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Archibald H. Grimke: A Brief Statement by His Brother

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Born in Charleston, S. C., August 17, 1849.

Died in Washington, D. C., February 25, 1930.



A BRIEF STATEMENT BY HIS BROTHER,

Rev. Francis J. Grimke,

Pastor Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church,

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ARCHIBALD H. GRIMKE.

A brief Statement from his brother, Francis J. Grimke.

Archibald H. Grimke was a strong man,—strong mentally, strong morally. He had a first class mind, and, in his private and public life lived always on the highest moral plane. There was never the slightest suspicion as to the purity of his character and life. He was one of our race leaders who had nothing to fear, nothing to cover up in his private or public record. He was a gentleman in the truest and best sense of the term,—a man whose example can be safely commended to our young people for their imitation. Of the bad habits that curse so many of our young men, and older ones too, he had none.

He was a man also of splendid courage. He was utterly fearless. In his defense of the rights of the race, he feared none, from the least to the greatest. The fear of man had no place in his make up.

His unselfish devotion to the race was also of the highest quality. He asked nothing, expected nothing, accepted nothing for the many and great services which he rendered it. He was not of the class of leaders, too common in our day, who serve the race only for what they can get out of it, and not from any real interest in it or in what concerns its welfare.

He was also a level-headed man, a man of large common sense. He knew how to deal with all classes of people and all grades of intelligence so as to arouse in them the least possible friction. He never hesitated, however, where a principle was involved to say or do the unpopular thing. I once heard Bishop Hurst, in speaking of him, use the term, wise. He said, "Mr. Grimke is a wise man." And he was, he possessed a considerable amount of that rare commodity, wisdom, common sense.

He was also a man of positive character. No one ever had any difficulty in finding out where he stood on any matter. He was never on the fence, waiting to see which was the

popular or profitable side before taking a stand. He took his stand promptly, regardless of personal consequences. He had a wholesome contempt for that kind of indecision, vacillation, cowardice. He was never a negative quantity anywhere, and at any time.

He had also the knack or ability of attaching people to himself and of holding them in perfect loyalty. There were about him, those upon whom he could always depend when their services were needed in furthering any measure which he had on hand.

He was a man also of strong convictions. He did his own thinking. He called no man master. Whatever he did, or whatever line he followed, was because it accorded with his own sense of what was right and proper.

He was a man also of great self-respect. He lived ever in the consciousness of what was befitting his dignity as a man created in the image of God. And, while entirely free from that foolish, senseless pride which arrogates to itself superiority to others based upon mere outward circumstances or conditions, there were things that he felt himself above—things base and mean. His self-respect kept him moving ever on the high level of honorable deportment.

He was a man also of large executive ability. He knew how to direct, how to organize, how to set things going and keep them going.

He was a man also of a very tender heart. No one could be more sympathetic, more ready to share the burdens and sorrows of others, than himself. Some men of strong character, as he was, are deficient just here, but he was not. He had a heart, and a big heart, full of the milk of human kindness.

He possessed also remarkable physical stamina. Until within the last few years his strength seemed entirely unimpaired. He used to take long walks, as far as the Capitol and back, without seeming to weary or exhaust him in the least. He felt all the better for the exercise. He inherited from his father and mother a healthy body, and from his earliest manhood took the very best care of himself, avoiding tobacco, strong drink, and other things which tend to under-

mine the constitution and to implant the seeds of decay. And it stood him well.

During the last ten days of his illness, when it did not seem possible for him to survive another moment, again and again he pulled up to the surprise of all, even to the doctor and nurses. His grip upon life was extraordinarily great. Young men, who think they can sow their wild oats and yet escape the consequences had better take notice and begin early to lay up those physical reserves which they will need in the struggle of life, when the crises come, as they will be sure to, sooner or later.

In politics he was what was called a Mugwump or Independent. He had very little faith in the average Negro politician, and none in either of the great political parties. He believed that the Negro should look out for himself, and to affiliate with any party that will protect him in his rights and further his interest civil and political. He knew that neither party cared anything for him, except so far as it can use him. And the Negro, he felt, should have sense enough in turn to use political parties just as they use him, to further his own interest.

He was a man who did not talk much about his religion. Not because he was not religious, for he was. He had little or no faith in the brand of Christianity in dealing with the race question, that is in circulation in most of our white churches. He believed firmly, however, in God and in Jesus Christ. The religion of Jesus is what he accepted, believed in, tried to live.

Years ago, while a student at Lincoln University, he made a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ and so exemplary were his religious character and conduct, that though he was a very young man, he was elected to the high and responsible position as ruling elder in the Ashman Church of the university, and continued to serve as such, until his graduation.

In nothing was the strong character of the man shown more than during the months that he lay helpless upon his sick bed. During all that time no word of complaint escaped his lips. He bore with singular fortitude those months of enforced inactivity. Most of the time he was cheerful. I used to look at him often and wonder how he was able to bear up under the strain, as he did.

When he was first taken sick, after we had gotten him in bed, he said to me: "Frank, I guess the crisis has come," meaning that he thought he was about to die. In this he was mistaken; the crisis did not then come, but it has since. After nearly twenty months of patient waiting, the release came; the spirit long fettered, was set free.

And here I am reminded of Lowell's noble lines on Dr. William Ellery Channing:

"No power can die that ever wrought for Truth;
Thereby a law of nature it became,
And lives unwithered in its sinewy youth,
When he who called it forth is but a name.
Therefore I cannot think of thee wholly gone
The better part of thee is with us still;
Thy soul its hampering clay aside hath thrown,
And only freer wrestles with the ill."

We may be sure, that he is now, on the other side of the "great divide," just what he was here, a simple, straightforward, earnest, conscientious man, seeking for himself what is highest and best in point of character, and desiring only to be of service to others.

The race has not produced many leaders of the stamp of Archibald H. Grimke—highminded, fearless, steadfast, uncompromising, asking no quarter and giving none in defense of the rights of the race, always ready and willing to serve, and with no thought of compensation.

The great prayer of Theodore Parker, "The Higher Good," as he entitled it, was:

"Father, I will not ask for wealth or fame,
Though once they would have joyed my carnal sense;
I shudder not to bear, a hated name,
Wanting all wealth—myself my sole defence.
But give me, Lord, eyes to behold the truth,
A seeing sense that knows eternal right,
A heart with pity filled, and gentle ruth,
A manly faith that makes all darkness light;
Give me the power to labor for mankind;
Make me the mouth of those who cannot speak;
Eyes let me be to groping men and blind;
A conscience to the base; and to the weak
Let me be hands and feet; and to the foolish mind."

The principles embodied in that prayer Archibald H. Grimke believed in, and in the spirit of them he lived and wrought. It is that kind of leadership that the race needs and must have if it is to go forward in the great struggle in which it is engaged in this country. The wishy-washy, namby-pamby type, wishing only to be cared for, must be replaced by men who respect themselves and who are willing to suffer rather than compromise with evil—rather than have the race suffer through any connivance or complicity of theirs.

A word also, in this connection, should be said about his daughter, Angelina W. Grimke, whose devotion to her father was singularly beautiful. No man ever had a more devoted daughter. I can conceive of nothing finer than the completeness with which she gave herself to the care of him, from the first day that he was taken down to the moment of his death. She left nothing undone. She watched over him with the tenderest solicitude by day and night. Her one thought was ever of him. In a very real and true sense, she lived for him.

The long months of most exacting service while he waited in the hope of regaining his strength did not diminish in the least her zeal and earnestness, her steady and unremitting attention. She watched over him with an intelligent and loving interest which detected the slightest thing that would contribute in any way to his comfort and happiness, and saw that it was at once provided. She could not have done any more than she did, however hard she might have tried.

And no one appreciated her devotion, her loving and untiring service more than did her father. It was one of the things—it was the thing more than any other, that helped to cheer him as he lay helpless on his sick bed.

In her devotion to him she has set a splendid example to all daughters—to all children, as to the consideration, the tender, loving consideration which they owe to their parents. It is a lesson that cannot be too strongly emphasized. May there be more daughters like her, not only here, but all over the world. Fortunate is the man who, when the end is coming, finds himself in the hands of such a daughter.

Just a word more. The relation that existed between my brother and myself was always very close, and remained so to the end. Nothing was ever able to impair in the least, that relationship. For the first fifteen or sixteen years of life we grew up together in our home in Charleston, South Carolina, under the fostering care of a loving mother. After that we both started North together in search of an education.

For a little while we were separated, but soon found ourselves together again at Lincoln University where we roomed together, studied together, ate and played together year after year until our graduation in 1870. After that we were separated again: He went to Boston to enter the Harvard Law School, and I, ultimately, to enter the Princeton Theological Seminary.

After graduation he settled in Boston and began the practice of his profession, and I, after mine, settled in this city. Though hundreds of miles apart we still kept in close touch with each other through correspondence and occasional visits. About twenty-five years ago, after his daughter became connected with the schools of Washington as teacher, he gave up his residence in Boston and came here and made his home with me, which he continued to do.

We always got along pleasantly together. There were no jarring notes between us, no misunderstandings, no bickerings. Nothing was ever able to disturb the peaceful, happy relations existing between us. The tie which bound us together never weakened, but, with advancing years, grew steadily stronger. He was always to me a brother beloved, and I to him.

Again another separation has come, the last great earthly one. It will not be long, however, before I will be going out to join him and the other loved ones who went on before, in a delightful and never-ending fellowship, in the beautiful Beyond.

“We shall meet beyond the river,
Where the surges cease to roll,
Where in all the bright forever,
Sorrow ne'er shall press the soul.”

APPENDIX

As he lay in his casket his face was calm and sweet. Everything indicated that he was at rest. The battle was over, and a sense of having fought a good fight seemed to be reflected in his countenance.

He had a strong, pure, highly intellectual face. He was a distinguished looking man. He bore all the marks of a man of note. No one who met him only casually would have taken him for an ordinary or commonplace individual. He was a very capable man, a man of outstanding ability.

When he was in battle array, when his sword was drawn for action, woe to the antagonist who encountered him. He could hit hard, and his blows were always telling blows. And yet he was a man of peace. He fought not because he loved fighting, but only where and when it was necessary, where a principle was involved, where right was imperiled, where justice demanded it.

The Afro-American, of Baltimore, contained the following at the time of his death:

Grimke, Ex-Consul to San Domingo, Dies—Elder Grimke Brother Was 1919 Spingarn Medallist

Archibald Henry Grimke, 80, ex-consul to Santo Domingo, the noted race advocate and champion, died early Tuesday night, February 25, 1930, at the home of his brother, the Rev. Francis J. Grimke, 1415 Corcoran Street, N. W., after a long illness. Mr. Grimke was born in Charleston, South Carolina, August 17, 1849.

He was for ten years one of the ablest and most persistent officers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, retiring from the presidency of the Washington Branch about ten years ago.

He was educated at Lincoln University and Harvard, graduating in law from the latter institution in 1874. In April 1879 he married Miss Sarah E. Stanley and leaves one daughter, Miss Angelina W. Grimke, at one time a teacher in the public schools of Washington.

From 1883 to 1885 he edited the Hub, a weekly paper in Boston, Massachusetts, and later was a special writer on the Boston Herald and Boston Traveller. He was United States

Consul to Santo Domingo from 1894 to 1898. He was president of the American Negro Academy from 1903 to 1916.

During his most active years he was a member of the Authors Club of London, England; American Social Science Association; president of the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association; treasurer of the Committee of Twelve for the Advancement of the Interests of the Colored Race; and in 1891 wrote the Life of William Lloyd Garrison; and in 1892 the Life of Charles Sumner.

He was awarded the Spingarn medal for special achievement in 1919.

