

THE
MIRROR OF THE
GRACES

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**MIRROR
OF
THE GRACES.**

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON THE SUBJECT.

“Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;
For contemplation he, and valor formed;
For softness she, and sweet attractive grace;
He for God only, she for God in him.”

MILTON.

In discoursing on the degree of consequence, in the scale of creation, that may be allowed to the human body, two extremes are generally adopted. Epicureans, for obvious reasons, exalt our corporeal part to the first rank; and Stoics, by opposite deductions, degrade it to the last. But to neither of these opinions can the writer of these pages concede.

The body is as much a part of the human creature as the mind; by its outward expression, we convey to others a sense of our opinions, hopes, fears, and affections—we communicate love, and we excite it. We enjoy, not only the pleasures of the senses, but the delights which shoot from mind to mind, in the pressure of a hand, the glance of an eye, and the whisper of the heart. Shall we then despise this ready and obedient vehicle of all that passes within the invisible soul? Shall we contemn it as a lump of encumbering clay—as a piece of corruption, fitter for the charnel-house than the bosom of affection?

These ascetic ideas may be consistent with the thankless superstition of the ancient Zenos, or the modern fanatics, who

see neither beauty nor joyfulness in the works of the bounteous Lord of Nature; but the rational and fair-judging mind, which acknowledges “use and decency” in all the Creator’s works, while it turns from the pagan devotion which the libertine pays to his own body, regards that inferior part of himself with the respect which is due to it in consideration of its Maker and its purpose.

“Reverence thyself!” says the philosopher, not only with relation to the mind which directs, but to the body which executes. God created the body, not only for usefulness, but adorned it with loveliness; and what he has made so pleasing, shall we disesteem, and refuse to apply to its admirable destination?—The very approving and innocent complacency we all feel in the contemplation of beauty, whether it be that of a landscape or of a flower, is a sufficient witness that the pleasure which pervades our hearts at the sight of human charms, was planted there by the Divine Framer of all things, as a principle of delight and social attraction. To this end, then, I seek to turn your attention, my fair countrywomen, upon YOURSELVES!—not only to the cultivation of your minds, but to maintain in its intended station that inferior part of yourselves, which mistaken gravity would, on the one hand, lead you to neglect as altogether worthless; and vanity, on the other, incline you too much to cherish, and egregiously to over-value.

From this you will gather, that the PERSON of a woman is the primary subject of this discourse.

Mothers, perhaps, (those estimable mothers who value the souls as the better parts of their daughters,) may start at such a

text. But I call them to recollect, that it is “good all things should be in order!” This is a period when absurdity, bad taste, shamelessness, and self-interest, in the shapes of tire-men and tire-women, have arranged themselves in close siege around the beauty, and even chastity, of your daughters; and to preserve these graces in their original purity, I, a woman of virtue and a Christian, do not think it beneath my dignity to lift my pen.

Dr. Knox will not refuse to be my auxiliary, as a grave auxiliary may be necessary to give consequence to a subject usually deemed so trivial. “Taste requires a congruity between the internal character and the external appearance,” says he; “and the imagination will involuntarily form to itself an idea of such a correspondence. First ideas are in general of considerable consequence; and I should, therefore, think it wise in the female world to take care that their *appearance* should not convey a forbidding idea to the most superficial observer.”

Another author shall speak for me besides this respected moralist. The very High Priest of the Graces, the discriminating Chesterfield, declared, that “a prepossessing exterior is a perpetual letter of recommendation.” To show how different such an exterior is from affectation and extravagance, is one object of these pages; and I hope that my fair and candid readers will, after perusal, lay them down with a conviction that beauty is a blessing, and is to be used with maidenly discretion; that modesty is grace; simplicity elegance; and consistency the charm which rivets the attracted heart of well-judging men.

That you have sought my sentiments on these subjects makes it easier to me to enter into the minute detail I meditate. Indeed, I have ever blamed, as impolitic, the austerity which condemns, without distinction, any attention to personal appearance. It is surely more reasonable to direct the youthful mind to that medium between negligence and nicety which will preserve the person in health and elegance, than, by leaving a young woman ignorant of the real and supposed advantages of these graces, render her liable to learn the truth in the worst way from strangers, who will either insult her aggravated deformity, or teach her to set off her before-obscured charms with, perhaps, meretricious assistance.

It is unjust and dangerous to hold out false lights to young persons; for, finding that their guides have, in one respect, designedly led them astray, they may be led likewise to reject as untrue all else they have been taught; and so nothing but disappointment, error, and rebellion can be the consequence.

Let girls advancing to womanhood be told the true state of the world with which they are to mingle. Let them know its real opinions on the subjects connected with themselves as women, companions, friends, relatives. Hide not from them what society thinks and expects on all these matters; but fail not to show them, at the same time, where the fashions of the day would lead them wrong—where the laws of heaven and man's approving (though not always submitting) reason, would keep them right.

Let religion and morality be the foundation of the female character. The artist may then adorn the structure without any danger to its safety. When a girl is instructed on the great

purposes of her existence,—that she is an immortal being, as well as a mortal woman,—you may, without fearing ill impressions, show her, that as we admire the beauty of the rose, as well as esteem its medicinal power, so her personal charms will be dear in the eyes of him whose heart is occupied by the graces of her yet more estimable mind. We may safely teach a well-educated girl, that virtue ought to wear an inviting aspect—that it is due to her excellence to decorate her comely apparel. But we must never cease to remember that it is VIRTUE we seek to adorn. It must not be a merely beautiful form; for that, if it possess not the charm of intelligence, the bond of rational tenderness, is a frame without a soul—a statue which we look on and admire, pass away and forget. We must impress upon the yet ingenuous maid, that while beauty attracts, its influence is transient, unless it presents itself as the harbinger of that good sense and principle which can alone secure the affection of a husband, the esteem of friends, and the respect of the world. Show her that regularity of features and symmetry of form are not essentials in the composition of the woman whom the wise man would select as the partner of his life. Seek, as an example, some one of your less fair acquaintance, whose sweet disposition, gentle manners, and winning deportment, render her the delight of her kindred, the dear solace of her husband. Show your young and lovely pupil what use this amiable woman has made of her few talents; and then call on her to cultivate her more extraordinary endowments to the glory of her Creator, the honor of her parents, and to the maintenance of her own happiness in both worlds. To do this, requires that her aims should be virtuous, and the means she employs to reach them of the same nature.

We know, from every record under heaven, from the sacred page to that of the heathen world, that woman was made to be the help-mate of man—that, by rendering herself pleasing in his sight, she is the assuager of his pains, the solacer of his wo, the sharer of his joys, the chief agent in the communication of his sublunary bliss. This is beautifully alluded to in the Book of Genesis, where the work of Creation is represented as incomplete, and the felicity of Paradise itself imperfect, till woman was bestowed to consummate its delights:—

“The world was sad! the garden was a wild;
And man, the hermit, sighed—till woman smiled.”

We have all read in the sacred oracles, that “a woman’s desire is unto her husband!” and for that tender relation, the first on earth, (for, before the bonds of relationship, man and woman became a wedded pair,) woman must leave father and mother, and cleave unto him alone. Hence, I shall no longer beg the question, whether it be not right that a chaste maid should adorn herself with the graces of youth and modesty, and, with a sober reference to the duties of her sex, present herself a candidate for the love and protection of manliness and virtue, in the most agreeable manner possible.

By making the fairness of the body the sign of the mind’s purity, man is imperceptibly attracted to the object designed for him by Heaven as the partner of his life, the future mother of his children, and the angel which is to accompany him into eternity. Hence, insignificant as the means may seem, the end is great; and poor as we may choose to consider them, we all feel their effects, and enjoy their sweetness.

Having thus explained my subject, my fair friends will readily perceive, that there cannot be anything hostile to female delicacy in the prosecution of my scheme. I give to woman all her privileges; I allow her the empire of all her personal charms; I will assist her to increase their force: but it must be with a constant reference to their being the ensign of her more estimable mental attractions. She must never suppose that when I insist on attention to person and manners, I forget the mind and heart; or when I commend external grace, that I pass unregarded the internal beauty of the virgin soul.

In order to give a regular and perspicuous elucidation of the several branches of my subject, I shall arrange them under separate heads. Sometimes I may illustrate by observations drawn from abroad, at other times by remarks collected at home. Having been a traveller in my youth, whilst visiting foreign courts with my husband, on an errand connected with the general welfare of nations, I could not overlook the influence which the women of every country hold over the morals and happiness of the opposite sex in every rank and degree.

Fine taste in apparel I have ever seen the companion of pure morals, whilst a licentious style of dress was as certainly the token of the like laxity in manners and conduct. To correct this dangerous fashion, ought to be the study and attempt of every mother—of every daughter—of every woman.

GENERAL REMARKS ON THE MANNERS AND FASHIONS OF THE PAST AND PRESENT TIMES.

“Manners with fortunes, humors turn with climes,
Tenets with books, and principles with times.”

POPE.

When Innocence left the world, astonished man blushed at his own and his partner’s nakedness, and coverings were soon invented. For many an age, the twisted foliage of trees, and the skins of beasts, were the only garments which clothed our ancestors. Decoration was unknown, excepting the wild flower, plucked from the luxuriant shrub, the shell from the beach, or the berry off the tree. Nature was then unsophisticated; and the lover looked for no other attraction in his bride, than the peach-bloom on her cheek—the downcast softness of her consenting eye.

In after times, when Avarice ploughed the earth, and Ambition bestrode it, the gem and the silken fleece, the various product of the loom, and the Tyrian mystery of dyes, all united to give embellishments to beauty, and splendor to majesty of mien. But even at that period, when the east and south laid their decorating riches at the feet of woman, we see, by the sculpture yet remaining to us, that the dames of Greece (the then exemplars of the world) were true to the simple laws of just taste. The amply-folding robe, cast round the harmonious form; the modest clasp and zone on the bosom; the braided hair, or

the veiled head; these were the fashions alike of the wife of a Phocion, and the mistress of an Alcibiades. A chastened taste ruled at their toilets; and from that hour to this, the forms and modes of Greece have been those of the poet, the sculptor, and the painter.

Rome, queen of the world! the proud dictatress to Athenian and Spartan dames, disdained not to array herself in their dignified attire; and the statues of her virgins, her matrons, and her empresses, show, in every portico of her ancient streets, the graceful fashions of her Grecian province.

The irruption of the Goths and Vandals made it needful for women to assume a more repulsive garb. The flowing robe, the easy shape, the soft, unfettered hair, gave place to skirts, shortened for flight or contest—to the hardened vest, and head buckled in gold or silver.

Thence, by a natural descent, have we the iron boddice, stiff farthingale, and spiral coiffure, of the middle ages. The courts of Charlemagne, of our Edwards, Henries, and Elizabeth, all exhibit the figures of women as if in a state of siege. Such lines of circumvallation and outworks; such impregnable bulwarks of whale-bone, wood, and steel; such impassable mazes of gold, silver, silk, and furbelows, met a man's view, that, before he had time to guess it was a woman that he saw, she had passed from his sight; and he only formed a vague wish on the subject, by hearing, from an interested father or brother, that the moving castle was one of the softer sex.

These preposterous fashions disappeared, in England, a short time after the Restoration; they had been a little on the wane

during the more classic, though distressful reign of Charles I.; and what the beautiful pencil of Vandyke shows us, in the graceful dress of Lady Carlisle and Sacharissa, was rendered yet more correspondent to the soft undulations of nature, in the garments of the lovely, but frail beauties of the Second Charles's court. But as change too often is carried to extremes, in this case the unzoned tastes of the English ladies thought no freedom too free; their vestments were gradually unloosened of the brace, until another touch would have exposed the wearer to no thicker covering than the ambient air.

The matron reign of Anne, in some measure, corrected this indecency. But it was not till the accession of the House of Brunswick, that it was finally exploded, and gave way by degrees to the ancient mode of female fortification, by introducing the hideous Parisian fashion of hoops, buckram stays, waists to the hips, screwed to the circumference of a wasp, brocaded silks stiff with gold, shoes with heels so high as to set the wearer on her toes; and heads, for quantity of false hair, either horse or human, and height to outweigh, and perhaps outreach, the Tower of Babel! These were the figures which our grandmothers exhibited; nay, such was the appearance I myself made in my early youth; and something like it may yet be seen at a drawing-room, on court-days.

When the arts of Sculpture and Painting, in their fine specimens from the chisels of Greece and the pencils of Italy, were brought into this country, taste began to mould the dress of our female youth after their more graceful fashion. The health-destroying boddice was laid aside; brocades and whale-bone disappeared; and the easy shape and flowing drapery

again resumed the rights of nature and of grace. The bright hues of auburn, raven, or golden tresses, adorned the head in its native simplicity, putting to shame the few powdered *toupees*, which yet lingered on the brow of prejudice and deformity.

Thus, for a short time, did the Graces indeed preside at the toilet of the British beauty; but a strange caprice seems now to have dislodged these gentle handmaids. Here stands affectation distorting the form into a thousand unnatural shapes; and there, ill-taste, loading it with grotesque ornaments, gathered (and mingled confusedly) from Grecian and Roman models, from Egypt, China, Turkey, and Hindostan. All nations are ransacked to equip a modern fine lady; and, after all, she may perhaps strike a contemporary *beau* as *a fine lady*, but no son of nature could, at a glance, possibly find out that she meant to represent an *elegant woman*.

To impress upon your minds, my fair friends, that symmetry of figure ought ever to be accompanied by harmony of dress, and that there is a certain propriety in habiliment adapted to form, age, and degree, shall be the purport of my next observations.

ON THE FEMALE FORM.

“Who doth not feel, until his aching sight
Faints into dimness with its own delight,
His changing cheek, his sinking heart, confess
The might, the majesty of loveliness?”

BYRON.

To preserve the health of the human form, is the first object of consideration. This is of primary importance, for with its health we necessarily maintain its symmetry, and improve its beauty.

The foundation of a just proportion, in all its parts, must be laid in infancy; for, “as the twig is bent, the tree’s inclined.” A light dress, which gives freedom to the functions of life and action, is the best adapted to permit unobstructed growth; for thence the young fibres, uninterrupted by obstacles of art, will shoot harmoniously into the form which nature drew. The garb of childhood should in all respects be easy; not to impede its movements by ligatures on the chest, the loins, the legs, or the arms. By this liberty, we shall see the muscles of the limbs gradually assume the fine swell and insertions which only unconstrained exercise can produce. The shape will sway gracefully on the firmly poised waist; the chest will rise in noble and healthy expanse; and the human figure will start forward at the blooming age of youth, maturing into the full perfection of unsophisticated nature.

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