

## John Quincy Adams

*Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory: Delivered to the Classes of Senior and Junior Sophisters in Harvard University*, by John Quincy Adams. Vol 1. Cambridge: Hilliard and Metcalf, 1810.

While best known as President (1824-28), John Quincy Adams held, in 1806, the chair of Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at his alma matter, Harvard. As part of the responsibility of his position, Adams was required to deliver a series of lectures on rhetoric “based upon the models of the ancients.”

When Adams was first notified of his appointment in 1805, he was still serving as senator of Massachusetts. He immediately set to work on the lectures. We know that he read and studied many writers on rhetoric, including Quintilian, Cicero, Bacon, and George Campbell. He presented thirty-six lectures between 1806 and 1809. (You will read number eleven, on deliberative rhetoric.) While the overall reaction to the lectures was lukewarm, when students heard that Adams was leaving Harvard to become United States Minister to Russia, they asked that the

lectures be published. In 1810, Adams wrote in his diary that “I shall never, unless by some special favor of Heaven, accomplish any work of higher elevation.” However, the lectures failed to make much public impact.

Still, when read today, the Adams lectures give a solid, informative summary of much that has been written about various rhetorical forms. The section here is included to give you more ideas about your own deliberative speech. There is also a sense in which Adams is specifically American in his formation of rhetoric; he offers a public, straightforward, clear and practical guide to public debate and discussion. It is precisely what you might expect to hear from a member of one of the founding families of the Revolution, one who was witness to the evolution of the American public speech.

### **from *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory* “*Deliberative Oratory*”**

To ascertain the arguments peculiarly suitable to each of the three kinds of public speaking, where eloquence may be displayed, we must resort to that special principle, which constitutes the distinctive character of the kind. Thus we have seen, that, as show is the essential property of demonstrative orations, the arguments, best adapted to discourses of that class, are such as display sentiment or character. Proceeding in the same track to discover the arguments, which fall within the province of deliberative oratory, we are to recollect, that the characteristic common

measure of this class is utility. Deliberation presupposes a freedom of election in the deliberating body. It presupposes alternatives, which may be adopted or rejected. The issue of deliberation is action, and the final determination, what that action shall be, results from a sense of utility or expediency, entertained by the speaker's audience. The object of the orator then is to persuade his hearers, and to influence their conduct in relation to a future measure. His task is to inspire them with the belief, that the adoption of that, which

he recommends, or the rejection of that, which he dissuades, would be useful either to the hearers themselves, or to their constituents, whom they represent.

It is in deliberative oratory, and in that alone, that eloquence and the art of persuasion may be considered, as terms perfectly synonymous. Demonstrative orations terminate in themselves. They lead to no vote; they verge to no verdict. The drift of the discourse is to display the merits of the subject, and the talents of the speaker. He may indeed exercise powers of persuasion, but they are not essential to his task. He has no call to act upon the will of his hearers. Persuasion is not necessarily his aim.

Judicial discourses terminate in action; and in that respect resemble deliberative speeches. But the drift of the argument is to justice; not to utility. The aim of the speaker must be to produce conviction, rather than persuasion; to operate by proof, rather than by influence. The judge or jury, to whom the discourse is addressed, has no choice of alternatives, no freedom of option, like the deliberative body. That which is just, that which is prescribed by law, once discovered and made manifest, he is bound to follow. Persuasion therefore does not properly belong to that class of oratory. The judge is to act not under the impulse of his will, but of the law. He is the mere minister of justice. He must take the facts according to the proof. He is to presume nothing; to suppose nothing; to imagine nothing. The orator ought not to address himself to the inclinations of his auditor, because the auditor has no right to consult them himself. This distinction is much stronger in modern times and in our country, than among the ancients; because our judicial courts are more closely bound to the letter of the law. So then in

demonstrative orations the application of the orator's eloquence is only to the opinions of his audience; in judicial arguments to their judgment; but in deliberative discourses directly to their will.

From these observations you will perceive the solid grounds, upon which these divisions were originally made. So different is the nature of public speaking, on these different occasions, that the talents, required to shine in each of them, are different from those, which give excellence in the others. In our own experience we may observe, that the eloquence of the bar, of the legislature, and of public solemnities, are seldom or ever found united to high perfection in the same person. An admirable lawyer is not always a popular speaker in deliberative assemblies; and a speaker of brilliant orations often sinks into silence at the bar. In the relative estimate of the difficulties and importance of the several kinds of public oratory, Cicero has assigned to judicial eloquence the place of the highest difficulty, and to the eloquence of deliberation that of the highest importance. This arrangement is suited to all republican governments, and indeed to all governments, where the powers of legislation are exercised by a deliberative assembly. From the preponderancy of democracy in the political constitutions of our country, deliberative assemblies are more numerous, and the objects of their consideration are more diversified than they ever have been in any other age or nation. From the formation of a national constitution to the management of a turnpike, every object of concern to more than one individual is transacted by deliberative bodies. National and state conventions, for the purpose of forming constitutions, the congress of the United

States, the legislatures of the several states, are all deliberative assemblies. Besides which, in our part of the country, every town, every parish or religious society, every association of individuals, incorporated for purposes of interest, of education, of charity, or of science, forms a deliberative assembly, and presents opportunities for the exhibition of deliberative eloquence. These are scenes, in which your duties, as men or as citizen, will frequently call upon you all to engage. There is only a certain proportion among you, who will ever leave occasion to speak in the courts of justice, or in the sacred desk. Still fewer will ever have the call, or feel the inclination to deliver the formal oration of a public solemnity. But you are all citizens of a free republic; you are all favored with the most liberal and scientific education, which your country can afford. That country, in her turn, will have a peculiar claim upon you for the benefit of your counsels; and either in the selected bodies of her legislatures, or in the general assemblies of the people, will give you opportunities to employ, for her advantage and your own reputation, every faculty of speech, which you have received, or which you can acquire.

The principles of deliberative oratory are important also in another point of view; inasmuch as they are applicable to the ordinary concerns of life. Whoever in the course of human affairs is called to give advice, or to ask a favor of another, must apply, to the same principles of action, as those, which the deliberative orator must address. The arguments, which persuade an assembly, are the same, which are calculated to persuade an individual; and in speaking to a deliberative body the orator can often employ no higher artifice, than to consider himself as discoursing to a single man.

The objects of deliberative eloquence then are almost co-extensive with human affairs. They embrace every thing, which can be a subject of advice, of exhortation, of consolation, or of petition. The most important scenes of deliberative oratory however in these states are the congress of the union, and the state legislature. The objects of their deliberation affect the interests of individuals and of the nation, in the highest degree. In seeking the sources of deliberative argument I shall therefore so modify, the rules, generally to be observed, as to bear constant reference to them. They include all the subjects of legislation, of taxation, of public debt, public credit, and public revenue; of the management of public property; of commerce; treaties and alliances; peace and war:

Suppose yourself then, as a member of a deliberative assembly, deliberating upon some question, involving these great and important concerns; desirous of communicating your own sentiments, and of influencing the decision of the body you are to address. Your means of persuasion are to be derived from three distinct general sources; having reference respectively, first to the subject of deliberation; secondly to the body deliberating; and thirdly to yourself, the speaker.

1. In considering the subject of deliberation, your arguments may result from the circumstances of legality, of possibility, of probability, of facility, of necessity, or of contingency.

The argument of legality trust always be modified by the extent of authority, with which the deliberating body is invested. In its nature it is :in argument only applicable to the negative side of the question. It is an objection,

raised against the measure under consideration, as being contrary to law. It can therefore have no weight in cases, where the deliberating body itself has the power of changing the law. Thus in a town meeting it would be a decisive objection against any measure proposed, that it would infringe a law of the state. But in the legislature of the commonwealth this would be no argument, because that body is empowered to change the law. Again, in the state legislature a measure may be assailed, as contrary to a law of the Union; and the objection if well founded, must be fatal to the measure proposed; though it could leave no influence upon a debate in congress. There however the same argument may be adduced in a different form, if the proposition discussed interferes with any stipulation by treaty, or with the constitution of the United States. The argument of illegality therefore is equivalent to denial of the powers of the deliberating body. It is of great and frequent use in all deliberative discussions; but it is not always such, which is most readily listened to by the audience. Men are seldom inclined to abridge their own authority: and the orator, who questions the competency of his hearers to act upon the subject in discussion, must be supported by proof strong enough to control their inclinations, as well as to convince their reason.

The arguments of possibility and of necessity are those, which first command the consideration of the speaker, whose object is persuasion. Since, if impossibility on the one hand, or necessity on the other, be once ascertained, there is no room left for further deliberation. But, although nothing more can be required for dissuasion, than to show that the intended purpose is impracticable, barely to show its possibility can leave but very little

influence in a debate; and it becomes the province of the speaker to consider its probability and facility; insisting upon every circumstance, which contributes to strengthen these.

It is to be remarked, that the task of dissuasion or opposition is much easier to the orator, than that of persuasion; because for the rejection of a measure it is sufficient to show, either that it is impracticable, or inexpedient. But if its adoption be both its possibility and its expediency must

be made to appear. The proposer of the measure must support both the alternatives; the opponent needs only to substantiate one of them.

In discussing the probabilities and facilities of a measure, the speaker often indulges himself in the use of amplification, which here consists in the art of multiplying the incidents, favorable to his purpose, and presenting them in such aspects, as to give each other mutual aid and relief. As in the arguments of impossibility and necessity, he borrows from demonstrative oratory the art of approximation, and represents as impossible that, which is only very difficult, or as absolutely necessary that, which is of extreme importance.

The argument of contingency, or, as it is styled by the ancient rhetoricians, the argument from the event, derives a recommendation of the measure in debate from either alternative of a successful issue or of failure. An admirable instance of this kind of argument is contained in that advice of Cardinal Wolsey to Cromwell.

Still in thy right hand carry gentle  
peace,  
To silence envious tongues. Be just  
and fear not;  
Let all the ends, thou aim'st at, be  
thy country's,  
Thy God's, and truth's; then if thou  
fall'st, O Cromwell,  
Thou fall'st a blessed martyr.

2. With regard to the deliberating body, there are two views, in which they must be presented to the speaker's reflections, as accessible to persuasion the motives, by which they are to be stimulated, and their own manners and character. As motives of persuasion, an orator play address himself to the sense of duty, of honor, of interest, or of passion; motives, which I have here arranged according to the comparative weight, which they ought respectively to carry, but which in the influence, which they really possess over most deliberative assemblies, should be ranked in precisely an inverted order.

Of the sense of duty may be observed, what I have already said of arguments, pointed against the power of the audience. They are indeed only different modifications of the same tiling. To call upon the auditory to perform a duty is to speak the language of command; it virtually denies the power of deliberation; and, although the force and efficacy of the appeal may he admitted, it is seldom listened to with pleasure, and always rather controls, than persuades the will..

The most proper and the most powerful arguments, which are usually employed for the purposes of persuasion, are those addressed to the sense of honor and of interest. But in the choice and

management of these you are to consult in a special manner the character of your audience; for one class of men will be most powerfully swayed by motives of honor, while another will most readily yield to the impulse of interest. "The discourse mast be accommodated," I am now speaking the words of Cicero, "not only to the truth, but to the taste of the hearers. Observe then first of all, that there are two different descriptions of men; the one rude and ignorant, who always set profit before honor; the other polished and civilized, who prefer honor to every thing. Urge then to the latter of these classes considerations of praise, of honor, of glory, of fidelity, of justice; in short of every virtue. To the former present images of gain, of emolument, of thrift; nay, in addressing this kind of men, you must even allure them with the bait of pleasure. Pleasure, always hostile to virtue, always corrupting by fraudulent imitation the very nature of goodness herself, is yet most eagerly pursued by the worst of men; and by them often preferred not only to every instigation of honor, but even to the dictates of necessity. Remember too, that mankind are more anxious to escape evil, than to obtain good; less eager to acquire honor, than to avoid shame. Who ever sought honor, glory, praise, or fame of any kind, with the same ardor, that we fly from those most cruel of afflictions, ignominy, contumely and scorn? Again, there is a class of men, naturally inclined to honorable sentiments, but corrupted by evil education and vitiated opinions. Is it your purpose then to exhort or persuade, remember that the task before you is that of teaching how to obtain good, and eschew evil. Are you speaking to men of liberal education, enlarge upon topics of praise and honor; insist with the keenest earnestness upon those virtues, which contribute to the common safety and

advantage of mankind. But if you are discoursing to gross, ignorant, untutored hinds, to them hold all profit, lucre, money-making pleasure, and escape from pain. Deter them also with the prospect of shame and ignominy; for no man, however insensible to positive glory, is made of such impenetrable stuff, as not to be vehemently moved by the dread of infamy and disgrace.” This passage of Cicero, extracted from the dialogue between himself and his son, I recommend to your meditations, as the truly paternal advice of a father to his child. You will find it not only a most useful guide in the practice of deliberative oratory; but, if properly applied, it will furnish you a measure for many an audience, and many a speaker. It is however proper to remind you, that arguments of interest are in some degree purified of their dross by the constitution of our principal deliberative assemblies. They are representative bodies. Their measures operate upon their constituents, more than upon themselves. The interests, to which you appeal in arguing to them, are not their individual interests, but those of the nation. They are therefore often identified with the more elevated topics of honor; since to promote the interest of the people is the highest honor of the legislator.

This however is sufficiently understood by most of our deliberative orators. As for you, my young friends, whenever you may be called to deliberate upon the concerns of your country, I trust you will feel, that the honor, as well as the interest of the public, is the object of your pursuit; and without ever forgetting the sacred regard to the general interest, which becomes a virtuous citizen, you will still perceive the immeasurable distance between those regions of the soul, which are open only to

the voice of honor, and those, which are trodden by the foot of avarice.

In all numerous assemblies the characters, opinions, and prejudices of the auditors will be various; a certain proportion of them will belong to each of the classes, enumerated by Cicero. In such cases the deliberative orator will not find it adviseable to introduce a variety of arguments; some addressed to the generous, and some to the selfish feelings; some to the coarsest, and some to the most refined principles of action. But I cannot with Quintilian discuss the question, how far an orator may exert his talents of persuasion for base and dishonorable purposes; or urge his hearers to actions, which he himself would detest or despise. In judicial controversies, where the discussion relates to time and actions irretrievably past, it may often be the fortune of a good orator to defend what he cannot justify; and in the most rigorous court of justice or of honor, he may play the part, like Shakespeare's Isabella,

I something do excuse the thing I  
hate,  
For his advantage, whom I dearly  
love.

But of deliberative eloquence the first principle is sincerity. No honest man would advise what he cannot approve; and a counsellor should disdain to recommend that, which he would not join in executing himself. And this leads me to the third general head, from which the means of persuasion are to be drawn in deliberative oratory, the speaker himself.

3. The eloquence of deliberation will necessarily take much of its color from the orator himself. He must be careful to suit his discourse to his own character and

situation. In early life he may endeavour to make strong impression by the airy splendor of his style, contrasted with the unaffected modesty of his address. If advanced in years, and elevated in reputation and dignity, the gravity of his manner and the weight of sentiment should justly correspond with the reverence, due to his station. It is in deliberative assemblies, more than upon any other stage of public speaking, that the good opinion of his auditory is important to the speaker. The demonstrative orator, the lawyer at the bar, derive great advantage from a fair reputation and the good will of their hearers; but the peculiar province of the deliberative speaker is to advise; and what possible effect can be expected from advice, where there is no confidence in the adviser. This subject however :- is so important and so copious, that I shall reserve it **for a separate lecture, in which I** propose to consider

those qualities of the heart and of **1111 (mild)**, which are or ought to be best adapted to acquire that benevolence of the auditory, which is so powerful an auxiliary to the power of speech.

In treating this **part** of the subject, Aristotle, according to his usual custom, has pursued his train of analysis to its deepest root, affix to its minutest ramification. Assuming, as a fundamental position, that utility, that is the attainment of good or avoidance of evil, is the ultimate object of all deliberation, he proceeds to enumerate a catalogue of every thing, considered as a blessing by human beings. These blessings he divides into two classes; first of those, universally recognized, and positive; and second of those, which are only relative, and subject to controversy. Among the former he includes virtue, health, beauty, riches,

eloquence, arts, and sciences. Among the latter are the least of two evils; the contrary to what your enemy desires; the esteem of the wise; what multitudes desire; and specific objects to individual men. The forms of government also modify the prevailing estimate of good and evil. The end of civil government, under a democracy, is liberty; under an oligarchy, property; under an aristocracy, law; and under a monarchy, security. These are all positive blessings for all mankind. But their relative importance is greatly enhanced, where they constitute the basis of the social compact. The deliberative orator, whose appeal must always be to the sentiments of good and evil, rooted in the minds of his auditory, must always adapt his discourse to that standard measure of the land.

The ancient practice of declamation was an ingenious and useful exercise for improving in the art of deliberative oratory. A character and a situation, generally known in history, were assumed; and the task of the declaimer was to compose and deliver a discourse suitable to them. The Greek and Roman historians introduce speeches of this kind in the midst of their narratives; and among them are so many examples of the most admirable eloquence, that are regretted the cold accuracy of modern history, which has discarded this practice, without providing any adequate substitute in its stead.

As amplification has been said to be the favorite resort of demonstrative oratory, the allegation of examples is the most effectual support of deliberative discourses. There is nothing new under the sun. The future is little more than a copy of

tire past. What bath been shall be again. And to exhibit an image of tire past is often to present tire clearest prospect of the future. The examples which are adduced successfully by the deliberative speaker, are of two kinds; first fictitious inventions of his own, second real events, borrowed from historical fact. 'Fire first of these are called by Aristotle fables, and tire second parables. The fable, which pray be invented at the pleasure of tire speaker, is more easily applied to his purpose; but tire parable, always derived from matter of fact, makes a deeper impression upon the minds of the audience. Ire tire rude ages of society, mid among tire uncultivated class of mankind, tire power of fable, and still more of parable to influence tire will, is scarcely conceivable upon mere speculative investigation. But it is demonstrated by the uniform tenor of all human experience. The f fable of Menenius Agrippa stands conspicuous in the Roman annals. It pacified one of tire most dangerous insurrections, which ever agitated that turbulent but magnanimous people. The scriptures of tire old testament bespeak the efficacy of these instruments in a manner no Icass energetic. But their unrivalled triumph is in tire propagation of tire christian gospel; whose exalt

ed founder we are told " needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was ire man ;" and who delivered leis incomparable system of morality altogether through the medium of fables and parables; both of which in tire writings of the evangelists are included ill the latter term. " And n-ith many parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it; but without a parable spake he not unto them."O

The principal feature in the style of deliberative oratory- should be simplicity.

Not that it disdains, but that it has seldom occasion for decoration. The speaker should be much more solicitous for the thought, than for the expression. This constitutes the great difference between the diction proper for this, and that, which best suits the two other kinds of oratory. Demonstrative eloquence, intended for show, delights in ostentatious ornament. The speaker is expected to have made previous preparation. His discourse is professedly studied, and all the artifices of speech are summoned to the gratification of the audience. The heart is cool for the reception, the mind is at leisure for the contemplation of polished periods, oratorical numbers, coruscations of

metaphor, profound reflection and subtle ingenuity But deliberative discussions **require c** little more than prudence alai integrity. Even judicial oratory supposes a previous painful investigation of his subject by the speaker, and exacts an elaborate, methodical conduct of the discourse. But deliberative subjects often arise on :t sudden, and allow of no premeditation. Hearers are disinclined to advice, which they perceive the speaker leas beat dressing up in leis closet. Ambitious ornament should then be excluded, rather than sought. Plain sense, clear logic, and above all ardent sensibility, these are the qualities, needed by those who give, and those who take: counsel. A profusion of brilliancy betrays s a speaker more full of himself, than of his cause; More anxious to be admired, than believed. The stars and ribbands of princely favor may glitter on the breast of the veteran hero at a birth-day ball; but, exposed to the rage of battle, they only direct the bullet to his heart. A deliberative orator should bury himself in his subject. Like a superintending providence, he should be visible only- in his mighty

works. Hence that universal prejudice, about of ancient and modern times, against written, deliberative discourses; a prejudice, which bade defiance to all the thunders of Demosthenes. In the midst of their most enthusiastic admiration of his eloquence, his countrymen nevertheless remarked, that his orations " smelt too much of the lamp."

Let it however be observed, that upon great and important occasions the deliberative orator may be allowed a more liberal indulgence of preparation. When the cause of ages and the fate of nations hangs upon the thread of a debate, the orator may fairly consider himself, as addressing not only his immediate hearers, but the world at large; and all future times. Then \*it is, that, looking beyond the moment, in which he speaks, and the immediate issue of the deliberation, he makes the question of an hour a question for every age and every region; takes the vote of unborn millions upon the debate of a little senate, and incorporates himself and his discourse with the general history of mankind. On such occasions and at such times, the oration naturally and properly assumes a solemnity of manner and a dignity of language, commensurate with the grandeur of the cause. Then it is, that deliberative eloquence lays aside her plain attire of her daily occupation, and assumes the port and purple of a queen of the world: Yet even then she remembers, that majestic grandeur best comports with simplicity. Her crown and sceptre may blaze with the brightness of the diamond, but she must not, like the kings of the gorgeous east, be buried under a shower of barbaric pearls and gold.

## Margaret Fell (1614-1702)

Margaret Fell, "Women's Speaking Justified," Quaker Heritage Press Online Texts.  
<http://www.qhpress.org/texts/fell.html>

No rhetorical theory texts by women before 1600 have been found. As we have seen previously, the very idea of women engaging in public discourse in political settings has been pushed to the margins of most cultures in the West. By the time we reach the seventeenth century in England, the literacy rate for women is below twenty percent.

However, developments in America and Europe begin to influence this situation, so that by the next century, perhaps half of the women in those places could be considered literate. (The nature of literacy and under what conditions one might be considered literate during this time in history are difficult to determine precisely.) Still, since rhetoric was taught in the University (from which women were almost exclusively excluded until the end of the nineteenth century) and was designed for use in male-dominated professions like politics and the law, most women were still excluded from the world of rhetorical training.

When women did speak in public, it was often in causes where they were trying to overcome obstacles to their own advancement or rights. Certainly, the emphasis of Protestant thought in certain sects which believed in literacy for all (for the purpose of reading the Bible), helped empower women (in ways those advocating the practice could scarcely have imagined). This was particularly true in the Quaker faith. Women were among

the first to speak up in that sect for social change.

Margaret Fell was a Quaker. Her husband was a member of the English gentry, but she became interested in the teachings of George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends (called Quakers). Such a stance was not a safe one in the increasingly monarchist tenor of the times, and when her husband died in 1658, she suffered increased political pressure. She was jailed several times, including a four year imprisonment from 1664-1668, when she wrote the following tract. It helped establish the Quaker view of the equality of the sexes, and after she married George Fox, they developed the basic foundational Quaker beliefs in marriage equality.

Fell's persuasive power was not limited to issues of sexual equality. She persuaded Charles II to pardon her husband in 1674. She delivered petitions on religious toleration to James II and also advocated protection for Quakers in front of William II.

We will be reading a selection from her argument attempting to justify women speaking in worship. Following the opening paragraph, the reading concentrates on the last section of the work, where Fell attempts to provide additional arguments for her case.

*from “Women’s Speaking, Proved, and Allowed by the Scriptures”*

***Justified, Proved, and Allowed of by the Scriptures, All such as speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus.***

***And how Women were the first that Preached the Tidings of the Resurrection of Jesus, and were sent by Christ’s own Command, before he Ascended to the Father, John 20. 17.***

Whereas it hath been an Objection in the Minds of many, and several times hath been objected by the Clergy, or Ministers and others, against Women’s speaking in the Church; and so consequently may be taken, that they are condemned for meddling in the things of God: The ground of which Objection is taken from the Apostle’s Words, which he writ in his first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, Chap. 14. Vers. 34, 35. And also what he writ to *Timothy* in the first Epistle, Chap. 2. Vers. 11, 12. But how far they wrong the Apostle’s Intentions in these Scriptures, we shall shew clearly when we come to them in their course and order. But first let me lay down how God himself hath manifested his Will and Mind concerning Women, and unto women. . . .

***A further Addition, in Answer to the Objection concerning Women keeping silent in the Church: For it is not permitted for them to speak, but to be under Obedience; as also saith the Law, If they will learn any thing, let them ask their Husbands at home, for it is a shame for a Woman to speak in the Church: Now this as Paul writing in 1 Cor. 14. 34. is one with that of 1 Tim. 2. 11. Let Women learn in silence with all Subjection.***

To which I say, If you tie this to all outward Women, then there were many Women that were Widows, which had no Husbands to learn of; and many were Virgins, which had no Husbands; and *Philip* had four Daughters that were Prophetesses; such would be despised, which the Apostle did not forbid. And if it were to all Women, that no Women might speak, then *Paul* would have contradicted himself; but they were such Women that the Apostle mentions in *Timothy*, that grew wanton, and were Busie-bodies, and Tatlers, and kicked against Christ: For Christ in the Male and in the Female is one, and he is the Husband, and his Wife is the Church; and God hath said, that his Daughters should prophesie as well as his Sons: And where he hath poured forth his Spirit

upon them, they must prophesie, though blind Priests say to the contrary, and will not permit holy Women to speak.

And whereas it is said, *I permit not a Woman to speak, as saith the Law*: But where Women are led by the Spirit of God, they are not under the Law; for Christ in the Male and in the Female is one; and where he is made manifest in Male and Female, he may speak; for *he is the end of the Law for Righteousness to all them that believe*. So here you ought to make a Distinction what sort of Women are forbidden to speak; such as were under the Law, who were not come to Christ, nor to the Spirit of Prophecy: For *Huldah, Miriam, and Hannah*, were Prophetesses, who were not forbidden in the time of the Law, for they all prophesied in the time of the Law; as you may read in *2 Kings 22*. what *Huldah* said unto the Priest, and to the Ambassadors that were sent to her from the King, *Go, saith she, and tell the Man that sent you to me, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and on the Inhabitants thereof, even all the Words of the Book which the King of Judah hath read; because they have forsaken me, and have burnt Incense to other Gods, to anger me with all the Works of their Hands: Therefore my Wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched. But to the King of Judah, that sent you to me to ask Counsel of the Lord, so shall you say to him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Because thy Heart did melt, and thou humbledst thy self before the Lord, when thou heard’st what I spake against this place, and against the Inhabitants of the same, how they should be destroyed; Behold, I will receive thee to thy Father, and thou shalt be put into thy Grave in peace, and thine Eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place.*

Now let us see if any of you, blind Priests, can speak after this manner, and see if it be not a better Sermon than any of you can make, who are against Women’s Speaking. And *Isaiah*, that went to the Prophetess, did not forbid her Speaking or Prophesying, *Isai. 8*. And was it not prophesied in *Joel 2*. that *Hand-maids* should Prophesie? And are not *Hand-maids* Women? Consider this, ye that are against Women’s Speaking, how in the *Acts* the Spirit of the Lord was poured forth upon Daughters as well as Sons. In the time of the Gospel, when *Mary* came to salute *Elizabeth* in the Hill-Country in *Judea*, and when *Elizabeth* heard the Salutation of *Mary*, the Babe leaped in her Womb, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit; and *Elizabeth*

spoke with a loud Voice. Blessed art thou amongst Women, blessed is the Fruit of thy Womb. Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? For lo, as soon as thy Salutation came to my Ear, the Babe leaped in my Womb for Joy; for blessed is she that believes, for there shall be a Performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. And this was *Elizabeth's* Sermon concerning Christ, which at this day stands upon Record. And then *Mary* said, My Soul doth magnifie the Lord, and my Spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour, for he hath regarded the low Estate of his Handmaid: For, behold, from henceforth all Generations shall call me blessed; for he that is mighty, hath done to me great things, and holy is his Name; and his Mercy is on them that fear him, from Generation to Generation; he hath shewed Strength with his Arm; he hath scattered the Proud in the Imaginations of their own Hearts; he hath put down the Mighty from their Seats, and exalted them of low degree; he hath filled the Hungry with good things, and the Rich he hath sent empty away: He hath holpen his Servant *Israel*, in remembrance of his Mercy, as he spake to his Father, to *Abraham*, and to his Seed for ever. Are you not here beholding to the Woman for her Sermon, to use her Words, to put into your *Common Prayer*? and yet you forbid Women's Speaking.

Now here you may see how these two Women prophesied of Christ, and preached better than all the blind Priests did in that Age, and better than this Age also, who are beholding to Women to make use of their Words. And see in the Book of *Ruth*, how the Women blessed her in the Gate of the City, of whose Stock came Christ: The Lord make the Woman that is come into thy House like *Rachel* and *Leah*, which built the House of *Israel*; and that thou may'st do worthily in *Ephrata*, and be famous in *Bethlehem*, let thy House be like the House of *Pharez*, whom *Tamar* bare unto *Judah*, of the Seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young Woman. And blessed be the Lord, who hath not left thee this day without a Kinsman, and his Name shall be continued in *Israel*. And also see in the first Chapter of *Samuel*, how *Hannah* prayed and spake in the Temple of the Lord, O Lord of Hosts, if thou wilt look on the Trouble of thy Hand-maid, and remember me, and not forget thy Hand-maid. And read in the second Chapter of *Samuel*, how she rejoiced in God, and said, My Heart rejoiceth in the Lord; my Horn is exalted in the Lord, and my Mouth is enlarged over my Enemies, because I rejoyce in thy Salvation; there is none holy as the Lord, yea, there is none besides thee; and there is no God like our God. Speak no more presumptuously; let not Arrogancy come out

of your Mouths, for the Lord is a God of Knowledge, and by him Enterprizes are established; the Bow, and the mighty Men are broken, and the Weak hath girded to themselves Strength; they that were full, are hired forth for Bread, and the hungry are no more hired; so that the Barren hath born seven, and she that had many Children is feeble. The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; bringeth down to the Grave, and raiseth up; the Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; bringeth low, and exalteth; he raiseth up the Poor out of the Dust, and lifteth up the Beggar from the Dunghil, to set them among Princes, to make them inherit the Seat of Glory: For the Pillars of the Earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the World upon them; he will keep the Feet of his Saints, and the Wicked shall keep silence in Darkness; for in his own Might shall no Man be strong: The Lord's Adversaries shall be destroyed, and out of Heaven shall he thunder upon them; the Lord shall judge the ends of the World, and shall give Power to his King, and exalt the Horn of his Anointed.

Thus you may see what a Woman hath said, when old *Eli* the Priest thought she had been drunk; and see if any of you, blind Priests, that speak against Women's Speaking, can preach after this manner; who cannot make such a Sermon as this Woman did, and yet will make a Trade of this Woman and other Women's Words.

And did not the Queen of *Sheba* speak, that came to *Solomon*, and received the Law of God, and preached it in her own Kingdom, and blessed the Lord God that loved *Solomon*, and set him on the Throne of *Israel*; because the Lord loved *Israel* for ever, and made the King to do Equity and Righteousness? And this was the Language of the Queen of *Sheba*.

And see what glorious Expressions Queen *Hester* used to comfort the People of God, which was the Church of God, as you may read in the Book of *Hester*, which caused Joy and Gladness of Heart among all the Jews, who prayed and worshipped the Lord in all places; who jeoparded her Life contrary to the King's Command, went and spoke to the King, in the Wisdom and Fear of the Lord, by which means she saved the Lives of the People of God; and righteous *Mordecai* did not forbid her speaking, but said, If she held her Peace, her and her Father's House should be destroyed. And herein, you blind Priests, are contrary to righteous *Mordecai*.

Likewise you may read how *Judith* spoke, and what noble Acts she did, and how she spoke to the Elders of *Israel*, and said, Dear Brethren, seeing ye are the Honourable and Elders of the People of God, call to Remembrance how our

Fathers in time past were tempted, that they might be proved if they would worship God aright: They ought also to Remember how our Father *Abraham*, being try'd through manifold Tribulations, was found a Friend of God; so was *Isaac*, *Jacob*, and *Moses*, and all they pleased God, and were steadfast in Faith through manifold Troubles. And read also her Prayer in the Book of *Judith*, and how the Elders commended her, and said, All that thou speakest is true, and no Man can reprove thy Words; pray therefore for us, for thou art an holy Woman, and fearest God. So these Elders of *Israel* did not forbid her speaking, as you blind Priests do; yet you will make a Trade of Women's Words to get Money by, and take Texts, and preach Sermons upon Women's Words; and still cry out, Women must not speak, Women must be silent: So you are far from the Minds of the Elders of *Israel*, who praised God for a Woman's speaking. But the *Jezabel*, and the Woman, the false Church, the great Whore, and tatling and unlearned Women, and Busie-bodies, which are forbid to preach, which have a long time spoke and tatled, which are forbidden to speak by the true Church, which Christ is the Head of; such Women as were in Transgression under the Law, which are called a *Woman* in the *Revelations*.

And see farther how the wise Woman cried to *Joab* over the Wall, and saved the City of *Abel*, as you may read, *2 Sam.* 20. how in her Wisdom she spoke to *Joab*, saying, I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in *Israel*, and thou goest about to destroy a City and Mother in *Israel*: Why wilt thou destroy the Inheritance of the Lord? Then went the Woman to the People in her Wisdom, and smote off the Head of *Sheba*, that rose up against *David*, the Lord's Anointed: Then *Joab* blew the Trumpet, and all the People departed in Peace. And this Deliverance was by the means of a Woman's speaking. But Tatlers and Busie-bodies are forbidden to preach by the true Woman, whom Christ is the Husband, to the Woman as well as the Man, all being comprehended to be the Church. And so in this true Church, Sons and Daughters do prophesie, Women labour in the Gospel: But the Apostle permits not Tatlers, Busie-bodies, and such as usurp Authority over the Man, who would not have Christ to reign, nor speak neither in the Male nor Female; such the Law permits not to speak; such must learn of their Husbands. But what Husbands have Widows to learn of, but Christ? And was not Christ the Husband of *Philip's* four Daughters? And may not they that are learned of their Husbands speak then? But *Jezabel*, and Tatlers, and the Whore, that deny Revelation and Prophecy, are not permitted, who

will not learn of Christ; and they that are out of the Spirit and Power of Christ, that the Prophets were in, who are in the Transgression, are ignorant of the Scriptures; and such are against Women's Speaking, and Men's too, who preach that which they have received of the Lord God; but that which they have preached, and do preach, will come over all your Heads, yea, over the Head of the false Church, the Pope; for the Pope is the Head of the false Church, and the false Church is the Pope's Wife: And so he and they that be of him, and come from him, are against Women's Speaking in the true Church, when both he and the false Church are called *Woman*, in *Rev.* 17. and so are in the Transgression, that would usurp Authority over the Man Christ Jesus, and his Wife too, and would not have him to Reign; but the Judgment of the great Whore is come. But Christ, who is the Head of the Church, the true Woman, which is his Wife, in it do Daughters prophesie, who are above the Pope and his Wife, and a-top of them. And here Christ is the Head of the Male and Female, who may speak; and the Church is called a *Royal Priesthood*; so the Woman must offer as well as the Man. *Rev.* 22. 17. *The Spirit saith, Come, and the Bride saith, Come;* and so is not the Bride the Church? and doth the Church only consist of Men? You that deny Women's Speaking, answer: Doth it not consist of Women, as well as Men? Is not the Bride compared to the whole Church? And doth not the Bride say, *Come*? Doth not the Woman speak then, the Husband, Christ Jesus, the Amen? And doth not the false Church go about to stop the Bride's Mouth? But it is not possible; for the Bridegroom is with his Bride, and he opens her Mouth. Christ Jesus, who goes on Conquering, and to Conquer; who kills and slays with the Sword, which is the Word of his Mouth; the Lamb and the Saints shall have the Victory, the true Speakers of Men and Women over the false Speaker.

## Sarah Grimke (1792-1873)

Sarah M. Grimke, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women*, Addressed to Mary S. Parker (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), 14-21.

While Sarah Grimke's life spans a time period mostly addressed in Humanities 2B, we include her here because of her similarity to Fell. Both were Quakers; both were women speaking out in opposition to the dominant ideology; and both were political practitioners of rhetoric in an age where women were beginning to find their political voice.

Sarah Grimke was born in South Carolina, the daughter of a wealthy plantation owner who also owned many slaves. She wanted to be a lawyer, and her father allowed her to practice debate with her brothers at home, but refused to let her study Latin. During a trip with her dying father to Philadelphia, she came into contact with Quakerism and formally joined the sect in 1823, relocating to live in the city. She became involved in abolitionist work going on there. Her sister, Angelina, who had moved to be with her, joined her in this work. Angelina created a sensation when she published an appeal 'to the Christian Women of the Southern States' to rise up against slavery in 1836. Angelina became a sought after speaker and Sarah went along and began to take part in the speeches.

The two developed a particular style of speaking. Sarah would lay out the theory of the anti-slavery movement in the first half and her sister would then make the emotional appeal for action. The two began by speaking only to women's

groups, but as their reputation expanded, men began to sit in on these speeches. Finally, they addressed both men and women, becoming the first women in America to speak to mixed audiences.

Such appearances began to draw fire, and in response to an attack by a prominent educator, Catherine Beecher, Sarah wrote *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women*, which appeared in book form in 1838. The work divided the abolitionist movement, and the sisters stopped speaking in public in 1838, convinced that their controversial appearances actually hurt the movement more than helping it. After undergoing financial struggles, Angelina, her husband and Sarah opened a school in 1851, teaching first in New Jersey and then in Massachusetts.

The reading here is from a letter written in response to the 'Pastoral Letter of the General Association of Massachusetts to the Congregational Churches under their care.' This Pastoral Letter was written on July 28, 1837, and was a condemnation of William Lloyd Garrison and the Grimke sisters, without actually referring to them by name. The Association was against women speaking publicly in abolitionist rallies. What follows is Sarah Grimke's reply to the Association.

## Letter III: Response To The Pastoral Letter of the General Association of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts

Haverhill, 7th Mo. 1837

Dear Friend,

When I last addressed thee, I had not seen the pastoral Letter of the General Association. It has since fallen into my hands, and I must digress from my intention of exhibiting the condition of women in different parts of the world, in order to make some remarks on this extraordinary document. I am persuaded that when the minds of men and women become emancipated from the thralldom of superstition and "traditions of men," the sentiments contained in the Pastoral Letter will be recurred to with as much astonishment as the opinions of Cotton Mather and other distinguished men of his day, upon the subject of witchcraft; nor will it be deemed less wonderful, that a body of divines would gravely assemble and endeavor to prove that woman has no right to "open her mouth for the dumb," than it now is that judges would have sat on the trials of witches, and solemnly condemned nineteen persons and one dog to death for witchcraft.

But to the letter. It says, "We invite your attention to the dangers which at present seem to threaten the FEMALE CHARACTER with wide-spread and permanent injury." I rejoice that they have called the attention of my sex to this subject, because I believe if woman investigates it, she will soon discover that danger is impending, thought from a totally different source from which the Association apprehends, - danger from those who, having long held the reins of *usurped* authority, are unwilling to permit us to fill that sphere which God created us to move in, and who have entered into league to crush the immortal mind of woman. I rejoice, because I am persuaded that the rights of woman, like the rights of slaves, need only be examined to be understood and asserted, even by some of those, who are now endeavoring to smother the irrepressible desire for mental and spiritual freedom which glows in the breast of many, who hardly dare to speak their sentiments.

"The appropriate duties and influence of women are clearly stated in the New Testament. Those duties are unobtrusive and private, but the source of *mighty power*. When the mild, *dependent*, softening influence of woman upon the steariness of man's opinions is fully exercised, society feels the effects of it in a thousand ways." No one can desire more earnestly than I do, that

woman may move exactly in the sphere which her Creator has assigned to her; and I believe her having been displaced from that sphere has introduced confusion into the world. It is, therefore, of vast importance to herself and to all the rational creation, that she should ascertain what are her duties and her privileges as a responsible and immortal being. The New Testament has been referred to, and I am willing to abide by its decisions, but must enter my protest against the false translation of some passages by the MEN who did that work, and against the perverted interpretation by the MEN who undertook to write commentaries thereon. I am inclined to think, when we are admitted to the honor of studying Greek and Hebrew, we shall produce some various readings of the Bible a little different from those we now have.

The Lord Jesus defines the duties of his followers in his Sermon on the Mount. He lays down grand principles by which they should be governed, without any references to sex or conditions. -- "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven" [Matt. 5:14-16]. I follow him through all his precepts, and find him giving the same directions to woman as to men, never even referring to the distinction now so strenuously insisted upon between masculine and feminine virtues: this is one of the anti-Christian "traditions of men" which are taught instead of the "commandments of God." Men and women were CREATED EQUAL; they are both moral and accountable beings, and whatever is *right* for man to do, is *right* for woman.

But the influence of woman, says the Association, is to be private and unobtrusive; her light is not to shine before man like that of her brethren; but she is passively to let the lords of the creation, as they call themselves, put the bushel over it, lest peradventure it might appear that the world has been benefited by the rays of *her* candle. So that her quenched light, according to their judgment, will be of more use than if it were set on the candlestick. "Her influence is the source of mighty power." This has ever been the flattering language of man since he laid aside the whip as a means to keep woman in subjection. He spares the

body; but the was he has waged against her mind, her heart, and her soul, has been no less destructive to her as a moral being. How monstrous, how anti-Christian, is the doctrine that woman is to be dependent on man! Where, in all the sacred Scriptures, is this taught? Alas! she has too well learned the lesson, which MAN has labored to teach her. She has surrendered her dearest RIGHTS, and has been satisfied with the privileges which man has assumed to grant her; she has been amused with the show of power, whilst man has absorbed all the reality into himself. He has adorned the creature whom God gave him as a companion, with baubles and gewgaws, turned her attention to personal attractions, offered incense to her vanity, and made her the instrument of his selfish gratification, a plaything to please his eye and amuse his hours of leisure. "Rule by obedience and by submission sway," or in other words, study to be a hypocrite, pretend to submit, but gain your point, has been the code of household morality which woman has been taught. the poet has sung, in sickly strains, the loveliness of woman's dependence upon man, and now we find it reechoed by those who profess to teach the religion of the Bible. God says, "Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?" Man says, depend upon me. God says, "HE will teach us of his ways." Man says, believe it not, I am to be your teacher. This doctrine of dependence upon man is utterly at variance with the doctrine of the Bible. In that book I find nothing like the softness of woman, nor the sternness of man: both are equally commanded to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, love, meekness, gentleness, &c.

But we are told, "the power of woman is in her dependence, flowing from a consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection." If physical weakness is alluded to, I cheerfully concede the superiority; if brute force is what my brethren are claiming, I am willing to let them have all the honor they desire; but if they mean to intimate, that mental or moral weakness belongs to woman, more than to man, I utterly disclaim the charge. Our powers of mind have been crushed, as far as man could do it, our sense of morality has been impaired by his interpretation of our duties; but no where does God say that he made any distinction between us, as moral and intelligent beings.

"We appreciate," says the Association, "the *unostentatious* prayers and efforts of woman in advancing the cause of religion at home and abroad, in leading religious inquirers TO THE PASTOR for instruction." Several points here

demand attention. If public prayers and public efforts are necessarily ostentatious, then "Anna the prophetess, (or preacher,) who departed not from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day," "and spake of Christ to all them that looked for redemption in Israel," was ostentatious in her efforts. Then, the apostle Paul encouraging women to be ostentatious in their efforts to spread the gospel, when he gives them directions how they should appear, when engaged in praying, or preaching in the public assemblies. then, the whole association of Congregational ministers are ostentatious, in the efforts they are making in preaching and praying to convert souls.

But woman may be permitted to lead religious inquirers to the PASTORS for instruction. Now this is assuming that all pastors are better qualified to give instruction than woman. This I utterly deny. I have suffered too keenly from the teaching of man, to lead any one to him for instruction. The Lord Jesus says, - "Come unto me and learn of men" [Matt. 11:29]. He points his followers to no man; and when woman is made the favored instrument of rousing a sinner to his lost and helpless condition, she has no right to substitute any teacher for Christ; all she has to do is, to turn the contrite inquirer to the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world" [John 1:29]. More souls have probably been lost by going down to Egypt for help, and by trusting in man in the early stages of religious experience, than by any other error. Instead of the petition being offered to God, -- "lead me in thy truth, and TEACH ME, for thou art the God of my salvation" [Ps. 25:5] , -- instead of relying on the precious promises - "What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall HE TEACH in the way that he shall choose" [Ps. 25:12] -- "I will instruct thee and TEACH thee in the way which thou shalt go -- I will guide thee with mine eye" [Ps. 27:11] -- the young convert is directed to go to man, as if her were in the place of God, and his instruction essential to an advancement in the path of righteousness. That woman can have but a poor conception of the privilege of being taught of God, what he alone can each, who would turn the "religious inquirer aside" from the fountain of living waters, where he might slake his thirst for spiritual instruction, to those broken cisterns which can hold no water, and therefore cannot satisfy the panting spirit. The business of men and women, who are ORDAINED OF GOD to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to a lost and perishing world, is to lead souls to Christ, and not to Pastors for instruction.

The General Association say, that "when woman assumes the place and tone of man as a

public performer, our care and protection of her seem unnecessary; we put ourselves in self-defense against her, and her character becomes unnatural." Here again the unscriptural notion is held up, that there is a distinction between the duties of men and women as moral beings; that what is virtue in man, is vice in woman; and women who dare to obey the command of Jehovah, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression" [Isa. 58:1], are threatened with having the protection of the brethren withdrawn. If this is all they do, we shall not even know the time when our chastisement is inflicted; our trust is in the Lord Jehovah, and in him is everlasting strength. The motto of woman, when she is engaged in the great work of public reformation should be, -- "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" [Ps. 27:1]. She must feel, if she feels rightly, that she is fulfilling one of the important duties laid upon her as an accountable being, and that her character, instead of being "unnatural," is in exact accordance with the will of Him to whom, and to no other, she is responsible for the talents and the gifts confided to her. As to the pretty simile, introduced into the "Pastoral Letter," "If the vine whose strength and beauty is to lean upon the trellis work, and half conceal its clusters, thinks to assume the independence and the overshadowing nature of the elm," &c. I shall only remark that it might well suit the poet's fancy, who sings to me utterly inconsistent with the dignity of a Christian body, to endeavor to draw such an anti-scriptural distinction between men and women. Ah! how many of my sex feel in the dominion, thus unrighteously exercised over them, under the gentle appellation of *protection*, that what they have leaned upon has proved a broken reed at best, and oft a spear.

Thine in the bonds of womanhood,  
Sarah M. Grimké

## Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)

*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, by Mary Wollstonecraft. Boston: Peter Edes for Thomas and Andrews, 1792.

[www.bartleby.com/144/](http://www.bartleby.com/144/)

During a time in which the role of man in society was undergoing a process of re-evaluation, women continued to hold a culturally inferior role. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft argues that the time has finally come for “a revolution in female manners—time to restore to them (women] their lost dignity ...” Wollstonecraft challenges the inferior role women were assigned in the political and social arenas. Her essay, among the first of along line of radical feminist polemics, decries the demeaning role forced upon women, a role that was created by inferior education and confinement. According to Wollstonecraft, the secondary role assigned to women prevented men and women from creating a society founded on common bonds of humanity.

The second of five children, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *upbringing did* not presage her eventual prominence. Her father was an abusive alcoholic who squandered his inheritance in a number of failed agricultural efforts and her mother was submissive under the husband’s violent attacks. With her mother’s early death and her father’s subsequent remarriage. Mary left home to take a position as a lady’s companion in Bath. Self-educated, she also pursued a career as a governess.

By 1787, Mary Wollstonecraft recognized that she wanted to be a writer. Under the patronage of publisher Joseph Johnson, famous for his association with the French and American revolutionary writers and

artists, including Tom Paine, Talleyrand, William Blake and Henry Fuseli, Wollstonecraft wrote essays for the *Analytic Review*, translated Christian Salmann’s *Elements of Morality* and Jacques Necker’s *Of the Importance of Religious Opinions*, published a novel (*Mary, a Fiction*) and wrote a children’s book, *Ordinal Stories*, that included illustrations by William Blake. In 1790, she published her essay *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Although overshadowed by a similar essay published the following year by Tom Paine (*The Rights of Man*), Wollstonecraft argued that the French Revolution as analyzed by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the French Revolution* was not egalitarian but continued to exploit the working class to the advantage of the propertied class.

However, she is best remembered for her essay *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). This was not the first treatise Wollstonecraft wrote on women’s rights; ten years earlier, she had published *Thoughts on the Education of Women* in which she stressed equal educational opportunities. Written in six weeks, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* argues that the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity as proposed by the revolutionary theorist Talleyrand had to be extended to include women as well as men. Wollstonecraft argued that any attempt at creating an egalitarian society would be undermined if women were excluded from the programs of social reform. She found that the role assigned to women, revolving

around beauty and vanity, is the result of a lack of educational opportunities that permit women to explore and expand their minds rather than keeping them “in a state of perpetual childhood,” thus creating “artificial, weak characters [who are] useless members of society.” The only education available to women stresses the use of “feminine wiles” rather than intellectual discussion to establish one’s position in society. In her essay, she castigated Rousseau (a woman’s quest for knowledge can only lead to evil because of “the imperfect cultivation which [her] understandings now receive”), Milton (“women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace”), Pope and others for their misogynist views of women. Despite the lack of stability in her own childhood and the poor relationship between her parents, Wollstonecraft also recognized that an egalitarian relationship must exist between marital partners. The wife must be the friend of her husband and not an inferior dependent. Love and passion are transitory, but true friendship based on equal status, and admiration is the core of a lasting relationship.

Despite her ideal of feminine equality, Mary Wollstonecraft’s life outside her writing was anything but rewarding. She fell madly in love with the romantic painter Henry Fuseli, who was married at the time and uninterested in having an affair. Rebounding from that, Wollstonecraft left London for Paris where she had a brief affair with the American George Imlay; he deserted her in Paris shortly after the birth of their daughter

Fanny. Returning to London, she met the writer William Godwin whom she married shortly before the birth of her second daughter Mary. Tragically, this was a short-lived relationship; Mary Wollstonecraft died of childbed fever and blood poisoning within six weeks of daughter Mary’s birth. She was thirty-six years old.

Although Mary Wollstonecraft’s influence would eventually be widespread, her immediate impact was undermined by the publication by her husband of the love letters she had written to George Imlay. The public at the time found her tryst with Imlay to be flagrantly wanton, and her work was buried under an avalanche of public condemnation. It existed as an underground tract, influencing such writers as Charlotte Perkins Gilman (*Yellow Wallpaper*), Olive Schreiner (*Story of an African Farm*), Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One’s Own*), Margaret Fuller (*The Great Lawsuit*), and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley (*Frankenstein*). Despite its impact on the feminists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and its subsequent influence on contemporary feminist writers, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* continues to suffer from a lack of public recognition. Her ideas on education, marriage, and social responsibility continue to challenge cultural norms and the classic definitions of male and female roles.

## *from Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Women*

### **Introduction**

After considering the historic page, and viewing the living world with anxious solicitude, the most melancholy emotions of sorrowful indignation have depressed my spirits, and I have sighed when obliged to confess, that either nature has made a great difference between man and man, or that the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial. I have turned over various books written on the subject of education, and patiently observed the conduct of parents and the management of schools; but what has been the result?— a profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore; and that women, in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes, originating from one hasty conclusion. The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity.— One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who, considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers; and the understanding of the sex has been so bubbled by this specious homage, that the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect.

In a treatise, therefore, on female rights and manners, the works which have been particularly written for their improvement must not be overlooked; especially when it is asserted, in direct terms, that the minds of women are enfeebled by false refinement; 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 Mahometanism, they are treated as a kind of subordinate beings, and not as a part of the human species, when improveable reason is allowed to be the dignified distinction which raises men above the brute creation, and puts a natural sceptre in a feeble hand.

Yet, because I am a woman, I would not lead my readers to suppose that I mean violently to

agitate the contested question respecting the equality or inferiority of the sex; but as the subject lies in my way, and I cannot pass it over without subjecting the main tendency of my reasoning to misconstruction, I shall stop a moment to deliver, in a few words, my opinion.— In the government of the physical world it is observable that the female in point of strength is, in general, inferior to the male. This is the law of nature; and it does not appear to be suspended or abrogated in favour of woman. A degree of physical superiority cannot, therefore, be denied— and it is a noble prerogative! But not content with this natural pre-eminence, men endeavour to sink us still lower, merely to render us alluring objects for a moment; and women, intoxicated by the adoration which men, under the influence of their senses, pay them, do not seek to obtain a durable interest in their hearts, or to become the friends of the fellow creatures who find amusement in their society.

I am aware of an obvious inference:— from every quarter have I heard exclamations against masculine women; but where are they to be found? If by this appellation men mean to inveigh against their ardour in hunting, shooting, and gaming, I shall most cordially join in the cry; but if it be against the imitation of manly virtues, or, more properly speaking, the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character, and which raise females in the scale of animal being, when they are comprehensively termed mankind;— all those who view them with a philosophic eye must, I should think, wish with me, that they may every day grow more and more masculine.

This discussion naturally divides the subject. I shall first consider women in the grand light of human creatures, who, in common with men, are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties; and afterwards I shall more particularly point out their peculiar designation.

I wish also to steer clear of an error which many respectable writers have fallen into; for the instruction which has hitherto been addressed to women, has rather been applicable to ladies, if the little indirect advice, that is scattered through Sandford and Merton, be excepted; but, addressing my sex in a firmer tone, I pay particular attention to those in the middle class, because they appear to be in the most natural state. Perhaps the seeds of false-refinement, immorality, and vanity, have ever been shed by the great. Weak, artificial beings, raised above the common wants and affections of their

race, in a premature unnatural manner, undermine the very foundation of virtue, and spread corruption through the whole mass of society! As a class of mankind they have the strongest claim to pity; the education of the rich tends to render them vain and helpless, and the unfolding mind is not strengthened by the practice of those duties which dignify the human character.- They only live to amuse themselves, and by the same law which in nature invariably produces certain effects, they soon only afford barren amusement.

But as I purpose taking a separate view of the different ranks of society, and of the moral character of women, in each, this hint is, for the present, sufficient; and I have only alluded to the subject, because it appears to me to be the very essence of an introduction to give a cursory account of the contents of the work it introduces.

My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consists- I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt.

Dismissing then those pretty feminine phrases, which the men condescendingly use to soften our slavish dependence, and despising that weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners, supposed to be the sexual characteristics of the weaker vessel, I wish to shew that elegance is inferior to virtue, that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex; and that secondary views should be brought to this simple touchstone.

This is a rough sketch of my plan; and should I express my conviction with the energetic emotions that I feel whenever I think of the subject, the dictates of experience and reflection will be felt by some of my readers. Animated by this important object, I shall disdain to cull my phrases or polish my style;- I aim at being useful, and sincerity will render me unaffected; for, wishing rather to persuade by the force of my arguments, than dazzle by the elegance of my language, I shall not waste my time in rounding periods, or in fabricating the turgid bombast of artificial feelings, which, coming

from the head, never reach the heart.- I shall be employed about things, not words!- and, anxious to render my sex more respectable members of society, I shall try to avoid that flowery diction which has slid from essays into novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversation.

These pretty superlatives, dropping glibly from the tongue, vitiate the taste, and create a kind of sickly delicacy that turns away from simple unadorned truth; and a deluge of false sentiments and over-stretched feelings, stifling the natural emotions of the heart, render the domestic pleasures insipid, that ought to sweeten the exercise of those severe duties, which educate a rational and immortal being for a nobler field of action.

The education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly; yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavour by satire or instruction to improve them. It is acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves,- the only way women can rise in the world,- by marriage. And this desire making mere animals of them, when they marry they act as such children may be expected to act:- they dress; they paint, and nickname God's creatures.- Surely these weak beings are only fit for a seraglio!- Can they be expected to govern a family with judgment, or take care of the poor babes whom they bring into the world?

If then it can be fairly deduced from the present conduct of the sex, from the prevalent fondness for pleasure which takes place of ambition and those nobler passions that open and enlarge the soul; that the instruction which women have hitherto received has only tended, with the constitution of civil society, to render them insignificant objects of desire- mere propagators of fools!- if it can be proved that in aiming to accomplish them, without cultivating their understandings, they are taken out of their sphere of duties, and made ridiculous and useless when the short-lived bloom of beauty is over,<sup>1</sup> I presume that rational men will excuse me for endeavouring to persuade them to become more masculine and respectable.

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<sup>1</sup> A lively writer, I cannot recollect his name, asks what business women turned of forty have to do in the world?

Indeed the word masculine is only a bugbear: there is little reason to fear that women will acquire too much courage or fortitude; for their apparent inferiority with respect to bodily strength, must render them, in some degree, dependent on men in the various relations of life; but why should it be increased by prejudices that give a sex to virtue, and confound simple truths with sensual reveries?

Women are, in fact, so much degraded by mistaken notions of female excellence, that I do not mean to add a paradox when I assert, that this artificial weakness produces a propensity to tyrannize, and gives birth to cunning, the natural opponent of strength, which leads them to play off those contemptible infantine airs that undermine esteem even whilst they excite desire. Let men become more chaste and modest, and if women do not grow wiser in the same ratio, it will be clear that they have weaker understandings. It seems scarcely necessary to say, that I now speak of the sex in general. Many individuals have more sense than their male relatives; and, as nothing preponderates where there is a constant struggle for an equilibrium, without it has naturally more gravity, some women govern their husbands without degrading themselves, because intellect will always govern.

### ***From Chap. II: The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed***

To account for, and excuse the tyranny of man, many ingenious arguments have been brought forward to prove, that the two sexes, in the acquirement of virtue, ought to aim at attaining a very different character: or, to speak explicitly, women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue. Yet it should seem, allowing them to have souls, that there is but one way appointed by Providence to lead mankind to either virtue or happiness.

If then women are not a swarm of ephemeron triflers, why should they be kept in ignorance under the specious name of innocence? Men complain, and with reason, of the follies and caprices of our sex, when they do not keenly satirize our headstrong passions and groveling vices.- Behold, I should answer, the natural effect of ignorance! The mind will ever be unstable that has only prejudices to rest on, and the current will run with destructive fury when there are no barriers to break its force. Women are told from their

infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, every thing else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives.

Thus Milton describes our first frail mother; though when he tells us that women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace, I cannot comprehend his meaning, unless, in the true Mahometan strain, he meant to deprive us of souls, and insinuate that we were beings only designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wing of contemplation.

How grossly do they insult us who thus advise us only to render ourselves gentle, domestic brutes! For instance, the winning softness so warmly, and frequently, recommended, that governs by obeying. What childish expressions, and how insignificant is the being- can it be an immortal one? who will condescend to govern by such sinister methods! 'Certainly,' says Lord Bacon, 'man is of kin to the beasts by his body; and if he be not of kin to God by his spirit, he is a base and ignoble creature!' Men, indeed, appear to me to act in a very unphilosophical manner when they try to secure the good conduct of women by attempting to keep them always in a state of childhood. Rousseau was more consistent when he wished to stop the progress of reason in both sexes, for if men eat of the tree of knowledge, women will come in for a taste; but, from the imperfect cultivation which their understandings now receive, they only attain a knowledge of evil.

Children, I grant, should be innocent; but when the epithet is applied to men, or women, it is but a civil term for weakness. For if it be allowed that women were destined by Providence to acquire human virtues, and by the exercise of their understandings, that stability of character which is the firmest ground to rest our future hopes upon, they must be permitted to turn to the fountain of light, and not forced to shape their course by the twinkling of a mere satellite. Milton, I grant, was of a very different opinion; for he only bends to the indefeasible right of beauty, though it would be difficult to render two passages which I now mean to contrast, consistent. But into similar inconsistencies are great men often led by their senses.

To whom thus Eve with *perfect beauty*  
adorn'd.

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*.

These are exactly the arguments that I have used to children; but I have added, your reason is now gaining strength, and, till it arrives at some degree of maturity, you must look up to me for advice- then you ought to think, and only rely on God.

Yet in the following lines Milton seems to coincide with me; when he makes Adam thus expostulate with his Maker.

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  
Giv'n and *receiv'd*; but in *disparity*  
The one intense, the other still remiss  
Cannot well suit with either, but soon prove  
Tedious alike: of *fellowship* I speak  
Such as I seek, fit to participate  
All rational delight—

In treating, therefore, of the manners of women, let us, disregarding sensual arguments, trace what we should endeavour to make them in order to co-operate, if the expression be not too bold, with the supreme Being.

By individual education, I mean, for the sense of the word is not precisely defined, such an attention to a child as will slowly sharpen the senses, form the temper, regulate the passions as they begin to ferment, and set the understanding to work before the body arrives at maturity; so that the man may only have to proceed, not to begin, the important task of learning to think and reason.

To prevent any misconstruction, I must add, that I do not believe that a private education can work the wonders which some sanguine writers have attributed to it. Men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in. In every age there has been a stream of popular opinion that has carried all before it, and given a family character, as it were, to the century. It may then fairly be inferred, that, till society be differently constituted, much cannot be expected from education. It is, however, sufficient for my present purpose to assert, that, whatever effect circumstances have on the abilities, every being may become virtuous by the exercise of its own reason; for if but one being was created with vicious inclinations, that is positively bad, what can save us from atheism? or if we worship a God, is not that God a devil?

Consequently, the most perfect education, in my opinion, is such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render 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 opinion respecting men: I extend it to women, and confidently assert that they have been drawn out of their sphere by false refinement, and not by an endeavour to acquire masculine qualities. Still the regal homage which they receive is so intoxicating, that till the manners of the times are changed, and formed on more reasonable principles, it may be impossible to convince them that the illegitimate power, which they obtain, by degrading themselves, is a curse, and that they must return to nature and equality, if they wish to secure the placid satisfaction that unsophisticated affections impart. But for this epoch we must wait- wait, perhaps, till kings and nobles, enlightened by reason, and, preferring the real dignity of man to childish state, throw off their gaudy hereditary trappings: and if then women do not resign the arbitrary power of beauty- they will prove that they have less mind than man.

I may be accused of arrogance; still I must declare what I firmly believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society. I might have expressed this conviction in a lower key; but I am afraid it would have been the whine of affectation, and not the faithful expression of my feelings, of the clear result, which experience and reflection have led me to draw. When I come to that division of the subject, I shall advert to the passages that I more particularly disapprove of, in the works of the authors I have just alluded to; but it is first necessary to observe, that my objection extends to the whole purport of those books, which tend, in my opinion, to degrade one half of the human species, and render women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue.

Though, to reason on Rousseau's ground, if man did attain a degree of perfection of mind when his body arrived at maturity, it might be proper, in order to make a man and his wife one, that she should rely entirely on his understanding; and the graceful ivy, clasping the oak that supported it, would form a whole in which strength and beauty would be equally conspicuous. But, alas! husbands,

as well as their helpmates, are often only overgrown children; nay, thanks to early debauchery, scarcely men in their outward form and if the blind lead the blind, one need not come from heaven to tell us the consequence.

Many are the causes that, in the present corrupt state of society, contribute to enslave women by cramping their understandings and sharpening their senses. One, perhaps, that silently does more mischief than all the rest, is their disregard of order.

To do every thing in an orderly manner, is a most important precept, which women, who, generally speaking, receive only a disorderly kind of education, seldom attend to with that degree of exactness that men, who from their infancy are broken into method, observe. This negligent kind of guess-work, for what other epithet can be used to point out the random exertions of a sort of instinctive common sense, never brought to the test of reason? prevents their generalizing matters of fact- so they do to-day, what they did yesterday, merely because they did it yesterday.

This contempt of the understanding in early life has more baneful consequences than is commonly supposed; for the little knowledge which women of strong minds attain, is, from various circumstances, of a more desultory kind than the knowledge of men, and it is acquired more by sheer observations on real life, than from comparing what has been individually observed with the results of experience generalized by speculation. Led by their dependent situation and domestic employments more into society, what they learn is rather by snatches; and as learning is with them, in general, only a secondary thing, they do not pursue any one branch with that persevering ardour necessary to give vigour to the faculties, and clearness to the judgment. In the present state of society, a little learning is required to support the character of a gentleman; and boys are obliged to submit to a few years of discipline. But in the education of women, the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some corporeal accomplishment; even while enervated by confinement and false notions of modesty, the body is prevented from attaining that grace and beauty which relaxed half-formed limbs never exhibit. Besides, in youth their faculties are not brought forward by emulation; and having no serious scientific study, if they have natural sagacity it is turned too soon on life and manners. They dwell on effects, and modifications, without tracing them back to causes; and complicated rules to adjust behaviour are a weak substitute for simple principles.

As a proof that education gives this appearance of weakness to females, we may instance the example of military men, who are, like them, sent into the world before their minds have been stored with knowledge or fortified by principles. The consequences are similar; soldiers acquire a little superficial knowledge, snatched from the muddy current of conversation, and, from continually mixing with society, they gain, what is termed a knowledge of the world; and this acquaintance with manners and customs has frequently been confounded with a knowledge of the human heart. But can the crude fruit of casual observation, never brought to the test of judgment, formed by comparing speculation and experience, deserve such a distinction? Soldiers, as well as women, practice the minor virtues with punctilious politeness. Where is then the sexual difference, when the education has been the same? All the difference that I can discern, arises from the superior advantage of liberty, which enables the former to see more of life. . . .

Probably the prevailing opinion, that woman was created for man, may have taken its rise from Moses's poetical story; yet, as very few, it is presumed, who have bestowed any serious thought on the subject, ever supposed that Eve was, literally speaking, one of Adam's ribs, the deduction must be allowed to fall to the ground; or, only be so far admitted as it proves that man, from the remotest antiquity, found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion, and his invention to shew that she ought to have her neck bent under the yoke, because the whole creation was only created for his convenience or pleasure.

Let it not be concluded that I wish to invert the order of things; I have already granted, that, from the constitution of their bodies, men seem to be 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 respect to their nature. In fact, how can they, if virtue has only one eternal standard? I must therefore, if I reason consequentially, as strenuously maintain that they have the same simple direction, as that there is a God.

It follows then that cunning should not be opposed to wisdom, little cares to great exertions, or insipid softness, varnished over with the name of gentleness, to that fortitude which grand views alone can inspire.

I shall be told that woman would then lose many of her peculiar graces, and the opinion of a well known poet might be quoted to refute my

unqualified assertion. For Pope has said, in the name of the whole male sex,

Yet ne'er so sure our passion to create,  
As when she touch'd the brink of all we hate.

In what light this sally places men and women, I shall leave to the judicious to determine; meanwhile I shall content myself with observing, that I cannot discover why, unless they are mortal, females should always be degraded by being made subservient to love or lust.

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 rather to address the head than the heart. To endeavour to reason love out of the world, would be to out Quixote Cervantes, and equally offend against common sense; but an endeavour to restrain this tumultuous passion, and to prove that it should not be allowed to dethrone superior powers, or to usurp the sceptre which the understanding should ever coolly wield, appears less wild.

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 place of sensation. But Rousseau, and most of the male writers who have followed his steps, have warmly inculcated that the whole tendency of female education ought to be directed to one point:- to render them pleasing.

Let me reason with the supporters of this opinion who have any knowledge of human nature, do they imagine that marriage can eradicate the habitude of life? The woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and that they cannot have much effect on her husband's heart when they are seen every day, when the summer is passed and gone. Will she then have sufficient native energy to look into herself for comfort, and cultivate her dormant faculties? or, is it not more rational to expect that she will try to please other men; and, in the emotions raised by the expectation of new conquests, endeavour to forget the mortification her love or pride has received? When the husband ceases to be a lover- and the time will inevitably come, her desire of pleasing will then grow languid, or become a spring of bitterness; and love, perhaps, the most evanescent of all passions, gives place to jealousy or vanity.

I now speak of women who are restrained by principle or prejudice; such women, though they would shrink from an intrigue with real abhorrence, yet, nevertheless, wish to be convinced by the homage of gallantry that they are cruelly neglected by their husbands; or, days and weeks

are spent in dreaming of the happiness enjoyed by congenial souls till 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 only useful to a mistress; the chaste wife, and serious mother, should only consider her power to please as the polish of her virtues, and the affection of her husband as one of the comforts that render her task less difficult and her life happier.- But, whether she be loved or neglected, her first wish should be to make herself respectable, and not to rely for all her happiness on a being subject to like infirmities with herself.

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

He advises them to cultivate a fondness for dress, because a fondness for dress, he asserts, is natural to them. I am unable to comprehend what either he or Rousseau mean, when they frequently use this indefinite term. If they told us that in a pre-existent state the soul was fond of dress, and brought this inclination with it into a new body, I should listen to them with a half smile, as I often do when I hear a rant about innate elegance.- But if he only meant to say that the exercise of the faculties will produce this fondness- I deny it.- It is not natural; but arises, like false ambition in men, from a love of power.

Dr. Gregory goes much further; he actually recommends dissimulation, and advises an innocent girl to give the lie to her feelings, and not dance with spirit, when gaiety of heart would make her feel eloquent without making her gestures immodest. In the name of truth and common sense, why should not one woman acknowledge that she can take more exercise than another? or, in other words, that she has a sound constitution; and why, to damp innocent vivacity, is she darkly to be told that men will draw conclusions which she little thinks of?- Let the libertine draw what inference he pleases; but, I hope, that no sensible mother will restrain the natural frankness of youth by instilling such indecent cautions. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh; and a wiser than Solomon hath said, that the heart should be made clean, and not trivial ceremonies observed, which it is not very difficult to fulfill with scrupulous exactness when vice reigns in the heart.

Women ought to endeavour to purify their heart; but can they do so when their uncultivated understandings make them entirely dependent on their senses for employment and amusement, when no noble pursuit sets them above the little vanities of the day, or enables them to curb the wild emotions that agitate a reed over which every

passing breeze has power? To gain the affections of a virtuous man is affectation necessary? Nature has given woman a weaker frame than man; but, to ensure her husband's affections, must a wife, who by the exercise of her mind and body whilst she was discharging the duties of a daughter, wife, and mother, has allowed her constitution to retain its natural strength, and her nerves a healthy tone, is she, I say, to condescend to use art and feign a sickly delicacy in order to secure her husband's affection? Weakness may excite tenderness, and gratify the arrogant pride of man; but the lordly caresses of a protector will not gratify a noble mind that pants for, and deserves to be respected. Fondness is a poor substitute for friendship!

In a seraglio, I grant, that all these arts are necessary; the epicure must have his palate tickled, or he will sink into apathy; but have women so little ambition as to be satisfied with such a condition? Can they supinely dream life away in the lap of pleasure, or the languor of weariness, rather than assert their claim to pursue reasonable pleasures and render themselves conspicuous by practising the virtues which dignify mankind? Surely she has not an immortal soul who can loiter life away merely employed to adorn her person, that she may amuse the languid hours, and soften the cares of a fellow-creature who is willing to be enlivened by her smiles and tricks, when the serious business of life is over.

Besides, the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband; and if she, by possessing such substantial qualities, merit his regard, she will not find it necessary to conceal her affection, nor to pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution to excite her husband's passions. In fact, if we revert to history, we shall find that the women who have distinguished themselves have neither been the most beautiful nor the most gentle of their sex.

Nature, or, to speak with strict propriety, God, has made all things right; but man has sought him out many inventions to mar the work. I now allude to that part of Dr. Gregory's treatise, where he advises a wife never to let her husband know the extent of her sensibility or affection. Voluptuous precaution, and as ineffectual as absurd.- Love, from its very nature, must be transitory. To seek for a secret that would render it constant, would be as wild a search as for the philosopher's stone, or the grand panacea: and the discovery would be equally useless, or rather pernicious to mankind. The most holy band of society is friendship. It has been well

said, by a shrewd satirist, "that rare as true love is, true friendship is still rarer."

This is an obvious truth, and the cause not lying deep, will not elude a slight glance of inquiry.

Love, the common passion, in which chance and sensation take place of choice and reason, is, in some degree, felt by the mass of mankind; for it is not necessary to speak, at present, of the emotions that rise above or sink below love. This passion, naturally increased by suspense and difficulties, draws the mind out of its accustomed state, and exalts the affections; but the security of marriage, allowing the fever of love to subside, a healthy temperature is thought insipid, only by those who have not sufficient intellect to substitute the calm tenderness of friendship, the confidence of respect, instead of blind admiration, and the sensual emotions of fondness.

This is, must be, the course of nature.— Friendship or indifference inevitably succeeds love.— And this constitution seems perfectly to harmonize with the system of government which prevails in the moral world. Passions are spurs to action, and open the mind; but they sink into mere appetites, become a personal and momentary gratification, when the object is gained, and the satisfied mind rests in enjoyment. The man who had some virtue whilst he was struggling for a crown, often becomes a voluptuous tyrant when it graces his brow; and, when the lover is not lost in the husband, the dotard, a prey to childish caprices, and fond jealousies, neglects the serious duties of life, and the caresses which should excite confidence in his children are lavished on the overgrown child, his wife.

In order to fulfil the duties of life, and to be able to pursue with vigour the various employments which form the moral character, a master and mistress of a family ought not to continue to love each other with passion. I mean to say that they ought not to indulge those emotions which disturb the order of society, and engross the thoughts that should be otherwise employed. The mind that has never been engrossed by one object wants vigour- if it can long be so, it is weak.

A mistaken education, a narrow, uncultivated mind, and many sexual prejudices, tend to make women more constant than men; but, for the present, I shall not touch on this branch of the subject. I will go still further, and advance, without dreaming of a paradox, that an unhappy marriage is often very advantageous to a family, and that the neglected wife is, in general, the best mother. And this would almost always be the consequence if the female mind were more enlarged: for, it seems to be the common

dispensation of Providence, that what we gain in present enjoyment should be deducted from the treasure of life, experience; and that when we are gathering the flowers of the day and revelling in pleasure, the solid fruit of toil and wisdom should not be caught at the same time. The way lies before us, we must turn to the right or left; and he who will pass life away in bounding from one pleasure to another, must not complain if he acquire neither wisdom nor respectability of character.

Supposing, for a moment, that the soul is not immortal, and that man was only created for the present scene,- I think we should have reason to complain that love, infantine fondness, ever grew insipid and palled upon the sense. Let us eat, drink, and love, for to-morrow we die, would be, in fact, the language of reason, the morality of life; and who but a fool would part with a reality for a fleeting shadow? But, if awed by observing the improbable powers of the mind, we disdain to confine our wishes or thoughts to such a comparatively mean field of action; that only appears grand and important, as it is connected with a boundless prospect and sublime hopes, what necessity is there for falsehood in conduct, and why must the sacred majesty of truth be violated to detain a deceitful good that saps the very foundation of virtue? Why must the female mind be tainted by coquetish arts to gratify the sensualist, and prevent love from subsiding into friendship, or compassionate tenderness, when there are not qualities on which friendship can be built? Let the honest heart shew itself, and reason teach passion to submit to necessity; or, let the dignified pursuit of virtue and knowledge raise the mind above those emotions which rather imbitter than sweeten the cup of life, when they are not restrained within due bounds.

I do not mean to allude to the romantic passion, which is the concomitant of genius.- Who can clip its wing? But that grand passion not proportioned to the puny enjoyments of life, is only true to the sentiment, and feeds on itself. The passions which have been celebrated for their durability have always been unfortunate. They have acquired strength by absence and constitutional melancholy.- The fancy has hovered round a form of beauty dimly seen- but familiarity might have turned admiration into disgust; or, at least, into indifference, and allowed the imagination leisure to start fresh game. With perfect propriety, according to this view of things, does Rousseau make the mistress of his soul, Eloisa, love St. Preux, when life was fading before her; but this is no proof of the immortality of the passion.

Of the same complexion is Dr. Gregory's advice respecting delicacy of sentiment, which he advises a woman not to acquire, if she have determined to marry. This determination, however, perfectly consistent with his former advice, he calls indelicate, and earnestly persuades his daughters to conceal it, though it may govern their conduct;- as if it were indelicate to have the common appetites of human nature.

Noble morality! and consistent with the cautious prudence of a little soul that cannot extend its views beyond the present minute division of existence. If all the faculties of woman's mind are only to be cultivated as they respect her dependence on man; if, when a husband be obtained, she have arrived at her goal, and meanly proud rests satisfied with such a paltry crown, let her grovel contentedly, scarcely raised by her employments above the animal kingdom; but, if, struggling for the prize of her high calling, she look beyond the present scene, let her cultivate her understanding without stopping to consider what character the husband may have whom she is destined to marry. Let her only determine, without being too anxious about present happiness, to acquire the qualities that ennoble a rational being, and a rough inelegant husband may shock her taste without destroying her peace of mind. She will not model her soul to suit the frailties of her companion, but to bear with them: his character may be a trial, but not an impediment to virtue.

If Dr. Gregory confined his remark to romantic expectations of constant love and congenial feelings, he should have recollected that experience will banish what advice can never make us cease to wish for, when the imagination is kept alive at the expence of reason.

I own it frequently happens that women who have fostered a romantic unnatural delicacy of feeling, waste their lives<sup>2</sup> in imagining how happy they should have been with a husband who could love them with a fervid increasing affection every day, and all day. But they might as well pine married as single- and would not be a jot more unhappy with a bad husband than longing for a good one. That a proper education; or, to speak with more precision, a well stored mind, would enable a woman to support a single life with dignity, I grant; but that she should avoid cultivating her taste, lest her husband should occasionally shock it, is quitting a substance for a shadow. To say the truth, I do not know of what use is an improved taste, if the individual be not rendered more independent of the casualties of life;

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the herd of Novelists.

if new sources of enjoyment, only dependent on the solitary operations of the mind, are not opened. People of taste, married or single, without distinction, will ever be disgusted by various things that touch not less observing minds. On this conclusion the argument must not be allowed to hinge; but in the whole sum of enjoyment is taste to be denominated a blessing?

The question is, whether it procures most pain or pleasure? The answer will decide the propriety of Dr. Gregory's advice, and shew how absurd and tyrannic it is thus to lay down a system of slavery; or to attempt to educate moral beings by any other rules than those deduced from pure reason, which apply to the whole species.

Gentleness of manners, forbearance and long-suffering, are such amiable Godlike qualities, that in sublime poetic strains the Deity has been invested with them; and, perhaps, no representation of his goodness so strongly fastens on the human affections as those that represent him abundant in mercy and willing to pardon. Gentleness, considered in this point of view, bears on its front all the characteristics of grandeur, combined with the winning graces of condescension; but what a different aspect it assumes when it is the submissive demeanour of dependence, the support of weakness that loves, because it wants protection; and is forbearing, because it must silently endure injuries; smiling under the lash at which it dare not snarl. Abject as this picture appears, it is the portrait of an accomplished woman, according to the received opinion of female excellence, separated by specious reasoners from human excellence. Or, they<sup>3</sup> kindly restore the rib, and make one moral being of a man and woman; not forgetting to give her all the 'submissive charms.'

How women are to exist in that state where there is to be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, we are not told. For though moralists have agreed that the tenor of life seems to prove that man is prepared by various circumstances for a future state, they constantly concur in advising woman only to provide for the present. Gentleness, docility, and a spaniel-like affection are, on this ground, consistently recommended as the cardinal virtues of the sex; and, disregarding the arbitrary economy of nature, one writer has declared that it is masculine for a woman to be melancholy. She was created to be the toy of man, his rattle, and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused.

To recommend gentleness, indeed, on a broad basis is strictly philosophical. A frail being

should labour to be gentle. But when forbearance confounds right and wrong, it ceases to be a virtue; and, however convenient it may be found in a companion- that companion will ever be considered as an inferior, and only inspire a vapid tenderness, which easily degenerates into contempt. Still, if advice could really make a being gentle, whose natural disposition admitted not of such a fine polish, something towards the advancement of order would be attained; but if, as might quickly be demonstrated, only affectation be produced by this indiscriminate counsel, which throws a stumbling-block in the way of gradual improvement, and true melioration of temper, the sex is not much benefited by sacrificing solid virtues to the attainment of superficial graces, though for a few years they may procure the individuals regal sway.

As a philosopher, I read with indignation the plausible epithets which men use to soften their insults; and, as a moralist, I ask what is meant by such heterogeneous associations, as fair defects, amiable weaknesses, &c.? If there be but one criterion of morals, but one archetype for man, women appear to be suspended by destiny, according to the vulgar tale of Mahomet's coffin; they have neither the unerring instinct of brutes, nor are allowed to fix the eye of reason on a perfect model. They were made to be loved, and must not aim at respect, lest they should be hunted out of society as masculine.

But to view the subject in another point of view. Do passive indolent women make the best wives? Confining our discussion to the present moment of existence, let us see how such weak creatures perform their part? Do the women who, by the attainment of a few superficial accomplishments, have strengthened the prevailing prejudice, merely contribute to the happiness of their husbands? Do they display their charms merely to amuse them? And have women, who have early imbibed notions of passive obedience, sufficient character to manage a family or educate children? So far from it, that, after surveying the history of woman, I cannot help, agreeing with the severest satirist, considering the sex as the weakest as well as the most oppressed half of the species. What does history disclose but marks of inferiority, and how few women have emancipated themselves from the galling yoke of sovereign man?- So few, that the exceptions remind me of an ingenious conjecture respecting Newton: that he was probably a being of a superior order, accidentally caged in a human body. Following the same train of thinking, I have been led to imagine that the few extraordinary women who have rushed in

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<sup>3</sup> Vide Rousseau, and Swedenborg.

eccentric directions out of the orbit prescribed to their sex, were male spirits, confined by mistake in female frames. But if it be not philosophical to think of sex when the soul is mentioned, the inferiority must depend on the organs; or the heavenly fire, which is to ferment the clay, is not given in equal portions.

But avoiding, as I have hitherto done, any direct comparison of the two sexes collectively, or frankly acknowledging the inferiority of woman, according to the present appearance of things, I shall only insist that men have increased that inferiority till women are almost sunk below the standard of rational creatures. Let their faculties have room to unfold, and their virtues to gain strength, and then determine where the whole sex must stand in the intellectual scale. Yet let it be remembered, that for a small number of distinguished women I do not ask a place. . . .

From Chap. 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 Might Naturally Be Expected to Produce

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

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

These are the women who are amused by the reveries of the stupid novelists, who, knowing little of human nature, work up stale tales, and describe meretricious scenes, all retailed in a sentimental jargon, which equally tend to corrupt the taste, and draw the heart aside from its daily duties. I do not mention the understanding, because never having been exercised, its slumbering energies rest inactive, like the lurking particles of fire which are supposed universally to pervade matter.

Females, in fact, denied all political privileges, and not allowed, as married women, excepting in criminal cases, a civil existence, have their attention naturally drawn from the interest of the whole community to that of the minute parts, though the private duty of any member of society must be very imperfectly performed when not connected with the general good. The mighty business of female life is to please, and restrained

from entering into more important concerns by political and civil oppression, sentiments become events, and reflection deepens what it should, and would have effaced, if the understanding had been allowed to take a wider range.

But, confined to trifling employments, they naturally imbibe opinions which the only kind of reading calculated to interest an innocent frivolous mind, inspires. Unable to grasp any thing great, is it surprising that they find the reading of history a very dry task, and disquisitions addressed to the understanding intolerably tedious, and almost unintelligible? Thus are they necessarily dependent on the novelist for amusement. Yet, when I exclaim against novels, I mean when contrasted with those works which exercise the understanding and regulate the imagination.- For any kind of reading I think better than leaving a blank still a blank, because the mind must receive a degree of enlargement and obtain a little strength by a slight exertion of its thinking powers; besides, even the productions that are only addressed to the imagination, raise the reader a little above the gross gratification of appetites, to which the mind has not given a shade of delicacy.

This observation is the result of experience; for I have known several notable women, and one in particular, who was a very good woman- as good as such a narrow mind would allow her to be, who took care that her daughters (three in number) should never see a novel. As she was a woman of fortune and fashion, they had various masters to attend them, and a sort of menial governess to watch their footsteps. From their masters they learned how tables, chairs, &c. were called in French and Italian; but as the few books thrown in their way were far above their capacities, or devotional, they neither acquired ideas nor sentiments, and passed their time, when not compelled to repeat words, in dressing, quarrelling with each other, or conversing with their maids by stealth, till they were brought into company as marriageable.

Their mother, a widow, was busy in the mean time in keeping up her connections, as she termed a numerous acquaintance, lest her girls should want a proper introduction into the great world. And these young ladies, with minds vulgar in every sense of the word, and spoiled tempers, entered life puffed up with notions of their own consequence, and looking down with contempt on those who could not vie with them in dress and parade.

With respect to love, nature, or their nurses, had taken care to teach them the physical meaning of the word; and, as they had few topics of

conversation, and fewer refinements of sentiment, they expressed their gross wishes not in very delicate phrases, when they spoke freely, talking of matrimony.

Could these girls have been injured by the perusal of novels? I almost forgot a shade in the character of one of them; she affected a simplicity bordering on folly, and with a simper would utter the most immodest remarks and questions, the full meaning of which she had learned whilst secluded from the world, and afraid to speak in her mother's presence, who governed with a high hand: they were all educated, as she prided herself, in a most exemplary, manner; and read their chapters and psalms before breakfast, never touching a silly novel.

This is only one instance; but I recollect many other women who, not led by degrees to proper studies, and not permitted to choose for themselves, have indeed been overgrown children; or have obtained, by mixing in the world, a little of what is termed common sense: that is, a distinct manner of seeing common occurrences, as they stand detached: but what deserves the name of intellect, the power of gaining general or abstract ideas, or even intermediate ones, was out of the question. Their minds were quiescent, and when they were not roused by sensible objects and employments of that kind, they were low-spirited, would cry, or go to sleep.

When, therefore, I advise my sex not to read such flimsy works, it is to induce them to read something superiour; for I coincide in opinion with a sagacious man, who, having a daughter and niece under his care, pursued a very different plan with each.

The niece, who had considerable abilities, had, before she was left to his guardianship, been indulged in desultory reading. Her he endeavoured to lead, and did lead to history and moral essays; but his daughter, whom a fond weak mother had indulged, and who consequently was averse to every thing like application, he allowed to read novels: and used to justify his conduct by saying, that if she ever attained a relish for reading them, he should have some foundation to work upon; and that erroneous opinions were better than none at all.

In fact the female mind has been so totally neglected, that knowledge was only to be acquired from this muddy source, till from reading novels some women of superiour talents learned to despise them.

The best method, I believe, that can be adopted to correct a fondness for novels is to ridicule them: not indiscriminately, for then it

would have little effect; but, if a judicious person, with some turn for humour, would read several to a young girl, and point out both by tones, and apt comparisons with pathetic incidents and heroic characters in history, how foolishly and ridiculously they caricatured human nature, just opinions might be substituted instead of romantic sentiments.

In one respect, however, the majority of both sexes resemble, and equally shew a want of taste and modesty. Ignorant women, forced to be chaste to preserve their reputation, allow their imagination to revel in the unnatural and meretricious scenes sketched by the novel writers of the day, slighting as insipid the sober dignity and matron graces of history,<sup>4</sup> whilst men carry the same vitiated taste into life, and fly for amusement to the wanton, from the unsophisticated charms of virtue, and the grave respectability of sense.

Besides, the reading of novels makes women, and particularly ladies of fashion, very fond of using strong expressions and superlatives in conversation; and, though the dissipated artificial life which they lead prevents their cherishing any strong legitimate passion, the language of passion in affected tones slips for ever from their glib tongues, and every trifle produces those phosphoric bursts which only mimic in the dark the flame of passion.

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<sup>4</sup> I am not now alluding to that superiority of mind which leads to the creation of ideal beauty, when he, surveyed with a penetrating eye, appears a tragicomedy, in which little can be seen to satisfy the heart without the help of fancy.

