Frances Power Cobbe

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

ERRATA

CHAPTER I. FAMILY AND HOME.

CHAPTER II. CHILDHOOD.

CHAPTER III. SCHOOL AND AFTER.

CHAPTER IV. RELIGION.

CHAPTER V. MY FIRST BOOK.

CHAPTER VI. IRELAND IN THE FORTIES. THE PEASANTRY.

CHAPTER VII. IRELAND IN THE FORTIES. THE GENTRY.

CHAPTER VIII. UPROOTED.

CHAPTER IX. LONG JOURNEY.

CHAPTER X. BRISTOL. REFORMATORIES AND RAGGED SCHOOLS.

CHAPTER XI. BRISTOL. THE SICK IN WORKHOUSES.

CHAPTER XII. BRISTOL. WORKHOUSE GIRLS.

CHAPTER XIII. BRISTOL. FRIENDS.

CHAPTER XIV. ITALY. 1857–1879.

CHAPTER XV. LONDON IN THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES. LITERARY LIFE.

CHAPTER XVI. MY LIFE IN LONDON IN THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES JOURNALISM.

CHAPTER XVII. MY LIFE IN LONDON IN THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES. SOCIAL.

POSTSCRIPT, 1898.

CHAPTER XVIII. MY LIFE IN LONDON IN THE SEVENTIES AND EIGHTIES. SOCIAL

CHAPTER XIX. CLAIMS OF WOMEN.
CHAPTER XX. CLAIMS OF BRUTES.
CHAPTER XXI. MY HOME IN WALES.
INDEX

INTRODUCTION.

Table of Contents

The story of the beautiful life which came to an end on the 5th of April, 1904, is told by Miss Cobbe herself in the following pages up to the close of 1898. Nothing is left for another pen but to sketch in the events of the few remaining years.

But first a word or two as to the origin of the book. One spring day in 1891 or ’92, when Miss Cobbe was walking with me through the Hengwrt grounds on my way to the station, after some hours spent in listening to her brilliant stories of men and things, I asked her if she would not some day write her autobiography. She stood still, laughing, and shook her head. Nothing in her life, she said, was of sufficient importance to record, or for other people to read. Naturally I urged that what had interested me so greatly would interest others, and that her life told by herself could not fail to make a delightful book. She still laughed at the idea; and the next time I saw her and repeated my suggestion, told me that she had not time for such an undertaking, and also that she did not think her friend, Miss Lloyd, would like it. At last, however, to my great satisfaction, I heard that the friends had talked the matter over, and were busily engaged in looking at old letters and records of past days, and both becoming interested in the retrospection. So the book grew slowly into an accomplished fact, and Miss Cobbe often referred to it laughingly as “your” book, to which I replied that then I had not lived in vain! It is possible that the idea had occurred to her before;

but she always gave me to understand that my persuasion had induced her to write the book. She came to enjoy writing it. Once when I said:—“I want you to tell us everything; all your love-stories—and *everything*!” she took me up to her study and read me the passage she had written in the 1st Chapter concerning such matters. The great success of the book was a real pleasure to both Miss Cobbe and her friend. She told me that it brought her more profit than any of her books. Most of them had merely a *succès d’estime*. Better still, it brought her a number of kindly letters from old and new friends, and from strangers in far off lands; and these proofs of the place she held in many hearts was a true solace to a woman of tender affections, who had to bear more than the usual share of the abuse and misrepresentation which always fall to those who engage in public work and enter into public controversies.

The sorrow of Miss Lloyd’s death changed the whole aspect of existence for Miss Cobbe. The joy of life had gone. It had been such a friendship as is rarely seen—perfect in love, sympathy, and mutual understanding. No other friend —though Miss Cobbe was rich in friends—could fill the vacant place, and henceforward her loneliness was great even when surrounded by those she loved and valued. To the very last she could never mention the name of “my dear Mary,” or of her own mother, without a break in her voice. I remember once being alone with her in her study when she had been showing me boxes filled with Miss Lloyd’s letters. Suddenly she turned from me towards her bookshelves as though to look for something, and throwing up her arms cried, with a little sob, “My God! how lonely I am!”

It was always her custom, while health lasted, to rise early, and she often went to Miss Lloyd’s grave in the fresh morning hours, especially when she was in any trouble or perplexity. Up to within a few days of her death she had visited this—to her—most dear and sacred spot. Doubtless she seemed to find a closer communion possible with one who had been her counsellor in all difficulties, her helper in all troubles, at the graveside than elsewhere. She planted her choicest roses there, and watched over them with tender care. Now she rests beside her friend.

Yet this anguish of heart was bravely borne. There was nothing morbid in her grief. She took the same keen interest as before in the daily affairs of life—in politics and literature and social matters. There never was a nature more made for the enjoyment of social intercourse. She loved to have visitors, to take them for drives about her beautiful home, and to invite her neighbours to pleasant little luncheons and dinners to meet them. Especially she enjoyed the summer glories of her sweet old garden, and liked to give an occasional garden party, and still oftener to take tea with her friends under the shade of the big cherry tree on the lawn. How charming a hostess she was no one who has ever enjoyed her hospitality can forget. “A good talk” never lost its zest for her; until quite the end she would throw off langour and fatigue under the spell of congenial companionship, and her talk would sparkle with its old brilliance—her laugh ring with its old gaiety.

Her courtesy to guests was perfect. When they happened not to be in accord with her in their views upon Vivisection (which was always in these years the chief object of her

work and thought), she never obtruded the question, and it was her rule not to allow it to be discussed at table. It was too painful and serious a subject to be an accompaniment of what she thought should be one of the minor pleasures of life. For though intensely religious, there was no touch of the ascetic in Miss Cobbe's nature. She enjoyed everything; and guests might come and go and never dream that the genial, charming hostess, who deferred to their opinions on art or music or books, who conversed so brilliantly on every subject which came up, was all the time engaged in a hand to hand struggle against an evil which she believed to be sapping the courage and consciences of English men and women.

It is pleasant to look back upon sunny hours spent among the roses she loved, or under the fine old trees she never ceased to admire; upon the gay company gathered round the tea-table in the dark-panelled hall of Hengwrt; best of all, on quiet twilight talks by the fireside or in the great window of her drawing-room watching the last gleams of sunset fade from hill and valley, and the stars come out above the trees. But it is sadly true that the last few years of Miss Cobbe's life were not as peacefully happy as one would have loved to paint them to complete the pleasant picture she had drawn in 1894. Even her cheery optimism would hardly have led her to write that she would "gladly have lived over again" this last decade.

The pain of separating herself from the old Victoria Street Society was all the harder to bear because it came upon her when the loss of Miss Lloyd was still almost fresh. Only those who saw much of her during that anxious spring of

1898 can understand how bitter was this pain. Miss Cobbe has sometimes been blamed for—as it is said—causing the division. But in truth, no other course was possible to one of her character. When the alternative was to give up a principle which she believed vital to the cause of Anti-Vivisection, or to withdraw from her old Society, no one who knew Miss Cobbe could doubt for an instant which course she would take. It was deeply pathetic to see the brave old veteran of this crusade brace up her failing strength to meet the trial, resolved that she would never lower the flag she had upheld for five-and-twenty years. It was a lesson to those who grow discouraged after a few disappointments, and faint-hearted at the first failure. This, it seems to me, was the strongest proof Miss Cobbe's whole life affords of her wonderful mental energy. Few men, well past 70, when the work they have begun and brought to maturity is turned into what they feel to be a wrong direction, have courage to begin again and lay the foundations of a new enterprise. Miss Cobbe has herself told the story of how she founded the "British Union;" and I dwell upon it here only because it shows the intensity of her conviction that Vivisection was an evil thing which she must oppose to the death, and with which no compromise was possible. She did not flinch from the pain and labour and ceaseless anxiety which she plainly foresaw. She never said—as most of us would have held her justified in saying—"*I* have done all I could. I have spent myself—time, money, and strength—in this fight. Now I shall rest." She took no rest until death brought it to her. Probably few realise the immense sacrifices Miss Cobbe made when she devoted herself to the unpopular cause which absorbed

the last 30 years of her life. It was not only money and strength which were given. She lost many friends, and much social influence and esteem. This was no light matter to a woman who valued the regard of her fellows, and had heartily enjoyed the position she had won for herself in the world of letters. She often spoke sadly of this loss, though I am sure that she never for an instant regretted that she had come forward as the helper of the helpless.

From 1898 until the last day of her life the interests of the new Society occupied her brain and pen. It was at this time that I became more closely intimate with her than before. Her help and encouragement of those who worked under her were unfailing. No detail was too trifling to bring to her consideration. Her immense knowledge of the whole subject, her great experience and ready judgment were always at one's service. She soon had the care of all the branches of the Union on her shoulders; she kept all the threads in her hand, and the particulars of each small organisation clear in her mind. For myself, I can bear this testimony. Never once did Miss Cobbe urge upon me any step or course of action which I seriously disliked. When, on one or two occasions, I ventured to object to her view of what was best, she instantly withdrew her suggestion, and left me a free hand. If there were times when one felt that she expected more than was possible, or when she showed a slight impatience of one's mistakes or failures, these were as nothing compared with her generous praise for the little one achieved, her warm congratulation for any small success. It was indeed easy to be loyal to such a chief!

Much of Miss Cobbe’s leisure time during the years after Miss Lloyd’s death was spent in reading over the records of their old life. I find the following passage in a letter of December, 1900:—

“I have this last week broken open the lock of an old note-book of my dear Mary’s, kept about 1882–85. Among many things of deep interest to me are letters to and from various people and myself on matters of theology, which I used to show her, and she took the trouble to copy into this book, along with memoranda of our daily life. It is unspeakably touching to me, you may well believe, to find our old life thus revived, and such tokens of her interest in my mental problems. I think several of the letters would be rather interesting to others, and perhaps useful.”

There remain in my possession an immense number of letters, carefully arranged in packets and docketed, to and from Miss Lloyd, Lord Shaftesbury, Theodore Parker, Fanny Kemble, and others. These have all been read through lately by Miss Cobbe, and endorsed to that effect. Up to the very end Miss Cobbe’s large correspondence was kept up punctually. She always found time to answer a letter, even on quite trivial matters; and among the mass which fell into my hands on her death were recent letters from America, India, Australia, South Africa, and all parts of England, asking for advice on many subjects, thanking for various kindnesses, and expressing warm affection and admiration for the pioneer worker in so many good causes. With all these interests, her life was very full. Nothing that took place in the world of politics, history, or literature, was indifferent to her. She never lost her pleasure in reading,

though her eyes gave her some trouble of late years. At night, two books—generally Biography, Egyptology, Biblical Criticism, or Poetry—were placed by her bedside for study in the wakeful hours of the early morning. In spite of all these resources within herself, she sorely missed the companionship of kindred spirits. She was, as I have said, eminently fitted for the enjoyment of social life, and had missed it after she left London for North Wales. Up to the last, even when visitors tired her, she was mentally cheered and refreshed by contact with those who cared for the things she cared for.

In the winter of 1901–2 she was occupied in bringing out a new edition of her first book, “The Theory of Intuitive Morals.” She wrote thus of it to me at the time:—

“I have resolved not to leave the *magnum opus* of my small literary life out of print, so I am arranging to reprint ‘Intuitive Morals,’ with my essay on ‘Darwinism in Morals’ at the end of it, and a new Preface, so that when I go out of the world, this, my *Credo* for moral science and religion, will remain after me. Nobody but myself could correct it or preface it.... As I look back on it now, I feel glad to be able to re-circulate it, though very few will read anything so dry! It was written just 50 years ago, and I am able to say with truth that I have not seen reason to abandon the position I then took, although the ‘cocksureness’ of 30 can never be maintained to 80!”

During the same winter, Miss Cobbe joined the Women’s Liberal Federation, moved to take this decided step not only by her strong disapproval of the war in South Africa, but by her belief that the then existing government was in

opposition to all the movements which she longed to see carried forward. Her accession to their ranks met with a warm welcome from the President and Committee of the Women's Liberal Federation, many of whom were already her personal friends. To the end she kept in close touch with all that concerned women; and only a few days before her death, was asked to allow her name to be given to the Council as an Honorary Vice-President of the National Union of Women Workers of Great Britain and Ireland.

In the summer of 1902 an incident occurred—small in itself, but causing such intense mortification to Miss Cobbe that it cannot be passed over in any true account of the closing years of her life. In fact, those who saw most of her at the time, and knew her best, believe that she never recovered from the effects of it. A charge was brought against her of cruelly overdriving an old horse—a horse which had been a special pet. The absurdity of such a charge was the first thing that struck those who heard of it; but to Miss Cobbe it came as a personal insult of the cruellest kind. The charge was pressed on with what looked like malicious vindictiveness, and though it failed, the intention to give her pain did not fail. She wrote to me at the time that she was "wounded to the quick." The insult to her character, the attempt to throw discredit upon her life's work for the protection of animals from suffering, the unchivalrousness of such an attack upon an old and lonely woman—all this embittered the very springs of her life, and for a time she felt as if she could not stay any longer in a neighbourhood where such a thing had been possible. The results were very grievous for all who loved her, as well as

for herself. It had been one of her pleasantest recreations to drive by the lovely road—which was full of associations to her—between Hengwrt and Barmouth, to spend two or three hours enjoying the sea air and sunshine, and the society of the old friends who were delighted to meet her there. To Barmouth also she had a few years previously bequeathed her library, and had taken great interest and pleasure in the room prepared for the reception of her “dear books.” Yet it was in Barmouth that the blow was struck, and she never visited the little town again. It was pitiful! She had but a few more months to live, and this was what a little group of her enemies did to darken and embitter those few months!

On September 6th, she wrote to me:—

“This week I have had to keep quite to myself. I am, of course, enduring now the results of the strain of the previous weeks, and they are bad enough. The recuperative powers of 80 are—*nil*! My old friends, Percy Bunting and his wife, offered themselves for a few days last week, and I could not bear to refuse their offer. As it proved, his fine talk on all things to me most interesting—modern theological changes, Higher Criticism, etc.—and her splendid philanthropy on the lines I once humbly followed (she is the leading woman on the M.A.B.Y.S., which I had practically founded in Bristol forty years ago), made me go back years of life, and seem as if I were once more living in the blessed Seventies.... Altogether, their visit, though it left me quite exhausted, did my brains and my heart good. O! what friends I once had! How *rich* I was! How poor I am now!”

In October of that year she decided to leave Hengwrt for the winter. It was a great effort. She had not left her home

for eight years, and dreaded the uprooting. But it was a wise move. One is glad now to remember how happy Miss Cobbe was during that winter in Clifton. She lived over again the old days of her work in Bristol with Mary Carpenter; visited the old scenes, and noted the changes that had taken place. Some old friends were left, and greatly she enjoyed their company. At Clifton she had many more opportunities of seeing people engaged in the pursuits which interested her than in her remote Welsh home. Her letters at that time were full of renewed cheeriness. I quote a few sentences:

"November 13th.

"... I hope you have had as beautiful bright weather as we have had here, and been able to get some walks on the mountain. Now I can no longer 'take a walk,' I know how much such exercise helped me of old, mentally and morally, quite as much as physically. I see a good many old friends here, and a few new ones, and my niece comes to tea with me every afternoon. They are all very kind, and make more of me than I am worth; but it is a City of the Dead to me, so many are gone who were my friends long ago; and what is harder to bear is that when I was here last, eight or ten years ago, I was always thinking of returning *home*, and writing daily all that happened to dear Mary—and now, it is all a blank."

"November 16th.

"... It is so nice to think I am missed and wanted! If I do get back to Hengwrt, we must manage to see more of each other.... I have come to the conclusion that for such little time as may remain for me, I will not shut myself up again, and if I am at all able for it, I will return home very early in the spring. I see a good many nice, kind people here, old

friends and new, and I have nice rooms; but I sadly miss my own home and, still more, *garden*. And the eternal noise of a town, the screaming children and detestable hurdy-gurdies, torment my ears after their long enjoyment of peace—and thrushes.... I am shocked to find that people here read nothing but novels; but they flock to any abstruse lectures, *e.g.*, those of Estlin Carpenter on Biblical Criticism. I have just had an amusing experience—a journalist sent up to gather my views as to changes in Bristol in the last forty years. Goodness knows what a hash he will make of them!”

During this autumn, the thought occurred to me that as Miss Cobbe’s 80th birthday was at hand, a congratulatory address from the men and women who appreciated the work she had done for humanity and the lofty, spiritual influence of her writings, might cheer her, and help to remove some of the soreness of heart which the recent trouble at Barmouth had left behind. Through the kind help of Mr. and Mrs. Bunting and Mr. Verschoyle in England, and of Miss Schuyler and Mrs. Wister in America, an address was drawn up, and a notable list of signatures quickly and most cordially affixed to it. The address was as follows:—

“To FRANCES POWER COBBE

“December 4th, 1902.

“On this your eightieth birthday, we, who recognize the strenuous philanthropic activity and the high moral purpose of your long life, wish to offer you this congratulatory address as an expression of sincere regard.

“You were among the first publicly to urge the right of women to university degrees, and your powerful pen has done much to advance that movement towards equality of

treatment for them, in educational and other matters, which is one of the distinguishing marks of our time.

“In social amelioration, such as Ragged Schools and Workhouse reform, you did the work of a pioneer. By your lucid and thoughtful works on religion and ethics, you have contributed in no small degree to that broader and more humane view, which has so greatly influenced modern theology in all creeds and all schools of thought.

“But it is your chief distinction that you were practically the first to explore the dark continent of our relations to our dumb fellow-creatures, to let in light on their wrongs, and to base on the firm foundation of the moral law their rights and our duty towards them. They cannot thank you, but we can.

“We hope that this expression of our regard and appreciation may bring some contribution of warmth and light to the evening of a well spent life, and may strengthen your sense of a fellowship that looks beyond the grave.”

The Address happily gave Miss Cobbe all the gratification we had hoped. I quote from her letters the following passages:—

“Clifton, December 5th.

“I learn that it is to you I owe what has certainly been the greatest honour I have ever received in my long life—the address from English and American friends on my 80th birthday. I can hardly say how touched I am by this token of your great friendship, and the cheer which such an address could not fail to give me. The handsome album containing it and all the English signatures (the American ones—autographs—are on their way, but I have the names in type-writing) was brought to me yesterday by Mrs. Bunting and Mr. Verschoyle. I had three reporters dodging in and out all

day to get news of it, and have posted to you the *Bristol Mercury* with the best of their reports. It is really a very splendid set of signatures, and a most flattering expression of sympathy and approval from so many eminent men and women. It is encouraging to think that they would *endorse* the words about my care for animals."

"December 8th.

"You may not know that a very fair account of the address appeared in the *Times* of Saturday, and also in at least twenty other papers, so my *fame*! has gone evidently through the land. I also had addresses from the Women's Suffrage people, with Lady Frances Balfour at their head, and from the A.V. (German) Society at Dresden, Ragged School, etc.... I am greatly enjoying the visits of many literary men and women, old friends and new—people interested in theology and ethics and Egypt, and all things which interest me...."

"December 24th.

"Only think that I am booked to make an address on Women Suffrage to a ladies' club, five doors off, on the 2nd.... The trouble you must have taken (about the address) really overwhelms me! You certainly succeeded in doing me a really great honour, and in *cheering* me. I confess I was very downhearted when I came here, but I am better now. I feel like the man who 'woke one morning and found himself famous.'"

"January 4th.

"I like to hear of your fine walk on the mountain. How good such walks are for soul and body! I miss them dreadfully—for my temper as well as my health and strength. Walking in the streets is most disagreeable to me,

especially now that I go slower than other people, so that I feel myself an obstacle, and everybody brushes past me. I sigh for my own private walks, small as they are, where nobody has a right to come but myself, and my thoughts can go their ways uninterrupted. But oh, for the old precipice walk and Moel Ispry solitudes! You will be amused to hear that I actually gave an hour's address to about 100 ladies at a new club, five doors from me in this crescent, on Friday.... I was not sorry to say a word more on that subject, and, of course, to bring in how I trusted the votes of women to be against all sorts of cruelty, including Vivisection. I found I had my voice and words still at command.... They were nice, ladylike women in the club. One said she would have seven votes if she were a man. I do believe that it would be an immense gain for women themselves to have the larger interest which politics would bring into their cramped lives, and to cease to be de-considered as children."

Miss Cobbe was too human, too full of sympathy with her fellow-creatures, to know anything of the self-esteem which makes one indifferent to the affection and admiration of others. She was simply and openly pleased by this address, as the words I have quoted show; and more than a year later, only a few days before her death, she wrote to an old friend on *her* 80th birthday:—

"My own experience of an 80th birthday was so much brightened by that address... that it stands out as a happy, albeit solemn, day in my memory."

While in Clifton, Miss Cobbe presided at the committee meetings of the Bristol Branch of the British Union; and she

even considered the possibility of taking up the work once more in London. But a brief visit, when she occupied rooms in Thurloe Gardens, proved too much for her strength. The noise at night prevented her from sleeping, and she was reluctantly—for she enjoyed this opportunity of seeing old friends—obliged to return to North Wales. One Sunday morning when in London, she told me that she walked to Hereford Square to see the little house in which she and Miss Lloyd had spent the happiest years of their lives. But the changed aspect of the rooms in which they had received most of the distinguished men and women of that time distressed her, and she regretted her visit. On February 21st, she wrote to me from Hengwrt:—

"Dearest Blanche,

"As you see I have got home all right, and this morning meant to write to announce my arrival.... I have heaps of things to tell you, but to-day am dazed by fatigue and change of air. It was quite warm in London, and the cold here is great. But oh, how glad I am to be in the peace of Hengwrt again—how thankful that I have such a refuge in my old age! You will be glad, I know, that I can tell you I am in a great deal better health than when I left."

The first time I went to see her after her return, I found her standing in front of an immense chart which was spread out on a table, studying the successions of Egyptian dynasties. The address she had given in Clifton at the ladies' club was about to be printed in the *Contemporary Review*, and she wanted to verify a statement she had made in it about an Egyptian queen. She told me that this elaborate chronological and genealogical chart had been made by her, when a girl of 18, on her own plan. "How happy I was doing

it," she said, "with my mother on her sofa watching me, and taking such interest in it!" It was very delightful to find the old woman of 80 consulting the work of the girl of 18.

Alas! the improvement in her health did not continue long. From that time till the end, I hardly received a letter from Miss Cobbe without some reference to the cheerless, gloomy weather. She was very sensitive to the influences of the weather; and as one of her greatest pleasures had always been to pass much time out of doors, it became a serious deprivation to her when rain and cold made it impossible to take her daily drive, or to walk and sit in her beloved garden. She thought that some real and permanent change had come over our climate, and the want of sunshine, during the last winter especially, terribly depressed her spirits and health. I spent two or three happy days with her in the spring, and one drive on an exquisite morning at the end of May will long live in my memory. No one ever loved trees and flowers, mountain and river, more than she, or took more delight in the pleasure they gave to others.

Gradually, as the year went on, serious symptoms showed themselves—and she knew them to be serious. Attacks of faintness and complete exhaustion often prevented her from enjoying the society of even her dearest friends, though in spite of increasing weakness she struggled on with all the weight of private correspondence and the business of her new society; and sometimes, when strangers went to see her, they would find her so bright and animated that they came away thinking our fears for her unfounded.

A visit from two American friends in the summer gave her much pleasure; but all last year her anxieties and disappointments were great, and wore down her strength. The Bayliss *v.* Coleridge case tried her grievously, and the adverse verdict was a severe blow. The evident animus of the public made her almost despair of ever obtaining that justice for animals which had been the object of her efforts for so many years. Hope deferred, and the growing opposition of principalities and powers, made even her brave heart quail at times. One result of the trial, however, gave her real satisfaction. The *Daily News* opened its columns to a correspondence on the subject of Vivisection, and the wide-spread sympathy expressed with those who oppose it was, Miss Cobbe said, “the greatest cheer she had known in this sad cause for years.” The two young Swedish ladies who had been the principal witnesses at the trial, visited her at Hengwrt in November, and I met them there one afternoon at, I think, the last of her pleasant receptions. I have never seen her more interested, more graciously hospitable, than on that day. She listened to the account of the trial, sometimes with a smile of approval, sometimes with tears in her eyes; and when we went into the hall for tea, where the blazing wood fire lighted up the dark panelling, and gleamed upon pictures, flowers, and curtains, and she moved about talking to one and another with her sweet smile and kindly, earnest words, some one present said to me, “How young she looks!” I think it was the simplicity, the perfect naturalness of her manner and speech that gave an aspect of almost childlikeness to the dear old face at times. Every thought found expression in

her countenance and voice. The eyes, laughing or tearful, the gestures of her beautifully shaped hands, were, to the last, full of animation.

There was indeed a perennial flow of vitality which seemed to overcome all physical weakness in Miss Cobbe. But if others were deceived as to her health, she was not. As the dark, dreary winter went on, she grew more and more depressed. Four days before the end came, I received the following sad letter. Illness and other causes had made it impossible for me to go to Hengwrt for some weeks. The day after her death I was to have gone.

“It is very sad how the weeks go by, and we, living almost within *sight* of each other, fail to meet. It is most horribly cold to-day, and I would not have had you come for anything.... I think our best plan by far will be to settle that whenever you make your proposed start abroad, you come to me for three or four days on your way. This will let us have a little peaceful confab. I really want very much to do what I have been thinking of so long, but have never done yet, and give you advice about your future editorship of my poor books. To tell you my own conviction, even if I should be living when you return, I do not think I shall be up to this sort of business. I am getting into a wretched state of inability to give *attention* to things, and now the chances are all for a speedy collapse. This winter has been too great a trial for my old worn brains, and now the cold returning is killing.”

Happily for her, she was spared the pain of any protracted period of mental or bodily weakness. On Monday, April 4th, she drove out as usual, wrote her letters (one to

me, received after she was dead), and in the afternoon enjoyed the visit of a neighbour, who took tea with her. It was a better day with her than many had been of late, and she went to bed cheerful and well. In the morning, having opened her shutters to let in the blessed daylight, and to look her last upon the familiar scene of mountain, valley, river, and wood, with the grey headstone visible in the churchyard where her friend rested, she passed swiftly away, and was found dead, with a smile of peace upon her face. A short time before, she had written to me:—

"I am touched by your affectionate words, dear Blanche, but *nobody* must be sorry when that time comes, least of all those who love me."

We can obey her request not to sorrow for her; but for all those—and they are more than she ever realised—who loved her, the loss is beyond words to tell.

Miss Cobbe's personality breathes through all her writings. Yet there was a charm about her which not even her autobiography is able to convey. It was the charm of an intensely sympathetic nature, quickly moved to laughter or to tears, passionately indignant at cruelty and cowardice, tender to suffering, touched to a generous delight at any story of heroism. As an instance of this, I may recall that in the spring of 1899 Miss Cobbe started a memorial to Mrs. Rogers, stewardess of the *Stella*, by the gift of £25. The closing words of the inscription she wrote for the beautiful drinking fountain which was erected to that brave woman's memory are worth recording here:

"ACTIONS SUCH AS THESE—
SHOWING

STEADFAST PERFORMANCE OF DUTY IN THE FACE OF DEATH,
READY SELF-SACRIFICE FOR SAKE OF OTHERS,
RELIANCE ON GOD—
CONSTITUTE THE GLORIOUS HERITAGE OF OUR ENGLISH RACE.
THEY DESERVE PERPETUAL COMMEMORATION:
BECAUSE
AMONG THE TRIVIAL PLEASURES AND SORDID STRIFE OF THE WORLD
THEY REVEAL TO US FOR EVER
THE NOBILITY AND LOVE-WORTHINESS OF HUMAN NATURE.”

In Miss Cobbe’s nature a gift of humour was joined to strong practical sense. No one who ever lived less deserved the term “Faddist” or “Sentimentalist.” Miss Cobbe was impatient of fads. She liked “normal” people best—those who ate and drank, and dressed and lived according to ordinary conventions. Though, for convenience sake, she had adopted a style of dress for herself to which she kept, letting “Fashions” come and go unheeded, she was not indifferent to dress in other women, and admired colours and materials, or noted eccentricities as quickly as anyone. She once referred laughingly to her own dress as “obvious.” For many years dressmaker’s dresses would have been impossible to her; but she had no sympathy with the effort some women make to look peculiar at all costs. She could thoroughly enjoy a good story, or even a bit of amusing gossip. With her own strong religious convictions, she had the utmost respect for other people’s opinions. Her chosen friends held widely different creeds, and I do not think that she ever dreamt of proselytising.

No literary person, surely, ever had less self-conceit. What she had written was not flourished in one's face; other people's smallest doings were not ignored. One felt always on leaving her that every one else was lacking in something indefinable—was dull, uninteresting and common-place. One felt, too, that the whole conception of womanhood was raised. *This* was what a woman might be. Whatever her faults, they were the faults of a great-hearted, noble nature—faults which all generous persons would be quick to forget. Nothing small or mean could be tolerated by her.

Her character, as I read it, was drawn on large and simple lines, and was of a type that is out of fashion to-day. She had many points of resemblance to Samuel Johnson. With a strong and logical brain, she scorned all sophistries, evasions, compromises, and half measures, and was impatient of the wire-drawn subtleties in which modern moralists revel. With intensely warm affections, she was, like the great doctor, "a good hater." He would undoubtedly have classified her as "a clubbable woman"; and his famous saying, "Clear your mind of cant," would have come as appropriately from her lips as from his. If a sin was hateful to her, she could not feel amiably towards the sinner; and for the spiritual sins of selfishness, hypocrisy, avarice, cruelty, and callousness, she had no mercy, ranking them as far more fatal to character than the sins of the flesh. Like Johnson, too, she valued good birth, good breeding, and good manners, and was instinctively conservative, though liberal in her religious and political opinions.

She intensely disliked the license of modern life, both in manners and morals, and had no toleration for the laxity so

often pardoned in persons of social or intellectual eminence. Her mind and her tastes were strictly pure, orderly, and regular. It is characteristic of this type of mind that she most admired the classical in architecture, the grand style in art, the polished and finished verse of Pope and Tennyson in poetry. These were the two whose words she most frequently quoted, though she tells us that Shelley was her favourite poet.

Her gift of order was exemplified in the smallest details and the kindred power of organisation was equally well marked. It was the combination of impulsiveness and enthusiasm with practical judgment and a due sense of proportion that made her so splendid a leader in any cause she championed.

Miss Cobbe was what is often called “generous to a fault.” It was a lesson in liberality to go with her into the garden when she cut flowers to send away. She did not look for the defective blooms, or for those which would not be missed. It was always the best and the finest which she gave. How often I have held the basket while she cut rose after rose, or great sprays of rhododendron or azælea with the knife she wielded so vigorously. “Take as much as you like,” she would say, if she sent you to help yourself. She gave not only material things, but affection, interest sympathy, bountifully.

She hated a lie of any kind; her first instinct was always to stamp it out when she came across one. Perhaps, in her stronger days, she “drank delight of battle with her peers,” and did not crave over much for peace. But she was not

quarrelsome, and could differ without wrangling, and dispute without bitterness.

A woman without husband or child is fortunate if, in her old age, she has one or two friends who really love her. Miss Cobbe was devotedly loved by a large number of men and women. Indeed, I do not think that anyone could come close to her and not love her. She was so richly gifted, and gave so freely of herself.

To many younger women she had become the inspiration of and guide to a life of high endeavour, and the letters of gratitude and devotion which were addressed to her from all parts of the world bear witness, as nothing else can, to the extent of her splendid influence upon the characters of others. Only a day or two before her death she received letters from strangers who had lately read her autobiography and felt impelled to write and thank her for this story of a brave life. It is in the hope that through it her influence may go on growing, and that her spirit of self-sacrifice, of service to humanity, and faithfulness to the Divine law may spread until the causes she fought for so valiantly are victorious, that this new edition of the “Life of Frances Power Cobbe” is sent out.

Blanche Atkinson.

AUTHOR’S PREFACE.

Table of Contents

My life has been an interesting one to live and I hope that this record of it may not prove too dull to read. The days are past when biographers thought it necessary to apologize for the paucity of the adventures which they could recall and the obscurity of the achievements which their heroes might accomplish. We have gone far in the opposite direction, and are wont to relate *in extenso* details decidedly trivial, and to reproduce in imposing type correspondence which was scarcely worth the postage of the original manuscript. Our sense of the intrinsic interest of Humanity, as depicted either in biography or fiction,—that is, of the character of the *personages* of the drama going on upon our little stage,—has continually risen, while that of the *action* of the piece,—the “incidents” which our fathers chiefly regarded,—has fallen into the second plane. I fear I have been guilty in this book of recording many trifling memories and of reproducing some letters of little importance; but only through small touches could a happy childhood and youth be possibly depicted: and all the Letters have, I think, a certain value as relics and tokens of friendship, if not as expressions (as many of them are) of opinions carrying the weight of honoured names.

As regards these Letters (exclusively, of course, those of friends and correspondents now dead), I earnestly beg the heirs of the writers to pardon me if I have not asked their permission for the publication of them. To have ascertained, in the first place, who such representatives are and where

they might be addressed, would, in many cases, have been a task presenting prohibitive difficulties; and as the contents of the Letters are wholly honourable to the heads and hearts of their authors, I may fairly hope that surviving relatives will be pleased that they should see the light, and will not grudge the testimony they bear to kindly sentiments entertained towards myself.[1]

There is in this book of mine a good deal of "*Old Woman's Gossip*," (I hope of a harmless sort), concerning many interesting men and women with whom it was my high privilege to associate freely twenty, thirty and forty years ago. But if it correspond at all to my design, it is not only, or chiefly, a collection of social sketches and friendly correspondence. I have tried to make it the true and complete history of a woman's existence *as seen from within*; a real Life, which he who reads may take as representing fairly the joys, sorrows and interests, the powers and limitations, of one of my sex and class in the era which is now drawing to a close. The world when I entered it was a very different place from the world I must shortly quit, most markedly so as regards the position in it of women and of persons like myself holding heterodox opinions, and my experience practically bridges the gulf which divides the English *ancien régime* from the new.

Whether my readers will think at the end of these volumes that such a life as mine was worth *recording* I cannot foretell; but that it has been a "*Life Worth Living*" I distinctly affirm; so well worth it, that,—though I entirely believe in a higher existence hereafter, both for myself and for those whose less happy lives on earth entitle them far