PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
SEVENTH NATIONAL
WOMAN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION,
HELD IN NEW YORK CITY,
AT THE
BROADWAY TABERNACLE,
ON
TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY,
Nov. 25th and 26th, 1856.
(PHONOGRAPICALLY REPORTED BY WM. H. BURR.)
PUBLISHED FOR THE COMMITTEE.

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THE SEVENTH

National Woman’s Rights Convention.

Pursuant to a call issued by the Central Committee, the SEVENTH
National Woman’s Rights Convention was held in New York, at
the Broadway Tabernacle, Nov. 25 and 26, 1856.
The Convention was called to order by MARTHA C. WRIGHT,
President of the last Convention.
The following officers were duly appointed:

PRESIDENT.
LUCY STONE.

VICE PRESIDENTS.
LUCRETIA MOTT, of Pennsylvania.  CORNELIA MOORE, of New Jersey.
ELIZABETH JONES, of Ohio.  A. BRONSON ALCOTT, of New Ham.

SECRETARIES.
MARTHA C. WRIGHT, of New York, OLIVER JOHNSON, of New York.
HENRIETTA JOHNSON, of New Jersey.

BUSINESS COMMITTEE.
ERNESTINE L. ROSE,  JAMES MOTT,
SUSAN B. ANTHONY,  M. A. JOHNSON,
WENDELL PHILLIPS,  T. W. HIGGINSON,
WILLIAM GREEN, Junior.

TREASURER.
WENDELL PHILLIPS.

FINANCE.
SUSAN B. ANTHONY.
The Convention was then addressed by the President—

Lucy Stone. I am sure that all present will agree with me that this is a day of congratulation. It is our Seventh Annual National Woman's Rights Convention. Our first effort was made in a small room in Boston, where a few women were gathered, who had learned woman's rights by woman's wrongs. There had been only one meeting in Ohio, and one in New York. The laws were yet against us, custom was against us, prejudice was against us, and more than all, women were against us. We were strong only "in the might of our right"—and, now, when this seventh year has brought us together again, we can say as did a laborer in the Republican party, though all is not gained, "we are without a wound in our faith, without a wound in our hope, and stronger than when we began." We have indeed reason to thank God and take courage. Never before has any reformatory movement gained so much in so short a time. Looking over the past seven years, it seems almost a miracle that so much has been wrought, which is traceable directly to our efforts. When we began, the statute books were covered with laws against women, which an eminent jurist (Judge Walker) said would be a disgrace to the statute books of any heathen nation.

Now almost every Northern State has more or less modified its laws. The Legislature of Maine, after having granted nearly all other property rights to wives, found a bill before it asking that a wife should be entitled to what she earns, but a certain member grew fearful that wives would bring in bills for their daily service, and by an eloquent appeal to pockets, the measure was lost for the time, but that which has secured other rights will secure this. In Massachusetts, by the old laws, a wife owned nothing but the fee simple in her real estate. And even for that, she could not make a will without the written endorsement of her husband, permitting her to do so. Two years ago the law was so changed that she now holds the absolute right to her entire property, earnings included. Vermont, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island, have also very much amended their statutes.

New York, the proud Empire State, has, by the direct effort of this movement, secured to wives every property right except earnings. During two years a bill has been before the Legisla-
ture, which provides that if a husband be a drunkard, a profligate, or has abandoned his wife, she may have a right to her own earnings. It has not passed. Two hundred years hence that bill will be quoted as a proof of the barbarism of the times. Now it is a proof of progress.

Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana have also very materially modified their laws. And Wisconsin—God bless these young states!—has granted almost all that has been asked except the right of suffrage. And even this, Senator Sholes, in an able and manly minority report on the subject, said “is only a question of time, and as sure to triumph as God is just.” It proposed, that the convention which meets in two years to amend the constitution of the State should consider the subject.

In Michigan, too, it has been moved that women should have a right to their own babies—which none of you, ladies, have here in New York. The motion caused much discussion in the Legislature, and it would probably have been carried had not a disciple of Brigham Young’s, a Mormon member, defeated the bill. In Nebraska everything is bright for our cause. Mrs. Bloomer is there, and she has circulated petitions, claiming for women the right to vote. A bill to that effect passed the House of Representatives, and was lost in the Senate, only because of the too early closing of the session. That act of justice to woman would be gained in Nebraska first, and scores of women would go there that they might be made citizens, and be no longer subjects.

In addition to these great legal changes, achieved so directly by this reform, we find also that women have entered upon many new, and more remunerative industrial pursuits; thus being enabled to save themselves from the bitterness of dependent positions, or from lives of infancy.

Our demand that Harvard and Yale Colleges should admit women, though not yielded, only waits for a little more time. And while they wait, numerous petty “female colleges” have sprung into being, indicative of the justice of our claim that a college education should be granted to women. Not one of these female colleges (which are all second or third rate, and their whole course of study only about equal to what completes the sophomore year in our best colleges) meets the demand of the age, and so will eventually perish. Oberlin and Antioch Colleges in Ohio admit women on terms nearly equal with men.
Thus briefly I have mentioned some of the cheering results of our labors in this country.

In England the claims of women are making considerable progress. The most influential papers in London have urged the propriety of women physicians. Also a petition was sent to Parliament last year, signed by the Brownings, the Howitts, Harriet Martineau, Mrs. Gaskell, and Mrs. Jameson, asking for just such rights as we claim here. It was presented by Lord Brougham, and was respectfully received by Parliament.

Thus at home and abroad this great question of human equality is taking root, and bearing its own legitimate fruit. Everything has helped us. Everything will help us. The ballot is not yet yielded; but it cannot be far off when, as in the last Presidential contest, women were urged to attend political meetings, and a woman's name was made one of the rallying cries of the party of progress.

The enthusiasm which everywhere greeted the name of Jessie was so far a recognition of a woman's right to participate in politics. Encouraged by the success of these seven years of effort, let us continue with unfailing fidelity to labor for the practical recognition of the great truth, that all human rights inhere in each human being. We welcome to this platform, men and women irrespective of creed, country or color; those who dissent from us as freely as those who agree with us.

Mrs. Mary F. Davis was then introduced, and held the attention of the audience for an hour and a-half, to a most beautiful, earnest, and fearless address, which, by her own request, is omitted from the Report.

During the delivery of Mrs. Davis's speech, the audience were at first annoyed and afterwards amused by the conduct of a gentleman seated in front of the platform. He applauded vociferously on all conceivable occasions, but chiefly in the wrong places. He applauded alone, for no one kept him company. When she had concluded, he rose and asked permission to make a few remarks, which, being granted him, he ascended the platform, and was introduced to the audience, by the President, as Señor Tomas de Bélancourte y Agramente, a Cuban, and after uttering a few incoherent sentences, he was spoken to by the President, when he sat down.
Mrs. Ernestine L. Rose, from the Business Committee, reported the following series of resolutions:

1. *Resolved*, That the close of a Presidential election affords a peculiarly appropriate occasion to renew the demand of woman for a consistent application of Democratic principles.

2. *Resolved*, That the Republican Party, appealing constantly, through its orators, to female sympathy, and using for its most popular rallying cry a female name, is peculiarly pledged by consistency, to do justice hereafter in those States where it holds control.

3. *Resolved*, That the Democratic Party must be utterly false to its name and proffered principles, or else must extend their application to both halves of the human race.

4. *Resolved*, That the present uncertain and inconsistent position of woman in our community, not fully recognized either as a slave or as an equal, taxed but not represented, authorized to earn property but not free to control it, permitted to prepare papers for scientific bodies but not to read them, urged to form political opinions but not allowed to vote upon them, all marks a transitional period in human history which cannot long endure.

5. *Resolved*, That the main power of the Woman’s Rights movement lies in this: that while always demanding for woman better education, better employment, and better laws, it has always kept steadily in view the one cardinal demand for the right of suffrage, asking in a democracy the symbol and the guarantee of all other rights.

6. *Resolved*, That the monopoly of the elective franchise, and thereby all the powers of legislative government by man, solely on the ground of sex, is a usurpation, condemned alike by reason and common sense, subversive of all the principles of justice, oppressive and demoralizing in its operation, and insulting to the dignity of human nature.

7. *Resolved*, That while the constant progress of law, education and industry, prove that our efforts for women in these respects are not wasted, we yet proclaim ourselves unsatisfied, and are only encouraged to renewed efforts, until the whole be gained.

On motion of Mr. Blackwell, the resolutions were received and taken up for discussion.

Mrs. Lucretia Mott suggested that the speakers should make their remarks brief, and keep as much as possible to the point, in order that there might be an intelligent consideration of the resolutions submitted to the convention. However gratifying it might be to listen to eloquent words, it was needful, in a convention like this, that they should come together for business pur-
poses, and that they should go forth from it prepared to do something. They should resolve to be aggressive reformers. A great deal had been said about woman's peaceable and passive nature; this reform was one which needed all the combativeness of the spirit of Jesus; it needed that they should go forth armed with panoply divine. They should go forth into society as non-conformists, even as Jesus was. There was a duty for woman to perform in overthrowing and overcoming all those obstacles that had been placed in her way. The strong power of custom had closed the avenues of scientific preferment, and legislative enactments had deprived her of her just rights. She must not be kept back by the sneers and scorn that attend a movement of this kind.

The statement made by the President of the convention, of what had already been achieved in the course of the last few years, in consequence of this movement in behalf of woman's rights, and with comparatively little labor, was enough to repay them for coming together. The little progress, in this respect, that Pennsylvania had made, had been overlooked by the speaker. The laws of Pennsylvania were in a state of modification. There was a speaker present who would tell them about the efforts making in France. Some present might be familiar with the fact, that immediately after the attempted Revolution in that country, when a delegation of women waited upon the Provisional Government and asked for an equal representation, numbers of that Provisional Government entertained their appeal respectfully, some of them declaring that the only reason why the former Revolution had failed was, that France was only represented by one half of her people. Woman was suffering under the nightmare of oppression, and it was for her to raise her voice and make her plea before the people; for oppressors rarely saw themselves in their true light until the oppressed cried for deliverance. There was a native goodness in the heart of man that was ready for the reception of an appeal on every subject of moral reform; but at present so ignorant were the wisest of men on this subject of woman's legal disabilities that they had scarcely begun to imagine the extent of those wrongs. Some years ago, the speaker heard an intelligent advocate of the law in London say, that although it had been his business and his profession, for years, to settle marriage estates and other busi-
ness in behalf of women, yet he never imagined the extent of the oppression that she endured, until he read the report of the proceedings of the first Woman's Convention in Worcester. He then examined the whole subject, and such was his conviction of the truthfulness of the statements made at that convention, and the necessity of spreading the facts before the people, that he sent a sum of money to this country to aid in the publication of documents, and requested copies of all such publications to be sent to each of his daughters in England. And not only that gentleman, but the able editors of the Westminster Review had taken up the subject, and published an able article from the pen of a woman, called out by the proceedings of the first convention at Worcester. So this reform had now made a good beginning, and if they continued faithful and active their labors would not be in vain.

The President stated that several letters addressed to the convention had been received, among which was one from Francis Jackson, of Boston, one of the noblest of the noble men of the age, inclosing $50, which he says, he gives “to help this righteous cause along.” Also a letter from the Rev. Samuel Johnson, of Salem, Massachusetts, which would be read by Mr. Higginson.

Rev. T. W. Higginson said he was much more willing to be called upon to read the words of others at this time, than to utter poor words of his own. He was not going to make a speech, but wished to make a single remark. There were many who came into a Woman’s Rights Convention and started to find men on the platform. He could only say, that in these times, and with the present light, there was no place where a man could redeem his manhood better than on the Woman’s Rights Platform. Gentlemen in distant seats were perhaps trembling to think that they had actually got that far into this dangerous place. They might think themselves well off—no, badly off—if the maelstrom did not draw them nearer, and nearer and nearer in, as it did him. He began, like them, hesitating and smiling on the back seats; they saw what he had got to now, and he hoped they, too, might get into such noble company before long. He was prouder to train in this band than to be at the head of the play-soldiers who were marching through the streets to-day, and immortalizing them-
selves by not failing, so utterly as some of their companions, to hit some easy target. *Those* were play-soldiers; *these* were soldiers in earnest.

It was usual for men to talk a great deal of nonsense about the Woman's Rights movement. One of the nonsensical sayings was, that you can't reason with a woman. He never knew a husband who was demolished in an argument by his wife, or a young gentleman who found his resources of reason entirely used up by a young lady, who did not fall back at last when there was no retreat, and saying, "It's no use; you can't reason with a woman." Well, so it would seem in their case.

Others shelter themselves behind the general statement, that they don't wish to marry a Woman's Rights woman. I have no doubt the Woman's Rights women reciprocate the wish. These appear to have some anxiety about dinner—that seems to be the trouble. Jean Paul, the German, wanted to have a wife who could "cook him something good?" and Mrs. Frederica Bremer, the novelist, remarked, that a wife can always conciliate her husband by having something to stop his mouth. And so far was this carried, in a conversation in Philadelphia the other day, that a young lawyer, when told that Mrs. Emma R. Coe was studying law with the intention of practising, remarked, that he should never see her in Court, but she would remind him of *mince pies*; to which the gentleman he was in conversation with observed that he had better not get her as his antagonist in 'trying a suit, or she would remind him of *minced meat*. Now that was a specimen of the nonsense that men, otherwise sensible, talked about the Woman's Rights Convention.

Having given two or three examples of the nonsense of men upon this subject, he would now read them some sense. The letter he was about to read was from one of the most eloquent and learned of the younger clergy of New England; a man possessed of powers of genius and practical wisdom which would yet make him heard in a larger sphere than that which he now occupied, before many years. It was not the old English Sam. Johnson, who said that "there never was a lawsuit or a quarrel where a woman was not at the bottom of it." This was Sam. Johnson Americanized, and of course he was a Woman's Rights man.
WOMAN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION.

Salem, Oct. 4th, '56.

Dear Friend,—In complying with your desire that I should send a few words to the Woman's Rights Convention, I am quite aware that in this matter infinitely more depends upon what women do than upon what men say; nevertheless, if my confession of faith will be of the least service, it shall not be wanting.

I regard this movement as no less than the sum and crown of all our moral enterprises; as a proclamation of entire social freedom, never practicable until now. I welcome it, not merely because it aims at delivering half the human race from constraints that degrade and demoralize the whole, but also because it is opening a new spiritual hemisphere, destined to put a new heart into our semi-barbarian theology, politics, manners, literature and law. And especially do I rejoice that, having defrauded the feminine element of its due share in practical affairs for so many ages, and found ourselves, as a natural consequence, drifting towards barbarism with all our wealth and wisdom, we are compelled at last to learn that justice to woman is simply mercy to ourselves.

Doubtless the main obstacles to this work come from her own sex. Strange if it were not so; if the meagre hope doled out to women hitherto should have fitted them to believe that such a function awaits them. Strange if they did not fear a thousand perils in the untried way of freedom. But the unwise distrust will have to be abandoned; and so will the conventional flippancy and contempt.

I think the grand duty of every honorable man towards this effort at emancipation is simply not to stand in its way. For how much is really covered by that duty? It means that he must wash his hands of every law or prejudice that dooms woman to an inferior position, and makes her the victim of miserable wages and fatal competitions with herself. It means that he must clear himself of this senseless twaddle about "woman’s sphere,"—a matter surely no more for his legislation, than his "sphere" is for her’s; and one upon which, at this stage of their experience, it is unbecoming in either to dogmatize; and it means that, as a simple act of justice, he must resign to her the control of her own earnings, secure her fair and full culture, and welcome her to the pulpit, the bar, the medical profession, and to whatever other posts of public usefulness she may prepare herself to fill. As long as he fails of doing this, he is unjustly interfering with her sacred rights; and after he has done this, he may safely leave the rest to her.

It is humiliating indeed that numbers of well-disposed persons should not recognize so plain a duty. I have no patience to argue it. The moral logic of this movement is as patent as the simplest rule in arithmetic. Every argument brought against it resolves itself into a sneer at woman’s capacity, or an anxiety lest the distinction God has established between the sexes will not bear testing; or, what is more common still, though covered up in a thousand ways, the brutish assertion that “might makes right.”

There is but one answer to these impertinences, and that is the success of