



Frederick Douglass

A
MEMORIAL DISCOURSE;

BY

REV. HENRY HIGHLAND GARNET,

DELIVERED IN THE HALL OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

WASHINGTON CITY, D. C.

ON SABBATH, FEBRUARY 12, 1865.

WITH AN

INTRODUCTION,

BY

JAMES McCUNE SMITH, M. D.

PHILADELPHIA:
JOSEPH M. WILSON.
1865.

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provincial cities for the purpose of devising means for their advancement, the principal of which was an earnest endeavor to secure the right to vote on the same basis with the whites. These meetings answered a double purpose: they knit together the oppressed living in all parts of the State, enabled them to cheer and encourage each other in the up-hill road in which it was their destiny to tread; they also afforded to the dominant (white) class an opportunity to witness the fine talent for business and oratory which these convèntions always exhibited. The day sessions were devoted to business, and the evening sessions to speaking *at* and *to* the crowded audiences of the whites whose convictions were thus reached by evidence which could not be gainsayed. Foremost among the leaders of these conventions were the Revs. Theodore S. Wright, Henry H. Garnet, Samuel Ward, Charles B. Ray, Messrs. Stephen Myers, William H. Topp, Francis Thompson, William Rich and others. There were good times at most of them, there being just enough difference of opinion to produce lively debates without the bitter remembrances which sometimes remain after similar gatherings. Each session was opened and closed with prayer; there was a feeling of nearness to God, and dependence on his help, and submission to his Divine providence and will, which it is pleasant to look back upon, in these days, when even a colored national convention—intellectual at that—overlooking the concrete living God, is content to appeal to one of his supposed abstract attributes.

The New York City riots of 1863, among other disasters, has caused the destruction of nearly all the printed minutes of these conventions—our Alexandrine Library—from which some of the noblest pages in the history of our people could have been selected. We have, thus far, been able to find only the “Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of New York, held in the City of Schenectady on the 18th, 19th, and 20th September, 1844.”

From this, as illustrative of the time, and of the subject of this sketch twenty years ago, we make several extracts exhibiting the great leader, and to what labors he urged the people, and also the spirit of his devoted friend and coadjutor.

“CALL FOR THE CONVENTION.”

“FELLOW CITIZENS OF NEW YORK:—

“You are invited to attend the Annual Convention of the colored citizens of this state, and our friends, which will convene by leave of Divine Providence in the city of Schenectady, on Wednesday, September 18, at 10 A. M.

Your Committee believe that the success which has attended our former Conventions will be sufficient to secure a large attendance to the one anticipated.

In accordance with a resolution which was passed at the Rochester Convention, the delegates to the approaching meeting are requested to bring with them the religious, educational, property and Society Statistics of the districts which they represent.

It is the opinion of the laborious and long suffering among us, that our sphere of action should be enlarged:—that while we continue with unabated zeal to knock at the door of the Capitol until we obtain equal suffrage, at the same time we should consider every department of reform that is interesting to men, and that promises to improve our moral and intellectual being.

Brethren, we expect a great meeting. We know what to expect from New Yorkers. From that auspicious day when our State Banner was first flung to the breeze, to our last great gathering at Rochester, we have not failed in a single Convention. We have withstood every opposition with unflinching perseverance, although we have been assailed by foes from abroad, and enemies in our midst. But now the tide begins to turn, and smiling hope with anchor sure and steadfast, points to certain victory.

We invite our fellow-citizens in every part of the State to make a grand rally. Come from the regions of the lakes and the broad valleys of the west. Come from your mountain homes of the east—the rocky ramparts of the North, from the sea-beaten shores of the South. Come, hoary-headed sires, we desire your counsel. Come, young men, and unite your strength, and form a nucleus of Liberty around which the moral strength of the whole State shall gather. We need and earnestly solicit the aid and approbation of our noble-hearted women, who have never been backward in any measure of general good.—A brighter day is

1. A general diffusion of literary, scientific and religious knowledge among the people. This can be done, as it has already been done in some places, by the establishment of Public Libraries, Lyceums, and Public Lectures.

2. By the careful education of our youth, and holding out to them additional encouragement, in proportion to the extra difficulties which they have to encounter.

3. By giving our children useful trades, and by patronizing those who may have engaged in useful handicrafts.

4. The committee would urge as first in importance the removal of our people from the cities and large towns, and the betaking of themselves to the country. Prejudice is so strong in cities, and custom is so set and determined, that it is impossible for us to emerge from the most laborious and the least profitable occupations.

For instance, in the city of New York, a colored citizen cannot obtain a license to drive a cart! Many such like inconveniences beset them on every hand. Thus scores of men, whose intelligence (we would say nothing of their enterprise) is sufficient to entitle them to stations of trust and profit, are compelled to drudge out their lives for a scanty subsistence. It has been seen, that when they have satisfied the demands of the landlord, provided their fuel, and have paid devotion to the shrine of fashion, there is nothing left for "a rainy day," and they often die in want.

Not so in the country, where every man is known, and even our people who are so much abused in cities are respected almost according to their moral worth. The committee would not say that there are none of these difficulties in the country—but that there are far less than are met with in cities, we do affirm.

In the country, no man is prohibited from driving a cart! Nay, he can raise his own horses and cattle, and drive them over his fruitful fields, or to the fair, or to the market, or elsewhere. He can go to the woods and get his fuel, and burn the same in his log cabin, when winter winds are abroad, without fearing lest his solid comfort should be interrupted by a surly landlord, who is as certain to come every three months, as death is at the end of life.

In the towns of Syracuse and Geneva, among a colored population of some eight hundred, there are more voters according to the odious \$250

qualification, than there are in New York city, which has eighteen or twenty thousand colored inhabitants.

Whoever will take the pains to examine facts on the subject, will find that real influence and property dwindles away in the hands of our people, as we approach cities and large towns. In New York City there is but one * instance among our High Schools, Theological Seminaries, and Colleges, in which a colored youth can avail himself of its benefits. In many other cities not even one exception is found.

Indeed, the Committee know of no College or Female Seminary in any city of the Union whose doors are open for our children.

If the talents of our young men, which in the cities are hindered in their growth were transplanted to the country, there is no prejudice so strong as to be able to roll back the tide of our enfranchisement. †

In every prosperous country, and among every powerful and influential people, whose territory would admit of the employment, agriculture has contributed its full share of wealth and glory. In our country, where labor is honorable, and where the fruitful earth invites the husbandman to dress and till it, agriculture is emphatically the surest road to temporal happiness.

In the proudest days of Rome, when she stretched out her sceptre over a subjugated world, she called her favorite from the furrowed field. Her legislators encouraged her farmers, nor did the sun of her glory begin to set, until her fields were neglected, and her sons exchanged that honorable labor for the luxury and licentiousness of cities and camps. The Committee would venture to say, that if agriculture bore such an important part in promoting the greatness of an entire nation, the same course would secure an influence for the oppressed portion of any people.

But every man that removes to the country, or to some small and growing town, need not necessarily become a farmer. If he be a mechanic, he may turn his attention to his trade, with great advantage. Cities are not in themselves unfavorable to our people, but public opinion in them is such as to render it next to impossible for us to rise above

* Union Theological Seminary.

† A member of the committee was a short time ago informed by the esteemed Governor of Massachusetts, that there is a humble, though upright colored citizen of his town, who is doing more by his example and intelligence to benefit his people, than all other human efforts. He would not have been noticed in a large city.

dependence. Let our men become the owners of the soil, and they shall be the founders of towns and villages; and as they grow up, they may grow with them, and may give tone and character to a just and liberal public sentiment.

Let a few families select a good spot, having favorable water privileges, and other advantages—let them subdue the forests, erect their mills, and build their workshops, and in a few years they will have a thriving village. Or let them go to some youthful towns just springing into existence.

In conclusion the Committee would advise families and individuals to leave the large cities, and repair to the country, and by observing the other recommendations in the report, they will use the best and most certain means to promote our happiness and enfranchisement.

Signed,

H. H. GARNET.

3rd. We cannot resist adding here the letter of REV. T. S. WRIGHT, addressed to the same convention, showing the spirit which actuated the warmest friend, admirer and supporter of the Rev. Mr. Garnet, for “a man may be known by the company he keeps.”

NEW YORK, *Sept.* 17, 1844.

To the President of the State Convention, convened at Schenectady, on the 18th inst.

The subscriber through you, sir, begs the privilege to state, that having, in connection with others, the responsibility imposed upon him of representing the city of New York, in your honorable and important convocation, deeply regrets that in consequence of severe indisposition, he is denied the anticipated happiness of discharging that responsibility, by participating in your intrinsically important deliberations.

This circumstance, unimportant in others, and to the noble cause for the promotion of which you are convened, causes anxiety to myself, that my brethren of the city of my earliest and some of my most pleasant recollections and associations, may be apprised of the cause of my absence; and further, that the noble, the disinterested band of patriots and reformers, gathered from every section of our great, though to our people, unjust state, with whom it has been my high privilege and honor to labor and pray at previous conventions, may rest assured that my love for the great principles which brought into existence this great conventional

movement has in no wise abated, nor has my zeal, in their propagations, nor my confidence under God of their final and glorious triumph.

If God be just and true, his immutable and eternal truth will ultimately annihilate that cruel prejudice, injustice and oppression, which in our state has plundered our franchise, or fundamental rights, and with a cruel, bloody and wicked hand now crushes millions in this nation to the dust.

May I not hope for your forbearance whilst I express my great solicitude, that this convention, like those which have preceded it guided by the Spirit from on high in all its decisions may lean on God; planting itself on the great fundamental principles of his eternal and immutable truth, not on worldly expediency or on time-serving policy? The present is a period of danger. The political tornado is now sweeping through the land. And it cannot be expected that we in common with the multitude should be affected more or less, by the miserable sophisms wielded by many of both of the two great political parties, to carry the nation. My confidence is in the principles upon which the Liberty party is based. I believe they are just. But were it my happiness to be a member of the convention, I would not be anxious for its formal identification with this party. I should not advocate it, unless an issue between this and one of the other parties were forced upon me, or some action was proposed to the disparagement of the Liberty party. I would then feel religiously called upon to stand by liberty principles. If I was alone enjoying the sweet consciousness of having the truth with me, and the approbation of the God of the oppressed before whom as I am emphatically reminded I may be summoned to appear, before the return of another annual convention, having had, during the hours of my recent affliction, time for deliberate, solemn reflection on this subject with its bearings upon the nominally free and upon the more forlorn condition of our brethren in bonds, in humility I would say to my brethren of the delegation, if I were pronouncing my last dying words, adhere to these principles, swerve neither to the right nor the left, they are in my humble judgment truth indestructible and God-given.

Fear not results, leave them with God. He will take care of his own truth.

May the guidance and blessing of the Spirit from on high, the spirit of wisdom, be upon the delegation. Amen.

THEODORE SEDGWICK WRIGHT.