



“That woman still shall sure his equal be”

___ *The RIGHTS of COLONIAL WOMEN* ___

TWO POEMS, mid 1700s

Susanna Wright

“To Eliza Norris – at Fairhill”

ca. 1750

Since Adam, by our first fair Mother won
To share her fate, to taste, & be undone,
And that great law, whence no appeal must lie,
Pronounc'd a doom, that he should rule & die,
The partial race, rejoicing to fulfill
This pleasing dictate of almighty will
(With no superior virtue in their mind),
Assert their right to govern womankind.
But womankind call reason to their aid,
And question when or where that law was made,
That law divine (a plausible pretence)
Oft urg'd with non, & oft with little sense,
From wisdom's source no origin could draw,
That form'd the man to keep the sex in awe;
Say Reason governs all the mighty frame,
And Reason rules in every one the same,
No right has man his equal to control,
Since, all agree, there is no sex in soul;
Weak woman, thus in agreement grown strong,
Shakes off the yoke her parents wore too long;
But he, who arguments in vain had tried,
Hopes still for conquest from the yielding side,
Soft soothing flattery & persuasion tries,
And by a feign'd submission seeks to rise,
Steals, unperceiv'd, to the unguarded heart,
And there reigns tyrant —

But you, whom no seducing tales can gain
To yield obedience, or to wear the chain,
But set a queen, & in your freedom reign
O'er your own thoughts, of your own heart secure,
You see what joys each erring sex allure,
Look round the most intelligent — how few
But passions, sway, or childish joys pursue;
Then bless that choice which led your bloom of youth
From forms & shadows to enlight'ning truth,
Best found when leisure & retirement reign,
Far from the proud, the busy & the vain,
Where rural views soft gentle joys impart,
Enlarge the thought, & elevate the heart,
Each changing scene adorns gay Nature's face,
Ev'n winter wants not its peculiar grace,
Hoar frosts & dews, & pale & summer suns,
Paint each revolving season as it runs,
The showery bow delights your wond'ring eyes,
Its spacious arch, & variegated dyes,
You watch the transient colours as they fade,
Till, by degrees, they settle into shade,
Then calm reflect, so regular & fine,
Now seen no more, a fate will soon be mine,
When life's warm stream, chill'd by death's fey hand,
Within these veins a frozen current stands;
Tho' conscious of desert superior far,
Till then, my friend, the righteous claim forbear—
Indulge man in his darling vice of sway,
He only rules those who of choice obey;
When strip'd of power, & plac'd in equal light,
Angels shall judge who had the better right,
All you can do is but to let him see
That woman still shall sure his equal be,
By your example shake his ancient law,
And shine yourself, the finish'd piece you draw. _____

“Carolina, A Young Lady”

*On her Father having desired her
to forbid all young Men the House*

undated

When filial Words describe a Daughter’s Grief,
The Heart parental, ought to plead Relief;
Ease all the Pain, alleviate all the Woe,
And stem the Source from whence the Sorrows flow:
But then, if Reason join the Daughter’s Side,
The Father sure will walk by Reason’s Guide;
Divest his Thoughts of that false Prejudice,
That *every Woman* must be giv’n to Vice.

SOCIETY you know’s a Bliss design’d
To form the Manners and instruct the Mind;
By mutual Converse mutual Wants supply,
To teach us how to live and to die;
By free-born Thoughts to form a Judgment clear,
Know right from wrong, and what is bad to fear:
And must I then the *social Bliss* forego?
‘Cause *Woman’s frail*, or *Woman may* be so?
Must I obey? Decree too hard I find,
Must *Woman* live a-part from all Mankind?
Freedom and *Virtue* bless’d Product of our Isle,
Grow on one Stalk, and flourish in one Soil;
Freedom and *Virtue* wither *in one Hour*,
There is no *Virtue* when not in our Power.

Believe me, Father, what knows most Restraint,
To that the Passions are more strongly bent;
Forbidden Fruit first *ruin’d* Mother EVE,
Forbidden Things *We* mostly long to have:
Think you Vice banish’d from the Monkish State?
Or *Virtue* guarded by the Convent Grate?
No Vows in Convents, Lust can there aswage,
For Fires conceal’d flame with a fierce Rage.

Forgive, *dear Sire*, if an Offence it be,
For *British* Fair to sue for LIBERTY:
Britannia’s Fair, unspotted in your Fame,
Forgive, if I assume in *Britain’s* Name._____