



MANSFIELD PARK

AUTHORITATIVE TEXT

CONTEXTS

CRITICISM

Oh blest seclusion from a jarring world
 Which he thus occupied, enjoys! Retreat
 Cannot indeed to guilty man restore
 Lost innocence, or cancel follies past,
 But it has peace, and much secures the mind
 From all assaults of evil, proving still
 A faithful barrier, not o'erleap'd with ease
 By vicious custom, raging uncontroul'd
 Abroad, and desolating public life.

* * *

[W]ere England now
 What England was, plain, hospitable, kind,
 And undebauch'd. But we have bid farewell
 To all the virtues of those better days,
 And all their honest pleasures. Mansions once
 Knew their own masters, and laborious hinds
 That had surviv'd the father, serv'd the son.
 Now the legitimate and rightful Lord
 Is but a transient guest, newly arrived
 And soon to be supplanted. He that saw
 His patrimonial timber cast its leaf,
 Sells the last scantling, and transfers the price
 To some shrew'd sharper, 'ere it buds again.
 Estates are landscapes, gazed upon awhile,
 Then advertised, and auctioneer'd away.
 The country starves, and they that feed th' o'ercharged
 And surfeited lew'd town with her fair dues,
 By a just judgment strip and starve themselves.
 The wings that waft our riches out of sight
 Grow on the gamester's elbows, and th' alert
 And nimble motion of those restless joints
 That never tire, soon fans them all away.
 Improvement too, the idol of the age,
 Is fed with many a victim. Lo! he comes—
 The omnipotent magician, Brown! appears.
 Down falls the venerable pile, th' abode
 Of our forefathers, a grave whisker'd race,
 But tasteless. Springs a palace in its stead,
 But in a distant spot; where more exposed
 It may enjoy th' advantage of the north
 And ageish East, till time shall have transform'd
 Those naked acres to a shelt'ring grove.
 He speaks. The lake in front becomes a lawn,

1. Lancelot ("Capability") Brown (1715–1783) was the most famous English landscape designer before Humphry Repton. He favored "natural" designs that contrasted sharply with the formal, geometrical style of French gardening at the time. Cowper caustically laments the craze for "improvement" as disruptive and exorbitant.

Woods vanish, hills subside, and vallies rise,
 And streams as if created for his use,
 Pursue the track of his directing wand
 Sinuous or strait, now rapid and now slow,
 Now murm'ring soft, now roaring in cascades,
 Ev'n as he bids. Th' enraptur'd owner smiles.
 'Tis finish'd. And yet finish'd as it seems,
 Still wants a grace, th' loveliest it could show,
 A mine to satisfy the enormous cost.
 Drain'd to the last poor item of his wealth
 He sighs, departs, and leaves the accomplished plan
 That he has touch'd, retouch'd, many a long day
 Labor'd, and many a night pursued in dreams,
 Just when it meets his hopes, and proves the heav'n
 He wanted, for a wealthier to enjoy.

* * *

JOHN GREGORY

From A Father's Legacy to His Daughter (1774)†

From Conduct and Behaviour

One of the chief beauties in a female character, is that modest reserve, that retiring delicacy, which avoids the public eye, and is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration.—I do not wish you to be insensible to applause. If you were, you must become, if not worse, at least less amiable women. But you may be dazzled by that admiration, which yet rejoices your hearts.

When a girl ceases to blush, she has lost the most powerful charm of beauty. That extreme sensibility which it indicates, may be a weakness and incumbrance in our sex, as I have too often felt; but in yours it is peculiarly engaging. Pedants, who think themselves philosophers, ask why a woman should blush when she is conscious of no crime. It is a sufficient answer, that Nature has made you to blush when you are guilty of no fault, and has forced us to love you because you do so.—Blushing is so far from being necessarily an attendant on guilt, that it is the usual companion of innocence.

This modesty, which I think so essential in your sex, will naturally dispose you to be rather silent in company, especially in a large one.

† John Gregory (1724–1773) was a Scottish author, professor of medicine, and Fellow at the Royal Society. Among the best sellers of Austen's time, conduct books for women were didactic tracts—taking the form of sermons, letters, or even fiction—which admonished young ladies to be modest and dutiful daughters and wives. Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughter* (1774) was a widely respected and often reprinted text on female propriety. The excerpts here are from the 1774 and 1793 editions.

—People of sense and discernment will never mistake such silence for dulness. One may take a share in conversation without uttering a syllable. The expression in the countenance shews it, and this never escapes an observing eye.

I should be glad that you had an easy dignity in your behaviour at public places, but not that confident ease, that unabashed countenance, which seems to set the company at defiance. If, while a gentleman is speaking to you, one of superior rank addresses you, do not let your eager attention and visible preference betray the flutter of your heart. ~~Let your pride on this occasion preserve you from that meanness into which your vanity would sink you.~~ Consider that you expose yourselves to the ridicule of the company, and affront one gentleman, only to swell the triumph of another, who perhaps thinks he does you honour in speaking to you.

Converse with men even of the first rank with that dignified modesty which may prevent the approach of the most distant familiarity, and consequently prevent them from feeling themselves your superiors.

Wit is the most dangerous talent you can possess. It must be guarded with great discretion and good nature, otherwise it will create you many enemies. Wit is perfectly consistent with softness and delicacy; yet they are seldom found united. ~~Wit is so flattering to vanity, that they who possess it become intoxicated, and lose all self-command.~~

Humour is a different quality. It will make your company much solicited; but be cautious how you indulge it. It is often a great enemy to delicacy, and a still greater one to dignity of character. It may sometimes gain you applause, but will never procure you respect.

Be even cautious in displaying your good sense. It will be thought you assume a superiority over the rest of the company.—But if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding.

Consider every species of indelicacy in conversation, as shameful in itself, and as highly disgusting to us. All double entendre is of this sort.—The dissoluteness of men's education allows them to be diverted with a kind of wit, which yet they have delicacy enough to be shocked at, when it comes from your mouths, or even when you hear it without pain and contempt. ~~Virgin purity is of that delicate nature, that it cannot hear certain things without contamination.~~ It is always in your power to avoid these. No man, but a brute or a fool, will insult a woman with conversation which he sees gives her pain; nor will he dare to do it, if she resent the injury with a becoming spirit.—There is a dignity in conscious virtue which is able to awe the most shameless and abandoned of men.

You will be reproached perhaps with prudery. By prudery is usually

meant an affectation of delicacy. Now I do not wish you to affect delicacy; I wish you to possess it. At any rate, it is better to run the risk of being thought ridiculous than disgusting.

The men will complain of your reserve. They will assure you that a franker behaviour would make you more amiable. But trust me, they are not sincere when they tell you so. * * *

From Amusements

I would particularly recommend to you those exercises that oblige you to be much abroad in the open air, such as walking, and riding on horse-back. This will give vigour to your constitutions, and a bloom to your complexions. If you accustom yourselves to go abroad always in chairs and carriages, you will soon become so enervated, as to be unable to go out of doors without them. They are like most articles of luxury, useful and agreeable when judiciously used: but when made habitual, they become both insipid and pernicious.

An attention to your health is a duty you owe to yourselves and to your friends. Bad health seldom fails to have an influence on the spirits and temper. The finest geniusses, the soft delicate minds, have very frequently a correspondent delicacy of bodily constitution which they are too apt to neglect. Their luxury lies in reading and late hours, equal enemies to health and beauty.

But though good health be one of the greatest blessings of life, never make a boast of it, but enjoy it in grateful silence. We so naturally associate the idea of female softness and delicacy, with a correspondent delicacy of constitution, that when a woman speaks of her great strength, her extraordinary appetite, her ability to bear excessive fatigue, we recoil at the description in a way she is little aware of.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

From A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)†

From Chapter II. The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed

To account for, and excuse the tyranny of man, many ingenious arguments have been brought forward to prove, that the two sexes, in

† Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) was a novelist and polemicist on behalf of women's legal and educational rights and other progressive causes. Her most famous work, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), was among other things a tract on female education. It was well received until the British reaction against the Revolution in France (which she supported), along with disclosures about her unconventional personal life, turned opinion against her. She is one of the few prominent contemporary women writers Austen never mentions, though she was almost certainly familiar with her work. The selections here are from the Norton Critical Edition of *The Vindication*, 2nd ed., ed. Carol Poston.

issues of class & behavior

Keeps sense & clarity health & humour

silence of speaking of grace

pride B. Country

male beh.

the acquirement of virtue, ought to aim at attaining a very different character or, to speak explicitly, women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue. Yet it should seem, allowing them to have souls, that there is but one way appointed by Providence to lead mankind to either virtue or happiness.

If then women are not a swarm of ephemeron triflers, why should they be kept in ignorance under the specious name of innocence? Men complain, and with reason, of the follies and caprices of our sex, when they do not keenly satirize our headstrong passions and groveling vices.—Behold, I should answer, the natural effect of ignorance! The mind will ever be unstable that has only prejudices to rest on, and the current will run with destructive fury when there are no barriers to break its force. Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, every thing else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives.

Thus Milton describes our first frail mother, though when he tells us that women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace, I cannot comprehend his meaning, unless, in the true Mahometan strain, he meant to deprive us of souls, and insinuate that we were beings only designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wing of contemplation.

How grossly do they insult us who thus advise us only to render ourselves gentle, domestic brutes! For instance, the winning softness so warmly, and frequently, recommended, that governs by obeying. What childish expressions, and how insignificant is the being—can it be an immortal one? who will condescend to govern by such sinister methods!

[T]he most perfect education, in my opinion, is such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent. In fact, it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason. This was Rousseau's opinion respecting men: I extend it to women, and confidently assert that they have been drawn out of their sphere by false refinement, and not by an endeavour to acquire masculine qualities.

I may be accused of arrogance; still I must declare what I firmly believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contrib-

uted to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society * * *

To do every thing in an orderly manner, is a most important precept, which women, who, generally speaking, receive only a disorderly kind of education, seldom attend to with that degree of exactness that men, who from their infancy are broken into method, observe. This negligent kind of guess-work, for what other epithet can be used to point out the random exertions of a sort of instinctive common sense, never brought to the test of reason? prevents their generalizing matters of fact—so they do to-day, what they did yesterday, merely because they did it yesterday.

This contempt of the understanding in early life has more baneful consequences than is commonly supposed; for the little knowledge which women of strong minds attain, is, from various circumstances, of a more desultory kind than the knowledge of men, and it is acquired more by sheer observations on real life, than from comparing what has been individually observed with the results of experience generalized by speculation. Led by their dependent situation and domestic employments more into society, what they learn is rather by snatches; and as learning is with them, in general, only a secondary thing, they do not pursue any one branch with that persevering ardour necessary to give vigour to the faculties, and clearness to the judgment. In the present state of society, a little learning is required to support the character of a gentleman; and boys are obliged to submit to a few years of discipline. But in the education of women, the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some corporeal accomplishment; even while enervated by confinement and false notions of modesty, the body is prevented from attaining that grace and beauty which relaxed half-formed limbs never exhibit.

Rousseau declares that a woman should never, for a moment, feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquetish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a sweeter companion to man, whenever he chooses to relax himself. He carries the arguments, which he pretends to draw from the indications of nature, still further, and insinuates that truth and fortitude, the corner stones of all human virtue, should be cultivated with certain restrictions, because, with respect to the female character, obedience is the grand lesson which ought to be impressed with unrelenting rigour.

What nonsense! when will a great man arise with sufficient strength of mind to puff away the fumes which pride and sensuality have thus spread over the subject! If women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree, or virtue is a

downward
have souls

danger of
lygiance
VS

ideal education
reason = in too

reason = in too

city

women
need
order

relative idea; consequently, their conduct should be founded on the same principles, and have the same aim.

Connected with man as daughters, wives, and mothers, their moral character may be estimated by their manner of fulfilling those simple duties; but the end, the grand end of their exertions should be to unfold their own faculties and acquire the dignity of conscious virtue. They may try to render their road pleasant; but ought never to forget, in common with man, that life yields not the felicity which can satisfy an immortal soul. I do not mean to insinuate, that either sex should be so lost in abstract reflections or distant views, as to forget the affections and duties that lie before them, and are, in truth, the means appointed to produce the fruit of life; on the contrary, I would warmly recommend them, even while I assert, that they afford most satisfaction when they are considered in their true, sober light.

Wool + md duty *

* * *

The worthy Dr. Gregory fell into a similar error. I respect his heart; but entirely disapprove of his celebrated Legacy to his Daughters.

He advises them to cultivate a fondness for dress, because a fondness for dress, he asserts, is natural to them. I am unable to comprehend what either he or Rousseau mean, when they frequently use this indefinite term. If they told us that in a pre-existent state the soul was fond of dress, and brought this inclination with it into a new body, I should listen to them with a half smile, as I often do when I hear a rant about innate elegance. — But if he only meant to say that the exercise of the faculties will produce this fondness—I deny it.—It is not natural; but arises, like false ambition in men, from a love of power.

Dr. Gregory goes much further; he actually recommends dissimulation, and advises an innocent girl to give the lie to her feelings, and not dance with spirit, when gaiety of heart would make her feel eloquent without making her gestures immodest. In the name of truth and common sense, why should not one woman acknowledge that she can take more exercise than another? or, in other words, that she has a sound constitution; and why, to damp innocent vivacity, is she darkly to be told that men will draw conclusions which she little thinks of?

* * *

[T]he woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband; and if she, by possessing such substantial qualities, merit his regard, she will not find it necessary to conceal her affection, nor to pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution to excite her husband's passions. In fact, if we revert to history, we shall find that the women who have distinguished themselves have neither been the most beautiful nor the most gentle of their sex.

ideal

* * *

* Do passive and indolent women make the best wives? Confining our discussion to the present moment of existence, let us see how such weak creatures perform their part? Do the women who, by the attainment of a few superficial accomplishments, have strengthened the prevailing prejudice, merely contribute to the happiness of their husbands? Do they display their charms merely to amuse them? And have women, who have early imbibed notions of passive obedience, sufficient character to manage a family or educate children? So far from it, that, after surveying the history of woman, I cannot help, agreeing with the severest satirist, considering the sex as the weakest as well as the most oppressed half of the species. What does history disclose but marks of inferiority, and how few women have emancipated themselves from the galling yoke of sovereign man?

* Red. Discourse

From Chapter III. The Same Subject Continued

Bodily strength from being the distinction of heroes is now sunk into such unmerited contempt that men, as well as women, seem to think it unnecessary: the latter, as it takes from their feminine graces, and from that lovely weakness the source of their undue power; and the former, because it appears inimical to the character of a gentleman.

* * *

I once knew a weak woman of fashion, who was more than commonly proud of her delicacy and sensibility. She thought a distinguishing taste and puny appetite the height of all human perfection, and acted accordingly.—I have seen this weak sophisticated being neglect all the duties of life, yet recline with self-complacency on a sofa, and boast of her want of appetite as a proof of delicacy that extended to, or, perhaps, arose from, her exquisite sensibility: for it is difficult to render intelligible such ridiculous jargon.

* * *

more by her own weakness Delicacy

views against the assump. of the
clergy for financial reasons

THOMAS GISBORNE

From An Enquiry into the Duties of Men
in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society
in Great Britain (1794)†

From Chapter XI. On the Duties of the Clerical Profession

* * *

The first points concerning which a young man designed for the clerical profession is bound to satisfy himself (and whether he looks forward to that profession from his own unbiassed determination, or is destined to it by the judgement of his parents and friends, the enquiry is equally indispensable), are the purposes and intentions with which he becomes a candidate for the office of a Clergyman. I mean not to require of him a degree of disinterestedness in selecting his occupation unattainable in the common course of human nature, and the existing circumstances of the world. Extravagant statements unfounded in reason and scripture defeat their own object; and, were they likely to promote it, ought not to be adopted. That Clergyman undoubtedly may be expected to labour in his vocation with the greatest earnestness and success, with the greatest comfort and advantage to himself and to others, who embraces it from a sober and deliberate preference founded on the nature of the office itself; and from a conviction that it will afford him opportunities more ample than he should be likely to possess in any other employment, of promoting the glory of God, and the good of mankind. Yet to him who is conscientiously resolved to discharge with zeal and fidelity the functions of the clerical order, if admitted to the exercise of them; and to cherish the temper and dispositions, and diligently to aim at acquiring the endowments, necessary to that end; and in whole heart piety has already such a predominant influence, as to give him a reasonable ground of confidence that these resolutions will be rendered by the divine blessing permanent and effectual; the prospect of obtaining, by the aid of his friends and relations, a competent provision in the church may lawfully be the motive which determines him to that line of life in preference to another. But he who, from the probability of succeeding to a family living, or the hopes of being pushed forward to preferment by powerful connections, stifles an

† Thomas Gisborne (1758–1846) was an Anglican clergyman, a supporter of Evangelicalism, and the author of numerous sermons, poems, and tracts undertaking to “improve” the manners and morals of his readers. *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain* (1794) is a conduct book designed for men of the upper ranks of society; it was well received, going through six editions by 1811. The clergyman’s profession is frequently discussed in *Mansfield Park*. The selection excerpted here, regarding the duties of clergymen, is drawn from the 1806 edition. The author’s notes have been omitted.

inward repugnance to the office of a Minister of the Gospel, falls under the severe censure implied in the Scripture against those who “take the oversight of the flock of God for filthy lucre.” And he who enters into the clerical profession, though not from motives of avarice, yet without duly estimating its solemn nature and momentous functions, the obligations which it imposes, and the responsibility annexed to it; without possessing the qualifications essential to the upright performance of its duties; and without a serious purpose of habitually striving to improve in them, and to exhibit to those whom he shall be appointed to guide in the way of salvation and edifying example of piety and virtue; engages in a most important concern with a degree of presumptuous rashness little adapted to ensure the future peace of his own mind; to draw down the blessing of God upon his labours; or to leave any substantial hopes that he will labour at all with zeal and assiduity.

* * *

Among the peculiar functions of the Minister of a parish, the celebration of divine worship naturally offers itself in the first place to our attention.

The usual times of public worship ought never to be changed by the Minister for the purpose of suiting his own convenience, when his hearers will be incommoded or displeas'd by the alteration, and of course be apt to relax in their attendance.

* * *

In reading the liturgy, a natural, distinct, and moderately slow pronunciation, audible throughout the church, but not overstrained; appropriate to the several parts of the service, but free from affected emphasis; and that earnest and impressive solemnity of manner which proves the heart of the Minister to be engaged in his employment, are qualifications of the highest importance. This remark must be extended to the recital of the baptismal office, and of other similar parts of the book of common prayer; which are sometimes read with so much haste and irreverence, as to lose all appearance of being offices of religion.

With respect to the composition of sermons, the only observations proper to be suggested in this place are, that they should be plain, and that they should be Christian discourses.

A sermon which is above the capacity of the congregation to which it is addressed is useless or disgusting. In almost every congregation the poor and unlearned form by much the larger part; and, universally, the meaning of the preacher must be caught at once, or it is totally lost. Hence the peculiar necessity of plainness in propounding the subject to be discussed, and in the manner of treating it. Our rule therefore, while it requires, in discourses addressed to ordinary congregations, a simple and perfectly obvious arrangement, and, in most cases, the professed division of the subject into a few general heads; proscribes the bewildering multiplicity of subdivisions, frequently destitute of actual

distinction, which was common among eminent divines early in the present century; together with all long and complicated sentences, obscure metaphors, refined ornaments of language and composition, learned references to Pagan philosophers and Christian fathers, and prolix digressions from the main topics suggested by the text.

* * *

residence
The foregoing statement of the various duties of a parochial Minister clearly implies the general obligation of residence. Habitual residence on the spot is essential to his being able effectually to perform them. How far a temporary or permanent exemption from the general rule, in addition to those which the laws of the land expressly allow, may be reasonably granted in a particular case, is a point to be decided by the Bishop of the diocese. But such exemptions will never be sought by a conscientious Clergyman, except under extraordinary circumstances. A Curate has neither the authority in instructing and reproof which the actual possessor of the living has, nor the same ability to be charitable. He is not improbably a much younger man, and commonly therefore has less knowledge and experience; and is less likely to be impressed with a strict and serious sense of his momentous duties. And the uncertainty of his continuance in the cure lessens the force of several subordinate incitements to industry and exemplary conduct. It is far better however, in general, that a Clergyman should never visit his parish at all, but have his place supplied by a resident Curate; than that he should live at the distance of six or eight miles from it, and from thence take the whole care of it himself. For the consequence of the latter method will almost invariably be, that he will soon cease to visit his parishioners except on Sundays, and in very pressing cases at other times. They who have resided at the distance of two or three miles only from their parish, know how many real impediments even that small distance creates to the discharge of the duties of private instruction, and of friendly and improving intercourse; and how many pleas it supplies for indolence and neglect.

* * *

THOMAS GISBORNE

Change of Playacting - imdly - display
From An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex (1797)†

From Chapter IX

ON AMUSEMENTS IN GENERAL.

For some years past the custom of acting plays in private theatres, fitted up by individuals of fortune, has occasionally prevailed. It is a custom liable to this objection among others; that it is almost certain to prove, in its effects, particularly injurious to the female performers. Let it be admitted, that theatres of this description no longer present the flagrant impropriety of ladies bearing a part in the drama in conjunction with professed players. Let it be admitted, that the drama selected will be in its language and conduct always irreprehensible. Let it even be admitted, that eminent theatrical talents will not hereafter gain admission upon such a Stage for men of ambiguous, or worse than ambiguous, character. Take the benefit of all these favourable circumstances; yet, what is even then the tendency of such amusements? to encourage vanity; to excite a thirst of applause and admiration on account of attainments which, if they are to be thus exhibited, it would commonly have been far better for the individual not to possess; to destroy diffidence by the unrestrained familiarity with persons of the other sex, which inevitably results from being joined with them in the drama; to create a general fondness for the perusal of plays, of which so many are improper to be read; and for attending dramatic representations, of which so many are unfit to be witnessed. Most of these remarks fully apply to the practice of causing children to act plays, or parts of plays; a practice of which parents, while labouring to vindicate it, sometimes pronounce an emphatical condemnation, by avowing a future purpose of abandoning it so soon as their children shall be far advanced in youth.

* * *

† See above, p. 398, n. Thomas Gisborne's *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797) was very popular, going through eight editions by 1810. The excerpt here is taken from the first edition. The author's notes have been omitted.

From Chapter X

ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF TIME.

* * *

To every woman, whether single or married, the habit of regularly allotting to improving books a portion of each day, and, as far as may be practicable, at stated hours, cannot be too strongly recommended. I use the term improving in a large sense; as comprehending all writings which may contribute to her virtue, her usefulness, and her innocent satisfaction, to her happiness in this world and in the next. She who believes that she is to survive in another state of being through eternity, and is duly impressed by the awful conviction, will fix day by day her most serious thoughts on the inheritance to which she aspires. Where her treasure is, there will her heart be also. She will not be seduced from an habitual study of the Holy Scriptures, and of other works calculated to imprint on her bosom the comparatively small importance of the pains and pleasures of this period of existence. * * * At other parts of the day let history, let biography, let poetry, or some of the various branches of elegant and profitable knowledge, pay their tribute of instruction and amusement. (But let her studies be confined within the strictest limits of purity.) Whatever she peruses in her most private hours be such as she needs not to be ashamed of reading aloud to those whose good opinion she is most anxious to deserve. Let her remember that there is an all-seeing eye, which is ever fixed upon her, even in her closest retirement. Let her not indulge herself in the frequent perusal of writings, however interesting in their nature, however eminent in a literary point of view, which are likely to inflame pride, and to inspire false notions of generosity, of feeling, of spirit, or of any other quality deemed to contribute to excellence of character. Such unhappily are the effects to be apprehended from the works even of several of our distinguished writers, in prose or in verse. And let her accustom herself regularly to bring the sentiments which she reads, and the conduct which is described in terms, more or less strong, of applause and recommendation, to the test of Christian principles. In proportion as this practice is pursued or neglected, reading will be profitable, or pernicious.

* * *

Even in the class of novels least objectionable in point of delicacy, false sentiment unfitting the mind for sober life, applause and censure distributed amiss, morality estimated by an erroneous standard, and the capricious laws and empty sanctions of honour set up in the place of religion, are the lessons usually presented. There is yet another consequence too important to be overlooked. The catastrophe and the inci-

dents of these fictitious narratives commonly turn on the vicissitudes and effects of a passion the most powerful of all those which agitate the human heart. Hence the study of them frequently creates a susceptibility of impression, and a premature warmth of tender emotions, which, not to speak of other possible effects, have been known to betray young women into a sudden attachment to persons unworthy of their affection, and thus to hurry them into marriages terminating in unhappiness.

In addition to the regular habit of useful reading, the custom of committing to the memory select and ample portions of poetic compositions, not for the purpose of ostentatiously quoting them in mixed company, but for the sake of private improvement, deserves, in consequence of its beneficial tendency, to be mentioned with a very high degree of praise. The mind is thus stored with a lasting treasure of sentiments and ideas, combined by writers of transcendent genius and vigorous imagination; clothed in appropriate, nervous, and glowing language; and impressed by the powers of cadence and harmony. Let the poetry, however, be well chosen. Let it be such as elevates the heart with the ardour of devotion; adds energy and grace to precepts of morality; kindles benevolence by pathetic narrative and reflection; enters with accurate and lively description into the varieties of character; or presents vivid pictures of the grand and beautiful features which characterise the scenery of nature. Such are, in general, the works of Milton, of Thomson, of Gray, of Mason, of Beattie, and of Cowper. It is thus that the beauty and grandeur of nature will be contemplated with new pleasure. It is thus that taste will be called forth, exercised, and corrected. It is thus that judgement will be strengthened, virtuous emotions cherished, piety animated and exalted. At all times, and under every circumstance, the heart, penetrated with religion, will delight itself in the recollection of passages, which display the perfections of that Being on whom it trusts, and the glorious hopes to the accomplishment of which it humbly looks forward. When affliction weighs down the spirits, or sickness the strength, it is then that the cheering influence of that recollection will be doubly felt.

* * *

HANNAH MORE

From *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799)†From Chapter VI. *Filial Obedience Not the Character of the Age*

Among the real improvements of modern times, and they are not a few, it is to be feared that the growth of filial obedience cannot be included. Who can forbear observing and regretting in a variety of instances, that not only sons but daughters have adopted something of that spirit of independence, and disdain of control, which characterise the times? And is it not obvious that domestic manners are not slightly tinctured with the hue of public principles? The rights of man have been discussed, till we are somewhat wearied with the discussion. To these have been opposed with more presumption than prudence the rights of woman. It follows according to the natural progression of human things, that the next stage of that irradiation which our enlighteners are pouring in upon us as will produce grave descants on the rights of children.

* * *

An early habitual restraint is peculiarly important to the future character and happiness of women. They should when very young be inured to contradiction. Instead of hearing their bon-mots treasured up and repeated to the guests till they begin to think it dull, when they themselves are not the little heroine of the theme, they should be accustomed to receive but little praise for their vivacity or their wit, though they should receive just commendation for their patience, their industry, their humility, and other qualities which have more worth than splendour. They should be led to distrust their own judgment; they should learn not to murmur at expostulation; but should be accustomed to expect and to endure opposition. It is a lesson with which the world will not fail to furnish them; and they will not practise it the worse for having learnt it the sooner. It is of the last importance to their happiness in life that they should early acquire a submissive temper and a forbearing spirit. They must even endure to be thought wrong sometimes,

† Hannah More (1745–1833) was a poet, playwright, novelist, and author of religious and didactic tracts associated with the Evangelical movement and such causes as the abolition of the slave trade and the education of the poor in the virtues of sobriety, industry, and subordination. A formidable polemicist on behalf of the English reaction against the French Revolution (some of her tracts sold millions of copies), More denounced the female "rights" of independence and social equality vindicated by Mary Wollstonecraft, but she also scorned the attractiveness recommended by writers like Gregory and Gisborne as frivolous, advocating a severity and discipline Wollstonecraft herself might approve. More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) sold more than 19,000 copies. The selection here comes from the first edition.

when they cannot but feel they are right. And while they should be anxiously aspiring to do well, they must not expect always to obtain the praise of having done so. But while a gentle demeanor is inculcated, let them not be instructed to practise gentleness merely on the low ground of its being decorous and feminine, and pleasing, and calculated to attract human favour; but let them be carefully taught to cultivate it on the high principle of obedience to Christ; on the practical ground of labouring after conformity to HIM, who, when he proposed himself as a perfect pattern of imitation, did not say, learn of me for I am great, or wise, or mighty, but "learn of me for I am meek and lowly," and graciously promised that the reward should accompany the practice, by encouragingly adding, "and ye shall find rest to your souls." Do not teach them humility on the ordinary ground that vanity is unamiable, and that no one will love them if they are proud; for that will only go to correct the exterior and make them soft and smiling hypocrites. But inform them that "God resisteth the proud," while "them that are meek he shall guide in judgment, and such as are gentle them shall he teach his way." In these, as in all other cases, an habitual attention to the motives should be carefully substituted in their young hearts, in the place of too much anxiety about the event of actions, and too much solicitude for that human praise which attaches to appearances as much as to realities; to success more than to desert.

* * *

It is one grand object to give the young probationer just and sober views of the world on which she is about to enter. Instead of making her bosom bound at the near prospect of emancipation from her instructors; instead of teaching her young heart to dance with premature flutterings as the critical winter draws near in which she is to come out; instead of raising a tumult in her busy imagination at the approach of her first grown up ball; endeavour to convince her that the world will not turn out to be that scene of unvarying and never-ending delights which she has perhaps been led to expect, not only from the sanguine temper and warm spirits natural to youth, but from the value she has seen put on those showy accomplishments which have too probably been fitting her for her exhibition in life. Teach her that this world is not a stage for the display of superficial talents, but for the strict and sober exercise of fortitude, temperance, meekness, faith, diligence, and self-denial.

* * *