A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

1759–1797

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The 1792 text

Rendered into modern English with AI (Claude) and edited



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A Vindication of the Rights of Woman · Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797)

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INTRODUCTION

In 1791 the French statesman Talleyrand proposed to the National Assembly that girls be given only a domestic education. Mary Wollstonecraft, a London writer who had already answered Edmund Burke with *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, replied in six weeks with *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), dedicated to him.

Her argument is simple and radical: women are rational beings, and virtue is the same for both sexes. If women seem frivolous, vain and weak, it is because they are educated to please men rather than to think. She takes apart the advice books of her day, above all Rousseau's portrait of the ideal wife in *Emile*, and calls for women to be educated alongside men, to earn their own living, and to have a direct share in government. "I do not wish them to have power over men," she writes, "but over themselves."

The book is often called the founding text of modern feminism. The right-hand column is Wollstonecraft in lightly modernized English; the left is her original text, with her own footnotes after the paragraphs that cite them.

Dedication, Advertisement and Introduction

Wollstonecraft asks Talleyrand to reconsider his plan for women's education, and sets out her aim: to show that women are rational creatures degraded by a false education.

TO M. TALLEYRAND-PÉRIGORD, LATE BISHOP OF AUTUN

Ded.1 Sir,[1]

Ded.2 I have read with great pleasure a pamphlet on national education that you recently published, and I dedicate this volume to you—the first dedication I have ever written—to induce you to read it attentively. I also dedicate it to you because I think you will understand me, which I do not expect of the many smart-mouthed little wits who may ridicule arguments they cannot answer. But, Sir, I carry my respect for your understanding still further. I carry it so far that I am confident you will not toss my work aside and hastily conclude that I am wrong merely because you did not see the subject in the same light yourself. Forgive my frankness, but I must point out that you treated the subject too superficially. You were content to consider it as it used to be considered, when the rights of man, to say nothing of woman, were trampled on as fantasies. I therefore call on you now to weigh what I have put forward about the rights of woman and national education—and I call in the firm voice of humanity. For my arguments, Sir, come from a disinter-

1 Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (1754–1838), the former Bishop of Autun, presented a report on public education to France's National Assembly in September 1791.

ested spirit: I plead for my sex, not for myself. I have long considered independence the great blessing of life, the basis of every virtue. And independence I will always secure by limiting my wants, even if I had to live on a barren heath.

Ded.3 It is, then, affection for the whole human race that makes my pen dart rapidly along in support of what I believe to be the cause of virtue. The same motive makes me earnestly wish to see woman placed in a position where she would advance, instead of holding back, the progress of those glorious principles that give substance to morality. Indeed, my opinion about the rights and duties of woman seems to follow so naturally from these simple principles that I think it hardly possible that none of the broad minds who framed your admirable constitution will agree with me.

Ded.4 In France there is undoubtedly a wider spread of knowledge than in any other part of Europe, and I attribute it largely to the social mixing that has long existed between the sexes. It is true—I speak my mind freely—that in France the very essence of sensuality has been distilled to treat the pleasure-seeker, and a kind of sentimental lust has prevailed. Their political and civil government, in its whole tenor, has also taught a system of duplicity. Together, these have given the French character a sinister sort of shrewdness, properly called finesse, and a polish of manners that damages substance by hunting sincerity out of society.—And modesty, the fairest garment of virtue![2] Modesty has been more grossly insulted in France than even in England, until French women have come to treat as *prudish* the attention to decency that animals observe by instinct.

Ded.5 Manners and morals are so closely related that they have often been confused. Manners ought to be only the natural reflection of morals. Yet when various causes have produced artificial and corrupt manners, which are picked up very early, morality becomes an empty name. Personal reserve, and a sacred respect for cleanliness and delicacy in domestic life, are the

2 "Manners" here and throughout means the customs and behavior of a society, not just etiquette.

graceful pillars of modesty, and French women almost despise them. Far from despising them, French women should, if the pure flame of patriotism has reached their hearts, work to improve the morals of their fellow citizens. They should teach men not only to respect modesty in women but to acquire it themselves, as the only way to earn women's esteem.

Ded.6 In arguing for the rights of woman, I build my main argument on this simple principle: if she is not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge. For truth must be common to all, or it will have no influence on general practice. And how can woman be expected to cooperate unless she knows why she ought to be virtuous? How can she, unless freedom strengthens her reason until she understands her duty and sees how it is connected with her real good? If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot. The love of humanity, from which an orderly train of virtues springs, can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of humanity. But woman's present education and situation shut her out from such inquiries.

Ded.7 In this work I have put forward many arguments, which I found conclusive, to prove that the prevailing notion of a separate sexual character undermines morality. I have argued that chastity must become far more widespread if the human body and mind are to become more perfect. I have also argued that chastity will never be respected in the male world as long as a woman's person is, as it were, idolized even when little virtue or sense adorns it with the grand traces of mental beauty or the touching simplicity of affection.

Ded.8 Consider these observations dispassionately, Sir. A glimpse of this truth seemed to open before you when you remarked "that to see one half of the human race excluded by the other from all participation in government was a political phenomenon that, according to abstract principles, it was impossible to explain." If so, on what does your constitution rest? If the abstract rights of man can bear discussion and

explanation, those of woman, by the same reasoning, will not shrink from the same test. A different opinion does prevail in this country, but it is built on the very argument you use to justify the oppression of woman—prescription.[3]

Ded.9 I address you as a legislator: consider whether it is not inconsistent and unjust to subjugate women when men are fighting for their own freedom and for the right to judge their own happiness for themselves. It is unjust even if you firmly believe that you are acting in the way best designed to promote women's happiness. Who made man the sole judge, if woman shares with him the gift of reason?

Ded.10 This is how tyrants of every kind argue, from the weak king to the weak father of a family. They are all eager to crush reason, yet they always insist that they usurp its throne only to be useful. Do you not play a similar part when you deny women civil and political rights, and so *force* them all to stay shut up in their families, groping in the dark? For surely, Sir, you will not claim that a duty can be binding if it is not founded on reason? If this really is their destiny, arguments for it can be drawn from reason. With such noble support, the more understanding women acquire, the more attached they will be to their duty—because they comprehend it. For unless they comprehend it, and unless their morals rest on the same unchangeable principle as men's, no authority can make them carry it out virtuously. They may be convenient slaves, but slavery will have its constant effect, degrading both the master and the abject dependent.

Ded.11 But if women are to be excluded, without a voice, from sharing the natural rights of humanity, first prove that they lack reason. Only that will ward off the charge of injustice and inconsistency. Otherwise this flaw in your NEW CONSTITUTION, the first constitution founded on reason, will always show that man must in some way act like a tyrant. And tyranny will always undermine morality, wherever in society it rears its brazen head.

3 "Prescription" is a claim that rests on long-established custom or possession.

Ded.12 I have repeatedly asserted that women cannot be confined to domestic concerns by force, and I have given what seemed to me irrefutable arguments, drawn from matters of fact, to prove it. For however ignorant they are, they will meddle in weightier affairs. They will neglect their private duties only to disrupt, with cunning tricks, the orderly plans of reason that are beyond their comprehension.

Ded.13 Besides, as long as women are taught only personal accomplishments, men will look for pleasure in variety, and unfaithful husbands will make unfaithful wives. Such ignorant beings are never taught to respect the public good, nor allowed any civil rights. They will indeed be very excusable when they try to get justice for themselves by retaliating.

Ded.14 Once this box of mischief has been opened in society, what is to preserve private virtue, the only guarantee of public freedom and universal happiness?

Ded.15 So let no coercion be *established* in society. Let the ordinary law of gravity prevail, and the sexes will fall into their proper places. And now that fairer laws are shaping your citizens, marriage may become more sacred. Your young men may choose wives out of affection, and your young women may let love root out vanity.

Ded.16 The father of a family will not then ruin his health and debase his feelings by visiting prostitutes. Nor will he forget, in obeying the call of appetite, the purpose for which it was implanted. And the mother will not neglect her children to practice the arts of flirtation, when good sense and modesty secure her husband's friendship.

Ded.17 But until men pay attention to the duty of a father, it is useless to expect women to spend in the nursery the time that they, "wise in their generation," choose to spend at the mirror. This display of cunning is only an instinct of nature. It enables women to obtain indirectly a little of the power of which they are unjustly denied a share. For if women are not permitted to

enjoy legitimate rights, they will make both men and themselves vicious in order to obtain illicit privileges.[4]

Ded.18 I wish, Sir, to set some inquiries of this kind going in France. Should they confirm my principles, the Rights of Woman may be respected when your constitution is revised—if it is fully proved that reason calls for this respect and loudly demands JUSTICE for one half of the human race.

Ded.19 I am, Sir, Yours respectfully, M. W.

ADVERTISEMENT

Wollstonecraft explains that this volume is only the first part of a longer planned work.

Adv.1 When I began writing this work, I divided it into three parts. I supposed that one volume would contain a full discussion of the arguments that seemed to me to arise naturally from a few simple principles. But as I went on, new illustrations occurred to me, and I now present only the first part to the public.

Adv.2 Many subjects that I have only touched on briefly, however, call for detailed investigation, especially the laws relating to women and the consideration of their particular duties. These will provide ample material for a second volume, to be published in due course. That volume will clarify some of the views, and complete many of the sketches, begun in the first.[5]

INTRODUCTION

She blames a false education for women's weakness and sets out her aim of treating them as rational creatures.

Intro.1 I have studied the pages of history and watched the living world with anxious concern, and the most melancholy feelings of sorrowful indignation have weighed down my spirits. I have sighed when forced to admit one of two things. Either nature has made a great difference between one person and another, or

4 "Wise in their generation" echoes Luke 16:8.

5 The second volume was never written.

the civilization that has so far taken place in the world has been very incomplete. I have looked through various books on education, and I have patiently observed the conduct of parents and the management of schools. And what has been the result?—a deep conviction that the neglected education of my fellow creatures is the great source of the misery I deplore. I am convinced, too, that women in particular are made weak and wretched by a variety of combined causes, all stemming from one hasty conclusion. The conduct and manners of women plainly prove, in fact, that their minds are not in a healthy state. Like flowers planted in too rich a soil, they sacrifice strength and usefulness to beauty. The showy leaves please a fastidious eye for a while, then fade, neglected on the stalk, long before the season when they should have reached maturity.—I attribute one cause of this barren blooming to a false system of education. It is drawn from books on the subject written by men who see females as women rather than as human beings, and who have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than rational wives. Women's understanding has been so thoroughly duped by this plausible homage that the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, care only about inspiring love. They ought instead to cherish a nobler ambition and command respect by their abilities and virtues.

Intro.2 In a treatise on the rights and manners of women, therefore, the works written specifically for their improvement must not be overlooked. This is especially so when it is asserted in plain terms that women's minds are weakened by false refinement. It is also asserted that the books of instruction written by men of genius have had the same tendency as more frivolous productions, and that, in the true style of Islam, they regard women only as females and not as part of the human species. Yet improvable reason is acknowledged to be the noble distinction that raises men above the animals and puts a natural scepter in a feeble hand.[6]

6 She repeats a common eighteenth-century European misconception that Islam held women to have no souls.

Intro.3 Yet I would not have my readers suppose that, because I am a woman, I mean to stir up violently the disputed question of whether women are equal or inferior. But the subject lies in my path, and I cannot pass it by without exposing the main drift of my reasoning to misinterpretation. So I shall pause for a moment to give my opinion in a few words.—In the government of the physical world, it can be observed that the female is, in general, inferior to the male. The male pursues, the female yields—this is the law of nature, and it does not seem to be suspended or repealed in woman's favor. This physical superiority cannot be denied—and it is a noble prerogative! But men are not content with this natural pre-eminence. They try to sink us still lower, merely to make us alluring objects for a moment. And women, intoxicated by the adoration that men pay them under the influence of their senses, do not try to win a lasting place in men's hearts. Nor do they try to become the friends of the fellow creatures who find amusement in their company.

Intro.4 I am aware of an obvious inference. From every quarter I have heard outcries against masculine women—but where are they to be found? If by this label men mean to attack women's enthusiasm for hunting, shooting, and gambling, I shall most heartily join in the outcry. But the outcry may be aimed instead at the imitation of manly virtues. More properly speaking, it may be aimed at the attainment of those talents and virtues whose exercise ennobles human character, and which raise females in the scale of animal being when they are included under the general term mankind. In that case, all who view women with a philosophical eye must, I think, wish with me that they may grow more and more masculine every day.

Intro.5 This discussion naturally divides the subject. I shall first consider women in the grand light of human beings who, like men, are placed on this earth to develop their faculties. Afterward I shall point out more specifically their particular role.

Intro.6 I also wish to steer clear of an error into which many respectable writers have fallen. The instruction addressed to women so far has applied rather to *ladies*, apart from the little

indirect advice scattered through Sandford and Merton. Addressing my sex in a firmer tone, I pay particular attention to those in the middle class, because they seem to be in the most natural state. Perhaps the seeds of false refinement, immorality, and vanity have always been sown by the great. They are weak, artificial beings, raised above the common needs and affections of their kind in a premature, unnatural way, and they undermine the very foundation of virtue and spread corruption through the whole mass of society![7] As a class of humanity, the great have the strongest claim to pity. The education of the rich tends to make them vain and helpless, and their developing minds are not strengthened by practicing the duties that dignify human character.—They live only to amuse themselves. And by the same law that invariably produces certain effects in nature, they soon afford only barren amusement themselves.

Intro.7 But I intend to take a separate look at the different ranks of society, and at the moral character of women in each, so this hint is enough for now. I have only alluded to the subject because it seems to me the very essence of an introduction to give a brief account of the contents of the work it introduces.

STRENGTH OF MIND AND BODY

She urges women to seek strength of mind and body and to reject flattering talk of delicacy.

Intro.8 My own sex, I hope, will excuse me if I treat them like rational creatures. I will not flatter their *fascinating* graces, or view them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. I earnestly wish to point out what true dignity and human happiness consist in. I wish to persuade women to endeavor to acquire strength, both of mind and body. I wish to convince them that the soft phrases—susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste—are almost synonyms for weakness. And I wish to convince them

7 *The History of Sandford and Merton* (1783–89), a popular moral tale for children by Thomas Day.

that beings who are only the objects of pity, and of that kind of love which has been called its sister, will soon become objects of contempt.

Intro.9 Let us dismiss, then, those pretty feminine phrases that men condescendingly use to soften our slavish dependence. Let us despise the weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners supposed to be the sexual characteristics of the weaker vessel. I wish to show that elegance is inferior to virtue, and that the first object of praiseworthy ambition is to achieve a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex. All secondary aims should be tested against this simple touchstone.[8]

Intro.10 This is a rough sketch of my plan. I may express my conviction with the strong emotions I feel whenever I think of the subject. If I do, some of my readers will feel the force of what experience and reflection have taught me. Driven by this important aim, I shall scorn to pick my phrases or polish my style. I aim to be useful, and sincerity will keep me unaffected. I would rather persuade by the force of my arguments than dazzle by the elegance of my language. So I shall not waste my time rounding off sentences, or manufacturing the swollen bombast of artificial feelings, which come from the head and never reach the heart.—I shall deal with things, not words! I am anxious to make my sex more respectable members of society, and so I shall try to avoid the flowery language that has slid from essays into novels, and from novels into personal letters and conversation.

Intro.11 These pretty nothings slip glibly off the tongue, and they are caricatures of the real beauty of sensibility. They corrupt taste and create a sickly delicacy that turns away from simple, unadorned truth. A flood of false sentiments and overstrained feelings stifles the natural emotions of the heart. It makes insipid the domestic pleasures that ought to sweeten the per-

8 "Sensibility" was the eighteenth-century term for refined emotional susceptibility, the capacity for delicate feeling. "The weaker vessel" is from 1 Peter 3:7.

formance of those severe duties which educate a rational and immortal being for a nobler field of action.

Intro.12 Women's education has lately received more attention than it used to. Yet women are still considered a frivolous sex, and they are ridiculed or pitied by the writers who try to improve them by satire or instruction. It is admitted that they spend many of their early years acquiring a smattering of accomplishments. Meanwhile, strength of body and mind is sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty and to the desire to settle themselves by marriage—the only way women can rise in the world. This desire makes mere animals of them, and when they marry they act as such children may be expected to act: they dress, they paint, and they nickname God's creatures.—Surely these weak beings are fit only for a harem!—Can they run a household, or take care of the poor babies they bring into the world?[9]

Intro.13 Suppose, then, that one thing can be fairly concluded from the present conduct of women, and from the prevailing love of pleasure that takes the place of ambition and of the nobler passions that open and enlarge the soul. Suppose it follows that the instruction women have received, together with the constitution of civil society, has only tended to make them insignificant objects of desire—mere breeders of fools! Suppose it can be proved that by trying to give them accomplishments without cultivating their understanding, we take them out of their sphere of duties and make them ridiculous and useless once the short-lived bloom of beauty is over[10]. Then I presume that *rational* men will excuse me for trying to persuade women to become more masculine and respectable.

Intro.14 Indeed, the word masculine is only a bogeyman. There is little reason to fear that women will acquire too much courage or fortitude. Their apparent inferiority in bodily strength must make them dependent on men to some degree in the various

9 "Nickname God's creatures" echoes Hamlet's rebuke to Ophelia (*Hamlet* 3.1).

10 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. A lively writer—I cannot remember his name—asks what business women over forty have in the world.

relations of life. But why should that dependence be increased by prejudices that give a sex to virtue, and that confuse simple truths with sensual fantasies?

Intro.15 Women are in fact so degraded by mistaken notions of female excellence that I do not mean to add a paradox when I say that this artificial weakness produces a tendency to tyrannize. It also gives birth to cunning, the natural opponent of strength. And cunning leads them to put on those contemptible childish airs that undermine esteem even while they arouse desire. Do not foster these prejudices, and women will naturally fall into their subordinate, yet respectable, station in life.

Intro.16 It hardly seems necessary to say that I am speaking here of women in general. Many individual women have more sense than their male relatives. Where there is a constant struggle for balance, nothing outweighs the other side unless it naturally has more weight. So some women govern their husbands without degrading themselves, because intellect will always govern.

Chapter I: The Rights and Involved Duties of Mankind Considered

Reason, virtue and knowledge are what raise human beings; hereditary rank, monarchy, the army and the clergy corrupt them.

1.1 In the present state of society it seems necessary to go back to first principles in search of the simplest truths, and to contest every inch of ground with some prevailing prejudice. To clear my way, I must be allowed to ask a few plain questions. The answers will probably seem as unambiguous as the axioms on which reasoning is built. Yet when they become entangled with various motives for action, they are flatly contradicted, either by men's words or by their conduct.

1.2 What does man's superiority over the animals consist in? The answer is as clear as that a half is less than the whole: in Reason.

1.3 What acquirement raises one being above another? Virtue, we reply without hesitation.

1.4 For what purpose were the passions implanted? So that man, by struggling with them, might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the animals, whispers Experience.

1.5 Consequently, the perfection of our nature and our capacity for happiness must be measured by the degree of reason, virtue, and knowledge that distinguish the individual and direct the laws that bind society. And if humanity is viewed collectively, it is equally undeniable that knowledge and virtue flow naturally from the exercise of reason.

1.6 With the rights and duties of man thus simplified, it seems almost impertinent to try to illustrate truths that appear so indisputable. Yet such deeply rooted prejudices have clouded reason, and such counterfeit qualities have taken the name of virtues, that it is necessary to follow the course of reason. We must follow it as various incidental circumstances have confused it and entangled it in error, comparing the simple axiom with chance deviations from it.

1.7 Men in general seem to use their reason to justify prejudices they have absorbed, they cannot tell how, rather than to root them out. It takes a strong mind to form its own principles resolutely. A kind of intellectual cowardice prevails, which makes many men shrink from the task or do it only halfway. Yet the imperfect conclusions drawn in this way are often very plausible, because they are built on partial experience, on views that are accurate, though narrow.

1.8 When we go back to first principles, vice slinks away from close investigation in all its native ugliness. But a set of shallow reasoners are always exclaiming that such arguments prove too much, and that a measure rotten at the core may still be expedient. So expediency is continually set against simple principles, until truth is lost in a fog of words and virtue in formalities. And knowledge is reduced to a resounding nothing by the plausible prejudices that take its name.

1.9 In the abstract, every thinking being is forcibly struck by the idea that the wisest society is the one whose constitution is founded on the nature of man. It is so obvious that it looks like presumption to try to offer proofs. Yet proof must be offered, or reason will never storm the stronghold of prescription. And to cite prescription as an argument for depriving men (or women) of their natural rights is one of the absurd sophistries that insult common sense every day.

1.10 The civilization of most of the people of Europe is very incomplete. Indeed, one may question whether they have acquired any virtues, in exchange for their innocence, that make up for the misery produced by two losses. One is the vices

that have been plastered over their unsightly ignorance, and the other is the freedom they have bartered for splendid slavery. Several motives have all helped to crush the mass of humanity and make liberty a convenient handle for sham patriotism. There is the desire to dazzle by wealth, the surest pre-eminence a man can obtain. There is the pleasure of commanding flattering sycophants. And there are many other complicated, low calculations of doting self-love. Rank and titles are held to be of the utmost importance, and before them Genius "must hide its diminished head." So long as this is true, it is, with a few exceptions, very unfortunate for a nation when a man of ability, without rank or property, pushes himself forward into notice.—Alas! What unheard-of misery thousands have suffered to buy a cardinal's hat for some obscure, scheming adventurer who longed to be ranked with princes, or to lord it over them by seizing the triple crown![1]

1.11 Such, indeed, has been the wretchedness flowing from hereditary honors, riches, and monarchy that men of lively sensibility have almost uttered blasphemy in order to justify the ways of providence. Man has been depicted as independent of the power that made him, or as a lawless planet shooting from its orbit to steal the celestial fire of reason. And the vengeance of heaven, lurking in the subtle flame, has amply punished his rashness by bringing evil into the world.

ROUSSEAU AND THE STATE OF NATURE

She rejects Rousseau's claim that humans were better off in a state of nature than in civilization.

1.12 Struck by this view of the misery and disorder that pervaded society, and tired of jostling against artificial fools, Rousseau fell in love with solitude. Being at the same time an optimist, he labors with uncommon eloquence to prove that man was naturally a solitary animal. He was misled by his respect for the good-

1 The quotation adapts Milton, *Paradise Lost* 4.35. The "triple crown" is the papal tiara.

ness of God, who certainly—for what man of sense and feeling can doubt it!—gave life only to communicate happiness. So he regards evil as something positive, and as the work of man. He does not realize that he was exalting one attribute of God at the expense of another, equally necessary to divine perfection.[2]

1.13 Built on a false hypothesis, his arguments in favor of a state of nature are plausible but unsound. I say unsound, because to assert that a state of nature is preferable to civilization in all its possible perfection is, in other words, to put supreme wisdom on trial. His paradoxical exclamation claims that God made all things right, and that evil was introduced by the creature he formed, knowing what he formed. It is as unphilosophical as it is impious.[3]

1.14 When that wise Being who created us and placed us here saw the fair idea, he willed, by allowing it to be so, that the passions should unfold our reason, because he could see that present evil would produce future good. Could the helpless creature he called out of nothing break loose from his providence, and boldly learn to know good by practicing evil, without his permission? No.—How could that energetic champion of immortality argue so inconsistently? Suppose humanity had remained forever in the brutish state of nature, which even his magic pen cannot paint as a state in which a single virtue took root. It would then have been clear that man was born to run the circle of life and death, and to adorn God's garden for some purpose hard to reconcile with God's attributes. It would have been clear to everyone except the sensitive, unreflecting wanderer.

1.15 But suppose that, to crown the whole, rational creatures were to be produced, allowed to rise in excellence by exercising powers implanted for that purpose. Suppose that benevolence

2 Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Genevan-born philosopher and novelist.
3 *Emile* opens: "Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man."

itself saw fit to call into existence a creature above the animals[4], who could think and improve himself. Why, then, should that priceless gift be called, in so many words, a curse? For a gift it was, if man was so created as to have the capacity to rise above the state in which sensation produced brutish ease. It might be considered a curse if our whole existence were bounded by our time in this world. For why should the gracious fountain of life give us passions and the power of reflection only to embitter our days and fill us with mistaken notions of dignity? Why should he lead us from love of ourselves to the sublime emotions that the discovery of his wisdom and goodness arouses, if these feelings were not set in motion for a purpose? They are meant to improve our nature, of which they are a part[5], and to make us capable of enjoying a more godlike share of happiness. I am firmly convinced that no evil exists in the world that God did not intend to take place, and I build my belief on the perfection of God.

1.16 Rousseau strives to prove that all *was* right originally; a crowd of authors, that all *is* right now; and I, that all will *be* right.[6]

1.17 But, true to his first position, Rousseau celebrates barbarism as the next best thing to a state of nature. Addressing the ghost of Fabricius, he forgets that the Romans, in conquering the world, never dreamed of establishing their own liberty on a

4 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Anatomists argue by analogy from the structure of the teeth, stomach, and intestines that man is a carnivorous animal, but Rousseau will not allow it. And, carried away from nature by his love of system, he disputes whether man is a gregarious animal at all. Yet the long and helpless state of infancy seems to mark man out as especially driven to pair.

5 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Suppose you had asked a craftsman to make a watch that would tell you the time of day. To show off his ingenuity, he added wheels to make it a repeater, and so on, which complicated the simple mechanism. What would you say to him if he offered an excuse? He might say that if you had not touched a certain spring you would never have known anything about it, and that he had only amused himself by making *an experiment* that did you no harm. Would you not fairly retort that if he had not added those needless wheels and springs, the accident could not have happened?

6 The optimists' motto was Alexander Pope's "Whatever is, is right" (*An Essay on Man*, 1733–34).

firm basis or of extending the reign of virtue. Eager to support his system, he brands every effort of genius as vicious. And, deifying pre-civilized virtues, he raises to demigods men who were scarcely human—the brutal Spartans. In defiance of justice and gratitude, they massacred in cold blood the slaves who had proved themselves men by rescuing their oppressors.[7]

1.18 Disgusted with artificial manners and virtues, the citizen of Geneva did not properly sift the subject. Instead he threw out the wheat with the chaff, without stopping to ask whether the evils his ardent soul turned from in indignation were the consequence of civilization or the remnants of barbarism. He saw vice trampling on virtue, and the appearance of goodness taking the place of the reality. He saw talents bent by power to sinister purposes. Yet he never thought of tracing this gigantic mischief back to arbitrary power, back to the hereditary distinctions that clash with the mental superiority that naturally raises one man above his fellows. He did not see that royal power, within a few generations, brings mental incapacity into the noble line, and holds out bait that makes thousands idle and vicious.

THE CORRUPTION OF RANK

She argues that monarchy, standing armies and the church hierarchy corrupt those who live within them.

1.19 Nothing can show the royal character in a more contemptible light than the various crimes that have raised men to the supreme dignity.—Vile intrigues, unnatural crimes, and every vice that degrades our nature have been the steps to this distinguished height. Yet millions of men have passively allowed the

7 Rousseau invokes the Roman hero Fabricius in his *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (1750). The Spartans secretly killed about two thousand helots who had fought bravely for them (Thucydides 4.80).

feeble limbs of the descendants of such rapacious prowlers to rest quietly on their bloodstained thrones[8].

1.20 What but a poisonous vapor can hang over society when its chief director has been taught nothing but how to invent crimes, or the stupid routine of childish ceremonies? Will men never be wise?—will they never stop expecting wheat from tares, and figs from thistles?

1.21 Even under the most favorable circumstances, no man can acquire enough knowledge and strength of mind to fulfill the duties of a king entrusted with unchecked power. How badly, then, must those duties be violated when his very elevation is an insurmountable barrier to acquiring either wisdom or virtue! His feelings as a man are all stifled by flattery, and pleasure shuts out reflection. Surely it is madness to make the fate of thousands depend on the whims of a weak fellow creature whose very position sinks him *necessarily* below the lowest of his subjects! But one power should not be thrown down only to exalt another, for all power intoxicates weak man. Its abuse proves that the more equality is established among men, the more virtue and happiness will reign in society. Yet this maxim, and any like it drawn from simple reason, raises an outcry. The church or the state is in danger, we are told, if faith in the wisdom of antiquity is not unquestioning. And those who are roused by the sight of human suffering to attack human authority are reviled as despisers of God and enemies of man. These are bitter slanders, yet they reached one of the best of men[9]. His ashes still preach peace, and his memory calls for a respectful

8 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Could any greater insult be offered to the rights of man than the beds of justice in France, when an infant was made the mouthpiece of the detestable Dubois?

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. A *lit de justice* was a ceremonial session at which the king forced the Paris Parlement to register his edicts. Such sessions were held under the boy-king Louis XV, while Cardinal Guillaume Dubois (1656–1723) held power.

9 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Dr. Price.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Richard Price (1723–1791), Dissenting minister and Wollstonecraft's friend. His 1789 sermon welcoming the French Revolution provoked Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

pause whenever we discuss subjects that lay so close to his heart.

1.22 After attacking the sacred majesty of kings, I shall hardly cause surprise by adding my firm conviction that every profession whose power rests on a strict hierarchy of rank is highly damaging to morality.

1.23 A standing army, for instance, is incompatible with freedom. Subordination and rigor are the very sinews of military discipline, and despotism is needed to give vigor to enterprises that a single will directs. Only a few officers can feel a spirit inspired by romantic notions of honor, a kind of morality founded on the fashion of the age. The main body must be moved by command, like the waves of the sea. The strong wind of authority drives the crowd of subordinates forward with headlong fury, though they scarcely know or care why.

1.24 Besides, nothing can do more harm to the morals of people in country towns than the occasional stationing among them of a set of idle, superficial young men whose only occupation is gallantry. Their polished manners make vice more dangerous by hiding its ugliness under gay, ornamental drapery. An air of fashion is only a badge of slavery, and it proves that the soul has no strong individual character. Yet it awes simple country people into imitating the vices of politeness, even when they cannot catch its slippery graces. Every regiment is a chain of despots. Submitting and tyrannizing without exercising their reason, they become dead weights of vice and folly on the community. A man of rank or fortune, sure of rising through connections, has nothing to do but pursue some extravagant whim. Meanwhile the needy *gentleman*, who is to rise, as the phrase goes, by his merit, becomes a servile parasite or a vile pimp.

1.25 Sailors, the naval gentlemen, fit the same description, except that their vices take a different and coarser form. They are more thoroughly idle when they are not performing the ceremonial duties of their rank, while the pointless fluttering of soldiers might be called active idleness. Confined more to the company of men, sailors acquire a taste for crude humor and

practical jokes; soldiers, who mix often with well-bred women, pick up a sentimental jargon.—But mind is equally out of the question, whether they indulge in the horse-laugh or the polite simper.

1.26 May I extend the comparison to a profession where more mind is certainly to be found? The clergy have better opportunities for improvement, though subordination cramps their faculties almost as much. The blind submission to set forms of belief demanded at university serves as an apprenticeship for the curate, who must obsequiously defer to the opinions of his rector or patron if he means to rise in his profession. There may be no more striking contrast than the one between the servile, dependent walk of a poor curate and the courtly bearing of a bishop. And the respect and the contempt they inspire make both equally useless in performing their separate functions.

1.27 It is very important to observe that every man's character is, to some degree, formed by his profession. A man of sense may show only a certain professional cast of features, which fades as you come to know him as an individual. The weak, ordinary man, by contrast, hardly ever has any character except that of the body he belongs to. At least, all his opinions have been so steeped in the vat consecrated by authority that the faint spirit yielded by the grape of his own vine can no longer be told apart.

1.28 Society, therefore, as it becomes more enlightened, should take great care not to establish bodies of men who must necessarily be made foolish or vicious by the very constitution of their profession.

1.29 In the infancy of society, when men were just emerging from barbarism, chiefs and priests, who worked the most powerful springs of early human conduct, hope and fear, must have had unlimited sway. An aristocracy, then, is naturally the first form of government. But clashing interests soon lose their balance, and a monarchy and a priestly hierarchy break out of the confusion of ambitious struggles, with the foundation of both secured by feudal land tenure. This seems to be the origin

of monarchical and priestly power, and the dawn of civilization. But such combustible material cannot stay bottled up for long. It finds an outlet in foreign wars and internal uprisings, and the people gain some power in the tumult, which forces their rulers to gloss over their oppression with a show of right. So, as war, agriculture, commerce and literature expand the mind, despots are compelled to use covert corruption to hold on to the power they once seized by open force[10]. And this deadly, lurking gangrene is spread fastest by luxury and superstition, the sure dregs of ambition. The idle puppet of a court first becomes a pampered monster or a fastidious sensualist. He then turns the contagion that his unnatural condition has spread into an instrument of tyranny.

1.30 It is this poisonous purple that makes the progress of civilization a curse and warps the understanding, until people of sensibility doubt whether the expansion of the intellect produces more happiness or more misery. But the nature of the poison points to the antidote. Suppose Rousseau had climbed one step higher in his investigation, or his eye had pierced the foggy atmosphere he almost disdained to breathe. His active mind would then have leapt forward to contemplate the perfection of humanity in the establishment of true civilization, instead of taking its ferocious flight back into the night of sensual ignorance.[11]

10 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Men of ability scatter seeds that grow up and have a great influence on the forming of opinion; and once public opinion gains the upper hand through the exercise of reason, the overthrow of arbitrary power is not far off.

11 Purple, the color of royal robes, stands for hereditary rank and court power. Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* (1755) argued that civilization had corrupted humanity.

Chapter II: The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed

Against Milton, Rousseau and Gregory, Wollstonecraft argues that women's virtue must be the same as men's, grounded in reason.

2.1 To account for and excuse the tyranny of man, many ingenious arguments have been put forward to prove that the two sexes, in acquiring virtue, ought to aim at very different characters. To put it plainly, women are not granted enough strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue. Yet if we allow that they have souls, it would seem that Providence has appointed only one way to lead *humankind* to either virtue or happiness.

2.2 If, then, women are not a swarm of ephemeral triflers, why should they be kept in ignorance under the plausible name of innocence? Men complain, and with reason, of the follies and whims of our sex, when they are not bitingly satirizing our headstrong passions and groveling vices. Look, I would answer, at the natural effect of ignorance! A mind that has nothing but prejudices to rest on will always be unstable, and the current will run with destructive fury when there are no barriers to break its force. From infancy, women are told, and taught by their mothers' example, what will win them the protection of man: a little knowledge of human weakness (rightly called cunning), a soft temper, *outward* obedience, and scrupulous attention to a childish kind of propriety. And if they are beautiful, nothing else is needed, for twenty years of their lives at least.

2.3 This is how Milton describes our first frail mother. Yet when he tells us that women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace, I cannot understand what he means, unless, in the true Muslim strain, he meant to deprive us of souls. He would then be insinuating that we were beings designed only to gratify man's senses, by sweet attractive grace and docile blind obedience, when he can no longer soar on the wing of contemplation.[1]

2.4 How grossly they insult us who advise us to make ourselves nothing but gentle, domestic brutes! Take, for instance, the winning softness, so warmly and so often recommended, that governs by obeying. What childish expressions! And how insignificant is the being (can it be an immortal one?) who will stoop to govern by such underhanded methods! "Certainly," says Lord Bacon, "man is akin to the beasts by his body; and if he is not akin to God by his spirit, he is a base and ignoble creature!" Men really do seem to me to act very unphilosophically when they try to secure women's good conduct by keeping them forever in a state of childhood.[2] Rousseau was more consistent when he wished to halt the progress of reason in both sexes, for if men eat of the tree of knowledge, women will get a taste too. But given the imperfect cultivation their understandings now receive, the only knowledge they gain is a knowledge of evil.

2.5 Children, I grant, should be innocent; but when the word is applied to men or women, it is only a polite term for weakness. Suppose we allow that Providence destined women to acquire human virtues, and, by exercising their understanding, to acquire the stability of character that is the firmest ground for our hopes of the future. Then they must be permitted to turn to the source of light, not forced to steer by the twinkling of a mere satellite. Milton, I grant, was of a very different opinion, for he bows only to the indefeasible right of beauty. Yet it would be hard to reconcile the two passages I now mean to contrast. But

1 Milton, *Paradise Lost* 4.297–98: "For contemplation he and valour formed, / For softness she and sweet attractive grace."

2 Francis Bacon (1561–1626), from his essay "Of Atheism."

great men are often led into such inconsistencies by their senses.

2.6 "To whom thus Eve with *perfect beauty* adorned:
My Author and Disposer, what thou bidst
Unargued I obey; so God ordains;
God is *thy law*, *thou mine*: to know no more
Is Woman's *happiest* knowledge and her *praise*."[3]

2.7 These are exactly the arguments I have used with children. But I have added: your reason is now growing stronger, and until it reaches some degree of maturity you must look to me for advice; after that you ought to *think*, and rely only on God.

2.8 Yet in the following lines Milton seems to agree with me, when he has Adam remonstrate with his Maker:

2.9 "Hast thou not made me here thy substitute,
And these inferior far beneath me set?
Among *unequals* what society
Can sort, what harmony or true delight?
Which must be mutual, in proportion due
Given and received; but in *disparity*
The one intense, the other still remiss[4]

2.10 Cannot well suit with either, but soon prove
Tedious alike: of *fellowship* I speak
Such as I seek, fit to participate
All rational delight—"

2.11 In discussing the manners of women, then, let us set aside sensual arguments and trace what we should try to make them, so that they may cooperate, if the expression is not too bold, with the Supreme Being.

2.12 By individual education (for the sense of the term is not precisely defined) I mean the kind of attention to a child that will slowly sharpen the senses, form the temper, regulate the passions as they begin to ferment, and set the understanding to

3 Milton, *Paradise Lost* 4.634–38.
4 Milton, *Paradise Lost* 8.381–91.

work before the body reaches maturity. The adult will then only have to continue, not to begin, the important task of learning to think and reason.

2.13 To prevent any misunderstanding, I must add that I do not believe private education can work the wonders some optimistic writers have attributed to it. Men and women must be educated, to a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in. In every age a stream of popular opinion has carried everything before it and given, as it were, a family character to the century. We may fairly conclude, then, that until society is differently constituted, not much can be expected from education. For my present purpose, however, it is enough to assert that whatever effect circumstances have on people's abilities, every being can become virtuous by exercising its own reason. For if even one being were created with vicious inclinations, that is, positively bad, what could save us from atheism? Or if we worship a God, is that God not a devil?

2.14 Consequently, the most perfect education, in my view, is the exercise of the understanding best suited to strengthen the body and form the heart. In other words, it should enable the individual to acquire such habits of virtue as will make it independent. In fact, it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason. This was Rousseau's view regarding men. I extend it to women, and I confidently assert that they have been drawn out of their sphere by false refinement, not by any effort to acquire masculine qualities. Still, the royal homage they receive is so intoxicating that it may be impossible to convince them until the manners of the times change and are formed on more reasonable principles. They must see that the illegitimate power they gain by degrading themselves is a curse, and that they must return to nature and equality if they wish to secure the quiet contentment that unaffected affections bring. But for that era we must wait. We may have to wait until kings and nobles, enlightened by reason and preferring the real dignity of man to childish pomp, throw off their gaudy hereditary trappings. And if women do not then

give up the arbitrary power of beauty, they will prove that they have *less* mind than man.

AGAINST THE CONDUCT BOOKS

She charges writers from Rousseau to Gregory with making women artificial, weak and useless.

2.15 I may be accused of arrogance, but I must still declare what I firmly believe. All the writers on female education and manners, from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have helped to make women more artificial and weaker characters than they would otherwise have been, and consequently more useless members of society. I might have expressed this conviction in a quieter tone. But I fear it would then have been the whine of affectation, not the faithful expression of my feelings and of the clear conclusion that experience and reflection have led me to draw.[5] When I come to that part of the subject, I shall take up the passages I particularly object to in the works of the authors just mentioned. But I must first point out that my objection extends to the whole drift of those books. In my opinion they tend to degrade one half of the human species and to make women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue.

2.16 Admittedly, to reason on Rousseau's own ground: if man did reach a degree of perfection of mind when his body reached maturity, it might be proper, in order to make a man and his wife *one*, for her to rely entirely on his understanding. The graceful ivy, clasping the oak that supported it, would then form a whole in which strength and beauty were equally on display. But alas! husbands, like their helpmates, are often just overgrown children. Indeed, thanks to early debauchery, they are scarcely men even in outward form. And if the blind lead the blind, no one needs to come down from heaven to tell us the result.

2.17 In the present corrupt state of society, many causes help to enslave women by cramping their understandings and sharpen-

ing their senses. One that perhaps silently does more harm than all the rest is their disregard of order.

2.18 To do everything in an orderly way is a very important rule. Yet women, who generally receive only a disorderly kind of education, seldom follow it with the exactness observed by men, who are broken in to method from infancy. This careless kind of guesswork keeps them from generalizing from facts, and what other word describes the random exertions of a sort of instinctive common sense never tested by reason? So they do today what they did yesterday, merely because they did it yesterday.

2.19 This contempt for the understanding in early life has more harmful consequences than is commonly supposed. For various reasons, the little knowledge that women of strong minds acquire is more scattered than men's knowledge. It comes more from bare observation of real life than from comparing what one has personally observed with the results of experience generalized by theory. Their dependent situation and domestic occupations draw them more into company, so they learn in snatches. And since learning is generally only a secondary matter for them, they do not pursue any one branch with the persevering ardor needed to give vigor to the faculties and clarity to the judgment. In the present state of society, a little learning is required to keep up the character of a gentleman, and boys are made to submit to a few years of discipline. But in the education of women, cultivating the understanding always comes second to acquiring some physical accomplishment. Even so, the body, weakened by confinement and false notions of modesty, is kept from attaining the grace and beauty that slack, half-formed limbs never display. Besides, in youth their faculties are not drawn out by competition. Having no serious scientific study, whatever natural shrewdness they have is turned too soon upon life and manners. They dwell on effects and variations without

5 John Gregory (1724–1773), Scottish physician, author of *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1774), a popular conduct book for young women.

tracing them back to causes; and complicated rules for regulating behavior are a poor substitute for simple principles.

2.20 As proof that it is education that gives women this appearance of weakness, we may point to military men. Like women, they are sent into the world before their minds have been stocked with knowledge or fortified by principles. The consequences are similar. Soldiers pick up a little superficial knowledge, snatched from the muddy current of conversation, and from constantly mixing in society they gain what is called a knowledge of the world. This acquaintance with manners and customs has often been mistaken for a knowledge of the human heart. But does the crude fruit of casual observation deserve that distinction, when it has never been tested by a judgment formed from comparing theory with experience? Soldiers, like women, practice the minor virtues with punctilious politeness. Where, then, is the difference between the sexes, when the education has been the same? All the difference I can see comes from the superior advantage of liberty, which lets soldiers see more of life.

2.21 It is perhaps a digression from my present subject to make a political remark; but since it arose naturally from the train of my thoughts, I will not pass over it in silence.

2.22 Standing armies can never be made up of resolute, robust men. They may be well-disciplined machines, but they will seldom contain men moved by strong passions or possessed of very vigorous faculties. As for any depth of understanding, I will venture to say that it is as rarely found in the army as among women, and the cause, I maintain, is the same. It may further be observed that officers are also especially attentive to their appearance and fond of dancing, crowded rooms, adventures and ridicule[6]. Like the *fair* sex, they make gallantry the business of their lives.—They were taught to please, and they live only to

6 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Why should women be scolded with peevish bitterness because they seem to have a passion for a scarlet coat? Has not education put them more on a level with soldiers than with any other class of men?

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The scarlet coat was the uniform of the British army.

please. Yet they do not lose their rank in the distinction of the sexes, for they are still considered superior to women. In what their superiority consists, beyond what I have just mentioned, is hard to discover.

2.23 The great misfortune is that both acquire manners before morals, and a knowledge of life before they have, through reflection, any acquaintance with the grand ideal outline of human nature. The consequence is natural. Content with ordinary human nature, they fall prey to prejudices, and, taking all their opinions on credit, they blindly submit to authority. So if they have any sense, it is a kind of instinctive glance that catches proportions and makes judgments about manners. It fails when arguments must be pursued below the surface or opinions analyzed.

2.24 May not the same remark be applied to women? Indeed, the argument can be taken further, for both are thrown out of a useful position by the unnatural distinctions established in civilized life. Riches and hereditary honors have turned women into zeros, whose only use is to add value to the digit placed before them. And idleness has introduced into society a mixture of gallantry and despotism. It leads the very men who are slaves to their mistresses to tyrannize over their sisters, wives and daughters. This is only keeping them in rank and file, it is true. Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience. But since power always seeks blind obedience, tyrants and sensualists are quite right to try to keep women in the dark: the former want only slaves, and the latter a plaything. The sensualist, indeed, has been the most dangerous of tyrants. Women have been duped by their lovers, as princes by their ministers, while dreaming that they reigned over them.

2.25 I am chiefly referring here to Rousseau. His character of Sophie is undoubtedly captivating, though to me it seems grossly unnatural. It is not the superstructure, however, that I mean to attack, but the foundation of her character, the principles on which her education was built. I warmly admire the genius of that able writer, whose opinions I shall often have

occasion to cite. Yet when I read his voluptuous reveries, indignation always takes the place of admiration, and the stern frown of insulted virtue wipes away the smile of pleasure that his eloquent sentences usually raise.[7] Is this the man who, in his ardor for virtue, would banish all the gentle arts of peace and almost carry us back to Spartan discipline? Is this the man who delights in painting the useful struggles of passion, the triumphs of good disposition, and the heroic flights that carry the glowing soul out of itself?—How these mighty sentiments are lowered when he describes the pretty foot and enticing airs of his little favorite! But for the present I set the subject aside. Instead of severely condemning the passing outpourings of excessive sensibility, I will only make one observation. Anyone who has looked on society with a kindly eye must often have been pleased by the sight of humble mutual love, neither dignified by sentiment nor strengthened by a union in intellectual pursuits. The domestic trifles of the day have supplied matter for cheerful conversation, and innocent caresses have softened labors that required no great exercise of mind or stretch of thought. Yet has not the sight of this modest happiness aroused more tenderness than respect? The emotion is like the one we feel when children are playing or animals frolicking[8]. The contemplation of the noble struggles of suffering merit, by contrast, has raised our admiration and carried our thoughts to that world where sensation will give way to reason.

2.26 Women, therefore, must be regarded either as moral beings, or as so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men.

7 Sophie is the girl raised to be the ideal wife of Emile in Book 5 of Rousseau's treatise on education, *Emile* (1762).

8 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Milton's charming picture of the happiness of paradise has always raised similar feelings in me. Yet instead of envying the lovely pair, I have turned to hell for more sublime objects, whether from conscious dignity or Satanic pride. In the same way, when viewing some noble monument of human art, I have traced the emanation of the Deity in the order I admired. Then, coming down from that dizzy height, I have caught myself contemplating the grandest of all human sights;—for my imagination quickly placed, in some lonely retreat, an outcast of fortune rising above passion and discontent.

ONE VIRTUE FOR BOTH SEXES

She rejects Rousseau's training of women in obedience and argues that virtue must be the same for both sexes.

2.27 Let us examine this question. Rousseau declares that a woman should never for a moment feel herself independent. She should be governed by fear, so as to exercise her *natural* cunning, and made a coquettish slave, so as to become a more alluring object of desire and a *sweeter* companion to man whenever he chooses to relax. He carries the arguments he claims to draw from the indications of nature still further. He insinuates that truth and fortitude, the cornerstones of all human virtue, should be cultivated only with certain restrictions, because in the female character obedience is the great lesson, to be impressed with unrelenting rigor.

2.28 What nonsense! When will a great man arise with enough strength of mind to blow away the fumes that pride and sensuality have spread over this subject! If women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must still be the same in quality, if not in degree, or else virtue is a relative idea. Consequently, their conduct should be founded on the same principles and have the same aim.

2.29 Women are connected with man as daughters, wives and mothers, and their moral character may be judged by how they fulfill those simple duties. But the end, the grand end, of their efforts should be to unfold their own faculties and acquire the dignity of conscious virtue. They may try to make their road pleasant, but, like man, they should never forget that life does not yield the happiness that can satisfy an immortal soul. I do not mean to suggest that either sex should be so lost in abstract reflection or distant prospects as to forget the affections and duties that lie before them. These are in truth the means appointed to produce the fruit of life. On the contrary, I warmly recommend them, even while I maintain that they give the most satisfaction when they are seen in their true, subordinate light.

2.30 The prevailing opinion that woman was created for man probably arose from Moses's poetic story. Yet very few people who have given the subject any serious thought, it may be presumed, ever supposed that Eve was literally one of Adam's ribs. The inference must therefore be allowed to collapse. At most it proves one thing: that man, from the remotest antiquity, found it convenient to use his strength to subjugate his companion, and his ingenuity to show that she ought to have her neck bent under the yoke, because she, like the animals, was created to do his pleasure.[9]

2.31 Let no one conclude that I wish to turn the order of things upside down. I have already granted that, from the constitution of their bodies, men seem designed by Providence to attain a greater degree of virtue. I speak collectively of the whole sex. But I see not the shadow of a reason to conclude that their virtues should differ in nature. Indeed, how can they, if virtue has only one eternal standard? If I reason consistently, then, I must maintain that they have the same simple direction as strenuously as I maintain that there is a God.

2.32 It follows, then, that cunning should not be set against wisdom, or little cares against great efforts. Nor should insipid softness, varnished over with the name of gentleness, be set against the fortitude that only grand views can inspire.

2.33 I will be told that woman would then lose many of her peculiar graces, and the opinion of a well-known poet may be quoted to refute my unqualified assertion. For Pope has said, in the name of the whole male sex:

2.34 "Yet ne'er so sure our passion to create, / As when she touched the brink of all we hate."[10]

2.35 In what light this quip places men and women, I leave the judicious to decide. Meanwhile I will content myself with one observation. Unless women are merely mortal, I cannot see why they should always be degraded by being made subservient to love or lust.

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9 Genesis 2:21–23, traditionally attributed to Moses.
10 Pope, *Epistle to a Lady* (1735), lines 51–52.

2.36 To speak disrespectfully of love is, I know, high treason against sentiment and fine feelings; but I wish to speak the simple language of truth and to address the head rather than the heart. To try to reason love out of the world would be to out-Quixote Cervantes, and just as offensive to common sense. It seems less wild to try to restrain this tumultuous passion, and to prove that it should not be allowed to dethrone higher powers or to usurp the scepter that the understanding should always coolly wield.

2.37 Youth is the season for love in both sexes. But in those days of thoughtless enjoyment, provision should be made for the more important years of life, when reflection takes the place of sensation. Rousseau, however, and most of the male writers who have followed in his footsteps, have warmly taught that the whole tendency of female education ought to be directed to one point:—to make women pleasing.

2.38 Let me reason with those supporters of this opinion who have any knowledge of human nature. Do they imagine that marriage can uproot the habits of a lifetime? The woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are slanting sunbeams. They cannot have much effect on her husband's heart when he sees them every day, once the summer is past and gone. Will she then have enough native energy to look into herself for comfort and cultivate her dormant faculties? Or is it not more reasonable to expect that she will try to please other men, and, in the excitement of new conquests in prospect, try to forget the humiliation her love or pride has suffered? When the husband stops being a lover, and that time will inevitably come, her desire to please will either wither or become a source of bitterness. And love, perhaps the most fleeting of all passions, gives way to jealousy or vanity.

2.39 I am now speaking of women who are restrained by principle or prejudice. Such women would shrink from an affair with real horror. Nevertheless, they want the homage of gallantry to convince them that their husbands are cruelly neglecting them. Or else they spend days and weeks dreaming of the

happiness enjoyed by kindred souls, until their health is undermined and their spirits broken by discontent. How, then, can the great art of pleasing be such a necessary study? It is useful only to a mistress. The chaste wife and serious mother should regard her power to please only as the polish on her virtues. Her husband's affection is one of the comforts that make her task less difficult and her life happier.—But whether she is loved or neglected, her first wish should be to make herself worthy of respect, and not to rest all her happiness on a being subject to the same weaknesses as herself.

DR. GREGORY'S ADVICE

She criticizes Gregory's counsel to daughters on dress, dancing, dissimulation and hiding affection.

2.40 The amiable Dr. Gregory fell into a similar error. I respect his heart, but I entirely disapprove of his celebrated Legacy to his Daughters.

2.41 He advises them to cultivate a fondness for dress, because, he asserts, a fondness for dress is natural to them. I cannot understand what either he or Rousseau means when they so often use this vague term. Suppose they told us that in a previous existence the soul was fond of dress and brought this inclination with it into a new body. I would listen with a half-smile, as I often do when I hear someone rant about innate elegance.—But if he merely meant that the exercise of the faculties will produce this fondness, I deny it.—It is not natural. It arises, like false ambition in men, from a love of power.

2.42 Dr. Gregory goes much further. He actually recommends dissimulation. He advises an innocent girl to give the lie to her feelings and not dance with spirit, even when gaiety of heart would make her feet eloquent without making her gestures immodest. In the name of truth and common sense, why should one woman not admit that she can take more exercise than another, in other words, that she has a sound constitution? And why, to dampen innocent liveliness, should she be darkly told

that men will draw conclusions she little suspects? Let the libertine draw whatever inference he likes. But I hope no sensible mother will restrain the natural frankness of youth by instilling such indecent warnings. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. And one wiser than Solomon has said that the heart should be made clean, rather than trivial ceremonies observed, which are not very hard to perform with scrupulous exactness while vice reigns in the heart.[11]

2.43 Women ought to try to purify their hearts. But how can they, when their uncultivated understandings make them wholly dependent on their senses for occupation and amusement? No noble pursuit lifts them above the petty vanities of the day or enables them to curb the wild emotions that shake a reed at the mercy of every passing breeze. To win the affections of a virtuous man, is affectation necessary? Nature has given woman a weaker frame than man. But take a wife who has exercised her mind and body while carrying out the duties of a daughter, wife and mother, and so has let her constitution keep its natural strength and her nerves a healthy tone. To ensure her husband's affections, must she, I say, stoop to use art and fake a sickly delicacy in order to secure his affection? Weakness may arouse tenderness and gratify man's arrogant pride. But the lordly caresses of a protector will not satisfy a noble mind that longs to be respected, and deserves to be. Fondness is a poor substitute for friendship!

2.44 In a harem, I grant, all these arts are necessary; the epicure must have his palate tickled or he will sink into apathy. But do women have so little ambition as to be satisfied with such a condition? Can they lazily dream their lives away in the lap of pleasure or the languor of weariness, rather than assert their claim to pursue reasonable pleasures and distinguish themselves by practicing the virtues that dignify humanity? Surely she has no immortal soul who can loiter her life away occupied only in adorning her person. She does it so that she may amuse the languid hours and soften the cares of a fellow creature who

11 Matthew 12:34 and 23:25–26; "a greater than Solomon" (Matthew 12:42) is Jesus.

is willing to be cheered by her smiles and tricks once the serious business of life is over.

2.45 Besides, the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her household and practicing various virtues, become her husband's friend and not his humble dependent. And if she earns his regard by having such substantial qualities, she will not find it necessary to hide her affection, or to pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution in order to excite her husband's passion. In fact, if we turn to history, we will find that the women who have distinguished themselves have been neither the most beautiful nor the most gentle of their sex.

2.46 Nature (or, to speak with strict accuracy, God) has made all things right; but man has sought out many inventions to spoil the work. I am now referring to the part of Dr. Gregory's treatise where he advises a wife never to let her husband know the full extent of her sensibility or affection. A voluptuous precaution, and as ineffective as it is absurd.—Love, by its very nature, must be transitory. To look for a secret that would make it constant would be as wild a quest as the search for the philosopher's stone or the universal cure-all. And the discovery would be just as useless, or rather harmful, to humanity. The holiest bond of society is friendship.[12] A shrewd satirist has rightly said "that rare as true love is, true friendship is still rarer."[13]

2.47 This is an obvious truth, and since its cause does not lie deep, it will not escape even a quick glance of inquiry.

LOVE GIVES WAY TO FRIENDSHIP

She argues that passionate love must fade in marriage and that friendship should take its place.

2.48 Love, the common passion, in which chance and sensation take the place of choice and reason, is felt to some degree by the

12 Echoing Ecclesiastes 7:29: "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions."
13 La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims*, no. 473.

mass of humanity. There is no need, for the present, to speak of the emotions that rise above or sink below love. This passion, naturally heightened by suspense and difficulties, draws the mind out of its usual state and exalts the affections. But the security of marriage lets the fever of love subside. The healthy temperature that follows seems dull only to those who lack the intellect to replace blind admiration and the sensual emotions of fondness with the calm tenderness of friendship and the confidence of respect.

2.49 This is, and must be, the course of nature:—friendship or indifference inevitably follows love.—And this arrangement seems to harmonize perfectly with the system of government that prevails in the moral world. Passions are spurs to action, and they open the mind. But once the object is gained and the satisfied mind rests in enjoyment, they sink into mere appetites, a personal and momentary gratification. The man who had some virtue while he was struggling for a crown often becomes a voluptuous tyrant once it graces his brow. And when the lover is not lost in the husband, the doting fool falls prey to childish whims and foolish jealousies and neglects the serious duties of life. The caresses that should build confidence in his children are lavished on the overgrown child, his wife.

2.50 To fulfill the duties of life, and to pursue with energy the various occupations that form moral character, the master and mistress of a household ought not to go on loving each other with passion. I mean that they ought not to indulge those emotions that disturb the order of society and absorb thoughts that should be put to other uses. The mind that has never been absorbed by one object lacks vigor—but if it can stay absorbed for long, it is weak.

2.51 A mistaken education, a narrow, uncultivated mind, and many prejudices about sex tend to make women more constant than men; but for now I will not take up this branch of the subject. I will go further still and put forward, with no thought of paradox, that an unhappy marriage is often very good for a family, and that the neglected wife is, in general, the best mother.

And this would almost always be the result if women's minds were broader. For it seems to be the usual arrangement of Providence that what we gain in present enjoyment is deducted from the treasure of life, experience. While we are gathering the flowers of the day and reveling in pleasure, we cannot at the same time lay hold of the solid fruit of toil and wisdom. The road lies before us, and we must turn right or left. Whoever means to spend life bounding from one pleasure to another must not complain if he gains neither wisdom nor a respectable character.

2.52 Suppose for a moment that the soul is not immortal, and that man was created only for the present scene. Then I think we would have reason to complain that love, that infantile fondness, ever grew stale and faded on the senses. "Let us eat, drink, and love, for tomorrow we die" would in fact be the language of reason, the morality of life. And who but a fool would give up a reality for a fleeting shadow? But suppose that, awed by seeing how far the powers of the mind can be improved, we scorn to confine our wishes or thoughts to such a comparatively lowly field of action, one that looks grand and important only insofar as it is connected with a boundless prospect and sublime hopes. What need is there, then, for falsehood in conduct? Why must the sacred majesty of truth be violated to hold on to a deceptive good that undermines the very foundation of virtue? Why must women's minds be tainted by the arts of the coquette to gratify the sensualist, and to keep love from subsiding into friendship or compassionate tenderness, when there are no qualities on which friendship can be built? Let the honest heart show itself, and let *reason* teach passion to submit to necessity. Or let the dignified pursuit of virtue and knowledge raise the mind above those emotions that, when not kept within proper limits, embitter the cup of life rather than sweeten it.

2.53 I do not mean the romantic passion that goes with genius. —Who can clip its wings? But that grand passion, out of all proportion to the puny enjoyments of life, is true only to the feeling itself, and feeds on itself. The passions celebrated for lasting

have always been unhappy ones. They gained strength from absence and from an inborn melancholy.—The imagination hovered around a form of beauty dimly seen; but familiarity might have turned admiration into disgust, or at least into indifference, and given the imagination leisure to chase fresh game. Seen this way, Rousseau is perfectly right to make the mistress of his soul, Eloisa, love St.[14] Preux when her life was fading; but this is no proof that the passion is immortal.

2.54 Dr. Gregory's advice about delicacy of sentiment is of the same kind: he advises a woman not to acquire it if she has decided to marry. Yet this decision, perfectly consistent with his earlier advice, he calls *indelicate*, and he earnestly urges his daughters to conceal it, even though it may govern their conduct. As if it were indelicate to have the common appetites of human nature.

2.55 Noble morality! And just what you would expect from the cautious prudence of a little soul that cannot see beyond the present tiny division of existence. Suppose all the faculties of a woman's mind are to be cultivated only as they bear on her dependence on man, and that once she gets a husband she has reached her goal and, meanly proud, is satisfied with such a paltry crown. Then let her grovel contentedly, her occupations barely raising her above the animal kingdom. But if she is striving for the prize of her high calling, let her cultivate her understanding without stopping to consider what character the husband she is destined to marry may have. Let her only resolve, without being too anxious about present happiness, to acquire the qualities that ennoble a rational being. Then a rough, unrefined husband may offend her taste without destroying her peace of mind. She will not shape her soul to suit her companion's weaknesses, but to bear with them: his character may be a trial to her virtue, but not an obstacle to it.

2.56 If Dr. Gregory meant his remark to apply only to romantic expectations of constant love and kindred feelings, he should

14 Rousseau's novel *Julie, or the New Heloise* (1761), in which Julie's love for her former tutor Saint-Preux lasts until her deathbed.

have remembered this: when the imagination is kept alive at the expense of reason, experience will banish what advice can never make us stop wishing for.

2.57 I admit it often happens that women who have nurtured a romantic, unnatural delicacy of feeling waste their[15] lives *imagining* how happy they would have been with a husband who could love them with an ardent affection that grew every day, and all day. But they might as well pine married as single, and they would not be one bit more unhappy with a bad husband than longing for a good one. I grant that a proper education, or, to be more precise, a well-stocked mind, would enable a woman to bear a single life with dignity. But for her to avoid cultivating her taste in case her husband should now and then offend it is to give up the substance for the shadow. To tell the truth, I do not see what use an improved taste is if it does not make the individual more independent of life's accidents, and does not open new sources of enjoyment that depend only on the solitary workings of the mind. People of taste, married or single alike, will always be disgusted by various things that do not touch less observant minds. The argument must not be allowed to turn on this point. But, taking the whole sum of enjoyment, is taste to be called a blessing?

2.58 The question is whether it brings more pain or more pleasure. The answer will settle whether Dr. Gregory's advice is sound. It will also show how absurd and tyrannical it is to lay down a system of slavery in this way, or to try to educate moral beings by any rules other than those drawn from pure reason, which apply to the whole species.

2.59 Gentleness of manners, forbearance, and long-suffering are such lovable, godlike qualities that sublime poetry has clothed the Deity in them. Perhaps no picture of his goodness takes so strong a hold on human affections as those that show him abounding in mercy and willing to pardon. Seen in this light, gentleness bears on its face all the marks of grandeur, combined with the winning graces of condescension. But how

15 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. For example, the herd of novelists.

different it looks when it is the submissive bearing of dependence, the prop of a weakness that loves because it needs protection, and forbears because it must silently endure injuries—smiling under the lash at which it dare not snarl. Abject as this picture looks, it is the portrait of an accomplished woman according to the accepted idea of female excellence, which plausible reasoners have separated from human excellence. Or else they[16] kindly restore the rib and make one moral being out of a man and a woman, not forgetting to give her all the "submissive charms."[17]

2.60 How women are to exist in that state where there is to be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, we are not told. Moralists have agreed that the course of life seems to prove that *man* is prepared by various circumstances for a future state; yet they consistently agree in advising *woman* to provide only for the present. On this basis, gentleness, docility, and a spaniel-like affection are consistently recommended as the cardinal virtues of women. And, ignoring the arbitrary arrangement of nature, one writer has declared that it is masculine for a woman to be melancholy. She was created to be man's toy, his rattle, and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused.

2.61 To recommend gentleness on a broad basis is, indeed, strictly philosophical. A frail being should work at being gentle. But when forbearance confuses right and wrong, it stops being a virtue. However convenient it may be in a companion, that companion will always be regarded as an inferior, and will inspire only an insipid tenderness that easily degenerates into contempt. Still, if advice could really make a being gentle whose natural disposition did not allow such a fine polish, something would be gained toward the advancement of order. But this indiscriminate counsel, as could quickly be shown, produces

16 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. See Rousseau, and Swedenborg.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), Swedish mystic, taught that a married couple in heaven form a single angel.

17 "Submissive charms" is from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book 4, describing Eve.

only affectation, and it throws a stumbling block in the way of gradual improvement and true betterment of temper. If so, women gain little by sacrificing solid virtues to acquire superficial graces, even if for a few years those graces win individual women royal sway.

2.62 As a philosopher, I read with indignation the plausible epithets men use to soften their insults. As a moralist, I ask what is meant by such mismatched pairings as "fair defects," "amiable weaknesses," and so on. If there is only one standard of morals, only one archetype for humanity, then women seem to be left hanging by destiny, like Muhammad's coffin in the popular tale. They have neither the unerring instinct of animals, nor are they allowed to fix the eye of reason on a perfect model. They were made to be loved, and must not aim at respect, or they will be hunted out of society as masculine.[18]

2.63 But let us look at the subject from another angle. Do passive, indolent women make the best wives? Confining our discussion to the present life, let us see how such weak creatures play their part. Some women, by acquiring a few superficial accomplishments, have strengthened the prevailing prejudice. Do they merely contribute to their husbands' happiness? Do they display their charms merely to amuse them? And do women who absorbed notions of passive obedience early in life have enough character to manage a household or educate children? Far from it. After surveying the history of woman, I cannot help agreeing with the harshest satirist and regarding women as the weakest as well as the most oppressed half of the species. What does history reveal but marks of inferiority? And how few women have freed themselves from the galling yoke of sovereign man?—So few that the exceptions remind me of a clever guess about Newton: that he was probably a being of a higher order, accidentally caged in a human body. In the same vein, I have been led to imagine that the few extraordinary women who have rushed off in eccentric directions out of the orbit laid down for their sex were

18 A popular European legend held that Muhammad's coffin hung suspended in midair, between heaven and earth.

male spirits, confined by mistake in a female frame. But if it is not philosophical to think of sex when the soul is mentioned, then the inferiority must depend on the bodily organs. Otherwise the heavenly fire that is to ferment the clay is not handed out in equal portions.

2.64 So far I have avoided any direct comparison of the two sexes as wholes; or I have frankly acknowledged woman's inferiority as things now appear. I will go on doing so, and will only insist that men have increased that inferiority until women have sunk almost below the standard of rational creatures. Let their faculties have room to unfold and their virtues room to gain strength, and then decide where the whole sex must stand on the intellectual scale. But let it be remembered that I am not asking for a place for a small number of distinguished women.

2.65 It is hard for us half-blind mortals to say how far human discoveries and improvements may go once the gloom of despotism lifts, the gloom that makes us stumble at every step. But when morality is settled on a firmer basis, then, without any gift of prophecy, I will venture to predict that woman will be either the friend or the slave of man. We will not, as now, doubt whether she is a moral agent or the link that joins man to the animals. Suppose it should then turn out that, like the animals, women were created mainly for man's use. Then he will let them patiently bite the bridle, and not mock them with empty praise. Or, if their rationality should be proved, he will not hinder their improvement merely to gratify his sensual appetites. He will not, with all the graces of rhetoric, advise them to submit their understanding without question to the guidance of man. He will not, when he writes on the education of women, assert that they ought never to have the free use of reason. Nor will he recommend cunning and deceit to beings who are acquiring, just as he is, the virtues of humanity.

2.66 Surely, if morality has an eternal foundation, there can be only one rule of right. Whoever sacrifices virtue, strictly so called, to present convenience, or whose *duty* it is to act that

way, lives only for the passing day and cannot be an accountable creature.

2.67 The poet, then, should have dropped his sneer when he says,[19]

2.68 "If weak women go astray, / The stars are more to blame than they."

2.69 For it is quite certain that they are bound by the unbreakable chain of destiny, if it is proved that they are never to exercise their own reason, never to be independent, never to rise above opinion, and never to feel the dignity of a rational will that bows only to God. Such a will often forgets that the universe contains any being but itself and the model of perfection toward which its ardent gaze is turned. It adores attributes that, softened into virtues, may be imitated in kind, though their degree overwhelms the enraptured mind.

2.70 If, I say—for I do not want to make an impression by declamation when Reason offers her sober light—if they are really capable of acting like rational creatures, let them not be treated like slaves, or like the animals that depend on man's reason when they live with him. Instead, cultivate their minds, give them the healthy, sublime restraint of principle, and let them attain a conscious dignity by feeling themselves dependent only on God. Teach them, along with men, to submit to necessity, instead of giving morals a sex in order to make women more pleasing.

2.71 Further, should experience prove that they cannot reach the same degree of strength of mind, perseverance, and fortitude, let their virtues be the same in kind, even if they struggle in vain for the same degree. The superiority of man will be just as clear, if not clearer. And truth, being a simple principle that allows no modification, would be common to both. Indeed, the order of society as it is now arranged would not be overturned. Woman would then have only the rank that reason assigned her, and no arts could be practiced to even the balance, much less to tip it.

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19 Matthew Prior (1664–1721), in his tale "Hans Carvel."

2.72 These may be called utopian dreams.—Thanks, then, to that Being who impressed them on my soul and gave me enough strength of mind to dare to use my own reason. Depending now on him alone for the support of my virtue, I look with indignation on the mistaken notions that enslave my sex.

2.73 I love man as my fellow; but his scepter, real or usurped, does not extend to me, unless the reason of an individual demands my homage. And even then the submission is to reason, not to man. In fact, the conduct of an accountable being must be governed by the workings of its own reason. Otherwise, on what foundation does the throne of God rest?

2.74 It seems necessary to me to dwell on these obvious truths because women have been, as it were, isolated. While they have been stripped of the virtues that should clothe humanity, they have been decked out with artificial graces that allow them to exercise a short-lived tyranny. Love takes the place of every nobler passion in their hearts, so their only ambition is to be beautiful, to arouse emotion instead of inspiring respect. And this ignoble desire, like the servility found in absolute monarchies, destroys all strength of character. Liberty is the mother of virtue. If women are slaves by their very constitution, and are not allowed to breathe the sharp, invigorating air of freedom, they must always languish like exotic plants and be counted beautiful flaws in nature. Let it also be remembered that they are the only flaw.

THE ARGUMENT FROM SUBJECTION

She answers the claim that women's long subjection proves their inferiority by pointing to men's submission to kings.

2.75 As for the argument drawn from the subjection in which women have always been held, it turns back against men. The many have always been enslaved by the few, and monsters who have shown hardly any discernment of human excellence have tyrannized over thousands of their fellow creatures. Why have men of superior gifts submitted to such degradation? For is it

not universally acknowledged that kings, taken as a group, have always been inferior in ability and virtue to the same number of men taken from the common mass of humanity? And yet have they not been treated, and are they not still treated, with a reverence that is an insult to reason? China is not the only country where a living man has been made a god. *Men* have submitted to superior strength so as to enjoy the pleasure of the moment without penalty. *Women* have only done the same. So until it is proved that the courtier, who servilely gives up the birthright of a man, is not a moral agent, it cannot be shown that woman is essentially inferior to man because she has always been subjugated.

2.76 Brute force has so far governed the world. And that the science of politics is still in its infancy is evident from the fact that philosophers hesitate to give that definite standing to the knowledge most useful to humanity.

2.77 I will pursue this argument no further than to establish an obvious inference: as sound politics spreads liberty, humankind, women included, will become wiser and more virtuous.

Chapter III: The Same Subject Continued

Bodily strength, health and a strong mind go together; women are taught weakness and then despised for it.

3.1 Bodily strength was once the distinguishing mark of heroes. It has now sunk into such undeserved contempt that men as well as women seem to think it unnecessary. Women think so because it takes away from their feminine graces and from that lovely weakness which is the source of their undue power. Men think so because it seems at odds with the character of a gentleman.

3.2 It can easily be proved that both, in leaving one extreme, have run into the other. But first it may be proper to note that a popular error has gained enough credit to lend force to a false conclusion, one in which an effect has been mistaken for a cause.

3.3 People of genius have very often damaged their health by study or by careless neglect of their bodies. Since the violence of their passions has matched the vigor of their intellects, the sword wearing out the scabbard has become almost proverbial. Superficial observers have concluded from this that men of genius usually have weak, or, to use a more fashionable word, delicate constitutions. Yet I believe the opposite will turn out to be the fact. On careful inquiry I find that strength of mind has, in most cases, gone with superior strength of body. By this I mean natural soundness of constitution, not the robust nerves and vigorous muscles that come from physical labor when the mind is idle or only directs the hands.

3.4 Dr. Priestley has remarked, in the preface to his biographical chart, that most great men have lived beyond forty-five. And consider how thoughtlessly they have squandered their strength. Investigating a favorite science, they have burned down the lamp of life, forgetting the midnight hour. Or, lost in poetic dreams, their imagination has peopled the scene, and the soul has been disturbed by the passions that meditation had raised, until it shook the body too; and the objects of those passions, the baseless fabric of a vision, faded before the exhausted eye. Given all this, they must have had iron frames.[1] Shakespeare never grasped the airy dagger with a feeble hand, nor did Milton tremble when he led Satan far from the borders of his dreary prison.—These were not the ravings of weakness, the sickly outpourings of disordered brains. They were the abundance of an imagination that, wandering "in a fine frenzy," was not constantly reminded of its material shackles.[2]

3.5 I am aware that this argument would take me further than I may be supposed to want to go. But I follow truth, and, still holding to my first position, I will grant that bodily strength seems to give man a natural superiority over woman. This is the only solid basis on which the superiority of men can be built. But I still insist that not only the virtue but also the *knowledge* of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree. Women, considered not only as moral but as rational creatures, ought to try to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the

1 Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), scientist and Dissenting minister, published *A Chart of Biography* in 1765. "The baseless fabric of this vision" is from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

2 The dagger is Macbeth's; "in a fine frenzy" is from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 5.

same means as men, instead of being educated like some fanciful kind of *half* being—one of Rousseau's wild fantasies[3].

PRIDE IN WEAKNESS

She attacks Rousseau's excuse for women's pride in physical weakness and the power it gives them.

3.6 But if bodily strength is, with some show of reason, men's boast, why are women so infatuated as to be proud of a defect?

3 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. "Researches into abstract and speculative truths, the principles and axioms of the sciences—in short, everything that tends to generalize our ideas—are not the proper province of women. Their studies should relate to matters of practice. It is for them to apply the principles that men have discovered, and it is their part to make observations that lead men to establish general principles. All the ideas of women that do not bear directly on points of duty should be directed to the study of men, and to acquiring those pleasant accomplishments whose object is taste. For works of genius are beyond their capacity. Nor do they have enough precision or power of attention to succeed in sciences that require accuracy. And as for knowledge of nature, it belongs only to those who are most active, most inquisitive, and who take in the greatest variety of objects. In short, it belongs to those who have the strongest powers, and who exercise them most, to judge the relations between sentient beings and the laws of nature. A woman who is naturally weak, and does not carry her ideas very far, knows how to judge and properly estimate the movements she sets working to help her weakness; and these movements are the passions of men. The machinery she uses is much more powerful than ours, for all her levers move the human heart. She must have the skill to incline us to do everything that her sex will not let her do for herself and that is necessary or pleasant to her. She ought therefore to study the mind of man thoroughly. She should study not the mind of man in general, in the abstract, but the dispositions of those men to whom she is subject, either by the laws of her country or by the force of opinion. She should learn to see into their real feelings from their conversation, their actions, their looks, and their gestures. She should also have the art of conveying, through her own conversation, actions, looks, and gestures, the feelings that are agreeable to them, without seeming to intend it. Men will reason more philosophically about the human heart, but women will read the heart of man better than men do. It belongs to women, if I may put it this way, to form an experimental morality, and to reduce the study of man to a system. Women have more wit, men more genius; women observe, men reason. From the two together we get the clearest light and the most perfect knowledge that the human mind is capable of attaining on its own. In a word, from this we acquire the most intimate acquaintance with ourselves and with others that our nature allows. It is in this way that art constantly tends to perfect the gifts nature has bestowed.—The world is the book of women." *Rousseau's Emile*. I hope my readers still remember the comparison I drew earlier between women and army officers.

Rousseau has supplied them with a plausible excuse. It could only have occurred to a man whose imagination had been allowed to run wild and to refine on the impressions of exquisite senses. The excuse is that they might, if you please, have a pretext for yielding to a natural appetite without violating a romantic sort of modesty, which gratifies the pride and libertinism of man.

3.7 Women, deceived by these sentiments, sometimes boast of their weakness, cunningly gaining power by playing on the *weakness* of men. And well they may glory in their illicit sway, for, like Turkish pashas, they have more real power than their masters. But virtue is sacrificed to passing gratifications, and a respectable life to the triumph of an hour.

3.8 Women, like despots, may now have more power than they would have if the world, divided and subdivided into kingdoms and families, were governed by laws drawn from the exercise of reason. But in gaining it, to carry the comparison further, their character is degraded, and licentiousness spreads through the whole of society. The many become a pedestal for the few. I will therefore venture to assert that until women are more rationally educated, the progress of human virtue and the growth of knowledge must be continually held back. Suppose it is granted that woman was not created merely to gratify man's appetite, or to be the upper servant who provides his meals and looks after his linen. Then it must follow that parents who really attend to the education of girls should make this their first concern: if not to strengthen the body, at least not to ruin the constitution through mistaken notions of beauty and female excellence. Nor should girls ever be allowed to absorb the harmful notion that a defect can, by any chemical process of reasoning, become an excellence. On this point, I am happy to find that the author of one of the most instructive books for children our country has pro-

duced agrees with me. I will quote his apt remarks, to lend the force of his respectable authority to reason[4].

3.9 But even if it should be proved that woman is naturally weaker than man, how does it follow that it is natural for her to work at becoming still weaker than nature intended? Arguments of this kind are an insult to common sense and smack of passion. The *divine right* of husbands, like the divine right of kings, may, it is to be hoped, be challenged without danger in this enlightened age. Conviction may not silence many loud disputants. Still, when any prevailing prejudice is attacked, the wise will consider, and leave the narrow-minded to rail with thoughtless vehemence against innovation.

3.10 The mother who wants to give her daughter true dignity of character must ignore the sneers of ignorance. She must proceed on a plan diametrically opposed to the one Rousseau has recommended with all the deceptive charms of eloquence and

4 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. A respectable old man gives the following sensible account of the method he followed in educating his daughter. "I tried to give both her mind and her body a degree of vigor seldom found in the female sex. As soon as she was strong enough for the lighter work of farming and gardening, I made her my constant companion. Selene, for that was her name, soon became skilled in all these country occupations, and I watched her with equal pleasure and admiration. If women are generally feeble in both body and mind, this comes less from nature than from education. We encourage a vicious indolence and inactivity, which we falsely call delicacy. Instead of hardening their minds with the sterner principles of reason and philosophy, we train them in useless arts that end in vanity and sensuality. In most of the countries I had visited, they are taught nothing higher than a few modulations of the voice or useless postures of the body. Their time is consumed in idleness or trifles, and trifles become the only pursuits that can interest them. We seem to forget that our own domestic comforts and the education of our children must depend on the qualities of women. And what comforts, or what education, is a race of beings fit to provide when they have been corrupted from infancy and know nothing of the duties of life? To play a musical instrument with useless skill; to display their natural or affected graces to the eyes of idle and debauched young men; to squander their husbands' inheritance on wild and needless expenses: these are the only arts women cultivate in most of the polished nations I had seen. And the consequences are invariably what one would expect from such polluted sources: private misery and public servitude.

"But Selene's education was governed by different aims and conducted on sterner principles—if that can be called severity which opens the mind to a sense of moral and religious duties, and most effectively arms it against the inevitable evils of life." *Mr. Day's Sandford and Merton*, Vol. III.

philosophical sophistry. His eloquence makes absurdities plausible, and his dogmatic conclusions puzzle, without convincing, those who lack the ability to refute them.

GIRLS, PLAY AND DOLLS

She argues that girls' fondness for dolls and dress comes from confinement and example, not nature.

3.11 Throughout the whole animal kingdom, every young creature needs almost constant exercise. Following this hint, children's infancy should be spent in harmless romping that exercises the feet and hands without needing very detailed direction from the head or the constant attention of a nurse. In fact, the care needed for self-preservation is the first natural exercise of the understanding, just as little inventions to amuse the moment unfold the imagination. But these wise designs of nature are thwarted by misguided fondness or blind zeal. The child, especially a girl, is not left to her own direction for a moment, and is thus made dependent—and then dependence is called natural.

3.12 To preserve personal beauty—woman's glory!—the limbs and faculties are cramped with worse than Chinese bindings. The sedentary life that girls are condemned to lead, while boys frolic in the open air, weakens the muscles and slackens the nerves.—Rousseau remarks, and several writers have since echoed him, that girls naturally have a fondness for dolls, dressing up, and talking, meaning that they have it from birth, independent of education. These remarks are so childish that they do not deserve a serious refutation.[5] A girl condemned to sit for hours on end listening to the idle chatter of foolish nurses, or to attend her mother at her dressing table, will try to join in the conversation. That is, indeed, very natural. And she will imitate her mother or aunts, and amuse herself by adorning her lifeless doll just as they adorn her, poor innocent babe! That is undoubtedly a most natural consequence. For men of the

5 The binding of girls' feet in China.

greatest abilities have seldom had strength enough to rise above the atmosphere around them. And if the page of genius has always been blotted by the prejudices of its age, some allowance should be made for a sex who, like kings, always see things through a distorting medium.

3.13 In this way the fondness for dress so conspicuous in women can easily be explained, without supposing that it springs from a desire to please the sex on which they depend. In short, it is absurd to suppose that a girl is naturally a coquette. It is absurd to suppose that a desire connected with the natural impulse to propagate the species should appear even before an improper education has called it forth prematurely by heating the imagination. The idea is so unphilosophical that so shrewd an observer as Rousseau would never have adopted it, had he not been in the habit of making reason give way to his love of being singular, and truth to a favorite paradox.

3.14 Yet giving a sex to the mind in this way was hardly consistent with the principles of a man who argued so warmly, and so well, for the immortality of the soul.—But what a weak barrier truth is when it stands in the way of a hypothesis! Rousseau respected, almost adored, virtue, and yet he allowed himself to love with sensual fondness. His imagination constantly prepared inflammable fuel for his inflammable senses. But he also respected self-denial, fortitude, and those heroic virtues that a mind like his could not coolly admire. To reconcile the two, he labors to invert the law of nature, and puts forward a doctrine full of mischief and insulting to the character of supreme wisdom.

3.15 His ridiculous stories, meant to prove that girls are *naturally* attentive to their appearance without giving any weight to daily example, are beneath contempt.—He tells of a little miss with such correct taste that she gave up the pleasant amusement of making O's merely because she saw it was an ungraceful posture. That tale should be filed alongside the anecdotes of the

learned pig[6]. I have probably had more chances to observe girls in their infancy than J. J.[7] Rousseau—I can remember my own feelings, and I have looked steadily around me. Yet, far from agreeing with him about the first dawn of the female character, I will venture to affirm the opposite. A girl whose spirits have not been dampened by inactivity, and whose innocence has not been tainted by false shame, will always be a romp. The doll will never hold her attention unless confinement leaves her no alternative. In short, girls and boys would play harmlessly together if the distinction of sex were not drummed into them long before nature makes any difference.—I will go further, and affirm as an indisputable fact that most of the women within my observation who have acted like rational creatures, or shown any vigor of intellect, have happened to be allowed to run wild, as some of the elegant shapers of the fair sex would put it.

3.16 The harmful consequences of neglecting health in infancy and youth reach further than people suppose. Dependence of body naturally produces dependence of mind. And how can a woman be a good wife or mother when most of her time is spent guarding against sickness or enduring it? Nor can we expect a woman to work resolutely at strengthening her constitution, and to give up enervating indulgences, if artificial notions of beauty and false descriptions of sensibility were tangled up early with her motives for acting. Most men are sometimes obliged to put up with bodily discomfort, and now and then to

6 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. "I once knew a young girl who learned to write before she learned to read, and began to write with her needle before she could use a pen. At first, indeed, she took it into her head to make no letter but the O. She was always making this letter, in all sizes, and always the wrong way. Unluckily, one day, while she was intent on this occupation, she happened to see herself in the mirror. Taking a dislike to the awkward posture she sat in while writing, she threw away her pen, like another Pallas, and resolved never to make the O again. Her brother was just as averse to writing; but it was the confinement, not the awkward posture, that most disgusted him." *Rousseau's Emile*.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. In the myth, Pallas Athena threw away the flute she had invented after seeing her puffed-out cheeks reflected in water.

7 The "learned pig" was a performing pig shown in London in the 1780s that supposedly spelled out words with lettered cards.

endure harsh weather. But genteel women are, quite literally, slaves to their bodies—and they glory in their subjection.

3.17 I once knew a weak woman of fashion who was more than usually proud of her delicacy and sensibility. She thought a fastidious taste and a puny appetite the height of all human perfection, and acted accordingly. I have seen this weak, artificial creature neglect all the duties of life, yet recline complacently on a sofa and boast of her lack of appetite as proof of a delicacy that extended to—or perhaps arose from—her exquisite sensibility. It is hard to make such ridiculous jargon intelligible. Yet at that very moment I have seen her insult a worthy old gentlewoman whom unexpected misfortunes had made dependent on her showy charity, and who, in better days, had earned her gratitude. Could a human creature possibly have become so weak and depraved a being unless, as with the Sybarites dissolved in luxury, everything resembling virtue had been worn away, or had never been impressed on her by precept? Precept is a poor substitute, it is true, for cultivation of the mind, but it does serve as a fence against vice.[8]

3.18 Such a woman is no more irrational a monster than some of the Roman emperors, who were depraved by lawless power. Yet since kings have been more restrained by law, and by the curb of honor, however weak, the records of history are no longer filled with such unnatural examples of folly and cruelty. Nor does the despotism that kills virtue and genius in the bud hang over Europe with the destructive blast that lays Turkey waste and makes the men, as well as the soil, barren.

3.19 Women everywhere are in this deplorable state. To preserve their innocence—as ignorance is politely called—truth is hidden from them, and they are made to take on an artificial character before their faculties have gained any strength. Taught from infancy that beauty is woman's scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body and, roaming around its gilded cage, seeks only to decorate its prison. Men have various occupations

8 The Sybarites, citizens of the ancient Greek city of Sybaris in southern Italy, were proverbial for luxury and self-indulgence.

and pursuits that engage their attention and give character to the developing mind. But women are confined to one, and their thoughts are constantly directed to the most insignificant part of themselves, so they rarely look beyond the triumph of the hour. But suppose their understanding were once freed from the slavery to which they have been subjected by the pride and sensuality of man, and by their own short-sighted desire for present sway, which is like tyrants' desire for dominion. We would probably read of their weaknesses with surprise. I must be allowed to pursue the argument a little further.

3.20 Perhaps, if we granted the existence of an evil being who, in the allegorical language of scripture, went about seeking whom he might devour, he could not degrade human character more effectively than by giving a man absolute power.

3.21 This argument branches out in various directions. Birth, riches, and every external advantage that raise a man above his fellows without any effort of mind actually sink him below them. In proportion to his weakness, he is played upon by scheming men, until the bloated monster has lost every trace of humanity. And that tribes of men should quietly follow such a leader, like flocks of sheep, is an absurdity that only a desire for present enjoyment and narrowness of understanding can explain. Men are raised in slavish dependence and weakened by luxury and idleness. Where, then, will we find men who will stand up to assert the rights of man, or claim the privilege of moral beings, who should have only one road to excellence? Slavery to monarchs and ministers has not yet been abolished. The world will take a long time to free itself from it, and its deadly grip stops the progress of the human mind.

3.22 So let men not, in the pride of power, use the same arguments that tyrannical kings and corrupt ministers have used, and falsely assert that woman ought to be subjected because she always has been. But when man, governed by reasonable laws, enjoys his natural freedom, let him despise woman if she does not share it with him. And until that glorious time arrives, when

he holds forth on the folly of women, let him not overlook his own.

3.23 Women, it is true, when they obtain power by unjust means, by practicing or fostering vice, clearly lose the rank that reason would assign them. They become either abject slaves or capricious tyrants. In acquiring power they lose all simplicity and all dignity of mind, and they act as men are seen to act when they have been raised up by the same means.

A REVOLUTION IN FEMALE MANNERS

She calls for women to reform themselves and the world, and grounds morality in God's balanced attributes.

3.24 It is time to effect a revolution in female manners—time to restore to them their lost dignity—and to make them, as a part of the human species, labor to reform the world by reforming themselves. It is time to separate unchangeable morals from local manners. If men are demigods—why, let us serve them! And if the dignity of the female soul is as debatable as that of animals—if their reason does not give them enough light to direct their conduct, while unerring instinct is denied them—then surely they are the most miserable of all creatures! Bent beneath the iron hand of destiny, they must submit to being a *fair defect* in creation.[9] But try to justify the ways of Providence toward women by pointing to some unanswerable reason for making so large a portion of humanity both accountable and not accountable. That task would baffle the subtlest casuist.

3.25 The only solid foundation for morality seems to be the character of the Supreme Being. The harmony of that character arises from a balance of attributes, and, to speak with reverence, one attribute seems to imply the *necessity* of another. He must be just, because he is wise; he must be good, because he is omnipotent. To exalt one attribute at the expense of another equally noble and necessary bears the stamp of man's warped

9 "Fair defect" is from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (10.891–92), where Adam calls Eve "this fair defect / Of Nature."

reason: it is the homage of passion. Man is used to bowing down to power in his pre-civilized state, and he can rarely rid himself of this barbarous prejudice, even when civilization shows how far mental strength surpasses bodily strength. These crude opinions cloud his reason even when he thinks of the Deity. God's omnipotence is made to swallow up his other attributes, or to preside over them. Those mortals who think that his power must be regulated by his wisdom are supposed to be irreverently limiting it.

3.26 I reject that plausible humility which, after investigating nature, stops short at its author. The High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity doubtless possesses many attributes of which we can form no idea. But reason tells me that they cannot clash with those I adore, and I am compelled to listen to her voice.

3.27 It seems natural for man to look for excellence. He either traces it in the object he worships, or blindly wraps that object in perfection, like a garment. But what good effect can the second kind of worship have on the moral conduct of a rational being? He bows to power; he adores a dark cloud, which may open a bright prospect to him, or burst in angry, lawless fury on his doomed head—he does not know why. And if we suppose that the Deity acts from the vague impulse of an undirected will, then man too must follow his own will, or else act by rules deduced from principles that he rejects as irreverent. Both religious enthusiasts and cooler thinkers have fallen into this dilemma, when they labored to free people from the healthy restraints that a just conception of God's character imposes.

3.28 It is not impious to examine the attributes of the Almighty in this way. Indeed, who that uses his faculties can avoid it? To love God as the source of wisdom, goodness, and power seems to be the only worship useful to a being who wishes to acquire either virtue or knowledge. A blind, unsettled affection may, like human passions, occupy the mind and warm the heart, while doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God are forgotten. I shall pursue this subject further when I con-

sider religion in a light opposite to the one recommended by Dr. Gregory, who treats it as a matter of sentiment or taste.

3.29 To return from this apparent digression: it is to be wished that women would cherish an affection for their husbands founded on the same principle that devotion ought to rest on. There is no other firm foundation under heaven. Let them beware of the deceptive light of sentiment, which is too often used as a softer word for sensuality. It follows, then, I think, that from infancy women should either be shut up like Eastern princes, or be educated so as to be able to think and act for themselves.

3.30 Why do men waver between two opinions and expect the impossible? Why do they expect virtue from a slave—from a being whom the constitution of civil society has made weak, if not vicious?

3.31 Still, I know it will take a considerable time to root out the firmly established prejudices that sensualists have planted. It will also take some time to convince women that they act against their real interest, on a larger scale, when they cherish or affect weakness under the name of delicacy. And it will take time to convince the world that the poisoned source of female vices and follies has been the sensual homage paid to beauty (if I may, following custom, use those two terms loosely as synonyms). I mean beauty of features. A German writer has shrewdly observed that men of every sort generally agree that a pretty woman is pretty, as an object of desire. A fine woman, however, who inspires more sublime emotions by displaying intellectual beauty, may be overlooked or regarded with indifference by those men who find their happiness in gratifying their appetites. I foresee an obvious retort. As long as man remains the imperfect being he seems so far to have been, he will be, more or less, the slave of his appetites. Since the women who gratify his predominant appetite gain the most power, women are degraded by a physical, if not a moral, necessity.

3.32 This objection has some force, I grant. But while so sublime a precept exists as "be pure as your heavenly Father is pure," it would seem that man's virtues are not limited by the

Being who alone could limit them. He may press forward without worrying whether he steps out of his sphere by indulging so noble an ambition. To the wild waves it has been said, "thus far you shall go, and no further; and here your proud waves shall be stopped." So they beat and foam in vain, held back by the power that keeps the struggling planets in their orbits. Matter yields to the great governing Spirit. But an immortal soul is not restrained by mechanical laws, and it struggles to free itself from the shackles of matter. When such a soul cooperates with the Father of spirits and tries to govern itself by the same unvarying rule by which the universe is regulated—to a degree before which our imagination faints—it contributes to the order of creation instead of disturbing it.

3.33 Besides, if women are educated for dependence, that is, to act according to the will of another fallible being and to submit to power, right or wrong, where are we to stop? Are they to be regarded as deputies allowed to rule over a small domain, and answerable for their conduct to a higher tribunal that is itself liable to error?

3.34 It will not be hard to prove that such deputies will act like men ruled by fear, and make their children and servants endure their tyrannical oppression. Since they submit without reason, they will have no fixed rules to square their conduct by. They will be kind or cruel just as the whim of the moment directs. And we ought not to wonder if sometimes, chafed by their heavy yoke, they take a malicious pleasure in laying it on weaker shoulders.

TWO WIDOWS

She contrasts a widow trained only to please with one whose mind and body have been strengthened.

3.35 But suppose a woman trained up to obedience is married to a sensible man. He directs her judgment without making her feel the servility of her subjection, so that she acts with as much propriety by this reflected light as can be expected when reason is

taken secondhand. Still, she cannot guarantee the life of her protector. He may die and leave her with a large family.

3.36 A double duty then falls on her. She must educate the children as both father and mother, form their principles and secure their property. But, alas! she has never thought for herself, much less acted for herself. She has only learned to please[10] men, to depend on them gracefully. Yet, burdened with children, how is she to find another protector—a husband to take the place of reason? A rational man (for we are not walking on romantic ground) may think her a pleasing, docile creature. But he will not choose to marry a *family* for love, when the world contains so many other pretty creatures. What, then, is to become of her? Either she falls easy prey to some mean fortune hunter, who cheats her children of their father's inheritance and makes her miserable; or she becomes the victim of discontent and blind indulgence. She is unable to educate her sons or to impress them with respect, for it is no play on words to say that people who are not respectable are never respected, however

10 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. "In the union of the sexes, both pursue one common object, but not in the same manner. From their difference in this respect arises the first definite difference between the moral relations of each. The one should be active and strong, the other passive and weak: it is necessary that the one should have both the power and the will, and that the other should make little resistance.

"This principle being established, it follows that woman is expressly formed to please the man. If the obligation is mutual too, and the man ought to please in his turn, it is not so immediately necessary: his great merit lies in his power, and he pleases simply because he is strong. This, I must admit, is not one of the refined maxims of love; it is, however, one of the laws of nature, prior to love itself.

"If woman is formed to please and to be subjected to man, it is her place, doubtless, to make herself agreeable to him, instead of provoking his passion. The violence of his desires depends on her charms; it is by means of these that she should urge him to exert the powers that nature has given him. The most successful way of exciting those powers is to make such exertion necessary by resistance; for in that case self-love is added to desire, and the one triumphs in the victory that the other was obliged to win. Hence arise the various modes of attack and defense between the sexes: the boldness of one sex and the timidity of the other; and, in a word, that bashfulness and modesty with which nature has armed the weak in order to subdue the strong." *Rousseau's Emile*.

I shall make no other comment on this ingenious passage than simply to observe that it is the philosophy of lasciviousness.

important their position. So she pines in the anguish of useless, impotent regret. The serpent's tooth enters her very soul, and the vices of dissolute youth bring her with sorrow, if not also with poverty, to the grave.[11]

3.37 This is not an exaggerated picture. On the contrary, it is a very possible case, and something like it must have come before every attentive eye.

3.38 I have, however, assumed that she meant well, though experience shows that the blind may as easily be led into a ditch as along the beaten road. But suppose, as is not very improbable, that a being taught only to please must still find her happiness in pleasing. What an example of folly, not to say vice, she will be to her innocent daughters! The mother will be lost in the coquette. Instead of making friends of her daughters, she will look at them askance, for they are rivals. They are crueler rivals than any others, because they invite comparison and drive her from the throne of beauty, and she has never thought of a seat on the bench of reason.

3.39 It takes no lively pencil, nor the sharp outline of a caricature, to sketch the domestic miseries and petty vices that such a mistress of a household spreads around her. Yet she only acts as a woman brought up according to Rousseau's system ought to act. She can never be reproached for being masculine or stepping out of her sphere. Indeed, she may observe another of his grand rules, carefully keep her reputation spotless, and so be reckoned a good sort of woman. Yet in what respect can she be called good? She refrains, it is true, without any great struggle, from committing gross crimes. But how does she fulfill her duties? Duties!—truly, she has enough to think about in adorning her body and nursing a weak constitution.

3.40 As for religion, she never presumed to judge for herself. She conformed, as a dependent creature should, to the ceremonies of the church she was brought up in, piously believing that wiser heads than hers have settled that business. Not to doubt is

11 The "serpent's tooth" echoes Shakespeare's *King Lear*: "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is / To have a thankless child!"

her idea of perfection. So she pays her tithe of mint and cumin, and thanks her God that she is not as other women are. These are the blessed effects of a good education! These are the virtues of man's helpmate[12]![13]

3.41 I must relieve my feelings by drawing a different picture.

3.42 Let the imagination now picture a woman of fair understanding (for I do not wish to leave the level of the ordinary). Her constitution, strengthened by exercise, has let her body reach its full vigor. At the same time her mind has gradually expanded to grasp the moral duties of life, and what human virtue and dignity consist in.

3.43 Formed in this way by carrying out the duties of her relationships and her station, she marries for love, without losing sight of prudence. Looking beyond married bliss, she secures her husband's respect before she needs to use mean arts to please him and feed a dying flame. Nature doomed that flame to go out once its object became familiar, when friendship and forbearance take the place of a more ardent affection. This is the natural death of love, and domestic peace is not destroyed by struggles to prevent its extinction. I also assume the husband to be virtuous; otherwise she needs independent principles all the more.

3.44 Fate, however, breaks this bond. She is left a widow, perhaps without sufficient means; but she is not desolate! She feels nature's pang. But after time has softened sorrow into melancholy resignation, her heart turns to her children with redoubled fondness. In her anxiety to provide for them, affec-

12 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. "Oh, how lovely," exclaims Rousseau, speaking of Sophie, "is her ignorance! Happy is he who is destined to instruct her! She will never pretend to be her husband's tutor, but will be content to be his pupil. Far from trying to subject him to her taste, she will adapt herself to his. She will be worth more to him than if she were learned: he will take pleasure in instructing her." *Rousseau's Emile*.

I shall content myself with simply asking how friendship can survive between the master and his pupil when love dies.

13 An echo of Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees, who tithe "mint and cumin" but neglect justice (Matthew 23:23), and of the Pharisee who thanks God he is "not as other men are" (Luke 18:11).

tion gives her maternal duties a sacred and heroic cast. She thinks that her virtuous efforts are seen by the eye from which all her comfort must now flow, and whose approval is life. Her imagination, a little withdrawn and exalted by grief, also dwells on the fond hope that the eyes her trembling hand closed may still see how she subdues every wayward passion to fulfill the double duty of being both father and mother to her children. Raised to heroism by misfortune, she represses the first faint dawn of a natural inclination before it ripens into love. In the bloom of life she forgets her sex—forgets the pleasure of an awakening passion, which might have been inspired and returned once more. She no longer thinks of pleasing, and a sense of her own dignity keeps her from priding herself on the praise her conduct deserves. Her children have her love, and her brightest hopes lie beyond the grave, where her imagination often wanders.

3.45 I think I see her surrounded by her children, reaping the reward of her care. Their intelligent eyes meet hers, while health and innocence smile on their chubby cheeks. As they grow up, their grateful attention lightens the cares of life. She lives to see the virtues she tried to plant on principle fixed into habits. She sees her children gain enough strength of character to endure adversity without forgetting their mother's example.

3.46 Her life's task thus fulfilled, she calmly awaits the sleep of death, and, rising from the grave, may say: Behold, you gave me a talent—and here are five talents.[14]

NO SEXUAL VIRTUES

She denies that there are separate virtues for each sex and insists on one standard of truth.

3.47 I want to sum up what I have said in a few words, for here I throw down my gauntlet and deny that there are separate virtues for each sex—not excepting modesty. For man and woman,

14 An allusion to the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30), in which faithful servants return their master's money multiplied.

truth must be the same, if I understand the meaning of the word. Yet the fanciful female character, so prettily drawn by poets and novelists, demands the sacrifice of truth and sincerity. So virtue becomes a relative idea, with no foundation but utility. And men claim the arbitrary right to judge that utility, shaping it to their own convenience.

3.48 Women, I grant, may have different duties to fulfill. But they are *human* duties, and I stoutly maintain that the principles that should govern how they are carried out must be the same.

3.49 To become respectable, women must exercise their understanding. There is no other foundation for independence of character. I mean to say explicitly that they must bow only to the authority of reason, instead of being the *modest* slaves of opinion.

3.50 In the upper ranks of life, how rarely do we meet a man of superior abilities, or even of ordinary attainments? The reason seems clear to me: the state they are born into is an unnatural one. Human character has always been formed by the occupations that the individual or class pursues. If the faculties are not sharpened by necessity, they must stay dull. The argument may fairly be extended to women. Rarely occupied with serious business, they pursue pleasure, and that pursuit gives their character the insignificance that makes the society of the *great* so insipid. The same lack of firmness, produced by a similar cause, drives both of them to flee from themselves into noisy pleasures and artificial passions. In the end vanity takes the place of every social affection, and the marks of humanity can hardly be made out. Such are the blessings of civil governments as they are now organized: wealth and female softness equally tend to debase humanity, and they are produced by the same cause. But if women are granted to be rational creatures, they should be urged to acquire virtues they can call their own. For how can a rational being be ennobled by anything that is not obtained by its *own* exertions?

Chapter IV: Observations on the State of Degradation to Which Woman Is Reduced by Various Causes

How pleasure, sensibility, dependence and the wish to please keep women from reason and make them tyrants and slaves.

4.1 It is clear, I think, that woman is either naturally weak or degraded by a combination of circumstances. I shall simply set this proposition beside a conclusion I have often heard sensible men draw in favor of aristocracy. They say that the mass of mankind cannot amount to anything; otherwise the servile slaves who patiently let themselves be penned up would feel their own importance and spurn their chains. Men everywhere submit to oppression, these sensible men go on to observe, when they have only to lift up their heads to throw off the yoke. Yet instead of asserting their birthright, they quietly lick the dust and say, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Women, I argue by analogy, are degraded by the same tendency to enjoy the present moment. In the end they despise the freedom they lack the virtue to struggle for. But I must be more explicit.

4.2 As regards cultivating the heart, all agree that sex does not come into it; but the line of subordination in the powers of the

mind must never be crossed[1]. Being only "absolute in loveliness," woman is granted a very scanty portion of rationality indeed. For once genius and judgment are denied her, it is hard to guess what is left to characterize intellect.[2]

4.3 The essential ground of immortality, if I may put it that way, is the perfectibility of human reason. Suppose man had been created perfect, or a flood of knowledge had broken in on him when he reached maturity and ruled out error. Then I would doubt whether his existence would continue after the body dissolved. But in the present state of things, some moral difficulties escape human discussion and baffle both the investigations of deep thought and the lightning glance of genius. Every such difficulty is an argument on which I build my belief in the immortality of the soul. Reason, consequently, is simply the power of improvement—or, more properly, of discerning truth. Every individual is in this respect a world in itself. Reason may show itself more in one being than in another. But its nature must be the same in all, if it is an emanation of divinity, the tie that connects the creature with the Creator. For can a soul bear the stamp of the heavenly image if it is not perfected by the exercise of its own reason[3]? Yet the soul of woman is outwardly decorated with elaborate care, and so adorned to delight

1 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. What inconsistencies men fall into when they argue without the compass of principles! Women—weak women—are compared to angels. Yet a superior order of beings must be supposed to possess more intellect than man, or in what does their superiority consist? In the same style (to drop the sneer), women are allowed to possess more goodness of heart, piety, and benevolence. I doubt the fact, however courteously it is put forward, unless ignorance is granted to be the mother of devotion. For I am firmly convinced that, on average, virtue keeps pace with knowledge more closely than is commonly admitted.

2 "Absolute in loveliness" is from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (8.547), where Adam describes Eve.

3 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. "Animals," says Lord Monboddo, "remain in the state in which nature has placed them, except insofar as their natural instinct is improved by the training *we* give them."

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. James Burnett, Lord Monboddo (1714–1799), Scottish judge and author of *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*.

man, "that with honor he may love[4]." It is not allowed this distinction. With man always placed between her and reason, she is always represented as created only to see through a coarse medium and to take things on trust. But let us dismiss these fanciful theories and consider woman as a whole, whatever that may be, rather than as a part of man. The question is whether she has reason or not. If she has (which for the moment I will take for granted), she was not created merely to be man's comfort, and her character as a woman should not destroy her character as a human being.

4.4 Men have probably been led into this error by viewing education in a false light. They have not seen it as the first step in forming a being who advances gradually toward perfection[5], but only as a preparation for life. On this sensual error (for I must call it that) the false system of female manners has been built. That system robs the whole sex of its dignity and classes women, dark and fair alike, with the smiling flowers that merely decorate the land. This has always been the language of men. Even women of superior sense have adopted the same views, for

4 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. See Milton.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. *Paradise Lost* 8.576–77, where the angel Raphael tells Adam to value Eve's outward beauty "that with honour thou may'st love / Thy mate."

5 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. This word is not strictly accurate, but I cannot find a better one.

fear of departing from a supposed character proper to their sex[6]. Thus understanding, strictly speaking, has been denied to woman. Instinct, refined into wit and cunning for the purposes of life, has been put in its place.

THE POWER OF GENERALIZING

She argues that women are kept from forming general ideas, the only knowledge worth the name.

4.5 The power of generalizing ideas, of drawing broad conclusions from individual observations, is the only acquirement that truly deserves the name of knowledge for an immortal being. Merely observing, without trying to account for anything, may serve (in a very incomplete way) as the common sense of life. But where is the store laid up that is to clothe the soul when it leaves the body?

4.6 This power has not only been denied to women. Writers have also insisted that, with a few exceptions, it is inconsistent with their character as women. Let men prove this, and I will grant that woman exists only for man. I must first remark, however, that the power of generalizing ideas to any great extent is

6 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. "Pleasure's the portion of th' *inferior* kind; / But glory, virtue, Heaven for *man* designed."

After writing these lines, how could Mrs. Barbauld write the following ignoble comparison?

"*To a Lady, with some painted flowers.*" / "Flowers to the fair: to you these flowers I bring, / And strive to greet you with an earlier spring. / *Flowers* sweet, *and gay, and* delicate like you; / *Emblems of innocence, and beauty too*. / With flowers the Graces bind their yellow hair, / And flowery wreaths consenting lovers wear. / *Flowers, the sole luxury which nature knew,* / In Eden's pure and guiltless garden grew. / *To loftier forms are rougher tasks assigned*; / *The sheltering oak resists the stormy wind*, / *The tougher yew repels invading foes*, / *And the tall pine for future navies grows*; / *But this soft family, to cares unknown*, / *Were born for pleasure and delight* alone. / Gay without toil, and lovely without art, / *They spring to* cheer *the sense, and* glad *the heart*, / Nor blush, my fair, to own you copy these; / *Your* best, *your* sweetest *empire* is—to please."

So the men tell us; but virtue must be acquired by *rough* toil and useful struggles with worldly *cares*.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743–1825), English poet and essayist; both passages come from her *Poems* (1773).

not very common among men or women. But this exercise is the true cultivation of the understanding, and everything conspires to make cultivating the understanding harder in the female world than in the male.

4.7 This assertion leads me naturally to the main subject of the present chapter. I shall now try to point out some of the causes that degrade women and prevent them from generalizing their observations.

4.8 I shall not go back to the distant annals of antiquity to trace the history of woman. It is enough to grant that she has always been either a slave or a despot, and to remark that each of these situations equally holds back the progress of reason. The great source of female folly and vice has always seemed to me to be narrowness of mind. The very constitution of civil governments has put almost insurmountable obstacles in the way of cultivating the female understanding—yet virtue can be built on no other foundation! The same obstacles are thrown in the way of the rich, with the same consequences.

4.9 Necessity has proverbially been called the mother of invention—the saying may be extended to virtue. Virtue is an acquirement, and an acquirement for which pleasure must be sacrificed. And who sacrifices pleasure when it is within reach, unless their mind has been opened and strengthened by adversity, or by the pursuit of knowledge spurred on by necessity? Happy are people who have the cares of life to struggle with! These struggles keep them from falling prey to enervating vices merely out of idleness. But suppose that from birth men and women are placed in a torrid zone, with the noonday sun of pleasure beating straight down on them. How can they brace their minds enough to carry out the duties of life, or even to enjoy the affections that carry them out of themselves?

4.10 Pleasure is the business of woman's life, as society is now arranged, and while it remains so, little can be expected from such weak beings. They have inherited the sovereignty of beauty in direct descent from the first fair defect in nature. To keep their power, they have given up the natural rights that the

exercise of reason might have won them. They have chosen to be short-lived queens rather than work to gain the sober pleasures that arise from equality. Exalted by their inferiority (this sounds like a contradiction), they constantly demand homage as women. Yet experience should teach them better. The men who pride themselves on paying this arbitrary, insolent respect to the sex with the most scrupulous exactness are the most inclined to tyrannize over, and despise, the very weakness they cherish. Such men often repeat Mr. Hume's sentiments, when, comparing the French and Athenian character, he alludes to women.[7] "But what is more singular in this whimsical nation, I say to the Athenians, is that a frolic of yours during the Saturnalia, when the slaves are served by their masters, is seriously continued by them through the whole year and the whole course of their lives—accompanied, too, by some circumstances that further increase the absurdity and ridicule. Your sport only raises up for a few days those whom fortune has thrown down, and whom she too, in sport, may really raise forever above you. But this nation gravely exalts those whom nature has subjected to them, and whose inferiority and infirmities are absolutely incurable. The women, though without virtue, are their masters and sovereigns."

4.11 Ah! why do women (I write with affectionate concern) stoop to receive from strangers a kind of attention and respect that differs from the reciprocal civility that the dictates of humanity and the politeness of civilization authorize between man and man? And why do they not discover, when "in the noon of beauty's power," that they are treated like queens only to be deluded by hollow respect, until they are led to give up their natural prerogatives, or never take them up? Confined then in cages like birds, they have nothing to do but preen themselves and strut with mock majesty from perch to perch. It is true they are provided with food and clothing, for which they neither toil

7 David Hume, "A Dialogue," appended to his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751); the speaker imagines explaining French customs to the ancient Athenians.

nor spin; but health, liberty, and virtue are given in exchange. Yet where among humankind has anyone been found with enough strength of mind to give up these accidental prerogatives? Who has risen with the calm dignity of reason above opinion, and dared to be proud of the privileges inherent in being human? And it is vain to expect it while hereditary power chokes the affections and nips reason in the bud.

4.12 The passions of men have thus placed women on thrones. Until humanity becomes more reasonable, it is to be feared that women will make use of the power that they gain with the least effort, and that is the least disputed. They will smile—yes, they will smile, though told that—

4.13 "In beauty's empire is no mean,
And woman, either slave or queen,
Is quickly scorned when not adored."

4.14 But the adoration comes first, and no one sees the scorn coming.

4.15 Louis XIV in particular spread artificial manners, and with a plausible show he caught the whole nation in his net. By building an artful chain of despotism, he made it in the interest of every individual to respect his position and support his power. And women, whom he flattered with a childish attentiveness to their whole sex, gained in his reign that princely distinction which is so fatal to reason and virtue.[8]

4.16 A king is always a king—and a woman always a woman[9]: his authority and her sex always stand between them and rational conversation. With a lover, I grant, she should be a woman, and her sensibility will naturally lead her to try to stir his emotions, to gratify not her vanity but her heart. I do not count this as coquetry if it is the artless impulse of nature. I only

8 Louis XIV (reigned 1643–1715), king of France, whose court at Versailles set the pattern of aristocratic manners for Europe.

9 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. One might add that a wit is always a wit. The vain antics by which wits and beauties try to attract attention and make conquests are much of a piece.

protest against the sexual appetite for conquest when the heart has nothing to do with it.

4.17 This desire is not confined to women. "I have tried," says Lord Chesterfield, "to win the hearts of twenty women whose persons I would not have given a fig for." The libertine who, in a gust of passion, takes advantage of unsuspecting tenderness is a saint compared with this cold-hearted rascal—for I like to use words that mean something. Yet because they are taught only to please, women are always on the watch to please. With truly heroic ardor they try to win hearts merely to give them up, or spurn them, once the victory is decided and on display.[10]

4.18 I must now get down to the small details of the subject.

TRIVIAL ATTENTIONS

She condemns the gallantries paid to women and compares women to the idle rich and nobility.

4.19 I lament that women are systematically degraded by accepting the trivial attentions that men think it manly to pay them. In fact, by paying them, men are insultingly asserting their own superiority. It is no condescension to bow to an inferior. These ceremonies strike me as so ludicrous that I can scarcely keep a straight face when I see a man leap up with eager, serious concern to pick up a handkerchief or shut a door, when the *lady* could have done it herself had she only moved a step or two.

4.20 A wild wish has just flown from my heart to my head, and I will not stifle it, though it may provoke a horse-laugh.—I earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex blurred in society, except where love animates behavior. I am firmly convinced that this distinction is the foundation of the weakness of character attributed to woman. It is the reason why the understanding is neglected while accomplishments are acquired with painstaking care. The same cause explains why women prefer the graceful virtues to the heroic ones.

10 Philip Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield (1694–1773), whose *Letters to His Son* became a byword for polished worldly cynicism.

4.21 People of every kind wish to be loved and respected for *something*, and the common herd will always take the shortest road to getting what they want. The respect paid to wealth and beauty is the surest and least ambiguous, so it will always catch the vulgar eye of common minds. Men from the middle rank of life can rise into notice only through ability and virtue, and the natural consequence is well known: the middle rank contains the most virtue and ability. So men, in one station at least, have the chance to exert themselves with dignity and to rise by the kind of effort that really improves a rational creature. But until their character is formed, all women are in the same condition as the rich. They are born (I am speaking now of a civilized state) with certain sexual privileges, and while these are handed to them for nothing, few will ever think of doing more than is required in order to win the esteem of a small number of superior people.

4.22 When do we hear of women who rise out of obscurity and boldly claim respect for their great abilities or daring virtues? Where are they to be found?—"To be observed, to be attended to, to be noticed with sympathy, satisfaction, and approval, are all the advantages they seek."—True! my male readers will probably exclaim. But before they draw any conclusion, let them remember that this was not originally written as a description of women, but of the rich. In Dr. Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* I have found a general portrait of people of rank and fortune that, in my opinion, could quite properly be applied to women.[11] I refer the shrewd reader to the whole comparison. But I must be allowed to quote a passage to reinforce an argument I intend to press, because I think it is the most conclusive one against the idea of a distinct sexual character. Apart from warriors, no great men of any kind have ever appeared among the nobility. May we not fairly infer that their particular situation swallowed up the man and produced a character like that of women? Women are *localized*, if I may use the word, by the rank they are given by *courtesy*. Women, commonly called Ladies, are not to be contra-

11 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Part I, section iii, chapter 2.

dicted in company and are not allowed to use any physical strength. Only the negative virtues are expected of them, when any virtues are expected at all: patience, docility, good humor, and flexibility. These virtues are incompatible with any vigorous use of the intellect. Besides, because they live more with one another and are seldom entirely alone, they are more under the influence of sentiments than of passions. Solitude and reflection are needed to give wishes the force of passions, and to let the imagination enlarge the object until it becomes the most desirable of all. The same may be said of the rich. They do not deal enough in general ideas, gathered by impassioned thinking or calm inquiry, to acquire that strength of character on which great resolutions are built. But hear what a sharp observer says of the great.

4.23 "Do the great seem unaware of how cheaply they may buy public admiration? Or do they seem to imagine that, for them as for other men, it must be paid for with sweat or with blood? By what important accomplishments is the young nobleman taught to uphold the dignity of his rank, and to make himself worthy of that superiority over his fellow citizens to which the virtue of his ancestors raised them? Is it by knowledge, by hard work, by patience, by self-denial, or by virtue of any kind? As all his words and all his movements are watched, he learns a habitual attention to every detail of ordinary behavior, and he studies to perform all those small duties with the most exact propriety. He knows how much he is observed, and how inclined people are to indulge his every wish, so he acts on the most trivial occasions with the freedom and loftiness that this thought naturally inspires. His air, his manner, his bearing all display that elegant and graceful sense of his own superiority which those born to a lower station can hardly ever attain. These are the arts by which he means to make people submit more readily to his authority and to steer their wishes as he pleases, and in this he is seldom disappointed. Backed by rank and pre-eminence, these arts are enough to govern the world on ordinary occasions. For most of his reign, Louis XIV was regarded, not only in France but

throughout Europe, as the most perfect model of a great prince. But what were the talents and virtues by which he acquired this great reputation? Was it the scrupulous and inflexible justice of all his undertakings, the immense dangers and difficulties that attended them, or the tireless, unrelenting application with which he pursued them? Was it his wide knowledge, his exquisite judgment, or his heroic courage? It was none of these qualities. But he was, first of all, the most powerful prince in Europe, and therefore held the highest rank among kings. And then, says his historian, 'he surpassed all his courtiers in the gracefulness of his figure and the majestic beauty of his features. The sound of his voice, noble and moving, won the hearts that his presence intimidated. He had a walk and a bearing that could suit only him and his rank, and that would have been ridiculous in anyone else. The embarrassment he caused those who spoke to him flattered the secret satisfaction with which he felt his own superiority.' These frivolous accomplishments established this prince in the esteem of his own age, and have won a good deal of respect for his memory even from posterity. They were backed by his rank, and no doubt also by some degree of other talents and virtues, though these do not seem to have risen much above mediocrity. Compared with these accomplishments, in his own times and in his own presence, no other virtue, it seems, appeared to have any merit. Knowledge, industry, courage, and generosity trembled, were abashed, and lost all dignity before them."

4.24 Woman too, "in herself complete" in this way by possessing all these *frivolous* accomplishments, so changes the nature of things

4.25 —"That what she wills to do or say
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;
All higher knowledge in *her presence* falls
Degraded. Wisdom in discourse with her
Loses, discountenanced, and like Folly shows;
Authority and Reason on her wait."—[12]

4.26 And all this is built on her loveliness!

PLEASURE AS WOMAN'S BUSINESS

She shows how the pursuit of marriage and pleasure makes women creatures of sensation rather than reason.

4.27 To continue the comparison: in the middle rank of life, men are prepared in their youth for professions, and marriage is not seen as the great event of their lives. Women, on the contrary, have no other scheme to sharpen their faculties. It is not business, far-reaching plans, or any of the roving flights of ambition that occupy their attention. No, their thoughts are not employed in raising such noble structures. To rise in the world and be free to run from pleasure to pleasure, they must marry advantageously. To this goal their time is sacrificed, and their persons are often legally prostituted. A man entering a profession keeps his eye steadily fixed on some future advantage (and the mind gains great strength when all its efforts are directed at one point). Absorbed in his business, he regards pleasure as mere relaxation, whereas women seek pleasure as the main purpose of existence. In fact, given the education they receive from society, the love of pleasure may be said to govern them all. But does this prove that souls have a sex? It would be just as rational to declare that the courtiers of France, once a destructive system of despotism had formed their character, were not men, because they sacrificed liberty, virtue, and humanity to pleasure and

12 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 8, where Adam describes to the angel Raphael the effect Eve has on him.

vanity.—Fatal passions, which have always tyrannized over the *whole* human race!

4.28 The same love of pleasure, fostered by the whole drift of their education, gives a trifling cast to women's conduct in most circumstances. For instance, they are always anxious about secondary things, and they look out for adventures instead of attending to their duties.

4.29 A man setting out on a journey generally has the destination in view. A woman thinks more about the incidental events: the strange things that might happen on the road, and the impression she may make on her fellow travelers. Above all, she is anxiously intent on looking after the finery she carries with her. It is more than ever a part of herself when she is going to cut a figure on a new stage, when, to use an apt French turn of phrase, she is going to produce a sensation.—Can dignity of mind coexist with such trivial cares?

4.30 In short, women in general, like the rich of both sexes, have acquired all the follies and vices of civilization and missed its useful fruit. I need not keep stating in advance that I am speaking of the condition of the whole sex, leaving exceptions aside. Their senses are inflamed and their understandings neglected. As a result they become the prey of their senses, which is delicately called sensibility, and they are blown about by every passing gust of feeling. They are therefore in a much worse condition than they would be in a state closer to nature. They are forever restless and anxious, and their overexercised sensibility not only makes them uncomfortable themselves but also, to put it gently, troublesome to others. All their thoughts turn on things designed to stir emotion. Because they feel when they should reason, their conduct is unstable and their opinions waver. This is not the wavering that comes from deliberation or developing views, but the wavering produced by contradictory emotions. By fits and starts they are enthusiastic about many pursuits. Yet this enthusiasm is never concentrated into perseverance, and it soon exhausts itself. Either it burns off in its own heat, or it meets some other fleeting passion to which

reason has never given any particular weight, and neutrality follows. Miserable indeed must be the being whose cultivation of mind has only served to inflame its passions! We should distinguish between inflaming the passions and strengthening them. When the passions are pampered like this and the judgment is left unformed, what can we expect to follow?—A mixture of madness and folly, without a doubt!

4.31 This observation need not be confined to the *fair* sex. For the present, however, I mean to apply it only to women.

4.32 Novels, music, poetry, and gallantry all tend to make women creatures of sensation. Their character is formed this way while they are acquiring accomplishments, which are the only improvement their position in society encourages them to seek. This overstretched sensibility naturally slackens the other powers of the mind. It keeps the intellect from gaining the sovereignty it ought to have if a rational creature is to be useful to others and content with its own station. For as life goes on, the exercise of the understanding is the only method nature has pointed out for calming the passions.

4.33 Satiety has a very different effect. I have often been forcibly struck by a vivid description of damnation, in which the spirit is pictured endlessly hovering, with frustrated eagerness, around the defiled body, unable to enjoy anything without the organs of sense. Yet women are made slaves to their senses, because it is through their sensibility that they gain power in the present.

4.34 And will moralists presume to assert that this is the condition in which half the human race should be encouraged to remain, in listless inactivity and stupid acquiescence? Kind instructors! What were we created for? To remain innocent, it may be said, by which they mean in a state of childhood.—We might as well never have been born, unless we had to be created only so that man could acquire the noble privilege of reason, the power of telling good from evil, while we lie down in the dust from which we were taken, never to rise again.—

4.35 It would be an endless task to trace all the kinds of meanness, worry, and sorrow into which women are plunged by the prevailing opinion that they were created to feel rather than to reason, and that all the power they gain must be gained through their charms and their weakness:

4.36 "Fine by defect, and amiably weak!"[13]

4.37 This amiable weakness makes them entirely dependent on man, except for what they gain by illicit influence, not only for protection but for advice. Is it surprising, then, that they neglect the duties that reason alone points out, shrink from the trials meant to strengthen their minds, and exert themselves only to give their defects a graceful covering, which may heighten their charms in the eyes of the sensualist even as it sinks them below the scale of moral excellence?

4.38 Fragile in every sense of the word, they are forced to look to man for every comfort. In the most trivial dangers they cling to their support with parasitic tenacity, pitifully begging for help. Their *natural* protector then extends his arm or raises his voice to guard the lovely trembler—from what? Perhaps the frown of an old cow, or the jump of a mouse. A rat would be a serious danger. In the name of reason, and even of common sense, what can save such beings from contempt, however soft and fair they may be?

4.39 These fears, when they are not put on, may be very pretty. But they show a degree of feebleness that degrades a rational creature in a way women do not realize, for love and esteem are very different things.

4.40 I am fully convinced that we would hear of none of these childish airs if girls were allowed enough exercise, instead of being shut up in stuffy rooms until their muscles go slack and their digestion is ruined. To carry the point further: fear in girls is cherished and perhaps even created. If it were treated the way cowardice is treated in boys, we would soon see women with a more dignified bearing. It is true that they could not then so fittingly be called the sweet flowers that smile along man's path.

13 Adapted from Pope's *Epistle to a Lady*, which has "delicately weak."

But they would be more respectable members of society, and they would carry out the important duties of life by the light of their own reason. "Educate women like men," says Rousseau, "and the more they resemble our sex, the less power they will have over us." This is the very point I am aiming at. I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves.

4.41 I have heard men argue in the same strain against educating the poor, for aristocracy takes many forms. "Teach them to read and write," they say, "and you take them out of the station nature assigned them." An eloquent Frenchman has answered them, and I will borrow his ideas. When they make a man a brute, they do not realize that they may expect at any moment to see him turned into a ferocious beast. Without knowledge there can be no morality!

4.42 Ignorance is a frail foundation for virtue! Yet the writers who have argued most vehemently for man's superiority (a superiority not of degree but of essence) have insisted that ignorance is the condition for which woman was designed. To soften the argument, though, they have labored with chivalrous generosity to prove that the sexes ought not to be compared. Man was made to reason, woman to feel, and together, flesh and spirit, they make the most perfect whole, happily blending reason and sensibility into one character.

4.43 And what is sensibility? "Quickness of sensation; quickness of perception; delicacy." That is how Dr. Johnson defines it, and the definition gives me no other idea than that of a most exquisitely polished instinct. I see no trace of the image of God in either sensation or matter. Refine them seventy times seven, and they are still material. Intellect does not live there, and fire will never turn lead into gold![14]

4.44 I come back to my old argument. If woman is allowed to have an immortal soul, she must have an understanding to improve as the business of her life. Everything shows this present life to be only a fraction of a vast sum. So when she is lured by immediate gratification into forgetting her great des-

14 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755).

tiny, in order to make this present life more complete, then Nature is thwarted. Otherwise she was born only to breed and die. Or, if we grant animals of every kind a soul, though not a rational one, then the exercise of instinct and sensibility may be the step they are meant to take in this life toward attaining reason in the next. In that case they will lag behind man through all eternity, because man, for reasons we cannot tell, was given the power of attaining reason in his first mode of existence.

4.45 When I discuss the particular duties of women, as I would discuss the particular duties of a citizen or a father, it will be clear that I do not mean to suggest that women should be taken out of their families. I am speaking of the majority. "He that has wife and children," says Lord Bacon, "has given hostages to fortune; for they are impediments to great enterprises, whether of virtue or of mischief. Certainly the best works, and those of greatest merit for the public, have come from unmarried or childless men." I say the same of women.[15] But the welfare of society is not built on extraordinary efforts. If society were more reasonably organized, there would be even less need for great abilities or heroic virtues.

4.46 Running a household and educating children particularly require understanding, in a plain and unpretentious sense: strength of both body and mind. Yet the men whose writings have worked hardest to domesticate women have tried to weaken their bodies and cramp their minds, using arguments dictated by a gross appetite that satiety had made fastidious. Even so, suppose that by these sinister methods they really *persuaded* women, by working on their feelings, to stay at home and fulfill the duties of a mother and mistress of a household. Then I would be cautious about opposing opinions that led women to right conduct by getting them to make the performance of a duty the business of their lives, even though reason was insulted in the process. Yet (and I appeal to experience) neglecting the understanding detaches women from these domestic duties as

15 Francis Bacon, essay "Of Marriage and Single Life" (1612; revised 1625).

much as the most serious intellectual pursuit could, or even more. It may be observed, of course, that most people will never vigorously pursue an intellectual object[16]. Still, I may be allowed to infer that reason is absolutely necessary for a woman to perform any duty properly. And I must repeat once more that sensibility is not reason.

4.47 The comparison with the rich keeps coming back to me, for when men neglect the duties of humanity, women will do the same. A common current sweeps them both along with thoughtless speed. Riches and honors keep a man from enlarging his understanding and sap all his powers, because they reverse the order of nature, which has always made true pleasure the reward of labor. Pleasure (enervating pleasure) is likewise within women's reach without their earning it. But until inherited wealth is more widely spread, how can we expect men to take pride in virtue? And until they do, women will govern them by the most direct means, neglecting their dull domestic duties to snatch the pleasure that flies past on the wing of time.

4.48 "The power of woman," says some author, "is her sensibility." Men do not see the consequences, and they do everything they can to make this power swallow up every other. Those who constantly use their sensibility will have the most of it: poets, painters, and composers, for example[17]. Yet when sensibility is increased in this way at the expense of reason, and even of imagination, why do philosophical men complain of women's fickleness? Man's sexual attentions act especially on female sensibility, and women have been exercising this responsiveness since they were young. A husband cannot keep up those attentions for long with the passion needed to excite lively emotions. The heart, used to lively emotions, then turns to a new lover, or pines in secret, the victim of virtue or prudence. I mean when

16 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Most people are slaves of their appetites rather than of their passions.

17 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Men of these kinds pour it into their works to fuse the crude materials, and, molding them with passion, they give the inert body a soul. But in a woman's imagination, love alone gathers these ethereal rays to a single point.

the heart has really been made susceptible and the taste formed. From what I have seen of fashionable life, I am inclined to conclude that the kind of education and the relations between the sexes I have condemned foster vanity more often than sensibility. I also conclude that coquetry springs more often from vanity than from the inconstancy that overstrained sensibility naturally produces.

THE DEPENDENT SISTER

She describes the unmarried sister left dependent on a brother and his jealous wife.

4.49 Another argument has weighed heavily with me, and I think it must have some force with every thoughtful, kind heart. Girls who have been educated in this weak way are often cruelly left by their parents without any provision. They are then dependent not only on the reason but on the charity of their brothers. To look at the brighter side of the question, these brothers are decent enough men, and they give as a favor what children of the same parents had an equal right to. A docile woman may remain for some time in this ambiguous, humiliating position with a reasonable degree of comfort. But when the brother marries, as he probably will, she goes from being regarded as the mistress of the household to being viewed with averted eyes as an intruder, an unnecessary burden on the kindness of the master of the house and his new partner.

4.50 Who can recount the misery that many unfortunate beings, whose minds and bodies are equally weak, suffer in such situations—unable to work and ashamed to beg? Suppose the wife is a cold-hearted, narrow-minded woman. This is not an unfair supposition, for the present mode of education does no more to enlarge the heart than the understanding. She is jealous of the little kindness her husband shows his relations. Her sensibility does not rise to humanity, so she is displeased to see the property of *her* children lavished on a helpless sister.

4.51 These are facts that I have seen for myself again and again. The consequence is obvious. The wife resorts to cunning to undermine the habitual affection she is afraid to oppose openly. She spares neither tears nor caresses until the spy is worked out of her home and thrown on the world, unprepared for its difficulties. Or else the sister is sent off into joyless solitude with a small allowance and an uncultivated mind, as a great act of generosity or out of some regard for propriety.

4.52 These two women may be much on a par in reason and humanity, and had their situations been reversed, each might have played exactly the same selfish part. But had they been educated differently, the case would also have been very different. The wife would not have had that sensibility of which self is the center. Reason might have taught her not to expect her husband's affection, or even to be flattered by it, if it led him to violate prior duties. She would wish to love him not merely because he loved her, but for his virtues. And the sister might have been able to fight her own way instead of eating the bitter bread of dependence.

4.53 I am indeed convinced that the heart, as well as the understanding, is opened by cultivation. It is also opened by strengthening the bodily organs, though this may seem less obvious. I am not talking now of momentary flashes of sensibility, but of the affections. Perhaps the hardest task in educating both sexes is to adjust instruction so that it does not narrow the understanding while the heart is warmed by the generous juices of spring, just raised by the electric ferment of the season. Nor should it dry up the feelings by occupying the mind with inquiries remote from life.

4.54 As for women, when they do receive a careful education, they are made either into fine ladies, brimming with sensibility and teeming with capricious fancies, or into mere "notable" women. The latter are often friendly, honest creatures. They have a shrewd sort of good sense joined to worldly prudence, which often makes them more useful members of society than the fine sentimental lady, though they have neither greatness of

mind nor taste. The intellectual world is closed to them. Take them out of their family or neighborhood and they come to a standstill, because the mind finds nothing to do. Literature offers a store of amusement, but they have never tried to enjoy it and have often despised it.[18] The sentiments and taste of more cultivated minds seem ridiculous to them, even in people whom chance and family ties have led them to love. In mere acquaintances they think it all affectation.

4.55 A man of sense can love such a woman only because of her sex, and respect her only because she is a trusty servant. To keep his own peace, he lets her scold the servants and go to church in clothes made of the very best materials. A man of her own size of understanding would probably not get along with her so well, because he might want to encroach on her prerogative and manage some household matters himself. Yet some women's minds have not been enlarged by cultivation, and their natural selfishness of sensibility has not been widened by reflection. Such women are very unfit to run a household. They overstretch their power, always tyrannizing in order to prop up a superiority that rests only on the arbitrary distinction of fortune. Sometimes the evil is more serious. Servants are denied innocent pleasures and made to work beyond their strength so that the notable housewife can keep a better table and outshine her neighbors in finery and display. If she attends to her children, it is generally to dress them expensively. Whether this attention comes from vanity or fondness, it is equally harmful.

4.56 Besides, how many women of this type spend their days, or at least their evenings, in discontent! Their husbands acknowledge that they are good managers and chaste wives, but they leave home to seek more agreeable company, more *piquant* company, if I may use an expressive French word. The patient drudge, who does her task like a blind horse in a mill, is cheated of her just reward. The wages due to her are her husband's caresses, and women who have so few resources in themselves do not bear this deprivation of a natural right very patiently.

18 "Notable" here means capable and industrious in housekeeping.

4.57 A fine lady, on the other hand, has been taught to look down with contempt on the ordinary tasks of life. Yet she has only been encouraged to acquire accomplishments that rise one notch above the senses. Even physical accomplishments cannot be acquired with any precision unless the understanding has been strengthened by exercise. Without a foundation of principles, taste is superficial, and grace must spring from something deeper than imitation. Her imagination, however, is heated, and her feelings are made fastidious, if not artificial. Or else no counterweight of judgment is acquired, even when the heart remains artless, though it becomes too tender.

4.58 These women are often lovable. Their hearts are really more responsive to general benevolence, and more alive to the sentiments that civilize life, than the square-elbowed household drudge. But they lack a due measure of reflection and self-government, so they inspire only love. They are their husbands' mistresses as long as they have any hold on their affections, and the platonic friends of his male acquaintances. These are the fair defects in nature. They are the women who seem created not to enjoy man's companionship, but to save him from sinking into sheer brutality by rubbing off the rough edges of his character, and to lend some dignity, by playful flirtation, to the appetite that draws him to them. Gracious Creator of the whole human race! Have you created such a being as woman, who can trace your wisdom in your works and feel that you alone are by your nature exalted above her—for no better purpose?—Can she believe that she was made only to submit to man, her equal, a being who, like her, was sent into the world to acquire virtue?—Can she consent to be occupied merely with pleasing him, merely with adorning the earth, when her soul is capable of rising to you?—And can she rest in lazy dependence on man for reason, when she ought to climb with him the arduous heights of knowledge?—

4.59 Yet if love is the supreme good, let women be educated only to inspire it, and let every charm be polished to intoxicate the senses. But if they are moral beings, let them have a chance

to become intelligent. And let love for man be only one part of that glowing flame of universal love which, after encircling humanity, rises in grateful incense to God.

4.60 Fulfilling domestic duties takes a great deal of resolution, and a serious kind of perseverance that needs firmer support than emotions, however lively and true to nature. To set an example of order, which is the soul of virtue, one must adopt a certain austerity of behavior. This can hardly be expected from a being who has been made, from infancy, the weathervane of its own sensations. Whoever rationally intends to be useful must have a plan of conduct. Even in performing the simplest duty, we are often obliged to act against the immediate impulse of tenderness or compassion. Severity is often the surest, as well as the most sublime, proof of affection. Many doting mothers lack this power over the feelings. They also lack that lofty, dignified affection which makes a person prefer the future good of the one they love to a present gratification. This lack is the reason why so many of them spoil their children, and it has made it an open question whether neglect or indulgence does more harm. I am inclined to think the latter has done the most.

4.61 Everyone seems to agree that children should be left in women's care during their early years. Now, from all the observation I have been able to make, women of sensibility are the least fit for this task, because they will infallibly be carried away by their feelings and spoil a child's temper. Managing the temper is the first and most important branch of education, and it requires the sober, steady eye of reason: a plan of conduct equally far from tyranny and from indulgence. Yet these are exactly the extremes that people of sensibility fall into by turns, always overshooting the mark. I have followed this line of reasoning much further, until I concluded that a person of genius is the worst possible choice to employ in education, public or private. Minds of this rare kind see things too much in the mass, and seldom if ever have an even temper. That habitual cheerfulness called good humor is perhaps as rarely joined with great mental powers as with strong feelings. Some people follow the

flights of genius with interest and admiration. Others, with cooler approval, drink in the instruction that the profound thinker has carefully prepared for them. Neither should be put off if they find the genius hot-tempered and the thinker morose. A lively imagination and a tenacious grasp of mind are hardly compatible with that pliant courtesy which leads a man, at least, to bend to the opinions and prejudices of others instead of bluntly confronting them.

4.62 But in discussing education or manners, we need not consider minds of a superior class; they may be left to chance. It is the multitude of moderate abilities who need instruction, and who take on the color of the atmosphere they breathe. I contend that this respectable crowd, men and women alike, should not have their sensations heightened in the hothouse of luxurious idleness at the expense of their understanding. For without a ballast of understanding, they will never become either virtuous or free. Aristocracy, whether founded on property or on genuine talent, will always sweep these slaves of feeling before it, timid and ferocious by turns.

ARGUMENTS FROM NATURE

She answers claims about women's early maturity and the supposed natural basis of polygamy.

4.63 To look at the subject from another angle: men have brought forward countless arguments, morally and physically, to degrade women, and these arguments carry a show of reason because they are supposedly drawn from nature. I must notice a few.

4.64 Women's understanding has often been spoken of with contempt on the grounds that it reaches maturity sooner than men's. I will not answer this argument by pointing to the early proofs of reason, as well as genius, in Cowley, Milton, and Pope[19]. I will only appeal to experience to decide whether young men who are brought into company early (and examples now

19 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Many other names might be added.

abound) do not acquire the same precocity. This fact is so well known that merely mentioning it must call up, for anyone who mixes in the world at all, a picture of a whole troop of swaggering apes of men, whose understandings have been narrowed by being brought into the society of men when they ought to have been spinning a top or rolling a hoop.[20]

4.65 Some naturalists have also claimed that men do not reach their full growth and strength until thirty, while women reach maturity by twenty. I believe they are reasoning from false premises. They have been led astray by the male prejudice that regards beauty as the perfection of woman—mere beauty of features and complexion, the vulgar sense of the word—while male beauty is allowed to have some connection with the mind. Strength of body, and that character of face which the French call a *physionomie*, women do not acquire before thirty, any more than men do. It is true that the little artless tricks of children are especially pleasing and attractive. But once the pretty freshness of youth has worn off, these artless graces turn into studied airs and disgust every person of taste. In a girl's face we look only for liveliness and bashful modesty. When the springtide of life is over, we look instead for soberer sense in the face, and for traces of passion instead of the dimples of high spirits. We expect to see individuality of character, the only thing that fastens the affections[21]. We then want to converse, not to fondle; to give scope to our imaginations as well as to the feelings of our hearts.

4.66 At twenty the beauty of the two sexes is equal. But men's libertinism leads them to make the distinction, and aging coquettes are usually of the same opinion, for when they can no longer inspire love, they pay for the vigor and liveliness of youth. The French, who let more mind into their notions of beauty, prefer women of thirty. I mean that they consider

20 Abraham Cowley (1618–1667) published his first volume of poems at fifteen, and Alexander Pope was writing verse as a boy.

21 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. The strength of an affection is generally proportionate to how far the beloved person's character as a member of the species is lost in their character as an individual.

women to be at their most perfect when liveliness gives way to reason, and to that majestic seriousness of character which marks maturity—or the resting point. In youth, until twenty, the body shoots up. Until thirty, its solid parts are acquiring a certain density, and the flexible muscles, growing more rigid every day, give character to the face. That is, they trace the workings of the mind with the iron pen of fate, and tell us not only what powers lie within, but how they have been used.

4.67 It is worth noting that animals which reach maturity slowly live the longest and belong to the noblest species. Men cannot, however, claim any natural superiority on the grand score of longevity, for in this respect nature has not favored the male.

4.68 Polygamy is another physical degradation. This custom blights every domestic virtue, yet a plausible argument for it is drawn from the well-attested fact that in the countries where it is established more girls are born than boys. This appears to be a sign from nature, and before nature even apparently reasonable speculations must give way. A further conclusion obviously suggested itself: if polygamy is necessary, woman must be inferior to man, and made for him.

4.69 We know very little about how the fetus forms in the womb. But it seems probable to me that some accidental physical cause may account for this phenomenon, and show that it is not a law of nature. I have come across some pertinent observations on the subject in Forster's account of the South Sea islands, which will explain what I mean.[22] He first observes that, of the two sexes among animals, the one with the more vigorous and fiery constitution always prevails and reproduces its own kind. Then he adds: "If this is applied to the inhabitants of Africa, it is evident that the men there, accustomed to polygamy, are weakened by having so many women, and are therefore less vigorous. The women, on the contrary, have a warmer constitution. This is not only because of their more irritable nerves, more

22 Johann Reinhold Forster, naturalist on Cook's second voyage, published *Observations Made during a Voyage Round the World* (1778).

sensitive organization, and livelier imagination, but also because in their marriages they are deprived of that share of physical love which, under monogamy, would be entirely theirs. And so, for these reasons, most children there are born female."

4.70 "In most of Europe the most accurate mortality tables have proved that the numbers of men and women are nearly equal, or, if there is any difference, that more males are born, in the proportion of 105 to 100."

4.71 So the necessity of polygamy does not appear. Still, when a man seduces a woman, I think it should be called a *left-handed* marriage, and the man should be *legally* obliged to support the woman and her children—unless adultery, a natural divorce, canceled the obligation. And this law should remain in force as long as women's weakness led the word "seduction" to be used as an excuse for their frailty and lack of principle. Indeed, it should remain in force as long as they depend on men for their living instead of earning it by the work of their own hands or heads.[23] But such women should not be called wives in the full sense of that relationship, or the very purpose of marriage would be undermined. All those endearing kindnesses that flow from personal fidelity, and that make the bond sacred even when neither love nor friendship unites the hearts, would dissolve into selfishness. The woman who is faithful to the father of her children deserves respect and should not be treated like a prostitute. Even so, I readily grant that if a man and a woman need to live together to bring up their children, nature never intended a man to have more than one wife.

SEDUCTION AND PROSTITUTION

She pleads for women ruined by seduction and argues that they need justice, not charity.

4.72 Still, highly as I respect marriage as the foundation of almost every social virtue, I cannot help feeling the most intense com-

passion for those unfortunate women who are cut off from society. By one error they are torn from all the affections and relationships that improve the heart and mind. Often it does not even deserve the name of error. Many innocent girls are deceived by their own sincere, affectionate hearts, and still more are—as it may pointedly be put—*ruined* before they know the difference between virtue and vice. Prepared for infamy in this way by their education, they become infamous. Asylums and Magdalen houses are not the proper remedies for these abuses. It is justice, not charity, that the world is lacking![24]

4.73 A woman who has lost her honor imagines she cannot fall any lower. As for regaining her former position, that is impossible—no effort can wash away this stain. She has lost every incentive and has no other means of support, so prostitution becomes her only refuge. Her character is quickly corrupted by circumstances over which the poor wretch has little power, unless she has an uncommon share of sense and loftiness of spirit. Necessity never makes prostitution the business of men's lives, yet countless women are made systematically vicious in this way. This, however, arises to a great extent from the idleness in which women are brought up. They are always taught to look to a man for their support, and to regard their bodies as the proper return for his efforts to maintain them. Seductive airs, and the whole art of wantonness, then have a more powerful motive than either appetite or vanity. This observation lends force to the prevailing opinion that when chastity is lost, everything respectable in a woman is lost. Her character depends on keeping one virtue, although the only passion encouraged in her heart is—love. Indeed, a woman's honor is not even made to depend on her own will.

23 A "left-handed" or morganatic marriage was one between a man of rank and a woman of lower station, in which the wife and children did not share his rank or inheritance.

24 The Magdalen Hospital, founded in London in 1758, took in "penitent prostitutes"; similar institutions were called Magdalens.

4.74 When Richardson[25] has Clarissa tell Lovelace that he has robbed her of her honor, he must have had strange notions of honor and virtue. For miserable beyond every name for misery is the condition of a being who could be degraded without its own consent! I have heard this excessive strictness defended as a salutary error. I will answer in the words of Leibniz: "Errors are often useful; but usually to remedy other errors."[26]

4.75 Most of the evils of life arise from a desire for present enjoyment that outruns itself. The obedience demanded of women in marriage falls under this description. The mind, naturally weakened by depending on authority, never uses its own powers, and so the obedient wife becomes a weak, indolent mother. Or, supposing this is not always the result, a future state of existence is hardly taken into account when only negative virtues are cultivated. For in writing about morals, especially where women are concerned, writers have too often taken virtue in a very narrow sense and based it *solely* on worldly usefulness. Worse, this stupendous structure has been set on a still flimsier base: the wayward, fluctuating feelings of men have been made the standard of virtue. Yes, virtue, like religion, has been made subject to the verdicts of taste.

4.76 The vain absurdities of men strike us on every side. If they did not, it would almost provoke a smile of contempt to see how eager men are to degrade the sex from whom they claim to receive the chief pleasure of life. I have often, with full conviction, turned Pope's sarcasm back on them—or, to put it plainly, it has seemed to me to apply to the whole human race. A love of pleasure or of power seems to divide humanity, and the husband who lords it over his little harem thinks only of his pleasure or his convenience.[27] Indeed, an intemperate love of pleas-

25 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Dr. Young takes the same view in his plays, when he speaks of the misfortune that shunned the light of day.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Edward Young (1683–1765), best known for *Night Thoughts*, also wrote tragedies.

26 In Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa* (1747–48), the heroine is drugged and raped by the rake Lovelace.

27 Pope's line "Every woman is at heart a rake" (*Epistle to a Lady*, 1735).

ure carries some men so far that they seduce their own wives. These are prudent men, or worn-out libertines who marry to have a safe bedfellow.—Marriage banishes modesty, and chaste love takes flight.

4.77 Love, considered as an animal appetite, cannot feed on itself for long without dying out. And this extinction in its own flame may be called the violent death of love. But the wife who has been made licentious in this way will probably try to fill the void left by the loss of her husband's attentions. After being treated like a goddess, she cannot contentedly become a mere upper servant. She is still handsome, and instead of transferring her fondness to her children, she dreams only of enjoying the sunshine of life. Besides, many husbands are so lacking in sense and parental affection that, during the first effervescence of sensual fondness, they refuse to let their wives nurse their children. Their wives are only to dress, and to live to please them. And love—even innocent love—soon sinks into lasciviousness when the performance of a duty is sacrificed to its indulgence.

4.78 Personal attraction is a very happy foundation for friendship. Yet even when two virtuous young people marry, it might perhaps be fortunate if some circumstances checked their passion. The memory of an earlier attachment, or a disappointed affection, might make it, on one side at least, more of a match founded on esteem. In that case they would look beyond the present moment and try to make their whole life respectable, by forming a plan to govern a friendship that only death ought to dissolve.

4.79 Friendship is a serious affection. It is the most sublime of all affections, because it is founded on principle and cemented by time. The very opposite may be said of love. To a great extent, love and friendship cannot exist in the same heart. Even when they are inspired by different people they weaken or destroy each other, and for the same person they can only be felt one after the other. Vain fears and fond jealousies are the winds that fan the flame of love when they are judiciously or artfully

tempered. Both are incompatible with the tender confidence and sincere respect of friendship.

4.80 Love such as the glowing pen of genius has portrayed does not exist on earth. At most it exists only in those exalted, fervid imaginations that have sketched such dangerous pictures. They are dangerous because they not only give a plausible excuse to the sensualist who disguises sheer sensuality under a sentimental veil, but also spread affectation and detract from the dignity of virtue. Virtue, as the very word implies, should have an air of seriousness, if not austerity. To try to dress her up in the costume of pleasure, because the term has been used as another name for beauty, is to exalt her on quicksand—a most insidious attempt to hasten her fall under a show of respect. Virtue and pleasure are not, in fact, as closely allied in this life as some eloquent writers have labored to prove. Pleasure prepares the fading wreath and mixes the intoxicating cup; but the fruit that virtue yields is the reward of toil. Seen gradually as it ripens, it affords only calm satisfaction. Indeed, since it appears to be the result of the natural course of things, it is hardly noticed. Bread, the common food of life, is seldom thought of as a blessing, yet it supports the constitution and preserves health. Still, feasts delight the human heart, though disease and even death lurk in the cup or the delicacy that lifts the spirits or tickles the palate. In the same way, the lively, heated imagination paints the picture of love, as it paints every other picture, in those glowing colors which the daring hand will steal from the rainbow. That hand is directed by a mind condemned, in a world like this, to prove its noble origin by yearning after unattainable perfection, forever pursuing what it admits to be a fleeting dream. An imagination of this vigorous kind can give existence to insubstantial forms. It can give solidity to the shadowy daydreams into which the mind naturally falls when realities are found flat. It can then paint love with heavenly charms and dote on the grand ideal object. It can imagine a degree of mutual affection that will refine the soul and not expire once it has served as a "scale" to heavenly love; and, like religious devotion, it can make that

affection absorb every lower affection and desire. In each other's arms, as in a temple whose summit is lost in the clouds, the lovers are to shut out the world. They are to shut out every thought and wish that does not nourish pure affection and permanent virtue.—Permanent virtue! Alas, Rousseau, respectable visionary! Your paradise would soon be violated by the entrance of some unexpected guest. Like Milton's, it would contain only angels, or men sunk below the dignity of rational creatures.[28] Happiness is not material; it cannot be seen or felt! Yet everyone shapes the good to his own fancy, and the eager pursuit of it proclaims man the lord of this lower world. It shows him to be an intelligent creature who is not to receive happiness but to acquire it. Those who complain of the delusions of passion, then, forget that they are protesting against a strong proof of the immortality of the soul.

4.81 But let us leave superior minds to correct themselves, and pay dearly for their experience. I must point out that it is not against strong, persevering passions that I wish to guard the female heart by exercising the understanding. It is against romantic, wavering feelings. For these paradisal daydreams are more often the effect of idleness than of a lively imagination.

4.82 Women seldom have enough serious work to silence their feelings. A round of little cares or vain pursuits fritters away all their strength of mind and body, and so they naturally become mere objects of sense.—In short, the whole drift of female education (the education given by society) tends to make the best-disposed women romantic and inconstant, and the rest vain and mean. In the present state of society this evil can hardly be remedied, I fear, even in the slightest degree. Should a more praiseworthy ambition ever gain ground, women may be brought nearer to nature and reason. They may then become more virtuous and useful as they grow more respectable.

4.83 But I will venture to assert that their reason will never become strong enough to govern their conduct as long as mak-

28 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII: love "is the scale / By which to heavenly love thou mayst ascend."

ing a figure in the world is the first wish of most people. To this weak wish the natural affections and the most useful virtues are sacrificed. Girls marry merely to *better themselves*, to borrow an expressive vulgar phrase. They have such complete control over their hearts that they do not allow themselves to *fall in love* until a man with a larger fortune makes an offer. I intend to enlarge on this subject in a later chapter. For now it is only necessary to drop a hint, because women are so often degraded by letting the selfish prudence of age chill the ardor of youth.

NEEDLEWORK AND DRESS

She argues that needlework and concern with dress narrow women's minds, and praises the virtue of poor women.

4.84 From the same source comes the opinion that young girls ought to devote a large part of their time to needlework. Yet this occupation narrows their faculties more than any other that could have been chosen for them, because it confines their thoughts to their own persons. Men have their clothes made and are done with the subject. Women make their own clothes, necessary or ornamental, and are forever talking about them, and their thoughts follow their hands. It is not, in fact, making necessities that weakens the mind, but the frippery of dress. For when a woman of the lower classes makes her husband's and children's clothes, she is doing her duty; that is part of her work. But when women sew only to dress better than they could otherwise afford, it is worse than a sheer waste of time. To make the poor virtuous, they must be given work. Women of the middle class might employ them, if they did not ape the fashions of the nobility without catching their ease. They themselves could then manage their households, teach their children, and exercise their own minds. Gardening, experimental science, and literature would give them subjects to think about and matter for conversation that would exercise their understandings to some degree. French women are not so rigidly nailed to their chairs twisting lappets and knotting ribbons, and their conversation is

often superficial. But I maintain that it is not half so insipid as that of the English women whose time is spent making caps, bonnets, and the whole mischief of trimmings—not to mention shopping, bargain-hunting, etc., etc. And it is the respectable, prudent women who are most degraded by these practices, for their motive is simply vanity. The wanton who exercises her taste to make her person alluring has something more in view.

4.85 All these observations branch out of a general one that I have made before, and that cannot be insisted on too often. Whether we speak of men, women, or professions, we will find that what occupies the thoughts shapes the character, both generally and individually. Women's thoughts always hover around their persons—so is it surprising that their persons are considered their most valuable part? Yet some degree of freedom of mind is necessary even to form the person. This may be one reason why some gentle wives have so few attractions besides that of their sex. Add to this that sedentary occupations make most women sickly. False notions of female excellence then make them proud of this delicacy, though it is yet another fetter: by constantly calling their attention to the body, it cramps the activity of the mind.

4.86 Women of rank seldom do any of the handwork on their clothes, so only their taste is exercised. Because they think less about the finery once the business of dressing is over, they acquire an ease that seldom appears in the bearing of women who dress merely for the sake of dressing. In fact, the observation about the middle class—the one in which talents thrive best—does not extend to women. Women of the upper class pick up at least a smattering of literature and converse more with men on general topics. They therefore acquire more knowledge than the women who ape their fashions and faults without sharing their advantages. As for virtue—taking the word in a comprehensive sense—I have seen most of it among the poor. Many poor women support their children by the sweat of their brow, and hold together families that the vices of the fathers would have scattered. But gentlewomen are too indolent to be actively

virtuous, and are softened rather than refined by civilization. Indeed, I have met with good sense among poor women who have had few advantages of education and yet have acted heroically. It strongly confirmed me in the opinion that trifling occupations have made woman a trifler. Since men take her[29] body, the mind is left to rust. And so, as long as physical love weakens man, being his favorite recreation, he will try to enslave woman:—and who can tell how many generations may be needed to give vigor to the virtue and talents of the freed descendants of abject slaves[30]?

4.87 In tracing the causes that, in my view, have degraded woman, I have confined my observations to those that act universally on the morals and manners of the whole sex. It seems clear to me that they all spring from a lack of understanding. Whether this arises from a physical or an accidental weakness of the faculties, only time can decide. I will not lay much stress on the example of a few women[31] who acquired courage and resolution from having received a masculine education. I only maintain that men placed in similar situations have acquired a similar character—I am speaking of men as groups. I also maintain that men of genius and talent have emerged from a class in which women have never yet been placed.

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29 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. "I take her body," says Ranger.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Ranger is the young rake in Benjamin Hoadly's comedy *The Suspicious Husband* (1747).

30 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. "Supposing that women are voluntary slaves—slavery of any kind is unfavorable to human happiness and improvement." *Knox's Essays.*

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Vicesimus Knox, *Essays, Moral and Literary* (1778).

31 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Sappho, Héloïse, Mrs. Macaulay, the Empress of Russia, Madame d'Éon, etc. These, and many more, may be counted as exceptions; and are not all heroes, as well as heroines, exceptions to general rules? I wish to see women neither heroines nor brutes, but reasonable creatures.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Sappho, Greek lyric poet (about 600 BC); Héloïse (about 1100–1164), learned abbess and lover of Abelard; Catharine Macaulay (1731–1791), English historian; Catherine the Great of Russia (reigned 1762–96); the Chevalier d'Éon (1728–1810), French diplomat and soldier who lived as a woman from 1777.

Chapter V: Animadversions on Some of the Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects of Pity, Bordering on Contempt

A detailed critique of Rousseau, Fordyce, Gregory, Piozzi, de Staël, Genlis and Chesterfield, with praise for Catharine Macaulay.

5.1 It remains now to examine the opinions plausibly defended in some modern publications on women's character and education. These opinions have set the tone for most of the more casual remarks made about women.

ROUSSEAU'S SOPHIE

Wollstonecraft quotes Rousseau's plan for educating women to please men and answers it point by point.

5.2 I will begin with Rousseau, and give a sketch of his picture of women in his own words, interspersed with comments and reflections. My comments, it is true, will all spring from a few simple principles, and might have been deduced from what I have already said. But the artificial structure has been built with so much ingenuity that it seems necessary to attack it in more detail, and make the application myself.

5.3 Sophie, says Rousseau, should be as perfect a woman as Emile is a man, and to make her so, we must examine the character that nature has given to her sex.[1]

1 Wollstonecraft quotes William Kenrick's English translation of *Emile* (1762), published as *Emilius and Sophia*.

5.4 He then sets out to prove that woman ought to be weak and passive because she has less bodily strength than man. From this he infers that she was made to please him and to be subject to him, and that it is her duty to make herself *agreeable* to her master—this being the grand purpose of her existence[2]. Still, to lend a little mock dignity to sexual desire, he insists that a man should not use his strength, but depend on the woman's will, when he seeks pleasure with her.

5.5 "Hence we deduce a third consequence from the different constitutions of the sexes: that the stronger should be master in appearance, and in fact dependent on the weaker. This is not from any frivolous custom of gallantry or vanity of protection, but from an invariable law of nature. Nature gives woman a greater capacity to arouse desires than she has given man to satisfy them. She thereby makes him dependent on the woman's good pleasure, and compels him to try to please in his turn, *in order to obtain her consent that he should be strongest*[3]. On these occasions the most delightful thing a man finds in his victory is to doubt whether it was the woman's weakness that yielded to his superior strength, or whether her inclinations spoke in his favor. Women are generally cunning enough to leave the matter in doubt. In this respect women's understanding perfectly matches their constitution. Far from being ashamed of their weakness, they glory in it; their tender muscles offer no resistance; they pretend to be incapable of lifting the smallest burdens, and would blush to be thought robust and strong. What is the purpose of all this? Not merely to appear delicate, but as a cunning precaution. In this way they provide themselves in advance with an excuse, and a right to be feeble when they find it convenient[4]."

5.6 I have quoted this passage so that my readers will not suspect me of twisting the author's reasoning to support my own arguments. I have already asserted that, in the education of

2 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. I have already quoted the passage, on page 88.
3 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. What nonsense!
4 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Rousseau's *Emile*, vol. III, p. 168.

women, these fundamental principles lead to a system of cunning and lasciviousness.

5.7 Suppose woman was made only to please man and be subject to him. Then the conclusion is sound: she ought to sacrifice every other consideration to making herself agreeable to him. Once that is proved to be the iron bed of fate, let this brutish desire of self-preservation be the grand spring of all her actions. Her character must be stretched or cut short to fit that bed, regardless of all moral or physical distinctions. But I think it can be demonstrated that the purposes even of this life, taken as a whole, are undermined by practical rules built on this ignoble foundation. If so, I may be allowed to doubt whether woman was created for man. The cry of irreligion, or even atheism, may be raised against me, but I will simply declare this. If an angel from heaven told me that Moses's beautiful, poetic account of creation, and the account of the fall of man, were literally true, I could not believe what my reason told me was demeaning to the character of the Supreme Being. And having no fear of the devil before my eyes, I venture to call this a prompting of reason, instead of resting my weakness on the broad shoulders of the first seducer of my frail sex.

5.8 "It being once demonstrated," Rousseau continues, "that man and woman are not, and ought not to be, constituted alike in temperament and character, it follows naturally that they should not be educated in the same way. In following the directions of nature they ought indeed to act in concert, but they should not be engaged in the same occupations. The end of their pursuits should be the same, but the means they take to reach it, and consequently their tastes and inclinations, should be different[5]."

5.9 . . . . . .

5.10 "Whether I consider the particular destiny of the sex, observe their inclinations, or note their duties, everything equally points to the particular method of education best suited to them. Woman and man were made for each other, but their

5 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Rousseau's *Emile*, vol. III, p. 176.

mutual dependence is not the same. Men depend on women only because of their desires; women depend on men both because of their desires and because of their needs. We could get along better without them than they could without us[6]."

5.11 . . . . . .

5.12 "For this reason, the education of women should always be relative to men. To please us, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young and take care of us when grown, to advise and console us, to make our lives easy and agreeable—these are the duties of women at all times, and what they should be taught from childhood. As long as we fail to return to this principle, we miss the mark, and all the precepts given to them contribute neither to their happiness nor to ours[7]."

5.13 . . . . . .

5.14 "Girls are fond of dress from their earliest infancy. Not content with being pretty, they want to be thought so; we can see from all their little airs that this thought occupies them. They are hardly able to understand what is said to them before they can be governed by being told what people will think of their behavior. The same motive, however, when used unwisely with boys, does not have the same effect. Provided boys are allowed to pursue their amusements as they please, they care very little what people think of them. Time and effort are needed to make boys subject to this motive.

5.15 "Wherever girls get this first lesson, it is a very good one. Since the body is born, in a sense, before the soul, our first concern should be to cultivate the body. This order is common to both sexes, but the object of the cultivation is different: in one sex it is the development of bodily powers; in the other, that of personal charms. Not that either strength or beauty ought to be confined exclusively to one sex; only that the order in which they are cultivated is reversed. Women certainly need enough

6 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Rousseau's *Emile*, vol. III, p. 179.
7 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Rousseau's *Emile*, vol. III, p. 181.

strength to move and act gracefully, and men enough skill to act with ease."

5.16 . . . . . .

5.17 "Children of both sexes have a great many amusements in common, and so they should; do they not also have many such when they are grown up? Each sex also has its own particular taste in this respect. Boys love noisy, active games—beating the drum, whipping the top, and dragging their little carts about. Girls, on the other hand, are fonder of things of show and ornament, such as mirrors, trinkets, and dolls. The doll is the special amusement of girls, and from this we see that their taste is plainly adapted to their destiny. The physical part of the art of pleasing lies in dress, and this is all of that art that children are capable of cultivating."

5.18 . . . . . .

5.19 "Here, then, we see a primary inclination firmly established, which you need only follow and regulate. The little creature will no doubt be very eager to know how to dress her doll, to make its sleeve-knots, its flounces, its headdress, etc. She has to turn so often to the people around her for help with these things that it would be much more agreeable to her to owe them all to her own industry. Here we have a good reason for the first lessons usually taught to these young girls. In them we do not seem to be setting the girls a task, but doing them a favor, by teaching them what is immediately useful to themselves. And in fact almost all of them learn to read and write reluctantly, but apply themselves very readily to their needles. They imagine themselves already grown up, and think with pleasure that such skills will enable them to adorn themselves."

5.20 This is certainly only an education of the body. But Rousseau is not the only man who has indirectly said that the mere person of a *young* woman, without any mind—unless high spirits count as mind—is very pleasing. To make that person weak, and what some may call beautiful, the understanding is neglected, and girls are forced to sit still, play with dolls, and listen to foolish conversations—and then the effect of habit is

insisted on as an unquestionable sign of nature. I know it was Rousseau's opinion that the first years of youth should be spent forming the body, though in educating Emile he departs from this plan. Yet strength of mind largely depends on strength of body. And the difference between strengthening the body and merely giving it easy movement is very great.

5.21 It should be noted that Rousseau made his observations in a country where the art of pleasing had been refined only to draw off the grossness of vice. He did not go back to nature, or else his ruling appetite disturbed the workings of his reason. Otherwise he would not have drawn these crude inferences.

5.22 In France boys and girls, especially girls, are educated only to please, to manage their persons, and to regulate their outward behavior. Their minds are corrupted at a very early age by the worldly and pious warnings they receive to guard them against immodesty. I am speaking of past times. Mere children were obliged to make confessions, and the holy men asked them questions; I assert these facts on good authority. These confessions and questions were enough to stamp a sexual character on them, and the education of society was a school of coquetry and artifice. At ten or eleven, and often much earlier, girls began to flirt, and talked, without reproof, of establishing themselves in the world through marriage.

5.23 In short, they were made women almost from birth, and listened to compliments instead of instruction. Since these weakened the mind, Nature was supposed to have acted like a stepmother when she formed this afterthought of creation.

5.24 Since he does not allow them understanding, however, it was only consistent for him to subject them to an authority independent of reason. To prepare them for this subjection, he gives the following advice:

5.25 "Girls ought to be active and diligent; and that is not all: they should also be subjected to restraint early. This misfortune, if it really is one, is inseparable from their sex, and they never throw it off except to suffer crueler evils. All their lives they must be subject to the most constant and severe restraint—that

of decorum. It is therefore necessary to accustom them early to such confinement, so that it will not cost them too dearly later. They must also be accustomed early to the suppression of their whims, so that they will more readily submit to the will of others. If, indeed, they like to be always at work, they should sometimes be compelled to put it aside. Dissipation, frivolity, and inconstancy are faults that readily spring from their first inclinations when these are corrupted or perverted by too much indulgence. To prevent this abuse, we should teach them, above all, to place due restraint on themselves. By our absurd institutions, the life of a modest woman is reduced to a perpetual conflict with herself—though it is only just that this sex should share in the sufferings arising from the evils it has caused us."

5.26 And why is the life of a modest woman a perpetual conflict? I would answer that this very system of education makes it so. Modesty, temperance, and self-denial are the sober offspring of reason. But when sensibility is nurtured at the expense of the understanding, such weak beings must be restrained by arbitrary means and subjected to continual conflicts. Give their minds a wider range of activity, and nobler passions and motives will govern their appetites and feelings.

5.27 "The ordinary attachment and regard of a mother, and even mere habit, will make her loved by her children if she does nothing to earn their hatred. Even the restraint she places on them, if it is well directed, will increase their affection instead of lessening it. A state of dependence is natural to their sex, so girls perceive that they are made for obedience."

5.28 This is begging the question. Servitude not only degrades the individual; its effects seem to be passed down to later generations. Considering how long women have been dependent, is it surprising that some of them hug their chains and fawn like spaniels? "These dogs," a naturalist observes, "at first kept their ears erect; but custom has overridden nature, and a sign of fear has become a beauty."

5.29 "For the same reason," Rousseau adds, "women have, or ought to have, very little liberty; they tend to indulge them-

selves excessively in whatever is allowed them. They are given to extremes in everything, and they are carried away by their amusements even more than boys are."

5.30 The answer to this is very simple. Slaves and mobs have always indulged in the same excesses once they broke loose from authority.—A bent bow springs back violently when the hand that held it by force suddenly lets go. And sensibility, the plaything of outward circumstances, must either be subjected to authority or moderated by reason.

5.31 "From this habitual restraint," he continues, "there results a docility that women need throughout their lives. They always remain in subjection either to men or to the opinions of the world, and they are never permitted to set themselves above those opinions. The first and most important quality in a woman is good nature, or sweetness of temper. She is made to obey a being as imperfect as man, who is often full of vices and always full of faults, and so she ought to learn early even to suffer injustice and to bear her husband's insults without complaint. It is not for his sake but for her own that she should have a mild disposition. The perversity and ill nature of women only make their own misfortunes, and their husbands' misconduct, worse. They ought to see plainly that these are not the weapons by which they gain the upper hand."

5.32 Women are made to live with so imperfect a being as man, and so they ought to learn the necessity of forbearance by exercising their own faculties. But insisting on blind obedience violates all the sacred rights of humanity. Either that, or the most sacred rights belong *only* to man.

5.33 A being who patiently endures injustice and silently bears insults will soon become unjust, or unable to tell right from wrong. Besides, I deny the fact: this is not the true way to form or improve the temper. As a sex, men have better tempers than women, because they are occupied with pursuits that engage the head as well as the heart, and the steadiness of the head gives a healthy temperature to the heart. People of sensibility seldom have good tempers. Forming the temper is the cool work

of reason, when, as life goes on, she blends clashing elements with happy art. I have never known a weak or ignorant person with a good temper, though the name is often given to a constitutional good humor, and to the docility that fear stamps on behavior. I say behavior, because genuine meekness never reached the heart or mind except as the result of reflection. Mere restraint produces a host of ill humors in domestic life, as many sensible men will admit. They find some of these gentle, irritable creatures very troublesome companions.

5.34 "Each sex," he argues further, "should keep its own particular tone and manner. A meek husband may have an impertinent wife. But mildness of disposition on the woman's side will always bring a man back to reason, at least if he is not an absolute brute, and it will sooner or later triumph over him." True: the mildness of reason will. But abject fear always inspires contempt, and tears are eloquent only when they run down pretty cheeks.

5.35 What can a heart be made of if it melts when insulted, and kisses the rod instead of rebelling against injustice? Suppose a woman can caress a man, with true feminine softness, at the very moment he is treating her tyrannically. Is it unfair to infer that her virtue is built on narrow views and selfishness? Nature never dictated such insincerity. Prudence of this sort may be called a virtue, but morality becomes vague once any part of it is supposed to rest on falsehood. These are mere expedients, and expedients are useful only for the moment.

5.36 Let the husband beware of trusting too completely to this servile obedience. His wife may caress him with winning sweetness when he is angry, and at a time when she ought to be angry herself, unless contempt had smothered a natural outburst. If she can do that, she may do the same after parting from a lover. These are all preparations for adultery. Or suppose fear of the world, or of hell, restrains her desire to please other men once she can no longer please her husband. What substitute can then be found by a being who was formed, by nature and art, only to please man? What can make up to her for this loss, or where is

she to look for a new occupation? Where is she to find enough strength of mind to resolve to begin the search, when her habits are fixed and vanity has long ruled her chaotic mind?

5.37 But this biased moralist recommends cunning, and he does it systematically and persuasively.

5.38 "Daughters should always be submissive; their mothers, however, should not be inflexible. To make a young girl tractable, she should not be made unhappy; to make her modest, she should not be made stupid. On the contrary, I would not be displeased to see her allowed to use some art. It should not serve to escape punishment when she disobeys, but to excuse herself from having to obey. It is not necessary to make her dependence burdensome, only to let her feel it. Subtlety is a talent natural to the sex. I am convinced that all our natural inclinations are right and good in themselves, and so I believe this one should be cultivated like the others. We need only prevent its abuse."

5.39 "Whatever is, is right," he then goes on triumphantly to conclude. Granted;—yet perhaps no maxim ever contained a more paradoxical claim. It is a solemn truth with respect to God. He, and I say it with reverence, sees the whole at once, and saw its just proportions in the womb of time. But man can inspect only disjointed parts, and so he finds many things wrong. It is part of the system, and therefore right, that he should try to change what seems wrong to him, even while he bows to the Wisdom of his Creator and respects the darkness he labors to dispel.

5.40 The inference that follows is valid, supposing the principle to be sound. "The superior skill peculiar to the female sex is a very fair compensation for their inferiority in strength. Without it, woman would not be man's companion but his slave. It is by her superior art and ingenuity that she preserves her equality, and governs him while she pretends to obey. Woman has everything against her, our faults as well as her own timidity and weakness. She has nothing in her favor but her subtlety and her beauty. Is it not very reasonable, then, that she should cultivate both?" Greatness of mind can never live alongside cun-

ning, or "address." I will not quarrel about words when their plain meaning is insincerity and falsehood. I will only observe that if any class of human beings is to be educated by rules not strictly derived from truth, then virtue is a matter of convention. After giving this advice, how could Rousseau dare to assert that in the grand purpose of existence the aim of both sexes should be the same? He knew very well that the mind is shaped by its pursuits. Either it expands as great views swallow up little ones, or it becomes little itself.

5.41 Men have greater bodily strength. But if it were not for mistaken notions of beauty, women would acquire enough strength to earn their own living, which is the true definition of independence. They would also be able to bear the physical hardships and exertions needed to strengthen the mind.

5.42 Let us, then, be allowed to take the same exercise as boys, not only in infancy but in youth, and so arrive at bodily perfection. Then we may know how far man's natural superiority really extends. For what reason or virtue can be expected from a creature whose seed-time of life has been neglected? None—if the winds of heaven did not happen to scatter many useful seeds on the fallow ground.

5.43 "Beauty cannot be acquired by dress, and coquetry is an art not so early or quickly learned. While girls are still young, however, they are able to study graceful gestures, a pleasing modulation of the voice, and an easy bearing and manner. They can also learn to gain the advantage of gracefully adapting their looks and postures to time, place, and occasion. So when they come to display other talents whose usefulness is already obvious, their efforts should not be confined solely to the arts of industry and the needle."

5.44 "For my part, I would have a young Englishwoman cultivate her agreeable talents to please her future husband with as much care and diligence as a young Circassian cultivates hers to fit her for the harem of an Eastern pasha."[8]

8 Women from Circassia, in the northwest Caucasus, were prized in Ottoman and Persian harems; "bashaw" in the original is an old form of "pasha."

5.45 To make women completely insignificant, he adds: "Women's tongues are very fluent. They speak earlier, more readily, and more agreeably than men; they are also accused of speaking much more. But so it ought to be, and I would gladly turn this reproach into a compliment. Their lips and eyes have the same liveliness, and for the same reason. A man speaks of what he knows, a woman of what pleases her; the one requires knowledge, the other taste. The main object of a man's conversation should be what is useful; that of a woman's, what is agreeable. Their different kinds of conversation should have nothing in common but truth."

5.46 "We ought not, therefore, to check the chatter of girls as we would that of boys, with the stern question *What is the point of your talking?* We should check it with another question that is no less hard to answer: *How will what you say be received?* In childhood, while they are still unable to tell good from evil, they should observe it as a law never to say anything disagreeable to the people they are talking to. This rule will be even harder to practice because it must always be subordinate to the first one: never to speak falsely or tell an untruth." To govern the tongue in this way must indeed require great skill, and both men and women practice it too much.—How few speak out of the abundance of the heart! So few that I, who love simplicity, would gladly give up politeness in exchange for a quarter of the virtue that has been sacrificed to it. Politeness is an ambiguous quality, and at best it should be only the polish of virtue.

5.47 But, to complete the sketch: "It is easy to see that if male children are unable to form any true notions of religion, those ideas must be far beyond the grasp of girls. For this very reason I would begin to speak to girls about the subject earlier. If we waited until they were able to discuss such profound questions methodically, we would run the risk of never speaking to them about it as long as they lived. Reason in women is a practical reason. It enables them to find skillfully the means of reaching a known end, but it would never enable them to discover that end itself. The social relations of the sexes are truly admirable. From

their union there results a moral person, of which woman may be called the eyes and man the hand. Each depends on the other in this way: the woman is to learn from the man what she is to see, and the man is to learn from the woman what he ought to do. Suppose woman could go back to the first principles of things as well as man, and man could enter into their *minutiae* as well as woman. They would then always be independent of each other, they would live in perpetual discord, and their union could not last. But in the present harmony that naturally exists between them, their different faculties work toward one common end, and it is hard to say which contributes more to it. Each follows the other's impulse; each obeys, and both are masters."

5.48 "A woman's conduct is subject to public opinion, and for that very reason her faith in matters of religion should be subject to authority. *Every daughter ought to be of the same religion as her mother, and every wife of the same religion as her husband. Even if that religion should be false, the docility that leads mother and daughter to submit to the order of nature removes, in the sight of God, the guilt of their error*[9]." Since "they are not able to judge for themselves, they ought to abide by the decision of their fathers and husbands as confidently as by that of the church."

5.49 "Authority ought to regulate women's religion, and so it is less necessary to explain to them the reasons for their belief than to lay down precisely the doctrines they are to believe. A creed that presents only obscure ideas to the mind is the source of fanaticism, and one that presents absurdities leads to unbelief."

5.50 Absolute, unchallenged authority, it seems, must exist somewhere. But is not this a direct and exclusive seizure of reason? The *rights* of humanity have thus been confined to the male line from Adam downward. Rousseau would carry his

9 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. What is to happen if the mother's and the husband's opinions should *chance* not to agree? An ignorant person cannot be reasoned out of an error, and when she is *persuaded* to give up one prejudice for another, the mind is unsettled. Indeed, the husband may have no religion to teach her. Yet in that situation she will badly need a support for her virtue that does not depend on worldly considerations.

male aristocracy even further. Some people argue for leaving woman in the deepest ignorance, and he hints that he would not blame them, except that she needs a little knowledge of men and of the customs produced by human passions. That knowledge is necessary to preserve her chastity and to justify the man's choice in the eyes of the world. Otherwise she might breed at home without the exercise of her understanding making her any less voluptuous and innocent. The one exception is the first year of marriage, when she might use her understanding to dress like Sophie. "Her dress is extremely modest in appearance and yet very coquettish in fact. She does not display her charms; she conceals them. But in concealing them, she knows how to work on your imagination. Everyone who sees her will say, There is a modest and discreet girl. But while you are near her, your eyes and affections wander all over her person, and you cannot draw them away. You would conclude that every part of her dress, simple as it seems, was put in its proper order only to be taken apart by the imagination." Is this modesty? Is this a preparation for immortality? Again: what are we to think of a system of education when the author says of his heroine "that with her, doing things well is only a *secondary* concern; her main concern is to do them *neatly*"?

5.51 Secondary, in fact, are all her virtues and qualities. On the subject of religion, he has her parents address her in these words, since she is accustomed to submission: "Your husband will instruct you in good time."

5.52 He cramps a woman's mind in this way, though perhaps, in order to keep it fair, he has not made it a complete blank. He then advises her to reflect, so that a reflective man will not yawn in her company when he is tired of caressing her.—What has a woman who must obey to reflect about? And would it not be a refinement of cruelty to open her mind only to make the darkness and misery of her fate *visible*? Yet these are his sensible remarks. To give a fair view of the subject, I have had to quote

the passages above, and the reader may decide how consistent these remarks are with them.[10]

5.53 "Those who spend their whole lives working for their daily bread have no ideas beyond their business or their interests, and all their understanding seems to lie in their fingertips. This ignorance harms neither their integrity nor their morals; it is often useful to them. Sometimes reflection leads us to strike bargains with our duty, and we end by putting a jargon of words in the place of things. Our own conscience is the most enlightened philosopher. There is no need to know Cicero's Offices to make a man honest; and perhaps the most virtuous woman in the world is the one least acquainted with the definition of virtue.[11] But it is no less true that only a cultivated understanding can make company agreeable. And it is a sad thing for the father of a family who is fond of home to be forced always to keep to himself, with no one around him to whom he can confide his thoughts."

5.54 "Besides, how could a woman without reflection be capable of educating her children? How could she tell what is proper for them? How could she incline them to virtues she does not know, or to merit of which she has no idea? She can only soothe or scold them, and make them insolent or timid. She will make them affected fops or ignorant blockheads, but she will never make them sensible or amiable." How indeed could she, when her husband is not always at hand to lend her his reason? —when the two of them together make only one moral being? A blind will, "eyes without hands," would not get very far. His abstract reason is supposed to concentrate the scattered beams of her practical reason, but perhaps it is busy judging the flavor of wine, or holding forth on the best sauces for turtle. Or, more deeply absorbed at a card table, he may be generalizing his ideas as he bets away his fortune, leaving all the *minutiae* of education to his helpmate or to chance.

5.55 But let us grant that woman ought to be beautiful, innocent, and silly, to make her a more alluring and indulgent com-

10 "Darkness visible" echoes Milton's description of hell in *Paradise Lost* (1.63).
11 "Tully" is Cicero; his *De Officiis* ("On Duties") was known in English as his *Offices*.

panion. Then what is her understanding sacrificed for? And why is all this preparation needed, by Rousseau's own account, only to make her her husband's mistress for a very short time? No man ever insisted more on the fleeting nature of love. Thus speaks the philosopher: "Sensual pleasures are fleeting. The habitual state of the affections always loses by their gratification. The imagination, which adorns the object of our desires, is lost in its possession. Except for the Supreme Being, who is self-existent, nothing is beautiful but what is ideal."

5.56 But he returns to his unintelligible paradoxes when he addresses Sophie this way: "Emile, in becoming your husband, has become your master, and he claims your obedience. Such is the order of nature. When a man is married to such a wife as Sophie, however, it is proper that he should be guided by her; this too is in keeping with the order of nature. I have made you the arbiter of his pleasures, therefore, to give you as much authority over his heart as his sex gives him over your person. It may cost you some unpleasant self-denial. But you will be sure of keeping your empire over him if you can keep it over yourself. What I have already observed also shows me that this difficult undertaking is not beyond your courage.

5.57 Would you have your husband always at your feet? Keep him at some distance from your person. You will long hold authority in love if you only know how to make your favors rare and precious. In this way you may put even the arts of coquetry in the service of virtue, and those of love in the service of reason."

5.58 I will close my extracts with a fair description of a comfortable couple. "And yet you must not imagine that even such management will always be enough. Whatever precautions are taken, enjoyment will gradually blunt the edge of passion. But when love has lasted as long as it can, a pleasant habit takes its place, and the attachment of mutual confidence follows the raptures of passion. Children often form a more agreeable and lasting bond between married people than love itself. When you

cease to be Emile's mistress, you will still be his wife and friend; you will be the mother of his children[12]."

5.59 Children, he rightly observes, form a far more lasting bond between married people than love does. Beauty, he declares, will not be valued or even noticed after a couple have lived together for six months. Artificial graces and coquetry will likewise pall on the senses. Why, then, does he say that a girl should be educated for her husband with the same care as for an Eastern harem?

5.60 I now appeal from the daydreams of fancy and refined licentiousness to the good sense of humanity. Suppose the purpose of education is to prepare women to become chaste wives and sensible mothers. Are the methods so plausibly recommended in the foregoing sketch the best suited to produce those ends? Will anyone grant that the surest way to make a wife chaste is to teach her to practice the wanton arts of a mistress? The sensualist calls these arts "virtuous coquetry," but he can no longer relish the artless charms of sincerity. Nor can he taste the pleasure that comes from a tender intimacy, when trust is unchecked by suspicion and made interesting by good sense.

5.61 The man who can be content to live with a pretty, useful companion without a mind has lost his taste for more refined enjoyments in voluptuous gratifications. He has never felt the calm satisfaction of being loved by someone who could understand him, a satisfaction that refreshes the parched heart like the silent dew of heaven.—In his wife's company he is still alone, except when the man has sunk into the brute. "The charm of life," says a grave philosophical reasoner, is "sympathy; nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast."[13]

5.62 Women are kept from the tree of knowledge by a certain line of reasoning. According to that reasoning, the important years of youth, the usefulness of age, and the rational hopes of a

12 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Rousseau's *Emile*.

13 The "grave philosophical reasoner" is Adam Smith, loosely quoting *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

life to come are all to be sacrificed to make women an object of desire for a *short* time. Besides, how could Rousseau expect them to be virtuous and constant when reason is not allowed to be the foundation of their virtue, nor truth the object of their inquiries?

ROUSSEAU'S SENSIBILITY

She traces Rousseau's errors to his heated imagination and calls women to strengthen their minds by reflection.

5.63 But all Rousseau's errors in reasoning arose from sensibility, and sensibility to their charms is something women are very ready to forgive! When he should have reasoned, he became impassioned, and reflection inflamed his imagination instead of enlightening his understanding. Even his virtues led him further astray. He was born with a warm constitution and a lively fancy, and nature carried him toward the other sex with such eager fondness that he soon became lascivious. Had he given way to these desires, the fire would have burned itself out naturally. But virtue, and a romantic kind of delicacy, made him practice self-denial. Yet when fear, delicacy, or virtue restrained him, he debauched his imagination. He dwelt on the sensations to which fancy gave force, traced them in the most glowing colors, and sank them deep into his soul.

5.64 He then sought solitude. He did not seek it to rest with the man of nature, or to investigate calmly the causes of things in the shade where Sir Isaac Newton indulged in contemplation. He sought it merely to indulge his feelings. And he painted what he felt so intensely, and with such warmth, that he engages the heart and inflames the imagination of his readers. In proportion to the strength of their fancy, they imagine that their understanding is convinced, when they are only sympathizing with a poetic writer who skillfully displays the objects of sense, most voluptuously shaded or gracefully veiled. And so he makes us feel, while we dream, that we are reasoning, and he leaves mistaken conclusions in the mind.

5.65 Why was Rousseau's life divided between ecstasy and misery? What other answer can be given than that the ferment of his imagination produced both? Had his fancy been allowed to cool, he might perhaps have acquired more strength of mind. Still, if the purpose of life is to educate the intellectual part of man, everything in his case was right. Suppose, though, that death had not led him to a nobler scene of action. He would probably have enjoyed a more even happiness on earth, and felt the calm sensations of the man of nature, instead of being prepared for another stage of existence by nourishing the passions that agitate civilized man.

5.66 But peace to his shade! I do not make war on his ashes, but on his opinions. I make war only on the sensibility that led him to degrade woman by making her the slave of love.

5.67 ——"Cursed vassalage,
First idolized till love's hot fire is over,
Then slaves to those who courted us before." *Dryden.*

5.68 Some writers insidiously degrade women while they lie prostrate before their personal charms. The harmful tendency of their books cannot be exposed too often or too severely.

5.69 Let us, my dear contemporaries, rise above such narrow prejudices! If wisdom is desirable for its own sake, if virtue must be founded on knowledge to deserve the name, then let us try to strengthen our minds by reflection until our heads balance our hearts. Let us not confine all our thoughts to the petty events of the day, nor our knowledge to an acquaintance with the hearts of our lovers or husbands. Let the practice of every duty be subordinate to the grand one of improving our minds and preparing our affections for a more exalted state!

5.70 Beware, then, my friends, of letting your hearts be moved by every trivial incident. The reed is shaken by a breeze and dies every year, but the oak stands firm and braves the storm for ages!

5.71 If we were indeed created only to flutter out our hour and die—why, then let us indulge sensibility and laugh at the severity of reason.—Yet alas! even then we would lack strength of

body and mind, and life would be lost in feverish pleasures or wearisome listlessness.

5.72 I earnestly wish to see this system of education discredited. It seems to presuppose what ought never to be taken for granted: that virtue shields us from the accidents of life, and that Fortune will slip off her blindfold, smile on a well-educated girl, and bring an Emile or a Telemachus in her hand. On the contrary, the reward that virtue promises her devotees is plainly confined to their own hearts. Often they must struggle with the most vexing worldly cares, and put up with the vices and moods of relatives for whom they can never feel friendship.[14]

5.73 There have been many women in the world who were not supported by the reason and virtue of their fathers and brothers. Instead, they strengthened their own minds by struggling against those men's vices and follies. Yet these women have never met a hero in the shape of a husband who might pay them the debt humanity owed them. Such a hero might happen to bring their reason back to its natural dependent state and restore to man the privilege he has usurped, of rising above opinion.

DR. FORDYCE'S SERMONS

Fordyce's sermons to young women are attacked for their affected style and flattery of women's persons.

5.74 Dr. Fordyce's sermons have long been part of a young woman's library; indeed, girls at school are allowed to read them. But I would banish them at once from my pupil's shelves if I wished to strengthen her understanding by leading her to form sound principles on a broad basis. I would banish them even if I only wanted to cultivate her taste, though it must be granted that they contain many sensible observations.[15]

14 Telemachus is the hero of Fénelon's *Adventures of Telemachus* (1699); in *Emile*, Sophie falls in love with him from the book and wants a husband like him.
15 James Fordyce (1720–1796), Scottish Presbyterian minister, author of the widely read *Sermons to Young Women* (1766).

5.75 Dr. Fordyce may have had a very praiseworthy aim. But these discourses are written in so affected a style that I would not let girls read them on that account alone, even if I had nothing to object to in his *mellifluous* precepts. I would let them read these sermons only if I meant to hunt every spark of nature out of their makeup, melting every human quality into female weakness and artificial grace. I say artificial, because true grace arises from a certain independence of mind.

5.76 Children do not care about pleasing and only want to amuse themselves, and they are often very graceful. And the nobility, who have mostly lived among inferiors and always had money at their command, acquire a graceful ease of bearing. It should rather be called a habitual grace of body than that higher gracefulness which is truly the expression of the mind. This mental grace, unnoticed by vulgar eyes, often flashes across a rough face and lights up every feature, showing simplicity and independence of mind.—It is then that we read signs of immortality in the eye and see the soul in every gesture. At rest, the face and limbs may have little beauty to recommend them, and the behavior nothing unusual to attract general attention. Most people, however, look for more *tangible* beauty. Yet simplicity is generally admired when people do not stop to consider what they are admiring. And can there be simplicity without sincerity? But to be done with remarks that are somewhat rambling, though the subject naturally prompted them—

5.77 In declamatory periods Dr. Fordyce spins out Rousseau's eloquence. In the most sentimental rant he sets out his opinions on the female character, and on the behavior woman ought to adopt to make herself lovely.

5.78 He shall speak for himself. This is how he has Nature address man: "Behold these smiling innocents, whom I have graced with my fairest gifts and entrusted to your protection; behold them with love and respect; treat them with tenderness and honor. They are timid and need to be defended. They are frail; O do not take advantage of their weakness! Let their fears and blushes endear them to you. Let their confidence in you

never be abused.—But is it possible that any of you can be such brutes, so supremely wicked, as to abuse it? Can you find it in your hearts[16] to rob these gentle, trusting creatures of their treasure, or do anything to strip them of their native robe of virtue? Cursed be the impious hand that would dare to violate the unblemished form of Chastity! You wretch! You ruffian! Forbear, and do not venture to provoke heaven's fiercest vengeance." I know of no serious comment that can be made on this curious passage, and I could produce many like it. Some are so very sentimental that I have heard rational men call them indecent when they mentioned them with disgust.

5.79 Throughout there is a display of cold, artificial feeling, and that parade of sensibility which boys and girls should be taught to despise as the sure mark of a small, vain mind. Florid appeals are made to heaven, and to the *beauteous innocents*, the fairest images of heaven here below, while sober sense is left far behind.—This is not the language of the heart, nor will it ever reach the heart, though it may tickle the ear.

5.80 I will be told, perhaps, that the public has enjoyed these volumes.—True—and Hervey's *Meditations* are still read, though he sinned just as much against sense and taste.[17]

5.81 I particularly object to the lover-like phrases of pumped-up passion scattered everywhere through them. If women are ever to be allowed to walk without leading strings, why must they be coaxed into virtue by artful flattery and compliments to their sex?—Speak to them the language of truth and soberness, and away with the lullabies of condescending endearment! Let them be taught to respect themselves as rational creatures, and not led to dote on their own insipid persons. It stirs my bile to hear a preacher holding forth on dress and needlework. It stirs it still more to hear him address the *British fair, the fairest of the fair*, as if they had only feelings.

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16 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Can you?—Can you? would be the most emphatic comment, if it were drawled out in a whining voice.

17 James Hervey (1714–1758), Anglican clergyman whose effusive *Meditations Among the Tombs* (1746) was enormously popular.

5.82 Even in recommending piety he uses the following argument: "Never, perhaps, does a fine woman strike more deeply than when she is composed into devout recollection and filled with the noblest thoughts. Then, without knowing it, she takes on a higher dignity and new graces, so that the beauties of holiness seem to radiate around her, and the bystanders are almost led to imagine her already worshipping among her kindred angels!" Why are women to be brought up with this desire for conquest? The very word, used in this sense, makes me queasy! Do religion and virtue offer no stronger motives, no brighter reward? Must they always be debased by making women consider the sex of their companions? Must women be taught always to be pleasing? And when they aim their small artillery at the heart of man, is it necessary to tell them that a little sense is enough to make their attention *incredibly soothing*? "As a small degree of knowledge entertains in a woman, so from a woman, though for a different reason, a small expression of kindness delights, particularly if she has beauty!" I would have supposed it was for the same reason.

5.83 Why are girls told that they resemble angels, except to sink them below women? Or that a gentle, innocent female comes nearer than any other object to the idea we have formed of angels? Yet at the same time they are told that they are like angels only when they are young and beautiful. So it is their persons, not their virtues, that win them this homage.

5.84 Idle, empty words! What can such deceptive flattery lead to but vanity and folly? The lover, it is true, has a poetic license to exalt his beloved. His reason is the dupe of his passion, and he does not tell a lie when he borrows the language of adoration. His imagination may raise the idol of his heart above humanity without blame. It would be a happy thing for women if the only men who flattered them were the men who loved them—I mean who loved the individual, not the sex. But should a grave preacher stuff his sermons with such nonsense?

5.85 In sermons and novels alike, however, sensuality always stays true to its text. Moralists allow men to cultivate different

qualities, as nature directs, and to take on the different characters that the same passions, varied almost infinitely, give to each individual. A virtuous man may have a hot-tempered or a sanguine constitution, and be lighthearted or serious, without reproach. He may be firm to the point of being almost overbearing, or, weakly submissive, have no will or opinion of his own. But all women are to be leveled, by meekness and docility, into one single character of yielding softness and gentle compliance.

5.86 I will use the preacher's own words: "Let it be observed that in your sex manly exercises are never graceful; that in women a masculine tone and figure, as well as a masculine air and bearing, are always off-putting; and that men of sensibility want in every woman soft features and a flowing voice, a figure that is not robust, and a delicate and gentle manner."

5.87 Is the following portrait not the portrait of a house slave? "I am astonished at the folly of many women who keep reproaching their husbands for leaving them alone, for preferring this or that company to theirs, for treating them with this or that sign of disregard or indifference—when, to tell the truth, they have largely themselves to blame. Not that I would justify the men in anything wrong on their part. But had you behaved to them with more *respectful observance* and a more *steady tenderness—studying their moods, overlooking their mistakes, submitting to their opinions* in matters of no importance, letting pass little instances of unevenness, caprice, or temper, giving *soft* answers to hasty words, complaining as seldom as possible, and making it your daily care to relieve their anxieties and anticipate their wishes, to enliven their dull hours, and to call up ideas of happiness: had you followed this conduct, I have no doubt that you would have kept and even increased their esteem, enough to secure every degree of influence that could promote their virtue or your mutual satisfaction; and your house might today have been the home of domestic bliss." Such a woman ought to be an angel—or she is an ass—for I see not a trace of human character, neither reason nor passion, in this domestic drudge, whose being is swallowed up in a tyrant's.

5.88 Still, Dr. Fordyce must know very little of the human heart if he really thought that such conduct would bring back wandering love instead of arousing contempt. No: beauty, gentleness, etc., etc., may win a heart; but esteem, the only lasting affection, can be won only by virtue supported by reason. It is respect for the understanding that keeps tenderness for the person alive.

5.89 Because these volumes are so often put into the hands of young people, I have paid them more attention than, strictly speaking, they deserve. But since they have helped to corrupt the taste and weaken the understanding of many of my fellow creatures, I could not pass over them in silence.

DR. GREGORY'S LEGACY

Gregory's advice to his daughters is faulted for teaching dissimulation and rules of decorum instead of reason.

5.90 Such fatherly concern runs through Dr. Gregory's *Legacy to His Daughters* that I take up the task of criticism with affectionate respect. But since this little book has many attractions that recommend it to the most respectable women, I cannot pass silently over arguments that so plausibly support opinions which, I think, have had the most harmful effect on the morals and manners of the female world.

5.91 His easy, familiar style suits the drift of his advice particularly well, and the melancholy tenderness that his respect for the memory of a beloved wife spreads through the whole work makes it very affecting. Yet a certain concise elegance, conspicuous in many passages, disturbs this sympathy: we stumble on the author when we expected to meet only the—father.

5.92 Besides, having two aims in view, he seldom held steadily to either. He wished to make his daughters amiable, and he feared that unhappiness might be the only result of instilling sentiments that could draw them out of the track of ordinary life without enabling them to act with a matching independence and dignity. So he checks the natural flow of his thoughts, and advises neither one thing nor the other.

5.93 In the preface he tells them a sad truth: "that they will hear, at least once in their lives, the genuine sentiments of a man who has no interest in deceiving them."

5.94 Unhappy woman! What can be expected of you, when the beings on whom you are said naturally to depend for reason and support all have an interest in deceiving you! This is the root of the evil that has spread a corroding mildew over all your virtues and, blighting your opening faculties in the bud, has made you the weak thing you are! It is this separate interest—this insidious state of warfare—that undermines morality and divides the human race!

5.95 If love has made some women wretched, how many more has the cold, meaningless business of gallantry made vain and useless! Yet this heartless attention to women is thought so manly, so polite, that until society is organized very differently, I fear this remnant of Gothic manners will not give way to a more reasonable and affectionate way of behaving. Besides, to strip it of its imaginary dignity, I must point out that in the least civilized European states this lip service prevails to a very great degree, together with an extreme looseness of morals. In Portugal, the country I have particularly in mind, it takes precedence over the most serious moral obligations: a man is seldom assassinated when he is in a woman's company. The brutal hand of violence is unnerved by this chivalrous spirit; and if the stroke of vengeance cannot be held back, the lady is begged to pardon the rudeness and depart in peace—though spattered, perhaps, with her husband's or her brother's blood.

5.96 I shall pass over his remarks on religion, because I mean to discuss that subject in a separate chapter.

5.97 His remarks on behavior, though many of them are very sensible, I entirely disapprove of, because they seem to me to begin, so to speak, at the wrong end. A cultivated understanding and an affectionate heart will never need starched rules of decorum—something more substantial than mere seemliness will come of them; and without understanding, the behavior recommended here would be rank affectation. Decorum,

indeed, is the one thing needful!—decorum is to take the place of nature, and banish all simplicity and variety of character from the female world. Yet what good can all this superficial advice do? It is, of course, much easier to prescribe this or that way of behaving than to set the reason to work. But once the mind has been stocked with useful knowledge and strengthened by use, the regulation of behavior can safely be left to its guidance.

5.98 Why, for instance, should the following warning be given, when artifice of every kind must taint the mind? And why tangle up the great motives of action, which reason and religion join to enforce, with pitiful worldly dodges and sleight-of-hand tricks to win the applause of gaping, tasteless fools? "Be cautious even in displaying your good sense[18]. It will be thought that you assume a superiority over the rest of the company.—But if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great talents and a cultivated understanding." If men of real merit, as he observes afterward, are above this meanness, why must the behavior of all women be tuned to please fools—or men who, having little claim to respect as individuals, choose to keep close ranks in their phalanx? Men who insist on their shared superiority, when this superiority of sex is all they have, are of course very excusable.

5.99 There would be no end to rules of behavior if it were always proper to adopt the tone of the company; for by forever changing key in this way, a *flat* would often pass for a *natural* note.

5.100 Surely it would have been wiser to advise women to improve themselves until they rose above the fumes of vanity, and then let public opinion come around—for where are rules of accommodation to stop? The narrow path of truth and virtue leans neither to the right nor to the left. It is a straightforward business, and those who are earnestly pursuing their road may leap over many decorous prejudices without leaving modesty

18 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Let women once acquire good sense—and if it deserves the name, it will teach them (or what use would it be?) how to use it.

behind. Make the heart clean and give the head something to do, and I venture to predict that there will be nothing offensive in the behavior.

5.101 The fashionable air that many young people are so eager to acquire always strikes me as being like the studied poses in some modern prints, copied with tasteless servility from the antiques: the soul is left out, and none of the parts are tied together by what can properly be called character. This varnish of fashion, which seldom sticks very closely to good sense, may dazzle the weak; but nature left to itself will seldom disgust the wise. Besides, when a woman has enough sense not to pretend to anything she does not understand to some degree, there is no need for her to resolve to hide her talents under a bushel. Let things take their natural course, and all will be well.

5.102 It is this system of pretense, running through the whole book, that I despise. Women are always to *seem* to be this and that—yet virtue might address them in Hamlet's words: "Seems! I know not seems!—Have that within that passeth show!"—[19]

5.103 The same tone recurs. In another place, after recommending delicacy without drawing sufficient distinctions, he adds: "The men will complain of your reserve. They will assure you that a franker manner would make you more amiable. But trust me, they are not sincere when they tell you so.—I admit that on some occasions it might make you more agreeable as companions, but it would make you less amiable as women: an important distinction, which many of your sex are not aware of."

5.104 This desire to be women at all times is the very consciousness that degrades their sex. Except with a lover—and I must repeat an earlier observation with emphasis—it would be good if they were simply agreeable or rational companions. But on this point his advice is even inconsistent with a passage that I mean to quote with the most marked approval.

5.105 "The idea that a woman may allow all innocent liberties, provided her virtue is secure, is both grossly indelicate and dan-

19 Loosely quoting *Hamlet* 1.2: "Seems, madam? Nay, it is; I know not 'seems.' ... But I have that within which passeth show."

gerous, and has proved fatal to many of your sex." With this opinion I agree completely. A man or a woman of any feeling must always want to convince a beloved person that it is the caresses of the individual, not of the sex, that are received and returned with pleasure, and that the heart, rather than the senses, is moved. Without this natural delicacy, love becomes a selfish physical gratification that soon degrades the character.

5.106 I carry this idea still further. Affection, where love is not in question, authorizes many physical endearments which, flowing naturally from an innocent heart, give life to behavior; but physical familiarity that springs from appetite, gallantry, or vanity is despicable. When a man squeezes the hand of a pretty woman he has never seen before while handing her into a carriage, she will regard such an impertinent liberty as an insult, if she has any true delicacy, instead of being flattered by this meaningless homage to beauty. These are the privileges of friendship, or of the momentary homage the heart pays to virtue when it suddenly flashes into view—mere animal high spirits have no claim to the tokens of affection.

5.107 Wishing to feed the affections with what now feeds vanity, I would gladly persuade women to act on simpler principles. Let them deserve love, and they will obtain it, even if they are never told that "the power of a fine woman over the hearts of men, of men of the finest talents, is even beyond what she imagines."

5.108 I have already noted the petty warnings about duplicity, female softness, and delicacy of constitution; for these are the changes he rings over and over without end—more decorously than Rousseau, it is true, but it all comes back to the same point. Anyone who takes the trouble to analyze these sentiments will find the foundations not quite so delicate as the building on top of them.

5.109 The subject of amusements is treated too briefly, but in the same spirit.

5.110 When I come to treat friendship, love, and marriage, it will be seen that we differ substantially in opinion. I shall not anticipate here what I have to say on these important subjects,

but will confine my remarks to the general drift of his views—to that cautious family prudence, to those narrow views of partial, unenlightened affection, which shut out pleasure and improvement by vainly trying to ward off sorrow and error, and which, by guarding heart and mind in this way, destroy all their energy as well. It is far better to be often deceived than never to trust; to be disappointed in love than never to love; to lose a husband's fondness than to forfeit his esteem.

5.111 How happy it would be for the world—and so, of course, for individuals—if all this fruitless anxiety to achieve worldly happiness on a narrow plan were turned into an eager desire to improve the understanding!—"Wisdom is the principal thing; *therefore* get wisdom; and with all your getting get understanding."—"How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity and hate knowledge?" says Wisdom to the daughters of men![20]

WOMEN WRITERS ON WOMEN

Piozzi, de Staël and Genlis are criticized, Chapone respected, and Catharine Macaulay praised as the ablest woman of her country.

5.112 I do not intend to refer to every writer who has written on female manners—that would in fact only be going over old ground, since they have generally written in the same vein. But in attacking the boasted prerogative of man—the prerogative that may emphatically be called the iron scepter of tyranny, the original sin of tyrants—I declare myself against all power built on prejudices, however ancient.

5.113 If the submission demanded is founded on justice, there is no appeal to a higher power—for God is Justice itself. Let us, then, as children of the same parent—unless we are made illegitimate by being the younger born—reason together, and learn to submit to the authority of reason when her voice is clearly heard. But if it is proved that this throne of prerogative rests only on a chaotic mass of prejudices with no inner principle of order to hold them together—or on an elephant, a tortoise, or

20 Proverbs 4:7 and 1:22.

even the mighty shoulders of a son of the earth—then those who dare to brave the consequences may break free without any breach of duty, without sinning against the order of things.[21]

5.114 While reason raises humanity above the brutish herd, and death is pregnant with promises, the only people subject to blind authority are those who have no reliance on their own strength. "They are free—who will be free[22]!"—

5.115 The being who can govern itself has nothing to fear in life; but if anything is dearer to it than its own self-respect, the price must be paid to the last penny. Virtue, like everything valuable, must be loved for herself alone, or she will not make her home with us. She will not give that peace "which passeth understanding" when she is used merely as stilts for reputation, and respected with Pharisaic exactness because "honesty is the best policy."

5.116 It cannot be denied that the plan of life that enables us to carry some knowledge and virtue into another world is also the one best suited to secure contentment in this one. Yet few people act on this principle, though everyone admits it is beyond dispute. Present pleasure or present power sweeps these sober convictions aside; man bargains with happiness for the day, not for life. How few!—how very few!—have enough foresight or resolution to endure a small evil now in order to avoid a greater one later.

5.117 Woman in particular, whose virtue[23] is built on mutual prejudices, seldom attains this greatness of mind; so that, becoming the slave of her own feelings, she is easily subjugated by those of others. Thus degraded, her reason—her misty reason!—is used to polish her chains rather than to snap them.

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21 Alluding to the cosmology, familiar in Europe from travelers' accounts of India, in which the world rests on an elephant standing on a tortoise, and to the earth-born giant Atlas, who holds up the heavens.

22 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. "He is the freeman whom the *truth* makes free!" *Cowper.*

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. William Cowper, *The Task* (1785), Book 5.

23 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. I mean to use a word that covers more than chastity, the sexual virtue.

5.118 I have listened with indignation as women argued along the same lines as men, and adopted the sentiments that brutalize them, with all the stubbornness of ignorance.

5.119 I must illustrate my claim with a few examples. Mrs. Piozzi, who often repeated by rote what she did not understand, steps forward with Johnsonian periods.[24]

5.120 "Do not seek happiness in singularity; and dread a refinement of wisdom as a straying into folly." Thus she dogmatically addresses a newly married man; and to explain this pompous opening she adds: "I said that your lady's person would not grow more pleasing to you; but pray let her never suspect that it grows less so. It is well known that a woman will forgive an insult to her understanding much sooner than one to her person; nor will any of us contradict the assertion. All our attainments, all our arts, are employed to gain and keep the heart of man; and what mortification can exceed the disappointment if the end is not achieved? There is no reproof, however pointed, no punishment, however severe, that a woman of spirit will not prefer to being neglected; and if she can endure neglect without complaint, it only proves that she means to make up for her husband's slights with the attentions of others!"

5.121 These are truly masculine sentiments.—"All our *arts* are employed to gain and keep the heart of man"—and what is the conclusion? If her person is neglected—and was there ever a person, even one formed with the symmetry of the Medici Venus, that was not neglected?—she will make up for it by trying to please other men. Noble morality! But in this way the understanding of the whole sex is insulted, and their virtue robbed of the common basis of virtue. A woman must know that her person cannot be as pleasing to her husband as it was to her lover; and if she is offended with him for being a human creature, she might as well whine about the loss of his heart as about any other foolish thing.—And this very lack of discernment, or

24 Hester Lynch Piozzi (1741–1821), formerly Mrs. Thrale, writer and close friend of Samuel Johnson, whose grand balanced sentences Wollstonecraft accuses her of imitating.

unreasonable anger, proves that he could not turn his fondness for her person into affection for her virtues or respect for her understanding.

5.122 As long as women profess such opinions and act on them, their understandings, at least, deserve the contempt and abuse that men—*who never* insult their persons—have pointedly aimed at the female mind. And it is the sentiments of these polite men, who do not wish to be burdened with mind, that vain women thoughtlessly adopt. Yet they should know that insulted reason alone can spread around the person that *sacred* reserve which makes human affections—for human affections always contain some base alloy—as lasting as is consistent with the great end of existence: the attainment of virtue.

5.123 The Baroness de Staël speaks the same language as the lady just quoted, with more enthusiasm. Her eulogy of Rousseau happened to come into my hands, and her sentiments—the sentiments of too many women—may serve as a text for a few comments. "Though Rousseau," she observes, "has tried to keep women from meddling in public affairs and playing a brilliant part on the stage of politics, yet in speaking of them, how much he has done so to their satisfaction! If he wished to deprive them of some rights foreign to their sex, how he has restored to them forever all those to which it has a claim![25] And in trying to diminish their influence over the deliberations of men, how sacredly he has established the empire they hold over their happiness! In helping them to step down from a usurped throne, he has seated them firmly on the one for which nature destined them; and though he is full of indignation against them when they try to resemble men, yet when they come before him with all the *charms, weaknesses, virtues* and *errors* of their sex, his respect for their *persons* amounts almost to adoration." True!—for there was never a sensualist who worshiped more fervently at the shrine of beauty. So devout, indeed, was his respect for the person that, apart from the virtue of chastity—for obvious

25 Germaine de Staël (1766–1817), whose *Letters on the Works and Character of J.-J. Rousseau* appeared in 1788.

reasons—he wished to see it adorned only with charms, weaknesses, and errors. He was afraid that the austerity of reason might disturb the soft playfulness of love. The master wanted a courtesan-like slave to fondle, entirely dependent on his reason and his bounty. He did not want a companion whom he would be compelled to esteem, or a friend to whom he could entrust the education of his children should death take their father before he had fulfilled that sacred task. He denies woman reason, shuts her out from knowledge, and turns her away from truth; yet he is forgiven, because "he admits the passion of love." It would take some ingenuity to show why women should be so obliged to him for admitting love in this way, when it is clear that he admits it only for men's relaxation and to perpetuate the species. But he spoke with passion, and that powerful spell worked on the sensibility of a young admirer. "What does it matter to women," this rhapsodist continues, "that his reason disputes the empire with them, when his heart is devotedly theirs?" It is not empire but equality that they should contend for. Yet even if they wished only to prolong their sway, they should not rely entirely on their persons; for though beauty may win a heart, it cannot keep it, even while the beauty is in full bloom, unless the mind lends it at least some graces.

5.124 Once women are enlightened enough to discover their real interest on a grand scale, they will, I am convinced, be very ready to give up all the prerogatives of love that are not mutual—speaking of them as lasting prerogatives—in exchange for the calm satisfaction of friendship and the tender confidence of habitual esteem. Before marriage they will not put on insolent airs, nor will they submit abjectly afterward; by trying to act like reasonable creatures in both situations, they will not be tumbled from a throne onto a stool.

5.125 Madame de Genlis has written several entertaining books for children, and her *Letters on Education* offer many useful hints that sensible parents will certainly take advantage of; but her

views are narrow, and her prejudices as unreasonable as they are strong.[26]

5.126 I shall pass over her vehement argument for the eternity of future punishment, because I blush to think that any human being should argue vehemently for such a cause. I will make only a few remarks on her absurd way of letting parental authority take the place of reason. For everywhere she teaches *blind* submission not only to parents, but also to the opinion of the world[27].

5.127 She tells the story of a young man engaged, at his father's express wish, to a girl with a fortune. Before the marriage can take place, the girl loses her fortune and is thrown friendless on the world. The father uses the most infamous tricks to separate his son from her; and when the son uncovers his villainy and, following the dictates of honor, marries the girl, nothing but misery follows—because, if you please, he married *without* his father's consent. On what ground can religion or morality stand when justice is defied like this? In the same vein she presents an accomplished young woman as ready to marry anyone her *mamma* chose to recommend; and as actually marrying the young man of her own choice without feeling any stirrings of passion, because a well-educated girl had no time to be in love. Is it possible to have much respect for a system of education that insults reason and nature like this?

5.128 Many similar opinions appear in her writings, mixed with sentiments that do credit to her head and heart. Yet so much superstition is mixed into her religion, and so much worldly wisdom into her morality, that I would not let a young person

26 Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis (1746–1830), French educator and novelist; her *Adèle et Théodore, ou Lettres sur l'éducation* appeared in 1782.

27 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. A person is not to act in this or that way, though convinced that doing so is right, because some ambiguous circumstances might lead the world to *suspect* that they acted from other motives.—This is sacrificing the substance for a shadow. Let people simply watch their own hearts and act rightly, as far as they can judge, and they can wait patiently until the opinion of the world comes around. It is best to be guided by a simple motive—for justice has too often been sacrificed to propriety, which is another word for convenience.

read her works unless I could talk over the subjects afterward and point out the contradictions.

5.129 Mrs. Chapone's *Letters* are written with such good sense and unaffected humility, and contain so many useful observations, that I mention them only to pay the worthy author this tribute of respect. It is true that I cannot always agree with her; but I always respect her.[28]

5.130 The very word respect brings Mrs. Macaulay to mind—undoubtedly the woman of the greatest abilities this country has ever produced. And yet this woman has been allowed to die without sufficient respect being paid to her memory.[29]

5.131 Posterity, however, will be more just, and will remember that Catharine Macaulay was an example of intellectual attainments supposed to be incompatible with the weakness of her sex. In her style of writing, indeed, no sex appears; for, like the sense it conveys, it is strong and clear.

5.132 I will not call hers a masculine understanding, because I do not accept such an arrogant claim that reason belongs to men; but I maintain that it was a sound one, and that her judgment, the ripe fruit of profound thinking, was proof that a woman can acquire judgment in the full sense of the word. With more penetration than shrewdness, more understanding than imagination, she writes with sober energy and close argument; yet sympathy and benevolence lend interest to her sentiments, and give her arguments that vital heat which forces the reader to weigh them[30].

5.133 When I first thought of writing these criticisms, I looked forward to Mrs. Macaulay's approval with a little of that eager hopefulness which it has been the business of my life to sup-

28 Hester Chapone (1727–1801), author of *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773).

29 Catharine Macaulay died in June 1791; her *Letters on Education* had appeared in 1790.

30 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Since I agree with Mrs. Macaulay on many branches of education, I refer the reader to her valuable work instead of quoting her opinions in support of my own.

press; but I soon heard—with the sick qualm of disappointed hope, and the still seriousness of regret—that she was no more!

LORD CHESTERFIELD AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD

Teaching the young an early, suspicious knowledge of the world is argued to narrow the heart and stunt virtue.

5.134 In surveying the various works that have been written on education, Lord Chesterfield's *Letters* must not be passed over in silence. Not that I intend to analyze his unmanly, immoral system, or even to pick out any of the useful, shrewd remarks that turn up in his frivolous correspondence. No, I mean only to offer a few reflections on their avowed aim—the art of acquiring an early knowledge of the world. It is an art, I venture to assert, that secretly preys, like the worm in the bud, on the developing powers, and turns to poison the generous sap that should rise vigorously in the youthful frame, inspiring warm affections and great resolutions[31].

5.135 For everything, says the wise man, there is a season—and who would look for the fruits of autumn in the mild months of spring? But this is mere rhetoric, and I mean to reason with those worldly-wise instructors who, instead of cultivating the judgment, instill prejudices, and harden the heart that gradual experience would only have cooled. An early acquaintance with human weaknesses—what is called knowledge of the world—is, in my opinion, the surest way to narrow the heart and dampen the natural ardor of youth, which produces not only great talents but great virtues. For the vain attempt to bring forth the fruit of experience before the sapling has put out its leaves only exhausts its strength and keeps it from taking its natural form—

31 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. The opinion that children ought to be constantly guarded against the vices and follies of the world seems to me very mistaken. In the course of my experience—and my eyes have looked about me—I never knew a young person educated in this way, who had early absorbed these chilling suspicions and repeated by rote the hesitant *if* of old age, who did not turn out a selfish character.

just as the form and strength of settling metals are damaged when the attraction of cohesion is disturbed.

5.136 Tell me, you who have studied the human mind: is it not a strange way to fix principles, to show young people that principles are seldom stable? And how can principles be strengthened by habits when example proves them false? Why should the ardor of youth be damped like this, and the luxuriance of imagination cut to the quick? This dry caution may, it is true, protect a character from worldly mishaps; but it will infallibly rule out excellence in either virtue or knowledge[32]. The stumbling block that suspicion throws across every path will prevent any vigorous exertion of genius or benevolence, and life will be stripped of its most alluring charm long before its calm evening, when a person should withdraw into contemplation for comfort and support.

5.137 A young man who has been brought up among friends at home, and encouraged to stock his mind with as much speculative knowledge as can be gained from reading and from the natural reflections inspired by youthful bursts of high spirits and instinctive feelings, will enter the world with warm and mistaken expectations. But this seems to be the course of nature; and in morals, as in works of taste, we should heed her sacred indications, and not presume to lead where we ought humbly to follow.

5.138 In the world, few people act on principle; present feelings and early habits are the great mainsprings. But how deadened would the former become, and how would the latter turn into iron, corroding fetters, if the world were shown to young people just as it is, before any knowledge of humanity or of their own hearts, slowly gained by experience, had made them forbearing? Their fellow creatures would then be seen not as frail beings like themselves, condemned to struggle with human weaknesses, sometimes showing the light and sometimes the dark

32 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. I have already observed that an early knowledge of the world, gained in a natural way by mixing in it, has the same effect—citing army officers and women as examples.

side of their character, and drawing out by turns feelings of love and disgust—but as beasts of prey to be guarded against, until every broad social feeling, in a word, humanity itself, was rooted out.

5.139 In real life, on the contrary, as we gradually discover the imperfections of our nature, we also discover virtues; and when we mix with our fellow creatures and look at the same things they do, various circumstances attach us to them that are never thought of when a hasty, unnatural knowledge of the world is acquired. We see a folly swell into a vice by almost imperceptible degrees, and we pity even as we blame. But if the hideous monster burst suddenly on our sight, fear and disgust, making us more severe than a human being ought to be, might lead us with blind zeal to usurp the role of the Almighty and pronounce damnation on our fellow mortals—forgetting that we cannot read the heart, and that seeds of the same vices lie hidden in our own.

5.140 I have already remarked that we expect more from instruction than mere instruction can produce. Instead of preparing young people to meet the evils of life with dignity, and to gain wisdom and virtue by exercising their own faculties, we heap precept on precept and demand blind obedience, when conviction should be brought home to reason.

5.141 Suppose, for instance, that a young person in the first ardor of friendship idolizes the beloved friend—what harm can come of this mistaken, enthusiastic attachment? Perhaps virtue must first appear in human form to make an impression on young hearts; the ideal model that a more mature and elevated mind looks up to, and shapes for itself, would escape their sight. He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God? asked the wisest of men.[33]

5.142 It is natural for the young to adorn the first object of their affection with every good quality; and the emulation produced by ignorance—or, to put it more properly, by inexperience—

33 The saying is from 1 John 4:20; "the wisest of men" is the title usually given to Solomon.

brings forward the mind capable of such an affection. When, in the course of time, perfection is found to be beyond the reach of mortals, virtue in the abstract comes to seem beautiful, and wisdom sublime. Admiration then gives way to friendship properly so called, because it is cemented by esteem; and the person walks alone, dependent only on heaven for that eager longing for perfection which always glows in a noble mind. But this knowledge a person must gain by exercising his own faculties; and this is surely the blessed fruit of disappointed hope! For He who delights to spread happiness and to show mercy to the weak creatures who are learning to know him never planted a good inclination in us to be a tormenting will-o'-the-wisp.

5.143 We now let our trees spread with wild luxuriance, and we do not expect to combine by force the majestic marks of time with useful graces; we wait patiently until they have struck their roots deep and braved many a storm.—Is the mind, then, which advances toward perfection more slowly in proportion to its dignity, to be treated with less respect? To argue from analogy: everything around us is in a state of progress; and when an unwelcome knowledge of life produces almost a weariness of life, and we discover by the natural course of things that all that is done under the sun is vanity, we are drawing near the solemn close of the drama. The days of activity and hope are over, and the opportunities that the first stage of existence has offered for advancing in the scale of intelligence must soon be added up.—Knowledge of the futility of life at this stage, or earlier if it is gained by experience, is very useful, because it is natural. But when a frail being is shown the follies and vices of mankind so that he may be taught to guard prudently against the ordinary accidents of life by sacrificing his heart—surely it is not harsh to call this the wisdom of this world, as opposed to the nobler fruit of piety and experience.

5.144 I will venture a paradox and give my opinion without reserve: if human beings were born only to complete a circle of life and death, it would be wise to take every step that foresight could suggest to make life happy. Moderation in every pursuit

would then be the highest wisdom; and the prudent pleasure-seeker might enjoy a degree of contentment, though he neither cultivated his understanding nor kept his heart pure. Prudence, supposing we were mortal, would be true wisdom—or, to be more explicit, would secure the greatest share of happiness over the whole of life. But knowledge beyond the conveniences of life would be a curse.

5.145 Why should we damage our health by close study? The exalted pleasure that intellectual pursuits give would hardly make up for the hours of exhaustion that follow, especially if we must also count the doubts and disappointments that cloud our research. Every inquiry ends in vanity and vexation, for the cause we most wanted to discover retreats before us like the horizon as we advance. The ignorant, by contrast, are like children: they suppose that if they could only walk straight ahead, they would at last arrive where the earth and the clouds meet. Yet, disappointed as we are in our research, the mind gains strength from the exercise. Perhaps it gains enough to understand the answers it may receive, in another stage of existence, to the anxious questions it asked when the understanding, on feeble wings, was fluttering around the visible effects and trying to dive into the hidden cause.

5.146 The passions too, the winds of life, would be useless, if not harmful, if the substance that makes up our thinking being merely became, after we have thought in vain, the support of plant life, nourishing a cabbage or blushing in a rose. The appetites would serve every earthly purpose and produce a more moderate and lasting happiness. But consider the powers of the soul. They are of little use here, and probably disturb our animal enjoyments, even while a sense of our dignity makes us glory in having them. They prove that life is merely an education, a state of infancy, and that the only hopes worth cherishing should not be sacrificed to it. What I mean to conclude, then, is that we ought to have a precise idea of what we want to achieve by education. The immortality of the soul is contradicted by the actions of many people who firmly profess to believe in it.

5.147 Suppose your first concern is to secure ease and prosperity on earth, leaving the future to take care of itself. Then you act prudently in giving your child an early insight into the weaknesses of his nature. You may not, it is true, make an Inkle of him. But do not imagine that someone who has absorbed a low opinion of human nature very early will keep to more than the letter of the law, or think it necessary to rise much above the common standard. He may avoid gross vices, because honesty is the best policy; but he will never aim at great virtues. The example of writers and artists will illustrate this remark.[34]

5.148 I must therefore venture to doubt whether what has been taken as an axiom in morals may not be a dogmatic assertion made by men who have coolly viewed humanity through books. In direct contradiction to them, I say that regulating the passions is not always wisdom. On the contrary, one reason why men have superior judgment and more fortitude than women seems undoubtedly to be this: they give freer scope to the grand passions, and by going astray more often they enlarge their minds. If, then, by the exercise of their own[35] reason they settle on some stable principle, they probably have the force of their passions to thank. Those passions were nourished by *false* views of life and allowed to leap over the boundary that keeps us content. But suppose that at the dawn of life we could soberly survey the scenes ahead of us in perspective and see everything in its true colors. How could the passions then gain enough strength to unfold the faculties?

34 Inkle is the English trader in Richard Steele's tale of "Inkle and Yarico" (*Spectator* No. 11, 1711), who sells into slavery the Native American woman who had saved his life.

35 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. "I find that all is only lip-wisdom that lacks experience," says Sidney.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586), poet and courtier; the line is from his prose romance the *Arcadia*.

THE WORLD SEEN FROM A HEIGHT

Surveying life without illusions, she argues that the passions, though deceptive, are needed to unfold the mind.

5.149 Let me now survey the world as if from a height, stripped of all its false, deceptive charms. The clear air lets me see each object in its true light, while my heart is still. I am as calm as the landscape in the morning, when the mists slowly disperse and silently unveil the beauties of nature, refreshed by rest.

5.150 In what light will the world now appear?—I rub my eyes and think that perhaps I am just waking from a vivid dream.

5.151 I see the sons and daughters of men chasing shadows and anxiously wasting their powers to feed passions that have no adequate object. So it would be, at least, if the very excess of these blind impulses did not make short-sighted mortals wiser without their consent, by preparing them for some other state. These impulses are pampered by the imagination, a lying guide that we nonetheless constantly trust. Or, what comes to the same thing, the excess makes them wiser while they are pursuing some imaginary present good.

5.152 After viewing things in this light, it would not be very far-fetched to imagine this world as a stage on which a pantomime is performed daily for the amusement of higher beings. How entertained they would be to see the ambitious man wearing himself out running after a phantom, "pursuing the bubble fame in the cannon's mouth," when that cannon was to blow him to nothing! For once consciousness is lost, it does not matter whether we rise in a whirlwind or come down in rain.[36] Suppose they compassionately sharpened his sight and showed him the thorny path to eminence. That path sinks like quicksand as he climbs and disappoints his hopes when they are almost within his grasp. Would he not then leave to others the honor of amusing them, and work to secure the present moment instead?

36 Adapted from Jaques's "seven ages of man" speech in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (2.7): "Seeking the bubble reputation / Even in the cannon's mouth."

Yet the constitution of his nature would make it hard for him to catch the flying stream. Such slaves are we to hope and fear!

5.153 But, vain as the ambitious man's pursuits would be, he is often striving for something more substantial than fame. Fame alone would indeed be the merest meteor, the wildest will-o'-the-wisp that could lure a man to ruin.—What! Give up the slightest gratification in order to be applauded when he is no more! Why this struggle, whether man is mortal or immortal, if that noble passion did not really raise him above his fellows?—

5.154 And love! What entertaining scenes it would produce. Pantaloon's tricks would have to give way to even greater folly. To see a mortal adorn an object with imaginary charms, and then fall down and worship the idol he himself had set up—how ridiculous! But what serious consequences follow, robbing man of the share of happiness that the Deity, by calling him into existence, has undoubtedly promised him (or else on what can God's attributes rest?). Would not all the purposes of life have been much better served if he had felt only what has been called physical love?[37] And would not the sight of the object, seen without the medium of the imagination, soon reduce the passion to an appetite? It would, if reflection, the noble distinction of man, did not give it force and make it an instrument for raising him above this earthly dross, by teaching him to love the center of all perfection—whose wisdom appears clearer and clearer in the works of nature as reason is enlightened and exalted by contemplation, and by acquiring that love of order which the struggles of passion produce.

5.155 The habit of reflection, and the knowledge gained by fostering any passion, could be shown to be equally useful, even if the object of the passion proved equally illusory. All such objects would look alike if they were not magnified by the ruling passion that the Author of all good has implanted in us. He implanted it to call forth and strengthen the faculties of each

37 Pantaloon: the foolish, doddering old man of the Italian commedia dell'arte and of English harlequin pantomimes.

individual, and to let it gain all the experience that an infant can gain when it does certain things without being able to say why.

5.156 I come down from my height and, mixing with my fellow creatures, feel myself swept along by the common stream. Ambition, love, hope and fear exert their usual power, though reason convinces us that their present and most attractive promises are only lying dreams. But suppose the cold hand of caution had damped each generous feeling before it had left any lasting mark on the character or fixed some habit. What could we then expect but selfish prudence, and reason barely rising above instinct? Anyone who has read Dean Swift's disgusting description of the Yahoos, and his insipid one of the Houyhnhnms, with a philosophical eye must see the futility of degrading the passions, or of making man rest in contentment.[38]

5.157 The young should *act*. If a youth had the experience of a gray head, he would be fitter for death than for life. His virtues would reside in his head rather than his heart and could produce nothing great. His understanding, prepared for this world, would not prove by any noble flights that it had a claim to a better one.

5.158 Besides, it is impossible to give a young person a true view of life. He must have struggled with his own passions before he can judge the force of the temptation that betrayed his brother into vice. Those who are entering life and those who are leaving it see the world from such different points of view that they can seldom think alike—unless the unfledged reason of the young never attempted a solitary flight.

5.159 When we hear of some daring crime, it strikes us in the deepest shade of wickedness and rouses our indignation. But the eye that watched the darkness gradually thicken must view it with more compassionate forbearance. The world cannot be seen by an unmoved spectator. We must mix in the crowd and feel as men feel before we can judge their feelings. In short, suppose we mean to live in the world in order to grow wiser and

38 In Book 4 of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), the Yahoos are brutish humanlike creatures and the Houyhnhnms coolly rational horses.

better, and not merely to enjoy the good things of life. Then we must come to know others at the same time as we come to know ourselves. Knowledge acquired any other way only hardens the heart and confuses the understanding.

5.160 I may be told that knowledge acquired in this way is sometimes bought at too high a price. I can only answer that I very much doubt whether any knowledge can be gained without labor and sorrow. Those who want to spare their children both should not complain if the children turn out neither wise nor virtuous. They aimed only at making them prudent; and prudence, early in life, is nothing but the cautious cunning of ignorant self-love.

5.161 I have noticed that young people whose education received special attention have generally been very superficial and conceited, and far from pleasing in any respect, because they had neither the unsuspecting warmth of youth nor the cool depth of age. I cannot help blaming this unnatural appearance mainly on hasty, premature instruction. It leads them to repeat presumptuously all the crude notions they have taken on trust, so that the careful education they received makes them slaves of prejudice all their lives.

5.162 Mental exertion, like bodily exertion, is irksome at first, so much so that most people would gladly let others both work and think for them. An observation I have often made will illustrate what I mean. Among strangers or acquaintances, a person of moderate abilities will sometimes assert an opinion heatedly. I will venture to say that such an opinion is very often a prejudice, for I have traced this to its source many times. These echoes have a high regard for the understanding of some relative or friend. Without fully grasping the opinions they are so eager to retail, they defend them with a stubbornness that would surprise even the person who cooked them up.

AGAINST RESPECTING PREJUDICES

Opinions held only because they are old are prejudices, and education cannot give what only experience teaches.

5.163 I know that a fashion for respecting prejudices now prevails. When anyone dares to confront them, though moved by humanity and armed with reason, he is haughtily asked whether his ancestors were fools. No, I would reply. Opinions of every kind were probably all thought through at first, and were therefore founded on some reason. Naturally, though, that reason was often a local expedient rather than a fundamental principle that would be reasonable at all times. But moss-covered opinions take on the misshapen form of prejudices when they are lazily adopted only because age has given them a venerable look, even though the reason on which they were built has ceased to be a reason, or can no longer be traced. Why should we love prejudices merely because they are prejudices[39]? A prejudice is a fond, obstinate conviction for which we can give no reason. The moment a reason can be given for an opinion, it stops being a prejudice, though it may be an error of judgment. Are we, then, being advised to cherish opinions only in order to defy reason? This way of arguing, if it can be called arguing, reminds me of what is commonly called a woman's reason. For women sometimes declare that they love, or believe, certain things *because* they love, or believe, them.

5.164 It is impossible to have a useful conversation with people who, in this style, answer only yes or no. Before you can bring them to a fair starting point, you must go back to the simple principles that came before the prejudices put about by power. And it is ten to one that you will be stopped by the philosophical assertion that certain principles are as false in practice as they

39 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. See Mr. Burke.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) Burke praised prejudice and urged cherishing prejudices "because they are prejudices."

are true in the abstract[40]. Indeed, one may infer that reason has whispered some doubts to them. It generally happens that people assert their opinions most heatedly when they begin to waver. They try to drive out their own doubts by convincing their opponent, and they grow angry when those gnawing doubts are thrown back to prey on them.

5.165 The fact is that people expect from education what education cannot give. A shrewd parent or tutor may strengthen the body and sharpen the tools with which the child is to gather knowledge; but the honey must be the reward of the individual's own industry. It is almost as absurd to try to make a youth wise through someone else's experience as to expect the body to grow strong through exercise that is only talked about, or watched[41]. Many of the children whose conduct has been most closely watched become the weakest adults. Their instructors merely instill certain notions into their minds that have no foundation except the instructors' own authority. If the instructors are loved or respected, the child's mind is cramped in its efforts and hesitant in its advances. The business of education in this case is only to guide the shooting tendrils to a suitable pole. Yet parents pile precept upon precept without letting a child acquire judgment for itself. Then they expect their children to act by this borrowed, deceptive light exactly as if they had kindled it themselves, and to be, when they enter life, what their parents are at its close. They do not consider that a tree, and even the human body, does not strengthen its fibers until it has reached its full growth.

5.166 There seems to be something similar in the mind. The senses and the imagination give form to the character during childhood and youth. As life advances, the understanding gives firmness to the first fair intentions of sensibility. At last virtue arises from the clear conviction of reason rather than from the

40 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. "Convince a man against his will, / He's of the same opinion still."

41 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. "One sees nothing when one is content only to contemplate; one must act oneself to be able to see how others act." *Rousseau.*

impulse of the heart, and morality is made to rest on a rock against which the storms of passion beat in vain.

5.167 I hope I shall not be misunderstood when I say that religion will not have this consolidating power unless it is founded on reason. Suppose it is merely the refuge of weakness or of wild fanaticism, and not a governing principle of conduct drawn from self-knowledge and a rational view of God's attributes. What can we then expect it to produce? The religion that consists in warming the affections and exalting the imagination is only the poetic part of religion. It may give the individual pleasure without making it a more moral being. Such religion may be a substitute for worldly pursuits, and yet narrow the heart instead of enlarging it. But if any great degree of excellence is expected, virtue must be loved as sublime and excellent in itself, and not for the advantages it brings or the evils it prevents. People will not become moral when they merely build castles in the air in a future world to make up for the disappointments they meet with in this one, turning their thoughts away from the duties they owe to others toward religious daydreams.

5.168 Most prospects in life are spoiled by the shifty worldly wisdom of people who forget that they cannot serve God and mammon, and try to blend contradictory things.—If you want to make your son rich, follow one course. If your only concern is to make him virtuous, you must take another. But do not imagine that you can leap from one road to the other without losing your way[42].

42 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. See an excellent essay on this subject by Mrs. Barbauld, in *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose.*

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The essay is Barbauld's "Against Inconsistency in Our Expectations" (1773).

Chapter VI: The Effect Which an Early Association of Ideas Has upon the Character

Habits of thought formed in girlhood fix women's minds on appearance and feeling.

6.1 Women are educated in the enervating style recommended by the writers I have been criticizing. Because of their subordinate position in society, they have no chance to recover their lost ground. Is it surprising, then, that women everywhere seem a defect in nature? Considering how decisive an effect the early association of ideas has on character, is it surprising that they neglect their understandings and turn all their attention to their looks?

6.2 The great advantages that naturally come from storing the mind with knowledge are obvious from the following considerations. The association of our ideas is either habitual or instantaneous, and the second kind seems to depend on the original temper of the mind rather than on the will. Once ideas and facts have been taken in, they lie ready for use. Then some chance circumstance makes information received at very different periods of our lives dart into the mind with illuminating force. Many recollections are like a flash of lightning, one idea assimilating and explaining another with astonishing speed. I am not referring now to that quick perception of truth which is so intuitive that it defies investigation. It moves so fast that we lose sight of it, and cannot tell whether memory or reasoning opened the dark cloud. Over those instantaneous associations we have little

power. Once the mind has been enlarged by wide-ranging flights or deep reflection, the raw materials will to some degree arrange themselves. The understanding, it is true, may keep us from drawing out of proportion when we group our thoughts, or when we copy down the warm sketches of fancy from the imagination. But the animal spirits, the individual character, supply the coloring. Over this subtle electric fluid[1], how little power we have, and how little power reason can gain over it! These fine, intractable spirits seem to be the essence of genius. Shining in its eagle eye, they produce in the highest degree the happy energy of associating thoughts in ways that surprise, delight and instruct. These are the glowing minds that concentrate pictures for their fellow creatures. They make them look with interest at objects they had passed over in nature, once those objects are reflected from the impassioned imagination.

6.3 Let me explain myself. Most people cannot see or feel poetically. They lack fancy, and therefore flee solitude in search of objects for the senses. But when an author lends them his eyes, they can see as he saw, and be entertained by images they could not pick out for themselves, though those images were lying right before them.

6.4 Education, then, only supplies the man of genius with knowledge to give variety and contrast to his associations. But there is also a habitual association of ideas that grows "with our growth." It has a great effect on the moral character of humanity and usually gives the mind a bent that lasts throughout life. The understanding is so pliable, and yet so stubborn, that associations formed by chance circumstances while the body is growing to maturity can seldom be untangled by reason. One idea calls up another, its old associate. Memory is faithful to first impressions and retraces them with mechanical exactness, par-

1 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. When I have felt like laughing at materialists, I have sometimes asked the following question. The most powerful effects in nature seem to be produced by fluids, such as the magnetic fluid. Might the passions, then, be fine volatile fluids that embraced humanity and held its more stubborn elementary parts together? Or were they simply a liquid fire that pervaded the more sluggish materials, giving them life and heat?

ticularly when the intellectual powers are not used to cool our sensations.

6.5 This habitual slavery to first impressions has a more harmful effect on the female character than on the male. Business and other dry employments of the understanding tend to deaden the feelings and break associations that do violence to reason. Girls, however, are made into women when they are mere children, and brought back to childhood when they ought to have left the baby-walker behind forever. They do not have enough strength of mind to erase the layers of artifice that have smothered nature.

6.6 Everything they see or hear serves to fix impressions, call forth emotions and associate ideas that give the mind a character determined by sex. False notions of beauty and delicacy stop the growth of their limbs and produce a sickly tenderness rather than delicacy of organs. They are weakened further by being occupied in unfolding, rather than examining, the first associations forced on them by every surrounding object. How, then, can they gain the vigor they need to throw off their artificial character?—where are they to find the strength to fall back on reason and rise above a system of oppression that blights the fair promise of spring? Everything conspires to twist this cruel association of ideas into all their habits of thinking, or, to be more precise, of feeling. It gains new force when they begin to act a little for themselves, for they then see that pleasure and power are to be had only through their skill in exciting emotions in men. Besides, all the books professedly written for their instruction, which make the first impression on their minds, teach the same opinions. Since they are educated in worse than Egyptian bondage, it is unreasonable, as well as cruel, to reproach them with faults they can hardly avoid. Only a degree of native vigor that falls to the lot of very few human beings would let them escape these faults.

6.7 For instance, the harshest sarcasms have been aimed at women, and they have been ridiculed for repeating "a set of phrases learned by rote." Yet nothing could be more natural,

considering the education they receive, and considering that their "highest praise is to obey, unargued"—the will of man. If they are not allowed enough reason to govern their own conduct—why, then everything they learn must be learned by rote![2] And since all their ingenuity is called on to arrange their dress, "a passion for a scarlet coat" is so natural that it has never surprised me. Grant that Pope's summary of their character is just, "that every woman is at heart a rake." Why, then, should they be bitterly censured for seeking a kindred mind, and preferring a rake to a man of sense?

6.8 Rakes know how to work on their sensibility. The modest merit of reasonable men naturally has less effect on their feelings. Such men cannot reach women's hearts by way of the understanding, because they have few sentiments in common with them.

6.9 It seems a little absurd to expect women to be more reasonable than men in their *likings*, and yet to deny them the unrestricted use of reason. When do men *fall in love* with good sense? When do they, with their superior powers and advantages, turn from looks to mind? How, then, can they expect women to despise what they have spent their whole lives laboring to attain? Women are taught only to watch behavior, and to acquire manners rather than morals. Think of an awkward, virtuous man whose manners are off-putting and whose conversation is cold and dull, because it does not consist of pretty repartee or well-turned compliments. Women have been made into critical judges of manners. Where are they suddenly to find enough judgment to weigh his good sense patiently? To admire or esteem anything for any length of time, we must at least have our curiosity aroused by knowing, to some degree, what it is we admire. We cannot estimate the value of qualities and virtues beyond our understanding. Such respect, when it is felt, may be very sublime, and the confused consciousness of humility may make the dependent creature an interesting object from some

2 The second phrase echoes Eve's words to Adam in *Paradise Lost* (4.635–38): "unargued I obey."

points of view. But human love must have coarser ingredients. The body will very naturally come in for its share, and a generous share it usually gets!

6.10 Love is, to a great degree, an arbitrary passion. Like some other stalking mischiefs, it will reign by its own authority, without deigning to reason. It can also easily be distinguished from esteem, the foundation of friendship, because it is often excited by fleeting beauties and graces. Still, to give the sentiment energy, something more solid must deepen their impression and set the imagination to work, to make the fairest—the first good.

6.11 Common passions are excited by common qualities.—Men look for beauty and the simper of good-humored docility. Women are captivated by easy manners. A gentlemanly man seldom fails to please them, and their thirsty ears eagerly drink in the insinuating nothings of politeness. Meanwhile they turn away from the unintelligible sounds of the charmer—reason—charm he never so wisely. In superficial accomplishments the rake certainly has the advantage, and these are things women can judge, for it is their own ground. The whole course of their lives has made them gay and giddy, so the very look of wisdom, or the severe graces of virtue, must seem gloomy to them. These produce a kind of restraint against which they, and love, that playful child, naturally rebel. Without taste, except of the lighter kind (for taste is the offspring of judgment), how can they discover that true beauty and grace must arise from the play of the mind? And how can they be expected to relish in a lover what they themselves do not possess, or possess only very imperfectly? The sympathy that unites hearts and invites confidence is so very faint in them that it cannot catch fire and so rise to passion. No, I repeat it: the love cherished by such minds must have coarser fuel.

6.12 The conclusion is obvious. Until women are led to exercise their understandings, they should not be satirized for their attachment to rakes, or even for being rakes at heart, when this seems to be the inevitable consequence of their education.

Those who live to please must find their enjoyment, their happiness, in pleasure! It is a trite but true remark that we never do anything well unless we love it for its own sake.

6.13 Suppose, however, for a moment, that in some future revolution of time women were to become what I sincerely wish them to be. Even love would then acquire a more serious dignity and be purified in its own fires. With virtue giving true delicacy to their affections, they would turn away in disgust from a rake. They would then be reasoning as well as feeling, though feeling is at present woman's only province. They could easily guard against outward graces. They would quickly learn to despise the sensibility of a man whose feelings had been excited and worn out among women whose trade was vice, and whose allurements were wanton airs. They would remember that the flame they wished to kindle (one must use the proper expressions) had been exhausted by lust. They would know that the jaded appetite had lost all relish for pure and simple pleasures and could be roused only by licentious arts or by variety. What satisfaction could a woman of delicacy expect from a union with such a man, when the very artlessness of her affection might seem insipid to him? This is how Dryden describes the situation:

6.14 ———"Where love is duty, on the female side, / On theirs mere sensual gust, and sought with surly pride."[3]

6.15 But there is one great truth that women have yet to learn, though it matters a great deal to them to act on it. In choosing a husband, they should not be led astray by the qualities of a lover. A husband cannot remain a lover for long, even supposing him to be wise and virtuous.

6.16 If women were more rationally educated, and could take a more comprehensive view of things, they would be content to love only once in their lives. After marriage they would calmly let passion subside into friendship, into that tender intimacy which is the best refuge from care. Such intimacy is built on such pure, quiet affections that idle jealousies would not be

3 John Dryden, *The Hind and the Panther* (1687), Part 3; "gust" means appetite or relish.

allowed to disturb the performance of the sober duties of life, or to take over thoughts that ought to be otherwise employed. Many men live in this state, but few women, very few. And the difference is easily explained without appealing to a character supposedly peculiar to each sex. Men, for whom, we are told, women were made, have occupied women's thoughts too much. To harp a little on an old string, women have been employed solely in preparing themselves to excite love, or in actually putting their lessons into practice. This association has so entangled love with all their motives for action that they cannot live without love. But a sense of duty, or fear of shame, may oblige them to keep this pampered desire to please within certain limits. These limits are too wide for delicacy, it is true, though far short of the criminal. When this happens, they obstinately resolve to love their husbands, and I mean with passion, to the very end of the chapter. Then, acting the part they foolishly demanded of their lovers, they become abject wooers and doting slaves.

6.17 Men of wit and fancy are often rakes, and fancy is the food of love. Such men will inspire passion. Half of womankind, in its present childish state, would pine for a Lovelace, a man so witty, so graceful and so brave. Can they *deserve* blame for acting on principles so constantly drummed into them? They want a lover and a protector, and behold him kneeling before them—bravery prostrate before beauty! A husband's virtues are thus pushed into the background by love, and gay hopes or lively emotions banish reflection until the day of reckoning comes. And come it surely will, to turn the sprightly lover into a surly, suspicious tyrant, who contemptuously insults the very weakness he encouraged. Or suppose the rake is reformed. Even then, he cannot quickly get rid of old habits. When a man of ability is first carried away by his passions, sentiment and taste are needed to varnish the enormities of vice and give zest to brutal indulgences. But when the gloss of novelty has worn off and pleasure palls on the senses, lewdness becomes barefaced. Enjoyment is then only the desperate effort of weakness fleeing from reflec-

tion as if from a legion of devils. Oh, virtue, you are not an empty name! All that life can give—you give!

6.18 If little comfort can be expected from the friendship of a reformed rake of superior abilities, what follows when he lacks sense as well as principles? Truly, misery in its most hideous shape. When the habits of weak people have been consolidated by time, reform is barely possible. It actually makes wretched those who do not have enough mind to be amused by innocent pleasure. They are like the tradesman who retires from the bustle of business: nature presents them only a universal blank, and their restless thoughts prey on their dampened spirits[4]. Their reform, like his retirement, actually makes them wretched. It deprives them of all occupation by extinguishing the hopes and fears that set their sluggish minds in motion.

6.19 If such is the force of habit, and such the bondage of folly, how carefully we ought to guard the mind against storing up vicious associations! And we should be equally careful to cultivate the understanding, to save the poor creature from the weak, dependent state of even harmless ignorance. For it is the right use of reason alone that makes us independent of everything—except the unclouded Reason "whose service is perfect freedom."[5]

4 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. I have frequently seen this illustrated in women whose beauty could no longer be repaired. They have retired from the noisy scenes of dissipation. But unless they became Methodists, the solitude of the select company of their relatives or acquaintances has offered only a fearful void. Consequently, nervous complaints and the whole train of "vapors" that idleness brings have made them quite as useless, and far more unhappy, than when they joined the giddy crowd.

5 The phrase is from the Collect for Peace in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, addressed to God, "whose service is perfect freedom."

Chapter VII: Modesty. Comprehensively Considered, and Not as a Sexual Virtue

True modesty is purity of mind and sober self-respect, a virtue for both sexes.

7.1 Modesty! Sacred offspring of sensibility and reason!—true delicacy of mind!—may I without blame presume to investigate your nature, and trace to its hiding place the gentle charm that mellows each harsh feature of a character and makes what would otherwise inspire only cold admiration—lovely!—You who smooth the wrinkles of wisdom, and soften the tone of the sublimest virtues until they all melt into humanity;—you who spread the ethereal cloud that surrounds love and heightens every beauty it half shades, breathing those shy sweetnesses that steal into the heart and charm the senses—tune for me the language of persuasive reason, until I rouse my sex from the flowery bed on which they lazily sleep their lives away!

7.2 In speaking of the association of our ideas, I pointed out two distinct kinds. In defining modesty, it seems to me equally right to distinguish two things. The first is that purity of mind which is the effect of chastity. The second is a simplicity of character that leads us to form a just opinion of ourselves, equally far from vanity and from presumption, though by no means incompatible with a lofty consciousness of our own dignity. Modesty, in this second sense of the term, is that soberness of mind which teaches a man not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think. It should be distinguished from humility, because humility is a kind of self-abasement.

7.3 A modest man often conceives a great plan and clings to it tenaciously, conscious of his own strength, until success gives it a sanction that settles its character. Milton was not arrogant when he let slip a judgment that proved a prophecy. Nor was General Washington when he accepted command of the American forces. Washington has always been described as a modest man; but had he been merely humble, he would probably have shrunk back irresolute, afraid of trusting himself with the direction of an enterprise on which so much depended.[1]

7.4 A modest man is steady, a humble man timid, and a vain one presumptuous:—this is the judgment that observing many characters has led me to form. Jesus Christ was modest, Moses was humble, and Peter was vain.

7.5 So while I distinguish modesty from humility on one side, I do not mean to confuse it with bashfulness on the other. Bashfulness, in fact, is so different from modesty that the most bashful girl, or raw country lout, often becomes the most brazen. Their bashfulness is merely the instinctive timidity of ignorance, and habit soon changes it into self-assurance[2].

7.6 The shameless behavior of the prostitutes who crowd the streets of London, stirring pity and disgust by turns, may serve to illustrate this remark. They trample on maidenly bashfulness with a kind of bravado and, glorying in their shame, become more brazenly lewd than any man ever appears to be, however depraved—men, who have not had this supposedly sexual quality gratuitously assigned to them. But these poor ignorant wretches never had any modesty to lose when they gave themselves over to infamy; for modesty is a virtue, not a quality. No,

1 Milton had predicted, in *The Reason of Church Government* (1642), that he might leave something "so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die." George Washington accepted command of the Continental Army in 1775.

2 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. "Such is the country maiden's fright, / When first a redcoat is in sight; / Behind the door she hides her face; / Next time at distance eyes the lace: / She now can all his terrors stand, / Nor from his squeeze withdraws her hand. / She plays familiar in his arms, / And every soldier has his charms; / From tent to tent she spreads her flame; / *Gay.* / For custom conquers fear and shame."

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. John Gay (1685–1732), from his *Fables*.

they were only bashful, shamefaced innocents; and when they lost their innocence, their shamefacedness was roughly rubbed off. A virtue, had it been sacrificed to passion, would have left some traces in the mind, making us respect the grand ruin.

7.7 Purity of mind—that genuine delicacy which is the only virtuous support of chastity—is closely related to that refinement of humanity which is never found except in cultivated minds. It is something nobler than innocence: it is the delicacy of reflection, not the coyness of ignorance!

7.8 The reserve that comes from reason—which, like habitual cleanliness, is seldom seen to any great degree unless the soul is active—is easily distinguished from rustic shyness or wanton skittishness. Far from being incompatible with knowledge, it is knowledge's finest fruit. What a crude idea of modesty the writer of the following remark had! "The lady who asked whether women may be instructed in the modern system of botany consistently with female delicacy was accused of ridiculous prudery; nevertheless, if she had put the question to me, I would certainly have answered—They cannot." So the beautiful book of knowledge is to be shut with an everlasting seal![3] Reading passages like this, I have reverently lifted up my eyes and heart to Him who lives for ever and ever and said: O my Father, have You, by the very constitution of her nature, forbidden Your child to seek You in the beautiful forms of truth? And can her soul be sullied by the knowledge that so solemnly calls her to You?

7.9 I then pursued these reflections philosophically until I concluded that the women who have most improved their reason must have the most modesty—though a dignified composure of bearing may have replaced the playful, bewitching bashfulness of youth[4].

7.10 And this is how I have argued. To make chastity the virtue from which unaffected modesty will naturally flow, attention

3 The "modern system of botany" is Linnaeus's, which classified plants by their sexual organs.

4 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Modesty is the graceful, calm virtue of maturity; bashfulness, the charm of lively youth.

should be drawn away from occupations that exercise only the sensibility, and the heart should be made to beat in time with humanity rather than to throb with love. The woman who has devoted a good part of her time to purely intellectual pursuits, and whose affections have been exercised by humane and useful projects, must, as a natural consequence, have more purity of mind than the ignorant beings whose time and thoughts have been taken up with frivolous pleasures or schemes for conquering hearts[5]. Regulating one's behavior is not modesty, though those who study the rules of decorum are generally called modest women. Make the heart clean; let it expand and feel for all that is human instead of being narrowed by selfish passions; and let the mind often contemplate subjects that exercise the understanding without heating the imagination—and artless modesty will put the finishing touches on the picture.

7.11 She who can discern the dawn of immortality in the streaks of light that shoot across the misty night of ignorance, promising a clearer day, will respect as a sacred temple the body that houses such an improvable soul. True love, too, spreads this kind of mysterious sanctity around the beloved, making the lover most modest in her presence[6]. Affection is so reserved that, in giving or returning physical endearments, it wishes not only to avoid the human eye as a kind of profanation, but to spread an enveloping, cloudy obscurity that shuts out even the saucy, sparkling sunbeams. Yet an affection does not deserve to be called chaste unless it takes on a sublime gloom of tender

5 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. I have talked, as man to man, with medical men on anatomical subjects, and compared the proportions of the human body with artists—yet I met with such modesty that never once, by word or look, was I reminded of my sex, or of the absurd rules that make modesty a sanctimonious cloak for weakness. And I am convinced that in the pursuit of knowledge women would never be insulted by sensible men, and rarely by men of any kind, if they did not remind them by false modesty that they were women—acting in the same spirit as the Portuguese ladies who would think their charms insulted if a man, left alone with them, did not at least try to take liberties with their persons. Men are not always men in the company of women; nor would women always remember that they are women, if they were allowed to acquire more understanding.

6 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Male or female; for the world contains many modest men.

melancholy—a gloom that lets the mind stand still for a moment and enjoy the present satisfaction, when a consciousness of the Divine presence is felt. For this must always be the food of joy!

7.12 Since I have always liked to trace any prevailing custom back to its source in nature, I have often thought that it was a feeling of affection for whatever had touched the body of an absent or lost friend that gave birth to the veneration of relics, so much abused by selfish priests. Devotion or love may be allowed to hallow the clothes as well as the person; for a lover must lack imagination who does not have a sort of sacred respect for the glove or slipper of his beloved. He could not confuse them with ordinary things of the same kind. This fine sentiment would perhaps not survive analysis by the experimental scientist—but such is the stuff human rapture is made of! A shadowy phantom glides before us, blotting out every other object; yet when we grasp the soft cloud, the form melts into ordinary air, leaving a lonely void, or a sweet perfume stolen from the violet, which memory holds dear for a long time. But I have stumbled unawares onto fairy ground, feeling the balmy breeze of spring steal over me, though November frowns.

7.13 As a sex, women are more chaste than men; and since modesty is the effect of chastity, they may deserve to have this virtue attributed to them in a rather special sense. Yet I must be allowed to add a hesitant "if": for I doubt whether chastity will produce modesty (though it may produce proper conduct) when it is merely a respect for the world's opinion[7], and when coquetry and the lovelorn tales of novelists occupy the thoughts. Indeed, experience and reason would lead me to expect more modesty among men than among women, simply because men exercise their understanding more than women do.

7.14 But in propriety of behavior, apart from one class of women, women clearly have the advantage. What can be more disgusting than that impudent, debased gallantry, thought so

7 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. The immodest behavior of many married women who are nevertheless faithful to their husbands' beds will illustrate this remark.

manly, which makes many men stare insultingly at every woman they meet? Is this respect for women? Such loose behavior shows such habitual depravity, such weakness of mind, that it is useless to expect much public or private virtue until both men and women become more modest—until men, curbing a sensual fondness for women, or an affectation of manly self-assurance (more accurately, impudence), treat one another with respect, unless appetite or passion gives its own peculiar tone to their behavior. I mean even personal respect—the modest respect of humanity and fellow feeling—not the lecherous mockery of gallantry, nor the insolent condescension of the protector.

7.15 To take the observation further still: modesty must wholeheartedly disown, and refuse to live alongside, that debauchery of mind which leads a man coolly to come out, without a blush, with indecent allusions or obscene witticisms in the presence of a fellow creature. Women are now out of the question, for in their presence it is brutality. Respect for man as man is the foundation of every noble sentiment. How much more modest is the libertine who obeys the call of appetite or fancy than the lewd joker who has the whole table roaring!

7.16 This is one of the many instances in which the distinction made between the sexes regarding modesty has proved fatal to virtue and happiness. It is carried further still, however: woman, weak woman! made by her education the slave of sensibility, is required on the most trying occasions to resist that sensibility. "Can anything," says Knox, "be more absurd than keeping women in a state of ignorance, and yet insisting so vehemently that they resist temptation?" So when virtue or honor makes it right to check a passion, the burden is thrown onto the weaker shoulders—contrary to reason and true modesty, which should at least make the self-denial mutual, to say nothing of the generosity of courage, supposed to be a manly virtue.

7.17 Rousseau's and Dr. Gregory's advice about modesty—strangely misnamed!—runs in the same vein; for they both want a wife to leave it in doubt whether sensibility or weakness led

her into her husband's arms. The woman who can let the shadow of such a doubt remain in her husband's mind for a moment is immodest.

7.18 But to put the subject in a different light. The lack of modesty that I chiefly deplore as subversive of morality arises from the state of warfare that sensual men so strenuously uphold as the very essence of modesty, though it is in fact its bane. For it is a refinement of sensual desire into which men fall who lack enough virtue to relish the innocent pleasures of love. A man of delicacy carries his notions of modesty further still, for neither weakness nor sensibility will satisfy him—he looks for affection.

7.19 Again, men boast of their triumphs over women. What do they boast of? Truly, that the creature of sensibility was surprised by her sensibility into folly—into vice[8]; and the dreadful reckoning falls heavily on her own weak head when reason wakes. For where are you to find comfort, forlorn and disconsolate one? He who ought to have guided your reason and supported your weakness has betrayed you! In a dream of passion you agreed to wander across flowery lawns, and, heedlessly stepping over the precipice to which your guide lured you instead of guarding you, you start from your dream only to face a sneering, frowning world and to find yourself alone in a wasteland; for he who triumphed in your weakness is now pursuing new conquests. But for you—there is no redemption this side of the grave! And what resource do you have, in an enfeebled mind, to raise a sinking heart?

7.20 But if the sexes really are to live in a state of warfare—if nature has marked it out—let men act nobly, or let pride whisper to them that the victory is contemptible when they merely overpower sensibility. The real conquest is over an affection that has not been taken by surprise—when, like Héloïse, a woman gives up the whole world, deliberately, for love. I am not now considering the wisdom or virtue of such a sacrifice; I only maintain that it was a sacrifice to affection, and not merely to sensibility,

8 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. The poor moth fluttering around a candle burns its wings.

though sensibility had its share. And I must be allowed to call her a modest woman, before I close this part of the subject by saying that until men are more chaste, women will be immodest. Where, indeed, could modest women find husbands from whom they would not continually turn away in disgust? Modesty must be cultivated equally by both sexes, or it will always remain a sickly hothouse plant, while the affectation of it—the fig leaf borrowed by wantonness—may add spice to sensual enjoyments.

7.21 Men will probably still insist that woman ought to have more modesty than man; but it is not dispassionate reasoners who will most earnestly oppose my opinion. No, it will be the men of fancy, the favorites of women, who outwardly respect and inwardly despise the weak creatures they toy with in this way. They cannot bring themselves to give up the highest sensual gratification, or even to relish the refined epicureanism of virtue—self-denial.

7.22 To take another view of the subject, confining my remarks to women:

7.23 The ridiculous falsehoods[9] told to children out of mistaken notions of modesty tend very early to inflame their imaginations and set their little minds working on subjects that nature never intended them to think about until the body had reached some degree of maturity. At that point the passions naturally begin to take the place of the senses as the instruments that unfold the understanding and form the moral character.

7.24 Girls are first spoiled, I fear, in nurseries and boarding schools—especially the latter. A number of girls sleep in the

9 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Children see cats with their kittens, birds with their young, and so on, very early. Why, then, should they not be told that their mothers carry and nourish them in the same way? Since there would then be no appearance of mystery, they would never think about the subject again. The truth may always be told to children if it is told seriously; it is the immodesty of affected modesty that does all the harm, and this smoke heats the imagination by vainly trying to obscure certain things. If, indeed, children could be kept entirely away from improper company, we should never allude to any such subjects; but since that is impossible, it is best to tell them the truth—especially as such information, not interesting them, will make no impression on their imaginations.

same room and wash together. And though I would be sorry to contaminate an innocent creature's mind by instilling false delicacy, or the indecent prudish notions that early warnings about the other sex naturally breed, I would be very anxious to keep them from acquiring indelicate or immodest habits; and since many girls have learned very indelicate tricks from ignorant servants, mixing them together indiscriminately in this way is highly improper.

7.25 To tell the truth, women are generally too familiar with one another, and this leads to the gross degree of familiarity that so often makes married life unhappy. Why, in the name of decency, should sisters, female friends, or ladies and their maids be so grossly familiar as to forget the respect that one human being owes another? That squeamish delicacy which shrinks from the most disgusting tasks when affection[10] or humanity leads us to watch at a sickbed is despicable. But why women in good health should be more familiar with one another than men are, when they boast of their superior delicacy, is a contradiction in manners I have never been able to resolve.

7.26 To preserve health and beauty, I would earnestly recommend frequent ablutions—a dignified word, so that my advice may not offend fastidious ears; and girls ought to be taught by example to wash and dress alone, whatever their rank. If custom makes them need a little help, let them not ask for it until that part of the business is over which ought never to be done in front of a fellow creature, because it is an insult to the majesty of human nature. I say this not on grounds of modesty but of decency; for the care some modest women take not to let their

10 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Affection would rather make one choose to perform these tasks oneself, to spare a friend's delicacy by still keeping a veil over them; for the physical helplessness that sickness produces is humbling.

legs be seen, while making a show of that care, is as childish as it is immodest[11].

7.27 I could go further still and comment on some even more indelicate customs, which men never fall into. Secrets are told where silence ought to reign; and that regard for cleanliness which some religious sects have perhaps carried too far—especially the Essenes among the Jews, who made an insult to God of what is only an insult to humanity—is violated in a brutal way. How can *delicate* women force on others' notice that part of our animal functioning which is so very disgusting? And is it not very reasonable to conclude that women who have not been taught to respect the human nature of their own sex in these particulars will not long respect the mere difference of sex in their husbands?[12] Once their girlish bashfulness is lost, I have in fact generally observed, women fall back into old habits and treat their husbands as they treated their sisters or female acquaintances.

7.28 Besides, because their minds are not cultivated, women very often resort out of necessity to what I familiarly call bodily wit; and their intimacies are of the same kind. In short, in both mind and body, they are too intimate. That decent personal reserve which is the foundation of dignity of character must be kept up between women, or their minds will never gain strength or modesty.

7.29 For this reason too I object to many girls being shut up together in nurseries, schools, or convents. I cannot recall without indignation the jokes and hoydenish pranks that knots of young women indulge in, as I saw when, in my youth, chance threw me, an awkward country girl, in their way. They were almost on a level with the double meanings that shake the dinner table when the wine has flowed freely. But it is useless to try

11 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. I remember coming across a sentence in a book on education that made me smile: "It would be needless to caution you against putting your hand, by chance, under your neckerchief; for a modest woman never did so!"

12 The Essenes were an ascetic Jewish sect of the Second Temple period, known for strict rules of ritual purity and bodily cleanliness.

to keep the heart pure unless the head is stocked with ideas and set to work comparing them—so as to acquire judgment, by generalizing simple ones, and modesty, by making the understanding damp down the sensibility.

7.30 It may be thought that I put too much stress on personal reserve; but it is always the handmaid of modesty. So if I were to name the graces that ought to adorn beauty, I would immediately exclaim: cleanliness, neatness, and personal reserve. It is obvious, I suppose, that the reserve I mean has nothing sexual about it, and that I think it *equally* necessary in both sexes. So necessary, indeed, are the reserve and cleanliness that lazy women too often neglect, that I will venture to say that when two or three women live in the same house, the one who pays this kind of habitual respect to her person will be the most respected by the men of the family who live with them—leaving love entirely out of the question.

7.31 When members of a household meet in the morning, an affectionate seriousness will naturally prevail, especially if each is looking forward to carrying out the day's duties. It may be thought fanciful, but this feeling has often arisen spontaneously in me: after breathing the sweet, bracing morning air, I have been pleased to see the same kind of freshness in the faces I particularly loved. I was glad to see them braced, as it were, for the day, and ready to run their course with the sun. In this way the greetings of affection in the morning are more respectful than the familiar tenderness that often draws out the evening's talk. Indeed, I have often felt hurt, not to say disgusted, when a friend whom I had left fully dressed the evening before has appeared with her clothes thrown on anyhow, because she chose to lie in bed until the last moment.

7.32 Domestic affection can be kept alive only by these neglected attentions; yet if men and women took half as much trouble to dress neatly as a habit as they do to adorn—or rather to show off—their persons, much would be done toward attaining purity of mind. But women dress only to please men of gallantry; for the lover is always best pleased by the simple dress

that fits close to the figure. There is an impertinence in ornaments that rebuffs affection, because love always clings to the idea of home.

7.33 As a sex, women are habitually indolent, and everything tends to make them so. I do not forget the bursts of activity that sensibility produces; but since these flights of feeling only increase the evil, they are not to be confused with the slow, orderly walk of reason. So great, in reality, is their mental and bodily indolence that, until their bodies are strengthened and their understanding enlarged by active exertion, there is little reason to expect modesty to take the place of bashfulness. They may find it prudent to put on its appearance; but that lovely veil will be worn only on gala days.

7.34 Perhaps there is no virtue that blends so kindly with every other as modesty. It is the pale moonbeam that makes every virtue it softens more interesting, lending a mild grandeur to the narrowed horizon. Nothing could be more beautiful than the poetic fiction that makes Diana, with her silver crescent, the goddess of chastity. I have sometimes thought that a modest lady of antiquity, wandering with sedate step in some lonely retreat, must have felt a glow of conscious dignity when, after contemplating the soft, shadowy landscape, she invited with calm fervor the mild reflection of her sister's beams to turn toward her chaste breast.

7.35 A Christian woman has nobler motives still to spur her to preserve her chastity and acquire modesty, for her body has been called the Temple of the living God—of that God who requires more than a modest demeanor. His eye searches the heart; and let her remember that, if she hopes to find favor in the sight of purity itself, her chastity must be founded on modesty and not on worldly prudence—or truly a good reputation will be her only reward. For that awe-inspiring intercourse, that sacred communion which virtue establishes between man and his Maker, must give rise to the wish to be pure as He is pure!

7.36 After the preceding remarks it is almost superfluous to add that I consider immodest all those feminine airs of maturity

which replace bashfulness and to which truth is sacrificed in order to secure a husband's heart—or rather to force him to remain a lover when nature, had her operations not been interrupted, would have made love give way to friendship. The tenderness a man feels for the mother of his children is an excellent substitute for the ardor of unsatisfied passion; but it is indelicate, not to say immodest, for women to feign an unnatural coldness of constitution in order to prolong that ardor. Women as well as men ought to have the common appetites and passions of their nature; these are brutal only when unchecked by reason. But the obligation to check them is the duty of humanity, not a duty of one sex. In these respects nature may safely be left to herself: let women only acquire knowledge and humanity, and love will teach them modesty[13]. There is no need for falsehoods, as disgusting as they are futile; for studied rules of behavior impose only on shallow observers—a man of sense soon sees through the affectation and despises it.

7.37 How young people behave toward one another, as men and women, is the last thing that should be thought about in education. In fact, behavior is now thought about so much in most circumstances that simplicity of character is rarely seen. Yet if people were only anxious to cultivate each virtue and let it take firm root in the mind, the grace that results from it—its natural outward sign—would soon strip affectation of its flaunting plumes; for conduct not founded on truth is as deceptive as it is unstable!

7.38 If you, my sisters, would really possess modesty, you must remember that possessing virtue of any kind is incompatible with ignorance and vanity! You must acquire that sobriety of mind which only the performance of duties and the pursuit of knowledge can inspire, or you will still remain in a precarious, dependent position and be loved only while you are pretty! The

13 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. The behavior of many newly married women has often disgusted me. They seem anxious never to let their husbands forget the privilege of marriage, and to find no pleasure in a husband's company unless he is playing the lover. Short indeed must be the reign of love when the flame is constantly fanned in this way without receiving any solid fuel!

downcast eye, the rosy blush, the retiring grace are all proper in their season; but modesty, being the child of reason, cannot long survive alongside a sensibility that is not tempered by reflection. Besides, when love—even innocent love—is the whole occupation of your lives, your hearts will be too soft to give modesty that tranquil retreat where she delights to dwell, in close union with humanity.

Chapter VIII: Morality Undermined by Sexual Notions of the Importance of a Good Reputation

Teaching women to guard their reputation rather than their virtue breeds hypocrisy.

8.1 It occurred to me long ago that the advice about behavior, and all the various ways of preserving a good reputation, so strenuously drummed into the female world, were plausible-looking poisons that coat morality with a crust and eat away its substance. And that this measuring of shadows produced a false calculation, because their length depends so much on the height of the sun and other incidental circumstances.

8.2 Where does the easy, deceptive manner of a courtier come from? From his situation, undoubtedly. Since he needs dependents, he is obliged to learn the art of refusing without giving offense, and of evasively feeding hope on the chameleon's food. Thus politeness toys with truth and, eating away the sincerity and humanity natural to man, produces the fine gentleman.[1]

8.3 In the same way women acquire, from a supposed necessity, an equally artificial manner. Yet truth cannot be toyed with unpunished; for the practiced dissembler, at last the dupe of his own arts, loses that sagacity which has rightly been called common sense—namely, a quick perception of common truths, which the unsophisticated mind always accepts as such, though it might not have had enough energy to discover them itself

1 Chameleons were popularly believed to live on air—hence "the chameleon's food" means empty promises.

when they were obscured by local prejudices. Most people take their opinions on trust to avoid the trouble of using their own minds, and these indolent beings naturally stick to the letter rather than the spirit of a law, divine or human. "Women," says some author—I cannot remember who—"do not mind what only heaven sees." Why indeed should they? It is the eye of man they have been taught to dread; and if they can lull their Argus to sleep, they seldom think of heaven or of themselves, because their reputation is safe. And it is reputation, not chastity and all its lovely train, that they are busy keeping spotless—not as a virtue, but to preserve their position in the world.[2]

8.4 To prove the truth of this remark I need only point to the intrigues of married women, particularly in high society, and in countries where women are married off suitably, according to their rank, by their parents. If an innocent girl falls prey to love, she is degraded forever, though her mind was not polluted by the arts that married women practice under the convenient cloak of marriage; nor has she violated any duty—except the duty of respecting herself. The married woman, on the other hand, breaks a most sacred commitment, and becomes a cruel mother when she is a false and faithless wife. If her husband still has some affection for her, the arts she must practice to deceive him will make her the most contemptible of human beings; and in any case, the contrivances needed to keep up appearances will keep her mind in that childish or vicious turmoil which destroys all its energy. Besides, in time, like people who habitually take cordials to lift their spirits, she will need an intrigue to give life to her thoughts, having lost all taste for pleasures that are not highly seasoned with hope or fear.

8.5 Sometimes married women behave more brazenly still; I will mention an example.

8.6 A woman of rank, notorious for her love affairs—though, since she still lived with her husband, nobody chose to put her in the class where she belonged—made a point of treating with

2 Argus: the hundred-eyed watchman of Greek myth, lulled to sleep and slain by Hermes; here, the watchful husband or world.

the most insulting contempt a poor timid creature, ashamed of her past weakness, whom a gentleman in the neighborhood had seduced and afterward married. This woman had actually confused virtue with reputation; and I really believe she prided herself on the propriety of her behavior before marriage, though once she was settled to her family's satisfaction, she and her lord were equally unfaithful—so that the half-alive heir to an immense estate came from heaven knows where!

8.7 To view this subject in another light:

8.8 I have known a number of women who—if they did not love their husbands, loved nobody else—gave themselves up entirely to vanity and dissipation, neglecting every domestic duty, and even squandering all the money that should have been saved for their helpless younger children; yet they prided themselves on their unsullied reputation, as if the whole scope of their duty as wives and mothers were simply to preserve it. Other indolent women, meanwhile, neglecting every personal duty, have thought they deserved their husbands' affection because in this respect they acted with propriety.

8.9 Weak minds always like to rest in the ceremonies of duty, but morality offers much simpler motives; and one could wish that superficial moralists had said less about behavior and outward observances, for unless virtue of any kind is built on knowledge, it will produce only a sort of insipid decency. Respect for the opinion of the world has, however, been called woman's principal duty in the most explicit words; for Rousseau declares "that reputation is no less indispensable than chastity." "A man," he adds, "secure in his own good conduct, depends only on himself and may defy public opinion; but a woman, in behaving well, performs only half her duty, since what is thought of her is as important to her as what she really is. It follows that the system of a woman's education should in this respect be directly contrary to ours. Opinion is the grave of virtue among men, but its throne among women." It is strictly logical to infer that the virtue that rests on opinion is merely worldly, and that it is the virtue of a being to whom reason has

been denied. But even as regards the opinion of the world, I am convinced that this class of reasoners is mistaken.

8.10 This regard for reputation, however—apart from its being one of the natural rewards of virtue—arose from a cause I have already deplored as the great source of female depravity: the impossibility of regaining respectability by returning to virtue, though men keep theirs while indulging in vice. It was natural, then, for women to try to preserve what, once lost, was lost forever—until this care swallowed up every other, and a reputation for chastity became the one thing needful for women. But the scrupulousness of ignorance is futile; for neither religion nor virtue, when they live in the heart, requires such childish attention to mere ceremonies, because behavior must on the whole be proper when the motive is pure.

8.11 To support my opinion I can call on very respectable authority; and the authority of a cool reasoner ought to carry weight in compelling consideration, though not in establishing a view. Speaking of the general laws of morality, Dr. Smith observes: "That 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.[3] By an accident of this kind he may be said to lose everything, despite his integrity and justice, in the same way that a cautious man, despite his utmost care, may be ruined by an earthquake or a flood. Accidents of the first kind, however, are perhaps even rarer, and even more contrary to the ordinary course of things, than those of the second; and it still remains true that the practice of truth, justice, and humanity is a certain and almost infallible way of acquiring what those virtues chiefly aim at: the confidence and love of those we live with. A person may easily be misrepresented with regard to a particular action; but it is scarcely possible that he should be so with regard to the general tenor of his conduct. An innocent man may be believed to have done wrong; this, however, will

3 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

rarely happen. On the contrary, the established opinion of the innocence of his manners will often lead us to acquit him where he has really been at fault, despite very strong presumptions."

8.12 I entirely agree with this writer; for I truly believe that few people of either sex were ever despised for certain vices without deserving to be despised. I am not speaking of the passing slander that hangs over a character like one of the dense November fogs over this city, until it gradually lifts before the ordinary light of day; I only maintain that the daily conduct of most people prevails in stamping their character with the mark of truth. Quietly, the clear light shining day after day refutes the ignorant suspicion or malicious tale that has thrown dirt on a pure character. A false light distorted its shadow—reputation—for a short time; but that shadow seldom fails to become true once the cloud that caused the error of vision has dispersed.

8.13 Many people no doubt obtain, in several respects, a better reputation than, strictly speaking, they deserve; for unremitting effort will usually reach its goal in any race. Those who strive only for this paltry prize, like the Pharisees who prayed on street corners to be seen by men, truly obtain the reward they seek; for the heart of man cannot be read by man! Still, the good name that is naturally reflected by good actions—when a person is concerned only to direct his steps rightly, regardless of the onlookers—is generally not only more true but more secure.[4]

8.14 There are, it is true, trials in which the good man must appeal to God against the injustice of man, and, amid the whining candor or the hisses of envy, build a pavilion in his own mind to retire into until the rumor has passed; indeed, the darts of undeserved censure may pierce an innocent, tender heart through with many sorrows. But these are all exceptions to general rules, and it is by these common laws that human behavior ought to be regulated. The eccentric orbit of the comet never affects astronomical calculations about the unchanging order established in the motions of the principal bodies of the solar system.

4 The Pharisees praying on street corners "to be seen of men": Matthew 6:5.

8.15 I will venture, then, to affirm that once a man has reached maturity, the general outline of his character as the world sees it is accurate, allowing for the exceptions just mentioned. I do not say that a prudent, worldly-wise man, with only negative virtues and qualities, may not sometimes gain a smoother reputation than a wiser or a better man. Far from it: experience inclines me to conclude that where two people are nearly equal in virtue, the more negative character will be liked best by the world at large, while the other may have more friends in private life. But the hills and valleys, the clouds and sunshine, so conspicuous in the virtues of great men, set each other off; and though they give envious weakness an easier target, the real character will still work its way into the light, however spattered by weak affection or ingenious malice[5].

8.16 As for the anxiety to preserve a hard-earned reputation, which leads shrewd people to analyze it, I will not make the obvious comment. But I fear that morality is very insidiously undermined in the female world by attention being turned to the show instead of the substance. A simple thing is thus made strangely complicated; indeed, virtue and its shadow are sometimes set at odds. We would perhaps never have heard of Lucretia had she died to preserve her chastity instead of her reputation.[6] If we really deserve our own good opinion, we will usually be respected in the world. But if we long for higher improvement and higher attainments, it is not enough to view ourselves as we suppose others view us—though this has been ingeniously argued to be the foundation of our moral sentiments[7]. For each bystander may have his own prejudices, besides the prejudices

5 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. I am alluding to various biographical writings, but particularly to Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791), famous for recording its subject's faults and quirks alongside his greatness.

6 Lucretia, a legendary Roman noblewoman, killed herself after being raped by the king's son; her death was said to have led to the founding of the Roman Republic.

7 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Smith.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* grounds moral judgment in how we imagine an impartial spectator would see us.

of his age or country. We should rather try to view ourselves as we suppose we are viewed by that Being who sees each thought ripen into action, and whose judgment never swerves from the eternal rule of right. Righteous are all his judgments—as just as they are merciful!

8.17 The humble mind that seeks to find favor in His sight, and calmly examines its conduct when only His presence is felt, will seldom form a very mistaken opinion of its own virtues. In the still hour of self-collection, we will either fearfully pray to be spared the angry brow of offended justice, or recognize the tie that draws man to God in the pure feeling of reverent adoration, which swells the heart without stirring any tumultuous emotion. In these solemn moments man discovers the seeds of those vices which, like the Java tree, shed a poisonous vapor all around—death is in the shade![8] and he sees them without horror, because he feels himself drawn by some cord of love to all his fellow creatures, for whose follies he is eager to find every excuse in their nature—in himself. If I, he may argue, who exercise my own mind and have been refined by suffering, find the serpent's egg in some fold of my heart and crush it only with difficulty, shall I not pity those who have stamped on it less vigorously, or who have heedlessly nurtured the insidious reptile until it poisoned the lifeblood it fed on? Can I, conscious of my secret sins, cast off my fellow creatures and calmly watch them drop into the chasm of damnation that yawns to receive them?—No! no! The anguished heart will cry out with suffocating impatience—I too am a man! and I have vices, hidden perhaps from human eyes, that bow me to the dust before God, and tell me loudly, when all is silent, that we are formed of the same earth and breathe the same air. Humanity thus rises naturally out of humility, and twists the cords of love that entangle the heart in their many coils.

8.18 This sympathy extends still further, until a man is pleased to see force in arguments that do not convince him. He gladly

8 The upas tree of Java, reputed in travelers' tales to poison everything that came near it.

places in the best light, for himself, the appearances of reason that have led others astray, delighted to find some reason in all human errors—though already convinced that he who rules the day makes his sun shine on all. Yet while he thus shakes hands, as it were, with corruption, one foot on earth, the other mounts to heaven in a bold stride and claims kinship with higher natures. Virtues unobserved by man release their soothing fragrance in this cool hour, and the thirsty land, refreshed by the pure streams of comfort that suddenly gush out, is crowned with smiling green. This is the living green on which that eye may look with pleasure which is too pure to behold wickedness!

8.19 But my spirits are flagging, and I must silently indulge the reverie these reflections lead to. I cannot describe the feelings that have calmed my soul when, as I watched the sun rise, a soft shower drizzling through the leaves of nearby trees seemed to fall on my weary yet tranquil spirits, cooling a heart heated by passions that reason labored to tame.

8.20 The leading principles running through all my arguments would make it unnecessary to enlarge on this subject, if constant care to keep the varnish of the character fresh and in good condition were not often taught as the sum total of female duty—if rules for regulating behavior and preserving reputation did not too often replace moral obligations. But where reputation is concerned, attention is confined to a single virtue—chastity. If a woman's honor, as it is absurdly called, is safe, she may neglect every social duty, may even ruin her family by gambling and extravagance, and still show a shameless face to the world—for truly she is an honorable woman!

8.21 Mrs. Macaulay has rightly observed that "there is but one fault which a woman of honor may not commit with impunity." She then adds, justly and humanely: "This has given rise to the trite and foolish observation that the first fault against chastity in a 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 spite of their own sex."[9]

8.22 But in proportion as women prize this regard for the reputation of chastity, men despise it; and the two extremes are equally destructive to morality.

8.23 Men are certainly more under the influence of their appetites than women, and their appetites are more depraved by unbridled indulgence and the fussy contrivances of satiety. Luxury has introduced a refinement in eating that destroys the constitution, and a degree of gluttony so beastly that all sense of decent behavior must be worn away before one person could eat immoderately in front of another and afterward complain of the discomfort his excess naturally produced. Some women, particularly Frenchwomen, have also lost a sense of decency in this respect, for they will talk quite calmly about indigestion. One could wish that idleness were not allowed to breed, on the rank soil of wealth, those swarms of summer insects that feed on rot; we would not then be disgusted by the sight of such brutal excesses.

8.24 There is one rule of behavior that, I think, ought to govern every other. It is simply to cherish such a habitual respect for humanity as will keep us from disgusting a fellow creature for the sake of a momentary indulgence. The shameful laziness of many married women, and of others a little advanced in years, often leads them to sin against delicacy. For though they are convinced that the body is the bond of union between the sexes, how often, out of sheer laziness or to enjoy some trifling indulgence, do they disgust?

8.25 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 how grossly the sensualist insults nature! Leave aside the refinements of love. Nature, by making the gratification of this appetite, as of every other, a natural and commanding law for preserving the species,

9 From Catharine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* (1790).

elevates the appetite and mixes a little mind and affection with sensual relish. The feelings of a parent, mingling with a merely animal instinct, give it dignity; and as the man and woman often meet on account of the child, a mutual interest and affection is aroused by the exercise of a shared sympathy. Women, then, necessarily having some duty to fulfill nobler than adorning their bodies, would not contentedly be the slaves of casual appetite. That is now the situation of a very considerable number of women who are, literally speaking, standing dishes that every glutton may help himself to.

8.26 I may be told that, great as this outrage is, it affects only a sacrificed portion of women—sacrificed for the salvation of the rest. But every claim that recommends sanctioning a small evil to produce a greater good could easily be proved false; and in any case the harm does not stop there. For the moral character and peace of mind of the chaster part of the sex are undermined by the conduct of the very women to whom they allow no refuge from guilt: women whom they relentlessly consign to practicing arts that lure their husbands away from them, debauch their sons, and force them—let modest women not be startled—to take on, to some degree, the same character themselves. For I will venture to assert that all the causes of female weakness, as well as depravity, which I have already discussed at length, branch out from one great cause—lack of chastity in men.

8.27 This intemperance, so widespread, depraves the appetite to such a degree that a lewd stimulus is needed to rouse it. The parental design of nature is forgotten, and the mere body—and that only for a moment—alone occupies the thoughts. Indeed, the lustful prowler often grows so voluptuous that he refines upon female softness. Something softer than woman is then sought, until, in Italy and Portugal, men attend the receptions of ambiguous beings, to sigh for more than female languor.[10]

8.28 To satisfy this type of man, women are made systematically voluptuous. And though they may not all carry their lib-

10 Probably an allusion to the castrati, the celebrated castrated male singers of Italian opera.

ertinism to the same height, this heartless intercourse with women, which men allow themselves, depraves both sexes: the taste of men is corrupted, and women of all classes naturally shape their behavior to gratify the taste through which they obtain pleasure and power. Consequently women, grown weaker in mind and body than they ought to be—if one of the great ends of their existence, bearing and nursing children, were taken into account—do not have enough strength to perform the first duty of a mother. Sacrificing to lust the parental affection that ennobles instinct, they either destroy the embryo in the womb or abandon the child once it is born. Nature demands respect in everything, and those who violate her laws seldom do so with impunity. The weak, enervated women who particularly catch the attention of libertines are unfit to be mothers, though they may conceive. So the rich sensualist who has run riot among women, spreading depravity and misery, receives from his wife, when he wishes to perpetuate his name, only a half-formed being that inherits the weakness of both its father and its mother.

8.29 In contrasting the humanity of the present age with the barbarism of antiquity, great stress has been laid on the cruel custom of exposing children whom their parents could not support; while the man of sensibility who perhaps makes this complaint produces, by his promiscuous affairs, a most destructive barrenness and a contagious wickedness of manners. Surely nature never intended that women, by satisfying an appetite, should frustrate the very purpose for which it was implanted!

8.30 I have observed before that men ought to support the women they have seduced. This would be one means of reforming female manners and stopping an abuse that has an equally fatal effect on population and on morals. Another, no less obvious, would be to turn women's attention to the real virtue of chastity. For a woman has little claim to respect on the score of modesty—though her reputation may be white as the driven snow—if she smiles on the libertine while spurning the victims of his lawless appetites and their own folly.

8.31 Besides, pure as she thinks herself, she has a taint of the same folly when she carefully adorns her body only to be seen by men, to draw respectful sighs and all the idle homage of what is called innocent gallantry. If women really respected virtue for its own sake, they would not seek compensation in vanity for the self-denial they are obliged to practice to preserve their reputation; nor would they associate with men who defy reputation.

8.32 The two sexes corrupt and improve each other. I believe this to be an indisputable truth, and I extend it to every virtue. Chastity, modesty, public spirit, and the whole noble train of virtues on which social virtue and happiness are built, should be understood and cultivated by all humanity, or they will be cultivated to little effect. And instead of giving the vicious or idle a pretext for violating some sacred duty by calling it a duty of one sex only, it would be wiser to show that nature has made no difference here. For the unchaste man doubly defeats the purpose of nature, by making women barren and by destroying his own health—though he escapes the shame that pursues the crime in the other sex. These are the physical consequences; the moral ones are still more alarming. For virtue is only a distinction in name when the duties of citizens, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and heads of families become merely the selfish ties of convenience.

8.33 Why, then, do philosophers look for public spirit? Public spirit must be nurtured by private virtue, or it will resemble the artificial sentiment that makes women careful to preserve their reputation, and men their honor—a sentiment that often exists unsupported by virtue, unsupported by that sublime morality which makes the habitual breach of one duty a breach of the whole moral law.

Chapter IX: Of the Pernicious Effects Which Arise from the Unnatural Distinctions Established in Society

Rank and wealth corrupt rich and poor alike; women should be citizens, with work, rights and representation of their own.

9.1 From the respect paid to property flow, as from a poisoned spring, most of the evils and vices that make this world such a dreary scene to the reflective mind. For it is in the most polished society that loathsome reptiles and venomous serpents lurk under the rank grass; and there voluptuousness is pampered by the still, sultry air, which relaxes every good disposition before it can ripen into virtue.

9.2 One class presses on another, for all are aiming to win respect on account of their property; and property, once gained, will win the respect due only to talent and virtue. Men neglect the duties that fall to them as human beings, yet are treated like demigods. Religion, too, is separated from morality by a veil of ceremony—and yet people wonder that the world is almost, literally speaking, a den of swindlers or oppressors.

9.3 There is a homely proverb that speaks a shrewd truth: whoever the devil finds idle, he will put to work. And what can hereditary wealth and titles produce but habitual idleness? For man is so made that he can learn the proper use of his faculties only by exercising them, and he will not exercise them unless necessity of some kind first sets the wheels in motion. Virtue, likewise, can be acquired only by performing the duties that arise from our relations to others; but the importance of these

sacred duties will hardly be felt by a being who is coaxed 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 stand firm, even when founded on a rock, if one half of humanity is chained to its base by fate; for they will continually be undermining it through ignorance or pride.

9.4 It is vain to expect virtue from women until they are, to some degree, independent of men; indeed, it is vain to expect that strength of natural affection which would make them good wives and mothers. As long as they are absolutely dependent on their husbands, they will be cunning, mean, and selfish. And the men who can be gratified by the fawning fondness of a spaniel-like affection have little delicacy; for love is not to be bought, in any sense of the words—its silken wings instantly shrivel up when anything is sought besides a return in kind. Yet while wealth enervates men, and women live, as it were, by their personal charms, how can we expect them to perform those ennobling duties which alike require effort and self-denial? Hereditary property corrupts the mind. Its unfortunate victims, swaddled from birth, if I may put it so, seldom exert their powers of movement, in body or in mind; and so, viewing everything through one medium, and a false one, they are unable to discern what true merit and happiness consist in.

9.5 False indeed must be the light when the drapery of rank hides the man and makes him stalk about in masquerade, dragging from one scene of dissipation to another his nerveless limbs, which hang in stupid listlessness, and rolling round a vacant eye that plainly tells us there is no mind at home.

9.6 I mean, therefore, to conclude that a society is not properly organized if it does not compel men and women to perform their respective duties by making this the only way to win that approval from their fellow creatures which every human being wishes to obtain in some way. The respect paid to wealth and mere personal charms is, consequently, a true northeast wind that blights the tender blossoms of affection and virtue. Nature

has wisely attached affections to duties, to sweeten toil and to give the exertions of reason that vigor which only the heart can give. But affection that is put on merely because it is the assigned badge of a certain role, when the duties of that role are not fulfilled, is one of the empty compliments that vice and folly are obliged to pay to virtue and to the real nature of things.

9.7 To illustrate my view, I need only observe this. When a woman is admired for her beauty, and lets herself be so intoxicated by the admiration she receives that she neglects the indispensable duty of a mother, she sins against herself by neglecting to cultivate an affection that would tend equally 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 are not aware of the misery they cause, and the vicious weakness they foster, by urging women only to make themselves pleasing. They do not consider that they thus make natural and artificial duties clash, sacrificing the comfort and respectability of a woman's life to sensual notions of beauty, when in nature they all harmonize.

9.8 Cold would be the heart of a husband—unless early debauchery had made him unnatural—who did not feel more delight at seeing his child nursed by its mother than the most artful wanton tricks could ever arouse. Yet wealth leads women to spurn this natural way of cementing the marriage bond and entwining esteem with fonder memories. To preserve their beauty, and to wear the flowery crown of the day that gives them a kind of right to reign for a short time over their sex, they neglect to stamp impressions on their husbands' hearts that would be remembered with more tenderness, when the snow on the head began to chill the breast, than even their virgin charms. The maternal care of a reasonable, affectionate woman is very touching; 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 a respectable but a beautiful sight. So peculiar, indeed, are

my feelings—and I have tried not to catch artificial ones—that after being wearied by the sight of insipid grandeur, and of the slavish ceremonies that took the place of domestic affections with cumbersome pomp, I have turned to some other scene to relieve my eye by resting it on the refreshing green that nature scatters everywhere. I have then watched with pleasure a woman nursing her children and performing the duties of her station with, perhaps, only a maidservant to take the menial part of the housework off her hands. I have seen her get herself and her children ready, with no luxury but cleanliness, to receive her husband, who, coming home weary in the evening, found smiling babies and a clean hearth. My heart has lingered in the midst of the group, and has even throbbed with sympathetic emotion when the scrape of the well-known foot raised a pleasant commotion.

9.9 While my benevolence has been gratified by contemplating this artless picture, I have thought that a couple like this—equally necessary to each other and independent of each other, because each fulfilled the respective duties of their station—possessed all that life could give.—They were raised far enough above abject poverty not to have to weigh the consequences of every last penny they spent, and had enough to be spared a frigid system of economy that narrows both heart and mind. I declare—so commonplace are my ideas—that I do not know what is needed to make this the happiest as well as the most respectable situation in the world, except a taste for literature, to bring a little variety and interest into conversation, and some spare money to give to the needy and to buy books. For it is not pleasant, when the heart is opened by compassion and the head is busy arranging useful plans, to have a prim little imp constantly tugging back your elbow to keep your hand from drawing out an almost empty purse, whispering all the while some prudent maxim about justice coming first.

9.10 Destructive as riches and inherited honors are to human character, however, women are, if possible, even more debased and cramped by them than men. For men can still, to some

degree, develop their faculties by becoming soldiers and statesmen.

9.11 As soldiers, I grant, they can now for the most part gather only vainglorious laurels, while they adjust the European balance to a hair, taking special care that no bleak northern nook or sound tips the scale. But the days of true heroism are over, when a citizen fought for his country like a Fabricius or a Washington and then returned to his farm, to let his virtuous ardor flow in a calmer but no less wholesome stream.[1] No, our British heroes are more often sent from the gambling table than from the plow; and their passions have been inflamed by hanging in mute suspense on the roll of a die, rather than lifted by longing after the adventurous march of virtue in the pages of history.

9.12 The statesman, it is true, might more fittingly leave the faro bank or the card table to take the helm, for he still has only to shuffle and play tricks. The whole system of British politics—if it may politely be called a system—consists in multiplying dependents and devising taxes that grind the poor to pamper the rich. So a war, or any wild-goose chase, is, as common people say, a lucky turn-up of patronage for the minister, whose chief merit is the art of keeping himself in office.[2]

9.13 It is not necessary, then, that he should have any compassion for the poor, as long as he can secure the odd trick for his family. Or, should some show of respect for what is called, with ignorant ostentation, an Englishman's birthright be expedient to fool the gruff mastiff he has to lead by the nose, he can make an empty show quite safely by casting his single vote and letting his light squadron file off to the other side. And when a question of humanity is debated, he may dip a sop in the milk of human kindness to silence Cerberus, and talk of the interest his heart takes in an attempt to make the earth no longer cry out for vengeance as it drinks in its children's blood—though his cold hand

1 Fabricius, like Washington, went home to his farm after his campaigns. "Sound" likely glances at the Nootka Sound crisis of 1790, when Britain nearly went to war with Spain over a remote Pacific inlet.

2 Faro was a fashionable card game for high-stakes gambling.

may at that very moment rivet their chains by sanctioning the abominable trade. A minister is a minister only so long as he can carry a point he is determined to carry.—Yet it is not necessary that a minister should feel like a man, when a bold push might shake his seat.[3]

9.14 But, to be done with these digressions, let me return to the more plausible-looking slavery that chains the very soul of woman, keeping her forever in the bondage of ignorance.

9.15 The preposterous distinctions of rank, which make civilization a curse by dividing the world between voluptuous tyrants and cunning, envious dependents, corrupt almost every class of people equally. For respectability is attached not to performing the duties of our relations in life, but to rank; and when the duties are not fulfilled, the affections cannot gain enough strength to fortify the virtue of which they are the natural reward. Still, there are some loopholes through which a man may creep out and dare to think and act for himself. But for a woman it is a Herculean task, because she has difficulties peculiar to her sex to overcome, which require almost superhuman powers.

9.16 A truly benevolent legislator always tries to make it in each individual's interest to be virtuous; and so, with private virtue becoming the cement of public happiness, an orderly whole is consolidated by the tendency of all the parts toward a common center. But the private or public virtue of woman is very doubtful; for Rousseau, and a long list of male writers, insist that she should be subjected all her life to a severe restraint—that of propriety. Why subject her to propriety—blind propriety—if she is capable of acting from a nobler motive, if she is an heir of immortality? Is sugar always to be produced by lifeblood?[4] Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subjected to prejudices that brutalize them,

3 The debate is over the slave trade, which Parliament refused to abolish in 1791 despite Prime Minister Pitt's professed support. Cerberus, the three-headed dog guarding the underworld, was pacified with a honeyed sop.

4 Sugar was produced by enslaved labor in the West Indies; a popular boycott of slave-grown sugar was under way in 1791–92.

when principles would be a surer safeguard, only to sweeten man's cup? Is this not indirectly to deny woman reason? For a gift is a mockery if it is unfit for use.

9.17 Women, like men, are made weak and luxurious by the relaxing pleasures that wealth procures. But on top of this they are made slaves to their bodies, and must make them alluring so that man may lend them his reason to guide their tottering steps aright. Or, if they are ambitious, they must govern their tyrants by sinister tricks, for without rights there cannot be any binding duties. The laws concerning woman, which I intend to discuss in a later part, make an absurd unit of a man and his wife; and then, by the easy step of treating only him as responsible, she is reduced to a mere zero.[5]

WOMEN AS CITIZENS

Women's first duties are to themselves as rational beings and as citizens, which requires civil protection and independence.

9.18 The being who performs the duties of its station is independent. Speaking of women generally, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures; and the next in importance, as citizens, is the duty of a mother, which includes so many others. The rank in life that excuses them from fulfilling this duty necessarily degrades them by making them mere dolls. Or, if they turn to something more important than merely fitting drapery on a smooth block, their minds are occupied only by some soft platonic attachment; or the actual management of an intrigue may keep their thoughts in motion. For when they neglect domestic duties, they cannot take the field and march and countermarch like soldiers, or wrangle in the senate, to keep their faculties from rusting.

9.19 I know that Rousseau, as proof of women's inferiority, has exclaimed in triumph: How can they leave the nursery for the

5 Under the English common-law doctrine of coverture, a married woman's legal identity was absorbed into her husband's. The promised later part was never written.

camp!—And some moralists have called the camp the school of the most heroic virtues; though I think it would puzzle a sharp casuist to prove the reasonableness of most of the wars that have dubbed men heroes. I do not intend to consider this question critically. Having often regarded these freaks of ambition as the first natural mode of civilization, when the ground must be torn up and the woods cleared by fire and sword, I do not choose to call them plagues. But surely the present system of war has little connection with virtue of any kind, being the school of *finesse* and effeminacy rather than of fortitude.

9.20 Yet if defensive war—the only justifiable war in the present advanced state of society—were alone adopted as just and glorious, a war in which virtue can show its face and ripen amid the rigors that purify the air on the mountaintop, the true heroism of antiquity might again inspire women's hearts.—But gently, softly, reader, male or female, do not be alarmed! Though I have compared the character of a modern soldier with that of a civilized woman, I am not going to advise women to turn their distaffs into muskets—though I sincerely wish to see the bayonet turned into a pruning hook. I was only refreshing an imagination wearied by contemplating the vices and follies that all flow from a foul stream of wealth, which has muddied the pure brooks of natural affection. I did so by supposing that society will one day be so constituted that a man must necessarily fulfill the duties of a citizen or be despised; and that while he was employed in any department of civil life, his wife, also an active citizen, would be equally intent on managing her family, educating her children, and helping her neighbors.

9.21 But to make her really virtuous and useful, she must not, if she performs her civic duties, lack the protection of civil laws as an individual. She must not depend on her husband's generosity for her living during his life, or for her support after his death—for how can a being be generous who has nothing of its own? Or virtuous, who is not free? In the present state of things, the wife who is faithful to her husband, but neither nurses nor educates her children, hardly deserves the name of wife, and has no right

to that of citizen. But take away natural rights, and of course there is an end of duties.

9.22 Women thus inevitably become merely the wanton comfort of men, when they are so weak in mind and body that they cannot exert themselves except to pursue some frothy pleasure or invent some frivolous fashion. What can be a more melancholy sight to a thinking mind than to look into the many carriages that drive helter-skelter about this city in the morning, full of pale-faced creatures fleeing from themselves? I have often wished, with Dr. Johnson, to put some of them in a little shop with half a dozen children looking up to their languid faces for support. Unless I am much mistaken, some hidden vigor would soon bring health and spirit to their eyes; and a few lines drawn by the exercise of reason on those blank cheeks, which before had been rippled only by dimples, might restore lost dignity to the character—or rather enable it to attain the true dignity of its nature. Virtue is not to be acquired even by speculation, much less by the negative passivity that wealth naturally breeds.

REPRESENTATION AND WORK FOR WOMEN

She proposes that women have representatives in government and be able to work as physicians, farmers and shopkeepers.

9.23 Besides, when poverty is more disgraceful than even vice, is not morality cut to the quick? Still, to avoid being misunderstood: though I consider that women in the ordinary walks of life are called by religion and reason to fulfill the duties of wives and mothers, I cannot help lamenting that women of a higher sort have no road open by which they can pursue wider plans of usefulness and independence. I may provoke laughter by dropping a hint, which I mean to pursue at some future time: I really think that women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government.

9.24 But since the whole system of representation in this country is now only a convenient handle for despotism, they need

not complain; they are as well represented as a numerous class of hardworking laborers who pay for the upkeep of royalty when they can scarcely stop their children's mouths with bread. How are they represented whose very sweat supports the splendid stable of an heir apparent, or varnishes the carriage of some female favorite who looks down on shame? Taxes on the very necessities of life enable an endless tribe of idle princes and princesses to pass in stupid pomp before a gaping crowd, who almost worship the very parade that costs them so dear.[6] This is mere Gothic grandeur, something like the barbarous, useless parade of mounted sentries at Whitehall, which I could never see without a mixture of contempt and indignation.[7]

9.25 How strangely corrupted the mind must be when this sort of pomp impresses it! But until these monuments of folly are leveled by virtue, similar follies will leaven the whole lump. For the same character will, to some degree, prevail throughout society as a whole; and the refinements of luxury, or the vicious grumbling of envious poverty, will equally banish virtue from society, considered as the characteristic of that society, or will allow it to appear only as one of the stripes of the harlequin coat worn by civilized man.

9.26 In the upper ranks of life every duty is done by deputies, as if duties could ever be waived; and the vain pleasures that the resulting idleness forces the rich to pursue appear so enticing to the rank below that the numerous scramblers for wealth sacrifice everything to tread on their heels. The most sacred trusts are then regarded as sinecures, because they were obtained through influence and sought only to enable a man to keep *good company*. Women, in particular, all want to be ladies—which simply means having nothing to do but go listlessly they hardly care where, for they cannot tell what.

9.27 But what have women to do in society, I may be asked, except to idle about with easy grace? Surely you would not con-

6 The heir apparent was the Prince of Wales, the future George IV, notorious for his debts, horses and mistresses.

demn them all to suckle fools and chronicle small beer! No. Women might certainly study the art of healing, and be physicians as well as nurses. And decency seems to assign midwifery to them—though I am afraid the word midwife will soon give way in our dictionaries to *accoucheur,* and one proof of women's former delicacy be erased from the language.[8]

9.28 They might also study politics, and base their benevolence on the broadest foundation. Reading history will hardly be more useful than reading romances if it is read as mere biography, and the character of the times, political improvements, the arts, and so on are not noticed. In short, history must be read as the history of humanity, and not of particular men who filled a niche in the temple of fame and then dropped into the black, rolling stream of time, which silently sweeps everything before it into the shapeless void called—eternity.—For can it be called a shape, "that shape hath none"?[9]

9.29 They might likewise go into business of various kinds, if they were educated in a more orderly way, and this might save many from common and legal prostitution. Women would not then marry for support, the way men accept government posts and neglect the duties that come with them. Nor would an attempt to earn their own living (a most praiseworthy attempt!) sink them almost to the level of those poor abandoned creatures who live by prostitution. For are not milliners and dressmakers counted as the next class down? The few jobs open to women, far from being liberal professions, are menial. When a superior education enables them to take charge of children's education as governesses, they are not treated like the tutors of sons. Yet even clergymen who work as tutors are not always treated in a way that makes them respected in their pupils' eyes, to say nothing

7 The mounted guard of the Horse Guards at Whitehall, London, still posted there today.

8 "To suckle fools and chronicle small beer" is Iago's sneer at women's proper sphere in Shakespeare's *Othello* (2.1). *Accoucheur* is French for a male obstetrician: men were displacing female midwives in her day.

9 Echoes Milton's description of Death in *Paradise Lost* (2.666–67): "If shape it might be called that shape had none."

of their private comfort. But women educated as gentlewomen are never intended for the humiliating situations that necessity sometimes forces them into, so these situations are seen as a degradation. Anyone who needs to be told that nothing sharpens sensibility so painfully as such a fall in life knows little of the human heart.

9.30 Some of these women might be kept from marrying by a proper spirit or delicacy. Others may not have had the chance to escape servitude in this pitiful way. Is not a government very defective, then, and very careless of the happiness of half its members, if it does not provide for honest, independent women by encouraging them to fill respectable positions? But if their private virtue is to become a public benefit, they must have a civil existence in the state, married or single. Otherwise we shall continually see some worthy woman, whose sensibility has been made painfully acute by undeserved contempt, droop like "the lily broken down by a plowshare."

9.31 It is a melancholy truth (yet such is the blessed effect of civilization!) that the most respectable women are the most oppressed. Unless their understandings are far above the common run of understandings in both sexes, they must become contemptible from being treated as contemptible beings. How many women waste their lives away like this, a prey to discontent, who might have practiced as physicians, run a farm, managed a shop, and stood upright, supported by their own work! Instead they hang their heads, weighed down with the dew of sensibility, which consumes the beauty it at first gave luster to. Indeed, I doubt whether pity and love are as closely related as poets pretend, for I have seldom seen much compassion aroused by the helplessness of women unless they were pretty. Then, perhaps, pity was the gentle handmaid of love, or the forerunner of lust.

9.32 How much more respectable is the woman who earns her own bread by fulfilling any duty than the most accomplished beauty!—beauty, did I say? I am so conscious of the beauty of moral loveliness, the harmonious propriety that tunes the pas-

sions of a well-regulated mind, that I blush at making the comparison. Yet I sigh to think how few women aim at this respectability by withdrawing from the giddy whirl of pleasure, or from the lazy calm that stupefies the good sort of women it sucks in.

9.33 Proud of their weakness, however, they must always be protected, guarded from care and from all the rough labors that dignify the mind.—If this is the decree of fate, if they will make themselves insignificant and contemptible, sweetly to waste "life away," then let them not expect to be valued when their beauty fades. It is the fate of the fairest flowers to be admired and then pulled to pieces by the careless hand that plucked them. In how many ways do I wish, out of the purest benevolence, to impress this truth on my sex! Yet I fear they will not listen to a truth that dearly bought experience has brought home to many an agitated heart. Nor will they willingly give up the privileges of rank and sex for the privileges of humanity, and those who do not fulfill humanity's duties have no claim to them.

9.34 In my opinion the most useful writers are those who make one human being feel for another, regardless of the station he fills or the drapery of artificial sentiments. So I would gladly convince reasonable men of the importance of some of my remarks, and persuade them to weigh the whole drift of my observations without passion.—I appeal to their understandings. As a fellow creature, I claim in the name of my sex some place in their hearts. I beg them to help emancipate their companion, to make her a help meet for them![10]

9.35 If men would only generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more attentive 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. A worthy man's peace of mind would not be disturbed by his wife's idle vanity,

10 "An help meet for him": God's phrase for the woman in Genesis 2:18.

and his babies would not be sent to nestle at a stranger's breast, never having found a home at their mother's.

Chapter X: Parental Affection

Parental love is often a pretext for tyranny; a good mother needs understanding.

10.1 Parental affection is perhaps the blindest form of perverse self-love. Unlike the French[1], we have no pair of terms to distinguish the pursuit of a natural and reasonable desire from the ignorant calculations of weakness. Parents often love their children in the most brutal way, and sacrifice every duty they owe to others in order to advance them in the world.—They mean to promote (such is the perversity of unprincipled prejudices) the future welfare of the very beings whose present existence they embitter by the most despotic stretch of power. Power, in fact, is always true to its vital principle, for in every form it wants to reign without check or question. Its throne is built over a dark abyss that no eye must dare explore, for fear the baseless structure should totter under investigation. Obedience, unconditional obedience, is the catchword of tyrants of every kind, and to make "assurance doubly sure," one kind of despotism props up another. Tyrants would have reason to tremble if reason became the rule of duty in any of life's relationships, for the light might spread until full day appeared. And when it did, how people would smile at the bogeymen that startled them during the night of ignorance, or the twilight of timid inquiry!

10.2 In many minds, indeed, parental affection is only a pretext for tyrannizing where it can be done with impunity, for only

1 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. *L'amour propre. L'amour de soi-même.*
TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Rousseau's distinction between *amour-propre* (vain, comparative self-love) and *amour de soi* (natural, healthy self-regard).

good and wise men are content with a respect that will stand up to discussion. Convinced that they have a right to what they insist on, they do not fear reason or dread the sifting of questions that go back to natural justice. They firmly believe that the more enlightened the human mind becomes, the deeper just and simple principles will take root. They do not settle for expedients, or grant that what is true in principle can be false in practice. Disdaining the shifts of the moment, they calmly wait until time sanctions innovation and silences the hiss of selfishness or envy.

10.3 If the power to reflect on the past, and to dart the keen eye of contemplation into the future, is humanity's great privilege, it must be granted that some people enjoy this prerogative only to a very limited degree. Everything now looks wrong to them. Unable to tell the possible from the monstrous, they fear where fear has no place, and run from the light of reason as if it were a firebrand. Yet the limits of the possible have never been defined in a way that could stop the sturdy innovator's hand.

10.4 Woman, however, is in every situation a slave to prejudice, and so she seldom shows enlightened maternal affection. She either neglects her children or spoils them by improper indulgence. Besides, the affection of some women for their children is often, as I have called it before, very brutish, for it roots out every spark of humanity. Justice, truth, everything is sacrificed by these Rebekahs. For the sake of their *own* children they violate the most sacred duties, forgetting the common kinship that binds the whole family on earth together. Yet reason seems to say that those who let one duty, or one affection, swallow up all the rest do not have enough heart or mind to fulfill even that one conscientiously.[2] It then loses the venerable look of a duty, and takes on the fantastic shape of a whim.

10.5 Nature has attached the care of children in infancy to the female character as one of its great duties. If this duty were

2 Rebekah helped her favorite son Jacob deceive his blind father Isaac and cheat his brother Esau of the paternal blessing (Genesis 27).

properly considered, it would supply many forceful arguments for strengthening women's understanding.

10.6 The formation of the mind must begin very early, and the temper in particular needs the most judicious attention. Women cannot give that attention if they love their children only because they are their children, and look for the foundation of their duty no further than the feelings of the moment. It is this lack of reason in their affections that so often makes women run to extremes, so that they are either the fondest mothers or the most careless and unnatural ones.

10.7 To be a good mother, a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands. Meek wives are, in general, foolish mothers. They want their children to love them best, and to take their side in secret against the father, who is held up as a bogeyman. If the children are to be punished, the father must inflict the punishment, even when it is the mother they have offended; he must be the judge in all disputes. But I shall discuss this subject more fully when I deal with private education. For now I only mean to insist on one point: unless woman's understanding is enlarged, and her character made firmer by being allowed to govern her own conduct, she will never have enough sense or self-command to manage her children properly. Her parental affection, indeed, hardly deserves the name if it does not lead her to breastfeed her children. Fulfilling this duty is equally suited to inspire maternal and filial affection, and men and women are absolutely bound to fulfill the duties that give birth to the affections, which are the surest safeguards against vice. What is called natural affection I believe to be a very faint tie. Affections must grow out of the habitual exercise of mutual sympathy. And what sympathy does a mother exercise who sends her baby to a wet nurse, and takes it back from the nurse only to send it to school?

10.8 In the exercise of their maternal feelings, providence has given women a natural substitute for love. Once the lover has become only a friend, and mutual trust has taken the place of

overstrained admiration, a child gently twists the slackening cord, and a shared care produces a new mutual sympathy.—But a child, though a pledge of affection, will not enliven it if both father and mother are content to hand the charge over to hired help. Those who do their duty by proxy should not complain if they miss the reward of duty—parental affection produces filial duty.

Chapter XI: Duty to Parents

Children owe parents respect earned by reason and care, not blind obedience.

11.1 Human beings seem to have a lazy tendency to let established custom always take the place of reason, and to set every duty on an arbitrary foundation. The rights of kings are traced in a direct line from the King of kings, and the rights of parents from our first parent.

11.2 Why do we go back like this for principles that should always rest on the same base, and have the same weight today that they had a thousand years ago—and not one bit more? If parents do their duty, they have a strong hold and a sacred claim on their children's gratitude. But few parents are willing to receive their children's respectful affection on such terms. They demand blind obedience because they do not deserve a reasonable service. To make these demands of weakness and ignorance more binding, a mysterious sanctity is spread around the most arbitrary principle. For what other name can be given to the blind duty of obeying vicious or weak beings merely because they obeyed a powerful instinct?

11.3 The reciprocal duty that naturally exists between parent and child can be defined simply, 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 subject a rational being to the mere will of another, after he is old enough to answer to society for his own conduct, is a most cruel and unjustified stretch of power. It is perhaps as

harmful to morality as those religious systems that allow right and wrong no existence except in the Divine will.

11.4 I never knew a parent who had paid more than ordinary attention to his children to be disregarded by them[1]. On the contrary, the early habit of relying almost implicitly on the opinion of a respected parent is not easily shaken, even when mature reason convinces the child that his father is not the wisest man in the world. A reasonable man must steel himself against this weakness, for a weakness it is, though the word "amiable" may be tacked onto it. The absurd duty, too often taught, of obeying a parent only because he is a parent shackles the mind, and prepares it for slavish submission to any power but reason.

11.5 I distinguish between the natural and the accidental duty owed to parents.

11.6 The whole animal world shares the duty of caring for its young. The parent who diligently tries to form his child's heart and enlarge his child's understanding has given the fulfillment of that duty the dignity that only reason can give. This is the parental affection of humanity, and it leaves instinctive natural affection far behind. Such a parent acquires all the rights of the most sacred friendship, and his advice demands serious consideration even when his child is grown.

11.7 As for marriage, after the age of twenty-one a parent seems to have no right to withhold his consent on any grounds. Still, twenty years of care call for some return. The son ought at least to promise not to marry for two or three years if the person he has chosen does not fully meet with the approval of his first friend.

11.8 But respect for parents is, generally speaking, a much more degrading principle: it is only a selfish respect for property. The father who is blindly obeyed is obeyed out of sheer weakness, or from motives that degrade human character.

11.9 A great part of the misery that wanders in hideous forms around the world is admitted to arise from the negligence of parents. Yet these are the very people who cling most tightly to

1 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. Dr. Johnson makes the same observation.

what they call a natural right, even though it overturns humanity's birthright, the right to act as one's own reason directs.

11.10 I have already had frequent occasion to observe that vicious or lazy people are always eager to profit by enforcing arbitrary privileges. Generally they are eager in the same proportion as they neglect the duties that alone make those privileges reasonable. At bottom this is a dictate of common sense, or rather the instinct of self-defense peculiar to ignorant weakness. It resembles the instinct that makes a fish muddy the water it swims in to elude its enemy, instead of boldly facing it in the clear stream.

11.11 Indeed, the defenders of established custom, of every kind, flee from the clear stream of argument. They take refuge in the darkness that sublime poetry has imagined surrounding the throne of the Almighty, and dare to demand the implicit respect that is due only to His unsearchable ways. But (let me not be thought presumptuous) the darkness that hides our God from us concerns only speculative truths. It never obscures moral ones; they shine clearly, for God is light. By the constitution of our nature, he never requires us to perform a duty whose reasonableness does not shine on us when we open our eyes.

11.12 The lazy parent of high rank may, it is true, extort a show of respect from his child. Women on the Continent are particularly subject to the designs of their families, who never think of consulting their inclinations or providing for the comfort of the poor victims of their pride. The consequence is notorious. These dutiful daughters become adulteresses and neglect the education of their children, and in their turn they demand the same kind of obedience from them.

11.13 It is true that in all countries women are too much under the dominion of their parents. Few parents think of addressing their children in the following way, though it is in this reasonable way that Heaven seems to command the whole human race: "It is in your interest to obey me until you can judge for yourself. The Almighty Father of all has implanted an affection in me to serve as a guard for you while your reason is unfolding.

But when your mind reaches maturity, you must obey me, or rather respect my opinions, only so far as they agree with the light that is breaking in on your own mind."

11.14 A slavish bondage to parents cramps every faculty of the mind. Mr. Locke very wisely observes that "if the mind be curbed and humbled too much in children; if their spirits be abased and broken much by too strict a hand over them; they lose all their vigor and industry." This strict hand may partly account for the weakness of women, since girls, for various reasons, are kept down by their parents more than boys are, in every sense of the word.[2] The duty expected of them is, like all the duties arbitrarily imposed on women, more a matter of propriety, more out of respect for decorum than for reason. Taught in this way to submit slavishly to their parents, they are prepared for the slavery of marriage. I may be told that many women are not slaves in marriage. True, but then they become tyrants. What they obtain by degrading means is not rational freedom but a lawless kind of power, like the authority exercised by the favorites of absolute monarchs. Nor do I dream of suggesting that boys or girls are always slaves. I only insist that when they are obliged to submit blindly to authority, their faculties are weakened and their tempers made either imperious or abject. I also lament that parents, lazily taking advantage of a supposed privilege, damp the first faint glimmer of reason. At the same time they make the duty they are so anxious to enforce an empty name, because they will not let it rest on the only basis on which a duty can rest securely. Unless it is founded on knowledge, it cannot gain enough strength to resist the squalls of passion or the silent undermining of self-love. But the parents who most vehemently insist that their children submit to their will, merely because it is their will, are not those who have given the surest proof of their affection for their children. More properly, they are not the parents who have fulfilled their duty and so allowed a natural parental affection to take root in their hearts, one that is the child of exercised sympathy and reason and not

2 John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693).

the overbearing offspring of selfish pride. On the contrary, the parent who sets a good example patiently lets that example work, and it seldom fails to produce its natural effect—filial respect.

11.15 Children cannot be taught too early to submit to reason. Reason is the true definition of the necessity that Rousseau insisted on without defining it, for to submit to reason is to submit to the nature of things, and to the God who made them so in order to promote our real interest.[3]

11.16 Why should children's minds be warped just as they begin to expand, merely to indulge the laziness of parents who insist on a privilege without being willing to pay the price nature has fixed for it? I have had occasion before to observe that a right always includes a duty. I think it may also fairly be inferred that those who do not fulfill the duty forfeit the right.

11.17 It is easier, I grant, to command than to reason. But it does not follow that children cannot understand why they are made to do certain things habitually. A judicious parent gradually gains a healthy power over a child's mind, and that power flows from a steady adherence to a few simple principles of conduct. It becomes strong indeed if it is tempered by a steady display of affection brought home to the child's heart. I believe it must be allowed, as a general rule, that the affection we inspire always resembles the affection we cultivate. So natural affections, which have been thought almost separate from reason, may turn out to be more closely connected with judgment than is commonly admitted. Indeed, as a further proof that women's understanding needs to be cultivated, it is only fair to observe that the affections seem to have a kind of animal capriciousness when they reside merely in the heart.

11.18 It is the irregular exercise of parental authority that first injures the mind, and girls are more subject to these irregularities than boys. Some people never allow their will to be disputed unless they happen to be in a good mood, and then they relax to

3 In *Emile*, Rousseau wants children to yield only to "necessity," the force of things, and never to another person's will.

the same degree. Their will is almost always unreasonable. To elude this arbitrary authority, girls learn very early the lessons they later practice on their husbands. I have often seen a sharp-faced little miss rule a whole family, except when mamma's anger now and then bursts out of some chance cloud. Either her hair was badly dressed[4], or she had lost more money at cards the night before than she wanted to admit to her husband, or there was some other such moral cause of anger.

11.19 Watching outbursts of this kind has led me into a melancholy train of reflection about women. I conclude that when their first affection must lead them astray, or set their duties in conflict until those duties rest on mere whims and customs, little can be expected of them as they grow older. How, indeed, can a teacher remedy this evil? To teach them virtue on any solid principle is to teach them to despise their parents. Children cannot, and ought not to, be taught to make allowances for their parents' faults, because every such allowance weakens the force of reason in their minds and makes them still more indulgent toward their own. It is one of the most sublime virtues of maturity that leads us to be severe with ourselves and forbearing toward others. But children should be taught only the simple virtues. If they begin too early to make allowances for human passions and manners, they wear down the fine edge of the standard by which they should regulate their own, and become unjust in the same proportion as they grow indulgent.

11.20 The affections of children, and of weak people, are always selfish. They love others because others love them, and not on account of their virtues. Yet until esteem and love are blended together in the first affection, and reason is made the foundation of the first duty, morality will stumble at the threshold. But until society is constituted very differently, parents will still, I fear, insist on being obeyed because they will be obeyed. They will

4 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. I myself once heard a little girl say to a servant, "My mamma has been scolding me finely this morning, because her hair was not done to please her." Though the remark was pert, it was just. And what respect could a girl gain for such a parent without doing violence to reason?

constantly try to rest that power on a Divine right, since it cannot bear the scrutiny of reason.

Chapter XII: On National Education

A plan for free national day schools where boys and girls are taught together.

12.1 The good effects of attention to private education will always be very limited. Until education becomes a great national concern, the parent who really puts his own hand to the plow will always be disappointed to some degree. A man cannot retire into a desert with his child; and if he did, he could not make himself a child again and become the proper friend and playmate of an infant or a youth. When children are confined to the company of men and women, they very soon acquire a kind of premature adulthood that stops the growth of every vigorous power of mind or body. To open their faculties, children should be stirred to think for themselves. This can only be done by bringing a number of children together and having them pursue the same objects jointly.

12.2 A child who merely asks a question instead of looking for information, and then relies implicitly on the answer he gets, very soon falls into a numbing laziness of mind that he seldom has the vigor to shake off later. This could never happen with his equals in age. The subjects of inquiry, though they might be influenced, would not be entirely under the direction of men, who often damp, if not destroy, abilities by bringing them forward too hastily. And they will infallibly be brought forward too hastily if the child is confined to the company of a man, however wise that man may be.

12.3 Besides, the seeds of every affection should be sown in youth. The respectful regard felt for a parent is very different

from the social affections that are to make up the happiness of later life. Those affections are based on equality, and on an exchange of feelings unhampered by the watchful seriousness that prevents argument, even if it does not enforce submission. However much a child loves his parent, he will always long to play and chat with other children. He will feel respect, for filial esteem always has a dash of fear mixed into it, and that very respect, if it does not teach him cunning, will at least keep him from pouring out the little secrets that first open the heart to friendship and trust and gradually lead to a wider benevolence. On top of this, he will never acquire the frank openness of behavior that young people can gain only by being often in company where they dare to say what they think, afraid neither of being scolded for presumption nor of being laughed at for foolishness.

12.4 The sight of schools as they are now run naturally suggested certain reflections, and I was so strongly struck by them that I once gave my opinion rather warmly in favor of private education. But further experience has led me to see the subject differently. I still think, however, that schools as they are now regulated are hotbeds of vice and folly, and that the knowledge of human nature supposed to be gained there is merely cunning selfishness.[1]

12.5 At school boys become gluttons and slobs. Instead of cultivating domestic affections, they rush very early into the debauchery that destroys the constitution before it is formed, hardening the heart as it weakens the understanding.

12.6 In fact, I would oppose boarding schools if only for the unsettled state of mind that the prospect of vacations produces. The children's thoughts are fixed on vacations with eager, anticipating hopes for at least half the time, to put it moderately. When the vacations arrive, they are spent in total dissipation and beastly indulgence.

12.7 On the other hand, children brought up at home may follow a plan of study in a more orderly way than is possible when nearly a quarter of the year is actually spent in idleness, and as

1 Probably a reference to her earlier *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787).

much again in regret and anticipation. Yet at home they acquire too high an opinion of their own importance. This comes from being allowed to tyrannize over servants, and from the anxiety most mothers show about manners, for in their eagerness to teach the accomplishments of a gentleman they stifle the virtues of a man at birth. Brought into company in this way when they ought to be seriously occupied, and treated like men while they are still boys, they become vain and soft.

12.8 The only way to avoid two extremes, each as harmful to morality as the other, would be to devise some way of combining public and private education. Two natural steps might then be taken to make men citizens, and they seem to lead directly to the desired point. The domestic affections, which first open the heart to the various forms of humanity, would be cultivated. At the same time the children would be allowed to spend a large part of their time with other children on terms of equality.

12.9 I still remember with pleasure the country day school. A boy trudged there in the morning, rain or shine, carrying his books, and his dinner too if it was a good distance away. No servant led the young master by the hand in those days. Once he had put on coat and breeches, he was allowed to fend for himself, and to come home alone in the evening and tell the day's exploits at his parent's knee. His father's house was his home, and was fondly remembered ever after. Indeed, I appeal to some superior men who were educated this way. Has not the memory of some shady lane where they learned their lessons, or of some stile where they sat making a kite or mending a bat, endeared their country to them?

12.10 But what boy ever remembered with pleasure the years he spent in close confinement at an academy near London? He might, of course, happen to remember the poor scarecrow of an assistant master whom he tormented, or the tart-seller from whom he snatched a cake to devour it with the catlike appetite of selfishness. At boarding schools of every description, the younger boys' recreation is mischief, and the older boys' is vice. Besides, in the great schools, what could be more harmful to

moral character than the system of tyranny and abject slavery established among the boys? And that is to say nothing of the slavery to forms, which makes religion worse than a farce. What good can be expected of a youth who takes the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to avoid a fine of half a guinea, which he then probably spends in some sensual way? Half of what these youths do is dodge the obligation to attend public worship. And well they may, for such constant repetition of the same thing must be a very irksome restraint on their natural liveliness. These ceremonies have the most fatal effect on their morals. And our church no longer stores up a ritual performed by the lips, while the heart and mind are far away, as a bank to draw on for the fees of the poor souls in purgatory. So why should these ceremonies not be abolished?

12.11 But in this country the fear of innovation extends to everything.—It is only a covert fear, the anxious timidity of lazy slugs. They guard the snug place they regard as a hereditary estate by sliming it over, and they eat, drink, and enjoy themselves instead of fulfilling the duties it was endowed for, apart from a few empty forms. These are the people who most strenuously insist that the founder's will be observed, and cry out against all reform as if it were a violation of justice. I am alluding here particularly to the relics of popery kept up in our colleges, whose Protestant members seem to be such sticklers for the established church. Yet their zeal never makes them lose sight of the spoils of ignorance that grasping priests of superstitious memory scraped together. No, wise in their generation, they revere the right that long possession confers as a stronghold. They still let the sluggish bell tinkle for prayers as in the days when the elevation of the host was supposed to atone for the people's sins, for fear that one reformation should lead to another, and the spirit kill the letter.[2] These Catholic customs have the most harmful effect on the morals of our clergy. The idle vermin who two or three times a day perform, in the most

2 She inverts St. Paul's "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

slovenly way, a service they think useless but call their duty soon lose all sense of duty. At college, forced either to attend public worship or to evade it, they acquire a habitual contempt for the very service whose performance is to let them live in idleness. It is mumbled through as a piece of business, the way a stupid boy repeats his lesson. Often the college slang slips out of the preacher the moment he has left the pulpit, and even while he is eating the dinner he earned in such a dishonest way.

12.12 Nothing, indeed, could be more irreverent than the cathedral service as it is now performed in this country, and no set of men is weaker than the slaves of this childish routine. A disgusting skeleton of its former state is still put on show, but all the solemnity that engaged the imagination, even if it did not purify the heart, has been stripped away. On the Continent, the performance of high mass must impress every mind in which a spark of imagination glows with that awful melancholy, that sublime tenderness, which is so close to devotion. I do not say that these devotional feelings are of more moral use than any other emotion of taste. But I maintain that the theatrical pomp that gratifies our senses is preferable to the cold parade that insults the understanding without reaching the heart.

12.13 Such observations cannot be out of place among remarks on national education, especially since the supporters of these establishments, which have degenerated into childishness, pose as the champions of religion.—Religion, pure source of comfort in this vale of tears! How your clear stream has been muddied by the dabblers who presumptuously tried to confine in one narrow channel the living waters that forever flow toward God—the sublime ocean of existence! What would life be without that peace which the love of God alone can give, when it is built on humanity? Every earthly affection turns back at intervals to prey on the heart that feeds it. The purest outpourings of benevolence are often rudely damped by man, and so they must rise as a freewill offering to Him who gave them birth, whose bright image they faintly reflect.

12.14 In public schools, however, religion is mixed up with tedious ceremonies and unreasonable restrictions, and so it takes on its least attractive face. This is not the sober, austere face that commands respect while it inspires fear. It is a ridiculous one that serves as the point of a pun. In fact, most of the good stories and witty remarks that revive spirits worn out by concentrating at whist are made out of these very incidents. The men who work hardest to give them a comic twist are the same men who tolerate the abuse in order to live off the spoils.[3]

12.15 There is perhaps no more dogmatic or self-indulgent set of men in the kingdom than the pedantic tyrants who live in colleges and preside over public schools. The vacations are equally harmful to the morals of masters and pupils. The masters keep up social contact with the nobility, and this brings into their own families the same vanity and extravagance that drive domestic duties and comforts out of the lordly mansion, whose grandeur they clumsily ape on a smaller scale. The boys live at great expense with the masters and their assistants, yet they never become part of a household, though they were placed there for that purpose. After a silent dinner they gulp down a quick glass of wine and withdraw to plan some mischievous prank. Or they mock the looks or manners of the very people they have just been fawning on, people whom they ought to regard as standing in for their parents.

12.16 Is it any surprise, then, that boys shut out like this from social conversation become selfish and vicious? Or that a bishop's miter often crowns the head of one of these diligent pastors?[4]

12.17 The desire to live in the same style as the rank just above them infects every individual and every class of people, and meanness goes hand in hand with this ignoble ambition. But the most degrading professions are those in which one climbs by

3 In Britain, "public schools" are the old endowed boarding schools such as Eton and Winchester. Whist was a fashionable card game.

4 The masters of the great schools were usually clergymen, and many were later promoted to bishoprics.

the ladder of patronage. Yet the tutors of the young are generally chosen from one of these professions. Can we expect people to inspire independent feelings when their own conduct must be governed by the cautious prudence that is always on the lookout for promotion?

12.18 Far from thinking about the boys' morals, however, I have heard several schoolmasters argue that they had undertaken only to teach Latin and Greek. They had done their duty, they said, by sending some good scholars on to university.

12.19 A few good scholars, I grant, may have been produced by competition and discipline. But to push these clever boys forward, the health and morals of many others have been sacrificed. The sons of our gentry and of wealthy commoners are mostly educated at these institutions. Will anyone claim that the majority of them, making every allowance, can even be described as passable scholars?

12.20 It does not benefit society to bring a few brilliant men forward at the expense of the many. It is true that great men seem to spring up at fitting intervals, as great revolutions do, to restore order and to blow away the clouds that gather over the face of truth. But let more reason and virtue prevail in society, and these strong winds would not be needed. Public education of every kind should aim to form citizens. But if you want to make good citizens, you must first exercise the affections of a son and a brother. This is the only way to enlarge the heart. Public affections, like public virtues, must always grow out of private character. Otherwise they are mere meteors that streak across a dark sky and vanish even as they are gazed at and admired.

12.21 Few people, I believe, have felt much affection for humanity who did not first love their parents, their brothers and sisters, and even the household animals they first played with. The exercise of youthful sympathies sets the moral temperature. It is the memory of these first affections and pursuits that gives life to later ones, which are more under the direction of reason. In youth the fondest friendships are formed, as the warm juices of

life rise at the same time and blend kindly. Or rather, the heart is tempered to receive friendship, and so it grows used to seeking pleasure in something nobler than the boorish gratification of appetite.

12.22 So, to inspire a love of home and domestic pleasures, children ought to be educated at home. Rowdy holidays only make them fond of home for the sake of the holidays themselves. Yet the vacations, which do not foster domestic affections, constantly interrupt the course of study. They also wreck any plan of improvement that includes self-restraint. Still, if the vacations were abolished, children would be completely separated from their parents. I doubt they would become better citizens by sacrificing the affections that prepare them for citizenship, and by destroying the force of the family ties that make marriage as necessary as it is respectable. But if a private education produces self-importance, or isolates a man within his family, the evil is only moved, not cured.

DAY SCHOOLS

Boarding schools and home education both fail, so she argues for day schools run as national institutions.

12.23 This line of reasoning brings me back to a subject I intend to dwell on: the need to establish proper day schools.

12.24 But these should be national institutions. As long as schoolmasters depend on the whims of parents, we can expect little effort from them beyond what is needed to please ignorant people. Indeed, a master is obliged to give the parents some sample of the boys' abilities, which is shown to every visitor during the vacation[5], and this does more harm than one would at first suppose. To put it mildly, these samples are seldom done entirely by the child. So the master either tolerates falsehood or winds the poor machine up to some extraordinary effort. That

5 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. I am thinking particularly of the numerous academies in and around London, and of the behavior of the trading class of this great city.

effort damages the wheels and halts the progress of gradual improvement. The memory is loaded with unintelligible words for show, while the understanding acquires no clear ideas at all. Yet only an education that teaches young people how to begin to think truly deserves to be called cultivation of the mind. The imagination should not be allowed to corrupt the understanding before the understanding has gained strength, or vanity will become the forerunner of vice. Every way of showing off a child's attainments harms its moral character.

12.25 How much time is wasted teaching them to recite what they do not understand? The mothers sit on benches, all in their finest array, and listen in astonishment to the parrot-like chatter. It is delivered in solemn cadences, with all the pomp of ignorance and folly. Such exhibitions only drive the spreading fibers of vanity through the whole mind. They teach children neither to speak fluently nor to behave gracefully. So far from it, in fact, that these frivolous pursuits could be summed up as the study of affectation. We now rarely see a simple, bashful boy. Yet few people of taste were ever put off by the awkward sheepishness so natural to that age, which schools and an early entry into society have turned into impudence and apish grimacing.

12.26 Yet how can these things be remedied as long as schoolmasters depend entirely on parents for their living? And how, while so many rival schools hang out their bait to catch the attention of vain fathers and mothers, whose parental affection only makes them wish that their children should outshine the neighbors'?

12.27 Without great good luck, a sensible, conscientious man would starve before he could build up a school, if he scorned to dupe foolish parents by practicing the secret tricks of the trade.

12.28 Even in the best-run schools, where swarms of children are not crammed together, many bad habits must be picked up. But at ordinary schools the body, the heart, and the understanding are all equally stunted. Parents are often looking only for the cheapest school, and the master could not make a living unless he took far more pupils than he could manage himself. Nor will

the meager fee paid for each child allow him to hire enough assistant teachers to help with the mechanical part of the work. Besides, whatever impression the house and garden may make, the children enjoy the comfort of neither. Irksome restrictions constantly remind them that they are not at home. The best rooms, the garden, and so on must be kept in order for the enjoyment of the parents. The parents visit the school on Sundays and are impressed by the very show that makes their children's situation so uncomfortable.

12.29 With what disgust have I heard sensible women speak of the wearisome confinement they endured at school, for girls are more restricted and cowed than boys. Perhaps they were not allowed to step off one broad path in a superb garden. They were made to pace stupidly back and forth with a steady bearing, holding up their heads and turning out their toes, with shoulders braced back. Nature directs them instead to bound about in the various postures so good for health, and so to complete her own design[6]. The pure animal spirits, which make both mind and body shoot up and unfold the tender blossoms of hope, are turned sour. They are vented in vain wishes or pert complaints that narrow the faculties and spoil the temper. Or else they rise to the brain and sharpen the understanding before it gains proportionate strength. This produces that pitiful cunning which so disgracefully characterizes the female mind—and which, I fear, always will characterize it as long as women remain the slaves of power!

12.30 The male world pays little respect to chastity, and this, I am convinced, is the chief source of many of the physical and

moral evils that torment humanity. It is also the source of the vices and follies that degrade and destroy women. Yet at school boys inevitably lose that decent bashfulness which, at home, might have ripened into modesty.

12.31 And what nasty, indecent tricks they also learn from one another when a number of them are herded together like pigs in the same bedroom! That is not to mention the vices that weaken the body while effectively preventing any delicacy of mind from developing. The little attention paid to cultivating modesty among men produces great depravity in all the relationships of society. Love ought to purify the heart and first call forth all the youthful powers, preparing the man to carry out the benevolent duties of life. Yet love is sacrificed to premature lust. And not only that: all the social affections are deadened by the selfish gratifications that very early pollute the mind and dry up the generous juices of the heart. How unnaturally innocence is often violated, and what serious consequences follow, turning private vices into a public plague. Besides, a habit of personal order has more effect on moral character than is generally supposed. It can be acquired only at home, where a respectable reserve is maintained. That reserve checks the kind of familiarity which sinks into beastliness and undermines the very affection it insults.

12.32 I have already criticized the bad habits that girls pick up when they are shut up together. I think the observation may fairly be extended to the other sex, and this leads to the natural conclusion I have had in view throughout. To improve both

6 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. I remember an incident I once witnessed myself, which roused my indignation. I went to visit a little boy at a school where young children were prepared for a bigger one. The master showed me the schoolroom and so on. But as I walked down a broad gravel path, I could not help noticing that the grass grew very thickly on either side of me. I at once asked the child some questions. I learned that the poor boys were not allowed to step off the path, and that the master sometimes let sheep in to crop the untrodden grass. The tyrant of this domain used to sit by a window that overlooked the prison yard. There was one corner, turning off from the yard, where the unfortunate little ones could play freely, and he fenced it in and planted it with potatoes. His wife was just as anxious to keep the children in order, in case they dirtied or tore their clothes.

sexes, they ought to be educated together, not only in private families but in public schools. If marriage is the cement of society, all humanity should be educated on the same model. Otherwise relations between the sexes will never deserve the name of fellowship. Nor will women ever fulfill the particular duties of their sex until they become enlightened citizens. They must become free by being able to earn their own living, independent of men. To prevent misunderstanding, I mean independent in the same way that one man is independent of another. Indeed, marriage will never be held sacred until women are brought up with men and so prepared to be their companions rather than their mistresses. The mean twists and turns of cunning will always make women contemptible, while oppression makes them timid. I am so convinced of this truth that I will venture a prediction. Virtue will never prevail in society until the virtues of both sexes are founded on reason, and until the affections common to both are allowed to gain their proper strength through the performance of mutual duties.

12.33 If boys and girls were allowed to pursue the same studies together, graceful decencies could be instilled early. These produce modesty without the sexual distinctions that taint the mind. Habitually proper behavior would make lessons in politeness useless, along with that rulebook of decorum which follows close on the heels of falsehood. I do not mean behavior put on for visitors like the court robe of politeness. I mean the sober result of a clean mind. Would not this simple elegance of sincerity be a chaste tribute to the domestic affections? Would it not far surpass the tawdry compliments that shine with false luster in the heartless social life of fashionable society? But until more understanding carries weight in society, there will always be a lack of heart and taste. The prostitute's *rouge* will take the place of that heavenly blush which only virtuous affections can give the face. Gallantry, and what is called love, may survive without simplicity of character. But the main pillars of friendship are respect and confidence. Esteem is never founded on something it cannot put a name to!

12.34 A taste for the fine arts requires great cultivation, but no more than a taste for the virtuous affections does. Both presuppose that enlargement of mind which opens up so many sources of mental pleasure. Why do people rush to noisy scenes and crowded gatherings? I would answer: because they lack activity of mind, and because they have not cultivated the virtues of the heart. So they see and feel only crudely. They constantly crave variety and find everything simple insipid.

12.35 This argument can be carried further than philosophers realize. If nature intended woman in particular to carry out domestic duties, she made her highly susceptible to the affections of attachment. Now women are notoriously fond of pleasure. By my definition they naturally must be, because they cannot enter into the fine details of domestic taste, since they lack judgment, the foundation of all taste. For whatever sensualist quibblers may say, the understanding reserves to itself the privilege of bringing pure joy to the heart.

12.36 With what a languid yawn have I seen an admirable poem tossed aside, one that a man of true taste returns to again and again with rapture! And while music has almost made me hold my breath, a lady has asked me where I bought my gown. I have also seen an eye glance coldly over a most exquisite painting and then rest, sparkling with pleasure, on a crudely drawn caricature. And while some awe-inspiring feature of nature has spread a sublime stillness through my soul, I have been asked to watch the pretty tricks of a lapdog that my perverse fate forced me to travel with. Is it surprising that such a tasteless creature would rather cuddle this dog than her children? Or that she should prefer the ranting of flattery to the simple accents of sincerity?

12.37 To illustrate this remark, I must be allowed to point out that men of the highest genius and most cultivated minds have seemed to have the keenest relish for the simple beauties of nature. They must have felt strongly what they have described so well: the charm that natural affections and unspoiled feelings spread around the human character. The poet has the power to

look into the heart and vibrate in response to each emotion. It is this power that enables him to personify every passion, and the painter to sketch with a brush of fire.

12.38 True taste is always the work of the understanding employed in observing natural effects. Until women have more understanding, it is useless to expect them to have domestic taste. Their lively senses will always be at work hardening their hearts. The emotions struck out of them will go on being vivid and fleeting, unless a proper education stocks their minds with knowledge.

12.39 It is the lack of domestic taste that takes women away from their families, not the acquisition of knowledge. It is this lack that tears the smiling baby from the breast that ought to nourish it. Women have been left in ignorance and slavish dependence for many, very many years. And still we hear of nothing but their love of pleasure and power, their preference for rakes and soldiers, their childish attachment to trinkets, and the vanity that makes them value accomplishments above virtues.

12.40 History presents a fearful list of the crimes their cunning has produced, whenever the weak slaves have had enough skill to outwit their masters. In France, and in how many other countries, have men been the self-indulgent despots and women the crafty ministers?—Does this prove that ignorance and dependence make women domestic? Is not their folly a byword among the libertines who unwind in their company? And do not men of sense constantly complain that an excessive love of dress and dissipation keeps the mother of a family forever away from home? Their hearts have not been corrupted by knowledge, nor their minds led astray by scientific pursuits. Yet they do not fulfill the particular duties that nature calls on them, as women, to fulfill. On the contrary, the state of war that exists between the sexes makes them use wiles that defeat the more open designs of force.

12.41 When I call women slaves, then, I mean it in a political and civil sense. Indirectly they obtain too much power, and they are degraded by their efforts to gain illegitimate influence.

12.42 Let an enlightened nation[7], then, try what effect reason would have in bringing them back to nature and to their duty. Let it allow them to share the advantages of education and government with men, and see whether they become better as they grow wiser and become free. The experiment cannot harm them, for it is not in man's power to make them more insignificant than they are at present.

A PLAN FOR NATIONAL SCHOOLS

Free, government-run day schools would teach boys and girls, rich and poor, together.

12.43 To make this workable, the government should set up day schools for particular age groups, in which boys and girls could be educated together. The school for the younger children, from five to nine years old, ought to be completely free and open to all classes[8]. A select committee in each parish should also choose a sufficient number of masters. Any complaint of negligence, and so on, could be made to this committee if six of the children's parents signed it.

12.44 Assistant teachers, or "ushers," would then be unnecessary. I believe experience will always show that this kind of subordinate authority is especially harmful to the morals of the young. What, indeed, could do more to corrupt the character than outward submission combined with inward contempt? Yet how can boys be expected to treat an usher with respect when the master seems to regard him as a servant? The master almost

7 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. France.

8 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. In treating this part of the subject, I have borrowed some ideas from a very sensible pamphlet on public education written by the former bishop of Autun.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The former bishop of Autun is Talleyrand; his report on public instruction was presented to the National Assembly in 1791.

encourages the ridicule of the usher, which becomes the boys' chief amusement during playtime.

12.45 But nothing of this kind could happen in an elementary day school where boys and girls, rich and poor, would meet together. To prevent any distinctions of vanity, they should be dressed alike. All of them should be required to submit to the same discipline or leave the school. The schoolroom ought to be surrounded by a large piece of ground where the children could get useful exercise. At this age they should not be kept at any sedentary occupation for more than an hour at a time. But these breaks could all be made part of elementary education. Many things improve and entertain the senses when introduced as a kind of show, though children would turn a deaf ear to their principles if these were laid down dryly. Botany, mechanics, and astronomy are examples. Reading, writing, arithmetic, natural history, and some simple experiments in physical science could fill up the day. But these pursuits should never cut into gymnastic games in the open air. The elements of religion, history, the history of humankind, and politics could also be taught through conversations in the Socratic manner.

12.46 After the age of nine, girls and boys intended for domestic service or manual trades ought to be moved to other schools. There they should receive instruction suited, to some degree, to each individual's future occupation. The two sexes would still be together in the morning. But in the afternoon the girls should attend a school where their work would be plain sewing, dressmaking, hatmaking, and so on.

12.47 At this stage, young people of superior ability or fortune could be taught in another school. They would learn the dead and living languages and the elements of science. They would also continue the study of history and politics on a broader scale, which would not rule out polite literature.

12.48 Girls and boys still together? I hear some readers ask. Yes. And I would fear no other consequence than that some early attachment might form. Such an attachment would have the best effect on the young people's moral character, but it might

not entirely suit the parents' plans. It will be a long time, I fear, before the world is enlightened enough for parents to let their children choose their life companions for themselves, caring only to make them virtuous.

12.49 Besides, this would be a sure way to encourage early marriages, and the most healthful physical and moral effects naturally follow from early marriages. How different is the character of a married citizen from that of the selfish fop who lives only for himself, and who is often afraid to marry in case he cannot keep up a certain style. Great emergencies aside, which would rarely arise in a society founded on equality, a man can be prepared for the duties of public life only in one way. He must habitually practice the lesser duties that form the man.

12.50 Under this plan of education, boys' constitutions would not be ruined by the early debauchery that now makes men so selfish. Nor would girls be made weak and vain by idleness and frivolous pursuits. But I am assuming that a certain degree of equality would be established between the sexes. It would shut out gallantry and coquetry, yet allow friendship and love to temper the heart for carrying out higher duties.

12.51 These would be schools of morality. If human happiness were allowed to flow from the pure springs of duty and affection, what advances might the human mind not make? Society can only be happy and free in proportion as it is virtuous. But the present distinctions established in society corrode all private virtue and blight all public virtue.

12.52 I have already denounced the custom of confining girls to their needle and shutting them out from all political and civil employment. Narrowing their minds in this way makes them unfit to fulfill the particular duties that nature has assigned them.

12.53 Occupied only with the little incidents of the day, they inevitably grow up cunning. My very soul has often sickened at watching the sly tricks women use to get some foolish thing their silly hearts were set on. They are not allowed to handle money or to call anything their own, so they learn to skim a

profit off the household marketing. Or a husband may give offense by staying away from home, or stir up some feelings of jealousy. Then a new gown, or some pretty trinket, smooths Juno's angry brow.[9]

12.54 But these *littlenesses* would not degrade their character if women were led to respect themselves and if political and moral subjects were opened to them. I will venture to say that this is the only way to make them properly attentive to their domestic duties.—An active mind takes in the whole circle of its duties and finds time enough for all of them. What leads women astray from duty is not, I insist, a bold attempt to emulate masculine virtues. Nor is it the enchantment of literary pursuits, or the steady investigation of scientific subjects. No, it is idleness and vanity, the love of pleasure and the love of power, that will reign supreme in an empty mind. I stress the word empty, because the education women now receive hardly deserves the name. The little knowledge they are led to acquire during the important years of youth relates only to accomplishments. And these are accomplishments without any foundation, for unless the understanding is cultivated, every grace is superficial and monotonous. Like the charms of a made-up face, they strike the senses only in a crowd. At home, lacking mind, they lack variety. The result is obvious. In lively scenes of dissipation we meet the artificial mind and the artificial face. Those who flee from solitude dread the domestic circle almost as much as solitude itself. Since they have no power to amuse or interest others, they feel their own insignificance, or else find nothing to amuse or interest themselves.

12.55 Besides, what could be more indelicate than a girl's *coming out* into the fashionable world? In other words, it means bringing a marriageable young miss to market and parading her person from one public place to another, richly decked out like a horse in its trappings. Yet these butterflies move in the giddy circle under restraint, and they long to flutter freely. The first

9 Juno, queen of the Roman gods, was famous for her jealous rages against her unfaithful husband Jupiter.

affection of their souls is their own persons. Their attention was drawn to their persons with the most painstaking care while they were being prepared for the moment that decides their fate for life. Instead of following this idle routine, sighing for tasteless show and heartless grandeur, the young of both sexes would form attachments with dignity in the schools I have briefly sketched. As they grew older, dancing, music, and drawing could be admitted in these schools as recreations. Young people of fortune ought to stay at these schools, more or less, until they came of age. Those intended for particular professions could spend three or four mornings a week at the schools set aside for their specific training.

12.56 For now I offer these observations only as hints, or really as an outline of the plan I have in mind rather than a worked-out one. But I must add that I strongly approve of one rule mentioned in the pamphlet[10] already referred to. It makes the children and young people independent of the masters where punishments are concerned. They should be tried by their peers. This would be an admirable way of fixing sound principles of justice in the mind. It might also have the happiest effect on the temper, which tyranny sours or irritates very early, until it becomes peevishly cunning or ferociously domineering.

12.57 My imagination leaps forward with benevolent eagerness to greet these lovable and respectable groups. It does so in spite of the sneers of cold hearts, who are free to pronounce with frigid self-importance the damning word: romantic. I will try to blunt its force by repeating the words of an eloquent moralist. —"I do not know whether the illusions of a truly humane heart, whose zeal makes everything easy, are not preferable to that harsh and repellent reason which always finds in indifference to the public good the first obstacle to anything that would promote it."

12.58 I know that libertines will also cry out that woman would be unsexed by acquiring strength of body and mind. They will say that beauty, soft bewitching beauty, would no longer adorn

10 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. The Bishop of Autun's.

the daughters of men! I am of a very different opinion. On the contrary, I think we should then see dignified beauty and true grace, which many powerful physical and moral causes would combine to produce.—It would not be languid beauty, it is true, nor the graces of helplessness. It would be the kind of beauty we see in the relics of antiquity, which makes us respect the human body as a majestic building fit to receive a noble inhabitant.

12.59 I do not forget the popular opinion that the Greek statues were not modeled on nature. I mean that they were not modeled on the proportions of one particular man. Instead, beautiful limbs and features were chosen from various bodies to form a harmonious whole. This may be true to some extent. The fine ideal image of an exalted imagination might surpass the materials the painter found in nature. So it might properly be called the model of mankind rather than of a man. It was not, however, a mechanical selection of limbs and features. It was the outpouring of an ardent imagination bursting forth. The artist's fine senses and enlarged understanding selected the solid material, which he drew into this glowing focus.

12.60 I said it was not mechanical because a whole was produced. It was a model of that grand simplicity, of those harmonizing energies, which arrest our attention and command our reverence. A slavish copy of even beautiful nature produces only insipid, lifeless beauty. Yet, quite apart from these observations, I believe the human form must once have been far more beautiful than it is now. In our luxurious state of society, extreme idleness, barbarous bindings, and many other causes act forcefully on the body, and in earlier times these did not hinder its growth or deform it. Considering physical causes alone, exercise and cleanliness appear to be the surest means not only of preserving health but also of promoting beauty. Yet this is not enough. Moral causes must work alongside them, or beauty will be only of that rustic kind which blooms on the innocent, wholesome faces of some country people whose minds have not been exercised. To make a person perfect, physical and moral beauty ought to be attained together. Each lends

strength to the other and receives strength from it through the combination. Judgment must sit on the brow, affection and imagination must beam in the eye, and humanity must curve the cheek. Otherwise the sparkle of the finest eye and the elegant finish of the fairest features are in vain. Meanwhile, grace and modesty should appear in every movement that shows off the active limbs and well-knit joints. But this fine ensemble is not brought together by chance. It is the reward of efforts that support one another. Judgment can be acquired only by reflection, affection only by the performance of duties, and humanity only by the exercise of compassion toward every living creature.

HUMANITY TO ANIMALS

Cruelty to animals learned in boyhood leads to domestic tyranny, and women's sensibility toward pets is shown to be shallow.

12.61 Humanity to animals should be particularly instilled as part of national education, for at present it is not one of our national virtues. Among the lower classes, tenderness toward their humble, speechless household animals is more often found in a pre-civilized state than in a civilized one. In the rough hut or mud cabin, close contact creates affection, and civilization prevents it. In civilized society the rich trample uncultivated minds underfoot, and such minds are corrupted only by the refinements that prevail there. Civilization leads them to domineer over animals, in revenge for the insults they are forced to bear from their superiors.

12.62 This habitual cruelty is first picked up at school, where tormenting the miserable animals that come their way is one of the boys' favorite sports. As they grow up, the step from cruelty to animals to domestic tyranny over wives, children, and servants is a very easy one. Justice, or even benevolence, will not be a powerful motive for action unless it is extended to the whole of creation. Indeed, I believe it may be laid down as an axiom that those who can watch pain unmoved will soon learn to inflict it.

12.63 The vulgar, meaning the common run of people, are swayed by present feelings and by habits they have acquired by chance. But little reliance can be placed on partial feelings, however just they may be. When they are not strengthened by reflection, custom weakens them until they are hardly felt. The sympathies of our nature are strengthened by thoughtful reflection and deadened by thoughtless habit. Macbeth's heart struck him harder for one murder, the first, than for the hundred later ones he needed to back it up. But when I used the word "vulgar," I did not mean to restrict my remark to the poor. Partial humanity, based on present sensations or whim, is just as conspicuous among the rich, if not more so.

12.64 Take the lady who weeps for the bird starved in a trap, and who curses the devils in human shape who goad the poor ox to madness or whip the patient donkey staggering under a load beyond its strength. She will nonetheless keep her coachman and horses waiting for her for hours on end in a biting frost. Or she will keep them waiting while the rain beats against her tightly closed windows, which do not let in a breath of air to tell her how roughly the wind is blowing outside. And she who takes her dogs to bed, and nurses them with a great show of sensibility when they are sick, will let her babies grow up crooked in a nursery. This illustration of my argument is drawn from fact. The woman I am thinking of was handsome. Those who do not miss the mind when the face is plump and fair considered her very handsome. But literature had not led her understanding away from female duties, nor had knowledge corrupted her innocence. No, she was entirely feminine, in the masculine sense of the word. Far from loving these spoiled animals that filled the place her children ought to have occupied, she merely lisped out a pretty mixture of French and English nonsense to please the men who flocked around her. The wife, the mother, and the human being were all swallowed up by an artificial character, produced by an improper education and the selfish vanity of beauty.

12.65 I do not like to make a distinction where there is no difference. I confess I have been as disgusted by the fine lady who held her lapdog to her bosom instead of her child as by the ferocity of a man beating his horse, who declared that the horse knew as well as a Christian when it did wrong.

12.66 This brood of folly shows how mistaken some people are. They allow women to leave their harems, yet they do not cultivate women's understanding so as to plant virtues in their hearts. If women had sense, they might acquire the domestic taste that would lead them to love their whole family with reasonable subordination, from their husband down to the house dog. Nor would they ever insult humanity in the person of the lowliest servant by paying more attention to the comfort of an animal than to that of a fellow creature.

12.67 My remarks on national education are obviously only hints. My main aim is to press two needs: to educate the sexes together, so as to perfect both, and to have children sleep at home, so that they learn to love home. Yet, so that private affections support public ones instead of smothering them, children should be sent to school to mix with a number of equals. Only through the jostling of equality can we form a fair opinion of ourselves.

12.68 To make humanity more virtuous, and therefore happier, both sexes must act from the same principle. But how can that be expected when only one of them is allowed to see why it is reasonable? Again, to make the social compact truly fair, and to spread the enlightening principles that alone can improve the human lot, women must be allowed to found their virtue on knowledge. That is scarcely possible unless they are educated through the same pursuits as men. As things are, ignorance and low desires make them so inferior that they do not deserve to be ranked with men. Or else they climb the tree of knowledge by the serpentine wrigglings of cunning, and gain only enough to lead men astray.

12.69 The history of every nation makes it plain that women cannot be confined to purely domestic pursuits. They will not

fulfill their family duties unless their minds range more widely. As long as they are kept in ignorance, they become slaves of pleasure in exactly the measure that they are slaves of men. Nor can they be shut out of great enterprises, though the narrowness of their minds often leads them to spoil what they cannot understand.

12.70 The libertinism, and even the virtues, of superior men will always give women of a certain kind great power over them. These weak women, driven by childish passions and selfish vanity, will cast a false light over the very things these men see through their eyes, when the men ought to be enlightening the women's judgment. Men of imagination, and the ardent types who mostly steer human affairs, generally relax in the company of women. Surely I need not point out, even to the most superficial reader of history, the many examples of vice and oppression produced by the private intrigues of female favorites. I will not dwell on the harm that naturally follows from the blundering interference of well-meaning folly. In business it is far better to deal with a rogue than with a fool, because a rogue sticks to some plan, and any rational plan can be seen through much sooner than a sudden flight of folly. The power that vile and foolish women have had over wise men of sensibility is notorious. I will mention only one instance.

12.71 Who ever drew a more exalted female character than Rousseau? And yet, when he spoke of women as a whole, he constantly tried to degrade them. Why was he so anxious to do it? Really, to justify to himself the affection that weakness and virtue had led him to cherish for that fool Thérèse. He could not raise her to the ordinary level of her sex, so he labored to bring woman down to hers. He found her a convenient, humble companion, and pride made him determined to find some superior virtues in the person he had chosen to live with. But did her conduct, during his life and after his death, not show clearly how grossly mistaken he was to call her a heavenly innocent?[11]

11 Thérèse Levasseur (1721–1801), a former inn servant, was Rousseau's companion for over thirty years and eventually his wife.

Indeed, in the bitterness of his heart, he himself laments that she stopped caring for him once his bodily infirmities kept him from treating her as a woman. And it was only natural that she should. They had so few feelings in common that, once the sexual tie was broken, what was left to hold her? To hold the affection of someone whose sensibility is confined to one sex, or even to one man, takes the good sense to turn sensibility into the broad channel of humanity. Many women do not have mind enough to feel affection for a woman, or friendship for a man. But the sexual weakness that makes a woman depend on a man for her living produces a kind of cattish affection. It leads a wife to purr around her husband as she would around any man who fed and petted her.

12.72 Men, however, are often gratified by this kind of fondness, which is confined to themselves in an animal way. But if they ever become more virtuous, they will want to talk with a friend at their fireside once they stop playing with a mistress.

12.73 Besides, understanding is needed to give variety and interest even to sensual pleasures. Low indeed on the intellectual scale is the mind that can go on loving when neither virtue nor sense gives a human face to an animal appetite. But sense will always win out. If women are not, in general, brought more nearly level with men, some superior women, like the Greek courtesans, will gather men of ability around them. They will draw away from their families many citizens who would have stayed home if their wives had had more sense, or had the graces that come from exercising the understanding and the imagination, the legitimate parents of taste.[12] A woman of talent, unless she is absolutely ugly, will always gain great power, and the weakness of her sex makes that power greater. As men acquire virtue and delicacy through the exercise of reason, they will look for both in women. But women can acquire them only in the same way men do.

12.74 In France or Italy, have women confined themselves to domestic life? Though they have not so far had any political

existence, have they not held great sway illicitly, corrupting themselves and the men whose passions they played on? In short, however I look at the subject, reason and experience convince me that there is only one way to lead women to fulfill their particular duties. That way is to free them from all restraint by allowing them to share the inherent rights of humanity.

12.75 Make them free, and they will quickly become wise and virtuous, as men become more so. The improvement must be mutual. Otherwise the injustice that one half of the human race is forced to submit to will recoil on its oppressors, and the virtue of man will be worm-eaten by the insect he keeps under his feet.

12.76 Let men take their choice. Man and woman were made for each other, though not to become one being. And if men will not improve women, they will deprave them!

12.77 I am speaking of the improvement and emancipation of the whole sex. I know that a few women have gained more knowledge than the rest of their sex, by accident or by following a strong natural bent, and that their behavior has often been overbearing. But there have been women who acquired knowledge without discarding modesty. Nor did they always pedantically affect to despise the ignorance they had labored to clear from their own minds. So the outcries that any advice about female learning usually provokes, especially from pretty women, often spring from envy. Sometimes they see that even the luster of their eyes and the flippant playfulness of refined coquetry will not always hold attention for a whole evening, because a woman of more cultivated understanding is trying to give the conversation a rational turn. Their usual consolation then is that such women seldom get husbands. What tricks have I not seen silly women use to break up, by *flirtation* (a very telling word for such a maneuver), a rational conversation that had made the men forget they were pretty women!

12.78 But let us grant what comes very naturally to humankind: that rare abilities really do tend to excite overweening pride,

12 Educated courtesans (hetairai) such as Aspasia, companion of Pericles, were famous for the men of talent they drew around them.

which is disgusting in men and women alike. Even so, in what a state of inferiority must women's faculties have rusted, when the small amount of knowledge attained by the women sneeringly called learned women could be remarkable?—Remarkable enough to puff up its owner, and to excite envy in her contemporaries and in some of the other sex. Indeed, has not a little rationality exposed many women to the harshest censure? I am referring to well-known facts. I have often heard women ridiculed, and their every little weakness exposed, simply because they followed the advice of certain doctors and left the beaten track in the way they treated their infants. I have actually heard this barbarous aversion to innovation carried further still. A sensible woman had wisely taken these pains to preserve her children's health. Then, in the midst of all her care, she lost one of them to one of those accidents of infancy that no prudence can prevent, and she was branded an unnatural mother. Her acquaintances remarked that this was the result of newfangled notions—the newfangled notions of comfort and cleanliness. And those who claimed experience all but rejoiced at the disaster, which seemed to give a kind of sanction to established custom. Yet for years they had clung to prejudices that, in the opinion of the wisest physicians, have thinned the human race.

12.79 Indeed, if only for this reason, the national education of women is of the utmost importance. How many human sacrifices are made to that Moloch, prejudice! And in how many ways are children destroyed by men's lust? Many women lack natural affection because the admiration of men draws them from their duty, and many others are ignorant. Between them, they make human infancy a far more perilous state than the infancy of animals. Yet men are unwilling to place women where they could acquire enough understanding to know even how to nurse their babies.[13]

13 Moloch: a Canaanite god to whom, according to the Bible, children were sacrificed.

12.80 This truth strikes me so forcibly that I would rest the whole drift of my argument on it. Whatever tends to unfit a woman for motherhood takes her out of her sphere.

12.81 But it is vain to expect the present generation of weak mothers to take reasonable care of a child's body, as they must to lay the foundation of a good constitution (assuming the child does not suffer for the sins of its father). It is just as vain to expect them to manage its temper so wisely that, as it grows up, the child will not have to throw off everything its mother, its first teacher, taught it directly or indirectly. Unless the mind has uncommon vigor, the follies taught to women will cling to the character throughout life. The weakness of the mother will be visited on the children! And as long as women are brought up to rely on their husbands' judgment, this must always be the result. There is no improving an understanding by halves. Nor can any being act wisely by imitation, since every circumstance of life has a kind of individuality that calls for judgment to adapt general rules. A being who can think soundly along one line will soon extend its intellectual empire. And a woman with enough judgment to manage her children will not submit, right or wrong, to her husband, or patiently accept the social laws that make a wife a nonentity.

12.82 In the public schools, to guard against the errors of ignorance, girls should be taught the elements of anatomy and medicine. This would enable them to take proper care of their own health, and would also make them rational nurses of their infants, parents, and husbands. The death rolls are swelled by the blunders of headstrong old women who hand out remedies of their own without knowing anything about the human body. It is likewise proper, even from a purely domestic point of view, to acquaint women with the anatomy of the mind. This can be done by letting the sexes associate in every pursuit, and by leading them to observe how the human understanding has progressed through the improvement of the sciences and arts. The science of morality must never be forgotten, nor the study of the political history of humanity.

12.83 A human being has been called a microcosm, and every family might likewise be called a state. States, it is true, have mostly been governed by arts that disgrace human character. The lack of a just constitution and equal laws has so confused the ideas of the worldly-wise that they more than doubt whether it is reasonable to fight for the rights of humanity. So morality, polluted in the national reservoir, sends off streams of vice to corrupt the component parts of the body politic. But suppose nobler, or rather more just, principles governed the laws, and it was the laws that governed society, as they should, and not those who carry them out. Then duty might become the rule of private conduct.

12.84 Besides, by exercising their bodies and minds, women would acquire the mental activity so necessary to a mother. They would gain with it the fortitude that distinguishes steadiness of conduct from the obstinate perversity of weakness. It is dangerous to advise the indolent to be firm. They instantly become rigid, and to save themselves trouble they severely punish faults that the patient fortitude of reason might have prevented.

12.85 But fortitude presupposes strength of mind. And is strength of mind to be acquired by lazy acquiescence? By asking advice instead of using one's judgment? By obeying out of fear, instead of practicing the forbearance we all need ourselves?—The conclusion I want to draw is obvious. Make women rational creatures and free citizens, and they will quickly become good wives and mothers—that is, if men do not neglect the duties of husbands and fathers.

12.86 In discussing the benefits we might reasonably expect from combining public and private education as I have sketched it, I have dwelt most on those that particularly concern women, because I think women are oppressed. Yet oppression breeds vices, and the gangrene they produce is not confined to the diseased part but spreads through society at large. So when I long to see my sex become more like moral agents, my heart leaps at

the prospect of a general spread of that sublime contentment which only morality can spread.

Chapter XIII: Some Instances of the Folly Which the Ignorance of Women Generates; with Concluding Reflections on the Moral Improvement That a Revolution in Female Manners May Naturally Be Expected to Produce

Fortune-tellers, novels, fashion and false sensibility; a closing plea that justice to women will make them better wives, mothers and citizens.

13.1 There are many follies that are to some degree peculiar to women: sins against reason, of commission as well as omission. But since they all flow from ignorance or prejudice, I will point out only those that seem particularly harmful to women's moral character. In criticizing them, I especially want to prove one thing. Men, for various motives, have tried to perpetuate weakness of mind and body in women, and this weakness prevents women from carrying out the particular duty of their sex. When weakness of body will not let them nurse their children, and weakness of mind makes them spoil their children's tempers—is woman in a natural state?

FORTUNE-TELLERS

Fashionable women who consult fortune-tellers and magnetizers are shown to insult both reason and religion.

13.2 One glaring example of the weakness that comes from ignorance claims attention first, and calls for severe rebuke.

13.3 In this capital a number of lurking leeches make an infamous living by working on women's credulity, pretending to "cast nativities," to use the technical term. Many women are proud of their rank and fortune and look down on the common people with sovereign contempt. Yet by this credulity they show that the distinction is arbitrary, and that they have not cultivated their minds enough to rise above vulgar prejudices.[1] Women have not been taught to regard knowledge of their duty as the one thing necessary, or to live in the present moment by doing it. So they are very anxious to peep into the future, to find out what they have to look forward to that might make life interesting, and to break the emptiness of ignorance.

13.4 I must be allowed to remonstrate seriously with the ladies who chase these idle inventions. Ladies who are mistresses of households are not ashamed to drive in their own carriages to the door of the cunning man, the fortune-teller[2]. If any of them should read this work, I beg them to answer the following questions in their own hearts, not forgetting that they are in the presence of God.

13.5 Do you believe that there is only one God, and that he is powerful, wise, and good?

13.6 Do you believe that all things were created by him, and that all beings depend on him?

13.7 Do you rely on his wisdom, so plainly visible in his works and in your own body? And are you convinced that he has

1 To "cast a nativity" was to draw up a horoscope from the positions of the stars at a person's birth.

arranged all the things beyond the reach of your senses in the same perfect harmony, to fulfill his purposes?

13.8 Do you acknowledge that the power to look into the future, and to see things that are not as if they were, belongs to the Creator? And if he saw fit, by an impression on the minds of his creatures, to reveal to them some event hidden in the shadows of a time not yet born, to whom would the secret be disclosed by direct inspiration? The opinion of the ages answers this question—to venerable old men, to people distinguished by eminent piety.

13.9 The oracles of old were delivered in just this way, by priests dedicated to the service of the god who was supposed to inspire them. These impostors were surrounded by the glare of worldly pomp. They were respected by crafty politicians, who knew how to use this handy device to bend the necks of the strong under the rule of the cunning. The pomp and the respect together spread a sacred, mysterious veil of holiness over their lies and abominations. Impressed by such solemn religious display, a Greek or Roman lady might be excused for consulting the oracle when she was anxious to pry into the future or to ask about some uncertain event. Her inquiries, however contrary to reason, could not be counted impious.—But can those who profess Christianity escape that charge? Can a Christian suppose that the favorites of the Most High, the highly favored, would have to lurk in disguise and practice the most dishonest tricks to cheat silly women out of money—money the poor cry out for in vain?

13.10 Do not say that such questions insult common sense. It is your own conduct—O you foolish women!—that brings disgrace on your sex! These reflections should make you shudder at your thoughtlessness and irrational devotion.—For I do not suppose that all of you set aside your religion, such as it is, when you

2 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. I once lived near one of these men, a *handsome* man. With surprise and indignation, I watched women flock to his door whose appearance and servants showed that they belonged to the rank in which women are supposed to receive a superior education.

entered those mysterious dwellings. Yet I have all along imagined myself speaking to ignorant women, and ignorant you are, in the most emphatic sense of the word. So it would be absurd to reason with you about the egregious folly of wanting to know what the Supreme Wisdom has concealed.

13.11 You probably would not understand me if I tried to show you that prying into the future would be utterly inconsistent with the great purpose of life, which is to make human beings wise and virtuous. If God sanctioned it, it would disturb the order established in creation. And if God does not sanction it, do you expect to hear the truth? Can events be foretold, events that have not yet taken bodily form so as to come under mortal inspection? Can they be foreseen by a vicious man of the world, who pampers his appetites by preying on foolish women?

13.12 Perhaps, however, you devoutly believe in the devil, and imagine, to shift the question, that he may assist his followers. But if you really respect the power of such a being, an enemy of goodness and of God, can you go to church after putting yourself under such an obligation to him?

13.13 From these delusions it is a very natural step to the still more fashionable deceptions practiced by the whole tribe of magnetizers. It is equally fitting to ask women a few questions about them.[3]

13.14 Do you know anything about how the human body is constructed? If not, you ought to be told what every child should know. The body is an admirable system, and excess or idleness can disturb it. When that happens (I am speaking not of violent illnesses but of chronic ones), it must be brought back to health by slow degrees. If the vital functions have not been seriously damaged, a few means can recover that priceless blessing, health: regimen (another word for moderation), air, exercise, and a few medicines prescribed by people who have studied the human body. These are the only human means yet discovered that will bear investigation.

3 "Animal magnetism," the healing method of Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), was a fashionable craze in Paris and London in the 1780s.

13.15 Do you, then, believe that these magnetizers, who pretend to work miracles with hocus-pocus tricks, are sent by God? Or are they assisted by the one who solves all difficulties of this kind—the devil?

13.16 It is said that they put to flight illnesses that have defeated the powers of medicine. When they do so, do they work in accordance with the light of reason? Or do they bring about these wonderful cures with supernatural help?

13.17 An adept may answer that they do it by communicating with the world of spirits. A noble privilege, it must be admitted. Some of the ancients mention familiar spirits that guarded them from danger. The spirits kindly hinted when any danger was near (in what way, we cannot guess), or pointed out what they ought to undertake. Yet the men who claimed this privilege, which lay outside the order of nature, insisted that it was the reward, or the result, of superior temperance and piety. But today's workers of wonders are not raised above their fellows by superior temperance or holiness. They do not heal for the love of God, but for money. These are the priests of quackery. It is true that they lack the convenient device of selling masses for souls in purgatory. Nor do they have churches in which to display crutches, and models of limbs made sound by a touch or a word.

13.18 I am not familiar with the technical terms, nor initiated into the mysteries, so I may be speaking loosely. But it is clear that some men will not submit to the law of reason and earn a living honestly, little by little, and these men are very lucky to become acquainted with such obliging spirits. We cannot, indeed, credit those spirits with much wisdom or goodness. Otherwise they would have chosen nobler instruments when they wanted to show themselves the benevolent friends of mankind.

13.19 It is, however, little short of blasphemy to claim such powers!

13.20 The whole tenor of Providence's dealings makes it plain to sober reason that certain vices produce certain effects. Can anyone insult God's wisdom so grossly as to suppose that he will

allow a miracle to disturb his general laws? Would he restore the intemperate and vicious to health merely so that they can go on in the same course with impunity? "Be whole, and sin no more," said Jesus. He healed the body in order to reach the mind. Are greater miracles to be worked by those who do not follow in his footsteps?[4]

13.21 Mentioning the name of Christ right after such vile impostors may displease some of my readers. I respect their warmth. But let them not forget that the followers of these delusions bear his name and profess to be disciples of the one who said that by their works we should know who were the children of God and who the servants of sin. I grant that it is easier to touch the body of a saint, or to be magnetized, than to restrain our appetites or govern our passions. But health of body or mind can be recovered only by these means. Otherwise we make the Supreme Judge partial and vengeful.

13.22 Is he a man, that he should change, or punish out of resentment? He, the common father, wounds only to heal, says reason. Our excesses produce certain consequences, and so we are forcibly shown the nature of vice. That way we learn by experience to tell good from evil, and so we may hate the one and love the other in proportion to the wisdom we attain. The poison contains its antidote. Either we reform our bad habits and stop sinning against our own bodies, to use the forceful language of scripture, or a premature death, the punishment of sin, snaps the thread of life.

13.23 Here an awful halt is put to our inquiries.—But why should I hide my views? Considering the attributes of God, I believe that whatever punishment may follow will serve, like the anguish of disease, to show the malignity of vice so that we reform. Arbitrarily imposed punishment seems so contrary to the nature of God, as we can discover it in all his works and in our own reason, that I would sooner believe the Deity paid no

4 The words combine Jesus' sayings to the healed in Mark 5:34 ("be whole") and John 5:14 ("sin no more").

attention to human conduct than that he punished without the benevolent aim of reforming us.

13.24 Consider an all-wise and all-powerful Being, as good as he is great. Merely to suppose that he would create a being while foreseeing that after fifty or sixty years of feverish existence it would be plunged into never-ending woe—is blasphemy. On what will the worm feed that is never to die?—On folly, on ignorance, you say. If I could bring myself to write the natural conclusion down, I would blush with indignation at drawing it, and would wish to withdraw from under the wing of my God!—On such a supposition, I say it with reverence, he would be a consuming fire. We would wish, though in vain, to flee from his presence, when fear had swallowed up love and darkness shrouded all his counsels!

13.25 I know that many devout people boast of submitting blindly to the Will of God, as to an arbitrary scepter or rod. They do it on the same principle on which the Indians worship the devil. In other words, just as people do in the ordinary affairs of life, they pay homage to power and cringe under the foot that can crush them. Rational religion, on the contrary, is submission to the will of a being so perfectly wise that everything he wills must be directed by the proper motive—must be reasonable.

13.26 And if we respect God in this way, can we believe the mysterious insinuations that insult his laws? Even if it stared us in the face, could we believe that he would work a miracle to authorize confusion by sanctioning an error? Yet we must either accept these impious conclusions, or treat with contempt every promise to heal a diseased body by supernatural means, and every promise to foretell events that only God can foresee.

NOVELS AND SENTIMENTALITY

Ignorance makes women dependent on sentimental novels, which can best be cured by ridicule and better reading.

13.27 Another example of the feminine weakness of character that a narrow education often produces is a romantic twist of mind, which has very properly been called *sentimental*.

13.28 Ignorance makes women subject to their sensations, and they are taught to look for happiness only in love. So they refine upon their sensual feelings and adopt metaphysical notions about that passion, which lead them shamefully to neglect the duties of life. Often, in the midst of these sublime refinements, they plump straight into actual vice.

13.29 These are the women who are entertained by the reveries of stupid novelists. Knowing little of human nature, these writers work up stale tales and describe meretricious scenes, all retailed in a sentimental jargon. All of it tends equally to corrupt the taste and to draw the heart away from its daily duties. I do not mention the understanding, because it has never been exercised. Its slumbering energies lie inactive, like the hidden particles of fire that are supposed to pervade all matter.

13.30 Women, in fact, are denied all political privileges, and as married women they are allowed no civil existence except in criminal cases. So their attention is naturally drawn away from the interest of the whole community to that of its tiny parts. Yet any member of society will perform private duty very imperfectly when it is not connected with the general good. The great business of a woman's life is to please. Political and civil oppression keeps women from entering into more important concerns, so feelings become events. Then reflection deepens what it should have erased, and would have erased if the understanding had been allowed a wider range.

13.31 But since they are confined to trivial occupations, they naturally absorb the opinions inspired by the only kind of reading likely to interest an innocent, frivolous mind. Unable to

grasp anything great, is it any wonder they find reading history a very dry task? Is it any wonder that discussions addressed to the understanding seem intolerably tedious and almost unintelligible? So they necessarily depend on the novelist for their amusement. Yet when I cry out against novels, I mean them in contrast with works that exercise the understanding and regulate the imagination.—For I think any kind of reading is better than leaving a blank still blank. Even a slight exercise of its thinking powers must enlarge the mind somewhat and give it a little strength. Besides, even works addressed only to the imagination raise the reader a little above the gross gratification of appetites to which the mind has not lent a shade of delicacy.

13.32 This observation comes from experience. I have known several capable, managing women, and one in particular who was a very good woman, as good as so narrow a mind would let her be. She made sure that her daughters (three of them) never saw a novel. As she was a woman of fortune and fashion, they had various masters to teach them, and a sort of servant-governess to watch their every step. From their masters they learned what tables, chairs, and so on were called in French and Italian. But the few books put in their way were either far above their capacities or devotional, so they acquired neither ideas nor feelings. When they were not made to repeat *words*, they spent their time dressing, quarreling with one another, or chatting with their maids on the sly. So it went until they were brought out into society as marriageable.

13.33 Meanwhile their mother, a widow, was busy keeping up her "connections," as she called a large circle of acquaintances, so that her girls would not lack a proper introduction into high society. These young ladies had minds vulgar in every sense of the word, and spoiled tempers. They entered life puffed up with notions of their own importance, and looked down with contempt on anyone who could not compete with them in dress and display.

13.34 As for love, nature, or their nurses, had taken care to teach them the physical meaning of the word. They had few top-

ics of conversation and fewer refinements of feeling. So when they spoke freely, talking of marriage, they expressed their gross wishes in not very delicate phrases.

13.35 Could these girls have been harmed by reading novels? I almost forgot one shade in the character of one of them. She affected a simplicity bordering on foolishness, and with a simper she would come out with the most immodest remarks and questions. She had learned their full meaning while shut away from the world and afraid to speak in front of her mother, who ruled with a high hand. The mother prided herself that they had all been educated in the most exemplary manner. They read their chapters and psalms before breakfast, and never touched a silly novel.

13.36 This is only one instance. But I remember many other women who were not led step by step to proper studies and not allowed to choose for themselves. Some of them have indeed remained overgrown children. Others have picked up, by mixing in the world, a little of what is called common sense: that is, a distinct way of seeing ordinary events as isolated occurrences. But anything deserving the name of intellect, the power of forming general or abstract ideas, or even intermediate ones, was out of the question. Their minds were inert. When they were not roused by objects of the senses and occupations of that kind, they were low-spirited, and would cry or go to sleep.

13.37 So when I advise my sex not to read such flimsy works, it is to lead them to read something better. I agree with a shrewd man who had a daughter and a niece in his care and followed a very different plan with each.

13.38 The niece had considerable ability, and before she was left in his guardianship she had been indulged in random reading. Her he tried to lead to history and moral essays, and he succeeded. But his daughter had been indulged by a fond, weak mother, and so she disliked anything like application. He allowed her to read novels. He used to justify this by saying that if she ever acquired a taste for reading them, he would have

some foundation to work on, and that mistaken opinions were better than none at all.

13.39 In fact, the female mind has been so completely neglected that knowledge could be obtained only from this muddy source. It stayed so until some women of superior talent learned, from reading novels, to despise them.

13.40 The best way, I think, to cure a fondness for novels is to ridicule them. This should not be done indiscriminately, for then it would have little effect. But a sensible person with some gift for humor could read several of them to a young girl. By tone of voice, and by apt comparisons with moving incidents and heroic characters in history, that person could show her how foolishly and absurdly novels caricature human nature. Then sound opinions might take the place of romantic sentiments.

13.41 In one respect, however, most people of both sexes are alike, and show an equal lack of taste and modesty. Ignorant women, forced to be chaste to preserve their reputations, let their imaginations revel in the unnatural and meretricious scenes sketched by the novelists of the day. They scorn as insipid the sober dignity and matronly graces of history[5]. Meanwhile men carry the same corrupted taste into life. They fly from the unaffected charms of virtue and the grave respectability of sense to seek amusement with loose women.

13.42 Besides, reading novels makes women, and particularly ladies of fashion, very fond of using strong expressions and superlatives in conversation. The dissipated, artificial life they lead keeps them from cherishing any strong, genuine passion. Yet the language of passion, in affected tones, slips endlessly from their glib tongues. Every trifle produces those phosphorescent bursts that only mimic, in the dark, the flame of passion.

5 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. I am not referring here to the superiority of mind that leads to the creation of ideal beauty. To such a mind, life surveyed with a penetrating eye appears a tragicomedy in which little can be seen to satisfy the heart without the help of imagination.

THE LOVE OF DRESS

Fondness for dress comes from an uncultivated mind, as in any person or people denied education.

13.43 Ignorance makes women very fond of dress, and so does the misguided cunning that nature sharpens in weak heads as a means of self-preservation. This fondness produces all the vanity it can naturally be expected to breed, and shuts out emulation and magnanimity.

13.44 I agree with Rousseau that the physical part of the art of pleasing consists in ornaments. For that very reason I would guard girls against the contagious fondness for dress so common among weak women, so that they do not stop at the physical part. Yet weak are the women who imagine they can please for long without the help of the mind, or, in other words, without the moral art of pleasing. But the moral art is never found together with ignorance—if it is not a profanation to use the word art for a grace that is an effect of virtue, and not the motive of action. The playfulness of innocence, so pleasing to refined libertines of both sexes, is in its essence very different from this superior gracefulness.

13.45 A strong taste for external ornaments always appears in pre-civilized societies, though there it is the men, not the women, who adorn themselves. Where women are allowed to be even that far on a level with men, society has advanced at least one step toward civilization.

13.46 The attention to dress that has been thought a trait of one sex is therefore, I think, natural to humanity in general. But I should put this more precisely. When the mind is not open enough to take pleasure in reflection, the body will be adorned with painstaking care, and ambition will show itself in tattooing or painting it.

13.47 This first inclination is carried so far that even the hellish yoke of slavery cannot stifle the untamed desire for admiration that the Black heroes inherit from both their parents: all of a

slave's hard-earned savings are usually spent on a little tawdry finery. And I have seldom known a good servant, male or female, who was not especially fond of dress. Their clothes were their wealth. Arguing by analogy, I conclude that women's fondness for dress, so extravagant, arises from the same cause: an uncultivated mind. When men meet, they talk about business, politics, or literature; but, as Swift says, "how naturally do women apply their hands to each other's lappets and ruffles." And very natural it is. They have no business to interest them and no taste for literature, and they find politics dry, because they have never acquired a love for humanity by turning their thoughts to the great pursuits that elevate the human race and promote general happiness.[6]

13.48 Besides, men pursue many different paths to power and fame, by accident or by choice. They jostle one another, for men of the same profession are seldom friends, but there is a far greater number of their fellow creatures with whom they never clash. Women stand in a very different position toward one another: they are all rivals.

13.49 Before marriage their business is to please men, and afterward, with a few exceptions, they follow the same scent with all the dogged persistence of instinct. Even virtuous women never forget their sex in company, for they are forever trying to make themselves *agreeable*. A female beauty and a male wit seem equally anxious to draw the company's attention to themselves, and the hostility between rival wits of the same day is proverbial.

13.50 Is it surprising, then, that endless rivalries should follow when a woman's sole ambition centers on beauty, and self-interest gives vanity extra force? They are all running the same race, and they would rise above the virtue of mortals if they did not eye one another with suspicion and even envy.

13.51 An immoderate fondness for dress, for pleasure, and for power: these are the passions of pre-civilized peoples. They occupy those uncivilized beings who have not yet extended the

6 Lappets were the lace streamers hanging from a woman's cap.

rule of the mind, or even learned to think with the energy needed to link together the abstract chain of thought that produces principles. And I do not think anyone can deny that women, because of their education and the present state of civilized life, are in the same condition. To laugh at them, then, or to satirize the follies of a being who is never allowed to act freely by the light of her own reason, is as absurd as it is cruel. It is perfectly natural and certain that those who are taught to obey authority blindly will try to evade it by cunning.

13.52 Yet let it be proved that they ought to obey man without question, and I will at once agree that it is a woman's duty to cultivate a fondness for dress in order to please, and a knack for cunning for her own protection.

13.53 The virtues that are propped up by ignorance, however, must always waver. The house built on sand could not withstand a storm. The conclusion hardly needs drawing. If women are to be made virtuous by authority, which is a contradiction in terms, let them be shut up in harems and watched with a jealous eye. Do not fear that the iron will enter into their souls, for souls that can bear such treatment are made of yielding stuff, just animated enough to give life to the body.

13.54 "Matter too soft a lasting mark to bear, / And best distinguished by black, brown, or fair."[7]

13.55 Even the cruelest wounds will naturally heal soon enough, and they can still populate the world and dress to please man. Those are all the purposes that certain celebrated writers have granted they were created to fulfill.

SENSIBILITY AND HUMANITY

Women's narrow, exclusive affections are the result of their confinement, not proof of their inferiority.

13.56 Women are supposed to have more sensibility, and even more humanity, than men, and their strong attachments and

7 From Pope's *Epistle to a Lady*, on women who supposedly have no lasting character at all.

instant surges of compassion are offered as proof. But the clinging affection of ignorance seldom has anything noble in it. Like the affection of children and animals, it can mostly be reduced to selfishness. I have known many weak women whose sensibility was entirely taken up by their husbands. As for their humanity, it was very faint indeed; or rather, it was only a passing emotion of compassion. Humanity does not consist "in a squeamish ear," says an eminent orator. "It belongs to the mind as well as the nerves."

13.57 But this kind of exclusive affection, though it degrades the individual, should not be put forward as proof that women are inferior, because it is the natural result of narrow horizons. Even women of superior sense, whose attention is directed to small tasks and private plans, rarely rise to heroism unless love spurs them on. And love as a heroic passion, like genius, appears only once in an age. I therefore agree with the moralist who says "that women have seldom so much generosity as men." I also agree that their narrow affections, to which justice and humanity are often sacrificed, make women seem inferior, especially since those affections are usually inspired by men. But I maintain that the heart would expand as the understanding grew stronger, if women were not kept down from the cradle.[8]

13.58 I know that a little sensibility combined with great weakness will produce a strong attachment to the other sex, and that it takes reason to cement friendship. I therefore grant that more friendship is found among men than among women, and that men have a higher sense of justice. Women's exclusive affections do seem to resemble Cato's utterly unjust love for his country. He wanted to crush Carthage, not to save Rome but to feed its vainglory. In general it is to principles like these that humanity is sacrificed, for genuine duties support one another.[9]

8 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*: "Humanity is the virtue of a woman, generosity of a man."

9 Cato the Elder (234–149 BC), Roman statesman famous for ending his speeches with the demand that Carthage be destroyed.

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

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

Women's ignorance harms children's bodies and tempers, while their exclusive fondness spoils them.

13.60 Raising children has rightly been insisted on as woman's special calling, and that means laying a foundation of sound health, in body and mind, for the rising generation. The ignorance that unfits women for this task must therefore be contrary to the order of things. And I maintain that their minds can take in much more, and ought to, or they will never become sensible mothers. Many men attend to the breeding of horses and oversee the running of the stable, yet would think themselves degraded by paying any attention to the nursery. What a strange lack of sense and feeling! Yet how many children are downright killed by women's ignorance! And even when children survive, destroyed neither by unnatural neglect nor by blind indulgence, how few are handled properly where the infant mind is concerned! A child whose spirit was allowed to go bad at home is sent to school to have it broken. The methods used there, which must be used to keep a number of children in order, scatter the seeds of almost every vice in soil that has been so violently torn up.

13.61 These poor children should never have felt restraint, and never would have if they had always been guided with an even hand. I have sometimes compared their struggles to the desperate plunges of a spirited filly I once saw being broken on a beach. Its hooves sank deeper and deeper into the sand each time it tried to throw its rider, until at last it sullenly gave in.

13.62 I am fond of horses, and I have always found them very manageable when they are treated humanely and steadily. So I doubt whether the violent methods used to break them do not do them real harm. I am certain, however, that a child should never be tamed by force like this after being foolishly allowed to

run wild, for every violation of justice and reason in the treatment of children weakens their reason. And children take on a character so early that, as experience leads me to conclude, the foundation of moral character is fixed before the age of seven. That is precisely the period during which women are given sole charge of children. Afterward, too often, half the business of education is to correct faults that children would never have acquired if their mothers had had more understanding, and if the correcting is done in haste, it is done very imperfectly.

13.63 One striking example of women's folly must not be left out: the way they treat servants in front of children, letting the children suppose that servants ought to wait on them and put up with their moods. A child should always be made to receive help from any man or woman as a favor. As their first lesson in independence, children should be taught in practice, by their mother's example, not to demand the personal attendance that it is an insult to humanity to demand when one is in good health. Instead of being encouraged to put on airs of importance, they should first be brought, through a sense of their own weakness, to feel the natural equality of human beings. Yet how often, to my indignation, I have heard servants imperiously summoned to put children to bed and then sent away again and again, because master or miss clung to mamma to stay up a little longer. With the servants thus made to wait slavishly on the little idol, all the most disgusting tantrums that mark a spoiled child were put on display.

13.64 In short, to speak of most mothers: they either leave their children entirely to the care of servants, or else, because these are their children, treat them like little demigods. Yet I have always noticed that the women who idolize their children in this way rarely show ordinary humanity to servants, or feel the least tenderness for any children but their own.

13.65 These exclusive affections, however, and the narrowly personal way of seeing things that ignorance produces, are what keep women forever at a standstill in their improvement. They lead many women to devote their lives to their children, only to

weaken the children's bodies and spoil their tempers. They also lead them to frustrate any plan of education that a more rational father may adopt, for unless the mother goes along with it, the father who imposes restraint will always be regarded as a tyrant.

13.66 Yet a woman with a healthy constitution can fulfill the duties of a mother and still keep her person scrupulously neat. She can help support her family if necessary, or she can improve her mind by reading and by conversation with men and women alike. Nature has arranged things so wisely that if women nursed their own children, they would preserve their own health, and there would be such an interval between births that we would seldom see a house full of babies. And if they followed a plan of conduct, instead of wasting their time chasing the fashionable whims of dress, managing their household and children need not shut them out from literature. Nor need it keep them from devoting themselves to a science with the steady attention that strengthens the mind, or from practicing one of the fine arts that cultivate taste.

13.67 But paying visits to show off finery, playing cards, and going to balls, not to mention the idle bustle of morning trivialities, draw women away from their duty. These things make them insignificant, and make them pleasing, in the current sense of the word, to every man but their husband. A round of pleasures in which the affections are never exercised cannot be said to improve the understanding, though it is mistakenly called seeing the world. Meanwhile such senseless socializing makes the heart cold and averse to duty, and habit makes it necessary even after it has stopped amusing.

13.68 But until more equality is established in society, until ranks are mixed together and women are freed, we will not see that dignified domestic happiness whose simple grandeur cannot be appreciated by ignorant or corrupted minds. Nor will the important work of education ever be properly begun until a woman's body is no longer valued above her mind. It would be

as sensible to expect wheat from weeds, or figs from thistles, as to expect a foolish, ignorant woman to be a good mother.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Virtue needs liberty: freed and educated, women will become better wives, mothers and citizens.

13.69 As I begin my concluding reflections, there is no need to tell the shrewd reader that my discussion of this subject consists merely in laying out a few simple principles and clearing away the rubbish that obscured them. But since not all readers are shrewd, I must be allowed to add some explanatory remarks to bring the subject home to reason. I mean that sluggish reason which lazily takes its opinions on trust and stubbornly defends them to spare itself the labor of thinking.

13.70 Moralists have unanimously agreed that unless virtue is nurtured by liberty, it will never reach its proper strength. What they say of men I extend to all humankind. I insist that in every case morals must rest on unchanging principles, and that no being who obeys any authority but that of reason can be called rational or virtuous.

13.71 To make women truly useful members of society, I argue that they should be led to acquire a rational love for their country, founded on knowledge, by having their understandings cultivated on a large scale. After all, we obviously care little about what we do not understand. And to show that this general knowledge matters as it should, I have tried to demonstrate that private duties are never properly fulfilled unless the understanding enlarges the heart, and that public virtue is only the sum of private virtue. But the distinctions established in society undermine both, beating out the solid gold of virtue until it becomes nothing but a tinsel covering for vice. As long as wealth makes a man more respected than virtue does, wealth will be sought before virtue. And as long as women's bodies are caressed when a childish simper shows an absent mind, the mind will lie fallow. Yet true sensual delight must come from the

mind, for what can equal the feelings produced by mutual affection supported by mutual respect? Compared with the modest overflowings of a pure heart and an exalted imagination, what are the cold or feverish caresses of appetite but sin embracing death? Yes, when the libertine of fancy scorns understanding in a woman, let me tell him this: the mind he disregards is what gives life to the passionate affection from which alone rapture can flow, short-lived as it is! And without virtue, an attachment between the sexes must burn out like a tallow candle guttering in its socket, leaving an intolerable disgust. To prove this, I need only point out that the men who have wasted a great part of their lives with women, seeking pleasure from them with eager thirst, hold the lowest opinion of the sex. Virtue, true refiner of joy! If foolish men were to frighten you off the earth so as to give free rein to all their appetites without a check, some sensual fellow of taste would scale the heavens to invite you back and give pleasure its zest!

13.72 I do not think anyone can dispute that ignorance at present makes women foolish or vicious. And from this observation it seems at least probable that the most beneficial effects for the improvement of humanity might be expected from a revolution in female manners. Marriage has been called the parent of those endearing affections that draw man out of the brutish herd. It follows that the corrupting relations between the sexes produced by wealth, idleness, and folly do more universal harm to morality than all the other vices of humanity put together. The most sacred duties are sacrificed to adulterous lust because before marriage men, through promiscuous intimacy with women, learned to regard love as a selfish gratification. They learned to separate it not only from esteem but even from the affection built merely on habit, which at least mixes a little humanity into it. Justice and friendship are defied as well. And the purity of taste that would naturally lead a man to enjoy an artless display of affection more than affected airs is corrupted. But that noble simplicity of affection which dares to appear unadorned has few attractions for the libertine. Yet it is the very

charm that cements the marriage bond, and so secures for the offspring of a warmer passion the parental attention they need. Children will never be properly educated until there is friendship between their parents. Virtue flees from a house divided against itself, and a whole legion of devils moves in.

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

13.74 I contend, therefore, that the distinction between the sexes that men have so warmly insisted on is arbitrary. In making this case I have dwelt on an observation that several sensible men I have talked with on the subject agreed was well founded. It is simply this: the little chastity found among men, and the resulting disregard of modesty, tend to degrade both sexes. Further, until modesty is respected universally, the so-called modesty of women will often be merely a cunning veil for wantonness rather than the natural reflection of purity.

13.75 I firmly believe that most female follies proceed from the tyranny of man. I have also repeatedly tried to prove that the cunning which, I admit, is at present part of women's character is produced by oppression.

13.76 Were not Dissenters, for example, a class of people described, with strict truth, as cunning? And may I not lean on this fact to prove my point? Whenever any power but reason curbs the free spirit of man, people resort to pretense, and all the various dodges of artifice are naturally called forth. Dissenters paid great attention to decorum, to the point of fussiness. They showed all the childish bustle about trifles and the self-important solemnity that Butler's caricature of a Dissenter calls to mind. All this shaped their bodies as well as their minds in the mold of prim littleness.[10] I speak of them as a group, for I

10 Dissenters were English Protestants outside the Church of England, barred by law from public office and the universities. Samuel Butler mocked them in his satirical poem *Hudibras* (1663–78).

know how many ornaments to human nature have belonged to the sects. Still, I maintain that the Dissenting part of the community, however worthy in other respects, showed the same narrow partiality for their sect that women show for their families. I also maintain that the same timid prudence, or the same headstrong efforts, often disgraced the undertakings of both. Oppression thus shaped many features of their character to match exactly the character of the oppressed half of humanity. Is it not notorious that Dissenters, like women, were fond of deliberating together and asking one another's advice, until some little end was achieved through a tangle of little schemes? A similar concern to preserve their reputation was conspicuous among Dissenters and among women, and it was produced by a similar cause.

13.77 In asserting the rights that women, in common with men, ought to fight for, I have not tried to excuse their faults. I have tried to prove that those faults are the natural consequence of their education and their position in society. If so, it is reasonable to suppose that women will change their character, and correct their vices and follies, when they are allowed to be free in a physical, moral, and civil sense[11].

13.78 Let woman share the rights, and she will emulate the virtues of man. For once she is set free, she must either grow more perfect or justify the authority that chains so weak a being to her duty. If the latter, it will be advisable to open a new trade with Russia for whips. A father should always make one a present to his son-in-law on his wedding day, so that a husband can keep his whole family in order by the same means. Then, wielding this scepter, he can reign without any violation of justice as sole master of his house, because he is the only being in it who has reason: the divine, indefeasible earthly sover-

11 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S NOTE. I had written at greater length on the advantages that might reasonably be expected for the general reform of society from an improvement in female manners. But it seemed to me that such reflections would more properly close the last volume.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The further volume Wollstonecraft planned was never published.

eignty breathed into man by the Master of the universe. Grant this position, and women have no inherent rights to claim. By the same rule, their duties vanish, for rights and duties are inseparable.

13.79 Be just, then, O you men of understanding! Do not judge women's wrongdoing more harshly than the vicious tricks of the horse or the donkey you provide fodder for. Allow the privileges of ignorance to her to whom you deny the rights of reason, or you will be worse than the Egyptian taskmasters, expecting virtue where nature has not given understanding![12]

12 In Exodus 5, Pharaoh's taskmasters demand that the enslaved Israelites make bricks without being given straw.