

STRICTURES
ON THE
MODERN SYSTEM
OF
FEMALE EDUCATION

WITH
A VIEW OF THE PRINCIPLES AND CONDUCT PREVALENT
AMONG WOMEN OF RANK AND FORTUNE.

By HANNAH MORE.

May you so raise your character that you may help to
make the next age a better thing, and leave posterity
in your debt, for the advantage it shall receive by your
example. LORD HALIFAX.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

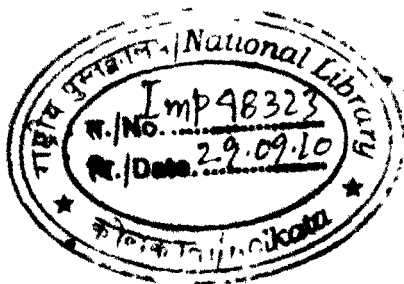
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A
V I E W
OF THE
PRINCIPLES AND CONDUCT
PREVALENT AMONG
WOMEN OF RANK AND FORTUNE.

The Hope and Expectation of the Time
Should not so lavish of their presence be,
Nor so enscoff'd to Popularity,
That being nightly swallowed by Men's eyes,
They're surfeited with honey, and begin
To loathe the taste of sweetness.

SHAKESPEARE.



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A VIEW

A
V I E W
OF THE
PRINCIPLES AND CONDUCT
PREVALENT AMONG
WOMEN OF RANK AND FORTUNE.

CHAP. XIII.

*The practical use of female knowledge, with
a sketch of the female character, and a
comparative view of the sexes.*

THE chief end to be proposed in cultivating the understandings of women, is to qualify them for the practical purposes of life. Their knowledge is not often like the learning of men, to be reproduced in some literary composition, nor ever in any learned profession; but it is to come out in conduct. A lady studies, not that she may qualify herself to become

an orator or a pleader; not that ~~they may~~ learn to debate, but to act. She is to read the best books, not so much to enable her to talk of them, as to bring the improvement which they furnish, to the rectification of her principles, and the formation of her habits. The great uses of study are to enable her to regulate her own mind, and to be useful to others.

To woman, therefore, whatever be her rank, I would recommend a predominance of those more sober studies, which, not having display for their object, may make her wise without vanity, happy without witnesses, and content without panegyrist; the exercise of which will not bring celebrity, but improve usefulness. She should pursue every kind of study which will teach her to elicit truth; which will lead her to be intent upon realities; will give precision to her ideas; will make an exact mind; every study which, instead of stimulating her sensibility, will chastise it; which will give her definite notions; will
bring

bring the imagination under dominion; will lead her to think, to compare, to combine, to methodise; which will confer such a power of discrimination, that her judgment shall learn to reject what is dazzling, if it be not solid; and to prefer, not what is striking, or bright, or new, but what is just. That kind of knowledge which is rather fitted for home consumption than foreign exportation, is peculiarly adapted to women.

It is because the superficial nature of their education furnishes them with a false and low standard of intellectual excellence, that women have sometimes become ridiculous by the unfounded pretensions of literary vanity: for it is not the really learned, but the smatterers, who have generally brought their sex into discredit, by an absurd affectation, which has set them on despising the duties of ordinary life. There have not indeed been wanting (but the character is not now common) *arceuses ridicules*, who, assuming a superiority

rionity to the sober cares which ought to occupy their sex, have claimed a lofty and supercilious exemption from the dull and plodding drudgeries

Of this dim speck called earth !

who have affected to establish an unnatural separation between talents and usefulness, instead of bearing in mind that talents are the great appointed instruments of usefulness ; who have acted as if knowledge were to confer on woman a kind of fantastic sovereignty, which should exonerate her from female duties ; whereas it is only meant the more eminently to qualify her for the performance of them. For a woman of real sense will never forget, that while the greater part of her proper duties are such as the most moderately gifted may fulfil with credit, (since Providence never makes that to be very difficult, which is generally necessary,) yet the most highly endowed are equally bound to fulfil them ; and the humblest of these
offices.

offices, performed on Christian principles, are wholesome for the minds even of the most enlightened, and tend to the casting down of those high imaginations which women of genius are too much tempted to indulge.

For instance ; ladies whose natural vanity has been aggravated by a false education, may look down on *economy* as a vulgar attainment, unworthy of the attention of an highly cultivated intellect ; but this is the false estimate of a shallow mind. Economy, such as a woman of fortune is called on to practise, is not merely the petty detail of small daily expences, the shabby curtailments and stinted parsimony of a little mind, operating on little concerns ; but it is the exercise of a sound judgment exerted in the comprehensive outline of order, of arrangement, of distribution ; of regulations by which alone well-governed societies, great and small, subsist. She who has the best regulated mind will, other things

things being equal, have the best regulated family. As in the superintendence of the universe, wisdom is seen in its *effects*; and as in the visible works of Providence that which goes on with such beautiful regularity is the result not of chance but of design; so that management which seems the most easy is commonly the consequence of the best concerted plan: a well-concerted plan is seldom the offspring of an ordinary mind. A sound œconomy is a sound understanding brought into action; it is calculation realized; it is the doctrine of proportion reduced to practice; it is foreseeing consequences, and guarding against them; it is expecting contingencies and being prepared for them. The difference is, that to a narrow-minded vulgar œconomist the details are continually present; she is overwhelmed by their weight, and is perpetually bespeaking your pity for her labours and your praise for her exertions; she is afraid you will
not

not see how much she is harassed. Little events and trivial operations engross her whole soul ; while a woman of sense, having provided for their probable recurrence, guards against the inconveniencies, without being disconcerted by the casual obstructions which they offer to her general scheme. Subordinate expences and inconsiderable retrenchments should not swallow up that attention which is better bestowed on regulating the general scale of expence, and correcting and reducing an overgrown establishment.

Superior talents, however, are not so common, as, by their frequency, to offer much disturbance to the general course of human affairs ; and many a lady, who tacitly accuses herself of neglecting her ordinary duties because she is a *genius*, will perhaps be found often to accuse herself as unjustly as good St. Jerome, when he laments that he was beaten by the angel for being too Ciceronian in his style

See Dr. Owen.

The truth is, women who are so puffed up with the conceit of talents as to neglect the plain duties of life, will not frequently be found to be women of the best abilities. And here may the author be allowed the gratification of observing, that those women of real genius and extensive knowledge, whose friendship have conferred honour and happiness on her own life, have been in general eminent for economy and the practice of domestic virtues; and greatly superior to the poor affectation of neglecting the duties and despising the knowledge of common life, with which literary women have been frequently, and not always unjustly, accused.

A romantic girl with a pretension to sentiment, which her still more ignorant friends mistake for genius, (for in the empire of the blind the one-eyed are kings,) and possessing something of a natural ear, has perhaps in her childhood exhausted all the images of grief, and love,
and

and fancy, picked up in her desultory poetical reading, in an elegy on a sick linnet or a dead lap-dog; she begins thenceforward to be considered as a prodigy in her little circle; surrounded with flatterers, she has no opportunity of getting to know that her fame is derived not from her powers, but her position; and that when an impartial critic shall have made all the necessary deductions, such as—that she is a neighbour, that she is a relation, that she is a female, that she is young, that she has had no advantages, that she is pretty perhaps—when her verses come to be stripped of all their extraneous appendages, and the fair author is driven off her vantage ground of partiality, sex, and favour, she will commonly sink to the level of ordinary capacities; while those quieter women, who have meekly sat down in the humble shades of prose and prudence, by a patient perseverance in rational studies, rise afterwards much higher in the scale of intellect, and acquire
a stock

a stock of sound knowledge for far better purposes than mere display. And, though it may seem a contradiction, yet it will generally be found true, that girls who take to scribbling are the least studious, the least reflecting, and the least rational. They early acquire a false confidence in their own unassisted powers; it becomes more gratifying to their natural vanity to be always pouring out their minds on paper, than to be drawing into them fresh ideas from richer sources. The original stock, small perhaps at first, is soon spent; and the subsequent efforts grow more and more feeble, if the mind which is continually exhausting itself, be not also continually replenished; till the latter compositions become little more than reproductions of the same ideas, and fainter copies of the same images, a little varied and modified perhaps, and not a little diluted and enfeebled.

These self-taught, and self-dependent scribblers pass for the unmerited and
unattain

unattainable praise of fancy and of genius, while they disdain the commendation of judgment, knowledge, and perseverance which would be within their reach. To extort admiration they are accustomed to boast of an impossible rapidity in composing; and while they insinuate how little time their performances cost them, they intend you should infer how perfect they might have made them had they condescended to the drudgery of application. They take superfluous pains to convince you that there was neither learning nor labour employed in the work for which they solicit your praise: the judicious eye too soon perceives it! though it does *not* perceive that native strength and mother-wit, which in works of real genius make some amends for the negligence, which yet they do not justify. But instead of extolling these effusions for their facility, it would be kind in friends rather to blame them for their crudeness: and when the young pretenders are eager

to prove in how short a time such a poem has been struck off, it would be well to regret that they had not either taken a longer time, or forborne from writing at all ; as in the former case the work would have been less defective, and in the latter the writer would have discovered more humility and self-distrust.

A general capacity for knowledge, and the cultivation of the understanding at large, will always put a woman into the best state for directing her pursuits into those particular channels which her destination in life may afterwards require. But she should be carefully instructed that her talents are only a means to a still higher attainment, and that she is not to rest in them as an end ; that merely to exercise them as instruments for the acquisition of fame and the promoting of pleasure, is subversive of her delicacy as a woman, and contrary to the spirit of a christian.

Study, therefore, is to be considered as the means of strengthening the mind, and
of

of fitting it for higher duties, just as exercise is to be considered as an instrument for strengthening the body for the same end. And the valetudinarian who is religiously punctual in the observance of his daily rides to promote his health, and rests in that as an end, without so much as intending to make his improved health an instrument of increased usefulness, acts on the same low and selfish principle with her who reads merely for pleasure and for fame, without any design of devoting the more enlarged and invigorated mind to the glory of the Giver.

But there is one *human* consideration which would perhaps more effectually tend to damp in an aspiring woman the ardours of literary vanity (I speak not of real genius, though there the remark often applies) than any which she will derive from motives of humility, or propriety, or religion; which is, that in the judgment passed on her performances, she will have to encounter the mortifying circumstance
of

of having her sex always taken into account, and her highest exertions will probably be received with the qualified approbation, *that it is really extraordinary for a woman.* Men of learning, who are naturally inclined to estimate works in proportion as they appear to be the result of art, study, and institution, are apt to consider even the happier performances of the other sex as the spontaneous productions of a fruitful but shallow soil; and to give them the same sort of praise which we bestow on certain fallads, which often draw from us a sort of wondering commendation; not indeed as being worth much in themselves, but because by the lightness of the earth, and a happy knack of the gardener, these indifferent cresses spring up in a night, and therefore one is ready to wonder they are no worse.

As to men of sense, however, they need be the less inimical to the improvement of the other sex, as they themselves will be sure to be gainers by it; the enlargement
of

of the female understanding being the most likely means to put an end to those petty cavils and contentions for equality which female smatterers so anxiously maintain. I say smatterers, for between the first class of both sexes the question is much more rarely and always more temperately agitated. Co-operation and not competition is indeed the clear principle we wish to see reciprocally adopted by those higher minds in each sex which really approximate the nearest to each other. The more a woman's understanding is improved, the more obviously she will discern that there can be no happiness in any society where there is a perpetual struggle for power; and the more her judgment is rectified, the more accurate views will she take of the station she herself was born to fill, and the more readily will she accommodate herself to it; while the most vulgar and ill-informed women are ever most inclined to be tyrants, and those always struggle most vehemently for power, who would not fail to make

the worst use of it when attained. Thus the weakest reasoners are always the most positive in debate; and the cause is obvious, for *they* are unavoidably driven to maintain their pretensions by violence who want arguments and reasons to prove that they are in the right.

There is this singular difference between a woman vain of her wit, and a woman vain of her beauty; that the beauty, while she is anxiously alive to her own fame, is often indifferent enough about the beauty of other women; and provided she herself is sure of your admiration, she does not insist on your thinking that there is another handsome woman in the world: while she who is vain of her genius, more liberal at least in her vanity, is jealous for the honour of her whole sex, and contends for the equality of their pretensions, in which she feels that her own are involved. The beauty vindicates her own rights, the wit, the rights of women; the beauty fights for herself, the wit for a party; and while the

the more selfish though more moderate
beauty

would but be Queen for life,

the public spirited wit struggles to abrogate
the Salique law of intellect, and to en-
throned

a whole sex of Queens.

At the revival of letters in the sixteenth
and the following century, the controversy
about this equality was agitated with more
warmth than wisdom; and the process
was instituted and carried on, on the part
of the female complainant, with that sort
of acrimony which always raises a suspicion
of the justice of any cause. The novelty
of that knowledge which was then bursting
out from the dawn of a long dark night,
kindled all the ardours of the female mind,
and the ladies fought zealously for a por-
tion of that renown which the reputation
of learning was beginning to bestow.
Besides their own pens, they had for their

advocates all those needy authors who had any thing to hope from their power, their riches, or their influence; and so giddy did some of these literary ladies become by the adulation of their numerous panegyrist, that through these repeated draughts of inebriating praise, they grew to despise the equality for which they had before contended, as a state below their merit and unworthy of their acceptance. They now scorned to litigate for what they already thought they so obviously possessed, and nothing short of the palm of superiority was at length considered as adequate to their growing claims. When court-ladies and princesses were the candidates, they could not long want champions to support their cause; by these champions female authorities were produced as if paramount to facts; quotations from these female authors were considered as proofs, and their point-blank assertions stood for solid and irrefragable arguments. In those parasites who offered this homage to female genius,

genius, the homage was therefore the effect neither of truth, nor of justice, nor of conviction. It arose rather out of gratitude, or it was a reciprocation of flattery; it was sometimes vanity, it was often distress, which prompted the adulation; it was the want of a patroness; it was the want of a dinner. When a lady, and especially as it then often happened, when one who was noble or royal, sat with gratifying docility at the foot of a professor's chair; when she admired the philosopher, or took upon her to protect the theologian, whom his rivals among his own sex were tearing to pieces, what could the grateful professor or delighted theologian do less in return than make the apotheosis of her who had had the penetration to discern his merit and the spirit to reward it? Thus in fact it was not so much *her* vanity as his own that he was often flattering, though she was the dupe of her more deep and designing panegyrist.

But it is a little unlucky for the perpetuity of that fame which the encomiast had made over to his patroness, in the never-dying records of his verses and orations, that in the revolution of a century or two the very names of the flattered are now almost as little known as the works of the flatterers. *Their memorial is perished with them**: an instructive lesson, that whoever bestows, or assumes a reputation disproportioned to the merit of the claimant, will find it as little durable as solid. For this literary warfare which engaged such troops of the second-hand authors of the age in question in such continual skirmishes, and not a few pitched battles; which provoked so much rancour, so many volumes, and so little wit; so much vanity and so much flattery, produced no useful or lasting effect. Those who promised themselves that their names would outlive "one half

* See Brantome, Pere le Moine, Mons. Thomas, &c.

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of round eternity," did not reach the end of the century in which the boast was made; and those who offered the incense, and those who greedily snuffed up its fumes, are buried in the same blank oblivion!

But when the temple of Janus seemed to have been closed, or when at worst the peace was only occasionally broken by a slight and random shot from the hand of some single straggler; it appears that though open rebellion had ceased, yet the female claim had not been renounced; it had only (if we may change the metaphor) lain in abeyance. The contest has recently been revived with added fury, and with multiplied exactions; for whereas the ancient demand was merely a kind of imaginary prerogative, a speculative importance, a mere titular right, a shadowy claim to a few unreal acres of Parnassian territory; the revived contention has taken a more serious turn, and brings forward political as well as intellectual pretensions:

and, among the innovations of this innovating period, the imposing term of *rights* has been produced to sanctify the claim of our female pretenders, with a view not only to rekindle in the minds of women a presumptuous vanity dishonourable to their sex, but produced with a view to excite in their hearts an impious discontent with the post which God has assigned them in this world.

But *they* little understand the true interests of woman who would lift her from the important duties of her allotted station, to fill with fantastic dignity a loftier but less appropriate niche. Nor do they understand her true happiness, who seek to annihilate distinctions from which she derives advantages, and to attempt innovations which would depreciate her real value. Each sex has its proper excellencies, which would be lost were they melted down into the common character by the fusion of the new philosophy. Why should we do away distinctions which increase the
mutual

mutual benefits and enhance the satisfactions of life? Whence, but by carefully preserving the original marks of difference stamped by the hand of the Creator, would be derived the superior advantage of mixed society? Have men no need to have their rough angles filed off, and their harshnesses and asperities smoothed and polished by affmilating with beings of more softness and refinement? Are the ideas of women naturally so *very* judicious, are their principles so *invincibly* firm, are their views so *perfectly* correct, are their judgments so *completely* exact, that there is occasion for no additional weight, no superadded strength, no increased clearness, none of that enlargement of mind, none of that additional invigoration which may be derived from the aids of the stronger sex? What identity could advantageously supersede an enlivening opposition and an interesting variety of character? Is it not then more wise as well as more honourable to move contentedly in

the plain path which Providence has obviously marked out to the sex, and in which custom has for the most part rationally confirmed them, than to stray awkwardly, unbecomingly, and unsuccessfully, in a forbidden road? Is it not desirable to be the lawful possessors of a lesser domestic territory, rather than the turbulent usurpers of a wider foreign empire? to be good originals, rather than bad imitators? to be the best thing of one's own kind, rather than an inferior thing even if it were of an higher kind? to be excellent women rather than indifferent men?

Is the author then undervaluing her own sex?—No. It is her zeal for their true *interests* which leads her to oppose their imaginary *rights*. It is her regard for their happiness which makes her endeavour to cure them of a feverish thirst for fame; of an ambition as little becoming the delicacy of their female character as the meekness of their religious profession. A little Christian humility and sober-mindedness

edness are worth all the wild metaphysical discussion which has unsettled the peace of vain women, and forfeited the respect of reasonable men. And the most elaborate definition of ideal rights, and the most hardy measures for attaining them, are of less value in the eyes of a truly amiable woman, than “that meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”

Natural propensities best mark the designations of Providence as to their application. The fin was not more clearly bestowed on the fish that he should swim, nor the wing given to the bird that he should fly, than superior strength of body and a firmer texture of mind was given to man, that he might preside in the deep and daring scenes of action and of council; in government, in arms, in science, in commerce, and in those professions which demand a higher reach, and a wider range of powers. The true value of woman is not diminished by the imputation of inferiority

feriority in *these* respects; she has other requisites better adapted to answer the ends and purposes of her being, by "Him " who does all things well;" who suits the agent to the action; who accommodates the instrument to the work.

Let her not then view with pining envy the keen satyrist, hunting vice through all the doublings and windings of the heart; the sagacious politician, leading senates, and directing the fate of empires; the acute lawyer, detecting the obliquities of fraud; and the skilful dramatist, exposing the pretensions of folly: but let her ambition be consoled by reflecting, that those who thus excel, to all that Nature bestows and books can teach, must add besides that consummate knowledge of the world to which a delicate woman has no fair avenues, and which even if she could attain, she would never be supposed to have come honestly by.

In almost all that comes under the description of polite letters, in all that captivates

privates by imagery, or warms by just and affecting sentiment, women are excellent. They possess in a high degree that delicacy and quickness of perception, and that nice discernment between the beautiful and defective which comes under the denomination of taste. Both in composition and action they excel in details; but they do not so much generalize their ideas as men, nor do their minds seize a great subject with so large a grasp. They are acute observers, and accurate judges of life and manners, as far as their own sphere of observation extends, but they describe a smaller circle. A woman sees the world, as it were, from a little elevation in her own garden, whence she makes an exact survey of home scenes, but takes not in that wider range of distant prospects which he who stands on a loftier eminence commands. Women have a certain *tact* which often enables them to feel what is just more instantaneously than they can define it. They have an intuitive penetration into

character, bestowed on them by Providence; like the sensitive and tender organs of some timid animals, as a kind of natural guard to warn of the approach of danger beings who are often called to act defensively.

In summing up the evidence, if I may so speak, of the different powers of the sexes, one may venture, perhaps, to assert, that women have equal *parts*, but are inferior in *wholeness* of mind, in the integral understanding: that though a superior woman may possess single faculties in equal perfection, yet there is commonly a juster proportion in the mind of a superior man: that if women have in an equal degree the faculty of fancy which creates images, and the faculty of memory which collects and stores ideas, they seem not to possess in equal measure the faculty of comparing, combining, analysing, and separating these ideas; that deep and patient thinking which goes to the bottom of a subject; nor that power of arrangement
which

which knows how to link a thousand connected ideas in one dependent train,* without losing sight of the original idea out of which the rest grow, and on which they all hang. The female too, wanting steadiness in her intellectual pursuits, is perpetually turned aside by her characteristic tastes and feelings. Woman in the career of genius, is the Atalanta, who will risk losing the race by running out of her road to pick up the golden apple; while her male competitor, without, perhaps, possessing greater natural strength or swiftness, will more certainly attain his object, by direct pursuit, by being less exposed to the seductions of extraneous beauty, and will win the race, not by excelling in speed, but by despising the bait *.

* What indisposes even reasonable women to concede in these points is, that the weakest man instantly lays hold on the concession; and, on the mere ground of sex, plumes himself on his own individual superiority; inferring, that the filiest man is superior to the fastest woman.

Here

Here it may be justly enough retorted, that, as it is allowed the education of women is so defective, the alleged inferiority of their minds may be accounted for on that ground more justly than by ascribing it to their natural make. And, indeed, there is so much truth in the remark, that till women shall be more reasonably educated, and till the native growth of their mind shall cease to be stunted and cramped, we have no juster ground for pronouncing that their understanding has already reached its highest attainable point, than the Chinese would have for affirming that their women have attained to the greatest possible perfection in walking, while the first care is, during their infancy, to cripple their feet. At least, till the female sex are more carefully instructed, this question will always remain as undecided as to the *degree* of difference between the masculine and feminine understanding, as the question between the understandings of blacks and whites; for until Africans and Europeans
are

are put more nearly on a par in the cultivation of their minds, the shades of distinction, if any there be, between their native powers can never be fairly ascertained.

And when we see (and who will deny that we see, it frequently?) so many women nobly rising from under all the pressure of a disadvantageous education and a defective system of society, and exhibiting the most unambiguous marks of a vigorous understanding, a correct judgment, and a *sterling piety, it reminds one of those shining lights* which have now and then burst out through all the "darkness visible" of the Romish church, have disincumbered themselves from the gloom of ignorance, shaken off the fetters of prejudice, and risen superior to all the errors of a corrupt theology.

But whatever characteristical distinctions may exist; whatever inferiority may be attached to woman from the slighter frame of her body, or the more circumscribed powers of her mind; from a less systematic education, and from the subordinate station

tion she is called to fill in life; there is one great and leading circumstance which raises her importance, and even establishes her equality. *Christianity* has exalted women to true and undisputed dignity; in Christ Jesus, as there is neither "rich nor poor," "bond nor free," so there is neither "male nor female." In the view of that immortality, which is brought to light by the gospel, she has no superior. Women (to borrow the idea of an excellent prelate) make up one half of the human race; equally with men redeemed by the blood of Christ. In this their true dignity consists; here their best pretensions rest, here their highest claims are allowed.

All disputes then for pre-eminence between the sexes have only for their object the poor precedence for a few short years, the attention of which would be better devoted to the duties of life and the interests of eternity.

And as the final hope of the female sex is equal, so are their present means, perhaps, more favourable, and their opportunities,

nities, often, less obstructed than those of the other sex. In their Christian course women have every superior advantage, whether we consider the natural make of their minds, their leisure for acquisition in youth, or their subsequently less exposed mode of life. Their hearts are naturally soft and flexible, open to impressions of love and gratitude; their feelings tender and lively; all these are favourable to the cultivation of a devotional spirit. Yet while we remind them of these benefits, they will do well to be on their guard lest this very softness and ductility lay them more open to the seductions of temptation and error.

They have in the native constitution of their minds, as well as from the relative situations they are called to fill, a certain sense of attachment and dependence, which is peculiarly favourable to religion. They feel, perhaps, more intimately the want of a strength which is not their own. Christianity brings that superin-

duced strength; it comes in aid of their conscious weakness, and offers the only true counterpoise to it. "Woman, be thou healed of thine infirmity," is still the heart-cheering language of a gracious Saviour.

Women also bring to the study of Christianity fewer of those prejudices which persons of the other sex too often early contract. Men, from their classical education, acquire a strong partiality for the manners of Pagan antiquity, and the documents of Pagan philosophy: this, together with the impure taint caught from the loose descriptions of their poets, and the licentious language even of their historians, (in whom we reasonably look for more gravity,) often weakens the good impressions of young men, and at least confuses their ideas of piety, by mixing them with so much heterogeneous matter. Their very spirits are imbued all the week with the impure follies of a depraved mythology; and it is well if even on Sundays they

they get to hear of the "true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent." While women, though struggling with the same natural corruptions, have commonly less knowledge to unlearn, and fewer schemes to unlearn; they have not to shake off the pride of system, and to disencumber their minds from the shackles of favourite theories: they do not bring from the porch or the academy any "oppositions of science" to obstruct their reception of those pure doctrines taught on the Mount: doctrines which ought to find a readier entrance into minds uninfected with the pride of the school of Zeno, or the libertinism of that of Epicurus.

And as women are naturally more affectionate than fastidious; they are likely both to read and to hear with a less critical spirit than men: they will not be on the watch to detect errors, so much as to gather improvement; they have seldom that hardness which is acquired by dealing deeply in books of controversy, but are

more inclined to works which quicken the devotional feelings, than to such as awaken a spirit of doubt and scepticism. They are less disposed to consider the compositions they peruse, as materials on which to ground objections and answers, than as helps to faith and rules of life. With these advantages, however, they should also bear in mind that their impressions being often less abiding, and their reason less open to conviction, by means of the strong evidences which exist in favour of the truth of Christianity, "they ought, therefore, to give the more earnest heed to the things which they have heard, lest at any time they should let them slip." Women are also, from their domestic habits, in possession of more leisure and tranquillity for religious pursuits, as well as secured from those difficulties and temptations to which men are exposed in the tumult of a bustling world. Their lives are more uniform, less agitated by the passions the, businesses, the contentions, the

the shock of opinions and of interests which convulse the world.

If we have denied them the talents which might lead them to excel as lawyers, they are preserved from the peril of having their principles warped by that too indiscriminate defence of right and wrong, to which the professors of the law are exposed. If we should question their title to eminence as mathematicians, they are happily exempt from the danger to which men devoted to that science are said to be liable ; namely, that of looking for demonstration on subjects, which, by their very nature, are incapable of affording it. If they are less conversant in the powers of nature, the structure of the human frame, and the knowledge of the heavenly bodies, than philosophers, physicians, and astronomers ; they are, however, delivered from the error into which many of each of these have sometimes fallen, I mean from the fatal habit of resting in second causes, instead of referring all to the first ; instead of

making "the heavens declare the glory of God, and proclaim his handy work;" instead of concluding, when they observe "how fearfully and wonderfully we are made, marvellous are thy works O Lord, and that my soul knoweth right well."

And let the weaker sex take comfort, that in their very exemption from privileges, which they are sometimes disposed to envy, consists their security and their happiness. If they enjoy not the distinctions of public life and high offices, do they not escape the responsibility attached to them, and the mortification of being dismissed from them? If they have no voice in deliberative assemblies, do they not avoid the load of duty connected with such privileges? Preposterous pains have been taken to excite in women an uneasy jealousy, that their talents are neither rewarded with public honours nor emoluments in life; nor with inscriptions, statues, and mausoleums after death. It has been absurdly represented to them as
a hard-

a hardship, that while they are expected to perform duties, they must yet be contented to relinquish honours, and must unjustly be compelled to renounce fame while they must sedulously labour to deserve it.

But for Christian women to act on the low views suggested to them by their ill-judging panegyrists; and to look up with a giddy head and a throbbing heart to honours and renumerations, so little suited to the wants and capacities of an immortal spirit, would be no less ridiculous than if Christian heroes should look back with envy on the pagan rewards of ovations, oak garlands, parsley crowns, and laurel wreaths. The Christian hope more than reconciles Christian women to these petty privations, by substituting a nobler prize for their ambition, "the prize of the high-calling of God in Christ Jesus;" by substituting, for that popular and fluctuating voice, which may cry, "Hosanna" and
D 4 "crucify"

“crucify” in a breath, that “favour of
“God which is eternal life.”

If women should lament the disadvantages attached to their sex, that their character is of so delicate a texture as to be sullied by the slightest breath of calumny, and that the stain is indelible; yet are they not led by that very circumstance more instinctively to shrink from all those irregularities to which the loss of character is so much expected to be attached; and to shun with keener circumspection the most distant approach towards the confines of danger? Let them not lament it as a hardship, but account it to be a privilege, that the delicacy of their sex impels them more scrupulously to avoid the very appearance of evil, and that the consciousness of their danger serves to secure their purity, by placing them at a greater distance from the evil itself.

Though it be one main object of this little work, rather to lower than to raise
any

any desire of celebrity in the female heart ; yet I would awaken it to a just sensibility to honest fame : I would call on women to reflect that our religion has not only made them heirs to a blessed immortality hereafter, but has greatly raised them in the scale of being here, by lifting them to an importance in society unknown to the most polished ages of antiquity. The religion of Christ has even bestowed a degree of renown on the sex beyond what any other religion ever did. Perhaps there are hardly so many virtuous women (for I reject the long catalogue whom their vices have transferred from oblivion to infamy) named in all the pages of Greek or Roman History, as are handed down to eternal fame, in a few of those short chapters with which the great Apostle to the Gentiles has concluded his epistles to his converts. Of “devout and honourable women,” the sacred scriptures record “not a few.” Some of the most affecting scenes, the most interesting transactions,

actions, and the most touching conversations which are recorded of the Saviour of the world, passed with women. *They* are the first remarked as having “ ministered to him of their substance.” *Theirs* was the praise of not abandoning their despised Redeemer when he was led to execution, and under all the hopeless circumstances of his ignominious death; *they* appear to have been the *last* attending at his tomb, and the *first* on the morning when he arose from it. *Theirs* was the privilege of receiving the earliest consolation from their risen Lord; *theirs* was the honour of being first commissioned to announce his glorious resurrection to the world. And even to furnish heroic confessors, devoted lants, and unshrinking martyrs to the Church of Christ, has not been the exclusive honour of the bolder sex.

CHAP. XIV.

CONVERSATION.—*Hints suggested on the subject.—On the tempers and dispositions to be introduced in it.—Errors to be avoided.—Vanity under various shapes the cause of those errors.*

THE sexes will naturally desire to appear to each other, such as each *believes the other will best like; their conversation will act reciprocally; and each sex will appear more or less rational as they perceive it will more or less recommend them to the other. It is therefore to be regretted, that many men, even of distinguished sense and learning, are so apt to consider the society of ladies, as a scene in which to rest their understandings, rather than to exercise them; while ladies, in return, are too much addicted to make their court by lending themselves to this spirit
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of trifling ; they often avoid to make use of what abilities they have ; and affect to talk below their natural and acquired powers of mind ; considering it as a tacit and welcome flattery to the understanding of men, to renounce the exercise of their own.

Now since taste and principles thus mutually operate ; men, by keeping up conversation to its proper standard, would not only call into exercise the powers of mind which women actually possess ; but would even awaken in them new energies which they do not know they possess ; and men of sense would find their account in doing this, for their own talents would be more highly rated by companions who were better able to appreciate them. And, on the other hand, if young women found it did not often recommend them in the eyes of those whom they might wish to please, to be frivolous and superficial, they would become more sedulous in correcting their own habits. Whenever fashionable women
indicate

indicate a relish for instructive conversation, men will not be apt to hazard what is vain, or unprofitable; much less will they ever presume to bring forward what is loose or corrupt, where some signal has not been previously given, that it will be acceptable, or at least that it will be pardoned.

Ladies commonly bring into company minds already too much relaxed by petty pursuits, rather than overstrained by intense application; the littleness of the employments in which they are usually engaged, does not so exhaust their spirits as to make them stand in need of that relaxation from company which severe application or overwhelming business makes requisite for studious or public men. The due consideration of this circumstance might serve to bring the sexes more nearly on a level in society; and each might meet the other half way; for that degree of lively and easy conversation which is a necessary refreshment to the learned and the busy, would not decrease

in pleasantness by being made of so rational a cast, as would yet somewhat raise the minds of women, who commonly seek society as a scene of pleasure, not as a refuge from intense thought or exhausting labour.

It is a disadvantage even to those women who keep the best company, that it is unhappily almost established into a system, by the other sex, to postpone every thing like instructive discourse till the ladies are withdrawn; their retreat serving as a kind of signal for the exercise of intellect. And in the few cases in which it happens that any important discussion takes place in their presence, they are for the most part considered as having little interest in serious subjects. Strong truths, whenever such happen to be addressed to them, are either diluted with flattery, or kept back in part, or softened to their taste; or if the ladies express a wish for information on any point, they are put off with a compliment, instead of a reason; and are considered

as

as beings who are not expected to see and to judge of things as they really exist.

Do we then wish to see the ladies, whose opportunities leave them so incompetent, and the modesty of whose sex ought never to allow them even to be as shining as they are able;—do we wish to see them take the lead in metaphysical disquisitions? Do we wish them to plunge into the depths of theological polemics,

And find no end in wand'ring mazes lost?

Do we wish them to revive the animosities of the Burgonian controversy, or to divide the profits between the Jesuits and the five propositions of Jansenius? Do we wish to enthrone them in the professor's chair, to deliver oracles, harangues, and dissertations? to weigh the merits of every new production in the scales of Quintilian, or to regulate the *unities* of dramatic composition by *Aristotle's* *close*? Or renouncing those foreign aids, do we desire to behold them, inflated with
their

their original powers, labouring to strike out sparks of wit, with a restless anxiety to shine, which generally fails, and with a laboured affectation to please, which never pleases?

Diseurs de bons mots, fades caractères!

All this be far from them!—But we *do* wish to see the conversation of well-bred women rescued from vapid common places, from uninteresting tattle, from trite and hackneyed communications, from frivolous earnestness, from false sensibility, from a warm interest about things of no moment, and an indifference to topics the most important; from a cold vanity, from the overflowings of self-love, exhibiting itself under the smiling mask of an engaging flattery, and from all the factitious manners of artificial intercourse. We *do* wish to see the time passed in polished and intelligent society, considered among the beneficial, as well as the pleasant portions of our existence, and not consigned over,

as it too frequently is, to premeditated, trifling, or systematic unprofitableness. Let me not, however, be misunderstood: it is not meant to prescribe that they should affect to talk on lofty subjects, so much as to suggest that they should bring good sense, simplicity, and precision, into those common subjects, of which, after all, both the business and the conversation of mankind must be in a great measure made up.

It is too well known how much the dread of imputed pedantry keeps off every thing that verges towards *learned*, and the terror of imputed enthusiasm staves off any thing that approaches to *serious* conversation; so that the two topics which peculiarly distinguish us, as rational and immortal beings, are by general consent in a good degree banished from the society of rational and immortal creatures. But we might almost as consistently give up the comforts of fire because a few persons have been burnt, and the benefit of water

because some others have been drowned, as relinquish the enjoyments of intellectual, and the blessings of religious intercourse, because the learned world has sometimes been infested with pedants, and the religious world with fanatics.

As in the momentous times in which we live it is next to impossible to pass an evening in company but the talk will so inevitably revert to politics, that, without any premeditated design, every one present shall infallibly get to know to which side the other inclines; why, in the far higher concern of eternal things, should we so carefully shun every offered opportunity of bearing even a casual testimony to the part we espouse in religion? Why, while we make it a sort of point of conscience to leave no doubt on the mind of a stranger, whether we adopt the party of Pitt or Fox, shall we chuse to leave it very problematical whether we belong to God or Baal? Why, in religion, as well as in politics, should we not act like people who, having
their

their all at stake, cannot forbear now and then adverting for a moment to the object of their grand concern, and dropping, at least, an incidental intimation of the side to which they belong?

Even the news of the day, in such an eventful period as the present, may lend frequent occasions to a woman of principle to declare, without parade, her faith in a moral Governor of the world; her trust in a particular Providence; her belief in the Divine Omnipotence; her confidence in the power of God, in educing good from evil, in his employing wicked nations, not as favourites but instruments; her persuasion that present success is no proof of the divine favour; in short, some intimation that she is not ashamed to declare that her mind is under the influence of christian faith and principle. A general concurrence in exhibiting this spirit of decided faith and holy trust, would inconceivably discourage that pert infidelity which is ever on the watch to produce

itself: and, as we have already observed, if women, who derive authority from their rank or talents, did but reflect how their sentiments are repeated and their authority quoted, they would be so on their guard, that general society might become a scene of general improvement, and the young, who are looking for models on which to fashion themselves, would become ashamed of exhibiting any thing like levity, or scepticism, or prophaneness.

Let it be understood, that it is not meant to intimate that serious subjects should make up the bulk of conversation; this, as it is impossible, would also often be improper. It is not intended to suggest that they should be abruptly introduced, or unsuitably prolonged; but only that they should not be systematically shunned, nor the brand of fanaticism be fixed on the person who, with whatever propriety, hazards the introduction of them. It is evident, however, that this general dread of serious topics arises a good deal from an ignorance

of the true nature of christianity ; people avoid it on the principle expressed by the vulgar phrase of the danger of playing with edge tools. They conceive of religion as something which involves controversy, and dispute, and mischief ; something of an inflammatory nature, which is to stir up ill humours and hatred ; as of a sort of party-busines which sets friends at variance. So much is this notion adopted, that I have seen announced two works of considerable merit, in which it was stipulated as an attraction, that the subject of religion, as being likely to excite anger and party-distinctions, should be carefully excluded. Such is the worldly idea of the spirit of that religion, whose direct object it was to bring " peace and good will to men !"

Women too little live or converse up to their understandings ; and however we have deprecated affectation or pedantry, let it be remembered, that both in reading and conversing, the understanding gains

more by stretching than stooping. If by exerting itself it may not attain to all it desires, yet it will be sure to gain something. The mind, by always applying itself to objects below its level, contracts its dimensions, and shrinks itself to the size, and lowers itself to the level, of the object about which it is conversant: while the mind which is active and aspiring, expands and raises itself, grows larger by exercise, abler by diffusion, and richer by communication.

But the taste of general society is not favourable to improvement. The seriousness with which the most frivolous subjects are agitated, and the levity with which the most serious are dispatched, bear a pretty exact proportion to each other. Society too is a sort of magic lanthorn; the scene is perpetually shifting. In this incessant change we must

Catch, e'er she falls, the Cynthia of the minute;—
and the evanescent fashion of the present minute, which, while in many it leads to the
cultivation

cultivation of real knowledge, has also sometimes led even the gay and idle to the affectation of mixing a sprinkling of science with the mass of dissipation. The ambition of appearing to be well-informed breaks out even in those triflers who will not spare time from their pleasureable pursuits sufficient for acquiring that knowledge, of which, however, the reputation is so desirable. A little smattering of philosophy often dignifies the pursuits of their day, without rescuing them from the vanities of the night. A course of lectures (that admirable assistant for enlightening the understanding) is not seldom resorted to as a means to substitute the appearance of knowledge for the fatigue of application; but where this valuable help is attended merely like any other public exhibition, and is not furthered by correspondent reading at home, it often serves to set off the reality of ignorance with the affectation of skill. But instead of producing in conversation a few reign-

ing scientific terms, with a familiarity and readiness, which

Amaze the unlearn'd, and make the learned smile, would it not be more modest even for those who are better informed, to avoid the common use of technical terms whenever the idea can be as well conveyed without them? For it argues no real ability to know the *names* of tools; the ability lies in knowing their *use*: and while it is in the thing, and not in the term, that real knowledge consists, the charge of pedantry is attached to the use of the term, which would not attach to the knowledge of the science.

In the faculty of speaking well, ladies have such a happy promptitude of turning their slender advantages to account, that there are many who, though they have never been taught a rule of syntax, yet, by a quick facility in profiting from the best books and the best company, hardly ever violate one; and who often exhibit an elegant and perspicuous arrangement
of

of style, without having studied any of the laws of composition. Every kind of knowledge which appears to be the result of observation, reflection, and natural taste, fits gracefully on women. Yet on the other hand it sometimes happens, that ladies of no contemptible natural parts are too ready to produce, not only pedantic expressions, but crude notions; and still oftener to bring forward obvious and hackneyed remarks, which float on the very surface of a subject, with the imposing air of recent invention, and all the vanity of conscious discovery. This is because their acquirements have not been worked into their minds by early instruction; what knowledge they have gotten stands out as it were above the very surface of their minds, like the *appliquée* of the embroiderer, instead of having been interwoven with the growth of the piece, so as to have become a part of the stuff. They did not, like men, acquire what they know while the texture was forming. Perhaps no
10 better

better preventive could be devised for this literary vanity, than *early* instruction: that woman would be less likely to be vain of her knowledge who did not remember the time when *she* was ignorant. Knowledge that is *burnt in*, if I may so speak, is seldom obtrusive, rarely impertinent.

Their reading also has probably consisted much in abridgments from larger works, as was observed in a former chapter; this makes a readier talker, but a shallower thinker, than the perusal of books of more bulk. By these scanty sketches, their critical spirit has been excited, while their critical powers have not been formed; for in those crippled mutilations they have seen nothing of that just proportion of parts, that skilful arrangement of the plan, and that artful distribution of the subject, which, while they prove the master hand of the writer, serve also to form the taste of the reader, far more than a disjointed skeleton, or a beautiful feature or two, can

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do. The instruction of women is also too much drawn from the scanty and penurious sources of short writings of the essay kind: this, when it comprises the best part of a person's reading, makes a smatterer and spoils a scholar; for though it supplies current talk, yet it does not make a full mind; it does not furnish a storehouse of materials to stock the understanding, neither does it accustom the mind to any trains of reflection: for the subjects, besides being each succinctly, and, on account of this brevity, superficially treated, are distinct and disconnected: they arise out of no concatenation of ideas, nor any dependent series of deduction. Yet on this pleasant but desultory reading, the mind which has not been trained to severer exercise, loves to repose itself in a sort of creditable indolence, instead of stretching its powers in the wholesome labour of consecutive investigation *.

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* The writer cannot be supposed desirous of depreciating the value of those many beautiful periodical essays

I am not discouraging study at a late period of life, or even slender knowledge; information is good at whatever period and in whatever degree it be acquired. But in such cases it should be attended with peculiar humility: and the new possessor should bear in mind, that what is fresh to her has been long known to others; and she should therefore be aware of advancing as novel that which is common, and obtruding as rare that which every body possesses. Some ladies are eager to exhibit proofs of their reading, though at the expence of their judgment, and will introduce in conversation quotations quite irrelevant to the matter in hand, because they happen at the instant to recur to their recollection, or were, perhaps, found in the book they

essays which adorn our language. But, perhaps, it might be better to regale the mind with them singly, at different times, than to read at the same sitting, a multitude of short pieces on dissimilar and unconnected topics, *by way of getting through the book.*

have

have just been reading. Unappropriate quotations or strained analogy may shew reading, but they do not shew taste. That just and happy allusion which knows by a word how to awaken a corresponding image, or to excite in the hearer the idea which fills the mind of the speaker, shews less pedantry and more taste than bare citations; and a mind imbued with elegant knowledge will inevitably betray the opulence of its resources, even on topics which do not relate to science or literature. Well-informed persons will easily be discovered to have read the best books, though they are not always detailing catalogues of authors. Though honey owes its exquisite taste to the fragrance of the sweetest flowers, yet the skill of the little artificer appears in this, that the delicious stores are so admirably worked up, and there is such a due proportion observed in mixing them, that the perfection of the whole consists in its not tasting individually of any of those sweets of the
very

very essence of which it is compounded. But true judgment will detect the infusion which true modesty will not display ; and even common subjects passing through a cultivated understanding, borrow a flavour of its richness. A power of apt selection is more valuable than any power of general retention ; and an apposite remark, which shoots straight to the point, demands higher powers of mind than an hundred simple acts of memory ; for the business of the memory is only to store up materials which the understanding is to mix and work up with its native faculties, and which the judgment is to bring out and apply. But young women who have more vivacity than sense, and more vanity than vivacity, often risk the charge of absurdity to escape that of ignorance, and will even compare two authors who are totally unlike, rather than miss the occasion to shew that they have read both.

Among the arts to spoil conversation, some ladies possess that of suddenly diverting

ing it from the channel in which it was beneficially flowing, because some *word* used by the person who was speaking has accidentally struck out a new train of thinking in their own minds, and not because the general *idea* expressed has struck out a corresponding idea, which sort of collision is indeed the way of eliciting the true fire. Young ladies, whose sprightliness has not been disciplined by a correct education, consider how things may be prettily said, rather than how they may be prudently or seasonably spoken; and hazard being thought wrong, or rash, or vain, for the chance of being reckoned pleasant. The flowers of rhetoric captivate them more than the justest deductions of reason; and to repel an argument, they arm themselves with a metaphor. Those also who do not aim so high as eloquence, are often surprised that you refuse to accept of a prejudice instead of a reason; they are apt to take up with a probability in place of a demonstration, and cheaply put you off with

with an assertion, when you are requiring a proof. The mode of education which renders them light in assumption, and superficial in reasoning, renders them also impatient of opposition; and if they happen to possess beauty, and to be vain of it, they may be tempted to consider that as an additional proof of their being always in the right. In this case, they will not ask you to submit your judgment to the force of their argument, so much as to the authority of their charms.

The same fault in the mind, strengthened by the same cause, (a neglected education,) leads lively women often to pronounce on a question without examining it: on any given point they seldom *doubt* than men; not because they are more clear-sighted, but because they have not been accustomed to look into a subject long enough to discover its depths and its intricacies; and not discerning its difficulties, they conclude that it has none. Is it a contradiction to say, that they seem

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at once to be quick-sighted and short-sighted? What they see at all, they commonly see at once; a little difficulty discourages them; and, having caught a hasty glimpse of a subject, they rush to this conclusion, that either there is no more to be seen, or that what is behind will not pay them for the trouble of searching. They pursue their object eagerly, but not regularly; rapidly, but not pertinaciously; for they want that obstinate patience of investigation which grows stouter by repulse. What they have not attained, they do not believe exists; what they cannot seize at once, they persuade themselves is not worth having.

Is a subject of moment started in company? While the more sagacious are deliberating on its difficulties, and viewing it under all its aspects, in order to form a competent judgment before they decide, you will often find the most superficial woman present determine the matter,

without hesitation. Not seeing the perplexities in which the question is involved, she wonders at the want of penetration in the man whose very penetration keeps him silent. She secretly despises the dull perception and slow decision of him who is patiently *untying* the knot which she fancies she exhibits more dexterity by *cutting*. By this shallow sprightliness, of which vanity is commonly the radical principle, the person whose opinion was best worth having is discouraged from delivering it, and an important subject is dismissed without discussion, by this inconsequent flippancy and voluble rashness. It is this abundance of florid talk, from superficial matter, which has brought on so many of the sex the charge of *inverting* the Apostle's precept, and being *swift to speak, slow to hear*.

For if the great Roman Orator could observe, that silence was so important a part of conversation, that "there was not only
"an art but an eloquence in it," how peculiarly does the remark apply to the
modesty

modesty of youthful females ! But the silence of listless ignorance, and the silence of sparkling intelligence, are two things almost as obviously distinct, as the wisdom and the folly of the tongue. An inviolable and marked attention may shew, that a woman is pleased with a subject, and an illuminated countenance may prove that she understands it, almost as unequivocally as language itself could do ; and this, with a modest question, which indicates at once rational curiosity and becoming diffidence, is in many cases as large a share of the conversation as it is decorous for feminine delicacy to take. It is also as flattering an encouragement as men of sense require, for pursuing such topics in the presence of women, which they would be more disposed to do, did they oftener gain by it the attention which it is natural to wish to excite ; and did women themselves discover that desire of improvement which liberal-minded men are pleased with communicating.

Yet do we not sometimes see an impatience to be heard (nor is it a *feminine* failing only) which good-breeding can scarcely subdue? And even when these incorrigible talkers are compelled to be silent, is it not evident that they are not listening to what is said, but are only thinking of what they themselves shall say when they can seize the first lucky interval for which they are so narrowly watching? The very turn of their countenance betrays that they do not take the slightest degree of interest in any thing that is said by others, except with a view to lie in wait for any little chasm in the discourse, on which they may lay hold, and give vent to their own overflowing vanity.

But conversation must not be considered as a stage for the display of our talents, so much as a field for the exercise and improvement of our virtues; as a means for promoting the glory of our Creator, and the good and happiness of our fellow-creatures. Well-bred and intelligent Christians

are not, when they join in society, to consider themselves as entering the lists like intellectual prize-fighters, in order to exhibit their own vigour and dexterity, to discomfit their adversary, and to bear away the palm of victory. Truth and not triumph should be the object; and there are few occasions in life, in which we are more unremittingly called upon to watch ourselves narrowly, and to resist the assaults of various temptations, than in conversation. Vanity, jealousy, envy, misrepresentation, resentment, disdain, levity, impatience, insincerity, and pride, will in turn solicit to be gratified. Constantly to struggle against the desire of being thought more wise, more witty, and more knowing, than those with whom we associate, demands the incessant exertion of Christian vigilance, a vigilance which the generality are so far from suspecting necessary in the intercourse of common society, that cheerful conversation is rather considered as an exemption and release from watchfulness,

fulness, than as an additional obligation to it. But a circumspect soldier of Christ will never be off his post; even when he is not called to public combat by the open assaults of his great spiritual enemy, he must still be acting as a centinel, for the dangers of an ordinary Christian will arise more from these little skirmishes which are daily happening in the warfare of human life, than from those pitched battles which more rarely occur, and for which he will be more probably armed.

But society, as was observed before, is not a stage on which to throw down our gauntlet, and prove our own prowess by the number of falls we give to our adversary; so far from it, good-breeding as well as Christianity, considers as an indispensable requisite for conversation, the disposition to bring forward to notice any talent in others, which their own modesty, or conscious inferiority, would lead them to keep back. To do this with effect requires a penetration exercised to discern merit,

merit, and a generous candour which delights in drawing it out. There are few who cannot converse tolerably on some one topic; what that is, we should try to find out, and in general introduce that topic, though to the suppression of any one on which we ourselves are supposed to excel: and however superior we may be in other respects to the persons in question, we may, perhaps, in that particular point, improve by them; and if we do not gain information, we shall at least gain a wholesome exercise to our humility and self-denial; we shall be restraining our own impetuosity; we shall, if we take this course on just occasions only, and so as to beware lest we gratify the vanity of others, by giving confidence to a doubting, or cheerfulness to a depressed spirit. And to place a just remark, hazarded by the diffident, in the most advantageous point of view; to call the attention of the inattentive, the forward, and the self sufficient, to the unobtrusive merit of some quiet person in the

company, who, though of much worth, is perhaps of little note; these are requisites for conversation, less brilliant, but far more valuable, than the power of exciting bursts of laughter by the brightest wit, or of extorting admiration by the most poignant sallies of ridicule.

For wit is, of all the qualities of the female mind, that which requires the severest castigation; yet the temperate exercise of this fascinating quality throws an additional lustre round the character of an amiable woman; for to manage with discreet modesty a dangerous talent, confers a higher praise than can be claimed by those in whom the absence of the talent takes away the temptation to misemploy it. To women, wit is a peculiarly perilous possession, which nothing short of the sober-mindedness of Religion can keep in subjection; and perhaps there is scarcely any one order of human beings that requires the powerful curb of Christian control more than women whose genius has this tendency,

tendency. Intemperate wit craves admiration as its natural aliment; it lives on flattery as its daily bread. The professed wit is a hungry beggar, that subsists on the extorted alms of perpetual panegyric; and like the vulture, in the Grecian fable, its appetite increases by indulgence. Simple truth and sober approbation become tasteless and insipid to the palate, daily vitiated by the delicious poignances of exaggerated commendation. Under the above restrictions, however, wit may be safely and pleasantly exercised; for *chastified wit* is an elegant and well-bred, and not unfeminine quality. But *humour*, especially if it degenerate into imitation, or mimicry, is very sparingly to be ventured on; for it is so difficult totally to detach it from the suspicion of buffoonery, that a woman will be likely to lose more of that delicacy which is her appropriate grace, than she will gain in another way in the eyes of the judicious, by the most successful display of humour.

But

But if it be true that some women are too apt to affect brilliancy and display in their own discourse, and to undervalue the more humble pretensions of less showy characters; it must be confessed also, that some of more ordinary abilities are now and then guilty of the opposite error, and foolishly affect to value themselves on not making use of the understanding they really possess; and affect to be thought even more silly than they are. They exhibit no small satisfaction in ridiculing women of high intellectual endowments, while they exclaim with much affected humility, and much real envy, that "they are thankful *they* are not geniuses." Now, though one is glad to hear gratitude expressed on any occasion, yet the want of sense is really no such great mercy to be thankful for; and it would indicate a better spirit, were they to pray to be enabled to make a right use of the moderate understanding they possess, instead of exposing with a
visible

visible pleasure the imaginary or real defects of their more shining acquaintance. Women of the brightest faculties should not only "bear those faculties meekly," but should consider it as no derogation, cheerfully to fulfil those humbler duties which make up the business of common life, while they should always take into the account the nobler exertions as well as the higher responsibility attached to higher gifts. In the mean time women of lower attainments should exert to the utmost such abilities as Providence has assigned them; and while they should not deride excellencies which are above their reach, they should not despond at an inferiority which did not depend on themselves; nor, because God has denied them ten talents, should they forget that they are equally responsible for the one he *has* allotted them, but set about devoting that one with humble diligence to the glory of the Giver.

Vanity,

Vanity, however, is not the monopoly of talents; let not a young lady, therefore, fancy that she is humble, merely because she is not ingenious, or consider the absence of talents as the criterion of worth. Humility is not the exclusive privilege of dulness. Folly is as conceited as wit, and ignorance many a time outstrips knowledge in the race of vanity. Equally earnest competitions spring from causes less worthy to excite them than wit and genius. Vanity insinuates itself into the female heart under a variety of unsuspected forms, and is on the watch to seize on many a little pass which was not thought worth guarding.

Who has not seen as restless emotion agitate the features of an anxious matron, while peace and fame hung trembling in doubtful suspense on the success of a soup or a sauce, on which sentence was about to be pronounced by some consummate critic, as could have been excited by any competition for literary renown, or any
struggle

struggle for contested wit? Anxiety for fame is by no means measured by the real value of the object pursued, but by the degree of estimation in which it is held by the pursuer. Nor was the illustrious hero of Greece more effectually hindered from sleeping by the trophies of Miltiades, than many a modish damsel by the eclipsing superiority of some newer decoration exhibited by her more successful friend.

There is another species of vanity in some women which disguises itself under the thin veil of an affected humility; they will accuse themselves of some fault from which they are remarkably exempt, and lament the want of some talent which they are rather notorious for possessing. This is not only a clumsy trap for praise, but there is a disingenuous intention, by renouncing a quality they eminently possess, to gain credit for others in which they are really deficient. All affectation involves a species of deceit. The Apostle when he enjoins, "not to think of ourselves,"

“felves more highly than we ought,” does not exhort us to think *falsely* of ourselves, but to think “soberly;” and it is worth observing that in this injunction he does not use the word *speak*, but *think*, inferring possibly, that it would be safer to *speak* little of ourselves or not at all; for it is so far from being an unequivocal proof of our humility to talk even of our defects, that while we make *self* the subject, in whatever way, self-love contrives to be gratified, and will even be content that our faults should be talked of, rather than that we should not be talked of at all. Some are also attacked with such proud fits of humility, that while they are ready to accuse themselves of almost every sin in the lump, they yet take fire at the imputation of the slightest *individual* fault; and instantly enter upon their own vindication as warmly as if you, and not themselves, had brought forward the charge. The truth is, they ventured to condemn themselves, in the full confi-

dence that you would contradict their self-accusation; the last thing they intended was that you should believe them, and they are never so much piqued and disappointed as when they are taken at their word.

Of the various shapes and undefined forms into which vanity branches out in conversation, there is no end. Out of a restless desire to please, grows the spurious desire to astonish: from vanity as much as from credulity, arises that strong love of the marvellous, with which the conversation of the ill-educated abounds. Hence that fondness for dealing in narratives hardly within the compass of possibility. Here vanity has many shades of gratification; those shades will be stronger or weaker, whether the relater chance to have been an eye-witness of the wonder she recounts; or whether she claim only the second-hand renown of its having happened to her friend, or the still remoter celebrity of its having been witnessed only by her friend's friend:

friend : but even though that friend only knew the man, who remembered the woman, who actually beheld the thing which is now causing admiration in the company, still *self*, though in a fainter degree, is brought into notice, and the relater contrives in some circuitous way to be connected with the wonder.

To correct this propensity “to elevate “and surprise,” it would be well in mixed society to abstain altogether from hazarding stories, which though they may not be absolutely false, yet lying without the verge of probability, are apt to impeach the credit of the narrator ; in whom the very consciousness that she is not believed, excites an increased eagerness to depart still farther from the soberness of truth, and induces a habit of vehement asseveration, which is too often called in to help out a questionable point †.

There

* The Rehearfal.

† This is also a good rule in composition. An event, though it may actually have happened, yet if it

There is another shape, and a very deformed shape it is, in which loquacious vanity shews itself; I mean the betraying of confidence. Though the act be treacherous, yet the fault, in the first instance, is not treachery, but vanity. It does not so often spring from the mischievous desire of divulging a secret, as from the pride of having been trusted with it. It is the secret inclination of mixing *self* with whatever is important. The secret would be of little value, if the revealing it did not serve to intimate *our* connexion with it; the pleasure of its having been deposited with us would be nothing, if others may not know it has been so deposited.—When we continue to see the variety of serious evils this

it be out of the reach of probability, or contrary to the common course of nature, will seldom be chosen as a subject by a writer of good taste; for he knows that a probable fiction will interest the feelings more than an unlikely truth. Verisimilitude is indeed the poet's truth, but the truth of the moralist is of a more sturdy growth.

principle involves, shall we persist in asserting that vanity is a slender mischief?

There is one offence committed in conversation of much too serious a nature to be overlooked, or to be animadverted on without sorrow and indignation: I mean, the habitual and thoughtless profaneness of those who are repeatedly invoking their Maker's name on occasions the most trivial. It is offensive in all its variety of aspects;—it is very pernicious in its *effects*;—it is a *growing* evil;—those who are most guilty of it, are from habit hardly conscious when they do it; are not aware of the sin; and for both these reasons, without the admonitions of faithful friendship, little likely to discontinue it.—It is utterly INEXCUSABLE;—it has none of the palliatives of *temptation* which other vices plead, and in that respect stands distinguished from all others both in its nature and degree of guilt.—Like many other sins, however, it is at once cause and effect; it *proceeds* from want of love

love and reverence to the best of Beings, and *causes* that want both in themselves and others. Yet with all those aggravations, there is, perhaps, hardly any sin so frequently committed, so seldom repented of, and so little guarded against. On the score of *impropriety* too, it is additionally offensive, as being utterly repugnant to female delicacy, which often affects to be shocked at swearing in a man. Now this species of profaneness is not only swearing, but, perhaps, in some respects, swearing of the worst sort; as it is a *direct* breach of an express command, and offends against the *very letter* of that law which says in so many words, THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD THY GOD IN VAIN. It offends against *delicacy* and *good breeding*; for those who commit it, little think of the pain they are inflicting on the sober mind, which is deeply wounded when it hears the holy name it loves dishonoured; and it is as contrary to good breeding to give pain, as

it is to true piety to be profane. It is astonishing that the refined and elegant should not reprobate this practice for its coarseness as much as the pious abhor it for its sinfulness.

I would endeavour to give some faint idea of the grossness of this offence, by an analogy, (oh ! how inadequate !) with which the feeling heart, even though not seasoned with religion, may be touched. To such I would earnestly say :—Suppose you had some beloved friend,—to put the case still more strongly, a departed friend—a revered parent, perhaps,—whose image never occurs without awaking in your bosom sentiments of tender love and lively gratitude ; how would you feel if you heard this honoured name *bandied about* with unfeeling familiarity and indecent levity ; or at best, thrust into every pause of speech as a vulgar expletive ? Does not your affectionate heart recoil at the thought ? And yet the hallowed name of your truest Benefactor, your heavenly Father,

Father, your best Friend, who gives you all you enjoy, those very friends in whom you so much delight, those very talents with which you dishonour him, that very speech with which you blaspheme him, is treated with an irreverence, a contempt, a wantonness, with which you cannot bear the very thought or mention of treating a human friend. His name is impiously, is unfeelingly, is ungratefully singled out as the object of decided irreverence, of systematic contempt, of thoughtless levity. It is used indiscriminately to express anger, joy, grief, surprize, impatience; and what is almost still more unpardonable than all, it is wantonly used as a mere unmeaning expletive, which, being excited by no temptation, can have nothing to extenuate it; which, causing no emotion, can have nothing to recommend it, unless it be the pleasure of the sin.

Among the deep, but less obvious mischiefs of conversation, *misrepresentation* must not be overlooked. Self-love is

continually at work, to give to all we say a bias in our own favour. The counter-action of this fault should be set about in the earliest stages of education. If young persons have not been discouraged in the natural, but evil, propensity to relate every dispute they have had with others to their own advantage; if they have not been trained to the duty of doing justice even to those with whom they are at variance; if they have not been led to aim at a complete impartiality in their little narratives, and instructed never to take advantage of the absence of the other party, in order to make the story lean to their own side more than the truth will admit; how shall we in advanced life look for correct habits, for unprejudiced representations, for fidelity, accuracy, and unbiassed justice?

Yet, how often in society, otherwise respectable, are we pained with narrations in which prejudice warps, and self-love blinds! How often do we see, that withholding

holding part of a truth answers the worst ends of a falsehood! How often regret the unfair turn given to a business, by placing a sentiment in one point of view, which the speaker had used in another! the letter of truth preserved where its spirit is violated! a superstitious exactness scrupulously maintained in the underparts of a detail, in order to impress such an idea of integrity as shall gain credit, while the leading principle is designedly misstated! nay, a new character given to a fact by a different look, tone, or emphasis, which alters it as much as words could have done! the false impression of a sermon conveyed, when we do not like the preacher, or when through him we wish to make religion itself ridiculous! the avoiding of literal untruths, while the mischief is better effected by the unfair quotation of a passage divested of its context; the bringing together detached portions of a subject, and making those parts ludicrous, when connected, which were perfect

in their distinct position! the insidious use made of a sentiment by representing it as the *opinion* of him who had only brought it forward in order to expose it! the relating opinions which had merely been put hypothetically, as if they were the avowed principles of him we would discredit! that subtle falsehood which is so made to incorporate with a certain quantity of truth, that the most skilful moral chemist cannot analyse or separate them! for a good *misrepresenter* knows that a successful lie must have a certain infusion of truth, or it will not go down. And this amalgamation is the test of his skill; for too *much* truth would defeat the end of his mischief; and too *little* would destroy the belief of the hearer. All that indefinable ambiguity and equivocation; all that prudent deceit, which is rather implied than expressed; those more delicate artifices of the school of Loyala and of Chesterfield, which allow us when we dare not deny a truth, yet so to disguise
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and discolour it, that the truth we relate shall not resemble the truth we heard! These and all the thousand shades of simulation and dissimulation will be carefully guarded against in the conversation of vigilant Christians.

Again, it is surprising to mark the common deviations from strict veracity which spring, not from enmity to truth, not from intentional deceit, not from malevolence or envy, or the least design to injure, but from mere levity, habitual inattention, and a current notion that it is not worth while to be correct in small things. But here the doctrine of habits comes in with great force, and in that view no error is small. The cure of this disease in its more inveterate stages being next to impossible, its prevention ought to be one of the earliest objects of education *.

The grievous fault of gross and obvious detraction which infects conversation, has been so heavily and so justly condemned

* See the Chapter on the Use of Definitions.

by divines and moralists, that the subject is exhausted. But there is an error of an opposite complexion, which we have before noticed, and against which the peculiar temper of the times requires that young ladies of a better cast should be guarded. From the narrowness of their own sphere of observation, they are sometimes addicted to accuse of uncharitableness, that distinguishing judgment which, resulting from a sound penetration and a zeal for truth, forbids persons of a very correct principle to be indiscriminately prodigal of commendation without inquiry, and without distinction. There is an affectation of candour, which is almost as mischievous as calumny itself; nay, if it be less injurious in its individual application, it is, perhaps, more alarming in its general principle, as it lays waste the strong fences which separate good from evil. They know as a general principle, (though they sometimes calumniate,) that calumny is wrong; but they have not been told

told that flattery is wrong also; and youth, being apt to fancy that the direct contrary to wrong must necessarily be right, are apt to be driven into violent extremes. The dread of being only suspected of one fault, makes them actually guilty of the other; and to avoid the charge of harshness or of envy, they plunge into insincerity and falsehood. In this they are actuated either by an unsound judgment which does not see what is right, or an unsound principle which prefers what is wrong.

In this age of high-minded independence, when our youth are apt to set up for themselves, and every man is too much disposed to be his own legislator without looking, as his standard, to the established law of the land; and to set up for his own divine, without looking to the revealed will of God—by a candour equally vicious with our vanity, we are also complaisantly led to *give the latitude we take*: and it is become too frequent a phrase in the mouths
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of our *tolerating* young ladies, when speaking of their more erring and misled acquaintance, to offer for them this flimsy vindication, “that what they do is right
“if it appear right to *them*.”—“if *they*
“see the thing in that light, and act up to
“it with sincerity, they cannot be materi-
“ally wrong.” But the standard of truth, justice, and religion, must neither be elevated nor depressed, in order to accommodate it to actual circumstances; it must never be lowered to palliate error, to justify folly, or to vindicate vice. Good-natured young people often speak favourably of unworthy, or extravagantly of common characters, from one of these motives; either their own views of excellence are low, or they speak respectfully of the undeserving, to purchase for themselves the reputation of tenderness and generosity; or they lavish unsparing praise on almost all alike, in the insidious hope of buying back universal commendation in return; or in those captivating characters in which
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the simple and masculine language of truth is sacrificed to the jargon of affected softness; and in which smooth and pliant manners are substituted for intrinsic worth, the inexperienced are too apt to *suppose* virtues, and to *forgive* vices. But they should carefully guard against the error of making *manner* the criterion of merit, and of giving unlimited credit to strangers for possessing every perfection, only because they bring into company the engaging exterior of urbanity and alluring gentleness. They should also remember that it is an easy, but not an honest way of obtaining the praise of candour, to get into the soft and popular habit of saying of all their acquaintance, when speaking of them, that *they are so good!* True Christian candour conceals faults, but it does not invent virtues. It tenderly forbears to expose the evil which may belong to a character, but it dares not ascribe to it the good which does not exist. To correct this propensity to false judgment

and insincerity, it would be well to bear in mind, that while every good action, come from what source it may, and every good quality, be it found in whomsoever it will, deserves its fair proportion of distinct and willing commendation; yet no character is good in the true sense of the word which is NOT RELIGIOUS.

In fine—to recapitulate what has been said, with some additional hints:—Study to promote both intellectual and moral improvement in conversation; labour to bring into it a disposition to bear with others, and to be watchful over yourself; keep out of sight any prominent talent of your own, which, if indulged, might discourage or oppress the feeble-minded. If you know any one present to possess any particular weakness or infirmity, never exercise your wit by maliciously inventing occasions which may lead her to expose or betray it; but give as favourable a turn as you can to the follies which appear, and kindly help her to keep the

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rest

rest out of sight. Never gratify your own humour, by hazarding what you suspect may wound any one present in their persons, connections, professions in life, or religious opinions; and do not forget to examine whether the laugh your wit has raised be never bought at this expence. Give credit to those who, without your kindness, will get none; do not talk *at* any one whom you dare not talk *to*, unless from motives in which the golden rule will bear you out. Seek neither to shine nor to triumph; and if you seek to please, take care that it be in order to convert the influence you may gain by pleasing, to the good of others. Cultivate true politeness, for it grows out of true principle, and is consistent with the Gospel of Christ; but avoid those feigned attentions which are not stimulated by goodwill, and those stated professions of fondness which are not dictated by esteem. Remember, that the praise of being thought *amiable* by strangers, may be bought

bought too dear, if it be bought at the expence of truth and simplicity: remember, that Simplicity is the first charm in manner, as Truth is in mind; and could Truth make herself visible, she would appear invested in Simplicity.

Remember also, that true good nature is the soul, of which politeness is only the garb. It is not that artificial quality which is taken up by many when they go into society, in order to charm those whom it is not their particular business to please; and is laid down when they return home to those to whom to appear amiable is a real duty. It is not that fascinating but deceitful softness, which after having acted over a hundred scenes of the most lively sympathy and tender interest with every slight acquaintance; after having exhausted every phrase of feeling, for the trivial sicknesses or petty sorrows of multitudes who are scarcely known, leaves it doubtful whether a grain of real feeling or genuine sympathy be reserved

reserved for the dearest connections ; and which dismisses a woman to her immediate friends with little affection, and to her own family with little attachment.

True good-nature, that which alone deserves the name, is not a holiday ornament, but an every-day habit. It does not consist in servile complaisance, or dishonest flattery, or affected sympathy, or unqualified assent, or unwarrantable compliance, or eternal smiles. Before it can be allowed to rank with the virtues, it must be wrought up from a humour into a principle, from an occasional disposition into a habit. It must be the result of an equal and well-governed mind, not the start of casual gaiety, the trick of designing vanity, or the whim of capricious fondness. It is compounded of kindness, forbearance, forgiveness, and self-denial ; " it seeketh not its own," but must be capable of making continual sacrifices of its own tastes, humours, and self-

self-love ; but among the sacrifices it makes, it must never include its integrity. Politeness on the one hand, and insensibility on the other, assume its name, and wear its honours ; but they assume the honours of a triumph, without the merit of a victory ; for politeness subdues nothing, and insensibility has nothing to subdue. Good-nature of the true cast, and under the foregoing regulations, is above all price in the common intercourse of domestic society ; for an ordinary quality, which is constantly brought into action by the perpetually recurring though minute events of daily life, is of higher value than more brilliant qualities which are more seldom called into use. Small pieces of ordinary current coin are of more importance in the commerce of the world than the medals of the antiquary. And, indeed, Christianity has given that new turn to the character of all the virtues, that perhaps it is the best
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test of the excellence of many that they have little brilliancy in them. The Christian Religion has degraded some splendid qualities from the rank they held, and elevated those which were obscure into distinction.

CHAP. XV.

On the Danger of an ill-directed Sensibility.

IN considering the human character with a view to its improvement, it is prudent to endeavour to discover the natural bent of the mind, and having found it, to direct your force against that side on which the warp lies, that you may lessen by counteraction the defect which you might be promoting, by applying your aid in a contrary direction. But the misfortune is, people who mean better than they judge are apt to take up a set of general rules, good perhaps in themselves, and originally gleaned from experience and observation on the nature of human things, but not applicable in all cases. These rules they keep by them as nostrums of universal efficacy, which they therefore often bring out for use

use in cases to which they do not apply. For to make any remedy effectual, it is not enough to know the medicine, you must study the constitution also; if there be not a congruity between the two, you may be injuring one patient by the means which are requisite to raise and restore another, whose temperament is of a contrary description.

It is of importance in forming the female character, that those on whom this task devolves should possess so much penetration as accurately to discern the degree of sensibility, and so much judgment as to accommodate the treatment to the individual character. By constantly stimulating and extolling feelings naturally quick, those feelings will be rendered too acute and irritable. On the other hand, a calm and equable temper will become obtuse by the total want of excitement: the former treatment converts the feelings into a source of error, agitation, and calamity; the latter starves their native energy, deadens the affections, and produces a cold,

dull, selfish spirit; for the human mind is an instrument which will lose its sweetness if strained too high, and will be deprived of its tone and strength if not sufficiently raised.

It is cruel to chill the precious sensibility of an ingenuous soul, by treating with supercilious coldness and unfeeling ridicule every indication of a warm, tender, disinterested, and enthusiastic spirit, as if it exhibited symptoms of a deficiency in understanding or prudence. How many are apt to intimate, with a smile of mingled pity and contempt, in considering such a character, that when she knows the world, that is, in other words, when she shall be grown cunning, selfish, and suspicious, she will be ashamed of her present glow of honest warmth, and of her lovely susceptibility of heart. May she never know the world, if the knowledge of it must be acquired at such an expence! But to sensible hearts, every indication of genuine feeling will be dear,
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for they well know that it is this temper which, by the guidance of the Divine Spirit, may make her one day become more enamoured of the beauty of holiness; which, with the co-operation of principle, and under its direction, will render her the lively agent of Providence in diminishing the misery that is in the world; into which misery this temper will give her a quicker intuition than colder characters possess. It is this temper which, when it is touched and purified by a "live coal from the altar *," will give her a keener taste for the spirit of religion, and a quicker zeal in discharging its duties. But let it be remembered likewise, that as there is no quality in the female character which more raises its tone, so there is none which will be so likely to endanger the peace, and to expose the virtue of the possessor; none which requires to have its luxuriancies more carefully watched, and its wild shoots more closely lopped,

* Isaiah, vi. 6.

For young women of affections naturally warm, but not carefully disciplined, are in danger of incurring an unnatural irritability; and while their happiness falls a victim to the excess of uncontrolled feelings, they are liable at the same time to indulge a vanity of all others the most preposterous, that of being vain of their very defect. They have heard sensibility highly commended, without having heard any thing of those bounds and fences which were intended to confine it, and without having been imbued with that principle which would have given it a beneficial direction. Conscious that they possess the quality itself in the extreme, and not aware that they want all that makes that quality safe and delightful, they plunge headlong into those sins and miseries from which they conceitedly and ignorantly imagine, that not principle but coldness has preserved the more sober-minded and well-instructed of their sex,

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But as it would be foreign to the present design to expatiate on those criminal excesses which are some of the sad effects of ungoverned passion, it is only intended here to hazard a few remarks on those lighter consequences of it which consist in the loss of comfort without ruin of character, and the privation of much of the happiness of life without involving any very censurable degree of guilt or discredit. Let it, however, be incidentally remarked, and let it be carefully remembered, that if no women have risen so high in the scale of moral excellence as those whose natural warmth has been conscientiously governed by its true guide, and directed to its true end; so none have furnished such deplorable instances of extreme depravity as those who, through the ignorance or the dereliction of principle, have been abandoned by the excess of this very temper to the violence of ungoverned passions and uncontrolled inclinations. Perhaps, if we were to inquire into the remote cause
of

of some of the blackest crimes which stain the annals of mankind, profligacy, murder, and especially suicide, we might trace them back to this original principle, an ungoverned Sensibility.

Notwithstanding all the fine theories in prose and verse to which this topic has given birth, it will be found that very exquisite sensibility contributes so little to *happiness*, and may yet be made to contribute so much to *usefulness*, that it may, perhaps, be considered as bestowed for an exercise to the possessor's own virtue, and at the same time, as a keen instrument with which he may better work for the good of others.

Women of this cast of mind are less careful to avoid the charge of unbounded extremes, than to escape at all events the imputation of insensibility. They are little alarmed at the danger of *exceeding*, though terrified at the suspicion of *coming short*, of what they take to be the extreme point of feeling. They will even resolve to
prove

prove the warmth of their sensibility, though at the expence of their judgment, and sometimes also of their justice. Even when they earnestly desire to *be* and to *do* right, they are apt to employ the wrong instrument to accomplish the right end. They employ the passions to do the work of the judgment; forgetting, or not knowing, that the passions were not given us to be used in the search and discovery of truth, which is the office of a cooler and more discriminating faculty; but that they were given to animate us to warmer zeal in the pursuit and practice of truth, when the judgment shall have pointed out what *is* truth.

Through this natural warmth, which they have been justly told is so pleasing, but which, perhaps, they have not been told will be continually exposing them to peril and to suffering, their joys and sorrows are excessive. Of this extreme irritability, as was before remarked, the ill-educated learn to boast as if it were a decided

cided indication of superiority of soul, instead of labouring to restrain it as the excess of a temper which ceases to be amiable, when it is no longer under the control of the governing faculty. It is misfortune enough to be born more liable to suffer and to sin, from this conformation of mind; it is too much to nourish the evil by unrestrained indulgence; it is still worse to be proud of so misleading a quality.

Flippancy, impetuosity, resentment, and violence of spirit, grow out of this disposition, which will be rather promoted than corrected, by the system of education on which we have been animadverting; in which system, emotions are too early and too much excited, and tastes and feelings are considered as too exclusively making up the whole of the female character; in which the judgment is little exercised, the reasoning powers are seldom brought into action, and self-knowledge and self-denial scarcely included.

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The propensity of mind which we are considering, if unchecked, lays its possessors open to unjust prepossessions, and exposes them to all the danger of unfounded attachments. In early youth, not only love at first sight, but also friendship, of the same sudden growth, springs up from an ill-directed sensibility; and in after-life, women under the powerful influence of this temper, conscious that they have much to be borne with, are too readily inclined to select for their confidential connections, flexible and flattering companions, who will indulge and perhaps admire their faults, rather than firm and honest friends, who will reprove and would assist in curing them. We may adopt it as a general maxim, that an obliging, weak, yielding, complaisant friend, full of small attentions, with little religion, little judgment, and much natural acquiescence and civility, is a most dangerous, though generally a too much desired confidante: she soothes the indolence, and gratifies the vanity of her friend, by re-

conciling her to her faults, while she neither keeps the understanding nor the virtues of that friend in exercise; but withholds from her every useful truth, which by opening her eyes might give her pain. These obsequious qualities are the "soft green" on which the soul loves to repose itself. But it is not a refreshing or a wholesome repose: we should not select, for the sake of present ease, a soothing flatterer, who will lull us into a pleasing oblivion of our failings, but a friend who, valuing our soul's health above our immediate comfort, will rouse us from torpid indulgence to animation, vigilance, and virtue.

An ill-directed sensibility also leads a woman to be injudicious and eccentric in her *charities*; she will be in danger of proportioning her bounty to the immediate effect which the distressed object produces on her senses: and she will be

* Burke's "Sublime and Beautiful."

more liberal to a small distress presenting itself to her own eyes, than to the more pressing wants and better claims of those miseries of which she only hears the relation. There is a sort of stage-effect which some people require for their charities; she will be apt also to desire, that the object of her compassion shall have something interesting and amiable in it, such as shall furnish pleasing images and lively pictures to her imagination, and engaging subjects for description; forgetting, that in her charities, as well as in every thing else, she is to be a "follower of Him who pleased not himself;" forgetting, that the most coarse and disgusting object is as much the representative of Him, who said, "Inasmuch as ye do it to one of the least of these, ye do it unto me," as the most interesting: nay, the more uninviting and repulsive cases may be better tests of the principle on which we relieve, than those which abound in pathos and interest, as we can have

have less suspicion of our motive in the latter case than in the former. But, while we ought to neglect neither of these supposed cases, yet the less our feelings are caught by pleasing circumstances, the less will be the danger of our indulging self-complacency, and the more likely shall we be to do what we do for the sake of Him who has taught us, that no deeds but what are performed on that principle "shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

But through the want of that governing principle which should direct her sensibility, a tender-hearted woman, whose hand, if she be actually surrounded with scenes and circumstances to call it into action, is

Open as day to melting charity ;
nevertheless may utterly fail in the great and comprehensive duty of Christian love, for she has feelings which are acted upon solely by local circumstances and present events.

events. Only remove her into another scene, distant from the wants she has been relieving; place her in the lap of indulgence, so entrenched with ease and pleasure, so immersed in the softness of life, that distress no longer finds any access to her presence, but through the faint and dull medium of a distant representation: remove her from the sight and sound of that misery, which, when present, so tenderly affected her—she now forgets that misery exists; as she hears but little, and sees nothing of want and sorrow, she is ready to fancy that the world is grown happier than it was: in the meantime, with a quiet conscience and a thoughtless vanity, she has been lavishing on superfluities that money which she would cheerfully have given to a charitable cause, had she not forgotten that any such were in existence, because *Pleasure* had blocked up the avenues through which misery used to find its way to her heart; and now, when again such a cause forces itself

into her presence, she laments with real sincerity that the money is gone which should have relieved it.

In the meantime, perhaps, other women of less natural sympathy, but whose sympathies are under better regulation, or who act from a principle which requires little stimulus, have, by an habitual course of self-denial, by a constant determination to refuse themselves unnecessary indulgencies, and by guarding against that dissolving PLEASURE which melts down the firmest virtue that allows itself to bask in its beams, have been quietly furnishing a regular provision for miseries, which their knowledge of the state of the world teaches them are everywhere to be found, and which their obedience to the will of God tells them it is their duty both to find out and to relieve; a general expectation of being liable to be called upon for acts of charity, will lead the conscientiously charitable always to be prepared.

On

On such a mind as we have been describing, *Novelty* also will operate with peculiar force, and in nothing more than in the article of charity. Old established institutions, whose continued existence must depend on the continued bounty of that affluence to which they owed their origin, will be sometimes neglected, as presenting no variety to the imagination, as having by their uniformity ceased to be interesting, there is now a total failure of those springs of mere sensitive feeling which set the charity a-going, and those sudden emotions of tenderness and gusts of pity, which once were felt, must now be excited by newer forms of distress.—As age comes on, that charity which has been the effect of mere feeling, grows cold and rigid; this hardness is also increased by the frequent disappointments charity has experienced in its too high expectations of the gratitude and subsequent merit of those it has relieved; and by withdrawing its bounty,

1 2

because

because some of its objects have been undeserving, it gives clear proof that what it bestowed was for its own gratification; and now finding that self-complacency at an end, it bestows no longer. Probably too the cause of so much disappointment may have been, that ill choice of the objects to which feeling, rather than a discriminating judgment, has led. The summer showers of mere sensibility soon dry up, while the living spring of Christian charity flows alike in all seasons.

The impatience, levity, and fickleness, of which women have been somewhat too generally accused, are perhaps in no small degree aggravated by the littleness and frivolousness of female pursuits. The sort of education they commonly receive, teaches girls to set a great price on small things. Besides this, they do not always learn to keep a very correct scale of degrees for rating the value of the objects of their admiration and attachment; but by a kind of unconscious idolatry, they rather make
a merit

a merit of loving *supremely* things and persons which ought to be loved with moderation and in a subordinate degree the one to the other. Unluckily, they consider moderation as so necessarily indicating a cold heart and narrow soul, and they look upon a state of indifference with so much horror, that either to love or hate with energy is supposed by them to proceed from a higher state of mind than is possessed by more steady and equable characters. Whereas it is in fact the criterion of a warm but well directed sensibility, that while it is capable of loving with energy, it must be enabled, by the judgment which governs it, to suit and adjust its degree of interest to the nature and excellence of the object about which it is interested; for unreasonable prepossession, disproportionate attachment, and capricious or precarious fondness, is not sensibility.

Excessive but unintentional *flattery* is another fault into which a strong sensibility

bility is in danger of leading its possessor. A tender heart and a warm imagination conspire to throw a sort of radiance round the object of their love, till they are dazzled by a brightness of their own creating. The worldly and fashionable borrow the warm language of sensibility without having the really warm feeling; and young ladies get such a habit of saying, and especially of writing, such over obliging and flattering things to each other, that this mutual politeness, aided by the self-love so natural to us all, and by an unwillingness to search into our own hearts, keeps up the illusion, and we get a habit of taking our character from the good we *bear* of ourselves, which others assume, but do not very well know, rather than from the evil we *feel* in ourselves, and which we therefore ought to be too thoroughly acquainted with to take our opinion of ourselves from what we hear from others.

Ungoverned sensibility is apt to give a wrong direction to its anxieties; and its affection often falls short of the true end of friendship. If the object of its regard happen to be sick, what inquiries! what prescriptions! what an accumulation is made of cases in which the remedy its fondness suggests has been successful! What an unaffected tenderness for the perishing body! Yet is this sensibility equally alive to the immortal interests of the sufferer? Is it not silent and at ease when it contemplates the dearest friend persisting in opinions essentially dangerous; in practices unquestionably wrong? Does it not view all this, not only without a generous ardour to point out the peril, and rescue the friend; but if that friend be supposed to be dying, does it not even make it the *criterion* of kindness to let her die undeceived? What a want of true sensibility, to feel for the pain, but not for the danger of those we love! Now see what sort of sensibility the Bible

teaches! "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart, but thou shalt in any wise rebuke him, and shalt not suffer sin upon him *." But let that tenderness which shrinks from the idea of exposing what it loves to a momentary pang, figure to itself the bare possibility, that the object of its own fond affection may not be the object of the Divine favour! Let it shrink from the bare conjecture, that "the familiar friend" "with whom it has taken sweet counsel," is going down to the gates of death, unrepenting, unprepared, and yet unwarned.

But mere human sensibility goes a shorter way to work. Not being able to give its friend the pain of hearing her faults or of knowing her danger, it works itself up into the quieting delusion that no danger exists, at least not for the objects of its own affection; it gratifies itself by inventing a salvation so comprehensive as shall take in all itself loves with all their faults;

* Leviticus, xix. 17.

it creates to its own fond heart an ideal and exaggerated divine mercy, which shall pardon and receive all in whom this blind sensibility has an interest, whether they be good or whether they be evil.

In regard to its application to religious purposes, it is a test that sensibility has received its true direction when it is supremely turned to the love of God: for to possess an overflowing fondness for our fellow-creatures and fellow-sinners, and to be cold and insensible to the Essence of goodness and perfection, is an inconsistency to which the feeling heart is awfully liable. God has himself the first claim to the sensibility he bestowed. "He *first* loved us:" this is a *natural* cause of love. "He loved us while we were sinners:" this is a *supernatural* cause. He continues to love us though we neglect his favours, and slight his mercies: this would wear out any earthly kindness. He forgives us, not petty neglects, not occasional slights, but grievous sins, repeated

peated offences, broken vows, and unrequited love. What human friendship performs offices so calculated to touch the soul of sensibility?

Those young women in whom feeling is indulged to the exclusion of reason and examination, are peculiarly liable to be the dupes of prejudice, rash decisions, and false judgment. The understanding having but little power over the will, their affections are not well poised, and their minds are kept in a state ready to be acted upon by the fluctuations of alternate impulses; by sudden and varying impressions; by casual and contradictory circumstances; and by emotions excited by every accident. Instead of being guided by the broad views of general truth, and having one fixed principle, they are driven on by the impetuosity of the moment. And this impetuosity blinds the judgment as much as it misleads the conduct; so that for want of a habit of cool investigation and inquiry, they meet every event with-

out any previously formed opinion or rule of action. And as they do not accustom themselves to appreciate the real value of things, their attention is as likely to be led away by the under parts of a subject, as to seize on the leading feature. The same eagerness of mind which hinders the operation of the discriminating faculty, leads also to the error of determining on the rectitude of an action by its success, and to that of making the event of an undertaking decide on its justice or propriety: it also leads to that superficial and erroneous way of judging which fastens on exceptions, if they make in one's own favour, as grounds of reasoning, while they lead us to overlook received and general rules which tend to establish a doctrine contrary to our wishes.

Open-hearted, indiscreet girls, often pick up a few strong notions, which are as false in themselves as they are popular among the class in question: such as, "that warm friends must make warm enemies ;"

“enemies;”—that “the generous love and
“hate with all their hearts;—that “a
“reformed rake makes the best husband;”—
—that “there is no medium in marriage,
“but that it is a state of exquisite happi-
“ness or exquisite misery;” with many
other doctrines of equal currency and
equal soundness! These they consider as
axioms, and adopt as rules of life. From
the two first of these oracular sayings, girls
are in no small danger of becoming unjust
through the very warmth of their hearts:
for they will get a habit of making their
estimate of the good or ill qualities of
others, merely in proportion to the greater
or less degree of kindness which they
themselves have received from them.
Their estimation of general character is
thus formed on insulated and partial
grounds; on the accidental circumstance
of personal predilection or personal pique.
Kindness to themselves or their friends in-
volves all possible excellence; neglect, all
imaginable defects. Friendship and grati-
tude

rude can and should go a great way; but as they cannot convert vice into virtue, so they ought never to convert truth into falsehood. And it may be the more necessary to be upon our guard in this instance, because the very idea of gratitude may mislead us, by converting injustice into the semblance of a virtue. Warm expressions should therefore be limited to the conveying a sense of our own individual obligations which are real, rather than employed to give an impression of general excellence in the person who has obliged us, which may be imaginary. A good man is still good, though it may not have fallen in his way to oblige or serve *us*, nay, though he may have neglected, or even unintentionally hurt us: and sin is still sin, though committed by the person in the world to whom we are the most obliged, and whom we most love.

We come next to that fatal and most indelicate, nay gross maxim, that “a re-
“formed rake makes the best husband;”

an aphorism to which the principles and the happiness of so many young women have been sacrificed. It goes upon the preposterous supposition, not only that effects do not follow causes, but that they oppose them; on the supposition, that habitual vice creates rectitude of character, and that sin produces happiness: thus flatly contradicting what the moral government of God uniformly exhibits in the course of human events, and what Revelation so evidently and universally teaches.

For it should be observed, that the reformation is generally, if not always supposed to be brought about by the all-conquering force of female charms. Let but a profligate young man have a point to carry by winning the affections of a vain and thoughtless girl; he will begin his attack upon her heart by undermining her religious principles, and artfully removing every impediment which might have obstructed her receiving the addresses of a man without character. And while

while he will lead her not to hear without ridicule the mention of that change of heart which Scripture teaches and experience proves that the power of Divine grace can work on a vicious character; while he will teach her to sneer at a change which he would treat with contempt, because he denies the possibility of so strange and miraculous a conversion; yet he will not scruple to swear, that the power of her beauty has worked a revolution in his own loose practices which is equally complete and instantaneous.

But supposing it possible that his reformation were genuine, it would even then by no means involve the truth of her proposition, that past libertinism infures future felicity; yet many a weak girl, confirmed in this palatable doctrine by examples she has frequently admired of those surprising reformations so conveniently effected in the last scene of most of our comedies, has not scrupled to risk her earthly and eternal happiness with a
man,

man, who is not ashamed to ascribe to the influence of her beauty that power of changing the heart which he impiously denies to Omnipotence itself.

As to the last of these practical aphorisms, that "there is no medium in marriage, but that it is a state of exquisite happiness or exquisite misery;" this, though not equally sinful, is equally delusive: for marriage is only one modification of human life, and human life is not commonly in itself a state of exquisite extremes; but is for the most part that mixed and moderate state, so naturally dreaded by those who set out with fancying this world a state of rapture, and so naturally expected by those who know it to be a state of probation and discipline. Marriage, therefore, is only one condition, and often the best condition, of that imperfect state of being which, though seldom very exquisite, is often very tolerable; and which may yield much comfort to those who do not look for constant transport.

transport. But unfortunately, those who find themselves disappointed of the unceasing raptures they had anticipated in marriage, disdaining to sit down with so poor a provision as comfort, and scorning the acceptance of that moderate lot which Providence commonly bestows with a view to check despondency and to repress presumption; give themselves up to the other alternative; and, by abandoning their hearts to discontent, make to themselves that misery with which their fervid imaginations had filled the opposite scale.

The truth is, these young ladies are very apt to pick up their opinions, less from the divines than the poets; and the poets, though it must be confessed they are some of the best embellishers of life, are not *quite* the safest conductors through it. In travelling through a wilderness, though we avail ourselves of the harmony of singing-birds to render the grove delightful, yet we never think of

following them as guides to conduct as through its labyrinths.

Those women, in whom the natural defects of a warm temper have been strengthened by an education which fosters their faults, are very dextrous in availing themselves of a hint, when it favours a ruling inclination, soothes vanity, indulges indolence, or gratifies their love of power. They have heard so often from their favourite sentimental authors, and their more flattering male friends, “that when
“ Nature denied them strength, she gave
“ them fascinating graces in compensa-
“ tion; that their strength consists in their
“ weakness;” and that “they are en-
“ dowed with arts of persuasion which
“ supply the absence of force, and the
“ place of reason;” that they learn, in time, to pride themselves on that very weakness, and to become vain of their imperfections; till at length they begin to claim for their defects, not only pardon,

but

but admiration. Hence they get to cherish a species of feeling which, if not checked, terminates in excessive selfishness; they learn to produce their inability to bear contradiction as a proof of their tenderness; and to indulge in that sort of irritability in all that relates to themselves, which inevitably leads to the utter exclusion of all interest in the sufferings of others. Instead of exercising their sensibility in the wholesome duty of relieving distress and visiting scenes of sorrow, that sensibility itself is pleaded as a reason for their not being able to endure sights of woe, and for shunning the distress it should be exerted in removing. That exquisite sense of feeling which God implanted in the heart as a stimulus to quicken us in relieving the miseries of others, is thus introverted, and learns to consider *self* not as the agent, but the object of compassion. Tenderness is made an excuse for being hard-hearted; and instead of drying the weeping eyes of others,

others, this false delicacy reserves its selfish and ready tears for the more elegant and less expensive sorrows of the melting novel or the pathetic tragedy.

When feeling stimulates only to self-indulgence; when the more exquisite affections of sympathy and pity evaporate in sentiment, instead of flowing out in active charity, and affording assistance, protection, or consolation to every species of distress within its reach; it is an evidence that the feeling is of a spurious kind; and instead of being nourished as an amiable tenderness, it should be subdued as a fond and base self-love.

That idleness, to whose cruel inroads many women of fortune are unhappily exposed, from not having been trained to consider wholesome occupation, vigorous exertion, and systematic employment, as making part of the indispensable duties of life, lays them open to a thousand evils of this kind, from which the useful and

the busy are exempted; and, perhaps, it would not be easy to find a more pitiable object than a woman with a great deal of time and a great deal of money on her hands, who, never having been taught the conscientious use of either, squanders both at random, or rather moulders both away, without plan, without principle, and without pleasure: all whose projects begin and terminate in self; who considers the rest of the world only as they may be subservient to her gratification; and to whom it never occurred, that both her time and money were given for the gratification and good of others.

It is not much to the credit of the other sex, that they now and then lend themselves to the indulgence of this selfish spirit in their wives, and cherish by a kind of false fondness those faults which should be combated by good sense and a reasonable counteraction: slothfully preferring a little false peace, the purchase of precarious quiet, and the reputation of good-