REMINISCENCES BY FRANCES D'GAGE.

SOJOURNER TRUTH.

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The leaders of the movement trembled on seeing a tall, gaunt black woman in a gray dress and white turban, surmounted with an uncombed sunbonnet, march deliberately into the church, walk at the air of a queen up the aisle, and take her seat upon the pulpit steps. A burst of disapprobation was heard all over the house, and there fell on the listening ear, “An abolition affair!” “Woman’s rights and niggers!” “I told you so!” “Go it, dotkey!”

I glanced on that occasion to wear my first laurels in public life as president of the meeting. At my request order was restored, and the business of the Convention went on. Morning, afternoon, and evening exercises came and went. Through all these sessions old Sojourner, quiet and reticent as the “Uphian Satyr,” sat crouched against the wall on the corner of the pulpit stairs, her sunbonnet shading her eyes, her elbows on her knees, her chin resting upon her bread, hard packed. At intermission she was busy selling the “Life of Sojourner Truth,” a narrative of her own strange and adventurous life. Again and again, timorous and trembling ones came to me and said, with earnestness, “Don’t let her speak, Mrs. Gage, it will ruin us. Every newspaper in the land will have our cause mixed up with abolition and slavery, and we shall be utterly denounced.” My only answer was, “We shall see when the time comes.”

The second day the work waxed warm. Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Universalist ministers came in to hear and discuss the resolutions presented. One claimed superior rights and privileges for man, on the ground of “superior intellect,” another, because of the “manhood of Christ, if God had decreed the equality of woman, He would have given some token of His will through the birth, life, and death of the Saviour.” Another gave us a theological view of the “sin of our first mother.”

There were very few women in those days who dared to “speak in meeting,” and the augurs teachers of the people were seemingly getting the better of us, while the boys in the galleries, and the seers among the pews, were hugely enjoying the discomfiture, as they supposed, of the “strong-willed.” Some of the tender-skinned friends were on the point of losing dignity, and the atmosphere thickened a storm. When, slowly from her seat in the corner rose Sojourner Truth, who, till now, had scarcely lifted her head. “Don’t let her speak!” gasped half a dozen at my ear. She moved slowly and solemnly to the floor, laid her old bonnet at her feet, and turned her great speaking eyes to me. There was a hushing sound of disapprobation above and below. I rose and announced “Sojourner Truth,” and begged the audience to keep silence for a few moments.

The tumult subsided at once, and every eye was fixed on this almost Amazon form, which stood nearly six feet high, head erect, and eyes piercing the upper air like one in a dream. At her first word there was a profound hush. She spoke in deep tones, which, though not loud, reached every ear in the house, and away through the throng at the doors and windows.

“Wait, children, what dar is so much racket dar must be somet’thin’ out o’ kilter. I tink dat twent de niggers de Souf and de woman at de Norf, all talkin’ ’bout rights, de white men will be as a fox pretty soon. But what’s all dis here talkin’ ’bout?

“Dat man ober dar say dat woman needs to be helped into carriages, and lidded ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or ober mud-puddles, or gibs me any best place!” And raising herself to her full height, and her voice to a pitch like rolling thunder, she asked, “And ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! (and she bared her right arm to the shoulder, showing her tremendous muscular power); I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and rat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear de lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen ‘em ’most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman?

“Den dey talks: ‘bout dis ting in de head, what dis dey call it? (“Intellect,” whispered some one near.) ‘Dat’s it, honey. What’s dat go to do wid woman’s rights or nigger’s rights? If my cup won’t hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn’t ye be mean to let me have my little half-measure full?” And she pointed her significant finger, and sent a keen glance at the minister who had made the allusion. The cheering was long and loud.

“Den dat little man in black dar, he say women can’t have as much rights as men, ‘cause Christ wan’t a woman! What did your Christ come from?” Rolling thunder couldn’t have stilled that crowd, as did those deep, wonderful tones, as she stood there with outstretched arms and eyes of fire. Raising her voice still louder, she repeated, “What did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do wid Him.” Oh, what a rebuke that was to that little man.

Turning again to another objector, she took up the defense of Mother Eve: “I can not follow her through it all. It was pointed, and witty, and solemn, shining at almost every sentence dazzling appliance, and she ended by asserting: ‘If de first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, disse women toger (and she glanced her eye over the platform) ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now day is in asking de woman, de men better let us.’ Long continued cheering greeted this. ‘Bleed ye for hearin’ on me, and now see Sojourner hadn’t got nothin’ more to say.’

Amid roars of applause, she returned to her corner, leaving more than one of us with streaming eyes, and hearts beating with gratitude. She had taken us up in her strong arms, and carried us safely over the rough of difficulty turning the whole tide in our favor. I have never in my life seen anything magical as the supernatural spirit of the day, and turned the ears and eyes of an excited crowd into notes of respect and admiration. Hundreds rushed up to shake hands with her, and congratulate the glorious old mother, and bid her God-speed on her mission of “testify” again concerning the wickedness of this ‘yer people.’

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