



The Female Right to LITERATURE, in a
Letter to a young Lady from FLORENCE.

By ———

W Hilst you, ATHENIA, with assiduous toil
Reap the rich fruits of learning's fertile soil:
Now search whate'er historick truth has shewn,
And make the wealth of ages past your own;
Now crop the blossoms of poetick flow'rs,
And range delighted in the Muses bowers;
Say, will the sweetest of her sex attend
To lines by friendship, not by by flatt'ry penn'd;
To lines which tempt not worth with empty praise;
But to still greater height that worth would raise;
To lines which dare against a world decide,
And stem the rage of custom's rapid tide!

Come then, ATHENIA, freely let us scan
The coward insults of that tyrant, man.
Self-prais'd, and grasping at despotick pow'r,
He looks on slav'ry as the female dow'r;
To Nature's boon ascribes what force has giv'n,
And usurpation deems the gift of heav'n.
See the first-peopled East, where ASIA sheds
Her balmy spices o'er her fertile meads:

There,

There, while th' ASSYRIAN stretch'd his wide domain
 From distant Indus to the Cyprian main,
 All nature's laws by impious force were broke ;
 The female sex to slav'ry's galling yoke
 Bow'd their fair necks : from social life confin'd,
 And all th' exertions of th' enlighten'd mind,
 Clos'd in a proud Seraglio's wanton bow'rs,
 The dalliance of a tyrant's looser hours.
 By kings' examples subjects form their lives,
 Dependent satraps had their train of wives ;
 Proportion'd pow'r each petty tyrant craves,
 And each poor female was the slave of slaves.

When PERSIA next o'erturn'd th' Assyrian throne,
 Destroy'd her tyranny and fix'd its own ;
 The fair distress'd no milder treatment saw,
 This was indeed *th' unalterable law*.

In future times, whatever masters came,
 Tyrants were chang'd, but tyranny the same :
 At length t' accumulate the female woes,
 The grand impostor MAHOMET arose ;
 Swoln with prophetick lyes, he lay'd his plan
 On the firm basis of the pride of man ;
 " Women, the toys of men, and slaves of lust,
 " Are but mere moulds to form man's outward crust ;
 " The heavenly spark, that animates the clay,
 " Of the prime essence that effulgent ray,
 " Th' immortal soul is all to man confin'd,
 " Not meanly squander'd on weak woman-kind."

Accursed wretch! by hell's black council driv'n
 Thus to debase the fairest work of heav'n.
 And could Religion rear her sacred head
 Fraught with such doctrines? could such errors spread
 From western TANGIER, and the sun-burnt Moor,
 To the cold TARTAR's ever-frozen shore?
 Ev'n GREECE too not exempt, GREECE, once the seat
 Where Sense and Freedom held the reins of state;
 Where Force was Reason's hand-maid; where the bands
 Of Love and Friendship join'd the wedded hands;
 Where flourish'd once, and flourish still in fame
 Th' ATHENIAN matron, and the SPARTAN dame.

In ROME too Liberty once reign'd, in ROME
 The female virtues were allow'd to bloom,
 And bloom they did: when CANNÆ's fatal plain
 Was heap'd with mountains of the Roman slain,
 Was there a matron wept her children *dead*?
 Was there a matron wept not those that *fled*?
 Then when each rumour seem'd the voice of fate,
 And spoke the victor thund'ring at their gate,
 Was there one mention'd peace? did they not pour
 Their wealth, their jewels to the publick store,
 In emulous haste all pressing to be poor?

Alas how chang'd! how are the mighty sunk,
 From the firm Patriot to the whining Monk!
 Where Industry secur'd the publick good,
 Where censors, consuls, and dictators plough'd.

Now

Now lazy zealots batten on the spoil,
 And consecrated Sloth devours the farmer's toil.
 But oh still worse! where Love and Friendship shone,
 Domestick Tyranny has fix'd his throne,
 With all his train of monsters: at his side
 Swoln with self-flatteries sits stiff-neck'd Pride;
 Two twin-born fiends his other ear engage,
 Heart-canker'd Jealousy, and fire-ey'd Rage;
 In front, his empire's sole support and source,
 Rattling chains, bars and locks, stalks brutal Force;
 Whilst pale and shrivel'd, crouch'd beneath the chair,
 Lies sneaking, conscious Worthlessness; and near
 Squint-ey'd Suspicion lurks, with self-distracting Fear. }

Hail, happy BRITAIN, dear parental land,
 Where Liberty maintains her latest stand!
 Oh while amidst tyrannick realms I rove,
 Enamour'd let me pour my filial love
 Into thy bosom. When the raven wings
 Of darkness hover o'er me, when the springs
 Of every outward sense are shut, my soul
 Thee oft revisits, oft without controul
 Ranges thy fields delighted, and inhales
 Friendship's pure joys, and Freedom's healthful gales.

But say, BRITANNIA, do thy sons, who claim
 A birth-right liberty, dispense the same
 In equal scales? Why then does Custom bind
 In chains of Ignorance the female mind?

Why is to them the bright ethereal ray
 Of science veil'd? Why does each pedant say,
 " Shield me, propitious powers, nor clog my life
 " With that supreme of plagues *a learned wife*.
 " 'Tis man's, with science to expand the soul,
 " And wing his eagle-flight from pole to pole;
 " 'Tis his to pierce antiquity's dark gloom,
 " And the still thicker shades of times to come;
 " 'Tis his to guide the pond'rous helm of state,
 " And bear alone all wisdom's solid weight.
 " Let woman with alluring graces move
 " The fondling passions and the baby love;
 " Be this our only science, be her doom
 " Fix'd to the toilette, the spinnet and loom."

Tongue-doughty pedant, was ATHENIA'S soul
 Form'd for these only? Bring th' exactest rule
 Of judgment to the tryal, prove that e'er
 Thy school-proud tribe engross'd a greater share
 Of mental excellence; tho' vernal Youth
 Jufts swell her lovely bosom, yet blest Truth,
 Offspring of Sense and Industry, has there
 Long fix'd her residence; and taught the fair
 Or wisdom's deep recesses to explore,
 Or on invention's rapid wings to soar
 Above th' Aonian mount; and can't thou think
 That virtues, which exalt the soul, can sink
 The outward charms? must knowledge give offence?
 And are the graces all at war with sense?

Say,

Say, who of all the fair is form'd to move
 The fondest passions, most ecstasick love,
 More than ATHENIA? in her gentle eye
 Soft innocence and virgin modesty
 Incessant shine, while still a new-born grace
 Springs in each speaking feature of her face.
 Her sprightly wit no forward pertness spoils:
 No self-assuming air her judgment foils;
 Still prone to learn, tho' capable to teach,
 And lofty all her thoughts, but humble all her speech.
 Proceed, ATHENIA, let thy growing mind
 Take ev'ry knowledge in of ev'ry kind:
 Still on perfection fix thy steady eye,
 Be ever rising, rise thou ne'er so high.
 But oh reflect, that in th' advent'rous flight,
 Thou mount'st a glorious, but a dangerous height:
 When ev'ry science ev'ry grace shall join,
 When most thy wit, when most thy beauties shine,
 When thickest crowds enamour'd press around,
 When loudest ev'ry tongue thy praise shall sound,
 When verse too offers incense to thy shrine,
 And adoration breathes in ev'ry line,
 Then let my friendly Muse express her care,
 Then most will danger spread her viewless snare:
 Then let this truth possess thy inmost soul,
 "One drop of Vanity may spoil the whole."

Not self-secure on earth can Knowledge dwell,
 Knowledge the bliss of heav'n and pang of hell,

Alike

Alike the instrument of good and evil,
 The attribute of God and of the Devil.
 Without her, Virtue is a powerless Will;
 She, without Virtue, is a powerful ill;
 Does she then join with Virtue, or oppose,
 She proves the best of Friends, or worst of Foes.
 O! be they once in happiest union join'd,
 And be that union in ATHENIA's mind.

On SHAKESPEAR'S Monument at Strat-
 ford upon Avon.

By the Same.

GREAT HOMER's birth sev'n rival cities claim,
 Too mighty such monopoly of Fame;
 Yet not to birth alone did HOMER owe
 His wond'rous worth; what EGYPT could bestow,
 With all the schools of GREECE and ASIA join'd,
 Enlarg'd th' immense expansion of his mind.
 Nor yet unrival'd the MÆONIAN strain,
 The ^a British Eagle, and the Mantuan Swan
 Tow'r equal heights. But happier STRATFORD, thou
 With incontest'd laurels deck thy brow:
 Thy Bard was thine *unschool'd*, and from thee brought
 More than all EGYPT, GREECE, or ASIA taught.
 Not HOMER's self such matchless honours won;
 The Greek has Rivals, but thy SHAKESPEAR none.

^a Milton.