



WOMAN'S RIGHTS TRACTS. NO. 5.

THE

RESPONSIBILITIES OF WOMAN.

A SPEECH BY

MRS. C. I. H. NICHOLS,

AT THE

WOMAN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION,

WORCESTER, OCTOBER 15, 1851.

MY FRIENDS, I have made no preparation to address you. I left home, feeling that, if I had anything to do here, I should have the grace given me to do it; or if there should be any branch of the subject not sufficiently presented, I would present it. And now, friends, in following so many speakers, who have so well occupied the ground, I will come as a gleaner, and be as a Ruth among my fellow-laborers.

I commenced life with the most refined notions of woman's sphere. My pride of womanhood lay within this nice sphere. I know not how it was, — perhaps because I am of mountain growth, — but I could, even then, see over the barriers of that sphere, and see that, however easy it might be for *me* to keep within it, as a daughter, a great majority of women were outside its boundaries; driven thither by their own, or invited by the necessities and interests of those they loved. I saw our farmers' wives, — women esteemed for every womanly virtue, — impelled by emergencies, helping their husbands in labors excluded from the modern woman's sphere. I was witness, on one occasion, to a wife's help-

ing her husband — who was ill and of feeble strength, and too poor to hire — to pile the logs, preparatory to clearing the ground that was to grow their daily bread; and my sympathies, which recognized in her act the self-sacrificing love of woman, forbade that I should judge her out of her sphere. For I felt in my heart that, if I were a wife and loved my husband, I, too, would help him when he needed help, even if it were to *roll logs*; and what true-hearted woman would not do the same?

But, friends, it is only since I have met the varied responsibilities of life, that I have comprehended woman's sphere; and I have come to regard it as lying within the whole circumference of humanity. If, as is claimed by the most ultra opponents of the wife's legal individuality, claimed as a conclusive argument in favor of her legal nonentity, the *interests of the parties are identical*, then I claim, as a legitimate conclusion, that their spheres are also identical. For interests determine duties, and duties are the landmarks of spheres. Wherever a man may *rightfully* go, it is proper that woman should go, and share his responsibilities. Wherever my husband goes, thither would I follow him, if to the battle-field. No, I would not follow him *there*; I would hold him back by his coat-skirts, and say, "Husband, this is wrong. What will you gain by war? It will cost as much money to fight for a bag of gold, or a lot of land, as it will to pay the difference; and if you fight, our harvests are wasted, our hearths made desolate, our homes filled with sorrow, and vice and immorality roll back upon us from the fields of human slaughter." This is the way I would follow my husband where he cannot rightfully go.

But I may not dwell longer on woman's *sphere*. I shall say very little of woman's *rights*; but I would lay the axe at the root of the tree. I would impress upon you woman's *responsibilities*, and the means fitly to discharge them before Heaven.

I stand before you, a wife, a mother, a sister, a daughter; filling every relation that it is given to woman to fill. And by the token that I have a husband, a father and brothers, whom I revere for their manliness, and love for their tenderness, I may speak to you with confidence, and say, I respect manhood. I love it when

it aspires to the high destiny which God has opened to it. And it is because I have confidence in manhood, that I am here to press upon it the claims of womanhood. My first claim for woman is the means of education, that she may understand and be able to meet her responsibilities.

We are told very much of "Woman's *Mission*." Well, every mission supposes a missionary. Every missionary whom God sends out, every being who is called of God to labor in the vineyard of humanity, recognizes his call before the world does. Not the world — not even God's chosen people — recognized the mission of his Son, till he had proclaimed that mission, and sealed it with his dying testimony. And the world has not yet fully recognized the saving power of the mission of Jesus Christ. Now, if woman has a mission, she must first feel the struggle of the missionary in her own soul, and reveal it to her brother man, before the world will comprehend her claims, and accept her mission. Let her, then, say to man, "Here, God has committed to *me* the little tender infant to be developed in *body* and *mind* to the maturity of manhood, womanhood, and I am ignorant of the means for accomplishing either. Give me knowledge, instruction, that I may develop its powers, prevent disease, and teach it the laws of its mental and physical organism." It is you, fathers, husbands, who are responsible for this instruction; your happiness is equally involved with ours. Yourselves must reap the harvest of our ignorance or knowledge. If we suffer, you suffer also; both must suffer or rejoice in our mutual offspring.

I have introduced this subject of woman's responsibilities, that I might, if possible, impress upon you a conviction of the expediency and duty of yielding our right to the means that will enable us to be the helpers of men, in the true sense of helpers. A gentleman said to me, not long since, "I like your woman's rights, since I find it is the right of women to be good for something and help their husbands." Now, I do not understand the term helpmeet, as applied to woman, to imply all that has come to be regarded as within its signification. I do not understand that we are at liberty to help men to the devil. (Loud cheering.) I

believe it is our mission to help them heavenward, to the full development and right enjoyment of their being.

I would say, in reference to the rights of woman, it has come to be forgotten that, as the mother of the race, her rights are the rights of men also, the rights of her *sons*. As a mother, I may speak to you, freemen, *fathers*, of the rights of my sons — of every mother's sons — to the most perfect and vigorous development of their energies which the mother can secure to them by the application and through the use of *all* her God-given powers of body or of mind. It is in behalf of our sons, the future men of the republic, as well as for our daughters, its future mothers, that we claim the full development of our energies by education, and legal protection in the control of all the issues and profits of ourselves, called *property*.

As a parent, I have educated myself with reference to the wants of my children, that if, by the bereavements of life, I am left their sole parent, I can train them to be good and useful citizens. Such bereavement *has* left me the sole parent of sons by a first marriage. And how do the laws of the state protect the right of these sons to their mother's fostering care? The laws say that, having married again, I am a *legal nonentity*, and cannot "*give bonds*" for the faithful discharge of my maternal duties; therefore I shall not be their guardian. Having, in the first instance, robbed me of the property qualification for giving bonds, alienating my right to the control of my own earnings, the state makes its own injustice the ground for defrauding myself and children of the mutual benefits of our God-ordained relations; and others, destitute of every qualification and motive which my mother's love insures to them, may "*give bonds*" and become the legal guardians of my children!

I address myself to you, *fathers*, I appeal to every man who has lived a half-century, if the *mother* is not the most faithful guardian of her children's interests? If you were going on a long journey, to be absent for years, in the prosecution of business, or in the army or navy would you exclude your wives from the care and guardianship of your children? Would you place them and

the means for their support in any other hands than the mother's? If you would, *you have married beneath yourselves.* (Cheers.) Then I ask you how it happens that, when you die, your estates are cut up, and your children, and the means for their support, consigned to others' guardianship, by laws which yourselves have made or sworn to defend? Do you reply that women are not qualified by education for the business transactions involved in such guardianship? It is for this I ask that they may be educated. Yourselves must educate your wives in the conduct of your business. My friends, *love* is the best teacher in the world. Fathers, husbands, you do not know how fast you can teach, nor what apt scholars you will find in your wives and daughters, if, with loving confidences, you call them to your aid, and teach them those things in which they can aid you, and acquire the knowledge, which is "power," to benefit those they love. Would it not soothe your sick bed, would it not pluck thorns from your dying pillow, to confide in your wife that she could conduct the business on which your family relies for support, and, in case of your death, keep your children together, and educate them to go out into the world with habits of self-reliance and self-dependence? And do you know that, in withholding from your companions the knowledge and inducements which would fit them thus to share your cares, and relieve you in the emergencies of business, you deny them the richest rewards of affection? for "*it is more blessed to give than to receive.*" Do you know that they would only cling the closer to you in the stern conflicts of life, if they were thus taught that you do not undervalue their devotion and despise their ability? Call woman to your side in the loving confidence of equal interests and equal responsibilities, and she will never fail you.

But I would return to woman's responsibilities, and the laws that alienate her means to discharge them. And here let me call your attention to my position, that *the law which alienates the wife's right to the control of her own property, her own earnings, lies at the foundation of all her social and legal wrongs.* I have already shown you how the alienation of this right defrauds her of the legal guardianship of her children, in case of the father's

death. I need not tell you, who see it every day in the wretched family of the drunkard, that it defrauds her of the means of discharging her responsibilities to her children and to society during the husband's life, when he proves recreant to his obligations, and consumes her earnings in the indulgence of idle and sinful habits. I know it is claimed by many, as a reason why this law should not be disturbed, that it is only the wives of reckless and improvident husbands who suffer under its operation. But, friends, I stand here prepared to show that, as an unjust law of general application, it is even more fruitful of suffering to the wives of what are called *good* husbands, — husbands who love and honor their wives while living, but, dying, leave them and their maternal sympathies to the dissecting-knife of the law. I refer you to the legal provision for the widow. The law gives her the *use* only of one third of the estate which they have accumulated by their joint industry. I speak of the real estate; for, in the majority of estates, the personal property is expended in paying the debts and meeting the expenses of settlement. Now, I appeal to any man here, whose estate is sufficient to support either or both in comfort, and give them Christian burial, and yet is so limited that the *use* of one third of it will support neither, whether his wife's interests are equally protected with his own, by the laws which "settle" his estate in the event of his dying first. Let me tell you a story to illustrate the "support" which, it is claimed, compensates the wife for the alienation of her earnings to the control of the husband. In my native town lived a single sister, of middle age. She had accumulated something, for she was capable in all the handicrafts pursued by women of her class. She married a worthy man, poor in this world's goods, and whose children were all settled in homes of their own. She applied her means, and, by the persevering use of her faculties, they secured a snug home, valued at some five hundred dollars, he doing what his feeble health permitted towards the common interest. In the course of years he died, and two thirds of that estate was divided among *his* grown-up children; one third remaining to her. No, she could only have the *use* of one third, and must keep it in good repair, — the *law* said so!

The *usu* of less than two hundred dollars in a homestead, on condition of "*keeping it in good repair*," was the *legal* pittance of this poor woman, to whom, with the infirmities of age, had come the desolation of utter bereavement! The old lady patched and toiled, beautiful in her scrupulous cleanliness. The neighbors remembered her, and many a choice bit found its way to her table. At length she was found in her bed paralyzed; and never, to the day of her death, — three years, — could she lift her hand or make known the simplest want of her nature; and yet her countenance was agonized with the appeals of a clear and sound intellect. And now, friends, how did the laws support and protect this poor widow? I will tell you. *They set her up at auction, and struck her off to the man who had a heart to keep her at the cheapest rate!* Three years she enjoyed the pauper's support, then died; and when the decent forms of a pauper's burial were over, *that third* was divided — as had been the other two thirds — among her husband's "well-to-do" children. (Great sensation.) And is it for *such* protection that the love of fathers, brothers, husbands, "represents" woman in the legislative halls of the freest people on earth? O, release to us our own, that we may protect ourselves, and we will bless you! If this old lady had died first, the laws would have protected her husband in appropriating the entire estate to his comfort or his *pleasure!* I asked a man, learned and experienced in jurisprudence by a half-century's discharge of the duties of legislator, administrator, guardian and probate judge, why the widow is denied absolute control of her third, there being no danger of creating "separate interests" when the husband is in his grave. He replied that it was to prevent a second husband from obtaining possession of the property of a first, to the defrauding of his children, which would be the result if the widow married again. Here, the law giving the control of the wife's earnings to the husband is made legal reason for cutting her off at his death with a pittance, so paltry, that, if too infirm to eke out a support by labor, she becomes a *pauper!* For if the law did not give the wife's earnings to the control and possession of a *first* husband, it would have no such excuse for

excluding the second husband, or for defrauding herself, and her children by a subsequent marriage, of her earnings in the estate of the first husband. But having legalized the husband's claim to the wife's earnings, by a law of universal application, our legislators have come to legislate for widows on the ground that they have *no property rights in the estates which have swallowed up their entire earnings!* They have come to give the preference of rights to the children of the husband; and sons, as well as daughters, are defrauded, legislated out of their interest in their mother's property. For, the estate not being divided when the wife dies, the earnings of a first wife are divided among the children of a second wife, to the prejudice of the children of the first wife. We ask for *equal* property rights, by the repeal of the laws which divert the earnings of the wife from *herself and her heirs.*

O men! in the enjoyment of well-secured property rights, you beautify your snug homesteads, and say within your hearts, "Here I may sit under my own vine and fig-tree; here have I made the home of my old age." And it never occurs to you that no such blissful feeling of security finds rest in the bosom of your wives. The wife of a small householder reflects that if her husband should be taken from her by death, that home must be divided, and a corner in the kitchen, a corner in the garret, and a "*privilege*" in the cellar, be set off to her *use*, and she called, in legal phrase, an "*incumbrance!*" (Great sensation.) Or if she chooses the alternative of renting her fractional accommodations, and removing to other quarters, her sweet home-associations — all that is left of her wedded love — are riven. The fireside that had been hallowed by family endearments, the chair vacant to other eyes, but to hers occupied by the loved husband still, all are desecrated by the law that drives her from the home which she had toiled and sacrificed to win for herself and loved ones, and she goes out to die under a vine and fig-tree strange to her affections; and, it may be, as in the case before mentioned, to find them wither away like Jonah's gourd, in absolute pauperism!

But I will tell you a story illustrating how women view these

things. It is not long since a gentleman of my acquaintance, who had often been heard to give his wife credit for having contributed equally to his success in laying up a property, was admonished by disease of the propriety of making a "will." He called his wife to him, and addressed her thus: "My dear, I have been thinking that the care of a third of my estate will be a burden to you, and that it will be better for you to have an annuity equal to your personal wants, and divide the rest among the children. The boys will supply you, if you should, from any unforeseen circumstance, need more. You can trust our boys to do what is right." "O yes, my dear," replied the wife, "we have excellent boys. You intrust to them the care of *your* business; and I could let them act as *my* agents in the care of my thirds. And I think, husband, that will be better. For there is this to be considered: We have other children, and differences obtain in their circumstances. You have seen these things, and, when one and another needed, you have opened your purse and given them help. When you are gone, there may still occur these opportunities for aiding them, and I should be glad to have it in my power to do as you have done. Besides, I have sometimes thought you had not done so well by the *girls*; and it would be very grateful to my feelings to make up the difference from my share of what our mutual efforts have accumulated."

Now, brothers, I appeal to you, whether you do not as much enjoy conferring benefits as receiving them? You have a wife whom you love. You present her with a dress, perhaps. And how rich you feel, that your love can give gifts! Women like to receive presents of dresses; I enjoy to have my husband give me dresses. (Laughter.) And women like to give presents to their husbands — a pair of slippers, or something of that sort. But they have no money of their own, and their thought is, "If I give my husband this, he will say to himself, It's of no account; it all comes out of my pocket in the end!" That is the feeling which rankles in the hearts of wives, whose provident husbands do not dream that they are not better content with gifts than their rights. We like, all of us, to give good gifts to those we love; but we do

not want our husbands to *give* us something to give back to them. We wish to feel, and have *them* feel, that our own good right hands have won for them the gift prompted by our affection; and that we are conferring, from our own resources, the same pleasure and happiness which they confer on us by benefits given. (Great cheering.)

But I had not exhausted the wrongs growing out of this alienation of the wife's right to her earnings. There is a law in Vermont—and I think it obtains in its leading features in most, if not all, the states of the Union—giving to the widow, whose husband dies childless (she may or may not be the mother of children by a former marriage), a certain portion of the estate, and the remaining portion to his heirs. Till the autumn of 1850, a Vermont widow, in such cases, had only one half the estate, however small; the other half was set off to her husband's heirs, if he had any; but, if he had none, the *state put it in its own treasury*, leaving the widow to a pauper's fate, unless her own energies could eke out a living by economy and hard toil! A worthy woman in the circle of my acquaintance, whose property at marriage paid for a homestead worth five hundred dollars, saw this law divide a half of it to the brothers and sisters of her husband at his death, and herself is left, in her old age, to subsist on the remaining half! In 1850, this law was so amended that the widow can have the whole property, if it be not more than one thousand dollars, and the half of any sum over that amount; the other half going to the husband's family; or, if he happen not to leave any fiftieth cousin Tom, Dick or Harry, in the Old World or the New, she may have it *all!* Our legislators tell us it is right to give the legal control of our earnings to the husband, because "in law" he is held responsible for our support, and is obliged to pay our debts (?), and *must have our earnings to do it with!* Ah, I answer, but why don't the state give us some security, then, for support during *our* life; or if it looses the husband from all obligation to see that we are supported after he is in his grave, why, like a just and shrewd business agent, does it not release to us the

“*consideration*” of that support- our earnings in the property which he leaves at his death ?

The law taking from the wife the control of her earnings is a fruitful source of divorces. To regain control of her earnings for the support of her children, many a woman feels compelled to sue for a *divorce*.

I am here in the hope that I can say something for the benefit of those who must suffer, because they cannot speak and show that they have wrongs to be redressed. It would ill become us, who are protected by love, or shielded by circumstances, to hold our peace while our sisters and their dependent children are mutilated in their hopes and their entire powers of existence, by wrongs against which we can protest till the legislators of the land shall hear and heed.

I was speaking of woman's self-created resources as necessary means for the discharge of her duties. Created free agents that we might render to God an acceptable and voluntary service, our Maker holds each human being accountable for the discharge of individual, personal responsibilities. Man, under his present disabilities, cannot come up to the full measure of his own responsibilities ; much less can he discharge his own and woman's too. Hence, in taking from woman any of the means which God has given her ability to acquire, he takes from her the means which God has given her for the discharge of her own duties, and thereby adds to the burthen of his own undischarged responsibilities. In taking from us our means of self-development, men expect us to discharge our duties, even as the Jews were expected to make brick without straw. If we are not fitted to be capable wives and mothers, — as contended by a gentleman on the stand yesterday, — if we make poor brick, it is because our brother man has stolen our straw. Give us back our straw, brothers, — there is plenty of it, — and we will make you *good* brick. Brick we must make — men say so ; then *give* us our straw, — we cannot *take* it. We are suffering ; the race is suffering from the ill-performance of our duties. We claim that man has proved himself incompetent to be the judge of our needs. His laws concerning our interests show that his intel-

ligence fails to prescribe means and conditions for the discharge of our duties. We are the best judges of the duties, as well as the qualifications, appropriate to our own department of labor; and should hold in our own hands, in our own right, means for acquiring the one and comprehending the other.

I have spoken of woman's legal disabilities as wife and mother; and adverted to the law which diverts from the wife the control of her own earnings, as a fruitful source of divorces. Increasing facilities for divorce are regarded by a majority of Christian men as significant of increasing immorality, and tending to weaken the sanctity of the marriage relation. But an examination of legislative proceedings will show that sympathy for suffering woman is the real source of these increasing facilities; and I am frank to say, that I consider man's growing consciousness of the wrongs to which wives and their helpless children are subject, by the laws which put it in the power of the husband and father to wrest from them the very necessities of life, consuming their sole means of support,—the earnings of the mother,—as heralding a good time coming, when every woman, as well as every man, "may sit under her own vine." Let me illustrate by relating one, among many incidents of the kind, which have fallen under my observation.

In travelling, some eighteen years ago, across the Green Mountains from Albany, a gentleman requested my interest in behalf of a young woman, whose history he gave me before placing her under my care, as a fellow-passenger. Said he, She was born here; is an orphan and the mother of two young children, with no means of support but her earnings. She was a capable girl, and has been an irreproachable wife. From a love of the social glass, her husband in a few years became a drunkard and a brute; neglected his business, and expended their entire living. She struggled bravely, but in vain. At length, just before the birth of her youngest child, he pawned the clothing which she had provided for herself and babes, sold her only bed, and drove her into the streets to seek from charity aid in her hour of trial. After her recovery, she went to service, keeping her children with her. But he pursued her from place to place annoying her

employers, collecting her wages by process of law, and taking possession of every garment not on her own or children's persons. Under these circumstances, and by the help of friends who pitied her sorrows, she, with her hatless and shoeless children, was flying from their "*legal protector*," half clothed, to New Hampshire, where friends were waiting to give her employment in a factory, till a year's residence should enable her to procure a divorce! Now, friends, if under New York laws this poor woman had enjoyed legal control of her own earnings, she might have retained her first home, supported her children, and, happy as a mother, endured hopefully the burden of unrequited affection, instead of flying to New Hampshire to regain possession of her alienated property rights, by the aid of "divorce facilities."

But, alas! not yet have I exhausted that fountain of wrongs growing out of the alienation of the wife's property rights. It gives to children *criminals* for guardians, at the same time that it severs what God hath joined together—the mother and her child! By the laws of all these United States, the father is in all cases the legal guardian of the child, in preference to the mother; hence, in cases of divorce for the criminal conduct of the father, the children are confided, by the natural operation of the laws, to the guardianship of the criminal party. I have a friend who, not long since, procured a divorce from her husband,—a libertine and a drunkard,—and by the power of *law* he wrested from her their only child, a son of tender age. Think of this, fathers, mothers! It is a sad thing to sever the marriage relation when it has become a curse—a demoralizing (?) thing; but what is it to sever the relation between mother and child, when that relation is a blessing to both, and to society? What is it to commit the tender boy to the training of a drunken and licentious father? The state appoints guardians for children physically orphaned; and much more should it appoint guardians for children morally orphaned. When it uses its power to imprison and hang the *man*, it is surely responsible for the moral training of the *boy*! But to return. I have asked learned judges why the state decrees that the father should retain the children,

thus throwing upon the innocent mother the penalty which should fall upon the guilty party only? Say they, "It is because the father *has the property*; it would not be *just* (?) to burden the mother with the support of *his* children." O justice, how art thou perverted! Here, again, is the unrighteous alienation of the wife's earnings made the reason for robbing the suffering mother of all that is left to her of a miserable marriage — her children! I appeal to Christian men and women, who would preserve the marriage relation inviolate, by discouraging increased divorce facilities, if prevention of the necessity be not the better and more hopeful course, — prevention by releasing to the wife means for the independent discharge of her duties as a mother. And I appeal to all present, whether, sacred as they hold the marriage relation, Christian men have not proved to the world that there is a something regarded by them as even more sacred — the *loaf*! The most scrupulous piety cites Bible authority for severing the marriage tie; but when has piety or benevolence put forth its hand to divide to helpless and dependent woman an equal share of the estate which she has toiled for, suffered for, in behalf of her babes, as she would never have done for herself — only to be robbed of both? If the ground of the divorce be the *husband's* infidelity, the law allows him to retain the children and whole estate; it being left with the court to divide to the wife (in answer to her prayer to that effect) a pittance called alimony, to keep starvation at bay. If the babe at her breast is decreed to her from its helplessness, it is, at her request, formally laid before the court; and the court has no power even to decree a corresponding pittance for its support. The law leaves her one hope of bread for her old age which should not be forgotten — if *he dies first*, she is entitled to dower! But let the wife's infidelity be the ground of divorce, and the laws send her out into the world, childless, without alimony, and cut off from her right of dower; *and property which came by her remains his forever!* What a contrast! He, the brutal husband, sits in the criminal's bench to draw a premium, be rid of an incumbrance; for what cares he for the severing of a tie that had ceased to bind him to his wife, that

perhaps divided between him and a more coveted companion! If we *are* the *weaker* sex, O, give us, we pray you, equal protection with the stronger sex!

Now, my friends, you will bear me witness that I have said nothing about woman's right to vote or make laws. I have great respect for manhood. I wish to be able to continue to respect it. And when I listen to Fourth-of-July orations and the loud cannon, and reflect that these are tributes of admiration paid to our fathers because they compelled freedom for themselves and sons from the hand of oppression and power, I look forward with greater admiration on their sons who, in the good time coming, will have won for themselves the unappropriated glory of having given justice to the physically weak; to those who could not, if they would, and would not, if they could, *compel* it from the hands of fathers, brothers, husbands and sons! I labor in hope; for I have faith that when men come to value their own rights, as means of human happiness, rather than of paltry gain, they will feel themselves more honored in releasing than in retaining the "*inalienable rights*" of woman.

Brothers, you ask us to accept the protection of your LOVE, and the law says that is sufficient for us, whether it feeds or robs us of our bread. You admit that woman exceeds man in self-sacrificing love; her devotion to you has passed into a proverb. Yet, for all this, you refuse to intrust *your interests to her love*. You do not feel safe in *your* interests without the protection of equal laws. You refuse to trust even the mother's love with the interests of her children! How, then, do you ask of us—you, who will not trust your interests to the love of a mother, wife, daughter, or sister—why do you ask of us to dispense with the protection of equal laws, and accept instead the protection of man's affection?

I would offer, in conclusion, a few thoughts on education. I would say to my sisters, lest they be discouraged under existing disabilities from attempting it,—we can educate ourselves: It may be that you hesitate, from a supposed inferiority of intellect. Now, I have never troubled myself to establish woman's intellect-

ual equality. The inequality of educational facilities forbids us to sustain such a position by facts. But I have long since disposed of this question to my own satisfaction, and perhaps my conclusion will inspire you with confidence to attempt equal — I would hope *superior* — attainments, for man falls short of the intelligence within reach of his powers. We all believe that the Creator is both omniscient and omnipotent, wise and able to adapt means to the ends he had in view. We hold ourselves created to sustain certain relations as intelligent beings, and that God has endowed us with capabilities equal to the discharge of the duties involved in these relations. Now, let us survey woman's responsibilities within the narrowest sphere to which any common-sense man would limit her offices. As a mother, her powers mould and develop humanity, intellectual, moral and physical. Next to God, woman is the creator of the race as it is and as it shall be. I ask, then, Has God created woman man's inferior? If so, he has been false to his wisdom, false to his power, in creating an inferior being for a superior work! But if it be true, as all admit, that woman's *responsibilities* are equal to man's, I claim that God has endowed her with *equal powers* for their discharge.

And how shall we develop these powers? My sisters, for your encouragement, I will refer to my own experience in this matter. I claim to be self-educated. Beyond a single year's instruction in a high school for young men and women, I have enjoyed no public educational facilities but the common school which our Green Mountain state opens to all her sons and daughters. Prevented by circumstances from availing myself of the discipline of a classical school of the highest order, and nerved by faith in my ability to achieve equal attainments with my brother man, I resorted to books and the study of human nature, with direct reference to the practical application of my influence and my acquirements to my woman's work, — the development of the immortal spirit for the accomplishment of human destiny. And my own experience is, that the world in which we live and act, and by which we are impressed, is the best school for woman as well as man. Practical life furnishes the best discipline for our powers. It qualifies

us to take life as we find it, and leave it better than we found it. I have been accustomed to look within my own heart to learn the springs of human action. By it I have read woman, read man; and the result has been a fixed resolution, an indomitable courage to do with my might what my hands find to do for God and humanity. And in *doing*, I have best learned my ability to accomplish, my capacity to enjoy. In the light of experience, I would say to you, my sisters, the first thing is to apply ourselves to the intelligent discharge of present duties, diligently searching out and applying all knowledge that will qualify us for higher and extended usefulness. Be always *learners*, and don't forget to teach. As individuals, as mothers, we must first achieve a knowledge of the laws of our physical and mental organisms; for these are the material which we work upon and the instruments by which we work; and, to do our work well, we must understand and be able to apply both. Then we need to understand the tenure of our domestic and social relations, — the laws by which we are linked to our kind. But I cannot leave this subject without briefly calling your attention to another phase of education.

Early in life, my attention was called to examine the value of beauty and accomplishments as permanent grounds of affection. I could not believe that God had created so many homely women, and suffered all to lose their beauty in the very maturity of their powers, and yet made it our duty to spend our best efforts in trying to look pretty. We all desire to be loved; and can it be that we have no more lasting claims to admiration than that beauty and those accomplishments which serve us only in the spring-time of life? Surely our days of dancing and musical performance are soon over, when musical instruments of sweeter tone cry "*Mother.*" (Loud cheers.) What, then, shall we do for admiration when stricken in years? Has not God endowed us with some lasting hold upon the affections? My sisters, I can only find lasting charms in that thorough culture of the mind and heart which will enable us to win upon man's higher and better nature. If you have beauty and accomplishments, these address themselves to

man's lower nature — his passions; and when age has robbed you of the one, and him of the other, you are left unloved and unlovely! Cultivate, then, your powers of mind and heart, that you may become necessary to his better and undying sympathies. Aid him in all the earnest work of life; and secure his aid in your self-development for noble purposes, by impressing upon him that you are in earnest. Sell your jewelry, if need be, abate your expenditures for show; and appropriate your means, and time spent in idle visiting, to the culture of your souls. Then will his *soul* respond to your worth, and the ties that bind you endure through time, and make you companions in eternity!

Let the daughters be trained for their responsibilities; and though you may say, "We do not know whom they will marry, whether a lawyer, a doctor, or farmer," if you educate them for practical life, by giving them general useful knowledge, their husbands can teach them the details of their mutual business interests, as easily as the new responsibilities of maternity will teach them the ways and means of being qualified to discharge *its* duties.

Educate your daughters for practical life, and you have endowed them better than if you had given them fortunes. When a young girl of fourteen, I said to my father, Give me education, instead of a "setting out in the world," if you can give me but one. If I marry, and am poor in this world's goods, I can educate my children myself. If my husband should be unfortunate, the sheriff can take his goods; but no creditor can attach the capital invested here. [Touching her forehead.] (Loud cheers.) And, friends, my education has not been only *bread*, but an inexhaustible fund of enjoyment, in all the past of my life.

50

LIBRARY

JUN 22 1976

**THE ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION**

