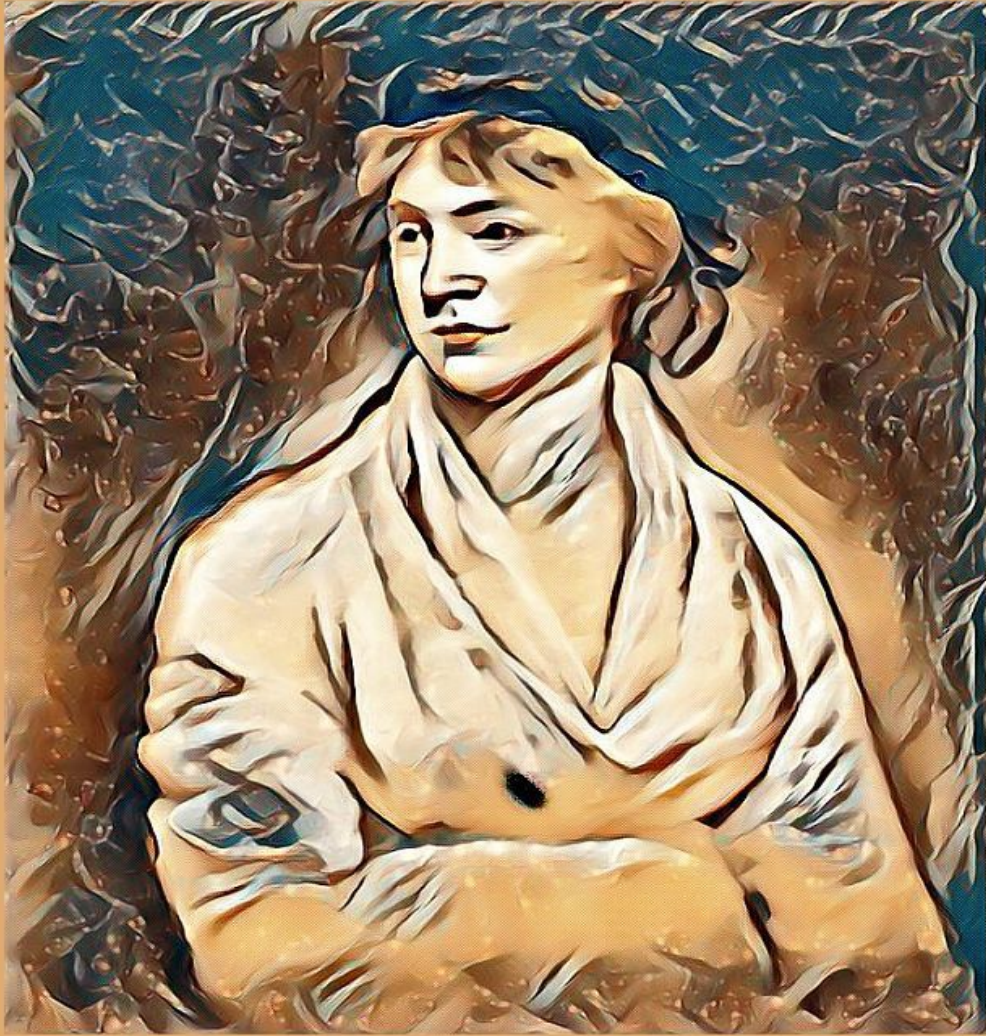


MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT



ORIGINAL STORIES
FROM REAL LIFE

Original Stories from Real Life

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CONTENTS:

[PREFACE.](#)

[INTRODUCTION.](#)

[CHAP. I](#)

[CHAP. II](#)

[CHAP. III](#)

[CHAP. IV](#)

[CHAP. V.](#)

[CHAP. VI](#)

[CHAP. VII.](#)

[CHAP. VIII.](#)

[CHAP. IX.](#)

[CHAP. X.](#)

[CHAP. XI.](#)

[CHAP. XII.](#)

[CHAP. XIII.](#)

[CHAP. XIV.](#)

[CHAP. XV.](#)

[CHAP. XVI.](#)

[CHAP. XVII.](#)

[CHAP. XVIII.](#)

[CHAP. XIX.](#)

[CHAP. XX.](#)

[CHAP. XXI.](#)

[CHAP. XXII.](#)

[CHAP. XXIII.](#)

CHAP. XXIV.

CHAP. XXV.

PREFACE.

THESE conversations and tales are accommodated to the present state of society; which obliges the author to attempt to cure those faults by reason, which ought never to have taken root in the infant mind. Good habits, imperceptibly fixed, are far preferable to the precepts of reason; but as this task requires more judgment than generally falls to the lot of parents, substitutes must be sought for, and medicines given, when regimen would have answered the purpose much better. I believe those who examine their own minds will readily agree with me, that reason, with difficulty, conquers settled habits, even when it is arrived at some degree of maturity: why then do we suffer children to be bound with fetters, which their half-formed faculties cannot break.

In writing the following work, I aim at perspicuity and simplicity of style; and try to avoid those unmeaning compliments, which slip from the tongue, but have not the least connection with the affections that should warm the heart, and animate the conduct. By this false politeness, sincerity is sacrificed, and truth violated; and thus artificial manners are necessarily taught. For true politeness is a polish, not a varnish; and should rather be acquired by observation than admonition. And we may remark, by way of illustration, that men do not attempt to polish precious stones, till age and air have given them that degree of solidity, which will enable them to bear the necessary friction, without destroying the main substance.

The way to render instruction most useful cannot always be adopted; knowledge should be gradually imparted, and flow more from example than teaching: example directly addresses the senses, the first inlets to the heart; and the

improvement of those instruments of the understanding is the object education should have constantly in view, and over which we have most power. But to wish that parents would, themselves, mould the ductile passions, is a chimerical wish, for the present generation have their own passions to combat with, and fastidious pleasures to pursue, neglecting those pointed out by nature: we must therefore pour premature knowledge into the succeeding one; and, teaching virtue, explain the nature of vice. Cruel necessity!

The Conversations are intended to assist the teacher as well as the pupil; and this will obviate an objection which some may start, that the sentiments are not quite on a level with the capacity of a child. Every child requires a different mode of treatment; but a writer can only choose one, and that must be modified by those who are actually engaged with young people in their studies.

The tendency of the reasoning obviously tends to fix principles of truth and humanity on a solid and simple foundation; and to make religion an active, invigorating director of the affections, and not a mere attention to forms. Systems of Theology may be complicated; but when the character of the Supreme Being is displayed, and He is recognised as the Universal Father, the Author and Centre of Good, a child may be led to comprehend that dignity and happiness must arise from imitating Him; and this conviction should be twisted into, and be the foundation of every inculcated duty.

At any rate, the Tales which were written to illustrate the moral, may recall it, when the mind has gained sufficient strength to discuss the argument from which it was deduced.

INTRODUCTION.

MARY and Caroline, though the children of wealthy parents were, in their infancy; left entirely to the management of servants, or people equally ignorant. Their mother died suddenly, and their father, who found them very troublesome at home, placed them under the tuition of a woman of tenderness and discernment, a near relation, who was induced to take on herself the important charge through motives of compassion.

They were shamefully ignorant, considering that Mary had been fourteen, and Caroline twelve years in the world. If they had been merely ignorant, the task would, not have appeared so arduous; but they had caught every prejudice that the vulgar casually instill. In order to eradicate these prejudices, and substitute good habits instead of those they had carelessly contracted, Mrs. Mason never suffered them to be out of her sight. They were allowed to ask questions on all occasions, a method she would not have adopted, had she educated them from the first, according to the suggestions of her own reason, to which experience had given its sanction.

They had tolerable capacities; but Mary had a turn for ridicule, and Caroline was vain of her person. She was, indeed, very handsome, and the inconsiderate encomiums that had, in her presence, been lavished on her beauty made her, even at that early age, affected.

CHAP. I

The Treatment of Animals—The Ant—The Bee—Goodness—The Lark's Nest—The Asses.

ONE fine morning in spring, some time after Mary and Caroline were settled in their new abode, Mrs. Mason proposed a walk before breakfast, a custom she wished to teach imperceptibly, by rendering it amusing.

The sun had scarcely dispelled the dew that hung on every blade of grass, and filled the half-shut flowers; every prospect smiled, and the freshness of the air conveyed the most pleasing sensations to Mrs. Mason's mind; but the children were regardless of surrounding beauties, and ran eagerly some insects to destroy them. Mrs. Mason silently observed their cruel sports, without appearing to do it; but stepping suddenly out of the foot-path into the long grass, her buckle was caught in it, and striving to disentangle herself, she wet her feet; which the children knew she wished to avoid, as she had been lately sick. This circumstance roused their attention; and they forgot their amusement to enquire *why* she had left the path; and Mary could hardly restrain a laugh, when she was informed that it was to avoid treading on some snails that were creeping across the narrow footway. Surely, said Mary, you do not think there is any harm in killing a snail, or any of those nasty creatures that crawl on the ground? I hate them, and should scream if one was to find its way from my clothes to my neck! With great gravity, Mrs. Mason asked how she dared to kill any thing, unless it were to prevent its hurting her? Then, resuming a smiling face, she said,

Your education has been neglected, my child, as we walk along attend to what I say, and make the best answers you can; and do you, Caroline, join in the conversation.

You have already heard that God created the world, and every inhabitant of it. He is then called the Father of all creatures; and all are made to be happy, whom a good and wise God has created. He made those snails you despise, and caterpillars, and spiders; and when he made them, did not leave them to perish, but placed them where the food that is most proper to nourish them is easily found. They do not live long, but He who is their Father, as well as your's, directs them to deposit their eggs on the plants that are fit to support their young, when they are not able to get food for themselves.—And when such as great and wise Being has taken care to provide every thing necessary for the meanest creature, would you dare to kill it, merely because it appears to you ugly? Mary began to be attentive, and quickly followed Mrs. Mason's example, who allowed a caterpillar and a spider to creep on her hand. You find them, she rejoined, very harmless; but a great number would destroy our vegetables and fruit; so birds are permitted to eat them, as we feed on animals; and in spring there are always more than at any other season of the year, to furnish food for the young broods.—Half-convinced, Mary said, But worms are of little consequence in the world. Yet, replied Mrs. Mason, God cares for them, and gives them every thing that is necessary to render their existence comfortable. You are often troublesome—I am stronger than you—yet I do not kill you.

Observe those ants; they have a little habitation in yonder hillock; they carry food to it for their young, and sleep very snug in it during the cold weather. The bees also have comfortable towns, and lay up a store of honey to support them when the flowers die, and snow covers the ground: and this forecast is as much the gift of God, as any quality you possess.