

**THE MOTHERS OF  
ENGLAND: THEIR  
INFLUENCE AND  
RESPONSIBILITY**

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The Mothers of England: Their Influence and Responsibility by Mrs. Ellis

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MOTHERS OF ENGLAND;

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INFLUENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY.

BY MRS. ELLIS,

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"THE MINISTER'S FAMILY," ETC., ETC.

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## PREFACE.

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In offering to the public the last of a series of works on the subject of female duty, I feel that to confess their deficiencies, would not be to supply them; and therefore, I would prefer soliciting the attention of the reader to this fact—that they have not been written under the idea of presenting an entire summary of the life and character of woman, in the situations of daughter, wife, and mother, nor consequently under that of offering a substitute for any of those standard and excellent works on the same subject which adorn our libraries, but rather with the hope of throwing out a few hints and observations relative to the present state of English society, the tendency of modern education, and the peculiar social and domestic requirements of the country and the times in which we live.

Thus I have purposely avoided entering upon many important points of duty, and particularly those of a strictly religious nature, because I knew that the reader could find them more clearly and more ably treated elsewhere; and because I felt it to be more within the compass of my own qualifications, to endeavor to assist and encourage the inexperienced, but well meaning, than to instruct the ignorant, or to convert the irreligious.

Looking seriously at those faults which are generally allowed, and at those follies which are sometimes by society, I have been compelled occasionally to speak in strong language of certain peculiarities in the present aspect of social and domestic life, and especially of some of the habits and prejudices of my own sex. Had such peculiarities been less popular, or less generally indulged; had they, in short, been regarded as objectionable, rather than otherwise, there would have been no need for me to have made any of them the subject of a book; but the very fact of the opinion of society, and of many excellent persons, being in favor of that

which is really opposed to the true interests of mankind, render it the more necessary for those who think differently, to speak what they believe to be the truth, and speak it without palliation or reserve.

If, in the performance of this somewhat stern duty, I may at times have appeared unjust or unsisterly to the class of readers whose attention I have been anxious to engage, they will surely have been able to perceive that it was from no want of sympathy with the weakness, the trials, and the temptations to which woman is peculiarly liable, but rather, since we can least bear a fault in that which we most admire, from an extreme solicitude that woman should fill, with advantage to others and enjoyment to herself, that high place in the creation for which I believe her character to have been designed.

It was originally my intention to have added to the present work, a chapter of hints for step-mothers, and another on the consolations of old maids, which I am far from believing to be few; but the subject more immediately under consideration grew, from its importance, to the usual extent of a book, almost before I was aware of it; and it grew also upon my own mind, as the duties and responsibilities of a mother were gradually unfolded, to an aspect of such solemn, profound, and unanswerable interest, that I feel the more forcibly how inadequate are my feeble representations to do justice to the claims of society upon the self-devoted, conscientious, and persevering exertions of the Mothers of England.

THE  
MOTHERS OF ENGLAND.

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CHAPTER I.

A MOTHER'S FIRST THOUGHTS.

To attempt a description of the *feelings* of a mother on that important event which ushered into the world an immortal being, destined to be her peculiar charge, in its preparation both for this world and the next, would be to lift the natural veil, beyond which are shrouded those inner workings of the elements of happiness and misery, with which it may be truly said, that a stranger intermeddleth not. Still there are—there must be—*thoughts* common to all mothers who reflect seriously; and it is with these, chiefly, that the writer on maternal influence has to do.

It is no disparagement to that strongest of all principles in the female sex—a mother's love—to call it a mere instinct; for such it must be, when shared in common with the animal creation. Yet surely an instinct of such power as this can not be acted upon by a rational and responsible being, without anxious inquiry as to the direct nature of that responsibility; and why, in the ordinations of Divine Providence, an instinct so powerful should have been implanted in the mother's breast.

A mother's love, then, could never have been intended merely to be trifled with in the nursery, or expended in infantine indulgence. That which is strong enough to overcome the universal impulse of self-preservation—that which brings the timid bird to stoop her wing to the destroyer, in order to lure him from her nestlings—that which softens into tenderness the nature of the eagle and the lion—that which has power to render the feeblest and most delicate



of women unflinching, heroic, and bold,—can never have been given by the Author of our existence for any mean or trifling purpose. In the animal creation we see that this wonder-working principle answers the end of its creation, simply by instructing the mother how to prepare for her offspring, and by enabling her to protect and provide for them during the limited period of their helplessness and incapacity for providing for themselves.

Thus far the human mother proceeds in the same manner; but as there is an existence beyond this, for which she has to prepare, so the love of the human mother, by its continuance to the end of life, is beautifully adapted to those higher responsibilities which devolve upon her as the parent of an immortal being, whose lot, it is her privilege to hope, will be cast among the happy, the holy, and the pure, for ever.

There is, then, a deep moral connected with the joyful tidings that a child is born into the world. And "joyful" let us call these tidings, notwithstanding all which a morbid and miserable philosophy would teach, about another human creature being sent into this world to sin and suffer like the rest. Yes, "joyful" let us call it; for the beneficent Creator himself has designed that there should be joy, and nature attests that there is joy, connected with this event, while the fond heart of the mother acknowledges, in the smiles of her infant, an "over-payment of delight" for all her solitudes, her anxieties, and her fears.

And why should not the mother rejoice? Has she not become the possessor of a new nature, to whose support she can devote all the vast resources of her self-love, without its selfishness? She has now an object peculiarly her own, for which to think and to feel, and, not less, for which to suffer. It is with joy, then, that a new being is ushered into the world, to share its portion among the many, in the mingled lot of human weal and woe—to enter upon a career in which it is but reasonable to indulge the hope of filling an honored place on the great theatre of life, of contributing its share to the sum of human happiness, and of enjoying in its turn the full exercise of all those faculties of mind and body with which so much happiness is connected.

Why should the mother not rejoice? Have we so learned the doctrine of our Lord and Savior, that we can not trust to him the keeping of our earthly treasure? Surely there is infidelity of the most ungrateful kind, in that spirit which believes, and yet knows not how to trust. But there is both hope and trust in the mother's heart at that glad moment when she folds her infant to her bosom; for though she may herself have failed in judgment and in will ten thousand times, and fallen short in acts of duty almost beyond the hope of pardon, she looks into the guileless countenance of her child, and while the tears of true repentance fall upon its brow, she dedicates its young life, with all its growing energies, to a holier and more faithful service than she, with her weakness and waywardness, has been able to pursue.

Granting then that there is joy in the event of a child being ushered into life, and that such joy is founded chiefly upon a kind of indefinite hope, which fills the mother's breast; granting, also, as one of our first poets has beautifully said, that

——“The food of Hope  
Is meditated action,”

the most natural inquiry—nay, that which must necessarily follow in the mind of a rational woman, is—For what shall I prepare my child?

Pending the solution of this most important question, it is more than probable that the mother's thoughts will go back to her own childhood. By the many retrospective glances she has at different times thrown back upon the course of her own life, she will no doubt have been able to perceive many defects in the management and training by which she was herself conducted from infancy to youth, and now, if ever, she looks seriously upon this picture, with a fervent desire to ascertain the truth; to make out, as in a faithful chart, the rocks and shoals upon which her own bark may at different times have nearly suffered shipwreck; as well as the safer channels through which she has at other times been enabled to pass unharmed.

There are quiet hours permitted almost to all, before a mother enters again upon the active duties of life, during

which this peculiar kind of retrospection might be, and no doubt often is, carried on with lasting benefit to herself and her family. Yet, on the other hand, it is deeply to be regretted, that the frivolous or low conversation of an ignorant nurse, should so often be permitted to rob these golden hours of their real value, by the introduction of idle jests and vulgar gossip, gathered up from other families and households, where the nurse has been in some measure a confidential, though temporary servant; and where she must necessarily have formed but a very imperfect idea of the general state of things within the domestic circle. How many a private history, whether true or false, has been thus detailed—how many a character has been robbed of its good name—how many an injurious suspicion has been excited which time could never afterward obliterate, those women best can tell, who have found the first weeks of a mother's life hang heavily upon their hands, because shut out from their accustomed occupations and amusements; and who have consequently resorted to this means, in the hope of obtaining relief from the burden of their own dull thoughts.

I have no voluntary condemnation to pass upon the class of necessary assistants to which these expressions refer. So far from it, I have often thought that their unremitting exertions, their cheerful devotedness to the comfort of a family in which they can feel no particular interest; and, above all, their care and solicitude for the preservation of a young life which can never be anything to them—entitles these nurses, especially, to gratitude and respect. That they are not a more enlightened class of women, is certainly no fault of theirs; and if they do sometimes make family histories fill up the long hours of their attendance in a sick-room, the blame of their doing so attaches far more to those who listen, than to those who tell.

But what is the young mother to do under these circumstances, who has never cultivated the habit of serious thought, and still less that of self-examination? By such there is but one thing to be done—to begin to cultivate these habits now. Hitherto she may have believed that she was acting only for herself, and therefore she may have been willing, to a certain extent, to reap the conse-