

CLASSICS TO GO
**THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION
OF DAUGHTERS**



MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

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Education of Daughters**

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P R E F A C E .

In the following pages I have endeavoured to point out some important things with respect to female education. It is true, many treatises have been already written; yet it occurred to me, that much still remained to be said. I shall not swell these sheets by writing apologies for my attempt. I am afraid, indeed, the reflections will, by some, be thought too grave; but I could not make them less so without writing affectedly; yet, though they may be insipid to the gay, others may not think them so; and if they should prove useful to one fellow-creature, and beguile any hours, which sorrow has made heavy, I shall think I have not been employed in vain.

THE NURSERY.

As I conceive it to be the duty of every rational creature to attend to its offspring, I am sorry to observe, that reason and duty together have not so powerful an influence over human conduct, as instinct has in the brute creation. Indolence, and a thoughtless disregard of every thing, except the present indulgence, make many mothers, who may have momentary starts of tenderness, neglect their children. They follow a pleasing impulse, and never reflect that reason should cultivate and govern those instincts which are implanted in us to render the path of duty pleasant—for if they are not governed they will run wild; and strengthen the passions which are ever endeavouring to obtain dominion—I mean vanity and self-love.

The first thing to be attended to, is laying the foundation of a good constitution. The mother (if there are not very weighty reasons to prevent her) ought to suckle her children. Her milk is their proper nutriment, and for some time is quite sufficient. Were a regular mode of suckling adopted, it would be far from being a laborious task. Children, who are left to the care of ignorant nurses, have their stomachs overloaded with improper food, which turns acid, and renders them very uncomfortable. We should be particularly careful to guard them in their infant state from bodily pain; as their minds can then afford them no amusement to alleviate it. The first years of a child's life are frequently made miserable through negligence or ignorance. Their complaints are mostly in their stomach or bowels; and these complaints generally arise from the quality and quantity of their food.

The suckling of a child also excites the warmest glow of tenderness—Its dependant, helpless state produces an affection, which may properly be termed maternal. I have even felt it, when I have seen a mother perform that office; and am of opinion, that maternal tenderness arises quite as much from habit as instinct. It is possible, I am convinced, to acquire the affection of a parent for an adopted child; it is necessary, therefore, for a mother to perform the office of one, in order to produce in herself a rational affection for her offspring.

Children very early contract the manners of those about them. It is easy to distinguish the child of a well-bred person, if it is not left entirely to the nurse's care. These women are of course ignorant, and to keep a child quiet for the moment, they humour all its little caprices. Very soon does it begin to be perverse, and eager to be gratified in every thing. The usual mode of acting is complying with the humours sometimes, and contradicting them at others—just according to the dictates of an uncorrected temper. This the infant finds out earlier than can be imagined, and it gives rise to an affection devoid of respect. Uniformity of conduct is the only feasible method of creating both. An inflexible adherence to any rule that has been laid down makes children comfortable, and saves the mother and nurse much trouble, as they will not often contest, if they have not once conquered. They will, I am sure, love and respect a person who treats them properly, if some one else does not indiscreetly indulge them. I once heard a judicious father say, "He would treat his child as he would his horse: first convince it he was its master, and then its friend." But yet a rigid style of behaviour is by no means to be adopted; on the contrary, I wish to remark, that it is only in the years of childhood that the happiness of a human being depends entirely on others—and to embitter those years by needless restraint is cruel. To conciliate affection, affection must be

shown, and little proofs of it ought always to be given—let them not appear weaknesses, and they will sink deep into the young mind, and call forth its most amiable propensities. The turbulent passions may be kept down till reason begins to dawn.

In the nursery too, they are taught to speak; and there they not only hear nonsense, but that nonsense retailed out in such silly, affected tones as must disgust;—yet these are the tones which the child first imitates, and its innocent playful manner renders them tolerable, if not pleasing; but afterwards they are not easily got the better of—nay, many women always retain the pretty prattle of the nursery, and do not forget to lisp, when they have learnt to languish.

Children are taught revenge and lies in their very cradles. If they fall down, or strike their heads against any thing, to quiet them they are bid return the injury, and their little hands held out to do it. When they cry, or are troublesome, the cat or dog is chastised, or some bugbear called to take them away; which only terrifies them at first, for they soon find out that the nurse means nothing by these dreadful threatenings. Indeed, so well do they discover the fallacy, that I have seen little creatures, who could scarcely speak, play over the same tricks with their doll or the cat.

How, then, when the mind comes under discipline, can precepts of truth be enforced, when the first examples they have had would lead them to practice the contrary?