The Story of
George Gavin Ritchie

Abolitionist

Nellie K. and William E. Edmonston
George Gavin Ritchie
(1820-1853)
Acknowledgments

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Prologue

I (NKE) first learned about George Gavin Ritchie in 1994 when I was looking for a topic for a Fortnightly Club paper. (The Hamilton Fortnightly Club is a women's literary club in which each member delivers a paper every year.) I wanted my paper to fit in with the Hamilton, NY, Bicentennial of 1995, and I wondered if the Underground Railroad or other antislavery activities had occurred in Hamilton's past. I went to see what might be in the Colgate Archives and sure enough, Carl Peterson, the archivist, brought out a number of documents, old minutes, letters, and newspapers. As I read through them, this very fascinating story unfolded about a young man—George Gavin Ritchie, a student at Madison University, who in 1847 made a heroic stand for his principles by publishing an antislavery editorial in his student newspaper against the fierce opposition of the university faculty. And for this act, he was expelled.

I delivered the paper to the Fortnightly Club, and a written copy was included in The Bicentennial Book, Hamilton, New York, 1995. But this did not end our association with the George Gavin Ritchie story. At that time, we owned a small publishing company that specialized in the American Civil War, especially diaries and letters written at the time. About a year after I wrote the paper on George Gavin Ritchie, a gentleman showed up on our doorstep with a manuscript under his arm. His name was Donald Gavin Ritchie, and the manuscript he was carrying contained the Civil War papers of his grandfather, David F. Ritchie, the only son of George Gavin Ritchie. In 1997 we published the Civil War papers of David F. Ritchie. In 1998, on our recommendation, Colgate University posthumously granted George Gavin Ritchie the degree that he had been denied back in the 1840's. At commencement that year we watched Donald G. Ritchie, his great grandson, walk across the stage to receive the degree.

Below is the story of the Ritchie family's extraordinary ancestor, George Gavin Ritchie. (Note: Spelling in Appendices B, D and E has been corrected for clarity. Original grammar and punctuation have been retained.)
The Story

“We regard slavery, as one of the most burning sins that man ever committed against high Heaven, an outrage upon humanity...” (Hamilton Student and Christian Reformer)

Thus penned George Gavin Ritchie, a virtually unknown abolitionist. For over a century and a half his sacrifices and contributions to the cause of abolition lay buried in the obscurity of the Archives of Colgate University and the minutes of the American Baptist Free Mission Society. His 2011 induction into the National Abolition Hall of Fame was particularly appropriate since, like Gerrit Smith, he resided in and carried forth his antislavery message in the Central New York locale of the Hall of Fame in Peterboro, New York.

George Gavin Ritchie was born in Scotland in 1820 and spent his early years in Rochester, New York, where, like his father before him, he plied the trade of house painter.

In 1845 he entered Madison University, then a Baptist Seminary, now Colgate University, to study for the ministry. Ritchie had applied for aid from a scholarship fund established for students with antislavery sentiments, but this request was denied since he was already receiving financial support from a Rochester Baptist church. In November of 1845, he proposed and published the college’s first student newspaper—the Hamilton Student—its masthead reading that it was a “mirror of religion, literature, science and art.”

He received only reluctant support from the faculty in this endeavor. Although he was 27 years of age and the married father of three young children, the faculty considered him “unsuitable” since he had completed only his Freshman year. They placed a number of editorial restrictions on the newspaper, disallowing articles of “a political or partisan character.”

Ritchie complied with faculty requirements, but conflict arose in January of 1847 when he sought to print an editorial entitled “Equal Suffrage and the Religious Press.” (See Appendix A) He was dismayed by the results of the 1846 fall election when New York State voters overwhelmingly defeated a measure to grant suffrage to black males on the same basis as whites. To Ritchie the vote was “a disgrace to the state of New York,” and he felt it his duty to publish his editorial criticizing the voters and the religious press of the state as being either “proslavery in their sentiments” or “indifferent to the subject.” By modern standards his words might be considered mild, but the Madison University faculty was outraged, and they ordered him not to print his editorial. When he insisted on moving ahead
with publication, they tried, but failed, to stop publication by interfering with the printer. They voted unanimously to expel Ritchie in January of 1847 on the grounds of
“insubordination and rebellion” for publishing the editorial against their express
instructions, and they tried to transfer management of the newspaper to the two campus
literary societies. However, Ritchie refused to hand over the list of subscribers or the funds.
He considered the Hamilton Student his property, not that of the faculty or the University.
He instead remained in Hamilton and continued to publish the newspaper on his own.

In frustration the faculty sent an angry, 12 page letter to George Gavin Ritchie’s
pastor at the First Baptist Church in Rochester detailing his transgressions, and they placed
a public notice in the Baptist Register that neither Ritchie nor the Hamilton Student had
any connection with Madison University. Although he had some support among the student
body, the faculty made overt student support nearly impossible by passing a resolution
forbidding, on pain of expulsion, other students from “sustaining the [newspaper] by written
contribution or otherwise.” They also engaged in vicious personal attacks from the pulpit of
the University Chapel. It must have been bitterly disappointing to Ritchie when his pastor in
Rochester wrote to him that “your success in our denomination depends upon your
submission to the faculty at Hamilton.”

Ritchie’s father, however, stood loyally with his son during this time of trial. In his
letter of support and encouragement (See Appendix B), he called attention to how early in
life Ritchie had recognized the evils of slavery: “…since ever you came to the age to
understand the degradation that the poor Colored man (the Slave) had to undergo, that you
have lifted up your voice against such bondage & [slave] traffic…”

The Madison University faculty asserted that Ritchie was not expelled for his
opinions, that he was free to print them in any other newspaper, but that he had “no right to
make [this] paper a vehicle for the expression of his own peculiar views,” and they labeled his
action a “violation of the rights of others.” What the faculty claimed to be a question of
discipline, Ritchie and his supporters viewed as issues of freedom of conscience and of the
press. In George Ritchie’s words: “Every citizen should feel that an attempt made to infringe
upon the liberty of the smallest and most insignificant paper in the land, is an injury done to
himself.” He received immediate strong support from the abolitionist press, including the
Christian Contributor and the Liberty Press in Utica, New York, as well as papers in Maine
and Rhode Island. George Gavin Ritchie stated repeatedly that he was expelled for one
reason only, “the crime of advocating equal rights to all men.”

Outrage in the abolitionist community over Ritchie’s expulsion led to the
establishment in 1848 of New York Central College in McGrawville, New York.

New York Central College c1848
The American Baptist Free Mission Society founded the school to provide a college where students would enjoy free speech and where free African Americans could receive an education. Among its principles were antislavery and equality of the sexes. It was the first college to appoint African Americans to its faculty.

In the face of public repudiation and humiliation by the faculty, Ritchie continued publication of his paper in Hamilton, New York, first under its original name of the Hamilton Student, then as the Hamilton Student and Christian Reformer, and finally as the Christian Reformer, an organ fearlessly devoted to abolition and other reforms—the causes of temperance, peace, liberty, and moral and church reforms. Ritchie’s commitment to abolition was clear; he wrote: “It shall be our duty to agitate the subject [of slavery], to present facts to the people and to advocate all peaceable and legitimate means for its abolition.” He urged membership in the American Baptist Free Mission Society as a completely antislavery organization. He earned the respect of prominent abolitionists through his fearless editorials. In addition, Ritchie’s newspaper reported on meetings and activities of antislavery organizations, and reprinted letters and articles from both abolition and mainstream papers: The Liberty Advocate in Rhode Island; The New Englander in New Haven, Connecticut; Elihu Burritt’s Christian Citizen in Worcester, Massachusetts; The Washington Patriot in Washington, DC; The Homestead Journal of Salem, Ohio; The Albany Spectator and The Albany Patriot in Albany, New York; The New York Tribune in New York City; The Westchester Spy in Westchester, New York; and The Liberty Press and Christian Contributor of Utica, New York. The Hamilton Student also carried announcements of abolitionist meetings and voiced support for Ritchie’s colleague and contemporary, Gerrit Smith, and for the Liberty Party. One reprinted article was Gerrit Smith’s 1847 announcement of his presidential candidacy.

In the March 1, 1847, issue of the Hamilton Student, Ritchie announced:

“Abolitionists, male and female, of the town and village of Hamilton, are requested to meet the evening of Tuesday the 8th of March, at the Free Church, in the village, for the purpose of taking in to consideration the propriety of forming a Liberty Association. Let every true friend of the slave be present.”
The Free Church to which Ritchie referred was constructed of hemlock and was first known as the Hemlock Church. From 1846 to 1853, it served as the Free Church of Hamilton and was attended by area abolitionists. Before its transformation into a private residence at 21 Madison Street, it served as the Hamilton Village Office and was used for public school classrooms. During the Civil War it was a hospital for the 157th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

On numerous occasions Ritchie urged the populace of Central New York to stand up for their belief in the rightness of abolition: “We hope that anti-slavery men, in the several towns of Madison, Chenango, and Otsego Counties, will make an effort in our behalf.” He broadened his message beyond the counties: “We call upon true anti-slavery men everywhere, to come up to our support. We are fighting . . . in the cause of liberty.” He recognized and praised those who gave food relief during the Irish famine, but reminded them not to “forget the infinitely greater debt, which [they] owed to the three millions of [their] enslaved countrymen.” He described his efforts as “fearlessly advocating the cause of the oppressed.” He also took the church establishment to task: “Churches . . . should hold no fellowship with slave holding churches—there should be no string of connection. It should be a disciplinable offense, to vote for a slave holder, or anyone who winks at slavery.”

When the United States refused to join a convention of nations for suppression of the slave trade, Ritchie wrote that the convention “does infinite honor to all the parties associated in it . . . and in precisely the same proportion it dishonors the United States. And thus the banner of the United States waves, as the special protector of every scoundrel slave trader on the surface of the globe.” But George Gavin Ritchie’s vision of freedom encompassed even more than immediate freedom for the oppressed African Americans of the country. Certainly, his primary concern was, as he said, for “the poor slave, toiling under the southern sun, robbed of his all, of his wife, children and labor,” but he felt there would be no real freedom until both poor blacks and poor whites could vote without property or other requirements. He argued that there should be no class distinctions governing access to the ballot, writing: “We want government administered for the benefit of the industrious masses, to protect the rights of all—not the right of a few at the expense of the rest.” “Every man should feel that he lives not by the permission of his fellow-man, but as his right.” In addition to opposing slavery, Ritchie urged the readers of his newspaper to oppose the Mexican War, to sign the anti-war Pledge of Universal Brotherhood, and to support the cause of temperance. The importance of Ritchie’s journalistic efforts did not go unnoticed by the abolition leadership of his time. The Utica Christian Contributor responded to the circumstances of Ritchie’s expulsion with an editorial noting his stand for freedom of the press, but most ardently supporting the main thrust of Ritchie’s vision of freedom for the oppressed black in the bondage of slavery.
Gerrit Smith voiced his support for Ritchie’s newspaper in a letter published in the Hamilton Student in April of 1847, reading as follows:

Peterboro, April 15th 1847

Mr. Ritchie:

My Dear Sir: The friends of the anti-slavery, and other moral reforms, in this County, have long desired that a newspaper warmly and ably expressing these reforms, might be established in their own County. Such a newspaper they now have in the Hamilton Student; and they will patronize it liberally, if they have that full confidence which I have, in the ability and integrity of its editor. Your friend and Brother, Gerrit Smith.

By speaking out on the plight of the black man in America in the late 1840’s, George Gavin Ritchie put his education, his career, his reputation, and the economic well-being of himself and his family at risk. For his outspoken fearlessness, the faculty of Madison University not only expelled him from the seminary—thwarting his efforts to obtain his degree in his chosen field as a minister of the Baptist church—but made every effort to deny him any legitimate role in the church in New York State. He found “every college door in the land locked and bolted and barred” against him, making it impossible for him to enter another seminary or to be ordained.

Even before his entrance, the faculty had shown hostility to antislavery activities. They had resisted open discussion of the issue for over a decade before George Gavin Ritchie arrived. It is not that they were in favor of slavery; they opposed it in principle. But they considered Gerrit Smith and other abolitionists extreme and fanatical, and they wanted to keep the fervor and passions of the movement away from their campus. After all, antislavery activity had already caused serious trouble at Hamilton and Amherst Colleges.

As early as 1834 the Madison University faculty abolished a student antislavery society on the basis of “expediency.” When a second society was formed in 1837, it met with a similar fate as student Isaac Brownson’s diary of August 4, 1837, tells us: “There have been some incidents to break the dull monotony of things since my last date. An Anti-Slavery Society was formed in the institution in the early part of the term, which was the second formed here. Though consisting of upwards of 20 members and prospering, the faculty pronounced it a nuisance and labored zealously for its dissolution. They wished to compel no one’s conscience or restrain liberty in any respect save this: the society was noxious to the best interests of the institution and must be dissolved. Hence the individuals composing it were presented with an official request to withdraw their names from the constitution within a fixed period or as an alternative leave the institution. The society was dissolved, all withdrawing their names except three, who left: two for Hamilton College and the other for the West.”

Some of the same students then formed an antislavery society in the Village of Hamilton, but the faculty soon shut it down as well. Some students petitioned for a “Free Discussion Society,” but the faculty denied the petition before free discussions of antislavery could gain a foothold. But the issue of abolition would not go away. In the early 1840’s one of the Seminary’s own graduates, Jacob Knapp, a firebrand evangelist from the class of 1824, urged the Hamilton Baptist Church to condemn slavery as a sin and brought on the first town-grown disagreement. The faculty and their families withdrew from the Village Church and formed their own church at the Seminary in 1845. With this history, it is little wonder that the faculty responded to Ritchie’s challenge as they did.

For the eight months that Ritchie continued to publish his abolitionist newspaper in the village of Hamilton, he faced grave difficulties supporting his family—his wife, Catherine, and their three children. When he was expelled, he lost all his tuition payment and was carrying debts incurred for the education he was now denied. He became dependent on what little he could earn through newspaper subscriptions and the support of fellow abolitionists. He wrote gratefully of “a pledge of ten dollars, to help us in this our time of
need" and of "a present of two bushels of very fine corn to help feed our little ones." The desperation of his circumstances was evident in the last issue of his newspaper when he nearly begged: "Wood! Wood!! We shall need some wood very soon. Will it suit any of our friends to bring us some?"

Although Ritchie wrote that "we have at times been ready to faint by reason of the burden we were called . . . to bear," he never gave up his work for those he called "the poor crushed African[s]." After dire economic circumstances forced him to close his paper, he could have returned to his original and financially more secure occupation as a painter, but instead he continued to work tirelessly for abolition.

Though never ordained, Ritchie preached for antislavery Baptists in small communities in Upstate New York from 1847 until his death in 1853. From the pulpit he actively advocated abolition, peace and temperance in such communities as Oneida, Vernon, Litchfield, Richfield, West Exeter, and Clinton, New York, for the Home Missions of the American Baptist Free Mission Society. The congregations were small and collections barely covered expenses. He distributed antislavery literature like Uncle Tom's Cabin and White Slaves in Central and Southern Tier New York. He wrote Frederick Douglass in 1852: "I have labored in Oneida, Herkimer, Madison, Tioga and Broome Counties, have delivered forty-three addresses, attended eight regular conventions, obtained twenty-five subscribers for ‘Fredk Douglass Papers’ & collected one hundred and forty-five dollars and 80c."

George Gavin Ritchie made crucial and extensive contributions to a number of local, regional, state and national abolitionist organizations. Tireless in his efforts, he crisscrossed the state, attending conventions, and speaking to diverse organizations and gatherings. He served on countless boards of antislavery organizations, functioning often as an officer, committee member, lecturing agent, and general fundraiser. It is easy to see why he was considered part of the "core of the American Baptist Free Mission Society," an organization he served diligently for the last six years of his life. He was recording secretary, corresponding secretary and on numerous committees—including appropriately the Committee on New York Central College, an institution, as mentioned before, established largely in response to the injustice of his expulsion from Madison University. As a member of the Publishing Committee, he oversaw the printing of 5,000 copies of the minutes in 1848. But the American Baptist Free Mission Society was not the only national antislavery organization to benefit from Ritchie's dedication. He also served as a lecturing agent and corresponding secretary for the American Baptist Free Will Society and as secretary for the 1852 Liberty Party National Convention. (See Appendix C for a complete list.)

On the state level Ritchie was secretary for the New York Convention of Anti-slavery Baptists in 1846. Gerrit Smith recommended his appointment as a lecturing agent for the New York Anti-slavery Society, and he served in that capacity from 1850-1853. He was equally as active as an officer and committee member in regional and local abolitionist organizations: the Otsego & Herkimer Free Mission Society, the Free Democracy of Oneida, the Madison County Liberty Party, the Madison County Convention of Friends of Political Reform, and the Liberty Association of Hamilton, New York, of which he was one of the founders.

Writing of his travels to his wife, Catherine, he said: "I met Miss Pellet in Utica on the morning I left home and got 25 White Slaves, 40 Uncle Toms unbound, 3 bound and a number of other publications amounting to nearly $40. I am afraid I shall get rid of all of the White Slaves again before I get home but will save one for you. I have only 10 left at present." White Slaves probably referred to one of several abolition texts by Richard Hildreth, journalist, historian and antislavery activist from Deerfield, Massachusetts.

The American Baptist Free Mission Society attested to Ritchie's value to the cause of abolition, noting that: "Eld. Geo. G. Ritchie has labored in Central New York as agent and Corresponding Secretary of the Society."

Ritchie carried on an extensive correspondence with a number of abolitionists across the Northeast and Canada, men such as Joshua Reed Giddings, antislavery Congressman
from Ohio, and J. C. Brown of the Dawn Settlement for fugitive slaves in Canada. Other correspondents were Horace Green Hutchins, Mayor of Charlestown, Massachusetts, and of course, Gerrit Smith and Frederick Douglass.

While spreading the word of freedom through the abolition of slavery to the people of Devereaux and Salisbury (NY), he became ill, but with determination, he continued to preach through his illness.

From Devereaux, New York, on February 14, 1853, he wrote Catherine, who was home taking care of the family which had grown to five children: “Have spoken nearly every evening last week. My health has been quite poor all the time. Two or three days I was so hoarse that I could barely speak. I have now a severe cold on my lungs & am keeping [to] the house today & taking medicine with the hope of being able to speak here tonight. Morally my labors this trip have not been in vain, I think. But pecuniarily they have not been very profitable. Yet enough to keep us alive. This week I do not expect to collect much though, if health is [permitting] I expect to labor hard having four appointments at different places. . . . If my health keeps good & sleighing continues I shall not be home, I think till somewhere between the 4th & 10th of March.” (See full text of letter in Appendix D)

On February 20, 1853, Catherine received a letter from N. B. Stebbens urging her to come to Ritchie’s bedside. (See Appendix E) He finally succumbed to a streptococcal infection and died on March 3, 1853, at the young age of thirty-three.

When the American Baptist Free Mission Society mourned his passing, they wrote: “Our brother and fellow-laborer, George G. Ritchie, the Recording Secretary of this Society, has been removed by death from his earthly labors and associations.” Frederick Douglass printed an extensive obituary in his Paper which began: “It becomes our painful duty to announce that George G. Ritchie is no more.”

George Gavin Ritchie never compromised his dedication to the cause of abolition, though in the end it cost him his education, his economic security, his career, his aspirations, his hopes, his reputation, his very life.

The press attention surrounding the controversy of George Ritchie’s expulsion from Madison University and his fearless work for abolition through his newspaper, sermons and lectures assured his reputation as an abolitionist in his own time. But after he died at an early age and the years passed, his contributions lay largely unrecognized in old archives. However, the New York Times twice in the 20th Century took note of this dedicated and principled man—first in a 1938 article titled “Old Papers Recall ‘Rebel’ at Colgate” and later in 1939 in a piece with the title “Old Volumes Yield Data on George Ritchie: Colgate Delves into Abolitionist’s Expulsion.”

At its 1938 commencement, a century and a half after his expulsion from Madison University, Colgate University conferred upon George Gavin Ritchie the Degree of Bachelor of Arts, Honoris causa postume. As mentioned earlier, his great grandson accepted George Gavin Ritchie’s posthumous degree with other Ritchie family members present for the honor bestowed on their ancestor. Sadly, Donald Ritchie died in 2005, and so missed seeing his great grandfather being honored by induction into the National Abolition Hall of Fame in 2011.

George Gavin Ritchie’s actions in the abolition movement were borne of selfless duty to principle. He cared not for notoriety nor wealth, but the advancement of the principles of freedom and liberty for all. His was a strong willed personality that brooked no compromise in the march toward freedom for oppressed peoples everywhere. He spent his adult life in the frontline trenches of warfare against bigotry and racism.

Upon George Gavin Ritchie’s death the Christian Contributor of Utica, New York, paid tribute to this abolitionist extraordinaire: “Freemen everywhere will bid him ‘God’s speed,’ and the Slave will the sooner walk forth un-manacled and bless the name of RITCHIE.” In part because of his efforts, the enslaved did walk forth un-manacled and we now live in a more just nation, one more true to its founding principles.
Appendix A

Equal Suffrage and the Religious Press
( Editorial from the Hamilton Student)
January 15, 1847

It is now about ten weeks since the close of the fall election. The excitement which at that time usually pervades all classes of the community has had time to subside. It has subsided. The public mind is now quiet.

The excitement, much less on this occasion than on some others, having gone down, the people are now prepared to look calmly and without passion on the record of public opinion which that election has made. That record is the index of the state of feeling existing in the community, and the facts brought to light by that election are the data on which we must rest our judgment of the state of the public mind on the question which was submitted for the decision of the people.

What are the facts exhibited by the late election in relation to Equal Suffrage? We find on examination that the whole number of votes cast was about 409,000. Of the 409,000 electors who cast these votes, only 85,000 voted in favor of Equal Suffrage; 224,000 voted against it; and the remaining 100,000 did not vote on the question.

These are the facts. To what conclusion do they lead us?

We reply that we can come to no other conclusion than this: that only one in five of the population of the State of New York are anti-slavery at heart and in feeling; however much they may claim by their words to be otherwise. “By their fruits ye shall know them.”

What a disgrace to the State of New York is the decision of her electors in this question of Equal Suffrage! How lamentable, too, the record which the future historian of our country will be compelled, through a love of truth, to make, of the state of public opinion in New York in the fall of 1846! Seventy years ago, the great principle of equal rights to all men was recognized in theory and, to a certain extent, adopted in practice. For seventy years have politicians been extolling this principle as the safety of our republican form of government; and yet how hollow have been their professions of devotedness to the extension of this principle! Are we not forced to believe that much of what is said in favor of it, is for no other object than to tickle the ears of the so-called lower classes? And in view of such facts as the late election exhibits, is it not strange that many of our religious papers should continue to assert that a strong anti-slavery feeling pervades our entire community? And is it not stranger still, that they should find fault with those who rather prefer to speak the truth boldly and plainly, even when it is unwelcome, than to fawn upon the public to obtain its good will and support?

Had there been that strong anti-slavery feeling which is said to exist, would it have failed to have shown itself in works, when the opportunity presented itself at the late election? We believe that there was not a single vote cast at the last election against Equal Suffrage, by any man who had really a hatred of slavery in his heart; and that those who either voted against Equal Suffrage, or refused to vote on the question, were either pro-slavery in their sentiments, or what amounts to the same thing, were perfectly indifferent to the subject.
Appendix B

Letter to George Gavin Ritchie from his father

Rochester 28th Feb. 1847

Dear Son,

Having received your paper of date 15th last which all along I anxiously & happily receive—but in reading over its contents, I was almost paralyzed at the gross & unwarrantable measures taken by the heads of the department of which you are a student that they should take it upon them to expel you for the sin of taking part in behalf of our fellowmen the Slave, it appears to me that the heads of the department have not the good of their fellowmen at heart, or else they would never have exposed themselves to the sneers of thousands of respectable abolitionists. Yes the noblest and best in this land of freedom joyfully looks for the day when this foul blot upon her escutcheon shall be wiped off—I am well aware that you my dear son has all along, since ever you came to the age to understand the degradation that the poor Colored man (the Slave) had to undergo, that you have lifted up your voice against such bondage & traffic—Yes & I hope the Almighty will strengthen you in this cause and raise up friends to your support in the good cause of emancipation, and that those of the dept. will ere long have to make concession to you for the false charges, (if I may so call them) against you, as also for the pecuniary embarrassment they have put you and your family to—In my humble opinion they have exposed and libeled you shamefully by throwing before the public such fallacious observations by cautioning the public against your receiving any more money & making it appear to many who are not acquainted with the case, that you are and has been an imposture when from what you say the paper never had any proprietor but yourself, and that the association of which they mention had never anything to do with it, being entirely your own property all of which the dept. belie themselves & libel you. I hope as you mention that you have common sense enough to know your rights & when you are trampled upon such conduct should not be let passed, and I hope the Press especially such as take an interest in the Slave cause, will let fly their mighty engine against the aggressors of this high minded & stern mandate and that the Press’s observations upon the same will make the guilty fear and quake at the exposure they have subjected themselves into by using you as cruelly, unchristianly & unconstitutionally.

That resolution passed by the faculty of date 15th Jany was presumption in the highest degree—the two Literary Societies did well to lay it indefinitely upon the table, well knowing that it was an infringement upon the rights of another man’s property. As also the possession of writings you have from such faculty recognizing you as Editor & proprietor of said paper. All of which speaks volumes to your praise and in your favour & behalf. As to the piece they have expelled you for to wit Equal Suffrage & the Religious Press is in my belief a real & true statement of facts and that every Christian minister as well as people (if not prejudiced) must admit it to be a fact. And I hope the pulpit as well as the Press will proclaim against Slavery from one end of the Union to the other if they have the Spirit or I may say the true Spirit of Christians. That piece Opposition to truth inserted in your paper forcibly shows how man will be stigmatized for the truth—but truth at the end will triumph. So will Equal suffrage & the Religious press triumph & prevail against error—tho for a little while it may be trammled by those skeptics who make unto themselves the Mammon of unrighteousness, by dealing in human beings for the sake of worldly wealth—utterly forgetful of the divine precept, do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

I am proud to see that the Editor of the Chistaian Contributor of Utica has so nobly & manfully taken part with you and truly and well might he say that never before he was persuaded has any American College expelled a student for such a cause—yet thanks be to God it is for no disgrace but rather a noble and Godly and Righteous feeling for your fellow men that you have so long advocated the cause of the poor manacled slave. I hope that this [expulsion] will yet more & more awaken in the hearts of many a deep abhorrence of that
unlawful & high-minded mandate against you a freeman & Citizen and I trust that Freemen generally will pray & bid you God Speed and that the slave may have cause to bless the name of Ritchie.

My dear Son— We all pray that the great God who ruleth in heaven as well as upon earth overrule this serious dispensation & affliction to his glory and to your good, both as regards your temporal as well as your spiritual good and that you may be granted wisdom from above to conduct you honorably through this great affliction & that ere long you may be enabled to triumph over your enemies in the cause you have espoused. Once more on this subject: What is the young men's education at College for—especially those who are studying for the ministry but to go to this or other heathen lands and proclaim the glorious gospel of our Saviour & why not to the slave that is bound and in darkness, because I suppose it is too near home or may be some friend holds traffic in such base chattels, therefore it would not do to displease our fellow men. This would be poor reasoning.

I am glad to understand that friends have stepped forth to your assistance at this trying juncture, and I trust they will increase more and more.

Dear Son—This hath been a heavy trial to mother and I. Yet I don't see any more than her where you have committed such an error or fault as to exclude you from your just rights at College. And more especially when your tuition had been so long paid for in advance. I hope by the time you receive this letter that the dept. will have thoroughly weighed the error they seem to hold to and be obliged to give you your just rights as a Freeman & Citizen. Mother and I feel very much for you as also for Catherine with regard to the shameful treatment you seem to have got from those who should have honored you and sustained you. I hope ere long that the dark clouds that seem hanging over you will soon be dispelled and that you my Son will yet shine brighter & brighter before God & the world. And you my daughter will endeavour (as I hope you do) to bear patiently this burden along with your much abused helpmate by aiding and assisting him as far as lieth in your power— trusting that God in his good time will again make the darkness that hangeth over you at present soon again to be light. We all feel for the children, and should be glad you would write us as soon as you possibly can, letting us know your own private opinion of the case we shall look anxiously for an answer, as well as your paper & do they come in a package here & who to. I am sometimes long or I get them for the P.O. My knee is getting better slowly. I am able to cripple round and do the most of the needful chores. It is all healed up but about the size of a sixpence and that being on the part where the knee bends keeps it longer from closing. My heifer has not been with calf. She is again in that way but I cannot attend to her. She keeps in good order. Have you your cow yet? Give our kind respects to Catherine and when you write let us know how her health is, as also how all the children are and how David and Ann is getting along if they are getting to be good scholars. Eliza sends her love to David & Ann as also to Granny Jean—hoping you will kiss them all for her. As also for Granma & Granpa. Mother keeps needling well but this is a sore affliction to her. She is beginning to see through it now and as I have said before she thinks all will soon be right again. Will the Baptist Church interfere for you in general?

Your afft. father,

D. Ritchie
Appendix C

George Gavin Ritchie's Activities in Abolitionist Organizations

American Baptist Free Mission Society  
Recording Secretary, 1847—1853  
Numerous committees, including Committee on New York Central College, 1850  
By invitation, offered the opening prayer at the annual meeting in Utica, NY, 1848  
By invitation, gave the annual sermon in Montrose, PA, 1852

Liberty Party National Convention, September 30 & October 1, 1852  
Secretary

American Baptist Free Will Society  
Agent  
Corresponding Secretary

New York Convention of Anti-slavery Baptists  
Secretary

New York Anti-slavery Society, 1850-1853  
Lecturing Agent, on recommendation of Gerrit Smith

Free Democrat Party  
Oneida District Elector at New York state convention, September 29, 1852.

Otsego & Herkimer Free Mission Society, 1850  
Corresponding Secretary  
Preached annual sermon

Free Democracy of Oneida, 1852  
Secretary  
Second District Corresponding Committee  
Committee on Resolutions

Liberty Association of Hamilton, NY  
A Founder  
Recording Secretary  
Committee to Draft the Constitution

Madison County (NY) Liberty Party  
Secretary

Madison County (NY) Convention of Friends of Political Reform, 1848 (Morrisville, NY)  
Secretary
Appendix D

Letter from George Gavin Ritchie to his wife Caroline

Devereaux Herk. Co. N.Y.
Feb'y 14th 1853

Dear Wife & Children

I reached Fairfield the evening of the same day on which I left home. Did not have the privilege of speaking till Sunday evening because a minister had been sent a hundred miles to preach to the congregation, no one knowing that I should be there. Had a good congregation in the evening, but was very ill prepared to speak because of sickness. I had been obliged to leave meeting in the afternoon before meeting was out. My trouble seemed to arise from cold in the bowels. I got along however in the evening very well. I have visited Middleville & Salisbury & am now in Devereaux. Have spoken nearly every evening last week. My health has been quite poor all the time. Two or three days I was so hoarse that I could scarcely speak. I have now a severe cold on my lungs & am keeping [to] the house today & taking medicine with the hope of being able to speak here tonight. Morally my labors this trip have not been in vain, I think. But pecuniarily they have not been very profitable. Yet enough to keep us alive. This week I do not expect to collect much though, if health is permitting I expect to labor hard having four appointments at different places. If you write address me at Lassellsville Fulton Co. N.Y. where I expect to be next Sabbath. Till Friday or Saturday I shall be here, & in Salisbury & Manheim near Little Falls. Should anything occur that you need to send for me send to Col. Spafford of Brocket's Bridge or to Zenas Brocket of the same place. As good luck would have it I met Miss Pellet in Utica on the morning I left home & got 25 White Slaves, 40 Uncle Toms unbound, 3 bound & a number of other publications amounting to nearly $40. I am afraid I shall get rid of all the White Slaves again before I get home, but will try & save one for you. I have only 10 left at present. If my health keeps good & sleighing continues I shall not be at home, I think till somewhere between the 4th & the 10th of March. But still I may be home a week earlier than that. Kiss each others for me. I think oftener of home than you do of me I suspect.

As ever

Yours truly & Affly
Geo. G. Ritchie
Appendix E

Letter from N. B. Stebbens to Caroline Ritchie

Salisbury Feb. 20. 9 o'clock P.M.

Mrs. Ritchie
Dear Madam

You have probably reed. intelligence of Mr. Ritchie's sickness. He wrote you on
Friday when he was much better than he had been for two days before, but that night he was
worse I think in consequence of over exertion or perhaps from contracting a new cold that
day—Since that time his symptoms have steadily become more and more aggravated to this
time. He is suffering most from a very severe & painful sore throat with some pretty strongly
marked fever & other constitutional symptoms.

Under these circumstances he feels considerable anxiety to see you & has therefore
sent a messenger to accompany you here. He thinks if you have not weaned the babe you had
better bring it with you. Wither you do so or not you had better prepare yourself for
encountering cold weather, that is put on a large amount of clothing.

I cannot at present regard his case as an alarming one but the attack is severe and
such cases sometimes result unfavorably when they have been running on as is supposed.
safely.

Eld. Ritchie thinks you had better get Mrs. Head to keep house in your absence but
you need not wait he says till she comes.

Truly yours N.B. Stebbens
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