

The Lecture

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By Virginia Woodward Cloud

"SHE says they can be done without."

"What?"

"Men can. Be done without."

"Why, how ever—well, go on."

"She says they's discordant notes in Creation's scheme—"

"Well, I never!"

"I wrote some things down best I could on the margin of newspaper that was there, so's to get 'em by heart. She says what a woman can't do ain't worth doing. 'Curb not your powers, my sisters, with bit and bridle like to the ox and mule,' she says."

"Oxes don't wear bits."

"That's what she says, anyhow. 'Shame not the glorious possibilities of womanhood by following like a bondswoman when the sovereignty of leadership is by right yours!' I pretty near got off the bench, and Mis' Jessup turned red in the face and untied her bonnet-

strings. The lecture-lady went on telling how unbecoming it was for a free female to turn in appeal to a man for everything. 'Use your own inspired intellects,' she says. 'Can you name a man in this village whose mind you consider superior to one in this noble assembly of representative women? No!'

"I was running them over to myself, beginning with Uncle Abe Washburn, while she talked, when Mis' Jessup spoke out like it was Experience Meeting. You know her deafness makes her lose about half, and she's always wanting to help somebody along. 'Yes'm,' she says; 'as you ask, it's my duty to speak out. Doctor's got more sense in his little finger than I got in my whole body,' she says, meaning Dr. Jessup. Her back's so wide it hid the lecture-lady all 'cepting her head. The lecture-lady smiled real polite and says:

"'Quite right, my dear madam; nothing

gives such vitality to a meeting as a call for discussion. I am glad that you opened this question which is so vital to the women of our country and to the progress of the nation. I should advise an immediate consideration of the subject, and appoint this lady—'

"'Excuse me, ma'am,' says Mis' Jessup; 'that isn't just it. I was speaking about the sense of the men in this village. Now, I'll own that all of 'em, so to speak, ain't to be counted in because of one thing and another, but there's the Doctor—'

"'Yes, yes,' says the lecture-lady, real amiable; 'we shall discuss the relative values of the force masculine and the force feminine, all in good time—' I wrote this down so's not to forget it. 'I am convinced that all my sisters resent the assumed superiority of the former, and realize within themselves the voice of Freedom and individual power crying for utterance! Press on to the foreground! Let not your rights be trampled under foot! Let the banner over you be "*Rights!*" Man is the sovereign brute of nature—'

"'Excuse me, ma'am,' says Mis' Jessup, 'but I'd say, meaning no offense, that it would go right hard to have to call the Doctor a "brute."'

"The lecture-lady smiled kind of coldly polite and said that she was speaking in abstrack—which means look at it small and it's one way, and look at it large and it's another.

"'Peas is peas, be they a peck or a bushel,' says Mis' Jessup, standing there like your dun cow that a steam whistle can't scare from those pasture bars till they're let down.

"'Your suggestions are of universal interest,' says the lecture-lady, 'and should strike to the heart of every woman whose soul cries for freedom. "Why should I be crushed beneath the wheel of Juggernaut?" should be her cry. "Down with those traditions which rob me of my birthright of liberty!"'

"We were so stirred up now that there was considerable nodding and whispering; the lecture-lady had got real powerful, and Mis' Jessup stood trying to catch every word, and she says:

"'It's a shame, ma'am, that it is!'

"'Yes, shame! shame!' cries the lecture-lady, waving her arms, 'shame, I say, my sister! Let us each avow ourselves free!' And she went on so feelingly, about the heel of man being on her neck, and so exciting about the same flag waving its stars over men and its stripes over women, that it was better than Labor Day parade, and Essie Crim waved her handkerchief.

"'I will no longer suffer in slave-like silence!' says the lecture-lady, waving her arms, and Mis' Jessup spoke out.

"'Don't, ma'am,' she says; 'as I said, it's a shame that any lady should have been treated so bad. You've come to the right place, for I think I'm speaking for all when I say that no woman appeals to us in vain for protection, and I would ask you right now to come home with me and let the Doctor advise you. Anybody can see you've been treated terrible bad by your husband, and if he's gone so far as to use his foot, as you say, ma'am, you've cause for complaint—though with most domestic quarrels there's faults on both sides, ma'am. Maybe your husband is a drinking man—'

"'Husband!' cries the lecture-lady, of a sudden losing hold of herself and dancing up and down. '*Me!* Me got a husband? Me put my head into the yoke of slavery? *Me* get trampled on by a *man!*' she screams, slamming her books together and pinning her hat on. 'How dare you insult me? *Husband!*' she panted like 'twas '*Snake!*' and she jumps off the platform, and we all got up together, and she glares at Mis' Jessup like mad. 'How dare you say "Husband!" to me? Do I look like a worm who crawls around the feet of a man? The next time you want a lecturer, send for one of your own purblind, cow-like, servile race, and not an enlightened and emancipated being!' she screams, 'a being who knows not the word "husband!" Ugh! Go home to your *husbands*, you poor, down-trod creatures, and never awaken from your ignorance!'

"And with that she pitches out the door and disappears, while we were all trying to explain that Mis' Jessup meant no harm.

"Presently Dr. Jessup drove up with his buggy-wheels all mud-splashed.

"'I wish you had got here sooner,' says Mis' Jessup, climbing in, 'to help soothe a poor creetur who was easing her mind here awhile ago.'

"The Doctor said that if it was the female he'd met on her way to the station he guessed she'd eased off pretty much all the mind she'd got, because when he picked her up she was clinging to the fence crying fit to kill herself.

"'Just like they all do,' he says. 'Something had made her mad, and when she come to she cried it out. I said to her, "Want to go to the train?" And I didn't wait, but jumped her in. She

was gasping and sobbing, "*Husband!*" so I calculated they'd quarreled, and I says, "There now, don't take it that way, ma'am. If your husband's gone and left you, he'll return, never fear, especially if you're a first-rate cook," I said; "all young people quarrel sometimes, and maybe you can win him back."

"'My, but she mopped her eyes and turned turkey-red as she jumped out and the whistle blew.

"' "*Husband!*" says she. "I'll have you know I haven't *got* any!"

"' "Well, now, is *that* it?" I said. "Then I wouldn't take it that bad, miss: *maybe you'll get one yet!*"

"' "But she jumped on that train without so much as "thanky."'"