

23 QUOTATIONS



Harriet Beecher Stowe

(1811-1896)

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life among the Lowly*, (1852), the most controversial and best-selling work of fiction in history—an attack on slavery so provocative it contributed to the Civil War. She came from a family of preachers and her tone is preachy, her novel didactic, sentimental, moving and, by her account, divinely inspired. Stowe rebelled against the strong Calvinist tradition of her family and affirmed a more heartfelt religion in her many local color novels and stories. Her values are Victorian: Christian piety, righteousness, sobriety, decorum, optimism, reformist zeal, class consciousness, domesticity, separate gender roles and a view of males as by nature brutish and in need of civilizing by women.

ORDER OF TOPICS: youth, political correctness, divine inspiration, morality, human nature, religion, class consciousness, Victorianism, women, time, regrets, advice, saving the nation:

YOUTH

The heroic element was strong in me, having come from a long line of Puritan ancestry, and just now it made me long to do something, I knew not what: to fight for my country, or to make some declaration on my own account.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

It was a general saying among conservative and sagacious people that this subject [slavery] was a dangerous one to investigate, and that nobody could begin to read and think upon it without becoming practically insane; moreover, that it was a subject of such delicacy that no discussion of it could be held in the free states without impinging upon the sensibilities of the slave states, to whom alone the management of the matter belonged.

DIVINE INSPIRATION

I did not write it. God wrote it. I merely took His dictation. [*Uncle Tom's Cabin*]

MORALITY

It's a matter of taking the side of the weak against the strong, something the best people have always done.

Whipping and abuse are like laudanum [opium]: you have to double the dose as the sensibilities decline.

Any mind that is capable of real sorrow is capable of good.

Perhaps it is impossible for a person who does no good to do no harm.

HUMAN NATURE

Human nature is above all things lazy.

It is this everlasting mediocrity that bores me.

RELIGION

No one is so thoroughly superstitious as the godless man.

I would not attack the faith of a heathen without being sure I had a better one to put in its place.

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

For convenience sake, we have said, hitherto, two gentlemen. One of the parties, however, when critically examined, did not seem, strictly speaking, to come under the species. He was a short, thick-set man, with coarse, commonplace features, and that swaggering air of pretension which marks a low man who is trying to elbow his way upward in the world. He was much overdressed, in a gaudy vest of many colors... His conversation was in free and easy defiance of Murray's Grammar, and was garnished at convenient intervals with various profane expressions, which not even the desire to be graphic in our account shall induce us to transcribe. His companion, Mr. Shelby, had the appearance of a gentleman.

VICTORIANISM

All places where women are excluded tend downward to barbarism; but the moment she is introduced, there come in with her courtesy, cleanliness, sobriety, and order.

WOMEN

A woman's health is her capital.

Most mothers are instinctive philosophers.

Friendships are discovered rather than made.

To do common things perfectly is far better worth our endeavor than to do uncommon things respectably.

To be really great in little things, to be truly noble and heroic in the insipid details of everyday life, is a virtue so rare as to be worthy of canonization.

So much has been said and sung of beautiful young girls, why doesn't somebody wake up to the beauty of old women?

TIME

The past, the present and the future are really one: they are today.

REGRETS

The bitterest tears shed over graves are for words left unsaid and deeds left undone.

ADVICE

Never give up, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn.

SAVING THE NATION

A day of grace is yet held out to us. Both North and South have been guilty before God; and the Christian church has a heavy account to answer. Not by combining together, to protect injustice and cruelty, and making a common capital of sin, is this Union to be saved,—but by repentance, justice and mercy; for, not surer is the eternal law by which the millstone sinks in the ocean, than that stronger law, by which injustice and cruelty shall bring on nations the wrath of Almighty God! [Conclusion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*]



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