

**THE DUTIES OF
WOMEN: A COURSE
OF LECTURES**

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The Duties of Women: A Course of Lectures by Frances Power Cobbe

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FRANCES POWER COBBE

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THE DUTIES OF WOMEN.

A COURSE OF LECTURES

BY

FRANCES POWER COBBE.

(AUTHORIZED EDITION.)

"Whatever any one does or says, I must be good; just as if the emerald were always saying this: Whatever any one does or says, I must be emerald and keep my color."—*Marcus Aurelius*, vii. 13.

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1881.

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Miss Isabel Winslow

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PREFACE.

THE following Lectures, somewhat differently arranged, were delivered last winter in London to an audience of ladies, and were repeated at Clifton in the ensuing spring. The reader will kindly bear in mind that they were prepared with a view to such *viva voce* use, and not for perusal in a book; and also that the plan of their delivery included many extempore illustrations and lighter remarks. A few of these only have been preserved in the foot-notes of the present volume.

My purpose in delivering these Lectures originally, and now in publishing them, will become sufficiently apparent as the reader proceeds; but, to avoid the risk of any possible misconstruction, I shall offer here a short explanation of my *locus standi* as regards the whole subject in question. I have been for many years deeply interested in what is called the "Woman's Movement," and have taken part in pleading for the higher education of women, for

the admission of women to university degrees, for the protection of the property of married women, for the employment of women, for the protection of women from aggravated assaults, for the entrance of women into the medical profession, and, lastly, for extension of the parliamentary suffrage to women possessed of the requisite property qualification. Of the wisdom of many of these demands (so far as they were then formulated), I was not in my earlier life convinced. I was then of opinion that the happy duties of a daughter and mistress of a household which fell to my lot, together with village charities and literary and other pursuits, sufficiently filled up the life of a woman, without adding to them wider social and political aims.) It was only after I had labored for some time with my honored friend Mary Carpenter, at Bristol, and learned to feel intense interest in the legislation which might possibly mitigate the evils of crime and pauperism, that I seriously asked myself (under the upbraiding of that good old abolitionist, S. J. May) *why* I should not seek for political representation as the direct and natural means of aiding every reform I had at heart. The answer was not long doubtful; and now, for nearly a quarter of a century, I have, as I have just said, associated myself, to the best of my ability, more or less with nearly all the movements in Eng-

land for the advancement of women. Looking back over these years, I find I have not lost one jot of faith in the righteousness or expediency of our demands. On the contrary, I have seen every year more reason to regard the part hereafter to be played by women in public affairs as offering the best hope for the moral and, still more emphatically, for the spiritual interests of humanity. I think more highly of women since I have watched them with the calm eyes of middle age; and I have more confidence than I had at first, both in their ability and in their stability.

But it would be idle to veil from myself that the path of progress on which women have now entered, and which we have done our best to open for them, is a road which leads up a steep hill of difficulty, and from which there are turnings to the right and the left, running down into all manner of quagmires and precipices. So many, indeed, and so grave are the dangers on either hand, that I cannot blame those who see more to fear than to hope from the movement in question, and raise around us rather a cry of alarm than a cheer of encouragement. But dangers must be faced whenever any time-honored evil is to be swept away or any new good achieved. The woman's movement could not now be stopped, if we desired it; nor do we desire to stop it, if it lay