Address before the Washington Relief Society.

April 5th 1848.

I cannot conceal the satisfaction which I experience, in being called upon to address a portion of my fellow citizens, on a subject which must be dear to all hearts. The establishment of this society for the relief of the distressed, marks the existence of a good feeling among us. It is worthy of all praise. It is in accordance with the enlightened philanthropy of the age. A new era has dawned upon the world with regard to benevolent objects. A Howard has rendered his name immortal by a life of devotion to the good of others, and a host of philanthropists are imitating his example. In all christian countries charitable institutions have been greatly multiplied, and a long night of darkness to the unfortunate, has been followed by the dawn of a brighter ~~day~~ day. Hope and gladness are now the joyous occupants of many hearts, where gloom & unmitigated despair long sat triumphant. This age differs from all past ages, in no respect more favorably than in this. These feelings should be nourished - these charitable institutions should be carefully fostered. We may have kind hearts & benevolent dispositions -

we may sympathize with the afflicted – we may pity the poor, but what will all this avail unless our sympathies assume a more substantial form? We may say in our hearts "be thou warmed & be thou filled", but these words have no magic to clothe the body & satisfy the craving of hunger. They cannot like Alladin's lamp, give substance to airy nothing & fond conceits. They have no charm by which they can "Administer to a mind diseased, pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, & raze out the written troubles of the brain".

To engage in an enterprise like this – to be instrumental in doing good without the hope of reward, save that greatest of all rewards the consciousness of doing good, is to do that, it seems to me, in which all might be ambitious to excel. And were other incentives needed, than those which flow from the generous impulses of the human soul, ~~was~~ is it not some satisfaction to feel, that we are treading in the footsteps of the wisest & best men that have lived upon the earth. But the heart needs no such prompting, it acts upon its own suggestions, it instinctively seeks to contribute to the happiness of others, because it loves happiness itself. It is pleasant

therefore, to turn away from ourselves & to employ our thoughts and our leisure moments in dispensing blessings to others. It is pleasant thus to learn to be good, by seeking to do good. The desire to do good is a law of our nature, and carries with it, its own reward. There is no joy like to that arising from the consciousness of making others happy. This feeling is almost universal. In all the forms of human society - in all climes - among all races - ~~among~~ amid the inhabitants of the lordly palace, and the tenants of the humble cottage, this desire to derive pleasure from benevolent actions is equally felt & acknowledged.

"But of the poor man ask, the abject poor
Go and demand of him, if there be here
In a cold abstinence from evil deeds
Wherewith to satisfy the human soul?
No - man is dear to man; the poorest poor
Long for some moments in a weary life
When they can know & feel that they have been
Themselves the fathers & the dealers out
Of some small blessings; have been kind to such
As needed kindness, & for this single cause,
That we have all of us one human heart.

It is pleasant too, to turn aside from the broad highway of sectional and party strife, to join in a work

where all religious and political differences are buried, and where even the gentler sex may be active, and yet move gracefully & beautifully within her appropriate sphere. This is a department of human responsibility, in which woman ever has been, ~~is now~~, and so long as she is true to her nature, ever will be pre-eminently distinguished. It is a department for which nature in sympathy & in feeling has peculiarly adapted her. Earth affords no sublimer spectacle, than the wandering of a benevolent & refined female among the poor. Her occupation is delightful. She supplies their little wants - she speaks kind words to them in their distress - she provides for them comforts beyond their reach - she softens the bed of their affliction - when friends are few, when no mothers & no sisters hand is nigh to afford relief. She stands by their dying couch; and in the hour of their dissolution she points them to the skies. We have all known of such & some there are amongst us. The smiles of Heaven and the blessings of the poor crown their efforts. The faltering & joyous tears, the richest offerings of grateful hearts, follow them through life.

But fellow citizens we all have obligations to discharge towards others. Each of us

has his own appropriate work to perform. We are not placed here to be inactive spectators. We live not for ourselves alone. Benevolence begins at home, but it does not end there. There are other duties besides those which we owe to ourselves & to our families. If self preservation is the first law of nature, benevolence is the second. Does not the thought often rise unbidden to the mind, Why am I here? What end have I to accomplish? What are the objects of my existence. & for what purpose has the great Deity placed me in this world! Is it to feed, and to sleep, & to die! Is it to ~~delight~~ gratify one's self with the delights of the eye - to live on in luxurious ease, and to cater pander to depraved appetites & desires? O No! it is for other and nobler purposes. It is to feed the hungry & to clothe the naked - to relieve those that are oppressed by the heavy hand of afflictions - to provide for the fatherless and widow - to aid in the general advancement of civilization & the improvement of society. "If a man, says Bacon, be generous & courteous to poor strangers, it shows that he is a citizen of the world, and that his heart is no island, cut off from other lands, but a continent that joins them. If he be compassionate towards the afflictions of others, it shows that his

breast is like the noble tree, that is wounded itself when it gives the balm." There are objects worthy of the highest ambition, and the field is as wide as the world. By far the greatest portion of the human race are in a state of suffering and abject poverty. In all except our own favoured land, the vast body of the people are subject to unjust oppressions - debased by ignorance & vice - exposed to the ravages of disease & live destitute of the meanest comforts of life.

"Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn".

The many live for the few - the people for the princes. Look at the Millions of wretched Asia, the plaything of despotic tyrants - abandoned to hideous vices - literally crowding each other out of life, and dying like reptiles on the banks of their rivers - Look at the oppressed children of degraded Africa - sold into slavery by their own brethren & carried in chains to other lands, to become hewers of wood & drawers of water and beasts of burthen. Look at the number & condition of England's poor! England - proud England - mistress of the seas - whose dominions extend from the rising to the setting of the sun - upon whose soil, the vast as man can tread & be a plane - proud England contains within her bosom the most wretched system of slavery that curses the

face of this beautiful earth. Her poor are in a more degraded servitude, than the pauper poor of Africa ever suffered. It is a slavery of body and of mind & of soul - a slavery of the noblest attributes of man's nature. How can I speak of down trodden, generous Ireland, that loveliest Isle of the Ocean, ~~without emotion~~! Her sons & her daughters - her old men & her maidens - her mothers & her infant children die of hunger. They cry to other lands for bread. ~~and~~ Most nobly has our country responded to that call, & so long as an Irish heart is left to throb, so long will that unfortunate ~~country~~ people bless America.

We have thank Heaven, in this favoured land no hereditary poverty. None whom bad laws & bad government have made poor. We have no superior grades of society established by law. Every man's good or bad fortune depends upon himself - the poor man of to day is the wealthy man of to-morrow. But while this is so we have many among us whom sudden misfortune, or protracted sickness, or natural infirmities, or their own folly, have made objects of benevolence. We need not go far from our own doors to dispense our charities. There is want in our very midst. The winter comes with its piercing cold & chilling rains, and finds some without comfortable shelter, or fuel or sufficient clothing for their

bodies. The storms which sweep along our coast & strew our shores with wrecks, bring amid the swelling surges & the ebbing sands of ocean, many of our hardy mariners, while their helpless wives & babes are at home in poverty & want. The heats of summer & the fevers incident to our climate, prostrate many poor on beds of affliction, where they need the kind attentions of the benevolent. The poor wanderer from other lands is sometimes stricken down among us. And there is much distress which is shut out from the eyes of the world. It exists in secluded spots, where the busy & the careless and the gay, never come to seek it out. There are some suffering sensitive beings, too proud to beg; or distrustful of the kind feelings of others, too timid to thrust themselves upon their ~~cold~~ charities, who conceal their wretchedness and pine in secret. To tender aid to such, unsought & unexpected, is to lift the heart from the depths of despair, and to pour the oil of gladness upon a wounded spirit. Such charities are never felt. "There is that scattereth & yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty." But there are crowds of poor in every land who are unfelted outcasts - beyond the pale of human society & human hopes. "Condemned on pennyes burden heath to roam, Scorned by the

world, and left without a home". Oh! turn not coldly away from them. We should not stop to inquire whether distress is the result of good or bad conduct. It is enough to know that it exists. "The example of God (says Bacon) teaches us this lesson truely; He sendeth his rain, and maketh his sun to shine upon the just and the unjust." Wherever there is suffering, there should be relief. Wherever in the universe of God, one human creature, be he ever so debased, is stricken with the hand of disease & want, thither should we go with hasty feet & eager hearts to comfort & to relieve him. We are too often governed by an improper test of merit in these matters.

"Through tattered clothes, small vices do appear,
Robes & furred gowns hide all".

Of all classes of mankind, none should excite a livelier sympathy, than those who are degraded by their own vices. They are truely objects of pity. They are lost to hope, and their bad habits have by by indulgence become part of their nature. They are held by the grasp of an iron hand that is as irresistable & immovable as a mountain of adamant. It is the hand of fate, made resistless by their own depravity. But though to the last depraved, they are human creatures and as such deserve compassion.

I have spoken of philanthropists – there is one whom I must not forget.

Many years ago there lived upon the earth, one whose business was benevolence. It was the business of his life. He ~~wandered~~ went from house to house, & from city to city. He wandered on foot among the hills and in the valleys – on the misty mountains & in the shady wilderness – among the busy haunts of men and on the lone sea shore. His locks were often wet with the dews of the night. The foxes had holes, and the birds had nests, but he often had not where to lay his head. His heart was touched with pity at every object of distress, and he had compassion on the vast multitude of the poor & afflicted that thronged about his path. He was "a great physician". He healed the sick – he comforted the broken hearted – he caused the lame to walk & the dumb to sing & the blind to see. He restored to life the only son of a poor widow, and he wept with bereaved sisters at the grave of their departed brother. He built left us this injunction.

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom".