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A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN, WITH STRICTURES ON POLITICAL AND MORAL SUBJECTS, BY MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR.

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A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.

M. Wollstonecraft was born in 1759. Her father was so great a wanderer, that the place of her birth is uncertain; she supposed, however, it was London, or Epping Forest: at the latter place she spent the first five years of her life. In early youth she exhibited traces of exquisite sensibility, soundness of understanding, and decision of character; but her father being a despot in his family, and her mother one of his subjects, Mary, derived little benefit from their parental training. She received no literary instructions but such as were to be had in ordinary day schools. Before her sixteenth year she became acquainted with Mr. Clare a clergyman, and Miss Frances Blood; the latter, two years older than herself; who possessing good taste and some knowledge of the fine arts, seems to have given the first impulse to the formation of her character. At the age of nineteen, she left her parents, and resided with a Mrs. Dawson for two years; when she returned to the parental roof to give attention to her mother, whose ill health made her presence necessary. On the death of her mother, Mary bade a final adieu to her father's house, and became the inmate of F. Blood; thus situated, their intimacy increased, and a strong attachment was reciprocated. In 1783 she commenced a day school at Newington green, in conjunction with her friend, F. Blood. At this place she became acquainted with Dr. Price, to whom she became strongly attached; the regard was mutual.

It is said that she became a teacher from motives of benevolence, or rather philanthropy, and during the time she continued in the profession, she gave proof of superior qualification for the performance of its arduous and important duties. Her friend and coadjutor married and removed to Lisbon, in Portugal, where she died of a

pulmonary disease; the symptoms of which were visible before her marriage. So true was Mary's attachment to her, that she entrusted her school to the care of others, for the purpose of attending Frances in her closing scene. She aided, as did Dr. Young, in "Stealing Narcissa a grave." Her mind was expanded by this residence in a foreign country, and though clear of religious bigotry before, she took some instructive lessons on the evils of superstition, and intolerance.

On her return she found the school had suffered by her absence, and having previously decided to apply herself to literature, she now resolved to commence. In 1787 she made, or received, proposals from Johnson, a publisher in London, who was already acquainted with her talents as an author. During the three subsequent years, she was actively engaged, more in translating, condensing, and compiling, than in the production of original works. At this time she laboured under much depression of spirits, for the loss of her friend; this rather increased, perhaps, by the publication of "Mary, a novel," which was mostly composed of incidents and reflections connected with their intimacy.

The pecuniary concerns of her father becoming embarrassed, Mary practised a rigid economy in her expenditures, and with her savings was enabled to procure her sisters and brothers situations, to which without her aid, they could not have had access; her father was sustained at length from her funds; she even found means to take under her protection an orphan child.

She had acquired a facility in the arrangement and expression of thoughts, in her avocation of translator, and compiler, which was no doubt of great use to her afterward. It was not long until she had occasion for them. The eminent Burke produced his celebrated "Reflections on the Revolution in France." Mary full of sentiments of liberty, and indignant at what she thought subversive of it, seized her pen and produced the first attack upon that famous work. It succeeded well, for though intemperate and contemptuous, it was vehemently and impetuously eloquent; and though Burke was beloved by the enlightened friends of freedom, they were dissatisfied and disgusted with what they deemed an outrage upon it.

It is said that Mary, had not wanted confidence in her own powers before, but the reception this work met from the public, gave her an opportunity of judging what those powers were, in the estimation of others. It was shortly after this, that she commenced the work to which these remarks are prefixed. What are its merits will be decided in the judgment of each reader; suffice it to say she appears to have stepped forth boldly, and singly, in defence of that half of the human race, which by the usages of all society, whether savage or civilized, have been kept from attaining their proper dignity—their equal rank as rational beings. It would appear that the disguise used in placing on woman the silken fetters which bribed her into endurance, and even love of slavery, but increased the opposition of our authoress: she would have had more patience with rude, brute coercion, than with that imposing gallantry, which, while it affects to consider woman as the pride, and ornament of creation, degrades her to a toy—an appendage—a cypher. The work was much reprehended, and as might well be expected, found its greatest enemies in the pretty soft creatures—the spoiled children of her own sex. She accomplished it in six weeks.

In 1792 she removed to Paris, where she became acquainted with Gilbert Imlay, of the United States. And from this acquaintance grew an attachment, which brought the parties together, without legal formalities, to which she objected on account of some family embarrassments, in which he would thereby become involved. The engagement was however considered by her of the most sacred nature, and they formed the plan of emigrating to America, where they should be enabled to accomplish it. These were the days of Robespierrean cruelty, and Imlay left Paris for Havre, whither after a time Mary followed him. They continued to reside there, until he left Havre for London, under pretence of business, and with a promise of rejoining her soon at Paris, which however he did not, but in 1795 sent for her to London. In the mean time she had become the mother of a female child, whom she called Frances in commemoration of her early friendship.

Before she went to England, she had some gloomy forebodings that the affections of Imlay, had waned, if they were not estranged from her; on her arrival, those forebodings were sorrowfully confirmed. His attentions were too formal and constrained to pass unobserved by her penetration, and though he ascribed his manner, and his absence, to business duties, she saw his affection for her was only something to be remembered. To use her own expression, "Love, dear delusion! Rigorous reason has forced me to resign; and now my rational prospects are blasted, just as I have learned to be contented with rational enjoyments." To pretend to depict her misery at this time would be futile; the best idea can be formed of it from the fact that she had planned her own destruction, from which Imlay prevented her. She conceived the idea of suicide a second time, and threw herself into the Thames; she remained in the water, until consciousness forsook her, but she was taken up and resuscitated. After divers attempts to revive the affections of Imlay, with sundry explanations and professions on his part, through the lapse

of two years, she resolved finally to forgo all hope of reclaiming him, and endeavour to think of him no more in connexion with her future prospects. In this she succeeded so well, that she afterwards had a private interview with him, which did not produce any painful emotions.

In 1796 she revived or improved an acquaintance which commenced years before with Wm. Godwin, author of "Political Justice," and other works of great notoriety. Though they had not been favourably impressed with each other on their former acquaintance, they now met under circumstances which permitted a mutual and just appreciation of character. Their intimacy increased by regular and almost imperceptible degrees. The partiality they conceived for each other was, according to her biographer, "In the most refined style of love. It grew with equal advances in the mind of each. It would have been impossible for the most minute observer to have said who was before, or who after. One sex did not take the priority which long established custom has awarded it, nor the other overstep that delicacy which is so severely imposed. Neither party could assume to have been the agent or the patient, the toil-spreader or the prey in the affair. When in the course of things the disclosure came, there was nothing in a manner for either to disclose to the other."

Mary lived but a few months after her marriage, and died in child-bed; having given birth to a daughter who is now known to the literary world as Mrs. Shelly, the widow of Percy Bysche Shelly.

We can scarcely avoid regret that one of such splendid talents, and high toned feelings, should, after the former seemed to have been fully developed, and the latter had found an object in whom they might repose, after their eccentric and painful efforts to find a resting place—that such an one should at such a time, be cut off from life is something which we cannot contemplate without feeling regret; we can scarcely repress the murmur that she had not been removed ere clouds darkened her horizon, or that she had remained to witness the brightness and serenity which might have succeeded. But thus it is; we may trace the cause to anti-social arrangements; it is not individuals but society which must change it, and that not by enactments, but by a change in public opinion.

The authoress of the "Rights of Woman," was born April 1759, died September 1797.

That there may be no doubt regarding the facts in this sketch, they are taken from a memoir written by her afflicted husband. In addition to many kind things he has said of her, (he was not blinded to imperfections in her character) is, that she was "Lovely in her person, and in the best and most engaging sense feminine in her manners."

TO

M. TALLEYRAND PERIGORD,

LATE BISHOP OF AUTUN.

Sir:—

Having read with great pleasure a pamphlet, which you have lately published, on National Education, I dedicate this volume to you, the first dedication that I have ever written, to induce you to read it with attention; and, because I think that you will understand me, which I do not suppose many pert wittlings will, who may ridicule the arguments they are unable to answer. But, sir, I carry my respect for your understanding still farther: so far, that I am confident you will not throw my work aside, and hastily conclude that I am in the wrong because you did not view the subject in the same light yourself. And pardon my frankness, but I must observe, that you treated it in too cursory a manner, contented to consider it as it had been considered formerly, when the rights of man, not to advert to woman, were trampled on as chimerical. I call upon you, therefore, now to weigh what I have advanced respecting the rights of woman, and national education; and I call with the firm tone of humanity. For my arguments, sir, are dictated by a disinterested spirit: I plead for my sex, not for myself. Independence I have long considered as the grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue; and independence I will ever secure by contracting my wants, though I were to live on a barren heath.

It is, then, an affection for the whole human race that makes my pen dart rapidly along to support what I believe to be the cause of virtue: and the same motive leads me earnestly to wish to see woman placed in a station in which she would advance, instead of retarding, the progress of those glorious principles that give a substance to morality. My opinion, indeed, respecting the rights and duties of woman, seems to flow so naturally from these simple principles, that I think it scarcely possible, but that some of the enlarged minds who formed your admirable

constitution, will coincide with me.

In France, there is undoubtedly a more general diffusion of knowledge than in any part of the European world, and I attribute it, in a great measure, to the social intercourse which has long subsisted between the sexes. It is true, I utter my sentiments with freedom, that in France the very essence of sensuality has been extracted to regale the voluptuary, and a kind of sentimental lust has prevailed, which, together with the system of duplicity that the whole tenor of their political and civil government taught, have given a sinister sort of sagacity to the French character, properly termed *finesse*; and a polish of manners that injures the substance, by hunting sincerity out of society. And, modesty, the fairest garb of virtue has been more grossly insulted in France than even in England, till their women have treated as PRUDISH that attention to decency which brutes instinctively observe.

Manners and morals are so nearly allied, that they have often been confounded; but, though the former should only be the natural reflection of the latter, yet, when various causes have produced factitious and corrupt manners, which are very early caught, morality becomes an empty name. The personal reserve, and sacred respect for cleanliness and delicacy in domestic life, which French women almost despise, are the graceful pillars of modesty; but, far from despising them, if the pure flame of patriotism have reached their bosoms, they should labour to improve the morals of their fellow-citizens, by teaching men, not only to respect modesty in women, but to acquire it themselves, as the only way to merit their esteem.

Contending for the rights of women, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge, for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice. And how can woman be expected to co-operate, unless she know why she ought to be virtuous? Unless freedom strengthen her reason till she comprehend her duty, and see in what manner it is connected with her real good? If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an orderly train of virtues spring, can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of mankind; but the education and situation of woman, at present, shuts her out from such investigations.

In this work I have produced many arguments, which to me were conclusive, to prove, that the prevailing notion respecting a sexual character was subversive of morality, and I have contended, that to render the human body and mind more perfect, chastity must more universally prevail, and that chastity will never be respected in the male world till the person of a woman is not, as it were, idolized when little virtue or sense embellish it with the grand traces of mental beauty, or the interesting simplicity of affection.

Consider, Sir, dispassionately, these observations, for a glimpse of this truth seemed to open before you when you observed, "that to see one half of the human race excluded by the other from all participation of government, was a political phenomenon that, according to abstract principles, it was impossible to explain." If so, on what does your constitution rest? If the abstract rights of man will bear discussion and explanation, those of woman, by a parity of reasoning, will not shrink from the same test: though a different opinion prevails in this country, built on the very arguments which you use to justify the oppression of woman, prescription.

Consider, I address you as a legislator, whether, when men contend for their freedom, and to be allowed to judge for themselves, respecting their own happiness, it be not inconsistent and unjust to subjugate women, even though you firmly believe that you are acting in the manner best calculated to promote their happiness? Who made man the exclusive judge, if woman partake with him the gift of reason?

In this style, argue tyrants of every denomination from the weak king to the weak father of a family; they are all eager to crush reason; yet always assert that they usurp its throne only to be useful. Do you not act a similar part, when you FORCE all women, by denying them civil and political rights, to remain immured in their families groping in the dark? For surely, sir, you will not assert, that a duty can be binding which is not founded on reason? If, indeed, this be their destination, arguments may be drawn from reason; and thus augustly supported, the more understanding women acquire, the more they will be attached to their duty, comprehending it, for unless they comprehend it, unless their morals be fixed on the same immutable principles as those of man, no authority can make them discharge it in a virtuous manner. They may be convenient slaves, but slavery will have its constant effect, degrading the master and the abject dependent.

But, if women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from a participation of the natural rights of mankind, prove first, to ward off the charge of injustice and inconsistency, that they want reason, else this flaw in your NEW CONSTITUTION, the first constitution founded on reason, will ever show that man must, in some shape,

act like a tyrant, and tyranny, in whatever part of society it rears its brazen front, will ever undermine morality.

I have repeatedly asserted, and produced what appeared to me irrefragable arguments drawn from matters of fact, to prove my assertion, that women cannot, by force, be confined to domestic concerns; for they will however ignorant, intermeddle with more weighty affairs, neglecting private duties only to disturb, by cunning tricks, the orderly plans of reason which rise above their comprehension.

Besides, whilst they are only made to acquire personal accomplishments, men will seek for pleasure in variety, and faithless husbands will make faithless wives; such ignorant beings, indeed, will be very excusable when, not taught to respect public good, nor allowed any civil right, they attempt to do themselves justice by retaliation.

The box of mischief thus opened in society, what is to preserve private virtue, the only security of public freedom and universal happiness?

Let there be then no coercion ESTABLISHED in society, and the common law of gravity prevailing, the sexes will fall into their proper places. And, now that more equitable laws are forming your citizens, marriage may become more sacred; your young men may choose wives from motives of affection, and your maidens allow love to root out vanity.

The father of a family will not then weaken his constitution and debase his sentiments, by visiting the harlot, nor forget, in obeying the call of appetite, the purpose for which it was implanted; and the mother will not neglect her children to practise the arts of coquetry, when sense and modesty secure her the friendship of her husband.

But, till men become attentive to the duty of a father, it is vain to expect women to spend that time in their nursery which they, "wise in their generation," choose to spend at their glass; for this exertion of cunning is only an instinct of nature to enable them to obtain indirectly a little of that power of which they are unjustly denied a share; for, if women are not permitted to enjoy legitimate rights, they will render both men and themselves vicious, to obtain illicit privileges.

I wish, sir, to set some investigations of this kind afloat in France; and should they lead to a confirmation of my principles, when your constitution is revised, the rights of woman may be respected, if it be fully proved that reason calls for this respect, and loudly demands JUSTICE for one half of the human race.

I am, sir,

Yours respectfully,

M. W.

INTRODUCTION.

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

In a treatise, therefore, on female rights and manners, the works which have been particularly written for their improvement must not be overlooked; especially when it is asserted, in direct terms, that the minds of women are

enfeebled by false refinement; that the books of instruction, written by men of genius, have had the same tendency as more frivolous productions; and that, in the true style of Mahometanism, they are only considered as females, and not as a part of the human species, when improvable reason is allowed to be the dignified distinction, which raises men above the brute creation, and puts a natural sceptre in a feeble hand.

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

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

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

I wish also to steer clear of an error, which many respectable writers have fallen into; for the instruction which has hitherto been addressed to women, has rather been applicable to LADIES, if the little indirect advice, that is scattered through Sandford and Merton, be excepted; but, addressing my sex in a firmer tone, I pay particular attention to those in the middle class, because they appear to be in the most natural state. Perhaps the seeds of false refinement, immorality, and vanity have ever been shed by the great. Weak, artificial beings raised above the common wants and affections of their race, in a premature unnatural manner, undermine the very foundation of virtue, and spread corruption through the whole mass of society! As a class of mankind they have the strongest claim to pity! the education of the rich tends to render them vain and helpless, and the unfolding mind is not strengthened by the practice of those duties which dignify the human character. They only live to amuse themselves, and by the same law which in nature invariably produces certain effects, they soon only afford barren amusement.

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

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

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

This is a rough sketch of my plan; and should I express my conviction with the energetic emotions that I feel whenever I think of the subject, the dictates of experience and reflection will be felt by some of my readers.

Animated by this important object, I shall disdain to cull my phrases or polish my style—I aim at being useful, and sincerity will render me unaffected; for wishing rather to persuade by the force of my arguments, than dazzle by the elegance of my language, I shall not waste my time in rounding periods, nor in fabricating the turgid bombast of artificial feelings, which, coming from the head, never reach the heart. I shall be employed about things, not words! and, anxious to render my sex more respectable members of society, I shall try to avoid that flowery diction which has slid from essays into novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversation.

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

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

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

(*Footnote. A lively writer, I cannot recollect his name, asks what business women turned of forty have to do in the world.)

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

Women are, in fact, so much degraded by mistaken notions of female excellence, that I do not mean to add a paradox when I assert, that this artificial weakness produces a propensity to tyrannize, and gives birth to cunning, the natural opponent of strength, which leads them to play off those contemptible infantile airs that undermine esteem even whilst they excite desire. Do not foster these prejudices, and they will naturally fall into their subordinate, yet respectable station in life.

It seems scarcely necessary to say, that I now speak of the sex in general. Many individuals have more sense than their male relatives; and, as nothing preponderates where there is a constant struggle for an equilibrium, without it has naturally more gravity, some women govern their husbands without degrading themselves, because intellect will always govern.

VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN.

CHAPTER 1.

THE RIGHTS AND INVOLVED DUTIES OF MANKIND CONSIDERED.

In the present state of society, it appears necessary to go back to first principles in search of the most simple truths, and to dispute with some prevailing prejudice every inch of ground. To clear my way, I must be allowed to ask some plain questions, and the answers will probably appear as unequivocal as the axioms on which reasoning is built; though, when entangled with various motives of action, they are formally contradicted, either by the words

or conduct of men.

In what does man's pre-eminence over the brute creation consist?

The answer is as clear as that a half is less than the whole; in Reason.

What acquirement exalts one being above another? Virtue; we spontaneously reply.

For what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes: whispers Experience.

Consequently the perfection of our nature and capability of happiness, must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue, and knowledge, that distinguish the individual, and direct the laws which bind society: and that from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow, is equally undeniable, if mankind be viewed collectively.

The rights and duties of man thus simplified, it seems almost impertinent to attempt to illustrate truths that appear so incontrovertible: yet such deeply rooted prejudices have clouded reason, and such spurious qualities have assumed the name of virtues, that it is necessary to pursue the course of reason as it has been perplexed and involved in error, by various adventitious circumstances, comparing the simple axiom with casual deviations.

Men, in general, seem to employ their reason to justify prejudices, which they have imbibed, they cannot trace how, rather than to root them out. The mind must be strong that resolutely forms its own principles; for a kind of intellectual cowardice prevails which makes many men shrink from the task, or only do it by halves. Yet the imperfect conclusions thus drawn, are frequently very plausible, because they are built on partial experience, on just, though narrow, views.

Going back to first principles, vice skulks, with all its native deformity, from close investigation; but a set of shallow reasoners are always exclaiming that these arguments prove too much, and that a measure rotten at the core may be expedient. Thus expediency is continually contrasted with simple principles, till truth is lost in a mist of words, virtue in forms, and knowledge rendered a sounding nothing, by the specious prejudices that assume its name.

That the society is formed in the wisest manner, whose constitution is founded on the nature of man, strikes, in the abstract, every thinking being so forcibly, that it looks like presumption to endeavour to bring forward proofs; though proof must be brought, or the strong hold of prescription will never be forced by reason; yet to urge prescription as an argument to justify the depriving men (or women) of their natural rights, is one of the absurd sophisms which daily insult common sense.

The civilization of the bulk of the people of Europe, is very partial; nay, it may be made a question, whether they have acquired any virtues in exchange for innocence, equivalent to the misery produced by the vices that have been plastered over unsightly ignorance, and the freedom which has been bartered for splendid slavery. The desire of dazzling by riches, the most certain pre-eminence that man can obtain, the pleasure of commanding flattering sycophants, and many other complicated low calculations of doting self-love, have all contributed to overwhelm the mass of mankind, and make liberty a convenient handle for mock patriotism. For whilst rank and titles are held of the utmost importance, before which Genius "must hide its diminished head," it is, with a few exceptions, very unfortunate for a nation when a man of abilities, without rank or property, pushes himself forward to notice. Alas! what unheard of misery have thousands suffered to purchase a cardinal's hat for an intriguing obscure adventurer, who longed to be ranked with princes, or lord it over them by seizing the triple crown!

Such, indeed, has been the wretchedness that has flowed from hereditary honours, riches, and monarchy, that men of lively sensibility have almost uttered blasphemy in order to justify the dispensations of providence. Man has been held out as independent of his power who made him, or as a lawless planet darting from its orbit to steal the celestial fire of reason; and the vengeance of heaven, lurking in the subtle flame, sufficiently punished his temerity, by introducing evil into the world.

Impressed by this view of the misery and disorder which pervaded society, and fatigued with jostling against artificial fools, Rousseau became enamoured of solitude, and, being at the same time an optimist, he labours with uncommon eloquence to prove that man was naturally a solitary animal. Misled by his respect for the goodness of God, who certainly for what man of sense and feeling can doubt it! gave life only to communicate happiness, he considers evil as positive, and the work of man; not aware that he was exalting one attribute at the expense of

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