

[Resolved, That, believing knowledge to be the foundation of a people's prosperity, and that through its influence, the greatest benefits have been conferred upon mankind—we recommend our clergymen, and others, to urge its importance upon our proscribed and disfranchised fellow-men, and to encourage the formation of societies for mental improvement, as a direct means of their elevation.]

Mr. Nell said, Mr. Chairman: In support of this resolution, I beg leave to suggest a few thoughts for the consideration of the Convention.

It cannot be denied that many of the embarrassments under which we labor, may be traced to the indifference manifested by us to the cause of improvement. We have been so long the victims of a wicked prejudice, that we have failed to avail ourselves of the means that have been presented, to advance our general interest; and have not appreciated the value of knowledge as the corner-stone of those qualifications that serve to render a community prosperous. Though all are willing to admit the truth and force of Lord Bacon's sentiment, that "Knowledge is power," that its possession has conferred the greatest benefits upon mankind, and the want of it is the greatest curse, yet they do not deem it of sufficient importance for them to concentrate their efforts for diffusing its salutary influence: though the assertion of the wise, of all ages, and the experience of all past history, is confirmation strong, that no community can ever be truly great, powerful, or virtuous, where the majority are uninterested in the cause of improvement.

It will, of course, be admitted, that in no previous age have the opportunities of acquiring knowledge been so numerous as at present; and though we are not yet per-

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mitted to bask at pleasure in the full sunshine of literary advantages, yet, if we but improve upon what is at our disposal, the foundation will assuredly be laid for future advancement. "It is not reasonable to put out our candle and sit still in the dark, because we have not the light of sunbeams."

We must be a reading people. Our characteristic must be that of a community striving to exert all our energies for improvement. We must remember, that by individual efforts we aid in rearing the temple of our rights. Upon us, the cause of Reform has a special claim. Struggling, as we are, against the withering influences of malignant prejudice, nothing will tend so effectually to ward off its blows, and produce the respect due to us as men, as the fact of our being engaged in intellectual pursuits: the result of which, will be seen in our daily deportment, and intercourse with society. It is even now in our power to overleap the barriers that shut us out from enlightened society; there are kindred spirits who will welcome us, if but earn the right to a place. It is natural that persons of like taste should associate with each other; let us, therefore prove ourselves men, in Literature, Philosophy, Science and the Arts, and those who love them will welcome us to their side.

There is no portion of the human family doomed by the Creator to everlasting seclusion from improvement. Man's avarice and tyranny has indeed been the means of burying in obscurity the intellect of many of our brethren; but the spark of genius has been kindled by an almighty power, and will develop itself, as truth advances. They shall find the path of knowledge, and walk therein.

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Knowledge is the foundation of a people's prosperity. It indeed [opens the avenue through which we must pass] to obtain our rights; and though its entrance may be guarded by foes to our race, though an unholy custom has hitherto compelled us to remain at a distance, and persecuted us with a spirit peculiarly its own, yet it is our glorious privilege to rise above these difficulties, step by step, until we make the victory ours. "They only are free, who *will* be free."

Knowledge will excite in us a spirit of enterprise.— Under the influence of its cheering beams, we shall arise and shake of our fatal lethargy. There will yet be warehouses erected, filled with merchandise, the property of colored merchants; and over the wide waste of waters will yet be seen the foamy tracks of our gallant barks, laden with the produce of other climes.

By the acquisition of knowledge, the people will be prepared for any emergency that may await them;— whether, to escape persecution, we adopt the language of the Greek emigrant, and seek a land beyond the wave—

"Where hands and hearts and souls are twined.
And free the MAN, and free the MIND:"

or whether we prefer to remain on the soil that gave us birth, and by our devotion to the cause of improvement, our untiring zeal in contending for rights withheld, and fidelity to our enslaved brethren, we live down the obstinate prejudices of the age, and thereby compel this guilty nation to acknowledge the debt she owes her oppressed sons and daughters.

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