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TO MOTHERS IN THE FREE STATES.

BY MRS. E. L. FOLLEN.

I speak to mothers. The mothers in the Free States could abolish slavery; American mothers are responsible for American slavery.

My countrywomen, let me ask you a few questions. Have you, to whom the holy fountain of a mother's love has been opened, — when that day-star of your life, a living child, was first set in the eternal firmament of your being, — solemnly consecrated this immortal soul to the service of justice, of truth, of God? to the imitation of Christ? I will take it for granted that you have performed this high and holy duty; your son, perhaps, is now a man; he is the pride of your life, the joy of your heart; you have, perhaps, some cherished picture of him when he was a boy, and you love to compare the manly face, filling and brightening daily with the record of a good and happy life, with the innocent child-face that you love for its very childishness, and for the dawning prophecy you read there of what now is a happy reality. Do you, when you so look at the child and the man, and bring home to your heart the memory of this happy darling boy playing at your feet or laughing in your lap, your heart running over with love and joy, do you sometimes think what would have been your desolation of soul at his being snatched from you and sold for a slave, condemned to life-long ignorance, hard labor, and brutal treatment, — bereft, both of childhood and manhood, — and you, left with a breaking heart, forced to submit in silence, or endure the lash should you murmur? And now when you rejoice in the manhood of your grown-up son, and his possible happy future, and find your waning existence brightened by the sunshine of his early days, do you remember the slave that has no childhood, no youth, no manhood, and his poor mother who can never know your joy?

There is even a more painful picture than this for American mothers to see, and one that God and man call upon them to look at and remember. You have a daughter; you are a proud, tender, virtuous mother. She is your heart's choicest treasure. You would bid the winds of Heaven to blow gently upon her; you guard her with the most sensitive care; she is as the flower of your existence. Imagine her exposed to ill usage, often cruelty, always to the lowest passions of humanity; her womanly feelings trampled upon, — if possible, obliterated; her pure affections laughed at and scorned; her person desecrated, and her whole nature brought down to the level of the vileness of a licentious man. I ask you whether, when you look upon your beloved daughter, you remember the poor slave-mother and her child? Is the picture overdrawn? If you will not believe authentic statements, like those in the *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and many others never disproved, use your

own reason, and yourself judge whether it is improbable. The slaveholder has, by law, the same power over his slaves as he has over his cattle. He puts them up on the auction-block to be examined by slave-traders, just as cattle are examined by a butcher. The poor girl whom he owns may not refuse to do his bidding, let the act he commands be what it will; if she disobey him, he may punish her in any way he pleases; if she forcibly resists, he may flog her to death. The law of the land and the customs of society give her to him. She is his slave.

Do you not — I address every mother in the land — do you not know that such irresponsible power must be abused? Would you trust your own husbands or sons with such power? Would you dare accept it yourselves? In spite of the restraints of law and public opinion, do you not see enough of injustice, licentiousness, and cruelty, to show you what a hell on earth life must be where all restraints are taken away? For my part, I only wonder that, in the South, the enormities of the Slave System are not multiplied tenfold. It speaks well for human nature, that so much love and tender care and justice are practised towards these poor helpless creatures who have nothing to protect them — nothing, save the unquenchable pity still left in the hearts of men, and the fear which even the worst masters have, lying at the bottom of their hearts, of the retribution laid up for them in the world where they and their victims will soon stand side by side before the Great Judge of all. But though it doubtless is true that excessive cruelty is the exception, not the rule, yet the story of the actual treatment of the slaves is too frightful to relate. Every honest and intelligent man and woman in the land must know that Uncle Tom and Ida May owe much of their power to the ghastly truths they reveal.

But if it were proved that no cruelty was exercised towards the slaves, the case would be no better. A slaveholder calls himself the owner of that to which he has no lawful claim. He who pretends to own a human soul usurps the prerogative of the Almighty. The right of a man to himself is his first and dearest right; and there is no robbery so monstrous as that which takes it from him, thereby stripping its victim of all that is worth having in life, and putting out of his power all redress save by death or crime. It is as mean as it is cruel.

You will, perhaps, say to me 'these things may be as you state them, but what can women, — what can we mothers do? why make ourselves miserable at the thought of these terrible facts, when we can do the poor sufferers no good? what can we do?' I answer, you can do everything; I repeat, you can abolish slavery. Let every mother take the subject to heart, as one in which she has a personal concern. In the silence of night, let her listen to the slave-mothers crying to her for help. Let her prayer for them be her "Soul's sincere desire." Let her promise before God to do all she can for their redemption. Let her be faithful to her vow, "in season and out of season," and watch every opportunity and means of doing, or saying, or suffering anything she can for these poor, dumb and helpless creatures. Let her seek for light how she can best serve their cause. Let the desire to serve them go with her where she goes, and dwell a perpetual presence in her home. Let her heart, her understanding, her thoughts, be ever on the alert in their cause. While she must ask for heavenly wisdom to guide her, she must take no council from her fears; she must call no man master.

She must, in all things, be "true as truth, uncompromising as justice." Let no worldly favor win her, no flattery deceive her, no danger deter her. Her children will see in her every act a respect for the rights of all. They will see that neither position, nor color, nor any circumstances of life, can ever make her forget that God made us all of one blood. They will grow up in an atmosphere of true christian love. When they are of an age to understand and hear the sad story, she will tell them of the wrongs done by the white man to the poor slave. She has kindled in the hearts of her children a love of justice, a hatred of tyranny, a passionate desire to take the part of the oppressed which shall enlist them for life as the champions of their sorely-injured, down-trodden, colored brethren. Such a mother is as an abiding inspiration to her children. Her son will not vote for the Fugitive Slave Law or the Nebraska Bill, nor become a kidnapping United States Commissioner! If he be opposed, persecuted for fidelity to the "higher law," if all his worldly prospects be destroyed, he will not waver for a moment. Should he be fined and imprisoned, or, as some faithful ones have been, called upon to die unless he will bow to the hideous idol of American slavery, he will still hold fast his faith. Like the young Hebrew, in the story of the Maccabees, who refused to obey the tyrant, he will be ready to say:—"even in death, in the last gasp; 'thou, like a fury, itakest me out of this present life; but the King of this world shall raise us up, who have died for his laws, unto everlasting life.'" And the heroic mother will, with God's help, support him and say as the noble Hebrew mother said:—"I beseech thee, my son, to look upon the Heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, and consider that God made them of things that were not, and so was mankind made likewise. Fear not this tormentor; take thy death, that I may receive thee again in mercy." In the early days of our country, we had such mothers; and they had such sons. Let them of the present day emulate their example. Let them so consecrate themselves, so dedicate their children; and, ere long, the chains will fall from our three millions of captives, and the jubilee be heard in our land.

Many will say, "Suppose all our sons were sincerely devoted, what could they do? What steps can they take? The Free States have no power to abolish slavery. Show us some practical way." It is an old, but true saying, "A will finds a way." But who does not know that the votes from the Free States made the Fugitive Slave Law and passed the Nebraska Bill? The Free States support Slavery. The Southerners are the *Slave Owners*, we are the *Slave Holders*. Put an end to the immoral participation of the Free States, and their almost as criminal indifference, and American Slavery could no longer exist. We are the greater sinners, for we have the baser motives for our share in this iniquity. A selfish fear of harm to ourselves keeps us quiet, while we see our Republic scorned or mourned over by the lovers of Justice throughout the world. No old sacred remembrances, no time-honored prejudices, no tender associations of early and childish attachments, none of all these things can be pleaded in extenuation of our conduct. Not one of us thinks Slavery right; nay, we declare it to be a sin; out of our own mouths we are condemned.

I say, then, to mothers in the Free States, you have before you a solemn duty, a glorious work. Shall the noble Florence Nightingale

spend eight hours in the day upon her knees, by the bedside of her wounded and suffering fellow-men, both countrymen and enemies, and will not you listen to the cry of the millions of sufferers in your native land? Her mission is one of love and mercy only; yours is a work of love and mercy and justice. Shall she and other heroic women, taking no counsel from fear of ridicule, or that shrinking fastidious delicacy in which they have been nurtured, nor from fear of hardship, disease, or death, leave comfort, luxury, home, in pity for bodily suffering; and can our American women do nothing, risk nothing, for those in their native land who are bereft of everything that is desirable in life! Shall not the broken spirit, the bruised body, the wounded affections, the cramped and distorted intellect, the crushed aspirations, of the slave be remembered by his happy and favored countrywomen? Will you not listen to his cry for help? Will you not hasten to his relief, and, "on the knees of your spirit," pray and labor for him, till his wrongs are redressed and he is set free? Can you not find the skill and the courage to apply efficient remedies to the moral contagion that is slowly but surely poisoning our very atmosphere, sapping the foundations of our existence as a Republic, so that liberty and love of justice are fast dying out in our land?

Mothers in the Free States, I tell you no idle dream; I present no visionary impracticable idea. I tell you the simple truth, when I say you can, if you will, abolish slavery. The tender heart of the boy is in the hands of the mother. From her he receives his first impressions of right and wrong — impressions which remain to him through life, mingled with the memory of his first and happiest hours. When he is tempted to abandon the highest right, to make a compromise with wrong, to adopt a time-serving policy dignified by the name of prudence and defended on the plea of necessity; then shall the memory of his mother and her faithful words come back to him — the angel of his early days. In that presence, the tempter shall stand rebuked, and take his true shape of cowardice and sin. Therefore, O my countrywomen, I call upon you, I plead with you to take up this cause with a heroic faith, a martyr-like fidelity, an unquenchable courage!

I am myself a mother. I am bound with the same ties that you are. I have counted the cost, and know what I demand of you. But the time has come when woman must come to the rescue in this land. As women, our all is at stake. We have, above every other motive, that especial call for our devotion — our children. They are, at once, the pledges of our sincerity and the tests of our courage. Let us not be found wanting.

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