Ward, Samuel Ringgold

(b. Oct. 17, 1817, Md., U.S.--d. c. 1866, St. George Parish, Jam.), black American abolitionist known for his oratorical power.

Born a slave, Ward escaped with his parents in 1820 and grew up in New York state. He was educated there and later became a teacher in black schools. In 1839 he became an agent of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Licensed the same year by the New York Congregational Association, he served as pastor to an all-white congregation in South Butler, N.Y., from 1841 to 1843. His second pastorate, from 1846 to 1851, was in Cortland, N.Y.

It was more as platform speaker, however, than as a preacher that Ward achieved fame in antebellum America. During the 1840s he joined the Liberty Party and spoke against slavery in nearly every Northern state. For his eloquence he was styled "the black Daniel Webster," but in 1850 he criticized Webster sharply for his acquiescence concerning the Fugitive Slave Act.

Ward himself became involved in the rescue of a fugitive slave in 1851. Then, fearing arrest, he fled to Canada. During his two years in Canada, he served as an agent of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada and assisted the fugitive American slaves who had taken residence north of the border.

In April 1853 Ward went to England on a fund-raising mission. During his two-year stay, he gave many speeches and published his life story, Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro (1855). In 1855 he settled in Kingston, Jam. Until 1860 he served as pastor to a small group of Baptists there. He later moved to St. George Parish.