An Antislavery Agent:
C. C. Burleigh in Pennsylvania,
1836-1837

The date was May 8, 1850. The place was the Broadway Tabernacle in New York City. The occasion was the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society under the guidance of its president, William Lloyd Garrison. The speeches were being interrupted by rowdies. "Shave that tall Christ!" yelled one. "Shave that tall Christ and make a wig for Garrison." The tall "Christ" was Charles Calistus Burleigh (commonly called "C. C."), who wore a full beard and whose sandy hair hung down over his shoulders in long ringlets in a period when such styles were not fashionable. (Garrison, on the other hand, was bald-headed.) One of the most colorful of the abolitionists and one of the most effective, Burleigh was an orator "unsurpassed in fluency, logical strictness, and fervor." One of his hearers reported that he could "hold an audience in breathless silence for several hours." He did his most notable work as an antislavery agent in Pennsylvania during the nine months from December 1836 through August 1837.

C. C. Burleigh was born in the town of Plainfield, Windham County, Connecticut, on November 3, 1810. He was of old New England stock. His father, Rinaldo Burleigh, was descended from John Burleigh of Union, Connecticut, who came from England about

1 Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children (New York, 1969; originally published 1885-1889), III, 298. The author wishes to acknowledge financial assistance provided by the Liberal Arts College Fund for Research of The Pennsylvania State University in the preparation of this article.
2 Ibid., I, 476.
3 Harrisburg Chronicle, quoted in the National Enquirer (Philadelphia), Feb. 25, 1837.
4 Gertrude K. Burleigh (Mrs. C. C.) to Samuel May, Jr., Nov. 14, 1857, Manuscripts Division, Boston Public Library. This letter gives a good sketch of Burleigh's early life.
1700. His mother, Lydia Bradford, was a descendant of Governor William Bradford of Plymouth. Rinaldo Burleigh was born in Eastford, Connecticut, in 1774. He attended a school taught by one John Adams in the town of Canterbury and graduated from Yale in 1803. He lost an arm in his youth and went blind in middle age. Married in 1805 and trained as a “classical scholar,” he taught in several academies, including the one at Plainfield, but later retired to farming. For many years he was a deacon of the Congregational Church of Plainfield and served as the first president of the Anti-Slavery Society of Windham County.

Rinaldo and Lydia Burleigh had six sons and two daughters. One son and one daughter died in infancy. Charles was the fourth child. Four of the sons distinguished themselves in literary work and social reform: Charles Calistus, William (b. 1812), Cyrus Moses (b. 1820), and George Shepard (b. 1821). Rinaldo did not have the resources to send them to college, but he taught them in his academy, and they completed their education on their own. At the age of twenty, C. C. chose to prepare himself in law, studying first with Zachariah Eddy of Middleboro, Massachusetts. He taught school several months each year to help defray his expenses, and also assisted for a while in conducting an Anti-Masonic newspaper called We the People, published in Plymouth and devoted partly to antislavery. Returning to Plainfield, he completed his course of legal study with a local judge named Eaton. When he was admitted to the bar in January 1835, his examiners pronounced him the best prepared candidate whom they had known in Windham County. While he did not pursue a career in this field, his legal training was of great help to him in his work as an antislavery agent.

Burleigh was drawn directly into the antislavery crusade as a result of the controversy over Prudence Crandall’s school for girls

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5 Charles Burleigh, Genealogy of the Burley or Burleigh Family of America (Portland, 1880), 129-133.
7 Sketches of these men, excluding Cyrus, are included in the Dictionary of American Biography, III, 284-286.
8 Gertrude K. Burleigh to Samuel May, Jr., Nov. 14, 1857.
in Canterbury, Connecticut, in 1833. When Miss Crandall admitted a local black girl to her school, the white children were withdrawn by their parents. She then recruited enough black girls from other communities to fill her school. For this she was subjected to horrendous persecution. The state of Connecticut passed a law prohibiting the operation of schools enrolling out-of-state blacks and the teaching of local blacks without the consent of the town selectmen. Miss Crandall was jailed and tried under the terms of this law. Finally her school was destroyed. She soon after married and moved to Illinois.\(^\text{10}\)

The young Burleigh, then only twenty-three years of age, wrote an article denouncing the actions of the Connecticut authorities for a New York newspaper called *The Genius of Temperance*, which came to the attention of the Reverend Samuel J. May, a Unitarian minister of Brooklyn, Connecticut, and a prominent abolitionist. With financial support from the wealthy New York philanthropist Arthur Tappan, May determined to publish a newspaper in his town devoted to the cause of equal rights for blacks.\(^\text{11}\) Deciding to ask Burleigh, whom he had heard speak on African colonization, to edit this paper, May hastened to the Burleighs' family farm, where he was told that Charles was busy in the fields. It was the haying season. Since May insisted that his business was more important than haying, Burleigh finally appeared, in work clothes and unshaven. "Nevertheless," May recalled later, "I do not believe that Samuel of old saw, in the ruddy son of Jesse, as he came up from the sheepfold, the man whom the Lord would have him anoint, more clearly than I saw in C. C. Burleigh the man whom I should choose to be my assistant in that emergency. So soon as I had told him what I wanted of him his eye kindled as if eager for the conflict."\(^\text{12}\)

They made an arrangement to supply Burleigh's place on his father's farm, and a few days later he moved to Brooklyn to assist May in editing the new paper, *The Unionist*. Its first number appeared on July 25, 1833. From the beginning Burleigh did most of the work, "and it was soon acknowledged by the public that the

\(^{10}\) The best account of this episode is Edmund Fuller, *Prudence Crandall: An Incident of Racism in Nineteenth-Century Connecticut* (Wesleyan, Conn., 1971).

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 68.

\(^{12}\) Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict* (Boston, 1869), 63–64.
young editor wielded a powerful weapon.”13 His paper, published for a little more than a year, stressed the supremacy of the Federal Union over the states and advocated equality of civil rights throughout the nation.14

About the time Burleigh passed his bar exams, early in 1835, he left his editorial work to become an antislavery lecturer. The Reverend May had received a letter from a “Dr. Farnsworth” of Groton, Massachusetts, the president of the Middlesex County Anti-Slavery Society, inquiring urgently for a capable lecturer whose services could be obtained as the general agent of that society. With this letter in hand, he went to see Charles Burleigh. After complimenting him on the results of his bar examinations, May said, “Now I have already a most important case, in which to engage your services,” and showed him Dr. Farnsworth’s letter. After less than an hour’s consideration, Burleigh replied: “This is not what I expected or intended, but it is what I ought to do. I will accept the invitation.”15 Then and there he said farewell to what were probably bright prospects in the legal profession, and for the next thirty years he gave himself unstintingly to the crusade against slavery.

Burleigh was with William Lloyd Garrison in Boston on October 21, 1835, when the latter was seized by a mob and dragged through the streets with a rope around his neck. Burleigh himself was not attacked, perhaps because he was relatively unknown, and by quick thinking and clever strategy he was able to prevent the office of The Liberator from being ransacked by the mob.16 Garrison was taken into custody by the police and lodged in the city jail for his own protection. A few days later he and his family went to his wife’s home until feelings in Boston quieted down. During Garrison’s absence Burleigh helped to keep The Liberator going and wrote a considerable number of articles for it.17

By this time abolitionism had become a nationally organized movement under the aegis of the American Anti-Slavery Society and its numerous affiliates. The society was established by a convention

13 Ibid., 64.
14 Fuller, Prudence Crandall, 71.
15 May, Some Recollections, 65.
17 Ibid., 39–45.
which met in Philadelphia in December 1833. The sixty-some delegates who were present at that fateful meeting 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." 18

Arthur Tappan was chosen president of the society, and Elizur Wright, Jr., corresponding secretary. "The national Society is now organized," Wright wrote on December 31, 1833; "the question is whether it shall live." "We want a number of faithful mighty agents, in whose persons the Society shall live and breathe and wax strong before the public. We must have men who will electrify the mass wherever they move,—and they must move on no small scale." 19

Over the course of the next five or six years the society was able to enlist dozens of agents to do its work. The movement was seen as fundamentally religious, and most agents had previously been clergymen; in this respect Burleigh was exceptional. "Jesus Christ has a right to any man whom he pleases to call," Elizur Wright wrote to one prospective agent, "and we trust that you will regard this as His call." 20 Agents traversed the length and breadth of the Northeastern and Middle Western states, speaking daily or even twice daily, organizing local antislavery societies, and raising money to support the movement. The parent body eventually spawned over

20 Elizur Wright, Jr. to Amos A. Phelps, Dec. 31, 1833, copy in Wright Papers, Library of Congress.
a thousand local affiliates, which by 1838 could claim perhaps a hundred thousand members. Within two years after its founding, it was raising $25,000 a year, a figure which rose to $50,000 by the end of the decade, a substantial sum for that period. From the society's headquarters in New York City emanated a flood of antislavery books, pamphlets, and broadsides, as well as thousands of copies of a weekly newspaper, The Emancipator, and several other antislavery journals published at different intervals for particular audiences. 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" prohibiting the discussion of such memorials. The peak of this propaganda was reached in 1836, which was the year in which C. C. Burleigh became an agent of the American Anti-Slavery Society.21

A special committee had been set up to select agents and supervise their work.22 It was headed by Arthur Tappan, the society's president. Agents were chosen with care. Behind each appointment lay an investigation into the candidate's personality, intellect, and character. "Sincerity, knowledge of the subject, and circumspection" were not enough, Wright wrote in connection with the suggested appointment of one candidate; the question was whether he had "the efficiency, the vis vividia, the galvanism that can reanimate the dead as well as the steadfastness that can withstand the onset of the living."23 Soon after the society was founded, Philadelphia abolitionists requested that Evan Lewis be commissioned as an agent, but the agency committee found that "his talents for public speaking were not sufficient" and declined to appoint him.24 C. C. Burleigh's name first appears in the committee's minutes for February 10, 1836, when he was appointed to lecture in Connecticut. Two months later he was commissioned to work in Rhode Island.25

22 The notebook of this committee, including the minutes of its meetings for the period 1833-1840, is preserved in the Manuscripts Division of the Boston Public Library.
23 Elizur Wright, Jr. to Theodore Dwight Weld, Weld-Grimké Letters, I, 204.
24 Elizur Wright, Jr. to Amos A. Phelps, Mar. 3, 1834, copy in Wright Papers.
Agents were instructed to send reports of their work along with their expense accounts to the New York office. These reports were often published in *The Emancipator*. Unmarried agents such as Burleigh were paid eight dollars a week and traveling expenses, in which they were expected to practice the utmost frugality. Burleigh’s expenses for one three-month period of work in Pennsylvania came to $9.91.\textsuperscript{26} Agents 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.\textsuperscript{27}

“The good cause goes steadily on,” Elizur Wright reported on July 31, 1836. “What it most wants now is a greater number of lecturers.”\textsuperscript{28} Under the leadership of Theodore Dwight Weld, the American Anti-Slavery Society in the fall of 1836 undertook to recruit and train “The Seventy” to serve as antislavery agents. This idealized number was taken from the Bible; Moses had gathered seventy elders, and Jesus had commissioned seventy apostles to spread the Gospel. The number who actually served was probably somewhat less than this figure. The new recruits, as well as some who had already been active in the cause, were brought to New York City on November 15 for two weeks of indoctrination under Weld’s leadership.\textsuperscript{29} Among those who attended was C. C. Burleigh. “We held three meetings a day,” William Lloyd Garrison reported, “scarcely allowing ourselves time to eat . . . .” Questions discussed included the following: “What is slavery? What is immediate emancipation? Why don’t you go to the south? The slaves if emancipated, would overrun the north. The consequences of emancipation to the

\textsuperscript{26} *Ibid.*, May 17, 1837, p. 77.

\textsuperscript{27} A copy of the *Particular Instructions to Agents* may be found in the James Miller McKim Papers at the New York Public Library.

\textsuperscript{28} Elizur Wright, Jr. to Elizur Wright, Sr., July 31, 1836, copy in Wright Papers.

At the conclusion of this convention, the American Anti-Slavery Society dispatched ten agents to Pennsylvania. Several members of this group converged on Philadelphia during the first week of December 1836. One of them was C. C. Burleigh, then twenty-six years of age.

A few months earlier Benjamin Lundy, the pioneer antislavery journalist, had settled in Philadelphia and begun publication of the *National Enquirer and Constitutional Advocate of Universal Liberty* in order to "plead the cause of the oppressed" and "promote the ends of justice and equality of human rights." More specifically, his purpose was to prevent the annexation of Texas as a slave state. On December 3, 1836, Lundy took notice in his paper of the arrival of the agents of the American Anti-Slavery Society in the Keystone State:

We have the pleasure to state, that several lecturers in addition to those heretofore engaged, (ten in all,) are now travelling in different parts of Pennsylvania, with the view of disseminating information, inculcating our principles, and awakening the public attention to the importance of the Anti-Slavery cause. They are all commissioned by the National Society.

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Some of them have engaged for a definite period—others are enlisted for—"during the war." 

Two weeks later the paper reported that the agents for Pennsylvania were "on their tour." They had several meetings in Philadelphia, which were well attended. "No rioting—no attempts at mobbing." Lundy gave much of the credit for this fact to Governor Joseph Ritner, who had included a plea for free discussion of the slavery issue in his recent annual message to the General Assembly. In the issue of December 31, 1836, the National Enquirer took special note of the work of Charles C. Burleigh, who had been "a short time in this city" and had delivered seven lectures, all except the first and second to "overflowing houses." Since leaving Philadelphia he had lectured more than thirty times in rural communities in the counties adjacent to Philadelphia. Lundy remarked that Burleigh was "an able and popular speaker—in fact he is a 'thunderer'." He was not only drawing large audiences, wherever sufficient advance notice of his lectures was given, but he was also "generally and emphatically greeted with the expressive approbation of his hearers." His lectures averaged nearly two hours in length—"every minute of which is usefully employed." Lundy advised all proslavery advocates, especially "ultra colonizationists" to keep away from his meetings unless they were prepared to be converted to abolitionism.

Leaders of the American Anti-Slavery Society felt that the best prospects for their cause lay in rural areas. "Let the great cities alone," wrote Theodore Dwight Weld: "they must be burned down by back fires. The springs to touch in order to move them lie in the country." Bearing this advice in mind, C. C. Burleigh left Philadelphia after only one week and headed for the outlying districts, where he concentrated his efforts for the ensuing year. On December 9, 1836, he took a train for West Chester. There he addressed "a few people" who came together that evening after two or three hours

33 National Enquirer, Dec. 3, 1836.
34 Ibid., Dec. 17, 1836.
35 The text of this message may be found in Pennsylvania Archives, Fourth Series, Papers of the Governors, VI (Harrisburg, 1900), 282–333; see especially 290–292.
36 National Enquirer, Dec. 31, 1836.
notice. West Chester had a small antislavery society, but Burleigh found the majority of its people opposed—"some of them very bitterly"—to abolitionist doctrines and measures. Something had been done in the way of distributing antislavery publications, and one of the two local newspapers was friendly to the cause, "but on the whole not much has been accomplished in this place as yet." 

On December 10 Burleigh walked from West Chester to Kennett Square, a distance of about twelve miles, where he was welcomed and entertained by Dr. Bartholomew Fussell, a Quaker physician who was a veteran abolitionist and had been present at the convention which organized the American Anti-Slavery Society three years earlier. Burleigh spoke in the Friends' meeting house on two successive days. The building was well filled for both lectures. At the second one an intruder appeared and "tried to make a disturbance," but was removed by a constable who was present for the lecture. At Dr. Fussell's home Burleigh talked with a Maryland judge who was sympathetic to the antislavery movement and invited him to lecture in that state.

Returning briefly to Philadelphia, he led a discussion at a meeting of the Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society. It was a cold, rainy night, but the hall was crowded, and many were turned away. On that occasion, as was to be the case often in his meetings, he engaged in a debate with an advocate of the program of the American Colonization Society for deporting American blacks to Africa. The discussion lasted until 11:00 P.M., "without any appearance of impatience on the part of the audience." He was assured that he had made a favorable impression.

On December 14 he again took a train for West Chester. On his way he fell into conversation with a Baptist clergyman who was an abolitionist and a Presbyterian clergyman who was a colonizationist. The latter "sang the common dolorous tune of the danger of emancipation," in reply to which Burleigh "urged some considera-
tions showing its safety, and cited various facts in support of my opinions." At West Chester he had a much larger audience than he had five days earlier. On this occasion a stone was thrown through the window, but fortunately no one was hurt. With the help of friends of the cause he traveled sixty miles by carriage over frozen roads to several other communities in Chester County, lecturing eleven times between December 16 and 21. The last two lectures were at Kimberton. There he met his bride-to-be, Gertrude Kimber, the daughter of Emmor Kimber, a Quaker minister who operated a boarding school for girls from 1818 to 1838. She and Burleigh were married in 1842.

In some of the places Burleigh visited antislavery societies already existed; in others there was talk of forming such groups. He was advised that it was best not to try to form societies at the meetings he addressed or under his guidance, but to leave that to be done by local people after his departure. Burleigh was "decidedly the ablest and most talented lecturer I ever heard speak on the subject," one Chester County man wrote. "He has wrought almost miraculously on the public sentiment of our neighborhood." While nine-tenths of those who came to hear him were opposed to abolitionism, by the time his addresses ended "there was not one in twenty who had not changed their sentiments and become proselytes to immediate abolitionism."

Burleigh appears to have spent Christmas with friends in Philadelphia. On December 30 he left the city and took a train to Paoli, where he was met and driven four or five miles to Willistown for an evening lecture to "a schoolhouse full of people," who gave him an "attentive hearing for three hours or more."

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42 Ibid.
43 On the Kimber family see R. C. Smedley, History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties of Pennsylvania (Lancaster, 1883), 194-205. Gertrude's sister Abigail (Abby) was active in the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and was one of the female delegates denied seats in the World's Anti-Slavery Convention which met in London in 1840.
44 The Burleighs were to be the parents of three children. Burleigh, Genealogy, 141.
45 The Emancipator, Jan. 5, 1837.
47 C. C. Burleigh to Benjamin Lundy, Jan. 11, 1837, ibid., Jan. 21, 1837.
traveled to Sadsbury in Lancaster County, where a moderate-sized schoolhouse was filled despite only a few hours' notice of the meeting. On January 1, 1837, in the same town he addressed a "goodly assembly" in the Friends' meetinghouse both afternoon and evening. Sadsbury was the home of a prominent abolitionist, Lindley Coates, who took Burleigh by carriage on a week's tour of Lancaster and Chester Counties. During this trip he lectured eleven times, averaging more than two hours for each lecture. At Strasburg the trustees of the schoolhouse closed it against him, an action which he thought increased interest in his cause. At Paradise a son of the governor of Maryland was in the audience, but he gave Burleigh no argument. At Wasteland a drunken man disturbed the meeting. At Lower Octoraro he debated with a Presbyterian minister. Here Burleigh was assisted by a Methodist minister who had recently been converted from colonizationism to abolitionism.

On Monday, January 9, Burleigh left Lindley Coates and went with James Fulton, Jr., to East Fallowfield, where he addressed large audiences in the Friends' meetinghouse both morning and evening. He thought this was evidence that the "good seed of Abolitionism" was falling on good ground, where it would "bring forth an abundant harvest." His next stop was at Lampeter, where he distributed antislavery publications, which people took eagerly and with "a seeming desire to know something more concerning this sect that is everywhere spoken against, than can be learned from the proslavery press, and the lips of political demagogues. . . ." Writing to Lundy on January 11, he reported that since leaving Philadelphia on December 30, he had traveled more than 180 miles, had lectured nineteen times, and talked for more than forty-two hours. Writing to Elizur Wright, Jr., on the 12th, he reported that he had a severe cold and was "so hoarse, that it is doing penance to speak an hour continuously. . . ." Despite this handicap, he continued to lecture. At Strasburg stones and eggs were thrown at the

48 On Lindley Coates, see Smedley, *Underground Railroad*, 84–89, and *passim*.
49 Burleigh to Lundy, Jan. 11, 1837, Jan. 21, 1837, in *National Enquirer*.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 The Emancipator, Jan. 26, 1837.
carriage in which he was riding. One of the Lancaster papers reported that sound eggs were in demand at two cents while rotten ones were going for four cents. He lectured at York Springs in Adams County on January 14. A member of his audience observed that he had stated the objections to abolition and then answered them "in such a manner that I know not how any one could refute him."

Looking back on his first six weeks of work in Pennsylvania, Burleigh noted that he had awakened an increased interest in the antislavery cause and that as a result of his lectures new abolition societies were being formed. These societies were electing delegates to a statewide convention which was to meet shortly in Harrisburg to organize a state antislavery society.

As early as June, 1834, the executive committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society had passed a resolution recommending the formation of state auxiliaries and asking agents of the national society to work toward this objective. Pennsylvania was one of the last of the northern states to organize such an auxiliary. "This State has lagged in the rear quite long enough," Lundy declared on October 22, 1836, "and we hope she will soon be able to give a better account of herself." Twelve hundred men finally signed the call for the convention. (Women were not invited to do so.) The convention met in Alter's Hotel in the state capital January 31-February 3, 1837, with approximately 250 delegates attending. Included among these were C. C. Burleigh and seven other agents of the American Anti-Slavery Society, who were admitted as "corresponding members." Dr. Bartholomew Fussell of Chester County called the convention to order, and another physician, Dr. F. Julius LeMoyne of Washington, Pennsylvania, was chosen president. The convention adopted a constitution modelled on that of the national society. Burleigh served on the committee which wrote the preamble to this

54 C. C. Burleigh to "Dear Brother," Apr. 10, 1837, in The Emancipator, Apr. 27, 1837.
55 National Enquirer, Jan. 21, 1837.
56 The Emancipator, Jan. 26, 1837.
57 Elizur Wright, Jr., to Amos A. Phelps, June 20, 1834, copy in Wright Papers.
59 Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Convention, Assembled to Organize a State Anti-Slavery Society, at Harrisburg, on the 31st of January and 1st, 2d, and 3d of February, 1837 (Philadelphia, 1837), 4.
document, declaring slavery to be a violation of "the law of God" and subversive of "the natural rights of man."\(^{60}\)

Burleigh also delivered several speeches in the convention and gave public addresses on the first and last evenings of the gathering. In his opening address he replied to charges that he was a "foreign agent" on account of his home being in Connecticut, noting that the venerable Pennsylvania Abolition Society had corresponding members from other states and foreign countries. He also declared that the southern states would not be likely to secede from the Union because they would lose more than they would gain by that action.\(^{61}\)

At the close of one of his public lectures, a voice came from the audience demanding to know "Why don't Mr. Burleigh go to the South?" His reply was: "because it is my object to have my argument bear upon Southern minds, and Southern consciences,—and this is being done while I remain here; and because, if I were to go there, I should be silenced before I should have time to give utterance to my testimony—which would defeat my object."\(^{62}\)

In the convention itself Burleigh advocated a resolution calling for giving alleged fugitive slaves the right of trial by jury, denounced the "sin of slaveholding," and paid tribute to the contributions that women were making to the antislavery cause. Members of the convention pledged themselves to raise $10,000 to support the work of the American Anti-Slavery Society during the coming year. In return for this commitment, Lewis Tappan, speaking for the executive committee of the national society, promised to keep C. C. Burleigh lecturing in the state for a full year.\(^{63}\)

Burleigh, in his closing address the last evening of the convention, expressed his gratitude for the confidence that had been placed in him and issued an appeal for Pennsylvanians to "combine in defence of liberty, until the tones of that bell in the old continental state house, at Philadelphia, shall proclaim, in the ears of the people, the words of the inscription upon it, 'liberty to all the inhabitants thereof.' "\(^{64}\)

Among those who heard him was a representative of the Harris-

\(^{60}\) *Ibid.*, 58.

\(^{61}\) *The Emancipator*, Mar. 16, 1837.

\(^{62}\) *National Enquirer*, Feb. 25, 1837.

\(^{63}\) *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Convention*, 77.

\(^{64}\) *The Emancipator*, Feb. 23, 1837.
This reporter did not agree with Burleigh’s ideas and found his style of dress “careless and indifferent beyond excuse,” but nevertheless thought he was “the most perfect public lecturer we have ever listened to.” Another person who heard him in Harrisburg remarked that Burleigh was “as plain a specimen” of human nature as one ever saw, but that for native shrewdness, good-natured wit, and logical reasoning—“for powerful, overwhelming, thundering eloquence”—he had few equals. “Were I called upon to describe Patrick Henry,” this observer wrote, “I would instantly point to C. C. Burleigh.”

John Greenleaf Whittier, who was also a representative of the American Anti-Slavery Society at the Harrisburg convention, remarked that “Our friend Burleigh is moving all before him wherever he goes. His plain, homespun appearance, united with his uncommon talents and stirring eloquence, renders him a great favorite among all classes.”

As the antislavery movement gathered strength, anti-abolitionist meetings came to be held to resist it. Such a meeting in Harrisburg on March 4, 1837, charged the abolitionists with “denouncing our fellow countrymen, south of the Potomac, as traitors, man-stealers, blood-thirsty homicides [sic] and pirates.” They were asserting doctrines which were shaking the nation to its foundations and which would surely eventuate in the dissolution of the Union. This gathering also charged that the recent antislavery convention in Harrisburg had been “composed partly of paid emissaries from New York and the New England states,” who were disseminating doctrines at variance with “the almost unanimously expressed sentiments of the people of Pennsylvania.” Persons at this meeting admitted that slavery was an evil, but declared that the abolitionists were proposing measures which were incompatible with “that spirit of compromise which effected the Union of the States.”

The anti-abolition convention endorsed the program of the American Colonization Society and

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requested that the General Assembly grant financial aid to the Colonization Society of Pennsylvania. At the same time it passed resolutions deploiring mob violence and supporting free discussion of the slavery issue.

After the organization of the state society C. C. Burleigh resumed his lecturing in southeastern Pennsylvania. On April 10 he reported that he had given a total of thirty-one lectures in sixteen places in Chester County, some in places where he had lectured previously. Generally he had been received favorably. The Hicksite Quakers of Chester County provided fertile ground for abolitionism. At West Chester, however, rowdies had dropped cayenne pepper on the stove, thrown eggs, and broken a window. He spoke eight times in Philadelphia, once to an audience of blacks in one of their churches, and once for the Peace Society. Since there was difficulty in obtaining meeting halls, Philadelphia abolitionists decided they needed a building of their own. Raising $40,000 for this purpose, they erected a handsome and commodious structure which they called Pennsylvania Hall. It was burned to the ground by a mob on May 17, 1838, three days after its opening.

One of Burleigh's lectures was specifically designed to appeal to workingmen. Slavery, he argued, had a tendency to demean free labor. Slavery also meant that a large part of the southern population did not have the wherewithal to buy the products of northern industry. If the slaves were freed and educated, they would work harder, produce more goods, and provide a great new market.

The general outline of Burleigh's antislavery argument may be followed in a full report of a speech he gave at Upper Darby on April 3, 1837. Slaveholding, he said, was "sinful in itself," regardless of whether the slaves were treated kindly or harshly. Slaves were supporting themselves and their masters both. They should be freed immediately and should be paid wages. No compensation should be paid to their former masters. They should be given equal protection of the law. The fact that so many slaves ran away proved that they

73 *National Enquirer*, May 27, 1837.
were not content with their lot. If they were freed they would not need to come north. Indeed, they would prefer to stay in the South. The goal of the abolitionists consisted in “spreading the truth, acting by moral power upon public sentiment, and the consciences of the slaveholders.” In conclusion, he called upon members of his audience to join with him in “the dissemination of truth and light” and “the advancement of the holy cause of Human Rights.”

Early in May 1837, Burleigh began a series of lectures in Bucks County. At New Hope arrangements were made for him to debate with a young opponent of abolitionism. The latter admitted that justice required emancipation but denied its expediency. He also argued that abolition literature being sent into the South was alarming the planters and inducing them to fasten the chains of slavery still more tightly. Above all, he felt that the abolitionists were pursuing a course which would lead to the dissolution of the Union. If this should happen, “the world’s last best hope of liberty will be lost and gone forever.” The abolitionists were bringing on a battle which would not be fought between the black man and the white but among whites themselves. Burleigh replied to this speech, and then a second opponent rose to defend “the solemn compact [the Constitution] and the rights of property.” Altogether the debate lasted four hours. It provided the subject matter for conversation in New Hope for some time afterward. As far as Burleigh could tell, the effect of the meeting on the antislavery cause was “highly favorable.”

On May 8, 1837, Burleigh left Pennsylvania in order to attend the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York City. From there he went on to Boston to attend the meeting of the New England Anti-Slavery Society. Both coming and going, he stopped at Plainfield, his home town, lecturing each time.

Returning to Pennsylvania late in June, Burleigh resumed his work in Bucks County. On July 10 he reported that he had lectured less frequently than previously, “my health being rather feeble,
partly in consequence of my former exertions."78 Thereafter reports of his lectures declined in the antislavery newspapers. At Gulph Mills in August he had the difficult job of responding to a lecture by Elliot Cresson, a distinguished Philadelphia merchant and philanthropist who was a leading defender of colonization as opposed to abolition.79 "Colonization," said Cresson, "goes to no foreign land, as the assassin of our country's reputation, for foreign aid. It stoops not to solicit British gold, nor British enemies, nor Yankee interlopers. Nor will it discuss with them." [Cresson refused to debate with Burleigh.] "It holds on its high and mighty course to lead the oppressed to the promised land—to Liberia. . . ." The abolitionists, on the other hand, he charged, "sieze the slaveholders by the throat, kick them and trample them in the dust, then ask them to leave off this wrong practice, and this they call moral suasion. Does any man believe this course can be effectual?"80

Speaking that evening to the same people, but without Cresson's presence, Burleigh argued that colonization was "based upon wrong principles." It held that "God's colored and white children cannot live together in the same place on terms of social and civil equality." It maintained that "the true way for tyrants to leave off oppression and wrong is, for the oppressors to combine and remove the victims out of their way." It said that Christianity could not do for the blacks in America what it could do for them in Africa. It was impractical; slaveholders would not consent to it, and the slaves did not want to go to Africa. Above all, colonization was upholding and perpetuating slavery itself.81

At the end of August 1837, Burleigh withdrew from lecturing and took over the less demanding work of editing the *National Enquirer* for about six weeks.82 (Lundy, too, was in failing health and needed a rest.) In November he decided to accompany Lewis C. Gunn, whose printing press produced the *Enquirer*, on a trip to Haiti. He had two objectives in mind: one was to recover his health (apparently he was suffering from consumption); the other was to observe con-

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78 C. C. Burleigh to Elizur Wright, Jr., July 10, 1837, in *The Emancipator*, Aug. 5, 1837
79 See the sketch in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, IV, 540.
80 *National Enquirer*, Aug. 31, 1837; Sept. 7, 1837.
ditions of life among the residents of this unique black republic. Burleigh and Gunn took passage on the brig Finance, which left Philadelphia on November 28 and arrived in Port-au-Prince on December 18, 1837. Although Burleigh’s “season in the sun” did not fully restore his health, he returned to Philadelphia early in May 1838, just in time to take part in the proceedings at the ill-fated Pennsylvania Hall. He continued to work in the antislavery cause, in a less intensive way, until its final triumph during the Civil War. His last years were spent in Florence, Massachusetts, where he was killed by a passing railroad train in 1878.

During the time when C. C. Burleigh conducted his lecture tour in Pennsylvania the number of antislavery societies in the state rose from 32 to 93. As Whittier wrote on January 30, 1837, “The labors of our anti-slavery agents in this state have been very successful. Their period of toil has not been of long duration, but the seed which they have sown is already springing up, some fifty and some an hundred fold.”

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park Campus

IRA V. BROWN

83 Lewis C. Gunn to Elizur Wright, Jr., Nov. 13, 1837, Wright Papers.
84 National Enquirer, Nov. 30, 1837; Feb. 8, 1838.
85 Angelina Grimké to Theodore Dwight Weld, May 6, 1838, in Weld-Grimké Letters, II, 663.