

from the books written on this subject by men who, considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers and the understanding of the sex has been so bubbled⁸ by this species of homage, that the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a noble ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect.

In a treatise, therefore, on female rights and manners, the works which have been particularly written for their improvement must not be overlooked especially when it is asserted, in direct terms, that the minds of women enfeebled by false refinement; that the books of instruction, written by authors of genius, have had the same tendency as more frivolous productions of that, in the true style of Mahometanism, they are treated as a kind of subordinate beings,⁹ and not as a part of the human species, when improvement is allowed to be the dignified distinction which raises men above brute creation, and puts a natural sceptre in a feeble hand.

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

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

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

I wish also to steer clear of an error which many respectable writers have fallen into; for the instruction which has hitherto been addressed to

has been applicable to *ladies*, if the little indirect advice, that is scattered through Southey and Merton, be excepted; but, addressing my sex in general, I pay particular attention to those in the middle class, because they are to be in the most natural state.² Perhaps the seeds of falsehood, immorality, and vanity, have ever been shed by the great. Weak beings, raised above the common wants and affections of their race, and in a manner, undermine the very foundation of virtue, and corruption through the whole mass of society! As a class of mankind, we are the strongest claim to pity; the education of the rich tends to make us vain and helpless, and the unfolding mind is not strengthened in the exercise of those duties which dignify the human character.—They are to blame themselves, and by the same law which in nature invariably produces certain effects, they soon only afford barren amusement.

I propose taking a separate view of the different ranks of society, and I have only alluded to the subject, because it appears to me that the moral character of women, in each, this hint is, for the present, very necessary of an introduction to give a cursory account of the work it introduces. I have said, I propose taking a separate view of the different ranks of society, and I have only alluded to the subject, because it appears to me that the moral character of women, in each, this hint is, for the present, very necessary of an introduction to give a cursory account of the work it introduces.

I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, and not as the objects of their *fascinating* graces, and viewing them as if they were of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. I earnestly wish to know what true dignity and human happiness consists—I wish to persuade them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness and inferiority, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt.

Let us then those pretty feminine phrases, which the men condescend to use in order to soften our slavish dependence, and despising that weak and capricious sensibility, and sweet docility of manners, suppose the several characteristics of the weaker vessel, I wish to shew that it is inferior to virtue, that the first object of laudable ambition is to be regarded as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex; and that every view should be brought to this simple touchstone. I will now sketch of my plan; and should I express my conviction that the female mind is capable of the same range of emotions that I feel whenever I think of the subject, the assurance and reflection will be felt by some of my readers, that this important object, I shall disdain to cull my phrases or polish them at being useful, and sincerity will render me unaffected; and I shall not waste my time in rounding periods, or in dazling the vulgar bombast of artificial feelings, which, coming from the heart, will never reach the heart.—I shall be employed about things, not about persons, to render my sex more respectable members of society,

8. Debauched, cheated (archaic).
9. It was a common but mistaken opinion among women that the middle class of society was the most natural state.

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