

Harriet Beecher Stowe sends *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to Victoria and Albert, 1852

Introduction

Harriet Beecher Stowe's opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 inspired her to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The novel, first serialized in newspapers and then published in 1852 as a two-volume work, enjoyed tremendous success in the United States and abroad, most notably in England. On the eve of publication, Stowe presented a copy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to Prince Albert and Queen Victoria. In this accompanying letter addressed to Prince Albert, Stowe acknowledged that England had made some strides since the "less enlightened days" in their treatment of an "oppressed race." She then appealed to the sympathetic hearts of the British people and their queen, writing "the author is encouraged by the thought that beneath the royal insignia of England throbs that woman's and mother's heart."

In 1853, Stowe traveled to England on a book tour and was well received by the people there. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* continues to be one of the most widely read books in the world.

Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction and transcript and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer these questions. You may also wish to discuss this with an English teacher.

1. What did Harriet Beecher Stowe mean when she wrote, "The wrong on England's part has been atoned"?
2. By providing a copy of her book and this letter to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, what might have been Harriet Beecher Stowe's expectations?
3. Upon meeting Stowe, Abraham Lincoln allegedly remarked, "So you're the little lady who started this great war!" Why was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* associated so strongly with the abolitionist movement?

Image

To His Royal Highness Prince Albert

The author of this work feels that she has an apology for presenting it to Prince Albert because it concerns the great interests of humanity, and from those noble & enlarged views of human progress, which she has at different times seen in his public speeches she has inferred that he has an eye & a heart for all that concerns the development & welfare of the human family.

Ignorant of the forms of diplomatic address & the etiquette of rank, may she be pardoned for speaking with the republican simplicity of her own country, as to one who possesses a nobility higher than that of rank or station.

This simple narrative is an honest attempt to enlist the sympathies both of England & America in the sufferings of an oppressed race, to whom in less enlightened days both England & America were unjust.

The money on England's part has been stowed in a manner worthy of herself, nor in all her strength & glory, is there any thing that adds such lustre to her position name as the position she holds in relation to human freedom (may America yet emulate her example.)

Harriet Beecher Stowe to Prince Albert, March 20, 1852. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC01585)

The appeal is in greater part as it should be to the
 mistress's own country, but when fugitives by thousands are
 crowding Britain shows she would enlist for them the
 sympathy of British hearts.

We, in America, have been told that
 the throne of earth's mightiest nation is now filled by one
 less adorned by all the world can give of power and
 splendor, than by a good & noble heart — a heart
 ever ready to feel for the suffering the oppressed and
 the lowly.

The author is encouraged by the thought
 that beneath the royal insignia of England throbs
 that woman's & mother's heart. May she ask that
 He who is nearest to her would present to her notice
 this simple story. Should it win from her compassion
 its nature, pitying thoughts for those multitudes
 of poor outcasts who have fled for shelter to
 the shadow of her throne, — it were enough —

May the blessing of ^{God} rest on the noble
 country from which America draws her lineage,
 & on Her the Queen of it. Tho' all other thrones be
 shaken may hers founder deep in the hearts of her
 subjects, be established to Her & to Her children, thro
 all generations.

With deep respect

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Monmouth Maine
 March 20 1852.

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Transcript

Harriet Beecher Stowe to Prince Albert, March 20, 1852. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC01585)

To His Royal Highness Prince Albert

The author of this work feels that she has an apology for presenting it to Prince Albert because it concerns the great interests of humanity and from those noble & enlarged views of human progress, which she has at different times seen in his public speeches she has inferred that he has an eye & a heart for all that concerns the development & welfare of the human family.

Ignorant of the forms of diplomatic address & the etiquette of rank, may she be pardoned for speaking with the republican simplicity of her own country as to one who possesses a nobility higher than that of rank or station.

This simple narrative is an honest attempt to enlist the sympathies both of England & America in the sufferings of an oppressed race, to whom in less enlightened days both England & America were unjust.

The wrong on England's part has been atoned in a manner worthy of herself, nor in all her strength & glory, is there any thing that adds such lustre to her [*struck*: position] name as the position she holds in relation to human freedom (may America yet emulate her example!)? –

The appeal is in greater part as it should be to the writer's own country, but when fugitives by thousands are crowding British shores she would enlist for them the sympathy of British hearts.

We, in America, have been told that the throne of Earth's mightiest nation is now filled by One less adorned by all this world can give of power and splendour, than by a good & noble heart – a heart ever ready to feel for the suffering the oppressed and the lowly.

The author is encouraged by the thought that beneath the royal insignia of England throbs that woman's & mother's heart. May she ask that He who is nearest to her would present to her notice this simple story. Should it win from her compassionate nature, pitying thoughts for those multitudes of poor outcasts who have fled for shelter to the shadow of her throne, – it were enough.

May the blessing of [*inserted above*: God] rest on the noble country from which America draws her lineage, & on Her the Queen of it. Tho all other thrones be shaken may hers founded

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Brunswick Maine

March 20 1852.