

A CALL TO MY COUNTRY-WOMEN

Gail Hamilton
(Mary Abigail Dodge)

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In the newspapers and magazines you shall see many poems written by women who meekly term themselves weak, and modestly profess to represent only the weak among their sex tunelessly discussing the duties which the weak owe to their country in days like these. The invariable conclusion is, that, though they cannot fight, because they are not men, or go down to nurse the sick and wounded, because they have children to take care of, or write effectively, because they do not know how, or do any great and heroic thing, because they have not the ability, they can pray; and they generally do close with a melodious and beautiful prayer. Now praying is a good thing. It is, in fact, the very best thing in the world to do, and there is no danger of our having too much of it; but if women, weak or strong, consider that praying is all they can or ought to do for their country, and so settle down contented with that, they make as great a mistake as if they did not pray at all. True, women cannot fight, and there is no call for any great number of female nurses; notwithstanding this, I believe, that, to-day, the issue of this war depends quite as much upon American women as upon American men, and depends, too, not upon the few who write, but upon the many who do not. The women of the Revolution were not only Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Reed, and Mrs. Schuyler, but the wives of the farmers and shoemakers and blacksmiths everywhere. . . . Tender hearts, if you could have finished the war with your needles, it would have been finished long ago; but stitching does not crush rebellion, does not annihilate treason, or hew traitors in pieces before the Lord. . . . When I read of the Rebels fighting bareheaded, bare-footed, haggard, and unshorn, in rags and filth, fighting bravely, heroically, successfully, I am ready to make a burnt-offering of our stacks of clothing. I feel and fear that we must come down, as they have done, to a recklessness of all incidentals, down to the rough and rugged fastnesses (remote and secluded places) of life, down to the very gates of death itself, before we shall be ready and worthy to win victories.

I wish you to be the consolers, the encouragers, the sustainers, and not tremble in perpetual need of consolation and encouragement. When men's brains are knotted and their brows corrugated with fearful looking for and bearing of financial crises, military disasters, and any and every form of national calamity consequent upon the war, come you out to meet them, serene and smiling and unafraid. And let your smile be no formal distortion of your lips, but a bright ray from the sunshine in your heart. Take not acquiescently, but joyfully, the spoiling of your goods. Not only look poverty in the face with high disdain, but embrace it with gladness and welcome. The loss is but for a moment; the gain is for all time. Go farther than this. Consecrate to a holy cause not only the incidentals of life, but life itself. Father, husband, child—I do not say, Give them up to toil, exposure, suffering, death, without a murmur—that implies reluctance. I rather say, Urge them to the offering; fill them with sacred fury; fire them with irresistible desire; strengthen them to heroic will.

Therefore let us have done at once and forever with paltry considerations, with talk of despondency and darkness. Let compromise, submission, and every form of dishonorable peace be not so much as named among us. Tolerate no coward's voice or pen or eye. Wherever the serpents head is raised, strike it down. Measure every man by the standard of manhood. Measure country's price by country's worth, and country's worth by country's integrity. Let a cold, clear breeze sweep down from the mountains of life, and drive out these miasmas that befog and beguile the unwary. Around every hearthstone let sunshine gleam. In every home let fatherland have its altar and its fortress. From every household let words of cheer and resolve and highheartiness ring out, till the whole land is shining and resonant in the bloom of its awakening spring.