My feelings on this occasion are very peculiar, because this is the first time, upon such an occasion, that I have had the privilege of addressing an audience on this side of the Atlantic; and it certainly comes to me like a cooling, soothing balm, to have the Lord Mayor of London take me by the hand, introduced to him by such a man as Thomas James—to be shaken hands with by the world-renowned Angell James—and that brave George Smith, do dares to do justice to Oliver Cromwell [applause]—to receive attestations of kind and tender feelings, creating sentiments in my mind which I can better feel than express. I thank you for all this, and I thank you for the many regards you have shown towards the province in which I reside. It is true that, fifteen years ago—and here I think the Report a little mistaken—it was fifteen years ago, that there were but nine churches in Upper Canada. It may be thought astonishing that the increase has been so great in so short a time. I will tell you the secret of that. The men you have sent there, and are in part or wholly sustaining, are men devoted to their work, and the God of the gospel grants such blessing to such devotion, as he always grants in like circumstances [hear, hear]. They are men labouring on very small salaries. Eighty pounds a-year of your money is a large sum for us in Canada, and the amount received by the men who are labouring in the cause of God’s gospel in Canada does not amount to that sum. I know an instance in which a gentleman who was endeared to me was obliged last fall to sell his horse, and do his missionary work on foot, to procure the means of giving education to a child up-grown whom he could not educate earlier on account of the smallness of his salary. Sir, when you think of the self-denying men that are in Canada, you need not wonder that God blesses
their labour, and that the work of God prospers. There are no black churches in Canada. My own family, I believe, is the only family of our persuasion. We attend Mr. Rolfe’s [hear, hear]. I intend, please God, to return to my country, to go to my farm, and to work for the sustenance of my small wife and large family [laughter] with my hoe, and then preach the gospel as opportunity may offer [hear, hear]. I have not received any salary, I do not expect any; I make no drafts upon this society or any other, and for that reason I can refer to this matter with greater liberty. In the course of my travels in Canada, I visited every Congregational church in the Upper Provinces, save four. I have been in the houses of the ministers, and have always enjoyed their hospitality as truly, as freely as Englishmen and Scotchmen can give it—and you all know how free that is; if you do not, I do [laughter]—and I have found them devoted to their work—I have found God’s blessing upon their labours in his work—and these are the ways the churches in Canada have so greatly flourished; and I think I can say, with a great deal of certainty, that you have only to increase your liberality, and redouble your energies, and continue your prayers, and you shall see the Church rising to that gigantic strength which shall gladden your hearts, and give to you the security in future that these provinces will rise religiously as they are growing in other respects [cheers]. I will not take up your time by adverting to the allusions which have been made to the Clergy Reserves. It is enough to say, that in Canada the Congregationalists are all right on that question [hear, hear]. This question of the secularization of the Clergy Reserves has a large number of advocates in what you would call here, but what we will not allow any one to call there, the Established Church.
We have leading Episcopalians who have gone a great way for the secularization of the Clergy Reserves. They did not learn that in England, they learned it in Canada, and they learned it not very indirectly from the teaching of Independents [applause]. I take my seat, sir, thanking you for the kind sentiments you have entertained towards black people [Go on, go on”]. I am devoted to them; I have none of the prejudices against their colour that some people have [laughter]; I married a black woman, sir [renewed laughter]; and if you will excuse me, sir, I must say that I have seen no people, not even my own people in the United States, exhibit such marks of improvement, as these people have since they have come to Canada [applause]. Mr. Chairman, there is something in a man’s being free [loud applause]—in shaking off the shackles and the fetter that applies to him a talismanic power. It is like a sort of resurrection, and the man becomes another being altogether. There is a development and a springing forth, like Minerva from the brain of Jove, armed and equipped for the battle [cheers]. The blacks, whenever they have had anything like a chance, have shown as much development and improvement as any other class of men. But we never say improvement like we did when we went to Canada. There we could understand what Harriet Martineau told us, that when she was travelling in the United States, an American captain told her that the most surprising thing there was the leap of the slave to the Canadian shore. Niagara poured down its mighty cascade in vain; there was one sight sublimer still—the leap of the slave to Canada [cheers]—a leap from chattelhood to manhood [cheers]. It was the transforming power of the sacred aegis of British laws that said to the man who was a chattel, “Be thou free—be a man!”