

# SOJOURNER TRUTH

Messenger of a New Day

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**I**N the second NATIONAL WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE CONVENTION, held in Akron, Ohio, in 1852, were gathered the liberals and humanitarians of the United States to discuss pro and con the question of equal rights for women. Suffrage for women in those days was about as popular among the "best" people as industrial democracy is today.

The second day of the convention was characterized by a very hot discussion indulged in mainly by Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian and Universalist ministers. One after another rose and vehemently argued against the principle of woman suffrage. Some claimed man's intellect was superior to woman's; others resorted to the mythical "sin" of Eve as evidence of woman's unfitness for the ballot. Things looked very dark for the cause. The pale, drawn faces of the little battalion registered blank dismay. Most of them were too timid to "speak out in meeting." The tide seemed to be against them that day. Only an oratorical miracle would save their cause now. Was there no woman there who was capable or courageous enough to turn the tide of opinion into favorable channels? The expressions of blank despair that played upon their faces answered, "NO!"

Then the "Lubyan Sibyl," the gaunt, black Sojourner Truth, who had sat silently in a corner, crouched against the wall listening intently to the vociferous discourses of the learned clergymen, arose slowly from her seat, moved to the front of the building and laid her bonnet at her feet. Mrs. Cager, the presiding officer, eager to grasp at any straw that might turn the tide, announced "Sojourner Truth," and pleaded for silence. Every eye was turned upon the giant Negro woman. Her clear and deep tones rang through the house. To one man who had referred to woman's weakness and helplessness, she said, "Nobody eber helped me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gibs me any best place," and then she asked in a voice like thunder,

"And aint I a woman? Look at me, Look at my arm." And she bared her powerful arm to the shoulder. "I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me - and aint I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man, when I could get it, and bear de lash as well - and aint I a woman? I have borne five chilern and seen 'em mos' all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard - and aint I a woman? Dey talks about dis ting in de head - what dis dey call it?" "Intellect," cried some one. "Dat's it, honey. What's dat got to do with women's rights or niggers' rights? If my cup wout hold but a pint and yourn holds a quart wouldn't ye be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?" And she pointed a significant finger at the minister who had made the argument. There was a storm of applause. "Den dat little man in black dar, he say women can't have as much rights as man, 'cause Christ wa't a woman. But whar did Christ come from?" The house was as silent as the grave. With rising tones she repeated, "Whar did Christ come from? From God and Woman. Man had nothing to do with Him." The applause was deafening. Then she took another objector to task on the question of the "sin" of Eve. Her logic and wit carried the vast assemblage by storm; and she ended by asserting, "If de fust woman God made was strong enough to turn the world upside down, all alone, dese togedder ought to be able to turn it back and get it right side up again, and now dey is askin' to do it, de men better let 'em."

She returned to her corner amid tremendous roars of applause, leaving the women's eyes filled with tears and their hearts bursting with gratitude. In this way Sojourner Truth went up and down the land turning seeming defeats into victories, and making eloquent pleas for the enslaved Negro and the disfranchised woman.

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