

**Lajos Kossuth,**  
**The Claims of Hungary on the Female Sex, Speech given in New York City, 1851**

From: Lajos Kossuth (1802-1894), "Claims of Hungary on the Female Sex" *Select speeches of Kossuth condensed and abridged with Kossuth's express sanction by Francis W. Newman* (New York : C. S. Francis, 1854), pp. 117-124.

The Rev. Dr. Tyng having spoken in the name of the Ladies of New York, and concluded with the words " And now, sir, the ladies whom I have the honour to represent, knowing your history, and fully aware of its vast importance, desire themselves to be the audience, and to hear the voice of Kossuth and the claims of Hungary." Kossuth replied as follows:—

I would I were able to answer that call. I would I were able suitably to fill the place which your kindness has assigned to me. You were pleased to say that Austria was blind to let me escape. Be assured that it was not the merit of Austria. She would have been very glad to bury me alive, but the Sultan of Turkey took courage and notwithstanding all the remonstrances of Austria, I am free.

Ladies, worn out as I am, still I am very glad that the ladies of New York condescend to listen to my farewell. When in the midst of a busy day, the watchful care of a guardian angel throws some flowers of joy in the thorny way of man he gathers them up with thanks a cheerful thrill quivers through his heart, like the melody of an Aeolian harp; but the earnest duties of life soon claim his attention and his cares. The melodious thrill dies away, and on he must go; on he goes, joyless, cheerless, and cold, every fibre of his heart bent to the earnest duties of the day. But when the hard work of the day is done, and the stress of mind for a moment subsides, then the heart again claims its right, and the tender fingers of our memory gather up again the violets of joy which the guardian angel threw in our way, and we look at them with delight; while we cherish them as the favourite gifts of life—we are as glad as the child on Christmas eve. These are the happiest moments of man's life. But when we are not noisy, not eloquent, we are silent, almost mute like nature in a midsummer's night, reposing from the burning heat of the day. Ladies, that is my condition now. It is a hard day's work which I have had to do here. I am delivering my farewell address; and every compassionate smile, every warm grasp of the hand, every token of kindness which I have received (and I have received so many), every flower of consolation which the ladies of New York have thrown on my thorny way, rushes with double force to my memory. I feel happy in this memory—there is a solemn tranquillity about my mind; but in such a moment I would rather be silent than speak. You know, ladies, that it is not the deepest feelings which are the loudest.

And besides, I have to say farewell to New York! This is a sorrowful word. What immense hopes are linked in my memory with its name!—hopes of resurrection for my fatherland—hopes of liberation for the European continent! Will the expectations which the mighty outburst of New York's heart foreshadowed, be realized? or will the ray of consolation pass away like an electric flash? Oh, could I cast one single glance into the book of futurity! No, God forgive me this impious wish. It is He who hid the future from man and what he does is well done. It were not good for man to know his destiny. The sense of duty would falter or be unstrung, if we were assured of the failure or success of our aims. It is because we do not know

the future, that we retain our energy of duty, So on will I go in my work, with the full energy of my humble abilities, without despair, but with hope.

It is Eastern blood which runs in my veins. If I have somewhat of Eastern fatalism, it is the fatalism of a Christian who trusts with unwavering faith in the boundless goodness of a Divine Providence. But among all these different feelings and thoughts that come upon me in the hour of my farewell, one thing is almost indispensable to me, and that is, the assurance that the sympathy I have met with here will not pass away like the cheers which a warbling girl receives on the stage—that it will be preserved as a principle, and that when the emotion subsides, the calmness of reflection will but strengthen it. This consolation I wanted, and this consolation I have, because, ladies, I place it in your hands. I bestow on your motherly and sisterly cares, the hopes of Europe's oppressed nations,—the hopes of civil, political, social, and religious liberty. Oh let me entreat you, with the brief and stammering words of a warm heart, overwhelmed with emotions and with sorrowful cares—let me entreat you, ladies, to be watchful of the sympathy of your people, like the mother over the cradle of her beloved child. It is worthy of your watchful care, because it is the cradle of regenerated humanity.

Especially in regard to my poor fatherland, I have particular claims on the fairer and better half of humanity, which you are. The *first* of these claims is, that there is not perhaps on the face of the earth a nation, which in its institutions has shown more chivalric regard for ladies than the Hungarian. It is a praiseworthy trait of the Oriental character. You know that it was the Moorish race in Spain, who were the founders of the chivalric era in Europe, so full of personal virtue, so full of noble deeds, so devoted to the service of ladies, to heroism, and to the protection of the oppressed. You are told that the ladies of the East are degraded to less almost than a human condition, being secluded from all social life, and pent up within the harem's walls. And so it is. But you must not judge the East by the measure of European civilization. They have their own civilisation, quite different from ours in views, inclinations, affections, and thoughts. We in Hungary have gained from the West the advantages of civilization for our women, but preserved for them the regard and reverence of our Oriental character. Nay, more than that, we carried these views into our institutions and into our laws. With us, the widow remains the head of the family, as the father was. As long as she lives, she is the mistress of the property of her deceased husband. The chivalrous spirit of the nation supposes she will provide, with motherly care, for the wants of her children, and she remains in possession so long as she bears her deceased husband's name. Under the old constitution of Hungary (which we reformed upon a democratic basis—it having been aristocratic) the widow of a lord had the right to send her representative to the parliament, and in the county elections of public functionaries widows had the right to vote alike with the men. Perhaps this chivalric character of my nation, so full of regard toward the fair sex, may somewhat commend my mission to the ladies of America.

Our *second* particular claim is, that the source of all the misfortune which now weighs so heavily upon my bleeding fatherland, is in two ladies—Catharine of Russia, and Sophia of Hapsburg, the ambitious mother of this second Nero, Francis Joseph. You know that one hundred and fifty years ago, Charles the Twelfth of Sweden the bravest of the brave, foreseeing the growth of Russia, and fearing that it would oppress and overwhelm civilization, ventured with a handful of men to attack its rising power. After immortal deeds and almost fabulous victories, one loss made him a refugee upon Turkish soil like myself. But, happier than myself he succeeded in persuading Turkey of the necessity of checking Russia in her overweening ambition, and curtailing her growth. On went Mehemet Baltadji with his Turks, and met Peter

the Czar, and pent him up in a corner, where there was no possibility of escape. There Mehemet held him with iron grasp till hunger came to his aid. Nature claimed her rights, and in a council of war it was decided to surrender to Mehemet. Then Catharine who was present in the camp appeared in person before the Grand Vizier to sue for mercy. She was fair, and she was rich with jewels of nameless value. She went to the Grand Vizier's tent. She came back without her jewels, but she brought mercy, and Russia was saved. From that celebrated day dates the downfall of Turkey, and the growth of Russia. Out of this source flowed the stream of Russian preponderance over the European continent. The depression of liberty, and the nameless sufferings of Poland and of my poor native land, are the dreadful fruits of Catharine's success on that day, cursed in the records of the human race.

The second lady who will be cursed through all posterity in her memory, is Sophia, the mother of the present usurper of Hungary—she who had the ambitious dream to raise the power of a child upon the ruins of liberty, and on the neck of prostrate nations. It was her ambition—the evil genius of the House of Hapsburg in the present day—which brought desolation upon us. I need only mention one fact to characterize what kind of a heart was in that woman. On the anniversary of the day of Arad, where our martyrs bled, she came to the court with a bracelet of rubies set in so many roses as was the number of heads of the brave Hungarians who fell there, declaring that she joyfully exhibited it to the company as a memento which she wears on her very arm, to cherish in eternal memory the pleasure she derived from the killing of the heroes at Arad. This very fact may give you a true knowledge of the character of that woman, and this is the second claim to the ladies' sympathy for oppressed humanity and for my poor fatherland.

Our third particular claim is the behaviour of our ladies during the last war. It is no arbitrary praise—it is a fact,—that, in the struggle for our rights and freedom, we had no more powerful auxiliaries, and no more faithful executors of the will of the nation, than the women of Hungary. You know that in ancient Rome after the battle of Cannae which was won by Hannibal, the Senate called on the people spontaneously to sacrifice all their wealth on the altar of their fatherland. Every jewel, every ornament was brought forth, but still the tribune judged it necessary to pass a law prohibiting the ladies of Rome to wear more than half an ounce of gold, or particoloured splendid dresses. Now, we wanted in Hungary no such law. The women of Hungary brought all that they had. You would have been astonished to see how, in the most wealthy houses of Hungary, if you were invited to dinner, you would be forced to eat soup with iron spoons. When the wounded and the sick—and many of them we had, because we fought hard—when the wounded and the were not so well provided as it would have been our duty and our pleasure to do, I ordered the respective public functionaries to take care of them. But the poor wounded went on suffering, and the proper officers were but slow in providing for them. When I saw this, one single word was spoken to the ladies of Hungary, and in a short time there was provision made for hundreds of thousands of sick. And I never met a single mother who would have withheld her son from sharing in the battle; but I have met many who ordered and commanded their children to fight for their fatherland. I saw many and many brides who urged on the bridegrooms to delay their day of happiness till they should come back victorious from the battles of their fatherland. Thus acted, the ladies of Hungary. A country deserves to live; a country deserves to have a future, when the women, as much as the men, love and cherish it.

But I have a stronger motive than all these to claim your protecting sympathy for my country's cause. It is her nameless woe, nameless sufferings. In the name of that ocean of bloody tears which the impious hand of the tyrant wrung from the eyes of the childless mothers, of the

brides who beheld the executioner's sword between them and their wedding day—in the name of all these mothers, wives, brides, daughters, and sisters, who, by thousands of thousands, over the graves of Magyars so dear to their hearts,—who weep the bloody tears of a patriot (as they all are) over the face of their beloved native land—in the name of all those torturing stripes with which the flogging hand of Austrian tyrants dared to outrage human nature in the womankind of my native land—in the name of that daily curse against Austria with which even the prayers of our women are mixed—in the name of the nameless sufferings of my own dear wife[here the whole audience rose and cheered vehemently]—the faithful companion of my life,—of her, who for months and for months was hunted by my country's tyrants, with hope, no support, no protection, but at the humble threshold of the hard-working people, as noble and generous as they are poor—in the name of my poor little children, who when so young as to be scarcely conscious of life, had already to learn what an Austrian prison is—in the name of all this, and what is still worse, in the name of liberty trodden down, I claim, ladies of New York, your protecting sympathy for my country's cause. Nobody can do more for it than you. The heart of man is as soft wax in your tender hands. Mould it, ladies; mould it into the form of generous compassion for my country's wrongs, inspire it with the noble feelings of your own hearts, inspire it with the consciousness of your country's power, dignity, and might. You are the framers of man's character. Whatever be the fate of man, one stamp he always bears on his brow—that which the mother's hand impressed upon the soul of the child. The smile of your lips can make a hero out of the coward, and a generous Juan out of the egotist; one word from you inspires the youth to noble resolutions; the lustre of your eyes is the fairest reward for the toils of life. You can kindle energy even in the breast of age, that once more it may blaze up in a noble generous deed before it dies. All this power you have. Use it ladies, in behalf of your country's glory, and for the benefit of oppressed humanity, and when you meet a cold calculator, who thinks by arithmetic when he is called to feel the wrongs of oppressed nations, convert him, ladies. Your smiles are commands, and the truth which pours forth instinctively from your hearts, is mightier than the logic articulated by any scholar. The Peri excluded from Paradise brought many generous gifts to heaven in order to regain it. She brought the dying sigh of a patriot; the kiss of a faithful girl imprinted upon the lips of her bridegroom when they were distorted by the venom of the plague. She brought many other fair gifts; but the doors of Paradise opened before her only when she brought with her the first prayer of a man converted to charity and brotherly love for his oppressed brethren and humanity.

Remember the power which you have, and which I have endeavoured to point out in a few brief words. Remember this, and form associations; establish ladies' committees to raise substantial aid for Hungary. Now I have done. One word only remains to be said—a word of deep sorrow, the word, "Farewell, New York!" New York! that word will for ever make every string of my heart thrill. I am like a wandering bird. I am worse than a wandering bird. He may return to his summer home, I have no home on earth! Here I felt almost at home. But "Forward" is my call, and I must part. I part with the hope that the sympathy which I have met here in a short transitory home will bring me yet back to my own beloved home, so that my ashes may yet mix with the dust of my native soil. Ladies, remember Hungary, and farewell!