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Dinah Maria Mulock Craik  
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A WOMAN'S THOUGHTS  
ABOUT WOMEN.

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CHAPTER I.

*Something to do.*

I PREMISE that these thoughts do not concern married women, for whom there are always plenty to think, and who have generally quite enough to think of for themselves and those belonging to them. They have cast their lot for good or ill, have realised in greater or less degree the natural destiny of our sex. They must find out its comforts, cares, and responsibilities, and make the best of all. It is the

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single women, belonging to those supernumerary ranks, which, political economists tell us, are yearly increasing, who most need thinking about.

First, in their early estate, when they have so much in their possession—youth, bloom, and health giving them that temporary influence over the other sex which may result, and is meant to result, in a permanent one. Secondly, when this sovereignty is passing away, the chance of marriage lessening, or wholly ended, or voluntarily set aside, and the individual making up her mind to that which, respect for Grandfather Adam and Grandmother Eve must compel us to admit, is an unnatural condition of being.

Why this undue proportion of single women should almost always result from over-civilisation, and whether, since society's advance is usually indicated by the advance, morally and intellectually, of its women—this progress, by raising women's ideal standard of the "holy es-

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tate," will not necessarily cause a decline in the very *unholy* estate which it is most frequently made—are questions too wide to be entered upon here. We have only to deal with facts—with a certain acknowledged state of things, perhaps incapable of remedy, but by no means incapable of amelioration.

But, granted these facts, and leaving to wiser heads the explanation of them—if indeed there be any—it seems advisable, or at least allowable, that any woman who has thought a good deal about the matter, should not fear to express in word—or deed, which is better,—any conclusions, which out of her own observation and experience she may have arrived at. And looking around upon the middle classes, which form the staple stock of the community, it appears to me that the chief canker at the root of women's lives is the want of something to do.

Herein I refer, as this chapter must be understood especially to refer, not to those whom ill or

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good fortune—*query*, is it not often the latter?—has forced to earn their bread; but “to young ladies,” who have never been brought up to do anything. Tom, Dick, and Harry, their brothers, has each had it knocked into him from school-days that he is to do something, to be somebody. Counting-house, shop, or college, afford him a clear future on which to concentrate all his energies and aims. He has got the grand *pabulum* of the human soul—occupation. If any inherent want in his character, any unlucky combination of circumstances, nullifies this, what a poor creature the man becomes!—what a dawdling, moping, sitting-over-the-fire, thumb-twiddling, lazy, ill-tempered animal! And why? “Oh, poor fellow! ’tis because he has got nothing to do!”

Yet this is precisely the condition of women for a third, a half, often the whole of their existence.

That Providence ordained it so—made men to work, and women to be idle—is a doctrine that

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few will be bold enough to assert openly. Tacitly they do, when they preach up lovely uselessness, fascinating frivolity, delicious helplessness — all those polite impertinences and poetical degradations to which the foolish, lazy, or selfish of our sex are prone to incline an ear, but which any woman of common sense must repudiate as insulting not only her womanhood but her Creator.

Equally blasphemous, and perhaps even more harmful, is the outcry about “the equality of the sexes;” the frantic attempt to force women, many of whom are either ignorant of or unequal for their own duties — into the position and duties of men. A pretty state of matters would ensue! Who that ever listened for two hours to the verbose confused inanities of a ladies’ committee, would immediately go and give his vote for a female House of Commons? or who, on the receipt of a lady’s letter of business—I speak of the average — would henceforth desire to have our

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courts of justice stocked with matronly lawyers,  
and our colleges thronged by

“Sweet girl-graduates with their golden hair?”

As for finance, in its various branches—if you pause to consider the extreme difficulty there always is in balancing Mrs. Smith's housekeeping-book, or Miss Smith's quarterly allowance, I think, my dear Paternal Smith, you need not be much afraid lest this loud acclaim for “women's rights” should ever end in pushing you from your stools, in counting-house, college, or elsewhere.

No; equality of the sexes is not in the nature of things. Man and woman were made for, and not like one another. One only “right” we have to assert in common with mankind—and that is as much in our own hands as theirs—the right of having something to do.

That both sexes were meant to labour, one “by the sweat of his brow,” the other “in sor-

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row to bring forth"—and bring up—"children"—cannot, I fancy, be questioned. Nor, when the gradual changes of the civilised world, or some special destiny, chosen or compelled, have prevented that first, highest, and in earlier times almost universal lot, does this accidental fate in any way abrogate the necessity, moral, physical, and mental, for a woman to have occupation in other forms.

But how few parents ever consider this? Tom, Dick, and Harry, aforesaid, leave school and plunge into life; "the girls" likewise finish their education, come home, and stay at home. That is enough. Nobody thinks it needful to waste a care upon them. Bless them, pretty dears, how sweet they are! papa's nosegay of beauty to adorn his drawing-room. He delights to give them all they can desire—clothes, amusements, society; he and mamma together take every domestic care off their hands; they have abundance of time and nothing to occupy it; plenty of

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money, and little use for it ; pleasure without end, but not one definite object of interest or employment ; flattery and flummery enough, but no solid food whatever to satisfy mind or heart — if they happen to possess either — at the very emptiest and most craving season of both. They have literally nothing whatever to do, except to fall in love ; which they accordingly do, the most of them, as fast as ever they can.

“Many think they are in love, when in fact they are only idle” — is one of the truest sayings of that great wise bore, Imlac, in *Rasselas*, and it has been proved by many a shipwrecked life, of girls especially. This “falling in love” being usually a mere delusion of the fancy, and not the real thing at all, the object is generally unattainable or unworthy. Papa is displeased, mamma somewhat shocked and scandalised ; it is a “foolish affair,” and no matrimonial results ensue. There only ensues — what ?

A long, dreary season, of pain, real or ima-

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ginary, yet not the less real because it is imaginary; of anger and mortification, of impotent struggle—against unjust parents, the girl believes, or, if romantically inclined, against cruel destiny. Gradually this mood wears out; she learns to regard “love” as folly, and turns her whole hope and aim to—matrimony! Matrimony in the abstract; not *the* man, but any man—any person who will snatch her out of the dulness of her life, and give her something really to live for, something to fill up the hopeless blank of idleness into which her days are gradually sinking.

Well, the man may come, or he may not. If the latter melancholy result occurs, the poor girl passes into her third stage of young-ladyhood, fritters or mopes away her existence, sullenly bears it, or dashes herself blindfold against its restrictions; is unhappy, and makes her family unhappy; perhaps herself cruelly conscious of all this, yet unable to find the true root of bitter-

