

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects

Mary Wollstonecraft

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type.—If this work gets you interested in its author, read Claire Tomalin's fine *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1974).

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Glossary

accomplishment: That is a kind of sneer-word when MW uses it writing about the ‘accomplishments’ that women are trained to have. To ‘accomplish’ something can be to complete or finish it; a few decades ago some young women were sent to a ‘finishing school’ before being launched into society.

address: skill, elegance, dexterity; usually thought of (by MW at least) as something learned, practised, contrived—not natural. See page 58.

amuse: In MW’s time ‘amuse’ had a central meaning which it now has only at the margins: to ‘amuse oneself by. . .’ was to pass the time by. . . . A child who is ‘amusing herself’ by dressing her doll (page 29) needn’t be taking much pleasure in this.

animal spirits: These figured in a theory, popularised by Descartes: they were supposed to be an extremely fine-divided liquid or gas—much less lumpy than water or air—that could move with great speed and get in anywhere; among their roles was to transmit causal influences from the sense-organs to the brain, almost instantaneously.

brute, brutal: A brute is a lower or non-human animal. A brutal or brutish way of behaving is one that falls below a minimum standard for being human—e.g. the ‘brutal’ behaviour of a mother [on page 89] who indulges her child without thinking about the effects of her conduct on the child’s later development or on •other people.

docile: Strictly and originally this meant ‘able to learn’ and/or ‘willing to learn’. In MW’s usage, as in ours today, a ‘docile’ person is one who is easy to manage, persuade, manipulate, etc. One who is biddable.

education: In MW’s time this word had a wider meaning than it tends to have today. It wouldn’t be far wrong to replace most occurrences of it by ‘upbringing’. See MW’s discussion of ‘education’ starting on page 14.

genius: In the present work this means something like ‘extremely high-level intellect’; similar to the word’s present meaning, but not as strong.

he or she: MW never uses ‘he or she’, ‘his or hers’ or the like. These occur in the present version to avoid the discomfort we feel in her use of ‘it’, as when she says ‘every being’ can become virtuous by the exercise of ‘its own reason’.

(im)mortal: MW ties •being immortal to •having reason and to •being answerable to God.

mistress: In this work, a ‘mistress of a family is in charge of a family; and a ‘mistress of a man is a sexual partner of a man. The word is not used here except in those two kinds of context.

person: When MW refers to a woman’s ‘person’ she is always referring to the woman herself considered as sexually attractive. A man’s interest in a woman’s ‘person’ is his sexual interest in her body, though clothing and jewellery may also come into it.

prescription: In several important places MW uses ‘prescription’ in its sense as a legal term, now obsolete, referring to something’s being accepted or unchallenged etc. *because it has been in place for so long.*

sceptre: An ornamental rod held in the hand of a monarch as a symbol of royal authority. MW uses the word several times, always as a metaphor for power or authority: ‘beauty

is woman's sceptre' means that beauty is woman's source of power.

sense: MW speaks of 'a man of sense' she means 'a fairly intelligent man' or, in her terms, 'a man with a fairly enlarged understanding'.

sensibility: Capacity for refined emotion, readiness to feel compassion for suffering, or the quality of being strongly affected by emotional influences. MW uses the adjective 'sensible'—e.g. on page 63—in pretty much our sense of it.

sentimental: This meant 'having to do with feelings'; the implication of shallow and unworthy feelings came after MW's time. On page 1 'sentimental lust' presumably means 'intense hankering for various kinds of feelings'.

sex: For MW 'sex' is a classificatory term—e.g. 'I speak for my sex' meaning 'I speak for all women'. (The use of 'sex' as short for 'copulation' is of more recent vintage.) See the striking example on page 36. MW uses phrases about 'giving a sex to X' meaning (page 6) treating X as though it related to only one of the sexes, or (pages 24, 29 and 41) treating X as though there were one version of it for females and a

different one for males.

subtlety: In MW's usage this means something close to 'address' (see above).

vice, vicious: For an 18th century writer vice is simply wrong conduct, with no necessary implication of anything sexual (except perhaps on page 55); and a vicious person is simply someone who often acts wrongly, with no necessary implication of anything like savage cruelty.

virtue: On a few occasions in this work MW uses 'virtue' with some of its older sense of 'power'. One example is on page 36. On page 65 MW personifies virtue as feminine.

voluptuous: Having to do with sexual pleasure.

vulgar: In MW's day 'vulgar' as applied to people meant 'common, ordinary, not much educated, not very thoughtful'. More generally, 'vulgar x' meant 'the kind of x that would be associated with vulgar people'.

woman: This version follows MW exactly in her uses of 'woman', 'women', 'lady', 'female' and 'feminine', and in her use of the masculine counterparts of these.

Chapter 8: Morality undermined by sexual notions of the importance of a good reputation

I realized long ago •that advice about behaviour and about all the various ways of preserving a good reputation—advice that has been so strenuously forced on the female world—is a glittering poison that forms a crust around morality and eats away its substance. And •that this measuring of shadows produces a false calculation, because the length of a shadow depends so much on the height of the sun and other external circumstances.

The easy false behaviour of a courtier—where does it come from? From the fact that the courtier needs dependents, so that he has to learn the arts of •denying without giving offence, and of •evasively feeding hope with the chameleon's food. [The chameleon's tongue moves faster than the eye can see; so it used to be said that the chameleon feeds on air.] That is how politeness plays with truth and—eating away the sincerity and humanity natural to man— produces the fine gentleman.

Women in the same way acquire, from a supposed necessity, an equally artificial way of behaving. But you can't with impunity play with truth, because the experienced dissembler eventually becomes the dupe of his own arts, and can no longer quickly perceive common truths, which means that he loses his common sense. Those are truths that are constantly accepted as true by the unsophisticated mind, though it might not have had enough energy to discover them itself when local prejudices got in the way. Most people take their opinions on trust, to avoid the trouble of using their own minds, and these lazy beings naturally adhere to the letter of the law rather its spirit, whether the law be divine or human. Some author (I forget who) wrote: 'Women don't

care about things that only heaven sees.' Why indeed should they? It is the eye of man that they have been taught to dread—and if they can lull their Argus to sleep, they seldom think of heaven or themselves, because their reputation is safe; and it is not •chastity but •reputation that they are working to keep free from spot, not as a virtue but to preserve their status in the world. [Argus in Greek mythology was a guardian god with a hundred eyes.]

To prove the truth of this remark, I need only mention the intrigues of married women, particularly in the upper social ranks and in countries where women are suitably married according to their respective ranks by their parents. If an innocent girl become a prey to love [i.e. if she has a sexual affair before marriage], she is degraded forever, even if her mind wasn't polluted by the arts that married women practise under the convenient cloak of *marriage*; and she hasn't violated any duty except her duty to respect herself. In contrast with that, if a married woman is a false and faithless wife, she breaks a most sacred contract and becomes a cruel mother. If her husband still has an affection for her, the tricks she must use to deceive him will make her the most contemptible of human beings; and the contrivances necessary to preserve appearances will keep her mind in that childish or vicious tumult that destroys all its energy. . . .

I have known a number of women who, if they did not love their husbands, loved nobody else,

devoting themselves entirely to vanity and dissipation, neglecting every domestic duty, even squandering the money that should have been saved for their helpless younger children,

and priding themselves on their spotless reputation, as if the whole extent of their duty as wives and mothers was to preserve *that*. . . .

It would have been better if superficial moralists had said less about behaviour and outward observances, and more about the underlying frame of mind; for unless virtue of any kind is built on knowledge, it will produce only a kind of insipid decency. Yet respect for the opinion of the world has been explicitly claimed to be woman's principal duty, for Rousseau declares:

Reputation is as indispensable as chastity. A man, secure in his own good conduct, depends only on himself, and can brave public opinion; but a woman in behaving well performs only half her duty; the other half is to be well thought of, because what is thought of her is as important to her as what she really is. So the system of a woman's education should in this respect be directly contrary to that of men's education. Opinion is virtue's grave among the men but its throne among women.

It is strictly logical to infer from this that virtue depending on opinion is merely worldly, and that it is the virtue of a being to whom reason has been denied. But even with respect to the opinion of the world I am convinced that this class of reasoners—ones who think as Rousseau did about the matter—are mistaken.

This regard for reputation, independent of its being one of the natural rewards of virtue, arose from a cause that I have already deplored as the grand source of female depravity, namely the impossibility of regaining respectability by a return to virtue, although men preserve theirs *during* the indulgence of vice. This made it natural for women to try to preserve something that when lost can never be regained, namely reputation for chastity; this became the one thing

needed by the female sex, and the concern for it swallowed up every other concern. But. . . neither religion nor virtue, when they reside in the heart, require such a childish attention to mere ceremonies, because the behaviour must on the whole be proper when the motive is pure.

To support my opinion I can produce very respectable authority; and the authority of a cool reasoner ought to have weight—not to establish an opinion but to make one take it into consideration. Dr Smith observes:

By some very extraordinary and unlucky circumstance, a good man may come to be suspected of a crime of which he was altogether incapable, and on that account be most unjustly exposed for the rest of his life to the horror and aversion of mankind. By an accident of this kind he may be said to 'lose his all' despite his integrity and justice, in the same way that a cautious man may be ruined by an earthquake or a flood, despite all the care he has taken. Accidents of the first kind are rarer—more contrary to the common course of things—than accidents of the second kind; and it still remains true that the practice of truth, justice and humanity is a certain and almost infallible method of acquiring what those virtues chiefly aim at, the confidence and love of those we live with. A person may be easily misrepresented with regard to a particular action; but it is hardly possible that he should be misrepresented with regard to the general tenor of his conduct. An innocent man may be believed to have done wrong; but this won't often happen. On the other hand, the established opinion that his behaviour is innocent will often lead us to absolve him in cases where he has really been at fault. . . . [Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*]

I entirely agree with this writer, for I believe that few people of

either sex were ever despised for certain vices without deserving to be despised. I'm not talking about the short-term libel that hangs over someone's character, like a dense November morning fog over London, until it gradually subsides before the common light of day; my point is just that the daily conduct of the majority of people stamps their character with the hallmark of truth. The clear light, shining day after day, quietly refutes the ignorant suspicion or malicious tale that has thrown dirt on a pure character. . . .

Many people. . . obtain a better reputation than, strictly speaking, they deserve, for if you work hard enough you will reach your goal in almost any race. Those who strive only for this paltry prize—like the Pharisees who prayed at street-corners so as to be seen by men—do indeed get the reward they seek, for the heart of man cannot be read by man! But the fair fame that is naturally reflected by good actions, when the man is trying only to do the right thing, regardless of the lookers-on, is in general not only more true but more sure.

It's true that there are trials when the good man must appeal to God from the injustice of man, and to the accompaniment of the. . . hissing of envy, erect a shelter in his own mind to retire into until the rumour has passed; and indeed the darts of undeserved blame may pierce an innocent tender bosom with many sorrows; but these are all exceptions to general rules. And it is according to these common laws that human behaviour ought to be regulated. . . .

So I venture to assert that after a man has reached maturity, the general outline of his character in the world is just, allowing for the before mentioned exceptions to the rule. I don't deny that a prudent, worldly-wise man with only negative virtues and qualities may sometimes obtain a

smoother reputation than a wiser or a better man. . . . But the hills and dales, clouds and sunshine, that are conspicuous in the virtues of great men set each other off; and though they afford envious weakness a better target to shoot at, the real character will still work its way into the light even if it is bespattered by weak affection or ingenious malice.¹²

. . . .Morality is very insidiously undermined in the female world by the attention being given to the •show instead of to the •substance. This turns a simple thing into something strangely complicated; indeed, sometimes virtue and its shadow are set at variance. We might never have heard of Lucretia if she had she died to preserve her chastity instead of her reputation. [A heroine of early Rome who, according to legend, killed herself after being raped.] If we really deserve to think well of ourselves we shall commonly be respected in the world; but if we pant after higher improvement and higher attainments, it is not sufficient to view ourselves as we suppose that •others view us, though this has been ingeniously argued—by Adam Smith—to be the foundation of our moral sentiments. Why not? Because each bystander may have his own prejudices in addition to those of his age or country. We should rather try to view ourselves as we suppose that •God views us. . . .

[We are then given two pages of flowery prose on the theme of an honest person examining himself in the presence of God, seeing that he is far from perfect, and being led by this discovery to a less harshly blaming attitude to his fellow-mortals. Here is a one-sentence sample of the style of this passage: 'Virtues, unobserved by men, drop their balmy fragrance at this cool hour, and the thirsty land, refreshed by the pure streams of comfort that suddenly gush out, is crowned with smiling verdure; this is the living green on which that eye may look with complacency that is too pure

¹² I have in mind various biographical writings, particularly Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.

to behold iniquity!' Eventually MW comes to the end of this 'reverie', as she calls it, and gets back to her proper topic:]

The leading principles that run through all my discussions would make it unnecessary to go on about this subject if it weren't for the fact that a constant attention to keep the *varnish* of the character fresh and in good condition is often taught as the sum total of female duty; the fact that moral obligations are often pushed into second place by rules to regulate behaviour and preserve reputation. But with regard to reputation the attention is confined to a single virtue—chastity. If a woman's 'honour'—as it is absurdly called—is safe, she may neglect every social duty; even ruin her family by gambling and extravagance; yet still present a shame-free front—for truly she is an honourable woman!

Mrs. Macaulay has rightly remarked that 'there is only one fault that a woman of honour can't commit without being punished'. She then justly and humanely adds:

This has given rise to the foolish observation that the first fault against chastity in woman has a radical power to deprave the character. But no such frail beings come out of the hands of nature. The human mind is built of nobler materials than to be so easily corrupted; and with all their disadvantages of situation and education, women seldom become entirely abandoned until they are thrown into a state of desperation by the venomous rancour of their own sex.

But in proportion as this regard for the reputation of chastity is prized by women, it is despised by men: and the two extremes are equally destructive to morality.

[Two paragraphs on 'beastly' over-eating by the rich, and their lack of shame about it. Then from talking about this 'appetite' she moves to another:]

The depravity of the appetite that brings the sexes together has had a still more fatal effect. Nature must always be the standard of taste, the gauge of appetite—yet nature is grossly insulted by the voluptuary. 'I'll discuss this', leaving the refinements of love out of the question. Nature makes the gratification of this appetite. . . . a natural and imperious law to preserve the species; and by so doing, it exalts the appetite and mixes a little **(1)** mind and affection into **(2)** the sensual appetite. The **(1)** feelings of a parent mingling with **(2)** a merely animal instinct give the latter dignity; and because the man and the woman often interact on account of the child, a mutual interest and affection is aroused by the exercise of a shared sympathy. So mothers, having necessarily some duty to fulfil more noble than to adorn their persons, would not contentedly be the slaves of casual appetite. Yet many women are just that: they are, literally speaking, standing dishes to which every 'sexual' glutton can have access.

I may be told that bad as this sexual promiscuity is, it affects only one cursed part of the sex—cursed for the salvation of the rest. Well, it's easy to prove that it is never right to allow a small evil in order to produce a greater good; but that's not the end of the matter. The moral character and peace of mind of the more chaste part of the sex is undermined by the conduct of the very women to whom they allow no refuge from guilt. These are women whom the chaste women inexorably consign to the practice of skills and tricks that lure their husbands from them and debauch their sons. And they also force the modest women (who may be surprised to read this!) to become to some extent like themselves. For I will venture to assert that all the causes of female weakness or depravity that I have already discussed branch out from one grand cause—the lack of chastity in men.

[A paragraph introducing the extremely voluptuous man, 'the lustful prowler', and his ways of satisfying his sexual appetite. Then:]

To satisfy this type of man, women are made systematically voluptuous, and though they may not all take their libertinism as far as the man does, still this heartless interaction with males that they allow themselves depraves both sexes: the taste of men is vitiated, and women of all classes naturally adapt their behaviour to gratify the taste by which they obtain pleasure and power. In this way women become weaker in mind and body than they ought to be. . . .and don't have enough strength to discharge the first duty of a mother; so they sacrifice to lasciviousness the parental affection that ennobles instinct, and either destroy the embryo in the womb or throw it out when it has been born. [MW also builds into that sentence the thesis that 'bearing and nursing children is one of the grand ends of women's existence'.] Nature demands respect in everything, and those who violate her laws seldom violate them with impunity. The weak enervated women who particularly catch the attention of libertines are unfit to be mothers, though they may conceive; so that the rich sensualist who has rioted among women, spreading depravity and misery, when he wants to perpetuate his name receives from his wife only a half-formed being that inherits both its father's and mother's weakness. [That sentence is verbatim MW.]

. . . I have already remarked that men ought to maintain the women whom they have seduced; this would be one means of reforming female manners and by giving disgraced women an alternative to prostitution stopping an abuse

that has an equally fatal effect on population and morals. Another means of reforming female manners—an equally obvious one—would be to turn the attention of woman to the real virtue of chastity. A woman's reputation may be white as the driven snow, but she hasn't much claim to respect for her modesty if she smiles on the libertine while spurning the victims of his lawless appetites and their own folly.

Besides, she has a taint of the same folly when she studiously adorns her person [see Glossary] only to be seen by men, to excite respectful sighs and all the idle homage of what is called 'innocent gallantry'. Women who really respect virtue for its own sake won't look for compensation in the coin of vanity for the self-denial they have to practise to preserve their reputation, nor will they associate with men who set reputation at defiance.

The two sexes corrupt each other and improve each other. I believe this to be an indisputable truth, and I extend it to every virtue. Chastity, modesty, public spirit, and all the noble train of virtues on which social virtue and happiness are built, should be understood and cultivated by all mankind—otherwise they will be cultivated to little effect. And instead of providing vicious or idle people with a pretext for violating some sacred duty by saying that it is a duty for only one of the sexes, it would be wiser to show that nature has not drawn any line here, for the unchaste man doubly defeats the purpose of nature by rendering women barren and destroying his own constitution, though he avoids the shame that pursues the crime in the other sex. [MW is implying here that the unchaste man defeats the purpose of nature by getting syphilis and by spreading it]. . . .

Chapter 9: The pernicious effects of the unnatural distinctions established in society

Most of the evils and vices that make this world such a dreary scene to the contemplative mind flow—as from a poisoned fountain—from the respect paid to *property*. For it is in the most polished society that stinking reptiles and venomous serpents lurk under the nasty foliage; and there is voluptuousness pampered by the still sultry air, slackening every good disposition before it has time to ripen into virtue.

One class presses on another; for they are all aiming to get respect on account of their property; and once they have *that* it will bring them the respect that is really due only to talents and virtue. Men neglect their human duties, yet are treated like demi-gods; religion is also separated from morality by a ceremonial veil; yet men are surprised that the world is, almost literally speaking, a den of cheats or oppressors.

There's a shrewd truth in the homely proverb that whoever the devil finds idle he will employ. And what can hereditary wealth and titles produce except habitual idleness? Man is so constituted that he can attain a proper use of his faculties only by using them, and he won't use them unless the wheels are first set in motion by some kind of necessity. Virtue also can be acquired only by the performance of one's duties to others; but the importance of these sacred duties will hardly be felt by someone who is cajoled out of his humanity by the flattery of sycophants. There must be more equality established in society, or morality will never gain ground; and this virtuous equality will not rest firmly even when founded on a rock, if one half of mankind are chained to its bottom by fate, for they will be continually undermining it through ignorance or pride. [That sentence is verbatim MW.]

You can't expect virtue from women until they are to some extent independent of men; indeed, you can't expect the strength of natural affection that would make them good wives and good mothers. While they absolutely depend on their husbands, they will be cunning, mean, and selfish, and the men who can be gratified by the fawning fondness of spaniel-like affection don't have much delicacy—because love is not to be bought. . . .; its silken wings are instantly shrivelled up when anything is sought other than a return in kind. But while wealth enervates men, and women live (so to speak) by their personal charms, how can we expect them to perform the ennobling duties that equally require exertion and self-denial? Hereditary property perverts the mind, and the unfortunate victims of hereditary property (if I may call them 'victims'), swathed from their birth, seldom get either body or mind moving; so they view everything through one medium, and that a false one; so they can't tell what true merit and happiness consist in. False, indeed, must be the light when the drapery of situation hides the man, and makes him stalk in masquerade, dragging from one scene of dissipation to another the nerveless limbs that hang with stupid listlessness, and rolling round the vacant eye that plainly tells us that there is no mind at home. [That splendid sentence is verbatim MW.]

My point is that a society isn't properly organized if it doesn't *compel* men and women to perform their respective duties, by making that their only route to being viewed by their fellow creatures in the way that every human being wants. So the respect that is paid to wealth and mere personal charms is a true north-easterly blast that blights the

tender blossoms of affection and virtue. Nature has wisely attached •affections to •duties, to make the work sweeter and to give to the exertions of reason the vigour that only the heart can give. But when someone who doesn't perform the duties that go with a certain affection nevertheless *puts on* the affection merely because it is the trade-mark of a certain •kind of •character, this is one of the empty compliments that vice and folly are obliged to pay to virtue and the real nature of things.

For example: when a woman is admired for her beauty, and allows herself to be so intoxicated by the admiration she receives that she neglects to discharge the indispensable duty of a mother, she sins against herself by neglecting to develop an affection that *equally* tend to make her useful and happy. True happiness—I mean all the contentment and virtuous satisfaction that can be snatched in this imperfect state—must arise from well regulated affections; and an affection includes a duty. Men aren't aware of the misery they cause, and the vicious weakness they encourage, by only inciting women to make themselves pleasing; they don't consider that they are making natural and artificial duties clash by sacrificing the comfort and respectability of a woman's life to voluptuous notions of beauty, when in nature they all harmonize.

It would be a cold-hearted husband, or one made unnatural by early debauchery, who didn't feel more delight at seeing his child breast-fed by its mother than the most artful wanton tricks could ever raise; yet wealth leads women to spurn this natural way of cementing the matrimonial tie and weaving esteem in with fonder recollections. . . . The maternal care of a reasonable affectionate woman puts us on her side; and the chastened dignity with which a mother returns the caresses that she and her child receive from a father who has been fulfilling the serious duties of his position is not

only worthy of respect but is a beautiful sight. . . . I have viewed with pleasure a woman nursing her children, and performing the duties of her position with, perhaps, merely a servant maid to take off her hands the servile part of the household business. I have seen her prepare herself and children, with only the luxury of cleanliness, to receive her husband who, returning home weary in the evening, found smiling babes and a clean hearth. . . .

While my benevolence has been gratified by contemplating this artless picture, I have thought that a couple of this description. . . possessed all that life could give. Raised above abject poverty enough not to be obliged to think about every farthing they spend, and having enough to save them from having to manage a frigid system of economy that narrows both heart and mind. In my plain thoughts I don't know what else is needed to make this the happiest as well as the most respect-worthy situation in the world—except for •a taste for literature, to throw a little variety and interest into conversation, and •some surplus money to give to the needy and to buy books. . . .

Riches and inherited honours are destructive to the human character, and are even worse for women than for men, because men can still to some extent unfold their faculties by becoming soldiers and statesmen.

[MW goes on to say that soldiering has lost its glory and been reduced to mere fine-tuning of the balances of power on the European continent. Statesmen can do a little better, moving from gambling to government, and using the same skills for each. Then:] The whole system of British politics—calling it a 'system' is mere politeness—consists in multiplying dependents and contriving taxes that grind the poor to pamper the rich; thus a war or any wild-goose-chase is a bit of good luck for the minister, whose chief merit is the art of keeping himself in place.

[Then a scornful paragraph about how a minister can ply his trade, pretending to care about the poor and unfortunate but doing nothing for them. MW continues:] Let me return to the more specious slavery that chains the very soul of woman, keeping her for ever under the bondage of ignorance.

The preposterous distinctions of rank that make civilization a curse by dividing the world between •voluptuous tyrants and •cunning envious dependents corrupt every class of people almost equally; because the respect a person gets depends only on his rank, and not to his performance of his duties to others; and when the duties are neglected the affections can't gain enough strength to fortify the virtue of which they are the natural reward. There are some loop-holes out of which a man may creep, and dare to think and act for himself; but for a woman it is a Herculean task because the female sex faces difficulties of its own that require almost superhuman powers to overcome.

A truly benevolent legislator always tries to make it in the interests of each individual to be virtuous; this makes private virtue become the cement of public happiness, so that an orderly whole is consolidated by the tendency of all the parts towards a common centre. But the private or public virtue of women is very problematic because many male writers, including Rousseau, insist that a woman should throughout her life be subjected to the severe restraint of *propriety*. Why subject her to propriety—blind propriety—if she is capable of acting from a nobler spring, i.e. if she has inherited immortality [see Glossary]? . . .

[MW returns to her old theme of women being given the wrong kind of attention by men etc. One item in this is new: 'The laws respecting woman, which I mean to discuss in a future part, make an absurd unit of a man and his wife; and then by the easy transition of considering only him as responsible she is reduced to a mere cipher, •a nothing•.

[Then a great deal more of the old theme. In the course of dealing with Rousseau's statement that women's lower status is shown by the fact that they can't fight in wars, MW remarks in passing that 'defensive war' is 'the only justifiable war'. And she works her way around to a brief consideration of the poor:] What can be a more melancholy sight to a thinking mind than to look into the numerous carriages that drive helter-skelter about London in a morning, full of pale-faced creatures who are flying from themselves. I have often wished, with Dr Johnson, to place some of them in a little shop with half a dozen children looking up to their languid countenances for support. If that happened, I think that some latent vigour would soon give health and spirit to their eyes; and some lines drawn by the use of reason on the blank cheeks. . . . might restore lost dignity to the character, or rather enable it to attain the true dignity of its nature. . . .

Besides, when poverty is more disgraceful even than vice, isn't morality cut to the quick? Still to avoid misconstruction, though I consider that women in the common walks of life are called by religion and reason to fulfil the duties of wives and mothers, I can't help lamenting that women higher up the social scale don't have a road along which they can pursue more extensive plans of usefulness and independence. . . . I really think (don't laugh!) that women ought to have •parliamentary• representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without being allowed any direct share in the deliberations of government. This is just a hint; I mean to pursue it at some future time.

But the whole system of 'representation' in this country is at present only a convenient label for despotism; so women needn't complain, because they are as well represented as a numerous class of hard-working mechanics who pay for the support of royalty when they can scarcely put bread in their children's mouths. Men whose very sweat •supports

the splendid horses of the heir apparent to the throne, or •varnishes the chariot of some female favourite •of the king's—who looks down on shame—how are they *represented*? Taxes on the very necessities of life enable an endless tribe of idle princes and princesses to pass with stupid pomp before a gaping crowd, who almost worship the very parade that costs them so dear. This is mere barbarous grandeur, something like the useless parade of sentinels on horseback at Whitehall, which I could never see without a mixture of contempt and indignation.

How strangely must the mind be sophisticated when this sort of state impresses it! But until these monuments of folly are levelled by virtue, similar follies will leaven the whole mass. For the same character, in some degree, will prevail in the aggregate of society: and the refinements of luxury, or the vicious repinings of envious poverty, will equally banish virtue from society, considered as the characteristic of that society, or only allow it to appear as one of the stripes of the harlequin coat worn by the 'civilized' man.

In the upper ranks of society every duty is performed by deputies (as though duties could be transferred!), and the pointless pleasures that the resulting idleness forces •the rich to pursue appear so enticing to the next rank that the numerous scramblers for wealth sacrifice everything to tread on •their heels. . . . Women, in particular, all want to be ladies. Which is simply to have nothing to do except listlessly to go they hardly care where, for they cannot tell what.

'But what have women to do in society' I may be asked 'but to loiter with easy grace? Surely you wouldn't condemn them all to breast-feed fools and keep household accounts!' No. Women might certainly study the art of healing, and be •well paid• physicians as well as •very poorly paid• nurses. And there is also midwifery.

They might also study politics, and settle their benevolence on the broadest basis; for the reading of history will hardly be more useful than the reading of romances if the history is read as mere biography and the character of the times, the political improvements, arts, etc. are not observed. The profitable approach to history regards it as the history of *man*, and not of *particular men* who filled a niche in the temple of fame and then dropped into the black rolling stream of time that silently sweeps all before it. . . .

Women might also pursue business of various kinds if they were educated in a more orderly manner, and that might save many from common or legal prostitution [i.e. from actual prostitution or marrying in order to have economic security]. . . .

[MW remarks that an unmarried woman may have had honourable reasons for choosing not to marry, and others may have been unable to marry. She continues:] So it's a very defective government—one that entirely neglects the happiness of one half of its public—that doesn't provide for honest, independent women by encouraging them to occupy respectable positions in society. But to make their private virtue a public benefit, they must—whether married or single—have a civil existence in the state. . . .

The most respect-worthy women are the most oppressed; this is a melancholy truth about the blessed effects of civilization! Treating them like contemptible beings will make them become contemptible, unless they have understandings much above the average for humanity (both sexes). Many women waste life away, the prey of discontent, when they might have practised as physicians, run a farm, or managed a shop, and stood upright supported by their own industry, instead of hanging their heads. . . .

The woman who earns her own bread by fulfilling some duty deserves much more respect than the most accomplished beauty!. . . . I sigh to think how few women try to

attain this respect-worthiness by withdrawing from the giddy whirl of pleasure, or the lazy calm that stupefies the good sort of women it sucks in.

Proud of their weakness, however, they must always be protected (·they think·), guarded from care and all the rough toils that dignify the mind. If this is what fate ordains—if they choose to make themselves insignificant and contemptible, sweetly wasting life away, let them not expect to be valued when their beauty fades, for the fairest flowers are pulled to pieces by the careless hand that plucked them. . . .

The most useful writers, in my opinion, are the ones who make man feel for man, independent of his social position and of the drapery of false sentiments. So I would like to convince reasonable men of the importance of some of my remarks, and prevail on them to weigh dispassionately the

over-all position that I have been defending. I appeal to their understandings; and as a fellow-creature I claim, in the name of my sex, some interest in their hearts. I entreat them to assist to emancipate their companion to make her a *helpmate* for them!

If only men would generously break our chains and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers—in a word, better citizens. We would then love them with true affection, because we would learn to respect ourselves; and a worthy man's peace of mind wouldn't be interrupted by the idle vanity of his wife, and his babes wouldn't be sent to nestle in a strange bosom because they never found a home in their mother's.

Chapter 10: Parental Affection

Parental affection is perhaps, the blindest kind of perverse self-love. Parents often love their children in the most brutal [see Glossary] manner, and sacrifice every duty to anyone else in order to promote their children's advancement in the world. The aim to promote the future welfare of the very beings whose present existence they embitter by the most despotic stretch of power—that's a sign of how perverse an unprincipled prejudice can be.

In fact, every kind of power. . . .wants to reign without control or inquiry. Its throne is built across a dark abyss that

no eye must dare to explore, for fear that the baseless fabric might totter under investigation. Obedience, unconditional obedience, is the catch-word of tyrants of every description, and to make 'assurance doubly sure,' one kind of despotism supports another. Tyrants would have cause to tremble if reason were to become the rule of duty in any of the relations of life, for the light might spread until perfect day appeared. And when it did appear, men would smile at the sight of the bugbears that had made them jump during the night of ignorance or the twilight of timid inquiry. . . .

If man's great privilege is

- the power of reflecting on the past, and
- peering speculatively into the future,

it must be granted that some people enjoy this privilege in a very limited degree. Everything now appears to them wrong; and not able to distinguish what could happen from what couldn't, they fear where there should be no place for fear, running from the light of reason as if it were a firebrand. . . .

Woman, however, being in every situation a slave to prejudice, seldom exerts enlightened maternal affection; for she either •neglects her children or •spoils them by undue permissiveness. Also, the affection of many women for their children is (I repeat) very brutish, because it eradicates every spark of humanity. Justice, truth, *everything* is sacrificed by these Rebekahs, and for the sake of their own children they violate the most sacred duties, forgetting the common relationship that binds the whole family on earth together. [MW is echoing the story in *Genesis 27*, where Rebekah schemes with her favourite son Jacob to cheat his brother Esau.] Yet reason seems to say that someone who allows •one duty or affection to swallow up the rest doesn't have enough heart or mind to fulfil •that one conscientiously. . . .

As the care of children in their infancy is one of the grand duties that naturally fall to the female character, this duty—if it were properly considered—would provide many forcible arguments for strengthening the female understanding.

The formation of the mind must be begun very early, and the temperament (in particular) requires the most judicious attention; and that attention *can't* be paid by women who love their children only because they are their children, and don't try to base their duty on anything deeper than the feelings of the moment. It is this lack of reason in their affections that makes so many women be the most foolishly attentive mothers or—at the other extreme—the most careless and unnatural ones.

To be a good mother a woman must have •sense and also •the independence of mind that is possessed by few women who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands. Meek wives are usually foolish mothers, wanting their children to love them best, and to side with them in a secret conspiracy against the father, who is held up as a scarecrow—the one who must punish them if they have offended the mother, the one who must be the judge in all disputes: but I'll discuss this subject more fully when I deal with private education. At present I want only to insist that unless woman's understanding is enlarged and her character made more firm through her being allowed to govern her own conduct, she will never have enough sense or command of temperament to manage her children properly. A woman who doesn't breast-feed her children hardly counts as *having* parental affection, because the performance of this duty contributes equally to maternal and filial affection; and it is the indispensable duty of men and women to fulfil the duties that give rise to affections that are the surest preservatives against vice. So-called *natural affection* is a very weak tie, I think; affections •that strongly bond people together• must grow out of the habitual exercise of a mutual sympathy; and a mother who sends her babe to a nurse, and only takes it from a nurse to send it to a school—what sympathy does *she* exercise?

In the exercise of their natural feelings, God has provided women with a natural substitute for love: when the lover becomes only a friend, and mutual confidence replaces overstrained admiration, a child then gently twists the relaxing cord •thereby tightening it up again•, and a shared care produces a new mutual sympathy. But a child. . . won't enliven the parents' affections if they are content to transfer the charge to hirelings; those who 'do their duty' by having someone do it for them shouldn't complain if they miss the reward of duty, namely the child's dutifulness towards them.

Chapter 11: Duty to Parents

Man seems to have a lazy tendency to make prescription [see Glossary] always take the place of reason. . . . The rights of kings are deduced in a direct line from the King of kings; and that of parents from our first parent.

Why do we thus go back for principles that should always rest on the same base and have the same weight to-day that they had a thousand years ago—and not a jot more? If parents do their duty, they have a strong hold and sacred claim on the gratitude of their children; but few parents are willing to receive the respectful affection of their offspring on those terms. They demand *blind* obedience, because they don't deserve a reasonable service that their children might willingly provide with their eyes open; and to make these demands of weakness and ignorance more binding, a mysterious *sanctity* is spread around the most arbitrary principle. 'Arbitrary'? Well, what other name can be given to the blind duty of obeying vicious or weak beings merely because they obeyed a powerful instinct? [MW is referring to the parents' sexual 'instinct': their 'obedience' to that led to the coupling that caused the children to come into existence.] The simple definition of the two-way duty that naturally holds between parent and child can be stated in a few words:

The parent who pays proper attention to helpless infancy has a right to require the same attention when the feebleness of age comes upon him.

But to subjugate a rational being to the mere will of another when he is old enough to answer to society for his own conduct is cruel and improper; and it may be as harmful to morality as are the religious systems that make God's will the sole source of the line between right and wrong.

I never knew a parent who had paid more than common attention to his children who was then disregarded by the children; on the contrary, the early habit of relying almost unquestioningly on the opinion of a respected parent is not easy to shake off, even when mature reason convinces the child that his father is not the wisest man in the world. This is an attractive weakness, but it *is* a weakness, and a reasonable man should steel himself against it, because the all-too-common belief that one is obliged to obey a parent just because he is one's parent shackles the mind and prepares it for a slavish submission to any power but reason.

I distinguish the natural duty to parents from the accidental duty to parents.

The parent who carefully tries to form the heart and enlarge the understanding of his child has given to the performance of a duty that is common to the whole animal world a dignity that only reason can give. This is the parental affection of humanity, and leaves instinctive natural affection far behind. Such a parent acquires all the rights of the most sacred friendship, and his advice—even when his child is fully adult—demands serious consideration.

With respect to marriage: after 21 years a parent seems to have no right to withhold his consent for any reason, but twenty years of parental care deserve something in return, and the son ought at least to promise not to marry for two or three years if the woman of his choice doesn't entirely meet with the approval of his first friend.

But respect for parents is generally speaking a much lower cause of action, namely a selfish respect for property. The father who is blindly obeyed is obeyed from sheer weak-

ness or from motives that degrade the human character.

Much of the misery that wanders in hideous forms around the world is allowed to rise from the negligence of parents; and yet these are the people who cling most tightly to what they call a 'natural right', though it undermines man's birthright, the right to act as his own reason directs.

I have already often pointed out that vicious or idle people are always eager to profit from the enforcement of arbitrary privileges, usually in proportion to their neglect of the duties that might make the privileges reasonable. This is basically a dictate of common sense—i.e. the instinct of self-defence—that is typical of ignorant weakness, resembling the instinct that makes a fish muddy the water it swims in to escape its enemy, instead of boldly facing it in the clear stream.

The supporters of any kind of prescription do indeed fly from the clear stream of argument. Taking refuge in the darkness that . . . has been supposed to surround God's throne, they dare to demand the immediate and total respect that is due only to his unsearchable ways. (Don't misunderstand me: the darkness that hides our God from us only concerns speculative truths—it never obscures moral ones, which shine clearly. . . .)

Females in all countries are too much under the dominion of their parents; and few parents think of addressing their children like this:

It is your interest to obey me until you can judge for yourself; and ·God·, the Almighty Father of all, has implanted in me an affection to serve as your guardian while your reason is unfolding; but when your mind arrives at maturity, you must obey me—rather respect my opinions—only to the extent that they coincide with the light that is breaking in on your own mind.

A slavish bondage to parents cramps every faculty of the

mind. Locke was right when he said that 'if the mind is curbed and humbled too much in children—if their spirits are abased and broken by too strict a hand over them—they lose all their vigour and industry'. This strict hand may to some extent explain the weakness of women; because girls are for various reasons more kept *down* by their parents, in every sense of the word 'down', than boys are. The duty expected from them is, like all the duties arbitrarily imposed on women, based less on reason than on a sense of propriety, on respect for decorum; and by being taught slavishly to submit to their parents girls are prepared for the slavery of marriage. [MW concedes that some married women are not slaves, but they, she says, become tyrants. She also says that not all boys and girls are slaves to their parents, but continues her campaign on behalf of those who are. She emphatically contrasts parents who 'have allowed a natural parental affection to take root in their hearts' with those who are motivated by selfish pride'. The former, she says, will be rewarded by 'filial reverence'.]

Why should the minds of children be warped when they are just beginning to expand, only to favour the laziness of parents who insist on a privilege without being willing to pay the price for it fixed by nature? . . . A right always includes a duty; and I think we can fairly infer from this that those who don't perform the duty don't retain the right.

. . . I believe that in general the affection we inspire ·in others· always resembles the affection that we cultivate ·in ourselves·; so that natural affections—which have been supposed to be almost distinct from reason—are more nearly connected with judgment than is commonly allowed. Indeed, the affections that merely reside in the heart ·with no input from the head· seem to have a kind of animal capriciousness; I offer that as another proof of the necessity of cultivating the female understanding.

It is the irregular exercise of parental authority that first injures the mind, and girls are more subject to these irregularities than boys are. The will of those who never allow their will to be disputed except when they happen to be in a good mood is almost always unreasonable. [MW describes and deplors the tricks that little girls practice in order to cope with this kind of parental authority. Then:] I have been led into a melancholy train of reflection about females, concluding that when their first affection must •lead them astray or •make their duties clash until they rest on mere whims and customs, little can be expected from them as they grow older. How indeed can an instructor remedy this evil? for to teach children virtue on any solid principle is to teach them to despise their parents. Children ought not to be taught to make allowance for their parents' faults, because every such allowance weakens the force of reason in their minds, and makes them still more indulgent to their

own faults. It is a sublime virtue of maturity that leads us to be hard on ourselves and forbearing towards others; but children should be taught only the simple virtues, for if they begin too early to make allowance for human passions and manners, they'll wear off the fine edge of the criterion by which they should regulate their own. . . . [A few years before this was written, Mary Wollstonecraft had been governess to the children of Lord and Lady Kingsborough. Many facts could help to explain why her relationship with Lady Kingsborough went sour, so that eventually she was dismissed; the content of this paragraph may be part of the story! There is another side-light on it on page 98.]

The affections of children and weak people are always selfish: they love their relatives because they are loved by them, not because of their virtues. But until esteem and love are blended together in the •first affection, and reason is made the basis for the •first duty, morality will stumble at the threshold. . . .

Chapter 12: National education

The good effects of private education will always be very limited; the parent who really puts his own hand to the plough will always be somewhat disappointed until education becomes a grand national concern. A man can't retire into a desert with his child; and if he did, he couldn't bring himself back to childhood and become the proper friend and playmate of an infant or youth. When children are confined to the society of men and women, they soon acquire a kind of

premature manhood that stops the growth of every vigorous power of mind or body. In order to develop their faculties they should be stimulated to think for themselves; and this can be done only by mixing a number of children together and making them jointly pursue the same objects.

[MW continues with this theme. •If children are to be openly inquiring they need time with their peers rather than with parents who stand—however wisely—in authority over

them. •There are affections amongst children that are unlike the affection a child may have for his parents, and a child needs practice in the former, because ‘in youth the seeds of every affection should be sown’. •A frank openness of speech and feeling is possible between child and child but not between child and parent; and this matters because it ‘first opens the heart to friendship and confidence’ and leads on to ‘more expansive benevolence’. •A little further down she levels a further charge against home-schooling: it leads to the children’s acquiring ‘too high an opinion of their own importance’, to their ‘being allowed to tyrannize over servants’, and to their becoming ‘vain and effeminate’ because they are treated like men when they are still boys’.

[Considerations like these, MW says, have affected her former preference for private education; and yet she still has that preference, because:] I still think that schools as they are now regulated are hot-beds of vice and folly, and that the only knowledge of human nature that could be learned from them is merely cunning selfishness.

[She now holds forth strenuously against the schools: at them ‘boys become gluttons and slovens’, and rush into the libertinism that ‘hardens the heart as it weakens the understanding’. Children at boarding-schools spend at least ‘half of the time’ longing for vacations, and when these come ‘they are spent in total dissipation and beastly indulgence’. A little further on she refers to ‘the system of tyranny and abject slavery that is established among the boys’.]

The only way to avoid two extremes that are equally harmful to morality would be to contrive some way of combining a public and private education. Thus to make men citizens, two natural steps might be taken that seem to lead directly to the desired point: cultivating the domestic affections that first open the heart to the various modifications of humanity, while also allowing the children to spend great part of their

time on terms of equality with other children. [MW follows this up with a lyrical reminiscence of ‘a country day school’, whose pupils had the desirable daily mixture of childhood friends and family influence. She contrasts this fiercely with the evils of ‘close confinement in an academy near London’, ending with ‘. . . to say nothing of the slavery to forms that makes religion worse than a farce’. This launches her on an attack first on religious services in schools and then cutting with a wider swathe through religious practices more generally.]

•A DIATRIBE AGAINST RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN ENGLAND•

What good can be expected from the youth who receives the sacrament of the Lord’s supper so as to avoid paying a fine? Half the employment of the youths is to elude the necessity of attending public worship; and well they may, for such a constant repetition of the same thing must be a very irksome restraint on their natural vivacity. These ceremonies

- have the most fatal effect on their morals,
- are a ritual performed by the lips when the heart and mind are far away, and
- are no longer stored up by our •Protestant• church as a bank to draw on for the fees of the poor souls in purgatory;

so why shouldn’t they be abolished?

[This next paragraph is addressed to the situation of any school or college which was founded by someone who provided a financial endowment and laid down rules for how the institution was to be run. There were and still are many of these.]

But in this country there is a fear of *any* innovation. This hidden fear is really the apprehensive timidity of idle slugs who guard the snug place that they view as an hereditary estate—eating, drinking and enjoying themselves instead of fulfilling the duties (except a few empty forms) for which the ‘estate’ was endowed. How do they guard it? By sliming

it over! These are the people who most strenuously insist on conforming to the will of the founder, crying out against every reform as if it were a violation of justice. [MW is especially indignant, she explains, about institutions that are now Protestant but were founded by Roman Catholics and still hold onto ‘the relics of popery’ that remain from their foundation. She continues:] These Romish customs have the most baneful effect on the morals of our clergy; for the idle vermin who two or three times a day sloppily perform a service that they think is useless, but call their ‘duty’, soon lose their sense of duty. Having been forced at college to attend or evade public worship, they acquire an habitual contempt for the very service the performance of which will enable them to live in idleness. . . .

Nothing can be more irreverent than the cathedral service as it is now performed in this country, and England doesn’t contain a set of weaker men than those who are the slaves of this childish routine. A disgusting skeleton of the former state is still exhibited; but all the solemnity—which engaged the imagination even if it didn’t purify the heart—is stripped off. The performance of ‘Roman Catholic’ high mass on the ‘European’ continent must impress anyone who has a spark of imagination with that solemn melancholy, that sublime tenderness, which is so near a kin to devotion. I don’t say that these devotional feelings do more moral good than any other emotion of taste; but I do say that the ‘French Roman Catholic’ theatrical pomp that gratifies our senses is preferable to the ‘English Protestant’ cold parade that insults the understanding without reaching the heart.

These remarks can’t be misplaced in a discussion of national education, especially given that the supporters of these puerile establishments pretend to be the champions of religion. Religion, pure source of comfort in this vale of tears! how has your clear stream been muddied by the dabblers

who have presumptuously tried to confine in one narrow channel the living waters that always flow toward God—the sublime ocean of existence! What would life be without the peace that can’t be had except through the love of God, built on humanity?. . . .

·END OF THE DIATRIBE·

[There are several more paragraphs expressing scorn and disgust for boarding schools and what they do to the morals of their pupils. Then:]

I have heard several masters of schools maintain that their role was connected not with boys’ morals but only with their learning Latin and Greek; and that they had done their duty by sending some good scholars to college.

A few good scholars, I grant, may have been formed in this way; but to bring forward these clever boys, the health and morals of a number of others have been sacrificed. . . . It is not for the benefit of society that a few brilliant men should be brought forward at the expense of the multitude. It is true that great men seem to start up. . . .at proper intervals, to restore order and blow away the clouds that thicken over the face of truth; but if more reason and virtue prevailed in society, these strong winds wouldn’t be necessary. [MW now returns to the main theme of this chapter, taking it to the declaration that ‘children ought to be educated at home’. She adds some warnings about the danger of this, and then:]

This train of reasoning brings me back to a subject that I want to discuss at length, the need for proper day-schools.

But these should be *national* establishments; schoolmasters in private schools depend on the whims of parents, and as long as that is so they can’t be expected to exert themselves any more than is necessary to please ignorant people. A schoolmaster has to give the parents some sample of the boy’s abilities, which during the vacation is shown to every visitor to his home; and this does more harm than

would at first be supposed. For these purposes the master winds the poor machine up to some extraordinary exertion that injures the wheels and stops the progress of gradual improvement, or alternatively the master does much of the work himself, thus going along with falsehoods. . . .

[MW goes on with her indictment of most private schools; e.g. they have too many children in each class, because that is the only way the school can stay solvent. This eventually brings her to the first mention of girls in this chapter:]

With what disgust have I heard sensible women. . . .speak of the wearisome confinement they endured at school. . . . Obligated to walk with steady deportment stupidly backwards and forwards, holding up their heads, turning out their toes, with shoulders braced back, instead of moving vigorously and naturally in the ways that are so conducive to health. . . .

[She adds a little about the harm that separate schooling does to the characters of girls and (a different harm) the characters of boys, and draws from these facts a conclusion] that I have had in view throughout—namely that **to improve both sexes they ought to be educated together**, not only in private families but also in public schools. . . . If boys and girls were permitted to pursue the same studies together, they might early learn the graceful decencies that produce modesty. . . . Lessons of politeness and decorum (that rule-book that treads on the heels of falsehood!) would be made useless by habitual propriety of behaviour. . . .

[In case you are wondering about the frequency of ellipses in this chapter, it should be explained that they replace material that •essentially repeats things already said earlier in the work, or •provides details that we can supply for ourselves, given our knowledge of MW, or •is like this: ‘Until more understanding preponderate in society, there will always be a want of heart and taste, and the harlot’s rouge will supply the place of that

celestial suffusion that only virtuous affections can give to the face.’ Enough already!]

[Much more about the harm done to girls by their upbringing—notably harm to their grasp of what real virtue is and their ability to respond appropriately to the fine arts; MW thinks that these two are connected. As an example of the latter, she reports being made almost breathless by the beauty of music she was listening to, and ‘a lady asked me where I bought my gown’. She then moves back into her theme of women being deprived of power and therefore developing cunning; plus remarks about the harms that have been done by women partly manipulating the men who had power.]

When I call women ‘slaves’, I mean this in a political and civil sense; for *indirectly* they obtain *too much* power, and their efforts to get this illicit power debase them.

So let an enlightened nation run an experiment to discover how far *reason* would bring women back to nature and their duty; let them share the advantages of education and government with man, and see whether they become •better as they grow •wiser and become •free. They can’t be injured by the experiment, because it’s not in the power of man to make them more insignificant than they are at present.

To make this practicable, day schools for particular ages should be established by government, in which boys and girls might be educated together. The school for the younger children, from five to nine years of age, ought to be absolutely free and open to all classes.¹³ A sufficient number of masters should be chosen by a select committee in each parish, to whom complaints of negligence etc. could be made if signed by six of the children’s parents. . . .

¹³ Treating this part of the subject, I have borrowed some hints from a very sensible pamphlet on Public Education, written by M. Talleyrand. [see page 1]

I am advocating the creation of elementary day-schools where boys and girls, rich and poor, would meet together. To prevent any of the distinctions of vanity, they should be dressed alike, and all obliged to submit to the same discipline. The school-room ought to be surrounded by a large piece of ground in which the children could have exercise, because at this age they shouldn't be confined to any sedentary task for more than an hour at a time. But these relaxations could all be made a part of elementary education, for many things improve and occupy the senses when introduced as a kind of show—things that children would turn a deaf ear to if their principles were dryly laid down. For instance, botany, mechanics, and astronomy could all be taught in practical ways, out-of-doors. Reading, writing, arithmetic, natural history, and some simple experiments in natural philosophy could fill up the rest of the day; but these pursuits should never encroach on gymnastic play in the open air. The elements of religion, history, the history of man, and politics could be taught by conversations in the Socratic form.

After the age of nine, girls and boys who are intended for domestic employment or mechanical trades should be transferred to other schools and be given instruction that is to some degree adapted to the destination of each individual pupil; the two sexes should still be together in the morning, but in the afternoon the girls should attend a school where simple sewing, dressmaking, millinery, etc. would be their employment.

Young people of superior abilities, or fortune, might now be taught—in another school—the dead and living languages, the elements of science, and more on history and politics, on a more extensive scale that wouldn't exclude literature. 'Girls and boys still together?' I hear some readers ask. Yes! And I wouldn't fear any consequence except that there might be some early girl-boy attachment that didn't perfectly agree

with the views of the parents though it had an excellent effect on the moral character of the young people. I'm afraid that we are a long way from having a world that is so enlightened that parents, anxious only to make their children virtuous, will let them choose companions for life themselves.

Besides, this would be a sure way to promote early marriages, and from early marriages the most salutary physical and moral effects naturally flow. [Then a long page of praise for the advantages, very much in the spirit of things said in earlier chapters. A notable episode in this is MW's treatment of the 'coming out' of debutantes in the fashionable world. [That was where and when girls of 17+ from wealthy families were for the first time taken to adult balls and parties and so on.] MW writes: 'What can be more indelicate than a girl's coming out in the fashionable world? That is the process of bringing to market a marriageable miss whose person [see Glossary] is taken from one public place to another.' [She comes close to describing a debutante ball as a slave auction where the merchandise is ogled by potential buyers. 'Indelicate' indeed!]]

What I am offering here is only an outline of the plan I have in mind, not the fully detailed plan. But I must include one detail that I highly approve of in the regulations presented in M. Talleyrand's pamphlet, mentioned earlier. It is the proposal to make the children and youths independent of the masters respecting punishments. They should be tried by their peers, which would be an admirable method of fixing sound principles of justice in the mind, and might have an excellent effect on a child's temperament, which is very early soured or irritated by tyranny until it becomes peevishly cunning or ferociously overbearing. . . .

I know it will be said that woman would be 'unsexed' by acquiring strength of body and mind, and that beauty—soft bewitching beauty!—would no longer adorn the daughters of men. I think, on the contrary, that we would then see

•dignified beauty and •true grace, arising from many powerful physical and moral causes. It wouldn't be •relaxed beauty or •the graces of helplessness; but rather the beauty and grace that appears to make us respect the human body as a majestic structure that is fit to receive a noble inhabitant, in the relics of antiquity.

[MW moves now into a discussion of ancient Greek sculpture, why and how we admire it and why and how it was made. She takes this opportunity to re-work her themes of virtue, intelligence, and so on. The last sentence of this passage is a pivot note on which she modulates into a new topic:] Judgment can be acquired only by reflection, affection only by the discharge of duties, and humanity only by the exercise of compassion to every living creature.

Humanity to animals should be particularly taught as a part of national education, for it is not at present one of our national virtues. Gentleness towards their domestic animals, among the lower class, is more often found in savage states than in civilized ones. For civilization •prevents the dealings with animals that create affection in the crude hut or mud cabin, and •leads uncultivated minds—who are only depraved by the refinements of a society where they are trodden down by the rich—to domineer over their animals to revenge the insults they have to bear from their •social-superiors.

This habitual cruelty is first caught—like catching a

disease—•at school, where the boys have great sport tormenting the miserable animals that they come across. As they grow up they easily shift from barbarity towards animals to domestic tyranny over wives, children, and servants. Justice won't be a powerful spring of action unless it extends to the whole creation, nor will benevolence. Indeed, I believe it can be accepted as an axiom that *those who can •see pain without being moved will soon learn to •inflict it.*

[MW attacks not only people who treat animals cruelly but also ones who let sentimental affection for domestic pets supplant the feelings they should have for human beings, e.g. their children. She includes in this a portrait of her former employer, Lady Kingsborough [see note on page 93], lispng coy nothings to her lap-dogs and neglecting her children. She adds:]

I don't like to make a distinction without a difference, and I have to say that I have been as much disgusted by •the fine lady who took her lap-dog to her bosom instead of her child as by •the ferocity of a man who beat his horse and declared that the horse knew when he did wrong just as a Christian would.

[Then more about the troubles that would not occur if boys and girls were educated, in the right way, together. Followed by a three-page sweep through the theme of the moral harm done to women by the way they are treated by men.]

Chapter 13: Examples of the harm done by women's ignorance

There are many follies that are to some extent *women's* follies—sins against reason, of commission as well as of omission—but all flowing from ignorance or prejudice. I shall point out only five of them that appear to be harmful to the woman's moral character. In criticizing them I want especially to show that the weakness of mind and body that men have tried to perpetuate in •women prevents •them from discharging the special duty of their sex; for when weakness of body won't let them breast-feed their children, and weakness of mind makes them spoil their tempers—is woman in a natural state?

1: Charlatans

One glaring instance of the weakness that comes from ignorance calls for severe reproof.

1. In this city a number of lurking leeches wickedly make their living by exploiting women's credulity, claiming to 'cast nativities', to use the technical phrase [= 'to draw up horoscopes, making predictions on the basis of astrology']; and many females who are proud of their rank and fortune, and look down on the vulgar [see Glossary] with sovereign contempt, show by their credulity that the distinction between themselves and the vulgar is arbitrary, and that they have not sufficiently cultivated their minds to rise above vulgar prejudices. Because women haven't been led •to regard the knowledge of their duty as the one thing necessary to know, or •to live in the present moment by doing their duty, they are anxious to peep into the future, to learn what they have to expect to make life interesting, and to break the vacuum of ignorance.

If any of these ladies who are not ashamed to drive in their own carriages to the door of the cunning man should read this work, I beg them to answer the following questions, remembering that they are in the presence of God.

- Do you believe that there is only one God, and that he is powerful, wise, and good?
- Do you believe that all things were created by him, and that all beings depend on him?
- Do you rely on his wisdom (which is so conspicuous in his works, including your own body)? and are you convinced, that he has ordered all the things that don't come within the range of your senses in the same perfect harmony to fulfil his designs?
- Do you acknowledge that the power of looking into the future, and seeing things that are *not* as if they *were*, is an attribute of the Creator? And if he *does* ever want to impart to his creatures a knowledge of some event that hasn't yet happened, to whom would he reveal the secret by immediate inspiration?

The opinion of the ages will answer that last question: he will reveal it to reverend old men, to people distinguished for eminent piety.

[MW says that the priests of the ancient Greek and Roman religions were 'impostors' who were used by politicians to keep the populace quiet and malleable, and in that context there was some excuse for people who tried to learn about the future from oracles.] But can a Christian suppose that God's favourites—the ones he chose to reveal some of his future plans—would lurk in disguise, and practise the most

dishonest tricks to cheat silly women out of the money that the poor cry for in vain?

[She rails against the 'foolish women' who resort to astrologers, saying that this conduct is inconsistent with 'your religion, such as it is', adding that these women are so foolish that they probably wouldn't understand her if she tried to show that astrology is 'absolutely inconsistent with the grand purpose of life'. She then tries a different tack, from which she moves on to a different kind of charlatan:]

Perhaps, however, you devoutly believe in the devil, and imagine that he may assist those who are devoted to him? But if you really respect the power of such a being, who is an enemy to goodness and to God, can you go to church after having been under such an obligation to him?

2. There is a natural transition from these delusions to the still more fashionable deceptions practised by the whole tribe of magnetisers. [These people used so-called 'animal magnetism'—i.e. hypnotism—as a supposed means to curing various ills. The process was also called 'mesmerism', after the Austrian Dr Mesmer, who popularised it.] With respect to them, also, it is proper to ask women a few questions.

Do you know anything about the construction of the human body? If not, you should be told something that every child ought to know, namely that when the body's admirable system has been disturbed by intemperance or inactivity—I'm talking not about violent disorders, but about chronic diseases—it must be returned to a healthy state by slow degrees. If the functions of life haven't been materially injured—so that recovery is impossible—, the only ways that have yet been discovered for recovering that inestimable blessing, health—or anyway the only ones that will bear investigation—are through a *regimen* of temperance, air, exercise, and a few medicines prescribed by persons who have studied the human body.

Do you believe that these magnetisers, who by hocus-pocus tricks pretend to work a miracle, are •delegated by God, or •assisted by the solver of all these kinds of difficulties—the devil?

When the magnetisers put to flight (so they claim) disorders that have baffled the powers of medicine, are they working in conformity to the light of reason? Or do they bring about these wonderful cures by supernatural aid?

A magnetiser may answer 'We do it by communicating with the world of spirits'. A noble privilege, we must admit! . . . These men are very fortunate in becoming acquainted with such obliging spirits; but we can't give the spirits much credit for wisdom or goodness in choosing these ignoble instruments as means to show themselves the benevolent friends of man.

It is, however, little short of blasphemy to claim to have such power.

From the over-all way that God runs the world, it seems evident to sober reason that certain vices produce certain effects. Can anyone so grossly insult God's wisdom as to suppose that a 'magnetising' miracle will be allowed to disturb his general laws, restoring intemperate and vicious people to health merely to enable them to go back to their old ways with impunity? 'Be whole, and sin no more', said Jesus [John 5:14]. Are greater miracles to be performed by those who do not follow in the footsteps of him who healed the body in order to reach the mind?

The mention of the name of Christ after such vile impostors may displease you—I respect your warmth, but don't forget that the followers of these 'magnetising' delusions bear his name, and profess to be the disciples of him who said 'By their fruits ye shall know them' [Matthew 7:16], i.e. know who are the children of God and who are the servants of sin. It's certainly easier to •touch the body of a saint or

to •be magnetised than it is to •to restrain our appetites or govern our passions; but health of body or mind can only be recovered by those restraints. If there is another way—through ‘magnetising’—then the Supreme Judge is partial and revengeful. [‘partial’ in the sense of showing favoritism; ‘revengeful’—MW’s premature choice of that word is explained in the next two paragraphs.]

Is God a *man*, that he should change, or punish out of resentment? Reason tells us that God—our common father—wounds only in order to heal; our irregularities produce certain consequences, and that forcibly shows us the nature of vice. In that way we learn from experience to know good from evil, so that we will love one and hate the other in proportion to our degree of wisdom. The poison contains the antidote; and we either •reform our evil habits and stop sinning against our own bodies, to use the forcible language of scripture [1 *Corinthians* 6:18], or a premature death—the punishment of sin—snaps the thread of life.

This raises a question that is frightening to discuss, but why should I conceal my views? Considering God’s attributes, I believe that whatever punishment may follow will tend, like the anguish of disease, to show the malignity of vice, the purpose of all this being *reformation*. Positive punishment—i.e. punishment whose rationale lies wholly within itself rather than in its relation to its consequences—appears to be contrary to the nature of God that we can discover from his works and in our own reason; so contrary that I would find it easier to believe that •the Deity paid no attention to men’s conduct than that •he punished without the benevolent design of reforming. . . .

I know that many devout people boast of submitting blindly to God’s will, as to an arbitrary sceptre or rod. . . . In other words, like people in the common concerns of life they do homage to power, and cringe under the foot that

can crush them. Rational religion, on the other hand, is a submission to the will of a being who is so perfectly wise that all he wills must be directed by the proper motive—must be reasonable.

And if we respect God in this way, can we believe the mysterious insinuations that insult his laws? Can we believe—even if it stares us in the face—that God would work a miracle to authorise confusion by sanctioning an error? Yet we must either allow these impious conclusions, or treat with contempt every promise to **(2)** restore health to a diseased body by supernatural means, or to **(1)** foretell the incidents that can only God can foresee.

2: Novel-reading

Another instance of feminine weakness of character that is often produced by a confined education is a romantic twist of the mind that has been very properly called ‘sentimental’.

Women, subjected by ignorance to their sensations, and taught to look for happiness only in love, refine on sensual feelings and adopt metaphysical notions about love that lead them to neglect shamefully the duties of life, and frequently in the midst of these lofty refinements they plunge into actual vice.

These are the women who pass their time with the day-dreams of the stupid novelists who, knowing little of human nature, work up stale tales and describe tarted-up scenes, all retailed in a sentimental jargon that corrupts the reader’s •taste and draws the •heart away from its daily duties. I don’t mention the •understanding, because it has never been exercised, so that its slumbering energies rest inactive. . . .

Because females are denied all political privileges, and as married women. . . .are denied even a civil existence, their attention is naturally drawn from the interests of the whole

community to the interests of the tiny parts. . . . The mighty business of female life is *to please*, and for them—blocked by political and civil oppression from entering into more important concerns—*sentiments* become important events. When they reflect on these feelings they intensify them; whereas reflection ought to erase them, and would do so if the understanding were allowed to take a wider range.

Confined to trivial activities, women naturally imbibe the opinions expressed in the only kind of reading that can interest an innocent frivolous mind. Unable to grasp anything great, they naturally find the reading of history a very dry task, and find anything that is addressed to the understanding to be intolerably tedious and almost unintelligible. So they have to depend on the novelist for amusement [see Glossary]. When I criticize novels, I'm attacking them as contrasted with works that exercise the understanding and regulate the imagination; I'm not saying that the reading of novels is absolutely bad. I regard *any* kind of reading as better than leaving a blank still a blank, because the mind must be a little enlarged and a little strengthened by the slight exertion of its thinking powers that novel-reading may bring. And even novels that are addressed only to the imagination and provide nothing to think about raise the reader a little above the gross gratification of appetites that haven't been even slightly refined by the mind.

. . . I knew a woman—as good a woman as her narrow mind would allow her to be—who took care that her three daughters should never see a novel. She was a woman of fortune and fashion, so they had various masters to attend them, and a sort of menial governess to watch their footsteps. From their masters they learned how tables, chairs, etc. are called in French and Italian; but they acquired neither ideas nor sentiments, because the few books thrown in their way were either far above their capacities or devotional. When

they weren't being compelled to repeat *words* they spent their time in dressing, quarrelling with each other, or secretly conversing with their maids—until at last they were brought into company as marriageable.

Their mother, a widow, was busy in the meantime keeping up her 'connections', as she called her acquaintances, so as to ensure her girls a proper introduction into the great world. And these young ladies, with spoiled temperaments and minds that were *vulgar* in every sense of the word, entered life with puffed-up notions of their own importance and contempt for anyone who couldn't compete with them in dress and parade.

As for *love*: nature or their nurses had taken care to teach them the physical meaning of the word; and as they had few topics of conversation and even fewer refinements of sentiment, they expressed their gross wishes in not very delicate phrases when they had free conversations about marriage. . . .

This is only one instance; but I recollect many other women who, not having been led gradually to proper studies or permitted to choose for themselves, have indeed been overgrown children. They may have obtained, by mixing in the world, a little of what is called 'common sense', which is a distinct manner of seeing common events as they stand detached—i.e. seeing each event in isolation. What they didn't have was anything deserving the name 'intellect', the power of gaining general or abstract ideas. . . . Their minds were quiescent, and when they were not roused by sensible objects and employments of that kind they were low-spirited, tearful, or sleepy.

So when I advise my sex not to read such flimsy works as novels, it is to induce them to read something better. . . .

3: Dressing up

Ignorance, and the mistaken cunning that nature sharpens in weak heads as a means of self-preservation, make women very fond of dress, and produce the vanity that such a fondness naturally generates, to the exclusion of spirited attempts to grow and improve.

I agree with Rousseau that the physical part of the art of pleasing consists in ornaments; and for just that reason I want to guard girls against the contagious fondness for dress that is so common to weak women, so that they don't remain stuck in the **physical** part. Women who think they can long please without the aid of the mind—i.e. without the **moral** art of pleasing—must be weak indeed. The moral art is never accompanied by ignorance; it is essentially different from and superior to the sportiveness of innocence that is so pleasing to refined libertines of both sexes. (It may indeed be profanation to use the word 'art' in connection with the grace that is •an effect of virtue and not •the motive of action.)

[MW writes that a liking for fine clothes and ornamentation is 'natural to mankind'—common to both sexes and all social levels. (In the most barbarous states only men are allowed to act on this; that our society allows women to take part in this too is 'at least one step in civilisation'.) When the mind is not sufficiently opened to take pleasure in reflection, the body will be adorned with great care, and ambition will appear in tattooing or painting it.

[MW discusses reasons why vanity about dress is in our society more of a feminine than a masculine trait. The main reason is just that men are allowed to have other interests and pursuits, whereas women aren't. Also, a man can avoid clashing with most other men, whereas women]. . . are all rivals. Before marriage it is their business to please men; and after marriage most of them follow the same scent, with

all the persistence of instinct. Even virtuous women never forget their sex in company, for they are always trying to be *agreeable*. A female beauty and a male wit seem to be equally anxious to draw the attention of the company to themselves; and the animosity of contemporary wits is proverbial.

So it's not surprising that the sole ambition of woman centres on beauty. . . and that there are perpetual rivalships. They are all running the same race; they rise above the virtue of mortals if they didn't view each other with a suspicious and even envious eye. . . .

4: Sensibility

Women are supposed to have more sensibility [see Glossary] than men and even more humanity, and their strong attachments and instantaneous emotions of compassion are cited as proofs of this. But the clinging affection of ignorance seldom has anything noble in it; like the affections of children and the lower animals it is mostly a form of selfishness. I have known many weak women whose sensibility was entirely taken up by their husbands; and as for their humanity, it was very faint indeed, or rather it was only a transient emotion of compassion, 'Humanity does not consist in a squeamish ear', says an eminent orator [Charles James Fox]. 'It belongs to the mind as well as the nerves.'

This exclusive kind of affection, though it degrades the individual, shouldn't be offered as evidence of the inferiority of the ·female· sex, because it is the natural consequence of confined views. Even women of superior sense, when their attention is focussed on little employments and private plans, rarely rise to heroism. . . . I therefore agree with the moralist [Adam Smith] who says that women seldom have as much generosity as men, and that their narrow affections—often put ahead of justice and humanity—make the sex apparently

inferior. . . ., but I contend that the heart would expand as the understanding gained strength if women were not held down from their cradles.

I know that a little sensibility and great weakness will produce a strong sexual attachment [= 'a strong attachment to members of one's own sex'], and that friendship is made stronger by reason; so more friendship is to be found in the male than the female world, and men have a higher sense of justice. The narrowly focussed affections of women seem to resemble Cato's most unjust love for his country. He wished to crush Carthage, not to save Rome but to promote its vainglory. . . .

Besides, how can women be just or generous when they are the slaves of injustice?

5: Ignorance about child-care

As the rearing of children—i.e. the laying a foundation of sound health both of body and mind in the rising generation—has justly been insisted on as the task especially assigned to women, their ignorance about it must be contrary to the order of things. If they are to become sensible mothers, I contend, their minds will have to take in much more than they now do, and they *can* do so. Many men attend to the breeding of horses, and supervise the management of the •stable, and yet would. . . .think themselves degraded by paying any attention to the •nursery; yet ever so many children are absolutely murdered [MW's phrase] by the ignorance of women! And of those who escape that, and are not destroyed by unnatural negligence or blind fondness, very few are managed properly with respect to the infant mind. A child's spirit is allowed to become vicious at home, so the child is sent to school to have his or her spirit broken; and the methods the school uses—and must use to keep a number of children in order—scatter the seeds of almost every vice

in the soil that has been forcibly torn up.

[MW compares this treatment of children with the forceful 'breaking' of a horse. Perhaps the latter is not permanently injurious to the horse, she says, but:] I am certain that a child should never be thus forcibly tamed after it has unwisely been allowed to run wild; for every violation of justice and reason in the treatment of children weakens their reason. They catch a character [MW's phrase] so early—experience leads me to infer—that the base of the moral character is fixed before their seventh year, the period during which women are allowed the sole management of children. Afterwards it too often happens that half the business of education is to try to correct the faults, that the children would never have acquired if their mothers had had more understanding.

One striking instance of the folly of women must be mentioned, namely their treatment of servants in the presence of children, allowing the children to think that the servants ought to wait on them and to put up with their moods. A child should always be made to receive assistance from a man or woman as a *favour*; and as the first lesson of independence they should learn from their mother's example not to require personal attendance that it is an insult to humanity to require (unless one is ill). . . . I have often heard servants imperiously called to put children to bed, and sent away again and again because master or miss hung about mamma so as to stay up a little longer. . . .

[MW concludes this subsection with reflections on how a woman could be a good mother while also engaging in other pursuits that would improve her intellect and her morals.]

Section 6: Concluding thoughts

[This subsection is presented exactly as Mary Wollstonecraft wrote it (second edition of the work). You can probably think of reasons there might be for doing this.]

It is not necessary to inform the sagacious reader, now I enter on my concluding reflections, that the discussion of this subject merely consists in opening a few simple principles, and clearing away the rubbish that obscured them. But, as all readers are not sagacious, I must be allowed to add some explanatory remarks to bring the subject home to reason—to that sluggish reason, which supinely takes opinions on trust, and obstinately supports them to spare itself the labour of thinking.

Moralists have unanimously agreed, that unless virtue be nursed by liberty, it will never attain due strength—and what they say of man I extend to mankind, insisting, that in all cases morals must be fixed on immutable principles; and that the being cannot be termed rational or virtuous, who obeys any authority but that of reason.

To render women truly useful members of society, I argue, that they should be led, by having their understandings cultivated on a large scale, to acquire a rational affection for their country, founded on knowledge, because it is obvious, that we are little interested about what we do not understand. And to make this general knowledge of due importance, I have endeavoured to show that private duties are never properly fulfilled, unless the understanding enlarges the heart; and that public virtue is only an aggregate of private. But, the distinctions established in society undermine both, by beating out the solid gold of virtue, until it becomes only the tinsel-covering of vice; for, while wealth makes a man more respectable than virtue, wealth will be sought before virtue; and, while women's persons are caressed,

when a childish simper shows an absence of mind—the mind will lie fallow. Yet, true voluptuousness must proceed from the mind—for what can equal the sensations produced by mutual affection, supported by mutual respect? What are the cold or feverish caresses of appetite, but sin embracing death, compared with the modest overflowings of a pure heart and exalted imagination? Yes, let me tell the libertine of fancy when he despises understanding in woman—that the mind, which he disregards, gives life to the enthusiastic affection from which rapture, short-lived as it is, alone can flow! And, that, without virtue, a sexual attachment must expire, like a tallow candle in the socket, creating intolerable disgust. To prove this, I need only observe, that men who have wasted great part of their lives with women, and with whom they have sought for pleasure with eager thirst, entertain the meanest opinion of the sex. Virtue, true refiner of joy! if foolish men were to fright thee from earth, in order to give loose to all their appetites without a check—some sensual wight of taste would scale the heavens to invite thee back, to give a zest to pleasure!

That women at present are by ignorance made foolish or vicious, is, I think, not to be disputed; and, that the most salutary effects tending to improve mankind, might be expected from a REVOLUTION in female manners, appears at least, with a face of probability, to rise out of the observation. For as marriage has been termed the parent of those endearing charities, which draw man from the brutal herd, the corrupting intercourse that wealth, idleness, and folly produce between the sexes, is more universally injurious to morality, than all the other vices of mankind collectively considered. To adulterous lust the most sacred duties are sacrificed, because, before marriage, men, by a promiscuous intimacy with women, learned to consider love as a selfish gratification—learned to separate it not only from esteem,

but from the affection merely built on habit, which mixes a little humanity with it. Justice and friendship are also set at defiance, and that purity of taste is vitiated, which would naturally lead a man to relish an artless display of affection, rather than affected airs. But that noble simplicity of affection, which dares to appear unadorned, has few attractions for the libertine, though it be the charm, which, by cementing the matrimonial tie, secures to the pledges of a warmer passion the necessary parental attention; for children will never be properly educated until friendship subsists between parents. Virtue flies from a house divided against itself—and a whole legion of devils take up their residence there.

The affection of husbands and wives cannot be pure when they have so few sentiments in common, and when so little confidence is established at home, as must be the case when their pursuits are so different. That intimacy from which tenderness should flow, will not, cannot subsist between the vicious.

Contending, therefore, that the sexual distinction, which men have so warmly insisted on, is arbitrary, I have dwelt on an observation, that several sensible men, with whom I have conversed on the subject, allowed to be well founded; and it is simply this, that the little chastity to be found among men, and consequent disregard of modesty, tend to degrade both sexes; and further, that the modesty of women, characterized as such, will often be only the artful veil of wantonness, instead of being the natural reflection of purity, until modesty be universally respected.

From the tyranny of man, I firmly believe, the greater number of female follies proceed; and the cunning, which I allow, makes at present a part of their character, I likewise have repeatedly endeavoured to prove, is produced by oppression.

Were not dissenters, for instance, a class of people, with strict truth characterized as cunning? And may I not lay some stress on this fact to prove, that when any power but reason curbs the free spirit of man, dissimulation is practised, and the various shifts of art are naturally called forth? Great attention to decorum, which was carried to a degree of scrupulosity, and all that puerile bustle about trifles and consequential solemnity, which Butler's caricature of a dissenter brings before the imagination, shaped their persons as well as their minds in the mould of prim littleness. I speak collectively, for I know how many ornaments to human nature have been enrolled among sectaries; yet, I assert, that the same narrow prejudice for their sect, which women have for their families, prevailed in the dissenting part of the community, however worthy in other respects; and also that the same timid prudence, or headstrong efforts, often disgraced the exertions of both. Oppression thus formed many of the features of their character perfectly to coincide with that of the oppressed half of mankind; for is it not notorious, that dissenters were like women, fond of deliberating together, and asking advice of each other, until by a complication of little contrivances, some little end was brought about? A similar attention to preserve their reputation was conspicuous in the dissenting and female world, and was produced by a similar cause.

Asserting the rights that women in common with men ought to contend for, I have not attempted to extenuate their faults; but to prove them to be the natural consequence of their education and station in society. If so, it is reasonable to suppose, that they will change their character, and correct their vices and follies, when they are allowed to be free in a physical, moral, and civil sense.

Let woman share the rights, and she will emulate the virtues of man; for she must grow more perfect when emanci-

pated, or justify the authority that chains such a weak being to her duty. If the latter, it will be expedient to open a fresh trade with Russia for whips; a present that a father should always make to his son-in-law on his wedding day, that a husband may keep his whole family in order by the same means; and without any violation of justice reign, wielding this sceptre, sole master of his house, because he is the only being in it who has reason; the divine, indefeasible, earthly sovereignty breathed into man by the Master of the universe. Allowing this position, women have not any inherent rights

to claim; and, by the same rule their duties vanish, for rights and duties are inseparable.

Be just then, O ye men of understanding! and mark not more severely what women do amiss, than the vicious tricks of the horse or the ass for whom ye provide provender, and allow her the privileges of ignorance, to whom ye deny the rights of reason, or ye will be worse than Egyptian task-masters, expecting virtue where nature has not given understanding!