

Frederick Douglass's Paper

Frances E. Watkins (Harper)

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TO MRS. HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

BY FRANCES E. WATKINS

I thank thee for thy pleading
For the helpless of our race;
Long as our hearts are beating
In them thou hast a place.

I thank thee for thy pleading
For the fetter'd and the dumb;
The blessing of the perishing
Around thy path shall come.

I thank thee for the kindly words
That grac'd thy pen of fire,
And thrilled upon the living chords
Of many a heart's deep lyre.

For the sisters of our race
Thou'st nobly done thy part;
Thou hast won thyself a place
In every human heart.

The halo that surrounds thy name
Hath reached from shore to shore;
But thy best and brightest fame
Is the blessing of the poor.

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THE SYROPHENICIAN WOMAN

Joy to my bosom! rest to my fear!
Judea's prophet draweth near!
Joy to my bosom! peace to my heart!
Sickness and sorrow before him depart!

Rack'd with agony and pain,
Writhing, long my child has lain;
Now the prophet draweth near,
All our griefs shall disappear.

"Lord!" she cried with mournful breath,
"Save! Oh, save my child from death!"
But as though she was unheard,
Jesus answered not a word.

Save! Oh, save my child!

With a purpose naught could move,
And the seal of woman's love,
Down she knelt in anguish wild—
"Master! save, Oh! save my child!"

" 'Tis not meet," the Savior said,
"Thus to waste the children's bread;
I am only sent to seek
Israel's lost and scattered sheep."

"True," she said, "Oh, gracious Lord,
True and faithful is thy word:
But the humblest, meanest, may
Eat the crumbs they cast away."

"Woman," said th' astonish'd Lord,
"Be it even as thy word!
By thy faith that knows no fail,
Thou hast ask'd, and shalt prevail."

THE SLAVE MOTHER

Heard you that shriek? It rose
 So wildly on the air,
 It seemed as if a burden'd heart
 Was breaking in despair.
 Saw you those hands so sadly clasped—
 The bowed and feeble hand—
 The shuddering of that fragile form—
 That look of grief and dread?
 Saw you the sad, imploring eye?
 Its every glance was pain,
 As if a storm of agony
 Were sweeping through the brain.
 She is a mother, pale with fear,
 Her boy clings to her side,
 And in her kirtle vainly tries
 His trembling form to hide.
 He is not hers, although she bore
 For him a mother's pains;
 He is not hers, although her blood
 Is coursing through his veins!
 He is not hers, for cruel hands
 May rudely tear apart
 The only wreath of household love
 That binds her breaking heart.
 His love has been a joyous light
 That o'er her pathway smiled,
 A fountain gushing ever new,
 Amid life's desert wild.
 His lightest word has been a tone
 Of music round her heart,

Their lives a streamlet blent in one—
 Oh, Father! must they part?
 They tear him from her circling arms,
 Her last and fond embrace.
 Oh! never more may her sad eyes
 Gaze on his mournful face.
 No marvel, then, these bitter shrieks
 Disturb the listening air;
 She is a mother, and her heart
 Is breaking in despair.

BIBLE DEFENCE OF SLAVERY

Take sackcloth of the darkest dye,
 And shroud the pulpits round!
 Servants of Him that cannot lie,
 Sit mourning on the ground.
 Let holy horror blanch each cheek,
 Pale every brow with fears:
 And rocks and stones, if ye could speak,
 Ye well might melt to tears!
 Let sorrow breathe in every tone,
 In every strain ye raise;
 Insult not God's majestic throne
 With th' mockery of praise.
 A reverend man, whose light should be
 The guide of age and youth,
 Brings to the shrine of slavery
 The sacrifice of truth!
 For the direst wrong of man imposed,
 Since Sodom's fearful cry,

What if its shrine be red with blood?
Why, let him turn his eyes away.

Who dares dispute our right to bind
With galling chains the weak and poor?
To starve and crush the deathless mind,
Or hunt the slave from door to door?

Who dares dispute our right to sell
The mother from her weeping child?
To hush with ruthless stripes and blows
Her shrieks and sobs of anguish wild?

'Tis right to plead for heathen lands,
To send the Bible to their shores,
And then to make, for power and pelf,
A race of heathens at our door.

What holy horror filled our hearts—
It shook our church from dome to nave—
Our cheeks grew pale with pious dread,
To hear him breathe the name of slave.

Upon our Zion, fair and strong,
His words fell like a fearful blight;
We turned him from our silent fold;
And this we did to "serve him right."

THE SLAVE MOTHER, a Tale of the Ohio

I have but four, the treasures of my soul,
They lay like doves around my heart;
I tremble lest some cruel hand
Should tear my household wreaths apart.

My baby girl, with childish glance,
Looks curious in my anxious eye,
She little knows that for her sake
Deep shadows round my spirit lie.

My playful boys could I forget,
My home might seem a joyous spot,
But with their sunshine mirth I blend
The darkness of their future lot.

And thou my babe, my darling one,
My last, my loved, my precious child,
Oh! when I think upon thy doom
My heart grows faint and then throbs wild.

The Ohio's bridged and spanned with ice,
The northern star is shining bright,
I'll take the nestlings of my heart
And search for freedom by its light.

Winter and night were on the earth,
And feebly moaned the shivering trees,
A sigh of winter seemed to run
Through every murmur of the breeze.

She fled, and with her children all,
She reached the stream and crossed it o'er,
Bright visions of deliverance came
Like dreams of plenty to the poor.

Dreams! vain dreams, heroic mother,
Give all thy hopes and struggles o'er,
The pursuer is on thy track,
And the hunter at thy door.

Judea's refuge cities had power
To shelter, shield and save,

E'en Rome had altars, 'neath whose shade
Might crouch the wan and weary slave.

But Ohio had no sacred fane,
To human rights so consecrated,
Where thou may'st shield thy hapless ones
From their darkly gathering fate.

Then, said the mournful mother,
If Ohio cannot save,
I will do a deed for freedom,
Shalt find each child a grave.

I will save my precious children
From their darkly threatened doom,
I will hew their path to freedom
Through the portals of the tomb.

A moment in the sunlight,
She held a glimmering knife,
The next moment she had bathed it
In the crimson fount of life.

They snatched away the fatal knife,
Her boys shrieked wild with dread;
The baby girl was pale and cold,
They raised it up, the child was dead.

Sends this deed of fearful daring
Through my country's heart no thrill,
Do the icy hands of slavery
Every pure emotion chill?

Oh! if there is any honor,
Truth or justice in the land,
Will ye not, us men and Christians,
On the side of freedom stand?

RIZPAH, THE DAUGHTER OF AI

Tidings! sad tidings for the daughter of Ai,
They are bearing her prince and loved away,
Destruction falls like a mournful pall
On the fallen house of ill-fated Saul.

And Rizpah hears that her loved must die,
But she hears it all with a tearless eye;
And clasping her hand with grief and dread
She meekly bows her queenly head.

The blood has left her blanching cheek,
Her quivering lips refuse to speak,
Oh! grief like hers has learned no tone—
A world of grief is all its own.

But the deed is done, and the hand is stay'd
That havoc among the brethren made,
And Rizpah takes her lowly seat
To watch the princely dead at her feet.

The jackall crept out with a stealthy tread,
To batten and feast on the noble dead;
The vulture bore down with a heavy wing
To dip his beak in life's stagnant spring.

The hyena heard the jackall's howl,
And he bounded forth with a sullen growl,
When Rizpah's shriek rose on the air
Like a tone from the caverns of despair.

She sprang from her sad and lowly seat,
For a moment her heart forgot to beat,
And the blood rushes up to her marble cheek
And a flash to her eye so sad and meek.

The vulture paused in his downward flight,
As she raised her form to its queenly height,