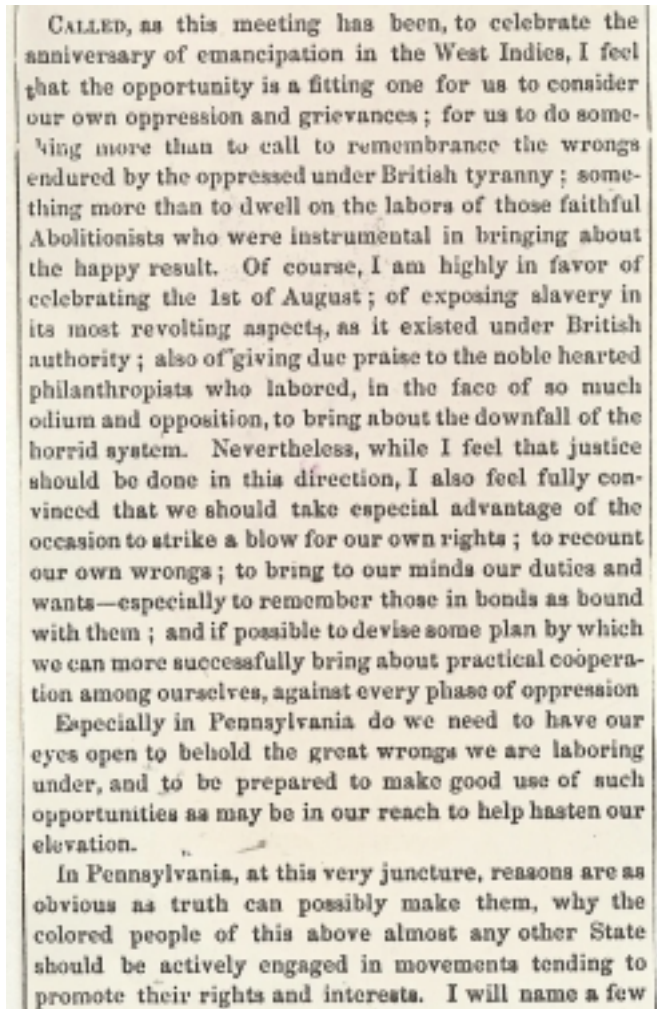


CALLED, as this meeting has been, to celebrate the anniversary of emancipation in the West Indies, I feel that the opportunity is a fitting one for us to consider our own oppression and grievances; for us to do something more than to call to remembrance the wrongs endured by the oppressed under British tyranny; something more than to dwell on the labors of those faithful Abolitionists who were instrumental in bringing about the happy result. Of course, I am highly in favor of celebrating the 1<sup>st</sup> of August; of exposing slavery in its most revolting aspects, as it existed under British authority; also of giving due praise to the noble hearted philanthropists who labored, in the face of so much odium and opposition, to bring about the downfall of the horrid system. Nevertheless, while I feel that justice should be done in this direction, I also feel full convinced that we should take especial advantage of the occasion to strike a blow for our own rights; to recount our own wrongs; to bring to our minds our duties and wants—especially to remember those in bonds as bound with them; and if possible to devise some plan by which we can more successfully bring about practical cooperation among ourselves, against every phase of oppression[.]

Especially in Pennsylvania do we need to have our eyes open to behold the great wrongs we are laboring under, and to be prepared to make good use of such opportunities as may be in our reach to help hasten our elevation.

IN Pennsylvania, at this very juncture, reasons are as obvious as truth can possibly make them, why the colored people of this above almost any other State should be actively engaged in movements tending to promote their rights and interests. I will name a few



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of the reasons thus alluded to.

1. Because we number a larger free proscribed population than any other Northern State.

2. Because we are bordered by three slaveholding States, where prejudice is engendered against us, and continual outrages from the slave-hunter under the operation of the infamous Fugitive Slave law.

3. Because, being in such close proximity to slavery, our movements and actions are daily watched by all classes, especially by the great body of whites, who adhere to pro-slavery sentiments, or who take no active part in our behalf. Hence, in assuming an earnest, resolute and practical ground in favor of freedom, we could not fail to strike most effective blows against oppression.

4. Because it is evident that not unfrequent visits are made to this State, from the bordering slave States, by slaveholders, *expressly* to view our condition; some with a partial and some with a positive desire to emancipate their slaves, and settle them on free soil among us. Of course our bearing and attitude weigh either favorably or unfavorably. If seen manfully engaged in important movements to raise ourselves and to redeem our brother from bondage, none could doubt the telling effect our actions would have in this direction. Again, it is a fact equally important to consider, that within the last few years, under the increasing barbarous enactments in the South, not a few of our brethren, nominally free, have been either summarily expelled from their homes, or admonished that they could only remain with barely the faintest hope of retaining but a few of the poor privileges that had hitherto been allowed them. Hence

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this class, too, from time to time, come among us, to see our condition, hoping to find sympathy and encouragement to cast in their lot with us; consequently, in this respect, as in the instances just alluded to, our actions speak louder than our words. The man who values his freedom—who cannot be content to be merely the hewer of wood and the drawer of water—who will not be kept down in ignorance, however hard he may have to struggle against difficulties to acquire knowledge—who chooses a life of sobriety and industry rather than intemperance and idleness, is, unquestionably, of the only class among us to make a favorable impression upon the minds of these deeply outraged visitors or exiles. I fear we are too apt to overlook our responsibility in this respect.

5. Because we can do for ourselves what nobody else can do for us. The hundreds of heroic fugitives who yearly throw off their yokes, passing through indescribable perils and hardships on their way to Canada, seem to cry aloud in our ears—"Hereditary bondmen! know ye not who would be free themselves must strike the blow?"

Thus viewing our chances for rendering vital service to our cause, I ask, does not common sense dictate that we should be intensely in earnest in the great work of abolition? Does not common sense indicate, that we are directly on the ground, notwithstanding prejudice, etc., where we could do, by wise and determined effort, what the free colored people of no other State could possibly do to weaken slavery?

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earnestness through petitions, memorials, etc.? In the very effort to procure signatures, with suitable documents to distribute, how successfully, we might advance our cause in various ways. How many minds we could interest who otherwise would remain indifferent!

Through the avenues of our numerous societies and Churches, situated as we are among the whites, with diligence, without much sacrifice of time or means, it would seem that we could easily reach hundreds of thousands of citizens annually with our petitions for the right of suffrage. Also, by proper management, doubtless, were we to appoint a delegation of respectable and intelligent colored men to bear our memorials and petitions to Harrisburg, a respectful hearing would be granted them by the Executive and House of Representatives, despite of prejudice and proscription. Indeed, information such as we could and should furnish, pleas and appeals earnestly made by ourselves, I feel confident would be seriously considered and effectively used for our benefit. For want of such information, those friendly to us in legislative halls, editorial chairs and places of power, on hearing us grossly slandered by pro-slavery men, often feel compelled to remain silent; and hence we have to suffer daily from many prejudicial charges and imputations, when we have it in our power to remedy these things, to some extent at least.

But, with regard to the momentous question of our liberty, what attitude do we occupy? What influence are we exerting? Unfortunate as our condition is, we have a history, or at least, should have one. We are taxed as other men are, and we have some men of means among us; some who have acquired learning, some who

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are farmers, mechanics or artisans, and many who are industrious, sober and upright, although in the humbler walks of life; in all we number about 70,000 inhabitants in Pennsylvania.

Now, I wish to inquire what we are doing to remove our disabilities. All of us have need to understand precisely our position in this respect.

1. Have the seventy thousand colored people of Pennsylvania a common fund for special emergencies, or to promote their general welfare? It cannot be said that they have.

2. Have we any Board, Committee or other organization, having the improvement of our people at heart? It cannot be said that we have any such instrumentalities, unless we expect a few literary societies, designed mainly for local improvement, which deserve credit. An organization, composed of honest, intelligent working men, could unquestionably accomplish a vast amount of service, by devising ways and means for our improvement; and by enlightening the public in directions where light is much needed.

3. Have we, as a people, published any pamphlets, books or documents, in defence of our rights, for distribution? Do we avail ourselves of the columns of newspapers, on every occasion when opportunity offers, to put in our plea for justice, our protest against oppression? In these respects, I fear our shortcomings have been very great. Doubt or dispute the assertion as we may, with regard to the press of this State, marked changes have been wrought by anti-slavery efforts; and although most of the journals of the day are timid or reluctant to espouse a cause likely to bring them so little

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profit and so much odium as ours, yet I firmly believe that we might find a respectful hearing, occasionally, at least, in many respectable papers of this State, if we would only earnestly press our suit. In many cases where we are deprived of our rights, it is more than probable that we could secure them if we would only contend for them earnestly. We need to give proof continually that we are sensible of the wrongs done us, and that we will not be satisfied until, in common with others, we get justice.

4. Have we given a hearty support to the anti-slavery cause? Do we take anti-slavery papers, and make ourselves acquainted with the great struggle going on in all parties in regard to slavery and our own liberties? Let us all think for a moment how much material aid we have rendered the cause. Then let us fancy ourselves just across Mason and Dixon's line—only a few hours ride from this spot—regarded there as property—as belonging, if you please, to the most pious and kind-hearted slaveholder that could be found—deprived of all rights, liable to all outrages. In this condition, what a solace it would be to us, longing to be free, to feel assured that thousands of those identified with us by complexion and sufferings, so near by in locality, were doing something practically for our deliverance—aiding to break our fetters, to unloose our heavy burdens, and let us go free. But if, on the other hand, we saw thousands acting as though they had as many privileges as they cared to be troubled with, unconcerned about us, not giving a dollar a year to aid the good work, naturally enough we should feel discouraged and forsaken.

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6. Have we any plans on foot for encouraging one another in agricultural or mechanical pursuits, or for bringing out native talent and genius, or improving the condition of the young? It appears not, I am sorry to say. As greatly as our cause needs action in this direction, as yet we are found without plans to effect anything in this respect.

By some who hear me I may be charged with looking too intently on the dark side of the picture; they may say it is not wise to dwell so largely on OUR inactivity. To portray our trials and the ill-usage we endure, would be better suited, they think, to the present occasion. While I may respect this view of the matter, I am far from assenting to it. Being found at a crisis like the present, with our liberties at stake, in a preeminent degree, and our whole manhood ignored, are we to refrain from self-examination? Should we not adopt this time-honored motto: "Self-reliance is the sure road to independence"? Are we to wait for others to do for us what we could do for ourselves? Are we to suppose that our elevation will be achieved through the influence of the Abolitionists, while we ourselves are not laboring for the same great object? It is suicidal to our interest to occupy any such ground.

The true friend of the slave may labor faithfully, and spend their money freely, to propagate anti-slavery doctrines; may aid thousands in their flight to Canada; defend the fugitive before the Courts, etc.; nevertheless, the important part of the work, so far as our elevation is concerned, I again repeat, *must be done by ourselves*.

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awaken the deepest sympathy—to command aid and respect, when acting bravely to free himself. An instance occurred, not a great while since, on a certain U.G.R.R.—the exact locality of which I will not name—which clearly illustrates this point. A gentleman of high position, a publisher of an influential and popular journal, which of course went in for carrying out the Fugitive Slave law, etc., having never been permitted to see an “arrival” on the U.G.R.R., thought the sight would be a curiosity to him. Therefore, on solemnly promising that he would “keep dark,” he was allowed to see an arrival of fifteen passengers, embracing men, women and children, all very likely looking, although they had passed through severe perils on the way. Here actions spoke with powerful effect. The gentleman’s long-cherished feelings of loyalty to the Fugitive Slave law and the pro-slavery idea of returning the bondman were not strong enough to resist the appeal of men and women thus heroically striving to be free! Without being asked, his own conscience voluntarily dictated that he should violate the Fugitive Slave law and help the weary fugitives on their way to Canada, and he put his hand in his pocket and aided them liberally. The struggle made by the sufferers themselves was what compelled this man to lend a helping hand. And it is always the case, where men are suffering and show a resolute spirit to get rid of their grievances, they will find ten to sympathize with them, where they might have looked in vain for one if acting as though they were satisfied with their lot. Men who are suffering greatly cannot act too earnestly in making their condition known—cannot place themselves in an attitude too

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quickly where all their wrongs may be viewed—cannot be too eager to avail themselves of friendly aid whenever proffered.

Indeed this indomitable spirit succeeds everywhere; and nowhere could we see greater evidences of what has been accomplished under its influence than by looking over the history of the fugitive slaves, for the last dozen years, scattered over the Northern States and Canada.

Where could we find among any class of poor people evidences of progress equal to that which has been made by many who escaped from slavery within the last twelve years? How many such have learned to read and write? How many, by industry, possessed themselves of property? How many entered into business as mechanics, merchants, etc.? The number of such is not small. Of course, I do not wish to make the impression that all the fugitives make such wonderful progress; many do not, yet the number succeeding, all things considered, is extraordinary.

In New Bedford, where many hundreds of fugitives have settled, and where, owing to the free atmosphere of the place, they feel perfectly safe, their condition is not only as good, pecuniarily, as the condition of the colored people of any other place I have seen, but I must confess they are in advance; they own more real estate and appear more prosperous than at any other place I know. A stranger visiting the place, ignorant whence they came, would not for a moment entertain the idea that they had ever worn chains in the South. Almost every family owns a genteel house and lot, with nice furniture, handsome garden, etc., proving how admirably they are capable of taking care of themselves. None

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could witness the great improvement so soon made without the utmost astonishment! At last so I felt, when I visited them one year ago. The determination to be somebody and have something is very general among the fugitives and colored people of New Bedford and Canada.

In conclusion, I wish to call your attention, briefly, to another consideration, deeply interesting to us all—indeed to the entire free colored people of the United States and Canada. I allude to the legacy of Three Hundred Thousand Dollars, left to promote the welfare of the colored man, by the late Rev. Charles Avery of Alleghany City, Pa., who died a little over two years ago. Under all our oppressions, hardships and wants in this country; but very few among the rich and great have remembered the colored man, in life and death, with such unswerving sympathy and Christian philanthropy as did the noble-hearted Avery!

Besides the endowment of a college (the Alleghany Institute), wholly at his own expense, expressly for the education of colored youth, his time and means were devoted unsparingly, in various other ways too numerous to detail here, to advance the rights of the colored man, not only in this country but elsewhere. For, although he was no colonizationist—seeing no necessity for the removal of the colored man from the land of his nativity in order that he might have justice—indeed against this spirit of colonization he earnestly protested—yet he was disposed to remember Africa and the cause of civilization and Christianity especially. Hence, of the \$300,000 he left to bless the colored man,

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\$150,000 he designed should be used to further civilization and Christianity in Africa. And the American Missionary Society, an anti-slavery organization existing in New York, was the appointed medium through which he designed that this latter sum should be appropriated. The remaining One Hundred and Fifty Thousand Dollars, intended for the free colored people in the North and Canada, was left to be appropriated by his Executors for the object named, without any specified channel or organization for its disbursement. How it may be used in order best to promote the general elevation of the free colored people, in accordance with the design of the testator, surely should interest us all. Being of the class to be benefited, and living in the State where this benefactor lived and died, and at the same time seeing our cause so greatly in need of aid, we should feel at least sufficient interest in the matter to thoroughly canvass and discuss the condition of our people throughout the entire North and Canada, either in Conventions or through the press, expressly for the purpose of satisfying ourselves as to the most propitious and feasible channels through which it could be used most effectively for the good of all. Doubtless the Executors, who are men of business and many cares, would look favorably upon any sign of interest that we might thus manifest. Proper steps taken by us might at least serve to show our gratitude and appreciation of the labors and aims of one so largely entitled to our regard and admiration as the Rev. Charles Avery.

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