

## **DR. ELIZABETH BLACKWELL**

*Pioneer Work In Opening the Medical Profession to Women Autobiographical Sketches, Chapter 2*

BY Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, Author Of '*The Moral Education Of The Young*,' Etc.

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If an idea, I reasoned, were really a valuable one, there must be some way of realising it. The idea of winning a doctor's degree gradually assumed the aspect of a great moral struggle, and the moral fight possessed immense attraction for me.

This moral aspect of the subject was increased by a circumstance which made a very strong impression on me. There was at that time a certain Madame Restell flourishing in New York. This person was a noted abortionist, and known all over the country. She was a woman of great ability, and defended her course in the public papers. She made a large fortune, drove a fine carriage, had a pew in a fashionable church, and though often arrested, was always bailed out by her patrons. She was known distinctively as a 'female physician,' a term exclusively applied at that time to those women who carried on her vile occupation.

Now, I had always felt a great reverence for maternity – the mighty creative power which more than any other human faculty seemed to bring womanhood nearer the Divine.

The first serious essay I ever attempted was on 'The Motherhood of the Race, or Spiritual Maternity' – that great fact of universal love and service which is the formative principle striving to express itself in the lower physical manifestations.

**The gross perversion and destruction of motherhood by the abortionist filled me with indignation, and awakened active antagonism. That the honourable term 'female physician' should be exclusively applied to those women who carried on this shocking trade seemed to me a horror. It was an utter degradation of what might and should become a noble position for women.**

Being at that time a reader of Swedenborg, and strongly impressed by his vivid representations of the unseen world, I finally determined to do what I could to 'redeem the hells,' and especially the one form of hell thus forced upon my notice.

My journals of those days, 1845, are full of the various difficulties encountered as this determination took root.