

I shall try to avoid that flowery diction which has slid from the novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversation.

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

The education of women has, of late, been more attended to than merly; yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied the writers who endeavour by satire or instruction to improve them acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives in ing a smattering of accomplishments;⁴ meanwhile strength of mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of being themselves,—the only way women can rise in the world,—by making such children may be expected to act:—they dress; they paint, and name God's creatures.⁵ Surely these weak beings are only fit for a narrow Can they be expected to govern a family with judgment, or take care poor babes whom they bring into the world?

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

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

Women are, in fact, so much degraded by mistaken notions of female lence, that I do not mean to add a paradox when I assert, that this weakness produces a propensity to tyrannize, and gives birth to cunning natural opponent of strength, which leads them to play off those cunning infantine airs that undermine esteem even whilst they excite desire. Let become more chaste and modest, and if women do not grow wiser in

4. I.e., the lessons in music, dancing, art, and needlework that were central elements in the education provided for genteel young women and that were supposed to enhance their value on the marriage market.

5. Shakespeare's Hamlet, charging Ophelia with the faults characteristic of women, says, "You jig, you amble, and you lurch, and you make waltzing with your

It will be clear that they have weaker understandings. It seems necessary to say, that I now speak of the sex in general. Many individuals more than their male relatives; and, as nothing preponderates there is a constant struggle for an equilibrium, without it has the priority, some women govern their husbands without degradation, because intellect will always govern.

The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed

and excuse the tyranny of man, many ingenious arguments are brought forward to prove, that the two sexes, in the acquirement of virtue, are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to attain at a very different character: or, to speak more truly, that there is but one way appointed by Providence to lead to either virtue or happiness.

Women are not a swarm of ephemeron triflers, why should they be so?—Why under the specious name of innocence? Men complain, and are angry at the follies and caprices of our sex, when they do not keenly feel the headstrong passions and groveling vices.—Behold, I should be glad to see the natural effect of ignorance! The mind will ever be unstable that is not fixed to rest on, and the current will run with destructive fury if there are no barriers to break its force. Women are told from their infancy that they are to be the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of the world is to be their portion, that they are to be obedient, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, *outward* obedience, a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the reputation of man; and should they be beautiful, every thing else is to be added to their charms.

At least, twenty years of their lives. Milton describes our first frail mother; though when he tells us that she was formed for softness and sweet attractive grace,⁸ I cannot comprehend the meaning, unless, in the true Mahometan strain, he meant to deprive her of the faculty of reason, and insinuate that we were beings only designed by sweet attraction and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man when he is in the mood of contemplation.

Why do they insult us who thus advise us only to render ourselves domestic brutes! For instance, the winning softness so warmly, and so justly recommended, that governs by obeying. What childish expression is that?—How insignificant is the being—can it be an immortal one? who is to govern by such sinister methods! 'Certainly,' says Lord Bolingbroke, 'he is a base and ignoble creature!'⁹ Men, indeed, appear to me to be very unphilosophical when they try to secure the good of women by attempting to keep them always in a state of childlike dependence! was more consistent when he wished to stop the progress

1. Throughout his writings Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) argued against the notion that civilization and rationality brought moral perfection. He argued that "For contemplation and sweet softness she and sweet