

[Mr. Austin Stewart, on taking his seat as President of the Convention said:]

“GENTLEMEN,—I thank you for the honor you have conferred upon me, and only wish that you had selected a better man. I well recollect the stirring Convention held in the city of Albany last August, which adopted measures to extend the elective franchise; and my heart swells now with emotion as I realize the weightiness of the position which myself and my brethren at that time occupied. I feel, therefore, the responsibility you have placed upon me in selecting me to preside over this important and respectable Convention.

I am aware that men have come here with great and solemn purposes. I can see here some from the near shores of the Atlantic, and some from the borders of our Northern Lakes, who have manifestly come with a view to have their wrongs prospectively redressed. It is highly proper for you thus to meet—for you are acting under the Constitution of your country, which warrants you peaceably to assemble for a redress of grievances.

It cannot be denied, gentlemen, that we are suffering under burdens too grievous to be borne. They are remnants of those that have been weighing our people down for the last two hundred years—therefore, it is fitting that you should be alive to the value of your rights, and I hope you will speak in such loud and clear tones as that your voice will be favorably heard in the Legislature next winter.

I hope I may never be called upon to attend another Convention in this State like the present; but rather trust that your measures as may be now adopted will prove successful. Not, however, that

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I am faint-hearted; no, gentlemen—rest assured, that should disappointment come, Western New York will again be with you—aye, twenty times again.

I wish you *God speed!* Be active! Let defeat give you courage! Freedom never was attained without very great expectations and sacrifices. Yes! even to the yielding of your life. Thanks to God! no blood is called for now! I believe the American people, whose blood was spilt at Ballston and Saratoga, will be willing, when we show our claims, to grant us equal political rights without any physical strife. Let me say, gentlemen, further, that I hope every one has come here to-day to work for the common good of the people. Let us be united in feelings, though we may differ in opinions. No private considerations should be entertained in this Convention, but each man should be willing to concede a little, that the great measures may be carried out.

We have much to encourage us to labor in the cause we have espoused. You will recollect that the 9 months' law has been but recently repealed; and from the disposition shown in the last Legislature, it becomes a double duty on us to persevere in sending up our petitions.

It cannot be denied, that the Constitution of our State tolerates an odious distinction—requiring \$250 real estate of a colored man before he can vote, while the white man is exempted from this requirement.

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is to be hoped that each delegate here is willing to pledge his honor never to cease in his efforts until this blot is wiped off from the Constitution.

It is but reasonable that we should enjoy this common right in the State. For, independence of our claims as native citizens, when we look back to the struggles of the Revolution, and remember how the blood of the black man mingled with that of his fairer countrymen, it is meet that we should be looked upon as citizens in fact; it is meet that we should assemble in solemn Convention, and adopt measures to improve our present political condition. I am certain, that when the American people calmly look at this matter, they will no longer withhold such rights from us.

A great deal, gentlemen, depends upon our present measures. I might refer, among other things, to our countrymen, whose sighs and moans come up from the dark prison-house of slavery; and this alone would be a consideration why you should no longer *sleep over* the wrongs that are heaped upon you, but rather rouse to action, until you are not only freed yourselves from partial bondage, but also till every chain shall be stricken off from the poor bondmen of the South.

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