

Sydney Smith

Edinburgh Review, XV, January 1810in *The Works of the Rev. Sydney Smith*, vol. I, 2nd edition, 1840

Advice to Young Ladies on the Improvement of the Mind. By
THOMAS BROADHURST. 8vo. London, 1808.

MR. BROADHURST is a very good sort of a man, who has not written a very bad book upon a very important subject. His object (a very laudable one) is to recommend a better system of female education than at present prevails in this country—to turn the attention of women from the trifling pursuits to which they are now condemned—and to cultivate faculties which, under the actual system of management, might almost as well not exist. To the examination of his ideas upon these points, we shall very cheerfully give up a portion of our time and attention.

A great deal has been said of the original difference of capacity between men and women; as if women were more quick, and men more judicious—as if women were more remarkable for delicacy of association, and men for stronger powers of attention. All this, we confess, appears to us very fanciful. That there is a difference in the understandings of the men and the women we every day meet with, every body, we suppose, must perceive; but there is none surely which may not be accounted for by the difference of circumstances in which they have been placed, without referring to any conjectural difference of original conformation of mind. As long as boys and girls run about in the dirt, and trundle hoops together, they are both precisely alike. If you catch up one half of these creatures, and train them to a particular set of actions and opinions, and the other half to a perfectly opposite set, of course their understandings will differ, as one or the other sort of occupations has called this or that talent into action. There is surely no occasion to go into any deeper or more abstruse reasoning, in order to explain so very simple a phenomenon. Taking it, then, for granted, that nature

has been as bountiful of understanding to one sex as the other, it is incumbent on us to consider what are the principal objections commonly made against the communication of a greater share of knowledge to women than commonly falls to their lot at present : for though it may be doubted whether women should learn all that men learn, the immense disparity which now exists between their knowledge we should hardly think could admit of any rational defence. It is not easy to imagine that there can be any just cause why a woman of forty should be more ignorant than a boy of twelve years of age. If there be any good at all in female ignorance, this (to use a very colloquial phrase) is surely too much of a good thing.

Something in this question must depend, no doubt, upon the leisure which either sex enjoys for the cultivation of their understandings :—and we cannot help thinking, that women have fully as much, if not more idle time upon their hands, than men. Women are excluded from all the serious business of the world ; men are lawyers, physicians, clergymen, apothecaries, and justices of the peace—sources of exertion which consume a great deal more time than producing and suckling children ; so that, if the thing is a thing that ought to be done—if the attainments of literature are objects really worthy the attention of females, they cannot plead the want of leisure as an excuse for indolence and neglect. The lawyer who passes his day in exasperating the bickerings of Roe and Doe, is certainly as much engaged as his lady who has the whole of the morning before her to correct the children and pay the bills. The apothecary, who rushes from an act of phlebotomy in the western parts of the town to insinuate a bolus in the east, is surely as completely absorbed as that fortunate female who is darning the garment, or preparing the repast of her *Æsculapius* at home ; and, in every degree and situation of life, it seems that men must necessarily be exposed to more serious demands upon their time and attention, than can possibly be the case with respect to the other sex. We are speaking always of the fair de-

mands which ought to be made upon the time and attention of women ; for, as the matter now stands, the time of women is considered as worth nothing at all. Daughters are kept to occupations in sewing, patching, mantua-making, and mending, by which it is impossible they can earn tenpence a day. The intellectual improvement of women is considered to be of such subordinate importance, that twenty pounds paid for needle-work would give to a whole family leisure to acquire a fund of real knowledge. They are kept with nimble fingers and vacant understandings, till the season for improvement is utterly passed away, and all chance of forming more important habits completely lost. We do not therefore say that women have more leisure than men, if it be necessary they should lead the life of artisans ; but we make this assertion only upon the supposition, that it is of some importance women should be instructed ; and that many ordinary occupations, for which a little money will find a better substitute, should be sacrificed to this consideration.

We bar, in this discussion, any objection which proceeds from the mere novelty of teaching women more than they are already taught. It may be useless that their education should be improved, or it may be pernicious ; and these are the fair grounds on which the question may be argued. But those who cannot bring their minds to consider such an unusual extension of knowledge, without connecting with it some sensation of the ludicrous, should remember, that, in the progress from absolute ignorance, there is a period when cultivation of mind is new to every rank and description of persons. A century ago, who would have believed that country gentlemen could be brought to read and spell with the ease and accuracy, which we now so frequently remark, — or supposed that they could be carried up even to the elements of ancient and modern history ? Nothing is more common, or more stupid, than to take the actual for the possible — to believe that all which is, is all which can be ; first to laugh at every proposed deviation from practice as impossible — then, when it is carried into effect, to be astonished that it did not take place before.

It is said, that the effect of knowledge is to make women pedantic and affected; and that nothing can be more offensive, than to see a woman stepping out of the natural modesty of her sex, to make an ostentatious display of her literary attainments. This may be true enough; but the answer is so trite and obvious, that we are almost ashamed to make it. All affectation and display proceed from the supposition of possessing something better than the rest of the world possesses. Nobody is vain of possessing two legs and two arms;—because that is the precise quantity of either sort of limb which every body possesses. Who ever heard a lady boast that she understood French?—for no other reason, that we know of, but because every body in these days does understand French; and though there may be some disgrace in being ignorant of that language, there is little or no merit in its acquisition. Diffuse knowledge generally among women, and you will at once cure the conceit which knowledge occasions while it is rare. Vanity and conceit we shall of course witness in men and women as long as the world endures: but by multiplying the attainments upon which these feelings are founded, you increase the difficulty of indulging them, and render them much more tolerable, by making them the proofs of a much higher merit. When learning ceases to be uncommon among women, learned women will cease to be affected.

A great many of the lesser and more obscure duties of life necessarily devolve upon the female sex. The arrangement of all household matters, and the care of children in their early infancy, must of course depend upon them. Now, there is a very general notion, that the moment you put the education of women upon a better footing than it is at present, at that moment there will be an end of all domestic economy; and that, if you once suffer women to eat of the tree of knowledge, the rest of the family will very soon be reduced to the same kind of aerial and unsatisfactory diet. These, and all such opinions, are referable to one great and common cause of error;—that man does every thing, and that nature does nothing; and that every

thing we see, is referable to positive institution, rather than to original feeling. Can any thing, for example, be more perfectly absurd than to suppose that the care and perpetual solicitude which a mother feels for her children, depends upon her ignorance of Greek and Mathematics ; and that she would desert an infant for a quadratic equation ? We seem to imagine, that we can break in pieces the solemn institution of nature, by the little laws of a boarding-school ; and that the existence of the human race depends upon teaching women a little more or a little less ;—that Cimmerian ignorance can aid parental affection, or the circle of arts and sciences produce its destruction. In the same manner, we forget the principles upon which the love of order, arrangement, and all the arts of economy depend. They depend not upon ignorance nor idleness ; but upon the poverty, confusion, and ruin which would ensue from neglecting them. Add to these principles, the love of what is beautiful and magnificent, and the vanity of display ;—and there can surely be no reasonable doubt but that the order and economy of private life is amply secured from the perilous inroads of knowledge.

We would fain know, too, if knowledge is to produce such baneful effects upon the material and the household virtues, why this influence has not already been felt ? Women are much better educated now than they were a century ago ; but they are by no means less remarkable for attention to the arrangements of their household, or less inclined to discharge the offices of parental affection. It would be very easy to show, that the same objection has been made at all times to every improvement in the education of both sexes, and all ranks—and been as uniformly and completely refuted by experience. A great part of the objections made to the education of women, are rather objections made to human nature, than to the female sex : for it is surely true, that knowledge, where it produces any bad effects at all, does as much mischief to one sex as to the other,—and gives birth to fully as much arrogance, inattention to common affairs, and eccentricity among men, as it does among women. But it by no means follows, that you get rid of

vanity and self-conceit, because you get rid of learning. Self-complacency can never want an excuse; and the best way to make it more tolerable, and more useful, is to give to it as high, and as dignified an object as possible. But at all events it is unfair to bring forward against a part of the world an objection which is equally powerful against the whole. When foolish women think they have any distinction, they are apt to be proud of it; so are foolish men. But we appeal to any one who has lived with cultivated persons of either sex, whether he has not witnessed as much pedantry, as much wrongheadedness, as much arrogance, and certainly a great deal more rudeness, produced by learning in men, than in women: therefore, we should make the accusation general — or dismiss it altogether; though, with respect to pedantry, the learned are certainly a little unfortunate, that so very emphatic a word, which is occasionally applicable to all men embarked eagerly in any pursuit, should be reserved exclusively for them: for, as pedantry is an ostentatious obtrusion of knowledge, in which those who hear us cannot sympathise, it is a fault of which soldiers, sailors, sportsmen, gamesters, cultivators, and all men engaged in a particular occupation, are quite as guilty as scholars; but they have the good fortune to have the vice only of pedantry, — while scholars have both the vice, and the name for it too.

Some persons are apt to contrast the acquisition of important knowledge with what they call simple pleasures; and deem it more becoming that a woman should educate flowers, make friendships with birds, and pick up plants, than enter into more difficult and fatiguing studies. If a woman has no taste and genius for higher occupations, let her engage in these to be sure, rather than remain destitute of any pursuit. But why are we necessarily to doom a girl, whatever be her taste or her capacity, to one unvaried line of petty and frivolous occupation? If she is full of strong sense and elevated curiosity, can there be any reason why she should be diluted and enfeebled down to a mere culler of simples, and fancier of birds? — why books of history and reasoning are to be torn out of her

hand, and why she is to be sent, like a butterfly, to hover over the idle flowers of the field? Such amusements are innocent to those whom they can occupy; but they are not innocent to those who have too powerful understandings to be occupied by them. Light broths and fruits are innocent food only to weak or to infant stomachs; but they are poison to that organ in its perfect and mature state. But the great charm appears to be in the word *simplicity*—simple pleasures! If by a simple pleasure is meant an innocent pleasure, the observation is best answered by showing, that the pleasure which results from the acquisition of important knowledge is quite as innocent as any pleasure whatever: but if by a simple pleasure is meant one, the cause of which can be easily analysed, or which does not last long, or which in itself is very faint; then simple pleasures seem to be very nearly synonymous with small pleasures; and if the simplicity were to be a little increased, the pleasure would vanish altogether.

As it is impossible that every man should have industry or activity sufficient to avail himself of the advantages of education, it is natural that men who are ignorant themselves, should view, with some degree of jealousy and alarm, any proposal for improving the education of women. But such men may depend upon it, however the system of female education may be exalted, that there will never be wanting a due proportion of failures; and that after parents, guardians, and preceptors have done all in their power to make every body wise, there will still be a plentiful supply of women who have taken special care to remain otherwise; and they may rest assured, if the utter extinction of ignorance and folly is the evil they dread, that their interests will always be effectually protected, in spite of every exertion to the contrary.

We must in candour allow, that those women who begin, will have something more to overcome than may probably hereafter be the case. We cannot deny the jealousy which exists among pompous and foolish men, respecting the education of women. There is a class of pedants, who would be cut short in the estimation of the

world a whole cubit, if it were generally known that a young lady of eighteen could be taught to decline the tenses of the middle voice, or acquaint herself with the *Æolic* varieties of that celebrated language. Then women have, of course, all ignorant men for enemies to their instruction, who being bound (as they think), in point of sex, to know more, are not well pleased, in point of fact, to know less. But, among men of sense and liberal politeness, a woman who has successfully cultivated her mind, without diminishing the gentleness and propriety of her manners, is always sure to meet with a respect and attention bordering upon enthusiasm.

There is in either sex a strong and permanent disposition to appear agreeable to the other : and this is the fair answer to those who are fond of supposing, that an higher degree of knowledge would make women rather the rivals than the companions of men. Presupposing such a desire to please, it seems much more probable, that a common pursuit should be a fresh source of interest than a cause of contention. Indeed, to suppose that any mode of education can create a general jealousy and rivalry between the sexes, is so very ridiculous, that it requires only to be stated in order to be refuted. The same desire of pleasing secures all that delicacy and reserve which are of such inestimable value to women. We are quite astonished, in hearing men converse on such subjects, to find them attributing such beautiful effects to ignorance. It would appear, from the tenor of such objections, that ignorance had been the great civiliser of the world. Women are delicate and refined only because they are ignorant ; — they manage their household, only because they are ignorant ; — they attend to their children, only because they know no better. Now, we must really confess, we have all our lives been so ignorant, as not to know the value of ignorance. We have always attributed the modesty and the refined manners of women, to their being well taught in moral and religious duty, — to the hazardous situation in which they are placed, — to that perpetual vigilance which it is their duty to exercise over thought,

word, and action,—and to that cultivation of the mild virtues, which those who cultivate the stern and magnanimous virtues expect at their hands. After all, let it be remembered, we are not saying there are no objections to the diffusion of knowledge among the female sex. We would not hazard such a proposition respecting any thing ; but we are saying, that, upon the whole, it is the best method of employing time ; and that there are fewer objections to it than to any other method. There are, perhaps, 50,000 females in Great Britain, who are exempted by circumstances from all necessary labour : but every human being must do something with their existence ; and the pursuit of knowledge is, upon the whole, the most innocent, the most dignified, and the most useful method of filling up that idleness, of which there is always so large a portion in nations far advanced in civilisation. Let any man reflect, too, upon the solitary situation in which women are placed,—the ill treatment to which they are sometimes exposed, and which they must endure in silence, and without the power of complaining,—and he must feel convinced that the happiness of a woman will be materially increased in proportion as education has given to her the habit and the means of drawing her resources from herself.

There are a few common phrases in circulation, respecting the duties of women, to which we wish to pay some degree of attention, because they are rather inimical to those opinions which we have advanced on this subject. Indeed, independently of this, there is nothing which requires more vigilance than the current phrases of the day, of which there are always some resorted to in every dispute, and from the sovereign authority of which it is often vain to make any appeal. ‘The true theatre for a woman is the sick-chamber ;’—‘Nothing so honourable to a woman as not to be spoken of at all.’ These two phrases, the delight of *Noddledom*, are grown into common-places upon the subject ; and are not unfrequently employed to extinguish that love of knowledge in women, which, in our humble opinion, it is of so much importance to cherish.

Nothing, certainly, is so ornamental and delightful in women as the benevolent affections ; but time cannot be filled up, and life employed, with high and impassioned virtues. Some of these feelings are of rare occurrence—all of short duration—or nature would sink under them. A scene of distress and anguish is an occasion where the finest qualities of the female mind may be displayed ; but it is a monstrous exaggeration to tell women that they are born only for scenes of distress and anguish. Nurse father, mother, sister and brother, if they want it ;—it would be a violation of the plainest duties to neglect them. But, when we are talking of the common occupations of life, do not let us mistake the accidents for the occupations ;—when we are arguing how the twenty-three hours of the day are to be filled up, it is idle to tell us of those feelings and agitations above the level of common existence, which may employ the remaining hour. Compassion, and every other virtue, are the great objects we all ought to have in view ; but no man (and no woman) can fill up the twenty-four hours by acts of virtue. But one is a lawyer, and the other a ploughman, and the third a merchant ; and then, acts of goodness, and intervals of compassion and fine feeling, are scattered up and down the common occupations of life. We know women are to be compassionate ; but they cannot be compassionate from eight o'clock in the morning till twelve at night :—and what are they to do in the interval ? This is the only question we have been putting all along, and is all that can be meant by literary education.

Then, again, as to the notoriety which is incurred by literature.—The cultivation of knowledge is a very distinct thing from its publication ; nor does it follow that a woman is to become an author, merely because she has talent enough for it. We do not wish a lady to write books,—to defend and reply,—to squabble about the tomb of Achilles, or the plain of Troy,—any more than we wish her to dance at the opera, to play at a public concert, or to put pictures in the Exhibition, because she has learned music, dancing and drawing. The great

use of her knowledge will be that it contributes to her private happiness. She may make it public : but it is not the principal object which the friends of female education have in view. Among men, the few who write bear no comparison to the many who read. We hear most of the former, indeed, because they are, in general, the most ostentatious part of literary men ; but there are innumerable persons who, without ever laying themselves before the public, have made use of literature to add to the strength of their understandings, and to improve the happiness of their lives. After all, it may be an evil for ladies to be talked of : but we really think those ladies who are talked of only as Mrs. Marcet, Mrs. Somerville, and Miss Martineau are talked of, may bear their misfortunes with a very great degree of Christian patience.

Their exemption from all the necessary business of life is one of the most powerful motives for the improvement of education in women. Lawyers and physicians have in their professions a constant motive to exertion ; if you neglect their education, they must in a certain degree educate themselves by their commerce with the world : they must learn caution, accuracy, and judgment, because they must incur responsibility. But if you neglect to educate the mind of a woman, by the speculative difficulties which occur in literature, it can never be educated at all : if you do not effectually rouse it by education, it must remain for ever languid. Uneducated men may escape intellectual degradation ; uneducated women cannot. They have nothing to do ; and if they come untaught from the schools of education, they will never be instructed in the school of events.

Women have not their livelihood to gain by knowledge ; and that is one motive for relaxing all those efforts which are made in the education of men. They certainly have not ; but they have happiness to gain, to which knowledge leads as probably as it does to profit ; and that is a reason against mistaken indulgence. Besides, we conceive the labour and fatigue of accomplishments to be quite equal to the labour and fatigue of knowledge ; and that it takes

quite as many years to be charming, as it does to be learned.

Another difference of the sexes is, that women are attended to, and men attend. All acts of courtesy and politeness originate from the one sex, and are received by the other. We can see no sort of reason, in this diversity of condition, for giving to women a trifling and insignificant education; but we see in it a very powerful reason for strengthening their judgment, and inspiring them with the habit of employing time usefully. We admit many striking differences in the situation of the two sexes, and many striking differences of understanding, proceeding from the different circumstances in which they are placed: but there is not a single difference of this kind which does not afford a new argument for making the education of women better than it is. They have nothing serious to do; — is that a reason why they should be brought up to do nothing but what is trifling? They are exposed to greater dangers; — is that a reason why their faculties are to be purposely and industriously weakened? They are to form the characters of future men; — is that a cause why their own characters are to be broken and frittered down as they now are? In short, there is not a single trait in that diversity of circumstances, in which the two sexes are placed, that does not decidedly prove the magnitude of the error we commit in neglecting (as we do neglect) the education of women.

If the objections against the better education of women could be overruled, one of the great advantages that would ensue would be the extinction of innumerable follies. A decided and prevailing taste for one or another mode of education there must be. A century past, it was for housewifery — now it is for accomplishments. The object now is, to make women artists, — to give them an excellence in drawing, music, painting and dancing, — of which, persons who make these pursuits the occupation of their lives, and derive from them their subsistence, need not be ashamed. Now, one great evil of all this is, that it does not last. If the whole of life were an Olympic

game, — if we could go on feasting and dancing to the end, — this might do ; but it is in truth merely a provision for the little interval between coming into life, and settling in it ; while it leaves a long and dreary expanse behind, devoid both of dignity and cheerfulness. No mother, no woman who has passed over the few first years of life, sings, or dances, or draws, or plays upon musical instruments. These are merely means for displaying the grace and vivacity of youth, which every woman gives up, as she gives up the dress and the manners of eighteen : she has no wish to retain them ; or, if she has, she is driven out of them by diameter and derision. The system of female education, as it now stands, aims only at embellishing a few years of life, which are in themselves so full of grace and happiness, that they hardly want it ; and then leaves the rest of existence a miserable prey to idle insignificance. No woman of understanding and reflection can possibly conceive she is doing justice to her children by such kind of education. The object is, to give to children resources that will endure as long as life endures, — habits that time will ameliorate, not destroy, — occupations that will render sickness tolerable, solitude pleasant, age venerable, life more dignified and useful, and therefore death less terrible : and the compensation which is offered for the omission of all this, is a shortlived blaze, — a little temporary effect, which has no other consequence than to deprive the remainder of life of all taste and relish. There may be women who have a taste for the fine arts, and who evince a decided talent for drawing, or for music. In that case, there can be no objection to the cultivation of these arts ; but the error is, to make such things the grand and universal object, — to insist upon it that every woman is to sing, and draw, and dance — with nature, or against nature, — to bind her apprentice to some accomplishment, and if she cannot succeed in oil or water-colours, to prefer gilding, varnishing, burnishing, box-making, to real and solid improvement in taste, knowledge, and understanding.

A great deal is said in favour of the social nature of the fine arts. Music gives pleasure to others. Drawing

is an art, the amusement of which does not centre in him who exercises it, but is diffused among the rest of the world. This is true; but there is nothing, after all, so social as a cultivated mind. We do not mean to speak slightly of the fine arts, or to depreciate the good humour with which they are sometimes exhibited; but we appeal to any man, whether a little spirited and sensible conversation — displaying, modestly, useful acquirements — and evincing rational curiosity, is not well worth the highest exertions of musical or graphical skill. A woman of accomplishments may entertain those who have the pleasure of knowing her for half an hour with great brilliancy; but a mind full of ideas, and with that elastic spring which the love of knowledge only can convey, is a perpetual source of exhilaration and amusement to all that come within its reach; — not collecting its force into single and insulated achievements, like the efforts made in the fine arts — but diffusing, equally over the whole of existence, a calm pleasure — better loved as it is longer felt — and suitable to every variety and every period of life. Therefore, instead of hanging the understanding of a woman upon walls, or hearing it vibrate upon strings, — instead of seeing it in clouds, or hearing it in the wind, we would make it the first spring and ornament of society, by enriching it with attainments upon which alone such power depends.

If the education of women were improved, the education of men would be improved also. Let any one consider (in order to bring the matter more home by an individual instance) of what immense importance to society it is, whether a nobleman of first-rate fortune and distinction is well or ill brought up; — what a taste and fashion he may inspire for private and for political vice! — and what misery and mischief he may produce to the thousand human beings who are dependent on him! A country contains no such curse within its bosom. Youth, wealth, high rank, and vice, form a combination which baffles all remonstrance and beats down all opposition. A man of high rank who combines these qualifi-

cations for corruption, is almost the master of the manners of the age, and has the public happiness within his grasp. But the most beautiful possession which a country can have is a noble and rich man, who loves virtue and knowledge ; — who without being feeble or fanatical is pious — and who without being factious is firm and independent ; — who, in his political life, is an equitable mediator between king and people ; and, in his civil life, a firm promoter of all which can shed a lustre upon his country, or promote the peace and order of the world. But if these objects are of the importance which we attribute to them, the education of women must be important, as the formation of character for the first seven or eight years of life seems to depend almost entirely upon them. It is certainly in the power of a sensible and well educated mother to inspire, within that period, such tastes and propensities as shall nearly decide the destiny of the future man ; and this is done, not only by the intentional exertions of the mother, but by the gradual and insensible imitation of the child ; for there is something extremely contagious in greatness and rectitude of thinking, even at that age ; and the character of the mother with whom he passes his early infancy, is always an event of the utmost importance to the child. A merely accomplished woman cannot infuse her tastes into the minds of her sons ; and, if she could, nothing could be more unfortunate than her success. Besides, when her accomplishments are given up, she has nothing left for it but to amuse herself in the best way she can ; and, becoming entirely frivolous, either declines altogether the fatigue of attending to her children, or, attending to them, has neither talents nor knowledge to succeed ; and, therefore, here is a plain and fair answer to those who ask so triumphantly, Why should a woman dedicate herself to this branch of knowledge ? or why should she be attached to such science ? — Because, by having gained information on these points, she may inspire her son with valuable tastes, which may abide by him through life, and carry him up to all the sublimities of knowledge ; — because she cannot

lay the foundation of a great character, if she is absorbed in frivolous amusements, nor inspire her child with noble desires, when a long course of trifling has destroyed the little talents which were left by a bad education.

It is of great importance to a country, that there should be as many understandings as possible actively employed within it. Mankind are much happier for the discovery of barometers, thermometers, steam-engines, and all the innumerable inventions in the arts and sciences. We are every day and every hour reaping the benefit of such talent and ingenuity. The same observation is true of such works as those of Dryden, Pope, Milton and Shakspeare. Mankind are much happier that such individuals have lived and written; they add every day to the stock of public enjoyment—and perpetually gladden and embellish life. Now, the number of those who exercise their understandings to any good purpose, is exactly in proportion to those who exercise it at all; but, as the matter stands at present, half the talent in the universe runs to waste, and is totally unprofitable. It would have been almost as well for the world, hitherto, that women, instead of possessing the capacities they do at present, should have been born wholly destitute of wit, genius, and every other attribute of mind of which men make so eminent an use: and the ideas of use and possession are so united together, that, because it has been the custom in almost all countries to give to women a different and a worse education than to men, the notion has obtained that they do not possess faculties which they do not cultivate. Just as, in breaking up a common, it is sometimes very difficult to make the poor believe it will carry corn, merely because they have been hitherto accustomed to see it produce nothing but weeds and grass—they very naturally mistake present condition for general nature. So completely have the talents of women been kept down, that there is scarcely a single work, either of reason or imagination, written by a woman, which is in general circulation either in the English, French, or Italian literature;—scarcely one that has crept even into the ranks of our minor poets.

If the possession of excellent talents is not a conclusive reason why they should be improved, it at least amounts to a very strong presumption ; and, if it can be shown that women may be trained to reason and imagine as well as men, the strongest reasons are certainly necessary to show us why we should not avail ourselves of such rich gifts of nature ; and we have a right to call for a clear statement of those perils which make it necessary that such talents should be totally extinguished, or, at most, very partially drawn out. The burthen of proof does not lie with those who say, Increase the quantity of talent in any country as much as possible — for such a proposition is in conformity with every man's feelings : but it lies with those who say, Take care to keep that understanding weak and trifling, which nature has made capable of becoming strong and powerful. The paradox is with them, not with us. In all human reasoning, knowledge must be taken for a good, till it can be shown to be an evil. But now, Nature makes to us rich and magnificent presents ; and we say to her — You are too luxuriant and munificent — we must keep you under, and prune you ; — we have talents enough in the other half of the creation ; — and, if you will not stupify and enfeeble the mind of women to our hands, we ourselves must expose them to a narcotic process, and educate away that fatal redundancy with which the world is afflicted, and the order of sublunary things deranged.

One of the greatest pleasures of life is conversation ; — and the pleasures of conversation are of course enhanced by every increase of knowledge : not that we should meet together to talk of alkalis and angles, or to add to our stock of history and philology — though a little of these things is no bad ingredient in conversation ; but let the subject be what it may, there is always a prodigious difference between the conversation of those who have been well educated and of those who have not enjoyed this advantage. Education gives fecundity of thought, copiousness of illustration, quickness, vigour, fancy, words, images and illustrations ; — it decorates every common thing, and gives the power of trifling without being un-

dignified and absurd. The subjects themselves may not be wanted, upon which the talents of an educated man have been exercised ; but there is always a demand for those talents which his education has rendered strong and quick. Now, really, nothing can be further from our intention than to say anything rude and unpleasant ; but we must be excused for observing, that it is not now a very common thing to be interested by the variety and extent of female knowledge, but it is a very common thing to lament, that the finest faculties in the world have been confined to trifles utterly unworthy of their richness and their strength.

The pursuit of knowledge is the most innocent and interesting occupation which can be given to the female sex ; nor can there be a better method of checking a spirit of dissipation, than by diffusing a taste for literature. The true way to attack vice, is by setting up something else against it. Give to women, in early youth, something to acquire, of sufficient interest and importance to command the application of their mature faculties, and to excite their perseverance in future life ; — teach them, that happiness is to be derived from the acquisition of knowledge, as well as the gratification of vanity ; and you will raise up a much more formidable barrier against dissipation, than an host of invectives and exhortations can supply.

It sometimes happens that an unfortunate man gets drunk with very bad wine, — not to gratify his palate, but to forget his cares : he does not set any value on what he receives, but on account of what it excludes ; — it keeps out something worse than itself. Now, though it were denied that the acquisition of serious knowledge is of itself important to a woman, still it prevents a taste for silly and pernicious works of imagination ; it keeps away the horrid trash of novels ; and, in lieu of that eagerness for emotion and adventure which books of that sort inspire, promotes a calm and steady temperament of mind.

A man who deserves such a piece of good fortune, may generally find an excellent companion for all the vicissi-

tudes of his life ; but it is not so easy to find a companion for his understanding, who has similar pursuits with himself, or who can comprehend the pleasure he derives from them. We really can see no reason why it should not be otherwise ; nor comprehend how the pleasures of domestic life can be promoted by diminishing the number of subjects in which persons who are to spend their lives together take a common interest.

One of the most agreeable consequences of knowledge, is the respect and importance which it communicates to old age. Men rise in character often as they increase in years ; — they are venerable from what they have acquired, and pleasing from what they can impart. If they outlive their faculties, the mere frame itself is respected for what it once contained ; but women (such is their unfortunate style of education) hazard every thing upon one cast of the die ; — when youth is gone, all is gone. No human creature gives his admiration for nothing : either the eye must be charmed, or the understanding gratified. A woman must talk wisely, or look well. Every human being must put up with the coldest civility, who has neither the charms of youth nor the wisdom of age. Neither is there the slightest commiseration for decayed accomplishments ; — no man mourns over the fragments of a dancer, or drops a tear on the relics of musical skill. They are flowers destined to perish ; but the decay of great talents is always the subject of solemn pity ; and, even when their last memorial is over, their ruins and vestiges are regarded with pious affection.

There is no connection between the ignorance in which women are kept, and the preservation of moral and religious principle ; and yet certainly there is, in the minds of some timid and respectable persons, a vague, indefinite dread of knowledge, as if it were capable of producing these effects. It might almost be supposed, from the dread which the propagation of knowledge has excited, that there was some great secret which was to be kept in impenetrable obscurity, — that all moral rules were a species of delusion and imposture, the detection of which, by the im-

provement of the understanding, would be attended with the most fatal consequences to all, and particularly to women. If we could possibly understand what these great secrets were, we might perhaps be disposed to concur in their preservation ; but believing that all the salutary rules which are imposed on women are the result of true wisdom, and productive of the greatest happiness, we cannot understand how they are to become less sensible of this truth in proportion as their power of discovering truth in general is increased, and the habit of viewing questions with accuracy and comprehension established by education. There are men, indeed, who are always exclaiming against every species of power, because it is connected with danger : their dread of abuses is so much stronger than their admiration of uses, that they would cheerfully give up the use of fire, gunpowder, and printing, to be freed from robbers, incendiaries, and libels. It is true, that every increase of knowledge may possibly render depravity more depraved, as well as it may increase the strength of virtue. It is in itself only power ; and its value depends on its application. But, trust to the natural love of good where there is no temptation to be bad — it operates nowhere more forcibly than in education. No man, whether he be tutor, guardian, or friend, ever contents himself with infusing the mere ability to acquire ; but giving the power, he gives with it a taste for the wise and rational exercise of that power ; so that an educated person is not only one with stronger and better faculties than others, but with a more useful propensity—a disposition better cultivated—and associations of a higher and more important class.

In short, and to recapitulate the main points upon which we have insisted.—Why the disproportion in knowledge between the two sexes should be so great, when the inequality in natural talents is so small ; or why the understanding of women should be lavished upon trifles, when nature has made it capable of higher and better things, we profess ourselves not able to understand. The affectation charged upon female knowledge is best cured by making that knowledge more general : and the economy devolved

upon women is best secured by the ruin, disgrace, and inconvenience which proceeds from neglecting it. For the care of children, nature has made a direct and powerful provision; and the gentleness and elegance of women is the natural consequence of that desire to please, which is productive of the greatest part of civilisation and refinement, and which rests upon a foundation too deep to be shaken by any such modifications in education as we have proposed. If you educate women to attend to dignified and important subjects, you are multiplying, beyond measure, the chances of human improvement, by preparing and *medicating* those early impressions, which always come from the mother; and which, in a great majority of instances, are quite decisive of character and genius. Nor is it only in the business of education that women would influence the destiny of men.—If women knew more, men must learn more—for ignorance would then be shameful—and it would become the fashion to be instructed. The instruction of women improves the stock of national talents, and employs more minds for the instruction and amusement of the world;—it increases the pleasures of society, by multiplying the topics upon which the two sexes take a common interest;—and makes marriage an intercourse of understanding as well as of affection, by giving dignity and importance to the female character. The education of women favours public morals; it provides for every season of life, as well as for the brightest and the best; and leaves a woman when she is stricken by the hand of time, not as she now is, destitute of every thing, and neglected by all; but with the full power and the splendid attractions of knowledge,—diffusing the elegant pleasures of polite literature, and receiving the just homage of learned and accomplished men.