and that "the duty, safety, and best interests of all concerned, require its *immediate abandonment*, without expatriation." The society would also endeavor "in a constitutional way" to influence Congress to put an end to the domestic slave trade, to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia and other federal territories, and to deny admission to any new slave states. The delegates pledged themselves, in addition, to work toward removing public prejudice against free Negroes to the end that the latter might "share an equality with the whites of civil and religious privileges." But no resort to physical violence was to be countenanced for the accomplishment of any of these objectives.⁶ Also adopted at this convention was

⁵ Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict* (Boston, 1869), 91-92. See also John G. Whittier, "The Antislavery Convention of 1833," *Atlantic Monthly*, XXIII (February, 1874), 166-172.

⁶ *The Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society: with the Declaration of the National Anti-Slavery Convention at Philadelphia, December, 1833, etc.* (New York, 1838), 3-5.

a somewhat more provocative "Declaration of Sentiments," written by Garrison during an all-night session at his lodgings in the home of James McCrummell, a Negro dentist of Philadelphia. This document declared that "every American citizen who retains a human being in involuntary bondage as his property, is, according to Scripture (Ex. xxi: 16) a man-stealer."⁷

Returning to Carlisle, McKim continued to manage the family affairs for another year and a half. He gave occasional speeches on behalf of the abolitionist cause, but the movement was not yet sufficiently well-organized to afford him full-time employment. In the fall of 1835 he accepted the pastorate of a new Presbyterian church at Womelsdorf, near Reading, a position he held for a year, long enough to convert most of his congregation to the antislavery point of view.⁸ Meantime he had been in correspondence with Lucretia Mott, a Hicksite Quaker, concerning a gradually developing crisis in his Christian faith. He was in rebellion against orthodox theology, and Mrs. Mott encouraged his gropings toward a practical, ethical emphasis in religion.⁹ In the fall of 1836 Miller McKim gave up his pastorate and became one of the famous "Seventy" agents recruited and trained by the American Anti-Slavery Society under the leadership of Theodore Dwight Weld.¹⁰

The society was growing like a mushroom. The parent body eventually spawned over a thousand local affiliates, which by 1838 numbered perhaps a hundred thousand members. Within two years after its founding, it was raising a total of \$25,000 a year, and the figure ran to \$50,000 by the end of the decade, a substantial sum for those days. From the society's headquarters in New York City emanated a veritable flood of antislavery books, pamphlets, and broadsides, of which the most important single item was Weld's powerful tome, *Slavery As It Is* (1839). From the same source came thousands of copies of a weekly newspaper, the *Emancipator*, and several other antislavery journals published at different intervals for particular audiences. The so-

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6-9.

⁸ William Still, *The Underground Rail Road* (Philadelphia, 1872), 656. This work provides the best contemporary sketch of McKim's life and work.

⁹ Anna Davis Hallowell, ed., *James and Lucretia Mott: Life and Letters* (Boston, 1884), 116-120.

¹⁰ Dwight Lowell Dumond, *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), 183-189.

ciety sent out dozens of lecturing agents, generally clergymen as in McKim's case, to give speeches, distribute literature, organize branch societies, and raise money up and down the land—except in the South. Through its affiliates the society bombarded Congress and the state legislatures with antislavery petitions, provoking both the House and the Senate to adopt “gag rules” in 1836. The peak of this propaganda was reached in the season 1836-37, which was the time when McKim became an agent of the society.¹¹

Agents were carefully chosen by a special committee headed by Arthur Tappan, the wealthy New York merchant who was president of the society. They were instructed to report their work and their expense accounts monthly to Elizur Wright, the corresponding secretary. Unmarried agents such as McKim received eight dollars a week and traveling expenses, in which they were expected to practice the utmost frugality. They were instructed to insist principally on “the SIN OF SLAVERY” and to dwell upon the general desirability of emancipation rather than upon any specific plan for accomplishing this object. After arrival in a new community they were first to visit known antislavery advocates, then local ministers and other leading citizens; only after consultation with such persons were they to hold public meetings. Their main duty was to arouse sufficient enthusiasm to get a local antislavery society started.¹²

McKim worked for several years as an agent of the American Anti-Slavery Society, lecturing in many different areas of Pennsylvania and the adjacent counties of New Jersey and Delaware. It was not an easy life. Traveling accommodations were primitive, and public opinion was always unenthusiastic, often downright hostile to his cause. His meetings were sometimes interrupted by rowdies with fife and drum or barking hounds. In some places pickets paraded with signs attacking him as a tool of the British

¹¹ For an excellent account of the structure and functioning of the American Anti-Slavery Society see Janet Wilson, “The Early Anti-Slavery Propaganda,” *More Books: The Bulletin of the Boston Public Library*, XIX (November, 1944), 343-360 and (December, 1944), 393-405, and XX (February, 1945), 51-67. See also the *Annual Reports* of the society, Vols. I-VI (New York, 1834-1839).

¹² Copies of the *Particular Instructions to Agents* were attached to the agents' commissions. See, for example, McKim's commissions (dated August 10, 1836, and September 9, 1837) in the McKim Papers at the New York Public Library.

and an advocate of racial amalgamation. Tomatoes, eggs, garbage, and even stones were thrown at him. In some communities he was unable to hold meetings at all.¹³ When violence loomed at one of his lectures in Gettysburg, Thaddeus Stevens intervened to calm the crowd and restore order, threatening personally to prosecute the offenders "to the very door of the penitentiary."¹⁴

Despite the hardships involved, the campaign which McKim and other agents waged was crowned with considerable success. About a hundred antislavery societies were started in Pennsylvania within a period of two or three years. The culmination of this crusade was the organization of the Pennsylvania State Anti-Slavery Society on January 31 and February 1-3, 1837. This was the society with which McKim was to labor for over twenty years. In 1838 he paid a memorable visit to Washington, D. C., where he observed conditions in the slave marts and came away with the conviction that "no man can fully appreciate the horrors of American slavery."¹⁵ Later that year he formally abandoned the Presbyterian ministry, announcing that he could no longer give his assent to "the doctrine of a vicarious atonement."¹⁶

Oratory, whether in the interests of Presbyterianism or abolitionism, was not McKim's forte. In 1840 he became "publishing agent" of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, Eastern Branch, a position he found somewhat more congenial than itinerant lecturing. When the state society was first established, provision was made for two executive committees, one for the eastern part of the Commonwealth and one for the western. From the beginning the two branches went their separate ways. Anti-slavery sentiment was not well organized in the wilderness regions of central and northern Pennsylvania, and within a few years antislavery people in the western counties affiliated with the Ohio organization known as the Western Anti-Slavery Society. The Eastern Branch later took the name "Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society," though it always drew its support almost entirely from

¹³ See, for example, reports of his work in the *National Enquirer* (Philadelphia), March 18, 1837, and July 1, 1837.

¹⁴ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, September 12, 1839.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, March 15, 1838.

¹⁶ J. Miller McKim, *A Letter to the Presbytery of Wilmington, to Which Is Added, A Solemn Appeal to Presbyterians*, by Theo-Philanthropus (Pittsburgh, 1838), 3.

Philadelphia and the adjacent counties along the bend of the Delaware River.¹⁷

Philadelphia abolitionists raised \$40,000 to build the ill-fated Pennsylvania Hall to provide an auditorium for their meetings and office space for the society's work. On May 17, 1838, three days after its opening, it was ransacked and burned by a mob.¹⁸ Shortly thereafter, however, quarters were rented at 31 North Fifth Street, which during the next two decades was known as "the Anti-Slavery Office." This was where McKim worked during most of his career.

At this location the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society maintained a "book depository" and a reading room as well as editorial offices for its weekly newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*. McKim was appointed to operate the bookstore, where the public could buy all manner of antislavery literature as well as selected publications of general interest, and to serve as business manager of the *Freeman*. His beginning salary was \$600 a year.¹⁹ The executive committee of the society reported in May, 1841, that "the assiduous care and judicious management of its eminently well qualified agent" had much improved the condition of the book depository and had enlarged its usefulness. More prosperous than ever before, it had "nearly paid its own expenses."²⁰

The same could not be said for the *Freeman*, which did not have adequate support from advertisers. Antislavery papers nearly always lost money, and the Philadelphia journal was no exception. It had been started by Benjamin Lundy on August 3, 1836, under the title of *National Enquirer*. Most generally remembered in connection with the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Lundy was the pioneer in antislavery journalism, his work antedating that of William Lloyd Garrison.²¹ In March, 1837, the Pennsyl-

¹⁷ The history of this organization is dealt with at some length in William Cohen, "The Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society," M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1960. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania holds some manuscript minutes of the society as well as copies of its published reports.

¹⁸ [Samuel Webb], *History of Pennsylvania Hall, Which Was Destroyed by a Mob, on the 17th of May, 1838* (Philadelphia, 1838), 3-6.

¹⁹ The letter from E. M. Davis offering him this appointment, dated December 12, 1839, is in the McKim Papers at the New York Public Library.

²⁰ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, May 12, 1841.

²¹ See Joseph A. Del Porto, "A Study of American Antislavery Journals," Ph.D. thesis, Michigan State University (1953).

vania Anti-Slavery Society, shortly after its founding, adopted the *National Enquirer* as its official organ. A year later Lundy retired from the editorship on account of poor health (he died in 1839), and John Greenleaf Whittier succeeded him. At this point the name of the paper was changed to the *Pennsylvania Freeman*. Under this title and a succession of editors it continued, with some interruptions, until 1854, when it merged with the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, published in New York. It carried on the front page of every issue the famous quotation from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

The year 1840 was a landmark not only in McKim's professional career but in his personal life as well. In October of that year he married Sarah Allibone Speakman (1813-1891), the daughter of Micajah and Phoebe Speakman, Chester County Quakers of English descent.²² McKim's marriage seems to have been a very happy one. Sarah bore him two children. Their daughter Lucy (b. 1842) married Wendell Phillips Garrison, son of William Lloyd Garrison and literary editor of the *Nation* in post-Civil War years. Their son Charles Follen (b. 1847), named for a distinguished German refugee professor and abolitionist, became one of America's most successful architects.²³ In addition the McKims reared an adopted daughter, Annie, the child of a relative. Sarah A. McKim loyally supported her husband's efforts in the abolitionist crusade. Both of them were included in the intimate circle of reformers which clustered about James and Lucretia Mott.²⁴

The American Anti-Slavery Society underwent a serious schism in 1840 and was never the same after this date. There were many sources of discord. From the beginning there had been confusion and disagreement over interpretation of the slogan "immediate emancipation." Another important point of controversy was the question of whether the abolition cause could properly be pro-

²² *In Memoriam: Sarah A. McKim*, 8-9, 22.

²³ See Charles Moore, *The Life and Times of Charles Follen McKim* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1929).

²⁴ Otelia Cromwell, *Lucretia Mott* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 98.

moted through a new political party. A third was the relation of abolitionism to other reform movements, such as temperance, pacifism, and anti-sabbatarianism. Finally, there was the question of the proper role of women in the movement. In all these issues personality conflicts played a considerable part. In the end it was the refusal of the New York leaders to swallow Garrison's increasing radicalism which broke up the national society in 1840. The latter's anticlerical and disunionist views were extremely obnoxious to many important abolitionists. The schism was precipitated, however, by Garrison's packing the annual convention with his followers and forcing the appointment of several women to the executive committee. Arthur and Lewis Tappan, Henry B. Stanton, James G. Birney, and other conservative leaders promptly withdrew and formed the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. The collapse of the united front which had prevailed from 1833 to 1840 was a serious blow to the abolitionist movement.²⁵

The Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society remained loyal to the old organization after the split, and in the course of an internal struggle lasting about five years (1839-1844) it endorsed Garrisonian principles straight down the line. The question of equal rights for women gave the Pennsylvanians relatively little difficulty. By 1838 women were taking part in meetings of the society, and in later years Lucretia Mott, Sarah Pugh, Mary Grew, and other women served as officers. More difficult for many Pennsylvania abolitionists to accept was Garrison's hostility to political action. There was a free and full debate in society meetings and in the columns of the *Freeman* over the merits of the Liberty party. Miller McKim was among those supporting the third party idea from 1840 until 1844. Thomas Earle of Philadelphia, leader of the political abolitionists in this state, was James G. Birney's running mate in 1840.²⁶ In 1844 McKim was converted to the Garrisonian position, and the following year the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society in its annual meetings adopted strong resolutions opposing not only the third party principle but any participation by abolitionists in the American political

²⁵ The story of the schism and its aftermath is well told in Dumond's *Antislavery*, 282-304.

²⁶ See Edwin B. Bronner, *Thomas Earle as a Reformer* (Philadelphia, 1948).

process. The Constitution was denounced as a pro-slavery document, "an unholy league with oppression," and any voting or officeholding under it, any swearing of allegiance to it, was disavowed. The convention also endorsed the famous Garrisonian slogan of "No Union with Slaveholders."²⁷ Shortly thereafter an editorial in the *Freeman* declared that those persons who were unwilling to accept the decision of the society in favor of Garrison's disunionist views should withdraw from the organization.

The principle of "No Union with Slaveholders" was also applied in the fields of religion and economics. The Garrisonians urged Northern antislavery people to cease all fellowship with their Southern slaveholding brethren in national church organizations and to boycott all goods produced by slave labor. Both of these ideas were frequently endorsed in meetings of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society and in the columns of the *Freeman*. Miller McKim served for a time as an agent of the American Free Produce Association, which attempted to sell sugar and textile products originating in nonslaveholding areas.²⁸ Back in the 1820's James Mott for reasons of conscience had abandoned the cotton importing business and had become a wool merchant instead. Florence Kelley, the famous social worker, recalled that her great-aunt Sarah Pugh, who was treasurer of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society for many years, never took sugar and never wore any cotton clothing because of the connection of these popular commodities with slavery.²⁹

After the showdown of 1845 the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society became essentially a closed corporation. Its membership, consisting largely of Hicksite Quakers, averaged about fifteen hundred, but its proceedings were dominated by about two dozen persons who served as officers year in and year out. Of these the most important, of course, were the well-known Lucretia Mott and her husband James, who was president of the society for fourteen years. Several others, however, are worth noting among McKim's close associates in the cause. The editor of the *Freeman* at the time when McKim began his work as publishing agent was

²⁷ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, August 28, 1845.

²⁸ See Ruth K. Nueremberger, *The Free Produce Movement: A Quaker Protest against Slavery* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1942).

²⁹ Florence Kelley, "My Philadelphia," *The Survey* (Graphic Number), I.VII (October 1, 1926), 54.

Charles C. Burleigh, who had likewise traveled under the auspices of the American Anti-Slavery Society in the 1830's. Burleigh was a gifted orator and debater, especially famous for his unconventional appearance—slovenly attire, a long sandy-colored beard, and flowing ringlets that hung down over his shoulders.³⁰ Much preferring the lecturing field to desk work, Burleigh time and again left McKim to run the editorial as well as the business side of the paper. In 1845 McKim became editor in name as well as in fact, but he was assisted in the work by Mary Grew, and the editorship was later held by Oliver Johnson and by Cyrus M. Burleigh, brother of Charles C. Sarah Pugh was treasurer for twenty years. Two Negroes played an important part in the society. One, Robert Purvis, the beneficiary of a substantial inheritance from his wealthy English father, was president or vice president for some time. The other, William Still, entered the society's service as a clerk in McKim's office and later became well known for his book on the underground railroad.³¹

The work of the society consisted largely of a many-sided propaganda campaign, designed primarily to persuade *Northern* people to stop condoning and supporting the institution of slavery. The executive committee met every week or two to plan strategy and to evaluate the progress of the cause. Annual meetings of the membership and interested friends were held in different communities, and resolutions were adopted endorsing the Garrisonian principles: slavery as a mortal sin, immediate emancipation without compensation, equal rights for Negroes, no voting or office-holding under the existing Constitution, boycott of slave produce, Christian separation from slaveholders, resistance to the fugitive slave laws, etc. Miller McKim generally served on the business committee of the conventions, and his wife contributed by singing antislavery songs. Annual reports of the executive committee, usually written by McKim, summarized and interpreted not only the operations of the society but also national developments relating to slavery and abolition.³² Special lecturing programs were

³⁰ May, *Some Recollections*, 62-66.

³¹ Larry Gara, "William Still and the Underground Railroad," *Pennsylvania History*, XXVIII (January, 1961), 33-44.

³² A few of these reports, but by no means all of them, were published in pamphlet form. The others were printed in the *Freeman* or the *Standard*.

undertaken at intervals. Petitions were circulated and presented at Harrisburg and Washington. The bookstore and reading room at "the Anti-Slavery Office" made available all kinds of anti-slavery publications—books, pamphlets, newspapers, prints, broadsides, etc. The weekly *Pennsylvania Freeman* carried a great variety of news, editorial articles, and correspondence relating to slavery, the Negro, and abolitionism in all their various ramifications. It was printed by Merrihew and Thompson, No. 7 Carter's Alley, and its circulation averaged about fifteen hundred copies. After its merger with the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, the Garrisonian organ in New York City, in 1854, Miller McKim became "Philadelphia correspondent" of the *Standard*.

The society raised on the average about \$5,000 per year, the bulk of which came from the sale of its publications. A considerable sum came, of course, from individual contributions. There were no dues, but pledges were solicited at the annual meeting. The third major source of revenue was receipts from sales of "useful and fancy articles" at the annual fairs sponsored by the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society from 1835 to 1861, which amounted to approximately \$1,000 a year and which were donated to the state society. Sarah McKim, Lucretia Mott, Mary Grew, Sarah Pugh, Harriet Purvis, Gertrude Burleigh, and several dozen other ladies came together for weekly sewing sessions all year long to prepare articles for the sale, which was held for several days just before Christmas. The fairs had a considerable propaganda value aside from the substantial revenue which was raised.³³ Expenditures of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society went mainly to printing costs and to salaries for traveling lecturers, for the editors of the *Freeman*, for Miller McKim as publishing agent and later as corresponding secretary (his salary eventually rose to \$1,000 a year), and for William Still as office clerk.

The chief excitement in the society after 1845 concerned the operations of the underground railroad, in which many of its members were deeply involved. Philadelphia was one of the few places where the business of helping fugitive slaves to escape was

³³ See N. Orwin Rush, "Lucretia Mott and the Philadelphia Antislavery Fairs," *Friends Historical Association Bulletin*, XXXV (1946), 69-75, and the annual reports of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society.

well organized, under the direction of an efficient "Vigilance Committee," of which McKim was a member. This group assisted about a hundred fugitives per year during the 1850's.³⁴ Probably McKim's most memorable experience in this connection was the arrival at "the Anti-Slavery Office" in 1849 of Henry "Box" Brown, a fugitive slave from Richmond, Virginia, who had himself crated in a wooden box and shipped to Philadelphia via an express company. It was an exciting moment when McKim rapped on the box and tremblingly asked, "All right?" Those present breathed a sigh of relief when the response came, "All right, sir!" Hurriedly the box was opened, and the fugitive arose and said with dignity, "Good morning, gentlemen!" It seemed a miracle that he had made the journey without being either suffocated or detected. After breakfast and a bath at McKim's home, he was taken to the Motts' residence, where he was lodged overnight before being sent on to Boston.³⁵ McKim took a keen interest not only in helping fugitives but also in the various court cases growing out of resistance to the fugitive slave law, such as the notorious treason trials resulting from the Christiana Riot of 1851.

Probably the most trying assignment Miller McKim ever had was that of helping Mrs. John Brown get her husband's body safely back to their home in New York State after his execution in 1859. Following Brown's imprisonment, Thomas Wentworth Higginson and others of his backers were interested in freeing him through storming the jail at Charlestown. Higginson persuaded Mary Brown to travel to Virginia to urge her husband to consent to this plan. McKim was asked to escort her from Philadelphia to Baltimore, but there word was received that Brown did not want her to come, and she was invited to spend the remaining days of her husband's life with various Philadelphia abolitionists, including the McKims and the Motts. During that time she obtained permission from Governor Henry A. Wise of Virginia to visit her husband just prior to his execution and to take custody of his body. Miller and Sarah McKim and Hector

³⁴ In this connection see Larry Gara's excellent revisionist study, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), esp. pp. 104-105.

³⁵ McKim to Samuel Rhoads, March 29, 1849, McKim Papers, New York Public Library. Other accounts of this episode may be found in Hallowell, ed., *James and Lucretia Mott*, 310-311, and in Still, *Underground Railroad*, 81-84.

Tyndale, a young Philadelphia attorney, accompanied her on the sad journey. The Virginia authorities insisted that the body be removed at once, without any preparation for burial, and it was planned to obtain undertaking services in Philadelphia. Mob disorders threatened there, however, and it was decided that the body would have to be sent on immediately. The entire journey to North Elba lasted several days, and the funeral was not held until December 8, 1859, six days after the hanging. Miller McKim accompanied Mary Brown and her dead husband to her home and, with Wendell Phillips, spoke at the funeral. While he had not known Brown personally, he thought that John Brown and his band were "all martyrs in a holy cause."³⁶

Like other Garrisonians, McKim rejoiced in the secession of South Carolina and opposed any compromises designed to keep the slave states in the Union. Garrison and his followers had been preaching separation of North from South for fifteen years. Now the South itself had taken action and relieved the North from the obligation of enforcing obnoxious proslavery provisions of the Constitution.³⁷ After the firing on Fort Sumter, however, McKim promptly came to the side of Union. "A virtuous war is better than a corrupt peace," he declared, and he thought this was a virtuous war if there ever was one. For McKim the issue of the war was the supremacy of slavery on the one hand or the overthrow of slavery on the other. "The armies of slavery are to encounter, in battle array, the hosts of freedom; and may God defend the right!"³⁸

Early in 1862 Miller McKim resigned his position with the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society and enlisted in the new cause of freedmen's aid. (The society itself, however, continued to exist until 1870, when the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment was interpreted as the final step in Negro emancipation.) Late in 1861 Union forces had occupied the Sea Islands of South Carolina, and refugees from slavery began to swarm to this haven of freedom, creating a serious relief problem. Not only were food, clothing, medicine, seed, implements, and other supplies needed,

³⁶ *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, December 17, 1859. See also Oswald Garrison Villard, *John Brown, 1800-1859* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1910), 511-513, 548-549, 561-562.

³⁷ *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, December 29, 1860.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, April 20, 1861.

but also labor superintendents and teachers. Freedmen's aid societies were soon organized in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. McKim became general secretary of the Philadelphia Port Royal Relief Association in March of 1862. This was the first of several freedmen's aid groups with which he was connected. In June of that year he and his daughter Lucy paid a personal visit to the Sea Islands to observe conditions among the ex-slaves. Speaking in Philadelphia on his return, he paid tribute to the freedmen's "industry and sobriety" and appealed for further assistance to help them adjust to their new status.³⁹

McKim was more sympathetic to Lincoln and his problems as President than were many other abolitionists. He hailed the Emancipation Proclamation as "the great event of the century on this continent." It was "an authoritative announcement of the doom of slavery, with the appointment of a day for the system's execution."⁴⁰ "The 1st of January, 1863," he remarked a little later, "will be set down by the future historian as the complement of the 4th of July, 1776. What the Declaration of Independence was to the war of that period, the Proclamation of Freedom, by Abraham Lincoln, is to this war."⁴¹ In the spring of 1864, after an interview with the President, he noted that Lincoln was "in advance of his party on the question of negro suffrage." He had seen some of the correspondence between the President and the authorities in New Orleans, and it was "greatly to Mr. Lincoln's credit as a friend to the black man."⁴²

Miller McKim believed in equal rights not only for Southern Negroes but for those in the North as well. He had long denounced Pennsylvania's disfranchisement of her colored citizens under the constitution of 1838. He was a leader in the efforts to obtain for Philadelphia Negroes equal access to the street railways of that city during the Civil War period. This objective was not obtained, however, until the passage of a state law on the subject in 1867, and the suffrage was not won until the adoption

³⁹ J. Miller McKim, *The Freedmen of South Carolina* (Philadelphia, 1862), 9.

⁴⁰ *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 4, 1862.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, January 17, 1863.

⁴² W. P. and F. J. Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, 4 vols. (New York, 1885-1889), IV, 122.

of the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.⁴³

In 1865 McKim helped to raise the funds which made possible the founding of the *Nation*, soon to become one of America's most distinguished magazines. His motives were twofold, public and private. The one was to obtain a strong journal which would advocate the interests of the freedmen. The other was to provide an editorial position for his prospective son-in-law, Wendell Phillips Garrison, who was about to marry Lucy McKim.⁴⁴ The younger Garrison, a recent graduate of Harvard, was to serve for many years as literary editor of the *Nation*.⁴⁵ He and Lucy made their home at Llewellyn Park, West Orange, New Jersey. There Miller and Sarah McKim soon joined them. In 1866 McKim became corresponding secretary of the American Freedmen's Union Commission, with headquarters in New York. This group played an important part in the freedmen's aid movement until 1869, when it disbanded.⁴⁶ His health gradually failing, McKim spent his last five years in quiet retirement at Llewellyn Park, where he died on June 13, 1874, at the age of sixty-three. William Lloyd Garrison, Lucretia Mott, and the Reverend William Henry Furness spoke at his funeral.⁴⁷

Though the cause of the slave had engaged his attention for more than thirty years, McKim wrote his son in 1867, he had "never for a day grown tired of it."⁴⁸ The *Nation* remarked on the occasion of his death that he had enjoyed the supreme satisfaction of "feeling at the end that his life had been on the whole what, were he to begin it over again, he would wish to make it."⁴⁹

James Miller McKim does not fit the common stereotype of abolitionists as neurotics and fanatics. There was nothing eccentric or bizarre about his appearance or his personality. In modern terms he seems to have been "well adjusted" both in his work and in his family life. While technically he must be labelled a Garrisonian,

⁴³ See Ira V. Brown, "Pennsylvania and the Rights of the Negro, 1865-1887," *Pennsylvania History*, XXVIII (January, 1961), 45-57.

⁴⁴ Rollo Ogden, ed., *Life and Letters of Edwin Lawrence Godkin*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1907), I, 236-240.

⁴⁵ Sketch in *Nation*, LXXXIV (March 7, 1907), 217-218.

⁴⁶ See Ira V. Brown, "Lyman Abbott and Freedmen's Aid, 1865-1869," *Journal of Southern History*, XV (February, 1949), 22-38. Abbott and McKim were co-workers in this cause.

⁴⁷ New York *Tribune*, June 16 and 17, 1874.

⁴⁸ Moore, *Charles Follen McKim*, 42.

⁴⁹ *Nation*, XVIII (June 18, 1874), 395.

he was not the doctrinaire that Garrison was, and he worked harmoniously with all kinds of people. Quiet, reserved, business-like, and efficient, he applied a fundamentally conservative temperament to the prosecution of a radical cause. Oliver Johnson, the well-known abolitionist editor, referred to McKim as a "prudent rash man," who combined "an earnest zeal with great wisdom in administration."⁵⁰ William Still, his co-worker in "the Anti-Slavery Office," praised his "caution, sound judgment, and mental balance."⁵¹ Optimistic and steady by nature, McKim seems never to have doubted that the antislavery cause would eventually triumph. While in his early years he had moved from medicine to the ministry and from the ministry to social reform, in all three of these professions there is a common concern for human welfare. While he had abandoned the church, he did not feel that he had abandoned religion. The abolitionist crusade, he once declared, was "in a high degree and in the best sense of the word, a religious movement." It had been started by "men who walked with God," and on the whole it had always been conducted "in a truly religious spirit."⁵²

⁵⁰ Oliver Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times* (Boston, 1880), 323.

⁵¹ Still, *Underground Rail Road*, 659.

⁵² *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, November 3, 1860.