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# Queen's Birthday Dinner

GIVEN BY THE

British Benevolent Association,

May 24th, 1869.

Toast to the Ladies.

Response by Henry E. Highton.









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There could be no fitter occasion for the toast to which I have the honor to respond than this annual festival, where, in the appropriate name of organized British benevolence, we pay our earnest tribute of respect to her who is the type and the exemplar of true womanhood throughout the world. The name of Victoria—first among British wives and British mothers—no less to the citizen than to the subject, suggests those intellectual and moral qualities which invest the character of woman with dignity and her influence with power. Inspiring in her sovereign capacity a deathless loyalty wherever the British heart beats, whether in arctic gloom or in tropical beauty—as the head of an order through which, for ages, the homes of Great Britain have shed a pure

and tender light upon every sphere and circle of society, she excites everywhere an unselfish affection, which springs from the poetic depths of our nature, and overflows the divisions of nationality and of race.

There are many wrongs to be righted, many inequalities to be adjusted, many sorrows to be relieved, many crushed aspirations to be renewed and fulfilled, before the boast of our civilization can be justified, and, in the reforms of the future, as in the reforms of the past, woman is to bear an important part; but, if she would retain the throne and wear the crown which the heart of man has awarded her, she must cling to the family as the social unit and the legitimate center of her sway. Fanatics may wave their crimson banners over death-strewn fields; tragic heroines may impersonate Fate and bury the glittering blade in the breasts of tyrants; triumphant revenge may blend on fair faces with the shadow of indelible remorse; queens, expelled from the hearts and from the presence of their people, may perish in ghastly isolation amid the ruin their own passions and appetites have wrought; female rhetoricians may trail the standard of their sex in the mire of a coarse publicity, and stain the bloom of modesty in the hot breath of turbulent conventions; but these will be enumerated among the failures and not the successes of humanity, and in every age experience will confirm what history now teaches: that true womanhood is no abnormal development but reigns in the seclusion

of pure and happy homes, veiled from all rude and corrupting associations,—not “undeveloped man,” but “like in difference”—the center of refined intelligence, of loyal truth, of rich affection, and of trusting faith.

“Thy emblem, gracious Queen, the British rose,  
Type of sweet rule and gentle majesty.”

More than railroads or telegraphs, more than the subtle connections of commerce and literature, woman is spinning the delicate threads that are to bind the English speaking races together, and blend their hearts into sympathy and love.

*Duty*, not *Glory*, is the corner stone of the Anglo-Saxon creed, and from the homes in three continents which rest on this foundation rises the arch of promise, which spans alike the stormy and the peaceful sea, and braids into bright and uplifted characters the noblest hopes of mankind. And if, amidst the teeming civilization of the present day, when in a thousand organized forms the strength of low ambition and of unscrupulous wealth is felt, liberty and virtue are not to be parted; if statesmen are to rise above the mists and obscurities of a narrow patriotism or a passionate revenge to the serene heights of wisdom and honor; if peace is to shed over all distracted lands its mild light and its perfumed warmth; if religion is to cleanse its garments of dogmatism and intolerance, and walk among men in the radiant

“beauty of holiness”;—to the molding influence of woman more than to all other earthly causes will these mighty results be due.

In woman, in the perfection of her attributes and of her power, imagination and fact are but the faithful reflections of each other. The earnest Ruth, glean- ing in the fields of Boaz; Mary, dropping repentant tears upon the Master's feet; Priscilla, exhibiting to the red savages the stern beauty of a Puritan enthusi- ast; the love lorn Evangeline, listening to the mys- terious undertone of the trackless sea; the twin sisters of mercy in England and America, soothing pain and anguish in prisons and hospitals and asylums—and even on the tented field—awakening contrition in the heart of guilt, and lifting the black curtain between despair and peace;—all these are types and illustrations of character, which shall form the loftiest themes of poetry and of song till the records of time are closed.

No marvel that to man—furrowed and hardened by the toil and pain of life—down through the weary years floats the sweet music of a woman's voice, returns the dewy brightness of her glance, and charms away the selfishness and the vice. No marvel that the dying soldier kisses a woman's shadow on his pillow. No marvel that here, at this festive board, our holiest feelings stir, as with one mind and with one heart, we give our last and our highest honors to the name of Woman.









