

*Women and Marriage
in Nineteenth-Century England*

JOAN PERKIN



**Also available as a printed book
see title verso for ISBN details**

Women and Marriage in
Nineteenth-Century
England

Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England

JOAN PERKIN



ROUTLEDGE
London

For Harold,
my husband, partner and private tutor
in social history, without whose
guidance, confidence and support this
book would never have been written.

First published in 1989 by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003.

© Joan Perkin 1989

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced
or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means,
now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording,
or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in
writing from the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Perkin, Joan
Women and marriage in nineteenth-century
England.
1. England. Marriage. Role of women,
1800–1900
I. Title
306.8'1'088042

ISBN 0-203-40195-6 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-71019-3 (Adobe eReader Format)
ISBN 0 415 00771 2 (Print Edition)

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
1 WOMEN AND THE LAW	10
I MARRIAGE À LA MODE	
2 A FAMILY ON THE THRONE	35
3 ONE LAW FOR THE RICH	50
4 THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE	76
5 THE PROVOKED WIFE	102
II RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS	
6 ANOTHER LAW FOR THE POOR	115
7 A LIFE OF WILLING SACRIFICE	130
8 ROUGH AND READY WOMEN	156
9 THE COUNTRY WIFE	181
III THE GILDED CAGE	
10 THE CRUSADE AGAINST MARRIAGE	207

CONTENTS

11 THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE	233
12 A LIFE OF ONE'S OWN	257
13 THE BATTLE OF JERICHO	292
Conclusion	311
Bibliography	317
Index	327

INTRODUCTION

The subjection of women was enshrined in English law and custom for nine hundred years. Common Law reflected rather than caused that subjection, which was based on the physical and political reality that, after the Norman Conquest even more than before, men controlled the resources of society. Things had not always been so starkly inequitable. In Anglo-Saxon England women had rights to property, to a share in control of domestic affairs and of children, and even in the last resort to divorce or legal separation, departing with the children and half the marital goods (Stenton, 1957, ch. 1).^{*} It was the full imposition of feudalism by the Normans, based on military service by male barons and knights, which destroyed the legal rights of women.

Down to the eighteenth century and beyond women were subjected to the domination of the unfair sex. The law undoubtedly regarded almost every woman as under tutelage to some man, usually father or husband. Being physically and economically the weaker sex their dependence, the theory went, was for their own good. In the much quoted phrase of the highest legal luminary of the day, Sir William Blackstone in *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, (1765–9), the law was ‘for her protection and benefit, so great a favourite is the female sex in the laws of England.’ A woman normally passed, either before or soon after the age of majority, from the protection of her father to that of her husband. ‘By marriage,’ wrote Blackstone,

the husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being, or legal existence of a woman is suspended during

^{*} Notes in parenthesis refer to entries in the Bibliography at the end of the book.

INTRODUCTION

marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything.

In short, she became a *feme covert*, a hidden person, sunk into and merged with the personality of her husband. In Orwellian language, she became an 'unperson'. There were, it is true, some advantages in her demeaning legal position. If a married woman committed any crime in her husband's presence, except murder or high treason, the law presumed that she performed the deed under his coercion and was therefore guiltless. He was also responsible for her debts, whether contracted while under his roof or living away from him, unless in the latter case he took legal steps, including an announcement in the public press, to repudiate them. He was obliged by law to support her as long as she shared bed and board (which the law enjoined her to do). He could not ill-use her beyond reasonable chastisement (which stretched in those days of corporal punishment to the actual beating of wives as well as children, servants and petty offenders, provided it fell short of life and limb), and he could not imprison her with impunity. Although he was entitled to all her property and earnings except what her relatives and friends could hold in trust for her, he could not *will* away her personal jewellery or clothes, though he could dispose of them during her life with her presumed consent. And the law of England, unlike most other countries, assumed that any child she had during marriage was her husband's, however improbable the circumstances, unless he sued another man for 'criminal conversation' and could prove her adultery with him. According to a popular proverb, seemingly oblivious to the fact that most servants were female, 'England is the paradise of women, the hell of horses, and the purgatory of servants' (Wade, 1825). But it was males who ruled in paradise, as well as in hell and purgatory.

Male privilege and domination began to be eroded in the nineteenth century. It was the Victorians who pioneered the emancipation of women. Only in the present generation has the law come to recognise (but not always to guarantee) women's equality in matters of divorce, family property, equivalent work and equal pay. In the long history of women's oppression this

INTRODUCTION

makes the nineteenth century—the ‘long’ nineteenth century between the French Revolution and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of The Rights of Women* and the First World War with its liberating war work (Braybon and Summerfield, 1987)—the pivotal period of change. Yet even then emancipation was a central concern for only a small minority of women. The great majority of wives not only accepted but embraced their lot. Marriage was the life plan of most women, and the single state a fate to be avoided like the plague. This book is concerned with how married women saw their own position in that critical century when emancipation at last became a theoretical possibility, but when most women rejected or ignored it. Why did the vast majority of women, given a vision by their radical sisters of the promised land, continue to love their chains, or at least not to chafe against them?

We are now almost incapable of understanding how yesterday’s women, before the present generation’s determined campaign for liberation, coped with their subordination. What is astonishing to modern feminists is that many women in the past who left any record of their feelings not only regarded marriage as their inevitable role in life, but actually welcomed it as an emotionally satisfying and, indeed, emancipating experience.

How did women survive and even thrive under this unequal yet accepted dispensation? How did wives at different levels of society contain their disabilities and become self-respecting human beings? How did women’s experience of marriage differ according to their social class? Why were some wives so much more dissatisfied than others that they were willing to fight long and hard for legal emancipation for themselves and other women? Why was it middle-class women rather than their politically more influential aristocratic sisters or their more oppressed working-class neighbours who led the campaign for reform?

Freedom is a relative concept, and for most women marriage meant release from a childlike and humiliating dependence on the parental home, the possibility of sharing on however unequal terms the creation of a home and family of their own and, surprising to those cocooned in our claustrophobic modern families, a greater freedom to go about and make separate friends, even sometimes of the opposite sex. In some cases, especially in the upper reaches of society, there was an astonishing degree of freedom for married

INTRODUCTION

women which puts modern notions of sexual permissiveness in the shade. At lower levels of society the key role of wife and mother and the emotional dependence of husband and of children upon her often amounted to matriarchy within the domestic sphere, and sometimes beyond it. The great hostesses of Regency and Victorian England with their strings of admirers and lovers were no doubt exceptional women, but there are examples of middle-class women in Victorian England—Jane Carlyle, Harriet Taylor (Mill), Beatrice Webb's mother Laurencina Potter, to name a few—who had male friends without raising eyebrows. In the working class, where morals at the higher end were much stricter than amongst many of their 'betters', behaviour amongst the less respectable was literally freer than in the most permissive circles of today, as the most casual reading of the annals of Victorian low life will show. Emotional independence, in contrast to today, often began with marriage rather than ended with it.

The law and theory of marriage were rarely the same as the actual practice, which in everyday life was based on the personalities of the spouses and how much hostility or affection they felt for each other. Not all wives were dominated by their husbands: Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (much revived in the Victorian Age) depicts only a male fantasy of how to control a rebellious wife; and many husbands would have echoed the Beadle in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*: when told that 'the law supposes that your wife acts under your direction' Mr Bumble replied,

If the law supposes that...the law is a ass—a idiot. If that's the eye of the law, the law is a bachelor; and the worst I wish the law is, that his eyes may be opened by experience—by experience.

There never was one true position of wives, but as many as there were different women with individual characters, and different husbands to take advantage of or complacently ignore the law.

More significantly, life was very different for wives in the different social classes. Despite the same general legal constraints and the same perils of pregnancy, childbirth, and illnesses peculiar to women, experience of marriage varied enormously according to social status, to an extent barely comprehensible to the modern democratic mind. In the highest 'class' of all, the royal family were subject to special laws limiting their right to marry and their choice

INTRODUCTION

of partners, and royal marriages had a ‘demonstration effect’ on the rest of society and increasingly had to fill the role expected of them by the general public. If the Prince of Wales (the Prince Regent, later George IV) could treat his wife so badly, what hope was there for other cast-off wives? If Queen Victoria never knew such happiness existed as was hers and Prince Albert’s, might there not be hope for all eager young brides? And if a later Princess of Wales (Alexandra) could get much of her own way and escape excessive childbearing by accepting her husband’s mistresses, wasn’t that a royal example of civilised behaviour for aristocratic ladies in the know?

Royal spouses set the tone for the *marriage à la mode* which flourished in the fashionable upper reaches of society, but a family on the throne could mean very different things to a George IV, a Victoria and Albert, or an Edward VII.

Upper-class wives were the most liberated women in Europe. The aristocratic *grandes dames* who dominated the political salons and tyrannised over London and county ‘Society’ throughout the century enjoyed ‘the glorious licence of a wife’. Ostensibly subject to the same Common Law as other wives, aristocratic women, or at least those who had supportive families with clever lawyers, had built up for them a body of private law—one law for the rich—which gave them legal protection and access to separate income and property. They consequently possessed the independence and self-confidence to behave pretty much as they liked, subject only to the mores of their class. The only sin was to be found out, not by their equals who gossiped freely about each other, but by the *hoi polloi* outside the pale of Society, which could lead to scandal and disgrace. Yet even at their level the discontented wife, provoked into resistance or rebellion by a selfish or vicious husband, could find herself helpless and victimised by the law through her earnings or access to her children. When things went wrong with their normally tolerant, almost open marriages they too could suffer, since cruel, vindictive and brutally violent husbands were not confined to the classes below the salt.

A surprising by-product of landed society and primogeniture was that marriage became the key to the transmission and distribution of property. Once the eldest son was married, thus ensuring the continuity of the estate, the marriage of the daughters formed the main connecting links in the dynastic network of families which ruled the counties and the country. Far more

INTRODUCTION

attention and resources were devoted to marrying off the daughters, whose alliance with other influential families could bring political and social influence as well as opportunities for patronage and material bargains, than to settling the younger sons who were merely, as it were, an insurance against the premature death of their eldest brother and dynastic failure. That is why aristocratic and gentry families in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries habitually spent so much on giving balls and parties in the county towns or London 'Season' and why so much of the family's patrimony was invested in the dowry and the protracted bargaining to ensure 'a good match'. The supreme paradox of this male-oriented system of property and social structure was that marriage was the fulcrum on which its whole world turned, and women, as the chief instruments and match-makers, held the levers which turned it.

At the other end of the social scale, the great majority of women in the three-quarters of the population who constituted the working classes, were scarcely affected by the worst rigours of Common Law because they had little or no property for their husbands to confiscate and the husbands did not have the resources to enforce the law. Women's earnings, if any, went straight into the housekeeping to keep the family alive. If they were purloined by a drunken husband it was by brute force rather than the law. The reality of their marriages depended rather on the relative strength of character of the partners and on who controlled the pitifully scarce resources within the family. This in turn depended not merely on obvious material factors like the size and reliability of the husband's wages and the opportunities for women to work after marriage, but also on the geography of local custom. In some areas, west of the Pennines for example, the husband usually gave his wife his whole pay packet and received back his customary pocket money; in other areas, such as east of the Pennines, men gave only a small housekeeping allowance to their wives and kept the rest for themselves, mainly for drink; in yet others, as in East London, the customary housekeeping was the prior claim on the man, and he was expected to find 'round about a pound a week' (in Mrs Pember Reeves's phrase) by hook or by crook.

The law hardly affected working-class marriage, but to the extent that there was one law for the rich there was another for the poor. The working class was not an undifferentiated, homogeneous mass, so in Part II, *Respectables and Roughs*, the lives of the rural and

INTRODUCTION

urban and of the prudish and the shameless levels of the class will be considered separately. For the respectable working class 'till death do part' was a greater reality than for other workers and their philosophy was 'What you can't end you must mend' or at least 'Grin and bear it'. The respectable working-class wife lived a life of willing sacrifice. But for the not-so-respectable the sanctity of marriage was more honoured in the breach. Many were married 'without benefit of clergy' or 'over the broom'; many more found 'divorce' and even remarriage comparatively easy, by the simple expedient of removing themselves a mile or two; and some, though a decreasing few after mid-century, really believed that 'the sale of a wife' in open market constituted a valid transfer of the marriage contract to another partner. Despite the romantic image of rural England, wives of farm labourers were even worse off than their urban sisters, especially in the South far from the mines and factories of the North and Midlands where competition raised even rural wages. The labourer's country wife led a life of quiet desperation.

It was middle-class wives who were most affected by the laws of marriage, and who most reacted both for and against them. The gilded cage of bourgeois marriage called forth strong reactions both from those who idealised its comfort and security and those who found it claustrophobic and frustrating. Anti-marriage sentiment in nineteenth-century England was so strong that it provoked calls not only for changes in the legal relations between husband and wives but even for a boycott of the institution and a crusade against marriage. This in turn provoked a glorification of marriage, based on the concept of 'separate spheres' and the ideal of the 'angel in the house'. Contented wives often justified their lives in terms of high moral or religious purpose, though the mundane reality of marriage required them to have various survival techniques for coping with the inequities of their situation and achieving a life of their own.

The term 'middle class' covers a vast range of conditions, but for the more prosperous living standards and the employment of domestic help rose dramatically and these wives had more time and leisure to brood on their legal and social situation. Without the trust funds and marriage settlements, not to mention the political clout and social power of upper-class wives, and without the innocence of the law of most working-class wives, the middle-class wife and mother was the most vulnerable if the marriage

INTRODUCTION

began to go sour. Her husband was likely to know and exert his legal right over custody of children and control of his wife's property and income. Most reforming feminists accepted marriage as an institution, but demanded more just and equitable distribution of rights and resources within it. They were the only group of women ready to begin the fight for emancipation and to bear the heat and burden of the day. Yet even the great liberated ladies of the *haute monde* were subject to increasing moral pressures down an increasingly bourgeois century, and were forced to make discretion even more discreet to survive. In the end they too were to become glad enough to seek the protection of the developing public law of marriage which was ultimately more reliable than the private law concocted by family lawyers.

Working-class women, too, benefited from changes in the marriage law, such as legal separation with maintenance and control of their own earnings, which gave them some, if often inadequate, protection against a violent, drunken husband impervious to the pressure of neighbourhood norms. And autobiographies and oral histories have shown that, in elderly memories at least, no woman in any class was more emotionally appreciated and venerated by her children than 'our Mam', the working-class mother.

In the half-century between 1870 and 1923 (when women were allowed to sue for divorce on the same grounds as men) women achieved an equality of legal rights within marriage which had not been theirs during the eight-and-a-half centuries since Anglo-Saxon England. Yet this too led on to an irony and a paradox. Just as the practice of marriage had been different from the theory and the law in the centuries of inequality, so the practice, ironically, was less than the promise in the century of legal equality. Women in theory and law are now equal in marital rights, access to property, earnings and employment opportunities, education, political rights and so on, yet paradoxically, in none of these areas are they equal in practice. It is a salutary reminder that, like their subjection, the emancipation of women, in marriage as in life in general, is more than a question of law or theory. It can only stem from the attitudes and behaviour of men and women themselves.

However, to nineteenth-century feminists the Common Law of England enshrined the subjection of married women to their husbands, making them little better than slaves. The attack on the male chauvinist law was like the Battle of Jericho: it needed a very

INTRODUCTION

loud trumpet to bring the walls tumbling down. The first steps on the way to women's emancipation were the most fundamental. To understand the framework within which women experienced married life, we shall begin with the unreformed law as the nineteenth century inherited it.

Chapter 1

WOMEN AND THE LAW

THE COMMON LAW OF ENGLAND IN 1854

To get a clear picture of the Common Law of England concerning married women down to the mid-Victorian Age, we cannot do better than start with the *Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws of England concerning Women* (for brevity, this will be referred to as *Summary*) published in 1854 by Barbara Leigh Smith—later Barbara Bodichon—one of the founders of Girton College, Cambridge. She was one of the five illegitimate (but openly acknowledged) children of a Radical Member of Parliament who so believed in the right of women to equal treatment that he gave his daughters similar independent incomes to those he gave to his sons; on their twenty-first birthdays each received £300 a year to use as s/he pleased. In the 1850s this was a substantial income for an unmarried person.

Barbara Leigh Smith was moved to write her pamphlet by cases such as that of Caroline Norton, who (as we shall see later in the chapter) experienced most of the rigours of the law as it could apply to married women, and who challenged the law because of her own tribulations. Barbara Leigh Smith herself had a less personal interest, as she was unmarried at the time and in any case had a father who was likely to know how to protect her interests if and when she did marry. In her pamphlet she decided to let the bare facts speak for themselves. Her belief that change could be accomplished was enhanced by the fact that in the United States of America between 1839 and 1850 most states had passed some legislation permitting married women to own property (though they were unlikely to have

legal rights to their own earnings or to custody of children), and she drew attention to these changes. However, as she pointed out in the Introduction, English laws have never been codified, and it was often very difficult to know what the law really was. There were three sources for it: Acts of Parliament, or Statute Law; reported decisions of judges on actual cases, known as case-law or judge-made law; and a limited number of customs recognised by the courts, called customary or unwritten law. Statute Law was distinguished from Common Law, which embraced both judgemade and customary law. (In the early days, Common Law was handed down by word of mouth from one generation of lawyers to another, rather than being written down, as now, in volumes of Law Reports.) Most of the inequities and disabilities of women sprang from the ancient Common Law rather than from the Statute Book; and marriage laws reflected rather than caused the traditional subjection of women.

When her *Summary* of the laws concerning women was published in 1854 very little had changed in Common Law since feudal times. First, it set out the legal condition of an unmarried woman, who had the same rights to property and to protection from the laws, and the obligation to pay the same taxes to the state as a man. It then considered differences between the legal statuses of single and married women. It is interesting to lay out the differences side by side (information is taken from the 1869 edition of the *Summary*):

A Single Woman

1. Could act as agent for another person, and as an agent, execute delegated authority.
2. Could be invested with a trust (i.e. act as a trustee).
3. Could act as executrix under a will.
4. Could act as administratrix of the personal property of deceased next of kin.

A Married Woman

1. Could so act only if her husband did not dissent.
2. Could be a trustee, but her husband's name had always to be joined with hers, and his assent given to everything she did as trustee.
3. Could not accept an executorship without her husband's consent.
4. Could not so act without the consent of her husband.

WOMEN AND THE LAW

The pamphlet then looked at the laws concerning married women, and among other matters dealt with the following:

Prohibitions on whom one could marry

A widower could not marry his deceased wife's sister.

A widow could not marry her deceased husband's brother.

A widower could not marry his niece by marriage.

A widower could not marry his stepdaughter.

A widower could not marry his aunt by marriage.

Consanguinity or affinity, where the children were illegitimate, was equally an impediment.

A lunatic or idiot could not lawfully contract a marriage (except during a lucid interval); insanity after marriage did not invalidate it.

Consent to marriage

It was a punishable offence for a person under 21 years of age to marry without the consent of the father or guardians. The consent of the mother was not necessary if there was a father, or unless the mother was the guardian.

This meant that heiresses could not make runaway marriages when they were under age. Mrs Arbuthnot reported in her *Journal* for 1826 that 'Lancaster was as full as it could hold with people collected to hear the trial of Mr Wakefield for running away with Miss Turner' (Arbuthnot, 1950). Edward Gibbon Wakefield had in 1816 made a runaway match with an heiress, and after his wife's death he 'beguiled from school' Ellen Turner, daughter of a wealthy Cheshire manufacturer, whom he married at Gretna Green. Though he did not consummate the marriage, he took his bride to Calais, where they were overtaken by the Turner parents. He returned to England, where his brother had already been arrested for complicity in the affair, and both were sentenced to three years' imprisonment, during which time his marriage was annulled by a special Act of Parliament.

Bigamy

A second marriage, while a husband or wife was living, was absolutely void, and except under certain circumstances (such as ignorance of the fact that the former spouse was alive), was a felony, punishable by imprisonment or penal servitude.

WOMEN AND THE LAW

Breach of promise

An agreement to marry was a contract of betrothal, and either party could bring an action under Common Law if the contract was not completed. When a woman accepted betrothal, she could not thereafter dispose of or give away her property without the consent of her betrothed.

A married woman had no legal existence

A man and wife were one person in law; her existence was, as it were, absorbed in that of her husband; she lived under his protection or cover, and her condition was called coverture.

A wife's personal property vested in her husband

A wife's personal property before marriage (such as stock, shares, money in hand, money at the bank, jewels, household goods, clothes, etc.), though not her freehold land, became her husband's absolutely, unless settled in trust for her. The husband could assign or dispose of it at his pleasure, whether he and his wife lived together or not.

Husband took chattels real

Chattels real (i.e. leasehold and other estates held during a term of years, or an advowson, the next presentation to a church living, etc.) were personal property and became the husband's if he claimed them. If the wife survived him, she resumed them. Her *choses in action* (property *sub judice* in the courts) could be sued for and obtained by her husband; but if he failed to do so, they reverted to her on his death.

Indictment for theft

When a wife's property was stolen, as it legally belonged to the husband it had to be laid as his in the indictment.

Mrs Grote, wife of the banker and historian, was one day robbed of her watch and purse. When she appeared in court to give evidence, she was astonished to hear the purse described as belonging to Mr Grote, and on having the legal reason for this explained to her, she became so indignant that she rushed off to join the Women's Movement. A similar thing happened later in the century to Millicent Fawcett, wife of an MP, and she became a leader of the women's suffrage movement.

WOMEN AND THE LAW

Equity

While the Common Law gave the whole of a wife's personal property to her husband, the Courts of Equity, when he proceeded to recover property in right of his wife, obliged him to make a settlement of some portion of it upon her, as long as she was virtuous and unprovided for.

A wife's debts

A husband was liable for the cost of such goods as he allowed his wife, as his agent, to order; if a wife ordered goods without the knowledge of her husband, he was obliged to pay for them only if the court considered them domestic necessities for a family of their social level.

Wife's right to support

Neither the Courts of Common Law nor of Equity could oblige a man to support his wife. But a wife whose husband without valid reason refused to support her could rent lodgings, take up goods, etc. suitable to her station, and the creditors could compel the husband to pay. If a wife became chargeable on the poor rates, as a result of having to enter the workhouse, the Poor Law authorities could sue the husband for the cost.

Husband's power over wife's real property

husband had the possession and usufruct of his wife's freehold property; if she died without children the property went to her heirs; if there was a child of the marriage the husband held possession until his death, when it passed to her heirs; if she survived her husband, her freeholds reverted to her.

A married woman's earnings

Money earned by a married woman belonged absolutely to her husband; her receipt for the earnings was not legal, and her husband could claim the money notwithstanding such payment.

A wife's will

By permission of her husband, a wife could make a will of her personal property; but he could revoke his leave at any time before probate (i.e. the exhibiting and proving of a Will in Court).

A mother's rights over children

The legal custody of children belonged to the father. During the lifetime of a sane father, the mother had no rights over her children (except

WOMEN AND THE LAW

limited power over young infants from 1839) and the father could take them from her and dispose of them as he thought fit. If the parents were legally separated, right of custody of the children belonged to the father.

Responsibility of a wife

A married woman could not sue or be sued for contracts, nor enter into contracts except as the agent of her husband. Neither her word nor her deed was binding in law, and persons giving her credit had no remedy against her. (There were some exceptions, as where she contracted debts upon estates settled to her separate use, or where a wife carried on a trade separately according to the custom of London.)

Responsibility of husband for wife's debts

A husband was liable for his wife's debts contracted before marriage, and also for her breaches of trust committed before marriage.

Witnesses

Neither a husband nor a wife could be witnesses against or for the other in criminal cases, not even after divorce.

Wife could not bring actions

A wife could not bring actions in court unless the husband's name was joined with hers.

A married woman apprentice

A married woman could not be bound apprentice except with the permission of her husband, who would in the indenture stand in the same position to her as a father or guardian to an apprentice who was a minor.

The *Summary* discussed only briefly precautions that could be taken concerning the property of married women, but it is now intended to look at this important area of law in detail.

EQUITY

Common Law was only one branch of English law. As Sir William Blackstone had casually remarked in his famous *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, over and above this law was Equity, 'frequently called in to assist, to moderate, and to explain other laws'. Equity enforced trusts and other understandings that could

WOMEN AND THE LAW

assure to married women rights of property denied to them under Common Law. (In addition, there were private practices and agreements between men and women, to benefit the wife, which never came to the notice of the courts.) It was open to any father, or any friend or relative of a married woman, who wished to give her property, to safeguard her rights by the creation of a trust or other means, which agreements and trusts would be enforced by the court of Equity. It was therefore more accurately the case, in practice, that *in the absence of valid agreements and actions to the contrary* a husband could assert his Common Law rights over a wife's property. The difference between Common Law and Equity was laid out clearly in a Report of the Personal Laws Committee (of the Law Amendment Society) on the Laws relating to the Property of Married Women in 1856 (reproduced in the *Westminster Review*, New Series, vol.X, no. 11) as follows:

LAW

1. By the Common Law, the wife has no property of her own; her personal estate absolutely, and her real estate during coverture, are her husband's.
2. By the Common Law, the wife has no separate power of contracting. She can neither sue nor be sued.

EQUITY

1. Every kind or property, including estates in fee simple, and chattels personal, may be subject to a trust for the wife's separate use, which will be supported in Equity. She may dispose of such property as if she were a *feme sole*. She may dispose of her savings as of the principal.
2. Equity allows a married woman to sue wherever she has a clear right. She may even sue her husband, when there is no other way of asserting her right against him. Being considered a *feme sole* in respect of her property, she may be sued on her own contract with respect to such property.

WOMEN AND THE LAW

3. Marriage is an absolute gift to the husband of the goods, etc. of which the wife was naturally possessed at the time of marriage, and of such other goods and personal chattels as come to her during marriage.
4. If a husband obtain a judgment for a debt due to his wife at law, he is entitled to the whole fund.
5. So with respect to a legacy, the husband may appropriate the whole, if the executor pays it to him.
6. A woman, by law, cannot dispose of her property, nor make a will without the concurrence of her husband.
7. If a wife carries on a separate trade, even with her husband's consent, he is entitled to all the profits.
8. Deeds of separation are not valid at law.
9. A husband cannot give or grant any estate to his wife, either in possession, reversion, or remainder, though an exception under the Statute of Uses has been introduced.
3. If land or personalty be left to a married woman, for her separate use, even without the intervention of trustees, Equity secures such property for her separate use.
4. If it is necessary to have recourse to equity. Equity will compel him to secure a provision for his wife out of the fund.
5. Equity will compel a settlement in such a case.
6. She may in Equity.
7. Equity gives the profits to the wife, if the trade is carried on out of her separate estate.
8. In Equity, it may be considered as at present settled, that such deeds . . . are valid.
9. Although gifts of property by the husband and the wife are . . . void in law, yet they will be supported in Equity.

The Report pointed out that there were two different sets of courts, the Common Law courts and Chancery, dispensing diametrically opposite rules—indeed, two distinct codes—on ‘the all-important subject of marriage’. The rich were able to avoid the harshness of Common Law: those too poor to encounter the expenses of the courts of Equity were unable to escape.

Mary Beard argued in *Woman as Force in History* (1946), that Sir William Blackstone, whose *Commentaries* became the standard textbook for the training of lawyers in England and the United States (since the laws of the mother country were adopted in part by her offspring in the new world), disliked Equity jurisprudence, which invaded Common Law doctrines and introduced into the laws of England principles akin to those of the Roman law with respect to married women’s property rights. In his *Commentaries* he did not present the rules of Equity jurisprudence in full, but his statement was accepted as the whole truth of married women’s property status. To the modification of Common Law by legislation he was also hostile, saying that reformers destroyed its symmetry. His failure to give a full account concealed the revolution wrought by Equity in the domain of marital property relations among the wealthy. (It was estimated by a member of parliament in the 1850s that one in ten English women received an Equity settlement.) Yet the rising middle class seemed less aware of the possibilities of using trust funds and marriage settlements, or even of ways of giving a married woman a small legacy secured to her own use, than were the upper classes.

However, Blackstone’s interpretation of the legal status of wives unprotected by Equity in regard to property was perfectly correct and it passed into general usage. So much so that his words are invariably quoted in modern histories of English (and American) women, to stress the patriarchal family order that was an apparently immutable part of British society’s fabric in the period up to the early nineteenth century. He described quite accurately, too, the system of coverture and a father’s complete control over his children.

Despite his account of the Common Law subordination of a wife to her husband, Blackstone considered that it was intended for the protection and benefit of women, ‘so great a favourite is the female sex in the laws of England’. What he meant, apparently, were the following ‘advantages’. A woman who was forced or cajoled into marriage when she was under twelve years of age might afterwards have the marriage annulled. In cases of

rape a woman, or even a little girl, might give evidence in her own case, and the punishment of the offender could be death. An English wife did not lose her rank on marriage. A married man was obliged to support his wife as long as she shared his bed and board (though there was no actual way to force him to do so). A husband could not ill-use his wife or shut her up with impunity (that is, he could be punished if he mistreated her in ways unacceptable to the community). A man was answerable for his wife's actions: since she was presumed to act under the command and control of her husband, she was excused punishment for most offences committed in his presence, unless it could be proved that she did not act under his influence. What this amounted to was that the husband had a vested interest in keeping his wife under his control, and out of mischief. A wife could not be imprisoned for debt; she was not even obliged to pay her debts, though she might have contracted them against the will of her husband or even before marriage. This sounds very generous, but it was not intended to be a 'carte blanche' for a wife to run up debts—rather it was the case that creditors stood a better chance of being reimbursed by the husband who controlled the pursestrings. The law specifically stated that a man could not lend or let out his wife; such actions were 'against public decency' and they counted as misdemeanours or minor offences at law. This suggests that such actions were not unknown, and that they were not taken very seriously. Lawyers argued that the ability to palm off a bastard child on a husband, given to Englishwomen by law, was extraordinary and unequalled even in Scotland; it was the case that if a husband could not prove his wife's adultery, any child she had was assumed to be his (and his responsibility) however improbable the circumstances of the birth.

As mentioned earlier, by the middle of the nineteenth century little had changed in the English Common law on marriage since feudal times; but Church and State control of the institution of marriage had increased, a small dent had been made in the doctrine of indissoluble marriage, the total rights of fathers had been challenged, and as Blackstone had pointed out, 'in the politer reign of Charles the second, (the) power of correction (by domestic chastisement) of a wife began to be doubted'.

CHURCH AND STATE CONTROL OF MARRIAGE

In the middle ages, marriage had been very imperfectly controlled by the Church, but in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the State-controlled Protestant Church brought the institution under regulation by the public authorities. The introduction of registers of births, marriages and deaths in 1538 was evidence of a tightening of both lay and clerical controls over private lives, and the missionary activity of the church in the following century enforced Puritan attitudes to sexuality, though freer customs survived in some sections of the population. The official Christian view of marriage was basically as set out in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. Matrimony was ordained for three objects: firstly, for the procreation of children; secondly, to avoid the sin of fornication; thirdly, for the mutual society, help and comfort that the one partner ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and in adversity. In the marriage service the Church advocated partnership and mutual involvement of the spouses, though a woman also promised to 'obey' her husband as St Paul enjoined her to. The husband in fact was required to declare that he endowed his wife with all his worldly goods (a promise apparently the reverse of the Common Law of England). Christian teaching regarded marriage as an inviolable contract between one man and one woman, terminable only by death; sex outside marriage was regarded as morally wrong, and married couples were expected to practise monogamy. These teachings were constantly flouted, but the ideals dominated and determined the standard of outwardly acceptable, respectable behaviour in nineteenth-century England, and indeed remained so until the 1960s (and even today not everyone accepts the 'sexual revolution'). They were also accepted by most Victorian religious unbelievers.

The strength of the marriage bond has varied over time in England: in Anglo-Saxon times espousal before witnesses was the customary form of marriage, and divorce was relatively easy. The sacramental status and consequent indissolubility of marriage appeared only in the middle ages. Espousals remained legally valid, if irregular, until 1753, when the 'scandal of clandestine marriages', which were performed outside any church without licence or record, was abolished. It was said that in London clergymen in or near the Fleet Prison married 200 to 300 couples a week, and the Chapel in

Curzon Street was said to average 6,000 couples a year. It sounds as if people married early and often.

Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 declared that no marriage in England was valid unless celebrated by an ordained priest according to the Anglican liturgy in a parish church or public chapel of the Established Church, and after due public notice had been given. No ceremony could be performed, save by expensive licence from the Bishop, unless banns had previously been called on three successive Sundays. By 1838–41 there were nationally 19 or 20 marriages by licence for every 100 marriages by banns. The North, the North Midlands, Monmouthshire and Wales experienced above-average rates of marriage by licence, and the South and East below-average rates. The cost of a licence (several pounds) was clearly off-putting to the poor, but the licence system appealed to a sizeable minority of the population, mostly the wealthier groups, though the poorer ones were never totally absent. There were even cheap licences to be obtained in some places, as in the tiny Nottinghamshire parish of Fledborough. Speed and privacy doubtless explained the large number of widows and widowers who took advantage of the licence system, and also the large proportion of older bachelors and spinsters (those aged 40 and over). The system gave privacy where the marriage partners were markedly different in age or social class, allowed young people over the age of 21 to marry without the knowledge of their parents, and soldiers and sailors to marry in a hurry. The Registrar General once cited a private correspondent who told how in Cumberland there was 'a marked disinclination to publication of banns, on account of the notoriety it gives to the intended marriage, at which in many country parishes, idle lads congregate, and often annoy the parties.' Banns were a torment to the oddly assorted, those with unfortunate names, or those of odd appearance (Outhwaite, 1973).

The licence system became a fashion. Snobbery speeded the process, for marriage by licence was the resort of the upper classes, who married that way to avoid their affairs being publicised before all and sundry. Horace Walpole had objected to Hardwicke's Act and regarded the calling of banns as 'an impudent ceremony'. Licence also allowed people to be married in a distant, perhaps more fashionable church, rather than the local parish church. For example, Yorkshire gentry liked to marry in York Minster.

WOMEN AND THE LAW

A marriage register had to be kept, and a record of every marriage made, confirmed by the signatures of the contracting parties and witnesses. There were severe penalties, including transportation for fourteen years, for neglect of these provisions by the officiating party. Clearly it was intended that marriage was to be taken more seriously than it had been in the past. Hardwicke's Act established two important principles in English law: first, marriage had to be a public and registered contract; secondly, the right to determine what constituted a valid marriage was assumed by the State. The Church of England remained very powerful, because marriage had to take place in its churches. Special arrangements were made to register the marriages of Jews and Quakers, but members of other Christian churches, such as Roman Catholics and Dissenters, were forced to submit to an Anglican ceremony, and if they ignored this provision it affected the inheritance of their property, since their children were considered illegitimate. The latter grievance was not remedied until 1836, when a further Marriage Act licensed nonconformist and Roman Catholic churches for the celebration of marriages. The 1836 Act also established a wholly civil procedure for contracting marriage, and thus the citizens of England and Wales thereafter had a choice of a religious or a civil marriage in the Registry Office. This showed how much more secular England had become by then.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

For most people in early nineteenth-century England marriage *was* an indissoluble union, terminable only by death; this was because the Church Courts could not give an absolute divorce, though they could grant a legal separation, known as divorce *a mensa et thoro*, 'from bed and board'. The situation had been so since the Reformation, when an Act of 1534 abolished legal appeals to Rome, including the right to turn a partial divorce into a decree absolute. After that, the only authority in England competent to overrule the Church was Parliament, so those who wished to be completely divorced (called *a vinculo matrimonii*) with the right to remarry, had to secure a Private Act of Parliament for the purpose. Even this remedy remained unused for a century and a half, until the Earl of Macclesfield's case in 1697. Such an Act was expensive and time-consuming. Before the

Bill could be laid, there had to be a prior grant of divorce *a mensa et thoro* from the Ecclesiastical Court (known 22 as 'Doctors' Commons'), and a verdict of damages for 'criminal conversation' secured against the wife's seducer by a husband in the Common Law Courts. A Divorce Bill could be obtained as a matter of right by an innocent husband against a wife found guilty of adultery uncondoned by him; a wife who wanted a divorce had to prove not only adultery by the husband but aggravating enormities such as physical cruelty, bigamy or incest. Very few such Acts were passed: only 276 between 1765 and 1857, and far fewer divorces were granted to women. During a century and a half from 1697 (when the first Act 'to relieve a husband' was passed) only four Acts were passed at the suit of a wife, the first being in 1801 (see Macqueen, House of Lords and Privy Council).

It has commonly been assumed that divorce before 1857 was the prerogative solely of the aristocracy, the major reason being the high costs quoted by the Campbell Commission on the Law of Divorce in 1853—£700 to £800 and possibly thousands of pounds if there was protracted litigation. But S. Anderson has shown that of 74 petitioners for divorce from 1803 to the end of 1827, the upper class accounted for rather more than half, the rest being middle class with a few lowly petitioners such as a salesman, a clerk and a commercial traveller, and this pattern continued to the 1850s. The attitudes of successive Lord Chancellors in the early nineteenth century towards divorce, and their manner of proceeding, made a difference to the number of petitions submitted during their years in office. Anderson has shown, too, that the Campbell Commission vastly overstated the costs of divorce, perhaps not wanting to encourage it. About half the petitioners in the first half of the nineteenth century paid less than £475 for their divorce Act—though that sum was admittedly far beyond the reach of most ordinary people (Anderson, 1984).

Nonetheless, the numbers divorcing were minuscule. One reason for this was that it was much more difficult for a woman to file for divorce than it was for a man, since a man had only to prove simple adultery by his wife, whereas a woman had to prove adultery plus aggravating offences by her husband. The view expressed by Dr Johnson in the eighteenth century was still held by the Royal Commission on the Law of Divorce in 1853, that 'the difference between the adultery of the husband and the adultery of the wife (socially speaking) is boundless.' Lord Chancellor Cranworth stated

in the House of Lords in 1857 (Hansard, vol.145, 496 et seq.) what was generally accepted as grounds for such unequal treatment:

A wife might, without any loss of caste, and possibly with reference to the interests of her children, or even of her husband, condone an act of adultery on the part of the husband: but a husband could not condone a similar act on the part of a wife. No-one would venture to suggest that a husband could possibly do so, and for this, among other reasons...that the adultery of the wife might be the means of palming spurious offspring upon the husband, while the adultery of the husband could have no such effect with regard to the wife.

The safeguarding of inheritance and property rights was seen as paramount. It was not unknown for some wives to 'put a cuckoo in the nest'; and this was recognised in an indirect way because English law presumed that a child was the husband's, however improbable the circumstances, unless the husband could prove her adultery.

Generally speaking, if a husband ill-treated his wife or was unfaithful to her, there seemed little likelihood of her getting a full divorce (even if she could afford the action), her only redress in the early nineteenth century being to try to put an end to their cohabitation by obtaining a judicial separation (divorce *a memo, et thoro*). But the Courts wanted proof of severe cruelty or misconduct before they would accept the wife's right to leave her husband's home. In 1811 a court declared that 'nothing short of actual terror and violence' would justify such a course. However, by the 1830s the 'apprehension of ill-treatment' was held to be good cause for putting an end to cohabitation, so opinion had changed as to how much a wife could be expected to suffer.

Yet in theory a married woman's body belonged to her husband; she was in his custody, and he could enforce his right by a writ of *habeas corpus*. In 1840 a Mr Cochrane whose wife had left him, succeeded by means of a stratagem in enticing her back to his home, where he kept her confined to her room because she threatened to leave him again. When the case was tried, the Judge ruled that in his opinion the law, reflecting public opinion, held it was in the interests of all parties that the husband should be allowed to keep his wife within the bounds of duty, whatever her feelings on the matter might

be. But public opinion was changing, and became less prepared to tolerate that kind of treatment, as shown by a case tried by Lord Campbell in 1852. A Mrs Sandilands had left her husband, and he applied for a writ of *habeas corpus* against his son-in-law with whom she was living. His counsel argued that Mrs Sandilands could not be considered to have a will apart from that of her husband, any more than a child of tender years can have a will apart from its parents. But Lord Campbell refused to accept the argument, saying that although a parent had a right to custody of a child, the husband had no such right at Common Law to the custody of his wife.

So by 1854 not all judges would assist a man to enforce cohabitation, and a husband's legal rights over the person of his wife were checked. Not until the 1890s, however, was the right to enforce cohabitation altered by statute, and even then not everyone agreed with the change. If a woman left her husband of her own free will, without his consent, and without what was regarded as justification, she forfeited all rights to maintenance. Some women nonetheless did just that, usually when they had the means to earn a livelihood for themselves—for example, Fanny Kemble the actress and Anna Jameson the novelist in the 1830s and 1840s. And in 1881 Ellen Terry the actress separated from her drunken husband Charles Waddell, paying him three-quarters of what she earned so that he would stay away. She told Bernard Shaw that she would have died if she had had to live with him another month.

Harriet Martineau objected in *Society in America* (1837) to the 'disgraceful' English divorce laws, comparing them unfavourably with those of America. She said in her *Autobiography* that after publication of that book she received dozens of letters from married English women complaining of how law and custom oppressed them, and offering her

evidence of intolerable oppression, if I could point out how it might be used. Others offered money, effort, courage in enduring obloquy, everything, if I could show them how to obtain, and lead them in obtaining, arrangements by which they could be free in spirit and in outward liberty to make what they could of life (Martineau, 1983).

But Harriet Martineau was nervous about leading such a campaign, and the opportunity evaporated. Among those who could not afford

divorce proceedings, it was not uncommon for husbands simply to run away from unhappy marriages, so deserted wives were a sizeable group among the indigent poor; but for a woman with children it was not so easy to run away from a marriage.

The authoritarian state and the authoritarian family, accepted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as solutions to the deep need and yearning for order which developed after the unity of Christendom was shattered by the Reformation, continued to be accepted in early nineteenth-century England. When fears of revolution and breakdown of society on the French model were being taken so seriously, there were strong signs by mid-century that neither public opinion nor individuals would continue to accept without protest excessive harshness to wives.

Two early nineteenth-century cases show the harshness of Common Law provisions when a wife was unprotected from its rigours, and the growing concern to rectify abuses. The first concerned Caroline Norton, one of the three famous Sheridan sisters, a Society beauty and hostess of a celebrated salon, who married into the aristocracy in 1827. She had no fortune of her own. Her husband, the Hon. George Norton (a lawyer and heir to Lord Grantley), was jealous, vindictive, and liable to beat her (even Mrs Norton's enemies had nothing good to say about her husband). After nine years of unhappy marriage, separations, and reunifications Mr Norton took away their three small sons and thereafter refused to allow his wife to see them or know their whereabouts. He evaded a Court Order which said he must allow his wife to see the children by taking them to Scotland, where they were not subject to the jurisdiction of English courts. He also took possession of all her personal effects, which were legally his property, and brought an action against Lord Melbourne, then Prime Minister, charging him with 'criminal conversation' with his wife; the case was dismissed at the trial, and Norton could not thereafter sue for divorce. Nor could Mrs Norton sue for divorce, because she had returned to him previously and thereby 'condoned' his cruelty. She refused to return to her husband again, and found herself with none of the protection that marriage was supposed to afford her, yet with all the disabilities that the law imposed on separated married women.

She began a campaign to change the law on child custody: a devoted mother, she found that her husband was well within his rights in still refusing her access to the children. But Caroline Norton

had powerful friends who sympathised with her plight and encouraged her to write a pamphlet called *The Natural Claim of a Mother to the Custody of her Child as affected by the Common Law Right of the Father* (1837). It also publicised evidence she had collected of cases even worse than her own. Her main supporter, an M.P. and senior barrister, Serjeant Talfourd, was a man of progressive outlook who had long been disturbed by the terrible cases of misery and injustice he had seen in the courts, where badly treated women were deprived of their children through no fault of their own. His first Bill passed the Commons but was thrown out by the Lords. Caroline Norton determined to get the Lords to consider his second Bill objectively, and she wrote another pamphlet, *A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Infant Custody Bill*, protesting against laws which gave a father undivided custody over his children when the parents were separated. She signed this pamphlet with a masculine name, knowing this would carry more weight with male readers, and sent it to each member of the House of Lords. Its logical presentation of facts and clear arguments had the effect she hoped for; the Lords passed the Bill, and it became law in 1839. It was a limited measure—giving power to the Court to grant to a mother access to her infant children, and even custody of those under seven years of age—but it removed one of the chief reasons which had hitherto coerced a wife into remaining under the roof of a cruel or vicious husband. As Lord Cottenham said in 1849, giving judgment in favour of a mother,

Parliament thought the mother ought to have the protection of the law with respect to her children up to a certain age, that she should be at liberty to assert her rights as a wife without the risk of any injury being done to her feelings as a mother.

Harriet Martineau later described it as the first Bill to strike a blow at the oppression of English law in relation to wives. It was no accident that it was passed in the early years after the Reform Act of 1832, when it became clear that age-old customs could be changed by law. Ironically, Caroline Norton always said she was not rebellious, put forward ‘no absurd claim of equality’, and claimed only protection against a vicious husband. Yet she was instrumental in forging the first effective weapon against the total rights of fathers over their children.

However, up to the passing of the Custody of Infants Act of 1886, the father of a legitimate child was, as far as legal rights were concerned, the sole parent—even though the law imposed on the mother, under criminal and other penalties, liabilities and obligations almost equal to those of the father. Until 1886, a mother could be excluded altogether from guardianship of her children, in favour of someone of her husband's appointment.

Common Law was based on the principle that married women were legally incapable of individual action, so neither a judicial separation nor desertion by the husband removed from the wife the status of coverture. It was this injustice on which Caroline Norton dwelt in her *Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill* in 1855. When separated from her, Norton successfully claimed a legacy left her by her father (it had not been legally secured to her separately) but was unable to get his hands on a legacy settled on her by her mother, so he immediately stopped paying her a maintenance allowance he had previously agreed to make voluntarily. A trained lawyer and magistrate, knowing well his legal rights, Norton retained property left by his wife in their home, including gifts made to her by her own family; he received from Caroline's trustees the interest on the portion bequeathed her by her father (which had not been properly secured to her personal use); he subpoenaed her publishers for her earnings from her writings, and confiscated them for his own use. By 1855 Caroline Norton had not received any money from her husband for three years, so she pledged his credit and ran up bills in his name which he was obliged to pay. She said she wished she had been his housekeeper rather than his wife, for then he could not have libelled her with impunity; or a apprentice, whom he could not have maltreated lawlessly; or a scullion, whose wages he could not have refused. In her *Letter to the Queen* Caroline Norton pointed out that her concern was with the cause of all the women of England, not just herself, and that what all wives wanted and needed was the protection of the law. Of this pamphlet, the ex-Lord Chancellor, Lord Brougham (actually no friend of Caroline) said, 'It is as clever a thing as ever was written, and it has produced a great good. I feel certain that the Law of Divorce will be much amended, and she has greatly contributed to it.' His words were prophetic, as will be seen in Chapter 13 below.

The unfortunate Nellie Weeton also demonstrated the hell of being married to a harsh and selfish man. In 1814, after working for some years as a governess, she married Aaron Stock, owner of a small factory in Wigan, who probably married her for her money (she had saved and bought cottage property which brought her in an income of £75 a year). A daughter was born in 1815, but the following year she wrote, 'My husband is my terror, my misery. I have little doubt he will be my death.' Two years later she wrote, 'Bitter have been the years of my marriage, and sorrowful my days,' and in June 1818, 'Turned out of doors into the street. In the anguish of my mind, I broke out into complaints; this was my only fault.' After a reconciliation, Mr Stock gave his daughter by a previous marriage charge over the house; did not generally allow his wife to speak when sitting with him in the parlour; and constantly threatened to turn her out again. He then began to beat her, and threatened to send her to a lunatic asylum when she asked for more food. He got her arrested on the grounds that she had struck him, and if her friends had not arranged bail she might have been sent to a house of correction. Finally, she got a deed of separation by which her husband allowed her £50 a year (which was less than the income she brought to the marriage), but she was not allowed to live within 2½ miles of Wigan, and could see her daughter only three times a year. The husband even put obstacles in the way of these infrequent meetings; in 1823 the mother said she had not seen the child for twelve months, and it was many years before mother and daughter came together again. Nellie Weeton's husband was not typical of nineteenth-century husbands; but her 'faults' seem to have arisen from the fact that, having saved money from her pitifully small earnings when single, she did not like being totally dependent on her husband. She wrote, 'My principal ground of complaint is being kept so totally without money, at times when he is angry with me.' But her hard-earned income was no longer her own, having passed to her husband (Weeton, 1936).

Such cases of excessive hardship for wives were widely discussed, and clearly regarded as unusual, for most women in nineteenth-century England continued to marry, and divorce and separation were rare. Women had a clear idea of what they hoped to achieve in marriage (whatever reality followed). They wanted affection and companionship, even if they thought romantic love was not likely to last; they wanted a home of their own, children, a husband with a

legal obligation to maintain his family, an acknowledged status in the community as a wife and mother. Aware, if only dimly, that a woman lived completely under her husband's protection or cover, traditionalists justified this on several grounds. Firstly, those of justice—man was the natural breadwinner, wife and children lived mainly by the bread men earned, so it was fit and right that a man had disposal of his wife's property and earnings, if she had any. Secondly, grounds of expediency—someone had to rule the household, otherwise disputes would be endless, and it was better for the husband to be the ruler, since he was wiser, stronger, and knew more of the world. Thirdly, there were romantic, even poetical considerations—a sentimental ideal of absolute union of heart, life and purse which was how marriage ought to be, and which the law affirmed. Now, most observers of marriage could see that these notions did not tally with perceived reality, but the traditionalists liked to pretend that they did.

The English in the nineteenth century married comparatively late in life, as compared with societies where young people married as soon as they reached puberty: on average, women of all classes married between the ages of 23 and 26; men of all classes between 25 and 30. People got married when they had the means to set up a home; their requirements varied enormously according to their social class. In the century onwards from 1851, the proportion of each generation that got married remained stable at around 86 to 88 per cent. Few nineteenth-century marriages lasted more than 20 years, because of the early death of one or other partner; 'till death us do part' did not necessarily mean a long marriage. But remarriage was common, suggesting that despite all the jokes, maxims, cautionary tales, etc., marriage was generally preferred to the single state.

From the point of view of the government, Parliament, and the Christian churches, marriage was a public and virtually indissoluble contract, a legally approved sexual relationship and a validation of property and inheritance rights. It was thus the bedrock of a stable society. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792, the radical Mary Wollstonecraft emphasised women's lack of political rights and attacked 'the divine right of husbands', but she was wholly in favour of marriage as an institution and called it 'the cement of society'.

Thus, whatever the law and conventional morality said about

marriage, public opinion and actual behaviour accepted it for what it was, an institution of immense social convenience which the overwhelming majority found indispensable but which in some cases, because of the inequities of the law and the one-sidedness of the bargain, exploited and brutalised the wife and condoned the tyranny of the husband. Such cases occurred at every level of society, including the very highest, the royal family itself.

In general, most people thought there was not much wrong with the marriage bargain if both parties stuck to their agreement, which might include some very permissive behaviour. They disapproved of spouses who broke their marriage vows too flagrantly, though in some levels of society substantial infringements were tolerated provided they were discreet. But in the public's mind there were limits of behaviour beyond which no husband could or should go, and this principle applied as much to Royal husbands as to others, as we shall now see.

Part I

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

Chapter 2

A FAMILY ON THE THRONE

Until the wedding of Victoria and Albert, royal marriage had been the exemplar of *marriage à la mode*, the fashionable, free and easy marital relations of the aristocracy and gentry, and like theirs was much freer for the husbands than for their wives. Yet the public's *beau idéal* of happy marriage was the least representative of the upper class and of marital relations in general. Albert was a model of moral rectitude, and Victoria as Queen Regnant had the same rights, duties and prerogatives as a King. She was the only woman in England not legally subordinate to her husband.

A Queen Consort, too, like William IV's exemplary Adelaide, was considered by the law to be unlike other married women; she could purchase land and make leases, receive gifts from her husband, sue and be sued alone (*Summary*, 1854). But a Queen Consort's life was circumscribed by convention, and the King had even greater authority over his wife and children than other men. Under the Royal Marriages Act of 1772 members of the Royal Family could not contract a valid marriage without the sovereign's consent, unless they were over 25 years of age and gave twelve months' notice to the Privy Council. Some royals did marry without the monarch's consent, but their marriages were not legal.

GEORGE IV AND QUEEN CAROLINE

The predicament of a royal bride married to an autocratic and inconsiderate husband is startlingly illustrated by the life of the German Princess Caroline, who married her cousin the Prince of Wales in 1795. The Prince married her only to please his father and to

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

get his gambling debts paid; she was, by Lord Malmesbury's account, raw and inexperienced, devoid of dignity and slovenly in dress and person, as well as embarrassingly outspoken (for a Princess). Nevertheless, she never got the chance to show whether, with help and training, she could have become a more acceptable wife to the fastidious future king. At the marriage ceremony the Prince was so drunk that the Duke of Bedford could scarcely prevent him falling down, and his father had to prompt him in the responses. 'The Prince spent the greatest part of his bridal-night in the grate where he fell, and where I left him,' reported his wife in her Diary. However, the need for an heir was paramount, and Caroline became pregnant; but as soon as she produced a daughter in 1796 she was told that she could never again share her husband's bed. This information she requested in writing, and got it. For the rest of her life Caroline was persecuted by her husband; she was separated from her child, who remained in London when Caroline was sent off to Blackheath; she was refused public recognition of her social position as wife to the heir to the throne. From time to time the King was persuaded to intervene and help her, but few people at Court were willing to support her against her powerful husband. Generally speaking, *she* was blamed for not being more tactful, more sentimental, more subservient to her husband's wishes.

The tragic saga of Caroline's long marriage, the Royal Divorce case, and the political battle that ensued when her husband came to the throne and refused to allow her to be crowned Queen, are famous in political history and need not be repeated here. We need only consider the significance of Princess Caroline's case *as a wife*, as far as the general public in England was concerned. It is true that the Whigs and the Radicals who worked hard on her behalf hoped to make political capital out of her misfortunes (it was standard practice in Hanoverian England for the Opposition to support disenchanted Royals); they saw a chance of injuring the Tories and revenging themselves on the Prince Regent for his betrayal of the Whig cause in 1810. But when Caroline was persuaded by the Whigs no longer to submit passively to her humiliating treatment, and helped to draft a letter of remonstrance to the Regent against his harsh treatment of her (published in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1813) the whole nation was drawn into the dispute. By this time the Princess was aged 46, her husband 50, and they had been married for 18 years. The picture of an anguished mother long separated from

her child through no fault of her own, and of a wife deprived for many years of her lawful status, was an issue that everyone, even the most ignorant, could understand and sympathise with. It appealed to the better instincts of the English people, and the Prince Regent became a target for popular abuse. 'I recollect of no instance,' said Lord Brougham, 'of such effects being produced by any statement of a case of appeal to the public against a grievance.' It had the contrary effect on the Prince; he tried to have Caroline designated an unfit person to have charge of the heiress to the throne. This did not work, but the struggle was transferred to Parliament and public excitement increased. The tide of feeling for Caroline rose higher; the people constituted themselves judge and jury in the cause, and their verdict was for the Princess. Still the Prince was unmoved, and in 1814 Caroline gave up the fight and departed for the Continent, there embarking on a frantic round of revels in the Courts of Europe. Her follies and extravagances lost her much public sympathy, as did her employment of Bergami, said to be her lover.

However, when the Prince Regent became George IV in 1820, he raised public indignation again by striking the Queen's name from the Anglican liturgy read in every parish church. Emma, Countess Brownlow, an ardent Tory and no friend of Caroline, wrote in her *Diary* at the time, 'This omission caused a great sensation and animadversion amidst the lower and middle classes, and even among many of the upper who knew little of the Princess's conduct.' Lady Brownlow was apparently quite willing to overlook the Prince's conduct, his notoriously immoral life and many mistresses being very well known as well as his animosity towards his wife, but others were not.

Now, in 1820 Britain was seething with unrest from many causes, among them high taxation and dear food, and the newly aroused working-class demand for Parliamentary Reform (the 'Peterloo massacre' had occurred in August 1819). Yet on 12 September 1820 Wilbraham could write to Lord Colchester: 'Radicalism has taken the shape of affection for the Queen and deserted the old form.' In November Lord John Russell said, 'the Queen's business has done a great deal of good in renewing the old alliance of the Whigs and the people, and weakening the influence of the Radicals with the latter.' And the Radical newspapers complained that all the nation's business was suspended 'because a man and a woman could not agree', and that 'military despotism was considered trifling

compared with a decision about whether or not the Queen would be permitted to live at home', which only shows that people often decide for themselves what they think is really important, whatever politicians tell them.

The Queen returned to England in 1820 and was received as a popular heroine; at the King's insistence the Tory government framed a Royal Divorce Bill, to deprive Caroline of her rights and prerogatives as Queen Consort and thus grant the King his freedom; Caroline applied to state her claims at the bar of the House of Lords, and this was conceded. The debate on this bill constituted the 'Trial of Queen Caroline', and its withdrawal constituted her acquittal. Two days before the start of the Westminster trial, Madame d'Arblay (Fanny Burney) wrote, 'We are all, and of all classes, opinions, all ages, and all parties absolutely *absorbed* by the expectation of Thursday.' What absorbed people was the injustice of what had happened, was happening, and was likely to happen to Queen Caroline *as a wife*. On view were the trials and tribulations of a wronged woman, who had been denied her position as a wife, denied money to maintain herself suitably, denied access to her child when her husband sent her away. The husband was a debauched man who dared not face an action for divorce in the Ecclesiastical Court, yet he had the effrontery to spy on his wife and impugn her honour, and he proposed to abuse his power and privilege as monarch and head of the government to divorce her without possibility of her defence or criticism of himself, by Act of Parliament. By this time, Caroline was 53 years old, and no one had actually proved any misconduct on her part.

Thus, to the public Caroline represented a mistreated and rejected wife who was being discarded on slender evidence. The fact that she was not popular with aristocratic Society (who thought her plebeian in her interests and outlook) would have been another reason for the middle and lower classes to sympathise with her. Cobbett wrote in the *Political Register* for June 1820,

Has it (the law) refused to the wife of the King rights which it gives to every other married woman? Are we not punishable, by law, if we refuse to live with our wives? Are we not punishable, by law, if we refuse them the enjoyment of those rights of dwelling and of cohabitation, which they acquire at the time of

A FAMILY ON THE THRONE

their marriage, in return for the enormous sacrifice which they then make to us?

He went on,

Do they, at their marriage, surrender their all, surrender up their persons to our absolute government and control; do they give up their liberty, their right of locomotion, and even their right to love and be loved; do they give up their right to govern, to advise, and even to see their own children? yes, they do all this, and shall they be denied the right of living under the same roof with him to whom they make this enormous surrender; a surrender, too, made in numerous instances, to creatures not endowed with a hundredth part of their understanding and not endowed with a millionth part of their sensibility.

Cobbett was expressing the social expectation that a man had to honour his responsibilities in marriage, whether he was a monarch or a subject.

The Prince's treatment of his wife was an eye-opener to the women of Britain; it indicated that the situation of wives of men lower down in the social scale could also be one of great jeopardy. To defend Caroline adequately, though, she had to be turned into the perfect lady—kind, generous, and virtuous; so her uncircumspect behaviour with Bergami was overlooked or ignored. The involvement of tens of thousands of women in so public and sustained an agitation as the defence of Caroline was an innovation in popular politics. Female petitions on behalf of Caroline were regularly printed in the establishment and radical papers; some had a few hundred signatures and came from small towns like Truro; others came from cities like Nottingham (7,800 signatures) offering sympathy on the loss of her protectors; and the largest, from the 'married ladies of the metropolis', had 17,652 signatures and was presented by a hundred ladies dressed in white linen—the petition said the ladies 'adored the womanly feeling which gave Caroline the courage to defend her honour'. The identity of Caroline's interests with those of all other women in England was made explicit in her answer to the Bristol Women's Address: 'If an adultery can be established by remote inference, pleas for divorce will be indefinitely multiplied; jealousy and their ill feeling will not know restraint' (see

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

Political Register, August 5, 1820, cols 188–192, also August 19 and October 2). Women's lack of legal access to their children was made clear by the story of Caroline's inability to visit her daughter when the princess was in her father's custody; and much was made of the fact that in 1817 she had not been informed of her daughter Charlotte's death, or even invited to the funeral.

For the first time, English women were publicly protesting against husbands who did not fulfil their part of the marriage bargain; they were not at that period interested in easier divorce, and they clearly thought it grotesque that a known libertine like the King should try to divorce his wife on grounds of her unproved misconduct. This raised the question, too, of the sexual double standard, by which women were judged more harshly than men for sexual misconduct; on the rising tide of Evangelicalism people disapproved of sexual misconduct by either partner. And the 'natural' rights of a mother were being asserted against the legal rights of a father.

The case of Queen Caroline was of the utmost importance in rousing widespread public sympathy for all wronged wives and mothers in England. It laid the groundwork for reforms concerning a mother's access to her children, and the rights of deserted wives, which were eventually to follow.

WILLIAM IV AND QUEEN ADELAIDE

George IV was succeeded, on his death in 1830, by his brother William IV. After living for twenty years with the actress Mrs Jordan, who had ten children by him and frequently returned to the stage to pay off the family's debts, the Duke of Clarence (as he then was) had obeyed the family call to dynastic duty and legitimate heirs, and married the Princess of Saxe-Meiningen. Adelaide took on a difficult husband with many debts and bastard children; he made it clear that he intended to see his children as and when he chose, but he treated his wife correctly and with all due deference. Adelaide's own two children died in babyhood, but she was always kind to the Fitzclarence brood. Her marriage was one of convenience, but it was a model of decorum, and with Queen Adelaide the rights of royal wives (and by implication those of other wives) returned to firmer and more traditional grounds.

QUEEN VICTORIA AND PRINCE ALBERT

Queen Victoria may not have approved of the campaign for women's rights, calling it 'wicked', but she clearly enjoyed ruling the roost (and the country). In 1837, the 2nd Marchioness of Salisbury reported that when Victoria was told of her accession to the throne she said she was delighted with her sudden emancipation from all restraint, and asked if it were possible that she was truly her own mistress. She told Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister, in 1839 that she dreaded the thought of marrying, because she was so accustomed to having her own way that she didn't think she could agree with anybody (Creston, 1952, p.388). In fact, she never changed her view that women should not be forced into marriages they did not want: for example, of Princess Alix of Hesse, who would not marry her cousin Prince Albert Victor, Queen Victoria wrote to the Empress Frederick in 1889. 'She shows great strength of character. All her family and all of us wish it, but she refuses the greatest position there is' (*Kronberg Letters*, 7 May 1889).

It seems certain, therefore, that when Victoria married her cousin Albert, it was not simply to please her relations: Albert's 'beauty' bowled her over, they 'arranged' the marriage for themselves, and it was among the happiest and most successful in the history of the English Royal Family. After a week of marriage, she recorded that she had told Lord Melbourne that, 'I never could have thought there was such happiness in store for me' (*Journal*, 17 February 1840). Now, presumably she was not ignoring the physical side of marriage, and there is no suggestion in her writings that she was shocked or upset by sex, or had been lying back thinking of England. Indeed, she showed none of the ignorance of sex expected of well-brought-up girls (according to the marriage manuals).

But, as many of her later letters to her daughter show (Fulford, 1964), and also entries in her *Journal*, Victoria did not enjoy childbearing, which she called 'the shadow side of marriage'—or '*die Schattenseite*' (because it sounded more delicate in a foreign language). She said she never could see a young girl entering on matrimony without a shuddering thought of the *Schattenseite*, 'and therefore I think of our sex as a most unenviable one'. We can conclude that if Victoria had not liked the 'sunny' side of marriage (i.e. sexual love) she would not have gone on to bear nine children. She was fortunate, of course, not to have a miscarriage, a stillbirth or

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

an infant death; by contrast, her cousin Princess Charlotte (then heir to the British throne) had died in childbirth in 1817, and the child with her. But she was the one woman in England who could *command* her husband, took legal precedence over him, and could demand his obedience. To her Uncle Leopold she wrote, ‘...men never think, at least seldom think, what a hard task it is for women to go through this [childbirth] very often.’ But scarcely had her first child been christened than she was pregnant again, and she was furious. It was her resentment of the physical suffering in childbirth which led to her being one of the first women to use chloroform (for her eighth and ninth deliveries in 1853 and 1857) and thus she made the practice respectable for other women. We do not know whether she was ignorant of, or totally disapproving of, contraception; but she certainly did not follow the advice of the popular ballads which congratulated her on producing another darling baby but implored her to ‘do it no more’. However, she clearly felt little exultation in the self-sacrifice involved in bearing children, and warned her daughter about this (24 March 1858):

Now in reply to your observation that you find a married woman has much more liberty than an unmarried one, in one sense of the word she has—but if...you have hereafter aches and sufferings and miseries and plagues...enjoyments to give up—constant precautions to take [she meant taking care of herself during pregnancy], you will feel the yoke of a married woman [by which she meant childbearing]. Without that—certainly it is unbounded happiness—if one has a husband one worships!

Victoria did not pretend to be enthralled by the company of her children: in a letter dated 6 October 1856 she said,

I see the children much less and even here, where Albert is often away all day long, I feel no especial pleasure or compensation in the company of the elder children... And only very exceptionally do I find the rather intimate intercourse with them either agreeable or easy... I only feel properly *a mon aise* and quite happy when Albert is with me (Bolitho, 1938, p.74).

We may smile at the smugness with which she wrote on 20 October 1844: ‘They say no Sovereign was ever more loved than I am (I am

bold enough to say and this because of our domestic home, the good example it presents' (Benson and Esher, 1907, First Series, vol. 2, p.32), but she *does* seem to have been conspicuously different from other European sovereigns, and she was somewhat of a pioneer in excluding the formality and protocol of a court from her home life. After twenty-one years of marriage, and producing nine children, Victoria and Albert said they wished for no greater happiness than the enjoyment of each other's company in seclusion. Her private letters show that she was not always as censorious of irregular behaviour as people thought she was. For example, discussing in letters with her daughter, the Crown Princess of Prussia, the elopement of Valeric Hohenthal (Lady-in Waiting to the Crown Princess) with Count Uxkull, and their living together for some time before marrying, the Queen wrote,

To me there is such a vast difference between heartless, wicked immorality, like one sees, alas! constantly—especially in the higher classes, and one noble passion when all the feelings and aspirations are pure and noble—and when only, perhaps from impossibility of money, or rank, or God knows what, the outward early forms cannot be given by man!

This brings up the question of whether Queen Victoria had a lover after the death of her husband, as a great many of her subjects thought. In 1867, *Tinsley's Magazine* published a story linking the Queen's name with that of her Scots servant John Brown; they added a note that *they* of course did not believe the story. But other rumours flew around that Victoria had secretly re-married, and *Punch* went so far as to print a drawing of her with the caption, 'Mrs. John Brown'. The Queen's behaviour did not discourage the talk, for Brown was frequently heard speaking familiarly with his mistress, and he always slept like a guard-dog in the room very close to hers. At this time Victoria was no young beauty; she was a middle-aged widow who cared little for her appearance. She expected people not to misconstrue her behaviour, but perhaps she who had been such a gossip, and had misjudged or been openly censorious about some members of her court, should have known better.

What can be said with certainty is that Victoria and Albert achieved a partnership in marriage which had not previously been a *beau idéal* for royalty. By the end of the 1840s they had established

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

Buckingham Palace as an adjunct of Government. They watched the whole range of governmental activity, seeking information, and proffering advice; they corresponded frequently with their royal relations throughout Europe, passing on British feelings and intentions. Monarchy became noted for respectability and hard work, characteristics which were fervently approved by their middle-class subjects. In Victoria's reign the institutions both of monarchy and of marriage were regarded as stable props of society. What perhaps irritated some people was that because she had a happy marriage herself, the Queen seemed unable to understand that other people might not be so fortunate.

Writing in *The British Constitution* in 1865, Walter Bagehot was interested in 'how the actions of a retired widow and an unemployed youth become of such importance'. He was talking about Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales, and said,

A family on the throne is an interesting idea. It brings down the pride of sovereignty to the level of petty life. No feelings would seem more childish than the enthusiasm of the English at the marriage of the Prince of Wales. They treated as a great political event what, looked at as a matter of pure business, was very small indeed. But no feeling could be more like common human nature as it is, or as it is likely to be. The women—one half the human race at least—care fifty times more for a marriage than a ministry.

Well, of course, at that time women had no voting rights for members of parliament, and could argue that they consequently had no particular interest in how the cabinet was formed. But most women knew something about marriage and were directly involved in *that* institution, so they were interested in how a future king was likely to treat his wife.

PRINCESS ALEXANDRA AND ALBERT EDWARD, PRINCE OF WALES

On 9 September 1863, the 18-year-old Danish Princess Alexandra married the 21-year-old heir to the English throne. On her wedding morning, she said to the Prince's eldest sister, 'You may think I like marrying Bertie for his position, but if he were a cowboy I would love

him just the same and would marry no one else.' One may have doubts about that statement, but obviously she did love her husband, for she survived being the most publicly cheated wife in Europe since Queen Caroline (as far as sexual infidelity was concerned). Yet 'I was the one he loved best', she was reported to have told a member of the Seymour family later in life (Leslie, 1973, p.249). And she was probably right, for he was an affectionate, admiring husband throughout. This glamorous pair were from the first perfect social leaders, and they set the tone not only for England but for Europe. Queen Victoria could not restrain the behaviour of her lusty son, whom she interestingly referred to as a caricature of herself; in the first year of her son's marriage, the Queen commented that Bertie 'goes on going out every night until she will become a skeleton'. But Alix's first baby was premature due to the *Princess's* wish to be whirled out on a sledge to watch her husband play ice hockey.

Alexandra bore six children in seven years, then became extremely ill, and it seems likely that she did not wish to risk childbirth again. She was suffering from stiffening of the knee joints, and rheumatic fever triggered off a form of hereditary deafness which spoiled her middle age. The Prince loved his children but was unable to relax in the family circle: he could not stand being bored even for a minute, and he had a robust sense of humour and a love of practical jokes which must have been painful for others to endure. One of his mistresses, Lillie Langtry, said she was somewhat relieved when she was replaced, because it was such an exhausting way to live, keeping the Prince constantly amused.

But when word went around that the Prince was 'susceptible' there was no shortage of beautiful, respectable, married upper-class women who responded with alacrity. Few husbands raised objections, it seems; either they were interested in the freedom to have love affairs of their own, or they saw positive social and material advantages in the situation. The Prince's mistresses were regarded, both at home and abroad, as women who ruled socially and gave favours. A woman who became a favourite of the Prince of Wales was usually socially secure even when the relationship ended; the Prince remained on good terms with his ex-mistresses and often helped them, for example, make advantageous marriages for their children.

Queen Victoria wrote admiringly of Alix: 'I often think that her lot is no easy one, but she is very fond of Bertie, though not blind.'

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

Noted for her beauty, Alix was feather-brained but virtuous. Adored by the equerries and feared by her ladies-in-waiting, she gained a lifelong popularity with the general public never previously accorded a royal consort. The country idolised her—so pure, so badly treated. Had her husband been faithful (thereby perhaps forcing her to continue childbearing) she would not have received such applause and pity. When a scandal broke, such as the one concerning the Prince, the Countess of Warwick and Mina Beresford, Alix went off to visit European relations for a few weeks until things calmed down.

When Mrs Alice Keppel became mistress to the Prince of Wales in 1898, he was 58 and she was 29. She remained his mistress until his death. She took her post seriously and her well-bred husband George (younger brother of the Earl of Albermarle) raised no objection. Queen Alexandra accepted her as a friend, and the Keppels were often invited to stay at Sandringham with the royal couple. The future Queen Mary wrote to her husband, ‘What a pity Mrs G.K. is again to the fore. How annoyed Mama will be!’ but Princess Alice of Albany thought Queen Alexandra encouraged the liaison, writing, ‘There was a lot of gossip and public disapproval of their relationship [Alice Keppel and the King] and unnecessary sympathy for Aunt Alix, who did not need it as she welcomed the arrangement.’ It is documented that when the King was dying, Alexandra sent a brougham to fetch Mrs Keppel, and herself took her up to Edward’s bedroom, leaving her alone with him for a long time. ‘I say God bless her for it. Few women would have done it,’ wrote Daisy, Princess of Pless (*From My Private Diary*, John Murray, 1931).

No one knows for sure what Alix thought of her situation; we can only guess how she felt when her eldest son died in February 1892 of the combined effects of primary syphilis, influenza and pneumonia. But she was always surrounded by men who were in love with her and acted as her cavaliers. She had a long, Platonic love affair with the Hon. Oliver Montague (younger son of Lord Sandwich), who was equerry to the Prince, which lasted for 25 years from 1868 till his death in 1893. The Prince understood and respected their feelings. It was a pure and noble romance, without sex, according to Louisa, Lady Antrim, who described their lives and circumspect love. When Montague died, Alix chose as her favourite cavalier the Marquis de Serral, Portuguese Minister in London; but no breath of gossip arose about that relationship either.

Princess Alexandra is said to have ‘paid back’ her husband in a way by her habit of being totally unpunctual; this was at a time when unpunctuality was considered a cardinal sin, but, ‘Let him wait, it will do him good,’ the Princess is said by Mabell, Countess of Airlie to have declared when the Prince sent word imploring her to be on time for an important engagement. She also sometimes ‘paid back’ the Prince’s mistresses for open scandals: for example, Alix ignored the Prince’s request that she should support one of the Countess of Warwick’s philanthropic schemes, and she instructed her son Prince George to do likewise. George wrote to his wife, ‘In case you should hear from Lady Warwick asking you to become President of a Charity of hers, refuse it. Mother dear has done so and wishes you to do the same’ (Leslie, 1973, pp.254,262)

‘Mother dear’ knew how to play her cards. Apart from her unpunctuality, she also snubbed German royalty she did not like, and she just ‘did not hear’ complaints from Queen Victoria about this. The hard-headed Queen wrote about this, ‘Good as she is, she is not worth the price we paid in having such a family connection.’ Apparently Alexandra henpecked the Prince, gently but peremptorily, and he became rather frightened of her. She also kept the whip hand at home: her maids of honour were scared of her, according to Anita Leslie, who said that her grandmother Leonie Leslie told her of Alexandra (when Queen) actually beating a lady-in-waiting with a long steel umbrella. The human beings totally in her power were her three daughters: her love for her children was unhealthily possessive but whereas the boys were sent away into the Forces the girls had to stay at home with her. Prince George wrote his wife, ‘Mama, as I have always said, is one of the most selfish people I know’ (Leslie, 1973, p.255). This selfishness may have been a defence mechanism, a protection against the hurt her husband caused her, but it badly affected her daughters. She did not want them to marry, and announced point-blank that German courts were not to be considered. After one argument, the Prince reported to Queen Victoria that Alix found the girls such good companions that she would not encourage them to marry, and that they themselves had no inclination for it. Queen Victoria did not believe this. Eventually Louise married the Duke of Fife and became a recluse; Maud married a Viking Prince in 1903 and became Queen of the newly independent Norway, but she was rather unhappy because she could not live in England. Princess Victoria never escaped, and is

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

thought to have suffered a hidden, blighted life; her mother never recognised this and refused to believe family members who talked to her about it. When young, the Princess took to falling in love with commoners whom she was forbidden to marry; later, she became an embittered hypochondriac. In 1902 the Grand Duchess Augusta wrote in a letter, 'I had talk with Victoria...how odd that her mother doesn't feel that at 33 one requires a little freedom.' She was a sick old lady before she was allowed her own apartments in Kensington Palace. Alix's hard attitude towards her daughters has been attributed by some to lack of imagination rather than selfishness, but the two things are not so far apart.

Nonetheless, Alix was brave when her husband was stricken with appendicitis in June 1902, on the eve of his Coronation. She helped hold him down during the administration of chloroform and was indeed willing to stand by while the operation was performed, though her offer was refused. She never showed the strain she underwent, and when, two months later, the Coronation took place, she must have known she had won all round.

Queen Victoria's son behaved after his marriage much as George IV had done earlier in the century, as far as marital infidelity was concerned. But there were differences: Princess Alexandra was never publicly humiliated or denied the privileges of her rank, as Princess Caroline had been. Prince Albert Edward was protective towards his wife and kind to his ex-mistresses; he always tried to avoid public scandals, though he didn't always succeed. Above all, the later Prince of Wales felt obliged to *pretend* to set his subjects a good example in marital fidelity, at least. It was expected of him, and he could not openly flout the wish of his subjects that a royal marriage meant 'living happily ever after'. As Bagehot put it, 'A princely marriage is a brilliant edition of a universal fact, and, as such, rivets mankind.' But royal marriage had also been domesticated, by popular demand.

QUEEN MARY AND GEORGE V

Princess Mary of Teck was first engaged to the eldest son of Edward VII, who died in 1893, and then married the son who became George V in 1910. He was a conventional monarch and she was a straight-laced, stately wife. They restored the image of a monarch whose prime concern was to rule England and live his/her life strictly according to what was required by respectable subjects, and that

A FAMILY ON THE THRONE

included setting a good example of fidelity in marriage. It was said that King Edward VII looked out of a window one day and saw his eldest grandson, afterwards Edward VIII: the King said to a friend, 'Here comes the last King of England.' He was wrong, but in the sense that there could be no place in the future for a King who was as unconventional as he and his grandson, Edward VIII, who was forced to abdicate over his private life, he was probably right. By the twentieth century the public expected and required that royal husbands and wives would preserve with dignity the institution of marriage as well as the institution of monarchy.

Chapter 3

ONE LAW FOR THE RICH

Although *marriage à la mode* for the English upper classes in the nineteenth century was amazingly open and tolerant, it was also a very serious matter. Property in land and large sums of money were usually involved. The desire and the need for legitimate heirs was a powerful consideration, affecting people's deepest-held wishes. Alliances with other powerful families could be forged through marriage ties. Social status could be enhanced. Patronage for jobs affecting the whole family could be procured through the influence which property exerted.

History is often written as if these concerns were those *only* of upper-class men—as though women did not share them, were entirely passive creatures, manipulated by fathers and guardians, forced into marriages they did not want and from which they had no escape, and with no capability for independent action or rebellion. When we look at upper-class marriage from the women's point of view, the question arises how far that description fits the reality. We shall be astonished to find, here and in the next chapter, that upper-class Englishwomen with separate estates and income, provided for their benefit under a private system of law administered by the Court of Equity, were the most liberated group of wives in the country and perhaps in the world. How liberated they were depended on the size of their separate estates; but with even a modest private income assured to her separate use, a married woman had some choices about how to live her life. Thus, we are reaching down into the untitled gentry, and indeed any family of substance that *chose* to protect its married daughters in this way. We naturally tend to hear cries of woe from women whose families either could not, or would not, give

them such protection. And there was a vast difference for a wife between having even a small private income, and having none at all. It was not generally the way of the wealthy to leave their womenfolk without an income of their own; mainly this was done to protect property from avaricious, unlucky or unsuccessful husbands, but we should not rule out the very real affection that parents felt for their daughters. After all, many wealthy men left whole fortunes, or the bulk of their estates, to daughters, nieces, close female relatives or friends. For example, in 1811 his daughter Barbara Ashley Cooper became the sole heiress of the 5th Earl of Shaftesbury and inheritor of all his estates which did not pass with the title to his brother (that unpleasant and, for an earl, impecunious man who was father to the great humanitarian 7th Earl). Barbara married in 1814, and in 1838 her husband was created Lord De Mauley in acknowledgment of his wife's descent and the family's wealth. Frances Anne, only daughter of Sir Harry Vane-Tempest and of Anne, Countess of Antrim, inherited all their very large estates in Durham and in the north of Ireland. Of Fanny Pierrepont, who married Governor Bentinck in 1802, Lady Louisa Stuart commented that she 'would not have much less than £30,000, an old steward of the Duke of Kingston's having bequeathed her fifteen after his wife's death', and said with justice, 'She therefore is a good match for anybody' (Stuart, 1895). Lady Louisa, who was herself a very wealthy heiress, did not think it strange that the 'old steward' should so have disposed of his wealth. And in the 1850s the last Lord Maynard left all his immense fortune and lands to his little granddaughter, Frances, later Countess of Warwick.

WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE TRANSMISSION OF ESTATES, TITLES AND NAMES

After 1740, schemes of inheritance often gave precedence to close female kin such as sisters or nieces over remote male cousins. Also, once the practice of enforcing a change of name and arms upon fictive kin became common (husbands or sons of women who inherited), owners were more willing to settle their estates on females, or the children of females in tail general, since this assured that the family name remained attached to the seat (cf. Stone and Stone, 1984, pp. 119, 137-9). Some wealthy families insisted, when their daughters married noblemen, that their names should be added as prefixes or suffixes. Thus, the mighty Cecil family changed their name to Gascoyne-Cecil when Frances Mary Gascoyne married into

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

it in the 1820s and brought a Liverpool fortune. In 1819 heiress Frances Anne Vane-Tempest married as his second wife Charles William Stewart, half-brother of Lord Castlereagh, and on marriage he took the surname of Vane. In 1823 he was created Earl Vane and Viscount Seaham in the peerage of the United Kingdom, with remainder to the eldest son by his second marriage. In 1831 John Ward married an heiress and changed his name to Ward-Broughton-Leigh to signify her being the heiress of her mother (maiden name Broughton) and of her father (Leigh).

When a man married a great heiress, it was not uncommon practice for the marriage contract to specify that her freehold inheritance would not pass to her eldest son, but to her second son, who would thus re-start his mother's line all over again (he often took his mother's family name as a first name, to identify his rights and inheritance). Of course, if the elder son died first, or the second son had no heirs, the plan collapsed, and the two estates were amalgamated. For example, the Duchess of the 4th Duke of Devonshire, heiress of the 'architectural' Earl of Burlington and Cork, left her vast Irish estates to her second son, who was created Earl of Burlington, and *his* son later inherited the main Devonshire estates. Women thus played a very important part in the transmission of property and seats.

One noticeable effect of giving heiresses more economic independence by putting their separate property under the control of themselves or their trustees, was that they became somewhat less attractive to potential husbands whose eyes were mainly on the sole control of the money. At the same time, there was a growing demand both by men and by women for more freedom in the choice of a marriage partner (though perhaps the two developments were complementary). The marriage of inheritors to widows also fell dramatically, after 1800; the trustee system gave widows greater ability to protect their property from being squandered by a second husband, and propertied widows already had considerable economic independence, so they were not always in a hurry to remarry.

According to one historian, the aggregation of estates through marriage to heiresses and by inheritance was less pronounced among the great landed magnates in the nineteenth century than it had been in the eighteenth century (Thompson, 1963). More common was a dissolving and regrouping of estate blocks, through

ONE LAW FOR THE RICH

a succession of heiresses and coheiresses. For example, in 1814, Coghill's and Huck's estates in Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire respectively descended to the owners' two nieces. Both, however, remained spinsters, and on their deaths in 1841 and 1842 the estates went to a distant male relative (Stone, 1984, p. 115). Another example was that on the death of the 5th and last Duke of Ancaster in 1809 the property was finally divided between his two nieces who were sisters of the 4th Duke. The elder, who had married Peter Burrell in 1779, took with her the barony of Willoughby de Eresby (which was in tail general) and the Lincolnshire and Welsh estates and passed them to the Burrell family; their son married the heiress of Lord Perth in 1807, and acquired the vast Drummond estates in Perthshire. In turn his two sisters eventually became his coheiresses, in 1870, and again the elder inherited the bulk of the combined estates and transmitted the barony of Willoughby de Eresby (Thompson, 1963).

Women who controlled (albeit through trustees) such vast fortunes were persons of consequence in their own right, and marriage did nothing to change that. The ways in which wives used their independence will be looked at in detail in the next chapter: at this stage we shall examine the importance of the institution of marriage to upper-class women; who arranged their marriages; what choice of partner was available to them; and the system of law that protected them, their children and their futures if widowed.

None of this is intended to substantiate a view that changes in the public law, to give *all* married women property rights, were not necessary and morally just; it is to explain, however, why the justice of the cause was not immediately recognised by all upper-class women. In effect, most of these wives did not feel dominated and oppressed; they were often not aware of the legal disabilities they *did have*, because they were not subjected to them, and consequently saw no problem until something went seriously wrong with the marriage.

THE MARRIAGE INSTITUTION

A modern social historian has argued that

English society in 1800 was firmly based on the twin principles of property and patronage. One's place in that society was wholly

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

determined by the amount and kind of one's own property...or that of one's relations and friends. (Perkin, 1969, p.38.)

This was just as true for women as for men, of course. The glitter and elegance of nineteenth-century aristocratic life was made possible by income from valuable property, especially property in land. The landed family, spanning several generations and parallel branches and including cousins of far degree under its protection was expected to benefit even the distant members of the family; kinship ties were of great practical importance in obtaining appointments in church and state, for example.

So, when an upper-class family considered the marriage of children, more was at stake than momentary infatuation. As Dorothy Marshall explained, 'Emotions came and went: land remained' (Marshall, 1973). In Susan Edmonstone Ferrier's novel, *Marriage*, published in 1818, she expressed the rational view through the character of an aristocratic father: 'What has anybody to do with a heart when their establishment in life is at stake?... Persons of rank must be guided by family considerations in the connections they form.' In the novel, his daughter eloped with her penniless lover and lived unhappily ever after in the Highlands of Scotland. In real life, as long as he was a younger son without expectations, William Lamb was not considered a suitable match for Caroline Ponsonby (daughter of Lady Bessborough), though the young couple were in love. But when his elder brother died in 1805 and William became heir to the Melbourne title and estates, he courted and married Caroline. The marriage was a notorious disaster.

UPPER-CLASS WOMEN'S EXPECTATIONS OF MARRIAGE

When Mary Wollstonecraft wrote that 'the only way for a woman to rise in the world is by marriage' she expressed a realistic assessment for the majority of women (Wollstonecraft, 1792). It was not simply a question of rising, but of not falling. As Jane Austen remarked ironically, single women had an unfortunate propensity to be poor.

Aristocratic women in early nineteenth-century England generally had a coolly realistic view of marriage. For example,

ONE LAW FOR THE RICH

Elizabeth Montagu, known as the ‘Queen of the Blues’ (the intellectual blue-stockings) wrote,

Marriage is honourable in all, and I have an infinite respect for it, and would by no means be thought to make a jest of so serious a thing. It is a civil debt which people ought to pay.

She went on to say, however,

I own it astonishes me when I hear two people voluntarily, and on their own suggestion, entering into a bargain for perhaps fifty years cohabitation. I am so much of Solomon’s mind that the end of a feast is better than the beginning of a fray, that I weep more at a wedding than a funeral (Montagu, n.d.).

She married a man twenty-nine years older than herself; it was apparently a happy marriage but presumably shorter than the fifty years she had feared.

Upper-class women rarely had high expectations of romance or sexual fidelity in marriage. Mary Wollstonecraft suggested that marriage worked better if there was an absence of passionate love; friendship and quiet affection were a better basis for a long-term relationship and the rearing of children, she thought (Wollstonecraft, 1792). Lady Melbourne agreed, writing in a letter to Lord Byron in 1812 that ‘where love does not introduce itself, there can be no jealousys, torments & quarrels’. Jane Austen, asked for advice by her niece Fanny Knight, replied in 1814 that ‘Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection’ (Austen Letters, 1924). Affection is not romantic love, however, and she always made it clear that to marry a man without means was to be avoided. She believed that when poverty came in at the door, love flew out of the window.

Cynicism and a dislike of domesticity were flourishing in the 1830s, bolstered by the novels of the day. The successful novelist Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan) referred to the current cynicism about marriage when she wrote to her friend Mrs Lefanu in 1812, ‘I intend to write a book to explode the vulgar idea of matrimony being the tomb of love.’ That feeling was well captured by Emily Eden, daughter of Lord Auckland, who was a prominent hostess

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

and friend of Lord Melbourne. In her novel *The Semi-Attached Couple* (written in 1830 and first published 1860) she wrote:

Some years ago it was the fashion of all newly-married people to write word to their friends that they were the happiest of human creatures. Heaven alone knows if it were true, but so they always said. Now this romantic state of bliss has been laughed at in society, and sneered at in novels, till nobody dares say a word about it. It may be wiser, but it is not quite satisfactory. The domestic novels of the day have described with such accuracy and with so much satire, all the little fidgety amiabilities of life, that a wife who is inclined to praise her husband checks herself, for fear she should be reckoned like Mrs. Major Waddell. An active mother has a suspicion that she is laughed at as a Mrs. Fairbairn, and the kindly affections of the heart are now so carefully wrapped up and concealed, that it seems just possible that they may die altogether of suffocation.

Fanny Kemble, the actress, was scathing about women's inability to judge a man as a husband—and she herself made a very bad error. After one year of marriage, she wrote in 1835 to her friend Miss Perkins, who was about to marry.

Marriage quite as much as death seems to be the way of all flesh, so I have nothing to say to you or any other poor creature whose 'time is come' but to bless you and grant that you have thrown yourself into good hands. The manner in which women are brought up renders their exercising any degree of judgment and reason in the choice of a husband so very unlikely (I might say impossible) that it appears to me the merest chance in the world whether their existence after marriage is happy or miserable.

Fanny's own marriage was a disaster. She and her husband quarrelled about his ownership of slaves in the Southern United States, and she eventually left him and returned to England. Marriage was also getting a bad press in the 1850s: Charlotte Brontë wrote in a letter dated 11 May 1852, 'I read in a French book lately, a sentence to this effect, that "marriage might be defined as the state of two-fold selfishness."'

Even the sharp-eared children picked up their parents' matter-of-fact tone about marriage. Daisy Ashford's classic, *The Young*

Visitors, published in 1919 but written when she was nine years old in the Edwardian Age, gives amazing glimpses of what a young upper-class girl expected of marriage, for example ‘his wife had a savage temper so he thought he would divorce her and try again but he gave up the idea after several attempts and decided to offer it up as a Mortification.’ The book suggests that upper-class girls in the Edwardian Age were no more romantic about marital bliss than their foremothers had been a century earlier. According to Lady Cynthia Asquith, upper-class women used to talk about ‘marrying a country house’ (Asquith, 1950). Lillie Langtry (mistress of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales) said she married Edward Langtry in Jersey in 1886 to get his luxurious yacht (Langtry, 1925). When James, son of Sir Charles Forbes, proposed to Lady Angela, youngest daughter of the Earl of Rosslyn, she immediately answered: ‘Yes, if I may have your chestnut horse’—they were both keen hunters (Leslie, 1973).

Nevertheless, there is plenty of evidence of some upper-class women being happily married in what may be called a companionate sense. For example, Fanny Burney married a French émigré, M. D’Arblay, against her father’s advice in 1793 when she was 41 years old. The following year she had a son. Many years later she wrote, ‘And never, never was union more blessed and felicitous: though, after the first eight years of unmingled happiness, it was assailed by many calamities, chiefly of separation or illness, yet still mentally unbroken.’ The marriage lasted twenty-four years, until M. D’Arblay’s death in 1817. Lady Holland had an extraordinarily happy second marriage (following a famous divorce). Her letters show genuine adoration for her husband; she ordered him about, bullied him (and he usually gave way to her whims), but she took a delight in his society, and was grateful for a life of happiness with him, which he seems to have reciprocated. The void which his death created was to her irreparable. Other women, too, were offered romantic love in marriage: for example, Doctor (soon to be Sir Charles) Morgan wrote to Sydney Owenson in 1811,

The love I require is no ordinary affection. The woman who marries me must be *identified* with me. I must have a large bank of tenderness to draw upon, I must have frequent profession and frequent demonstration of it. Woman’s love is all in all to me; it stands in place of honour and riches, and what is yet more, in place of tranquillity of mind.

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

Sydney agreed to marry him, and according to her it was an exceptionally happy relationship. Of her daughter's marriage in 1834, Lady Shelley wrote,

Fanny's marriage will, I believe, be really a happy one; they suit exactly, and Edgcumbe is an excellent creature, and will never neglect her. They have the same tastes, but very different characters, and this I believe to be the secret of a happy marriage.

In that case, it apparently was (Shelley, 1912).

In the 1820s Lady Charlotte Harley (daughter of Lady Oxford) married Anthony Bacon, Senior Major of the 17th Lancers. Neither had any money, so their marriage was reckless, but their devotion became legendary. Lady Charlotte believed in shared interests: they were never apart, and as a superb horsewoman she rode with her husband in his campaigns. When Bacon did not get command of the 17th as he hoped, he sold his commission and entered the service of the King of Portugal as a mercenary, his wife going with him.

But typical of the way many aristocratic women discreetly described their marriages is this extract from the *Journal of Emma, Countess Brownlow*. She married in 1828, when she was 37 years old, and wrote,

The season proved an eventful one for me—before its close, on the 17th July, I became the third wife of Lord Brownlow, and during the 25 years of our married life, we neither of us ever regretted the step we then took, but each succeeding year drew us more closely together in heart and mind. The wedding was a quiet one—at our age any fuss or parade would have been absurd... The only painful parting was with my dear father (Brownlow, 1868).

Lady Dorothy Nevill, too, said little in her journals about her marriage in 1847 and her relations with her husband, though the marriage was stable and long-lasting, but mentioned that in his later years her husband, then something of an invalid and not himself mingling in society, nevertheless did not object to her entertaining or going about, for, 'being a sensible man, he recognised that people are not alike, and have different tastes' (Nevill, 1906). Esme Wingfield-Stratford told a delightful story of Mr and Mrs Gladstone in old age,

when they happened to be feeling especially happy, walzing round the room chorusing, 'A Ragamuffin husband and a rantipoling wife, we'll fiddle it and scrape it through the ups and downs of life!' (Wingfield-Stratford, 1930).

Zena Dare, star of London musical comedy, married in 1905 a Guards Officer, the Hon. Maurice Brett, who was the younger son of Lord Esher. She was the daughter of a sedate middle-class lawyer, but when they married her husband had to resign from the Guards (if a Guards officer married an actress he had to resign, however respectable she might be). Of love, Zena Dare said,

I have loved deeply in my life, but I know that I have never actually *fallen* in love—not, that is, into the state in which I have seen other women—hysterical, reckless, weeping all night. I may have missed something. I don't think so. I have known great love, but not that other thing—I stepped into love, I did not fall. Maybe it was the discipline of the theatre that prevented it—maybe the atmosphere in which I lived after marriage... I saw a great deal of my father-in-law, and I suppose I learned to love with the mind—to care for the person and not just for the mood. Isn't that sort of wildly giving way to being in love rather like indulging in a tantrum? But I have known real love all right (Leslie, 1973).

Can she have been aware of Lord Esher's platonic passion for young men and quasi-incestuous love affair with his son Maurice, nicknamed Molly, or Maurice's own earlier 'crushes' on young men? According to his elder son Oliver, Esher played a vicarious role in the marriage of Maurice and Zena, thus embarking on 'the second incest' (Lees-Milne, 1986). In spite of his proclivities, Lord Esher contracted a happy marriage that endured; his wife was content to live in her husband's shadow and accepted that it was her job to keep the marriage going. On the subject of husband-keeping she said, 'You must make the tea-kettle exciting.' She welcomed his boy friends and decided to age at the same rate as her husband—after he became bald she took to wearing a grey wig.

Despite all the cynicism about marital happiness, being a wife conferred benefits, as Emily, Lady Cowper made clear when, two years after the death of her husband in 1837, she wrote that her worldly position would be improved by re-marriage (*Huskisson Papers*):

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

it is a great trial for any woman after having enjoy'd every comfort and a happy Home for two and thirty years to find it all gone at the time of life when she naturally feels the most want of it, and when a Country Home in which she can receive her Children is the greatest pleasure one can have.

Emily had been for many years during her husband's lifetime the mistress of Lord Palmerston, and it was a matter of much speculation whether she would marry her lover. The Queen was all in favour of the match, writing to Prince Albert (*Queen Victoria's Letters*, 1st Series, 1, p.255) 'I think that they are quite right so to act, because Palmerston, since the death of his sisters, is quite alone in the world, and Lady C is a very clever woman, and much attached to him; still, I feel sure it will make you smile.' The latter part of the sentence suggests that the Queen was well aware of their past liaison. They did marry and lived happily together until Lord Palmerston's death a quarter of a century later.

CHOICE OF A HUSBAND

Most upper-class women married men of whom their families approved and who were considered 'suitable', for the very simple reason that they met few others, being shielded from contact with 'undesirables'. Most girls had the same criteria of suitability as their parents anyway, hoping through marriage to maintain the social status to which they were accustomed, to enjoy a life of comfort, and to remain on close terms with their friends and relatives in London and/or county Society. Many a happy marriage resulted from a sort of willing drift into a suitable alliance. For example, in November 1800 Lady Portarlington wrote to her sister Lady Louisa Stuart about her daughter Caroline:

She has had a very agreeable proposal which she is inclined to accept... I have known him from a child, have a great regard for all his family and connections... Caro has no objection to make but the very natural one of feeling not sufficiently acquainted with him.

The wedding took place in 1801, Henry Parnell the bridegroom being created Baron Congleton in 1841 (Stuart, 1895). Later in the

century, Mrs Villiers wrote in 1864 to her sister Lady Bloomfield, of her daughter Edith's engagement,

you need not be the least afraid...of our beloved Owen [Owen was the pen-name of Robert Lytton] not being properly appreciated for that is impossible with Edie—either she would have snubbed him in the early days...or she must succumb, as she has done absolutely and completely (Lutyens, 1956).

Parents could and did sometimes impose a veto on their children's choice of marriage partner, as when Lord Verulam prevented his eldest daughter Katty, future wife of the 4th Earl of Clarendon, from marrying one of the Coutts Trotters because his father 'came most unwillingly to the post and the alliance is moderate.' Presumably the Coutts Trotters did not come up with a generous enough settlement. But some young people extricated themselves voluntarily from love affairs of which their parents disapproved. For example, according to Madame de Lieven, one of Lady Conyngham's sons in the 1820s fell in love with Minny Cowper (later Countess of Shaftesbury); Minny liked the young man, but he was already engaged to an heiress with £40,000 a year, and she was 'afraid to encourage him, because it would upset the marriage and put her (Minny) out of favour at Court'. The young man, too, was 'anxious not to annoy his Mother' (who was George IV's mistress and socially very powerful). 'So, on both sides, there is a struggle between love and discretion,' wrote Madame de Lieven. Discretion won, and the relationship ended.

A marriage between partners of very different social rank disrupted social life, and unless the family was exceedingly rich it cared greatly what other people thought of their alliances. For example, when an aristocratic friend of Lord Monson's married a farmer's daughter in 1850, the Monson family was horrified; yet the rich and eccentric peer, Lord Vernon, was not apparently upset when his daughter married the Rector of Sudbury, near Derby. Having experienced a puritan and evangelical conversion, she chose this unambitious marriage and produced fourteen children, as well as running the household, prescribing and weighing out medicines for the village, looking after the sick and teaching in the local school. But class consciousness influenced most people's choice of marriage partner throughout the nineteenth century. In 1900 the Rev. Hon. Edward Lyttleton, who

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

became Headmaster of Eton, wrote a biting comment on the stupidity and cruelty typical of the moral code of the day:

A thoroughly conventional man in good society would sooner that his son should resort with prostitutes than that he should marry a respectable girl of a distinctly lower station than his own; indeed, it is not going too far to say that he probably would rather that his son should seduce such a girl, provided there were no scandal, than marry her (Lyttelton, 1900).

These and similar attitudes, he said, gave upper-class boys a view of womanhood that was ‘nothing but barbarous’. What the Rev. Lyttelton did not say was that most upper-class mothers were as opposed to their children marrying ‘beneath them’ as were the fathers. Sisterhood was not powerful between women of different classes, especially when it came to competition for husbands. Upper-class women rarely married downwards, and they saw no reason to encourage women from the lower classes to fish for husbands in the upper-class pool.

Most upper-class women wanted to marry someone of their own social level or just slightly above it—few aimed to marry above their station, though this sometimes happened. For example, the playwright Sheridan’s granddaughters, noted not only for their beauty but for swearing and telling bawdy jokes, and without personal fortunes, all married into the aristocracy in the early nineteenth century. One became Duchess of Somerset, one Lady Dufferin; the third was the unfortunate Caroline who married the Hon. George Norton, who treated her so badly. And in the 1880s the Earl of Fingall, whose family wanted him to marry money to keep up his castle, instead married the fortune-less daughter of an Irish magistrate. In her reminiscences she wrote of the proposal and her acceptance, ‘I thought how nice he was and what fun it would be to live at Killeen... And I probably thought that it would be fun to marry an Earl too... So I said, “I think I would like to, awfully!”’ She was 17, and it was as simple as that. According to her memoirs, the marriage was a happy one (Fingall, 1937).

Some romantic (or rash) young women eloped with, or insisted on marrying, men of whom their parents disapproved. These marriages were neither happier nor less happy than most others, as far as can be judged. For example, Jane Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra in

1807 of a runaway match: 'Miss Jackson is married to young Mr. Gunthorpe and is to be very unhappy. He swears, drinks, is cross, selfish and brutal: the match makes her family miserable and has occasioned *him* being disinherited' (Austen Letters, 1932).

Heiresses, however, generally married whom they wished: Frances, Lady Shelley told of agreeing in 1805 to marry Randal Wilbraham, a cousin of Lord Skelmersdale, but

when he tried to seal my resolve with a kiss, the truth flashed upon me, and the disgust this excited, made me fly to my room. Early the next morning I gave Mr. Wilbraham his congé, which he received with such fury and indignation as made me realise that I had had a providential escape from wretchedness for life (Shelley, 1912).

Later in the century, around 1875, Queen Victoria chose Lord Rosslyn's stepdaughter, Frances (known as Daisy) as a wife for her son Leopold. To everyone's amazement Daisy turned down the offer to enter the royal family and instead married Lord Brooke, heir to the Earl of Warwick, who was not at all well off by aristocratic standards. When marriage between Daisy and the royal Prince was being discussed, Disraeli's secretary wrote to him saying that, having inherited the entire lands and fortune of her grandfather Lord Maynard, Miss Daisy's fortune would be 'much over 30 thousand pounds a year', but that she would bestow it upon whom *she* chose—and turn out a *maîtresse femme*.

As far as marriage in general was concerned, however, the general impression is that down to 1914 it remained normal for the aristocracy to marry within their own circle, choosing children of landed families or allied groups, but that alliance with wealthy new families, English or foreign, was increasingly common. The need for injections of new wealth was clearly on the increase. For example, Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan said in her autobiography that she was coerced by her dominant American mother into marrying the Duke of Marlborough in 1896; soon afterwards, the Duke told her that

he had given up the girl he loved, to marry her, because to live at Blenheim in the pomp and circumstance he considered essential needed money, and a sense of duty to his family and to his traditions indicated the sacrifice of personal desires.

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

Consuelo felt chagrin but sympathy, for she had given up the man *she* loved to please her mother, who simulated a heart attack whenever she could not get her own way, and threatened to shoot Consuelo's lover if they eloped. But her marriage to the Duke was disastrous and ended in divorce eleven years later (Balsan, 1952).

The newly-ennobled families began to marry with each other as the century advanced. For example, Sir Henry Stafford Northcote, himself created Lord Northcote in 1900, married in 1873 Alice, adopted daughter of the future Lord Mount Stephen, the Canadian railway and banking magnate. And the eldest son of Viscount Peel, and grandson of the Prime Minister, married Ella Williamson, only child and heiress of Lord Ashton, the enormously wealthy Lancaster linoleum manufacturer.

CONTROL OF MARRIAGE ARRANGEMENTS

In English upper-class families the mothers were usually the marriage brokers. Since marriages were the instruments by which families were consolidated, strong bonds of friendship, patronage and career advancement were forged, and the family's reputation was made, marriage was for the upper classes the most important social institution in British society. The marriage settlement was *the* legal instrument by which the fate of the family for several generations was decided; fortunes and titles were readily intermingled as a result of bargains struck between the respective families. Mothers with marriageable daughters largely determined the field of selection, and contrived suitable meetings between the buyers and the sellers in the marriage market. Some lines from an Epilogue to *Whistle Me First*, the text of a play found among Lady Melbourne's papers and probably written by her son George Lamb, give an amusing picture of the marriage market in high society at the start of the nineteenth century, as someone closely involved saw it (quoted in Airlie, 1921):

And every candid female here allows
How hard a Misses life, who seeks a spouse.
At Operas, plays, and routs we never fail,
Put up, alas! to everlasting sale.
First in Hyde Park, sent by Maternal care,
At Noon we walk, and seem to take the air,
Or Bond Street's gay resort, for game we try

ONE LAW FOR THE RICH

And call at many a shop and seem to buy,
While, like a Dealer, the good Matron shews
Our shapes, and paces, to the chapmen Beaux,
Well skilled th' unfitting suitor to dispatch,
And to allure the Eligible Match.
At night again, on us all pleasures pall;
Bid for by inch of candle at a ball—
And e'en when fashion's toilsome revels cease,
For us no pause, no liberty, no peace—
Then when the Matrons speak of suppers small,
'A few choice friends besides ourselves—that's all,'
This language in plain truth they mean to hold
'A girl by private contract to be sold.'

These lines suggest that it was always the woman who was being hawked around for sale, but brides were not always passive, manipulated creatures. As shown earlier in this chapter, women made choices about whether and whom to marry; their reasons may not always have been noble or romantic, but they were probably more practical about the matter than are many brides in the late twentieth century. They were generally clear about their aims, and they weighed the pros and cons. Mothers looked at marriage both from the family's viewpoint and also that of the daughter. What one historian has called 'a strong matriarchal undercurrent beneath the surface of male ascendancy and manly virtues' was not unaware of the needs of a wife in a marriage, and most mothers made every effort to protect their daughters (Thompson, 1963). One way and another, upper-class Englishwomen were not defenceless as wives. They were protected by their own system of law.

THE SEPARATE LAW FOR THE RICH

Marriage settlements

From the early eighteenth century onwards, the English upper classes with property normally provided for their families by a strict settlement, in which the main questions were settled at the time of the marriage of the eldest son. Not only was his immediate income fixed, but his wife's jointure (the pension she would get if she became a widow) and also how much their children were to

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

receive—in what form and when—was decided. Surprisingly perhaps, the strict marriage settlement was the principal deed by which the estate was held and usually superseded all others. Its main purpose was to hold the estate together in the hands of a single holder in each generation, while at the same time providing an income or at least a lump sum for every member of the family, including the landlord's widow, daughters and younger sons. Essentially, it ensured that the family estate should in each generation descend to the eldest son; it did this by limiting the interest in the estate of the father of the new husband and, after him, of the husband himself, to that of a life-tenant, entailing the estate on the eldest son to be born of the marriage. A life-tenant was entitled only to the income of the settled estate for his life, and could not sell or mortgage it for a longer period. Often a smaller part of the estate was left outside the settlement to meet contingencies which might require a sale or loan.

Secondly, the marriage settlement required the estate to raise jointures if the father or the eldest son died before their wives (a kind of widow's pension), 'pin money' (an annual or monthly allowance) for their respective wives and portions (i.e. capital sums) for their daughters and younger sons when they married or came of age. The amounts of the jointures, pin money and portions were specified in the settlement and safeguarded by law, but the size of the jointure for a woman was usually dependent on the amount of money she brought into her husband's family, and often bore a precise relation, depending on the 'market' in brides and current rate of interest, to her dowry or inheritance.

Marriage settlements were of extreme complexity and required competent legal advice, the expense of which made it impossible for all but the rich to protect their daughters in marriage by this method. The strict settlement seems to have been normal among the landed aristocracy and gentry, but less frequent as one moved down the social scale. In the early nineteenth century it seems that a girl who was marrying somewhat above her station—a daughter of a banker or new landed family marrying into the older nobility, or a daughter of the lower aristocracy marrying into the ducal class—would be provided with a marriage portion in the order of £50,000 or £60,000. 'In an ambitious family resources would be mobilized behind the daughters, the instruments of family advance, while younger sons might be less generously portioned and left to make

their own way in the world,' F.M.L.Thompson has written (1963). The two examples following are culled from his book.

When banker Alexander Baring's daughter Harriet married Lord Henry Thynne, one of the Marquess of Bath's younger sons, in 1830, the disparity between the families was made plain by the fact that into the marriage pool Lord Henry put £10,000 to match Harriet's £50,000. This formed the entire sum for the portioning of their own children, and moreover Harriet's maximum jointure was fixed at £2,500 a year, that is 5 per cent on her own fortune (*Ashburton MSS, Marriage Settlement*, 17 April 1830). Similarly, on the marriage of Sir Matthew White Ridley's eldest son in 1803 to Laura Hawkins, that lady's fortune of some £20,000 formed the fund for portioning, and her jointure of £1,000 was 5 per cent of her own fortune (*Blagdon MSS, Marriage Settlement*, 12 August 1803). In marriages between equals in aristocratic circles portions of £10,000 to £30,000 were normal, and the bride would expect a jointure of 10 per cent at least on her fortune. But in fact the tariff laid down at the time of marriage, both in respect of jointure and of portions for younger children whose numbers could not be predicted, was a minimum which was quite often augmented by will as circumstances and affection permitted.

It was clearly a complicated matter to arrive at the going rates in the marriage market and negotiations of some delicacy might be called for, with the family solicitor in reserve to say what was normal in any given case. However, some aristocrats had strange notions of what constituted 'marrying without minding the money'; Lady Louisa Stuart commented in 1803, 'I always gave Lord Haddington credit for letting his son take his choice [in marriage] as he did himself, without minding money, tho' the Wortleys were so sure he would let him marry nothing but a great fortune' (Stuart, 1895). Nonetheless, according to Lady Louisa the bride as the only child of Lord Macclesfield had social status and £8,000, which was not inconsiderable. Similarly, when Lord Verulam's heir Lord Grimston married Elizabeth Wayland, daughter of a well-established Norfolk squire, it was for love and against his father's wishes; but the bride had a fortune of £10,000, which was not to be sniffed at.

Family discussions about marriage settlements and jointure, as well as the income which the bridegroom could expect continued to be of great importance throughout the nineteenth century. A very detailed statement of the financial position of a young aristocrat

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

without vast wealth himself who wanted to marry a young woman of good birth but no personal fortune, was given by Robert Lytton (later Baron Lytton) in 1864 to Lady Bloomfield, aunt of the woman he wished to marry (Edith Villiers). Two considerations were to be entertained, (1) present income, and (2) future settlements. Lytton felt that his current income was ample for a single man but insufficient for ‘a married couple in that class of Society to which both Miss V. and myself have been brought up’; he had an allowance of £400 a year from his father, and earned £500 a year as a foreign diplomat; he expected to earn a further £100 a year from *Chargé d’Affaireships*, and another £100 a year from his writings (though the latter was uncertain). He reckoned that £1,500 a year was ‘the absolute minimum on which any man of gentle birth, living in his own class of society, would be justified in inviting any gentlewoman to share life with him.’

‘But the first question which I presume that the family of any young lady in the position of your niece would ask of a man in my own position, is doubtless, “What settlements can you make on your wife and children?”’ Lytton went on to say, adding that there were serious difficulties there. He said he did not know how wealthy his father was, but that in any case the only portion of his father’s fortune that would, independently of his father’s will and bequest, *by law* descend to him, was the Rent Roll of Knebworth—about £6,000 a year. But the peculiarity of the Knebworth estate (which was entailed on Robert’s eldest son, should he have one, and failing which it would pass to his cousins) was that the entail was so tied up that it was absolutely out of his power to settle upon it one sixpence of jointure for his wife, or one sixpence to his younger children. Provision for these, therefore, would have to be made by some other means.

He said his father had always very distinctly and strongly enjoined upon him, that in consequence of this fact he ought to marry a woman whose own fortune, if settled on herself and younger children, would be considered sufficient for jointure; consequently, he would be reluctant to ask his father to help out in the matter, and indeed doubted whether he would do so. Whether Robert Lytton had actually seen the terms of the Knebworth settlement, or was quoting what his notoriously mean father had told him, we do not know. Edward Bulwer-Lytton had inherited Knebworth from his mother, who in turn inherited from her father, and *he* inherited it as the

husband of the niece of the previous owner (Stone and Stone, 1984, p. 132). However, what Robert proposed to do was to insure his own life, paying heavy premiums (an annual premium of £275 on a life insurance to secure his widow £600 a year) in order to make the necessary coverage. He hoped that his official salary would increase and his earnings from his writings would continue. He also pointed out that when his eldest son (if he had one) came of age, it would be within his power to alter the clauses of the entail, and so re-settle the estate.

It will be noted that Robert Lytton wrote to the aunt of the woman he wished to marry; presumably this was because her mother was a widow and Lady Bloomfield (her sister) was the senior member of the family, but it shows how intimately women could be involved in marriage negotiations.

When Robert Lytton told his troubles to his father, he was received unsympathetically; Lytton père said the marriage was socially acceptable but financially poor and politically distasteful to him. Bulwer-Lytton had been an advanced Liberal in his early parliamentary career, but when he re-entered Parliament in 1852 it was as a Tory. The Villiers were a Whig family, and Lytton looked upon Lord Clarendon in particular as his political enemy. However, he eventually changed his mind and said he would guarantee the premiums on Robert's life insurance policy. As explanation for not being more generous he explained that he had to pay £1,000 a year to Sir Henry Bulwer (a charge upon the Estate) and £500 a year to his estranged wife Lady Lytton (according to her, this was her own money).

Robert and Edith were married and seem to have been very happy; shortly after her marriage Edith unexpectedly inherited a lump sum which brought in sufficient income to raise their standard of living considerably, and she turned out to be a careful and economical housekeeper so they managed very well (Lutyens, 1956).

Pin-money

An important element in giving an upper-class woman some financial independence was a monthly or yearly allowance known as pin money, which she could spend as she wished; for a woman who did not have control of other funds it was important for her self-esteem that before marriage it was legally agreed that some money

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

should be made available to her. An account of how such an arrangement might be negotiated is given in the novel *The Semi-Detached House* (1859) written by Emily Eden, seventh daughter of Lord Auckland. She herself never married, but doubtless had heard a great deal about such arrangements from her family and friends:

Mr. Leigh, the uncle and guardian, was invited to come and talk settlements...[he] was so exacting in the article of pin-money, so regularly aggravating, that Colonel Hilton, who would willingly have permitted Aileen to spend half his fortune or the whole of it, if she liked, was provoked into saying that he did not see that she could want any pin-money at all, she could ask him for what money she required. But here Aunt Sarah's good sense stepped in: she thought it better that young married women should have a fixed income, whatever it might be called, pin-money or allowance. They knew then what they ought to spend, and all their little charities or any presents they wished to give, would be the fruits of their own self-denial, and she even hinted that the most devoted and liberal of husbands would, after a certain term of married life, object to milliners' bills, and become possessed with an insane idea that their wives were extravagant and always asking for money. And although Colonel Hilton said it was impossible he could ever be such a brute as that, yet he thought Aunt Sarah's advice sensible, and named for Aileen a much larger amount of pin-money than had been asked for by Mr. Leigh, 'just to show the fellow what he could do, if he were not bullied'.

Note the important part played by Aunt Sarah, an older woman who looked ahead to when the honeymoon days were over, and mediated on her niece's behalf. Soothing words achieved more than confrontation.

SEPARATE ESTATES FOR MARRIED WOMEN

Apart from the marriage settlement itself, which was generally a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, the rich had devised other means for making gifts of separate property to their married daughters. Long before the nineteenth century they had evolved a method whereby a married woman might own her own property quite independently of her husband. For this purpose they made use of the doctrine of trusts

which enabled a third person, in whom the property was vested at law, to hold it on trust for a married woman. This provision by trust had been upheld by Chancery, the Lord Chancellor's Court, which administered a system of law (separate from the Common Law), called Equity. This had been introduced in order to soften the rigour and inequalities resulting from the harsh use of Common Law; in legal words, 'the correction of that wherein the law, by reason of its universality, was deficient'. As time went on, Chancery devised the principle of the constructive trust, which did not even require a trustee. Under this, property could be set aside for the 'separate use' of a married woman, either by gift or will, even by a deed of gift of the husband. Where such property was given to a woman for her separate use and no trustee was appointed the Court of Equity held the husband responsible for it.

In practice the effect of making over an estate for the separate use of a married woman put her in much the same position as a *feme sole* (single woman) for that property (and no other): she could dispose of the property (though her right to dispose of her real property remained doubtful until 1865); she could charge it with her debts; she could devise or bequeath it. There were some differences, in that the rights attached only to property which was definitely separate property (over her other property her husband had his common-law rights), and her contract bound not herself personally but only her separate property (and this affected her contractual capacity). The Equity provisions laid the basis for a very different and independent lifestyle for wealthy women. Yet Equity would not interpose where a wife's property was under £200, or £10 a year, so critics rightly said there was one law for the rich and one for the poor.

Having made it possible for a married woman to own property independently of her husband, Equity next proceeded under pressure from families to give her a protection entirely unknown under Common Law, and one which put her in an extremely favourable position but also curtailed her freedom of action. In order to safeguard against a husband inducing his wife by threats or persuasion either to charge her properly with his debts, or sell it and hand over the proceeds to him, a device known as 'restraint upon anticipation' came into existence. Briefly, where property was given to a married woman for her separate use but subject to a restraint upon anticipation written into the deed of gift or will, she had no power to alienate it or to dispose of any part of her

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

income which was not actually in her possession or due to her. In other words, she could use the interest available from capital, but she could not mortgage the capital itself. Her power of disposal of her separate estate was in those circumstances limited, during her lifetime.

The doctrine of separate use was probably invented not so much to enable a woman to have control over her own property as to guarantee to her father that his money should be used for her and her children's benefit and not to defray the expenses of an extravagant son-in-law. As early as 1820, lawyers were concerned about bad husbands: when Frances Mary Gascoyne brought a Liverpool fortune to the house of Cecil that year, her lawyer Mr Leigh wrote concerning the marriage settlement under consideration,

Men in high ranks of life have of late shown such a turn for licentiousness that too much care cannot be taken to guard against it. I never knew a clause for misconduct in the husband. I think I have heard of such a thing. If such an unpleasant event should happen it is only right that the husband's life interest in the wife's estate should thenceforth cease, and she to have it for life (Oman, 1968).

The eventuality of a divorce never arose for Frances Gascoyne, but it is an interesting commentary on the way some lawyers were thinking at the time.

In addition to their rights under Equity, aristocratic women were entitled to any benefits of Common Law, such as the right not to be imprisoned for debt, even though the debts were contracted against the will of the husband or before the marriage. An amusing story is told of the sister of the Duchess of Cumberland (formerly Lady Anne Horton, daughter of the Earl of Carhampton) who, after squandering her fortune in the early nineteenth century, was put in prison for debt. However, she managed to raise enough money to give the prison barber £50 to marry her, and as he thus in law took on her debts she went free. There is no record of what happened to the man, but it is doubtful whether a court in the circumstances would have committed him to prison. Caroline Norton, too, used the law to her advantage; when separated from her husband in the 1830s he failed to

provide for her, and, as we have seen, she ran up bills for food and clothes and told the creditors to sue her husband.

Aristocratic women obviously benefited from the Common Law provision that a wife did not lose her rank on marriage. As was explained in a *Westminster Review* article in April 1889, pp 353–66 ('Married Women: An historical sketch'), although the legal theory was that man and wife were one person, it was principally applied to matters affecting property. A married woman could always 'succeed to dignities'; e.g. the office of High Sheriff of Westmorland was held by Ann, Countess of Pembroke, Dorset and Montgomery, while under coverture.

THE GENTRY AND ALLIED GROUPS

So far we have been mainly considering the elite aristocratic women or those who married into the magic circle of titled London-based Society which set the standards of conduct and manners, the fashions in dress, architecture, painting, music, poetry, theatre, for both town and country society. But there was also the untitled gentry, a group with ties to the nobility by marriage and similar lifestyle, but also with ties of family and farming interests to farmers and the middle class; when landed partners were not available, they formed marriage connections fairly freely with non-landed families who were roughly their equals. At such level marriages with daughters of the clergy abounded, followed by alliances with children of professional groups, of country bankers, merchants, career officers, or servants of the East India Company. Families of tradesmen who were akin to shopkeepers were not held to be eligible for marriage into the gentry, and neither were those of manufacturers generally acceptable until they had a chance to acquire at least second-generation respectability. Money invested in land did not always purchase automatic and instant acceptance, established county Society often scorning newcomers as vulgar aspirants. The intricacies and gradations of relationships between the aristocracy, gentry and allied groups early in the nineteenth century were carefully noted by Jane Austen in her novels. *Emma* was shocked to realise that Mr Elton 'failed to observe that *she* was his social superior both in connection and mind', though 'so well understanding the gradations of rank below him'; in the same

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

novel, it was remarked that Frank Churchill's indifference to a confusion of rank 'bordered too much on inelegance of mind'. *Mansfield Park* compared the old aristocratic view of marriage expressed by the Crawfords with the new notions of Evangelical piety expressed by Edmund Bertram and Fanny, with the future clearly belonging to the latter pair.

'The best of England was always provincial England, and the happiest people lived their uneventful lives in small country houses,' wrote one modern historian (White, 1963). It is doubtful if those banished from London Society would have agreed, but most of the gentry lived only on the fringe of London Society because they could not afford the lifestyle. Their diversions consisted mainly of balls in the assembly rooms of the county town, hunting, and visiting neighbours; the latter included not only morning calls and tea parties, but visits of anything from one evening to several weeks, often involving difficult cross-country journeys. There were also infrequent visits to inland spas such as Bath or Cheltenham, Matlock or Harrogate. The separation between men and women seems to have been more complete in the gentry than in the great world: after dinner the gentlemen talked over their port of the price of corn and the prospects of the crops, of local politics and incidents on the hunting field; women were segregated in the drawing-room to talk about children and servants. But what men regarded as idle talk among the women was in fact very important, for women helped their husbands on in their professions by 'oiling the social wheels', and 'spied out the land' for advantageous marriage partners for their children. Thus the forging of those all-important bonds of friendship and kinship was to a large extent in the hands of women.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have looked at the law which enabled a group of women (admittedly small in number) to control huge separate estates after marriage, but which enabled a much larger group of wives to own substantial property of their own, and an even greater number to have modest private incomes which their husbands could not touch. In total it was estimated in the middle of the nineteenth century that 10 per cent of wives had separate incomes. These women were not wholly dependent on one man, and this completely

ONE LAW FOR THE RICH

changed the terms of their personal relationships with their husbands.

As the century advanced, what was considered necessary to protect the personal property of upper-class wives came to be thought necessary for wives of all classes, and the legal system became a target for reformers. Progressively, public law took over from private law, as radical reform led to one system of law applicable to everyone. What needs to be stressed at this point is that private law pioneered the subsequent public law on property for married women. It was a pathbreaker or 'thin end of the wedge' in the campaign for reform. In pressing for financial protection for their daughters, aristocratic women opened the way which would lead to the economic emancipation of all married women.

Chapter 4

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

'I changed a Misses trammel'd life/For all the glorious licence of a wife;' said a character in the early nineteenth-century play, *Whistle Me First* (quoted in Airlie, 1921). And so it was—after marriage, wealthy women who had separate estates were the most liberated group of women in nineteenth-century England. These women could generally do as they pleased, and usually did. For this reason they were often hated and feared, envied or derided, and verbally censured (behind their backs): but no one ever doubted their power and influence. Long before the Married Women's Property Acts, their families had made financial provision for them by using the private system of law (Equity) which was explained in detail in the last chapter. Married women with personal wealth could lead much more independent lives than other women; they could travel at home or abroad, visit friends or relatives and thereby avoid the claustrophobia of marriages where the spouses depended on each other entirely; at times of conflict they could leave their husbands, since they could maintain themselves, and they could pay the costs of divorce (assuming there were sufficient grounds for action or it suited the husband to end the marriage). For example, Lady Holland stated in her *Journal* that she was able to buy herself out of a marriage in 1797 because her first husband (Sir Godfrey Webster) agreed to a divorce on condition that she handed over to him all her fortune of £7,000 a year less £800 a year for her own use (Holland, 1908). She was not reduced to penury because she married Lord Holland who was both fabulously wealthy and devoted to her. A wife could often 'call the tune' in a marriage if she held the purse-strings. Frances, Lady Shelley, said that in

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

1807 she married a gambler and spendthrift whom she nevertheless loved; he had long before that parted with his family estate to pay his debts, but in 1814 inherited from an uncle another estate (Maresfield). Lady Shelley spent £70,000 of her own fortune in improving the place. 'It was with great pleasure that I spent this enormous sum on Sir John's new property,' she wrote later, 'for it gave him a good position in the country, and consoled him for his early errors which he never ceased to deplore.' Clearly, Lady Shelley felt totally in control of her own money, and was in a position both to pay the piper and call the tune.

Wealthy women could exercise patronage on a wide scale: they controlled church livings, jobs on estates or in factories and mines. That a wife's involvement in an estate was considered real and not a fiction is shown by the following note from Lady Melbourne to Lord Byron in 1814, regarding his marriage to her niece Annabella Milbanke:

So at last yr Agent condescends to fix sometime when he will met my Brs people. I know that all those sort of personages who have had the Management of an Estate, and of course of the owner of it, are displeased, when they think it likely they may lose a portion of their power, by its being transferred to a wife—I mean power over their employer, and mostly dupe. They are enemies to matrimony.

Of the Earl and Countess Vane (later Lord and Lady London-derry), the *Dictionary of National Biography* says that:

He *and his wife* occupied themselves in improving and developing their property, especially the Seaham estate which they bought from the Milbanke family in 1822. By opening collieries and making a harbour, docks and a railway, they created a thriving seaport.

Wealthy women also controlled domestic jobs, employing governesses and nursery nurses, butlers, housekeepers, gardeners and grooms in their town and country establishments. Since they also usually controlled the supply of food and drink, household furniture, clothes for the family and servants, they could also dispense patronage to tradesmen and craftsmen, exerting tremendous influence over the fortunes of others. Woman as major consumer is not a new phenomenon.

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

Some aristocratic women were very good at business arrangements and handled them for the family. For example, Mrs Arbuthnot wrote in her *Journal*, Vol 1 in December 1825,

The poor Duchess of Rutland has died very suddenly...she will be a most dismal loss to her husband. She managed all his affairs for him, he did nothing himself, and his estates, his houses, his family, everything was under her rule. She had... an elevated taste and pursuits in planting and farming which were essentially beneficial to her husband's estates and to the poor and dependent around her...she scorned all the pretty arts and nonsenses of fashion...

Frances, Lady Shelley, wrote in her *Diary* in 1819 that,

Lord Warwick, without a single vice, is a complete nonentity, and is ruled by his wife (formerly Lady Monson) with a rod of iron. It is said that he is not even permitted to invite any personal friend to his own house... Her gains, which are immense, will be distributed among the poor younger branches of her lord's family. It is said that her will is made, by which she disposes in that manner of something like twenty thousand pounds which she has received from visitors to the Castle.

(The latter statement confirms the fact that the aristocracy in early nineteenth-century England were already charging people for looking round their houses, and that they were able to appropriate the usual 'vails' or tips to servants.) Mrs Charles Cholmondeley referred, in a letter to Richard Heber, to the fact that Bishop Reginald Heber had so trusted his wife's business acumen that when he died in 1826 he left her all his property, making her sole guardian of their children and executor of his affairs. However, in 1830 Mrs Heber remarried, to a foreigner, Count Valsamachi, and the family disapproved of that (Cholmondeley, 1950).

THE 'GRANDES DAMES' OF ENGLISH SOCIETY

The *grandes dames* or great ladies of English society in the nineteenth century were members of a small but closely welded community that made its own social laws. In 1803 Colquhoun estimated that there were 287 peers in Britain, 540 Baronets, 350 Knights, 6,000 Esquires and 20,000 Gentlemen. We do not know how many of them were married,

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

but probably the majority. Only a fraction of the group counted as London Society. According to the Oxford English Dictionary the use of the word 'Society' as meaning 'the aggregate of leisured, cultured or fashionable persons regarded as forming a distinct class or body; especially those persons collectively who are recognised as taking part in fashionable life, social functions, entertainments, etc.' was not common until the first quarter of the nineteenth century, when ranks were closed against wealthy newcomers and social change. A powerful group of patronesses, like Lady Castlereagh and Lady Jersey, took over the club Almacks (which had started as a set of subscription dances open to anyone who purchased tickets) and began to apply strict criteria for entry and behaviour. Eventually, tales were being circulated that even the Duke of Wellington was turned away for being five minutes late. True or false, the story illustrates a belief in the power of these women to decide what was acceptable behaviour. Masked balls, which had hidden social identity and allowed outsiders to mingle with the select, were falling into disfavour, and by about 1820 the houses of aristocratic hostesses who were lax about whom they excluded became 'fringe' meeting places attended only by men (Davidoff, 1973). Lady Jersey, the Prince of Wales's mistress, was described by Frances, Lady Shelley thus, after a visit in 1807 to Osterley Park, the Jerseys' home:

Lady Jersey then, as always, required all her associates to submit to her dictation, even in so small a matter as a novel; and the 'country girl' as she called me, was not allowed to differ in opinion from the powerful Queen of Society. I soon perceived that Lady Jersey tyrannised over her husband, who, adoring his commanding wife, almost trembled in her presence, and certainly never ventured to oppose her opinions, or wishes. In deference to my husband's request I patiently swallowed every affront, and bore her impertinent curiosity with humility, which was more feigned than real. She inquired into the amount of my fortune, and of our expenditure, giving her opinion as to what we should, or should not, do (Shelley, 1912).

The account may be exaggerated, but shows how powerful Lady Jersey was.

The *grandes dames* had a very influential role in facilitating entry to the royal circle; historically, the Court was considered to be the greatest house among all great houses, and access was

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

essentially the same as for any private house. It was necessary to have a private introduction through an individual sponsor, usually but not always a relative, who had already been accepted into the royal circle. The sponsor would send cards, her own and her nominee's, in advance. The introduction would then be accepted or rejected. If accepted, the newcomer could then be presented to the Sovereign, and this was most likely to happen when a change took place in the life of the person to be presented (such as marriage, acceptance of political office, or social or professional advancement). This kept the Sovereign informed of what was happening, of course, and allowed congratulations to be offered. The women were presented both before and after marriage, which was seen as a change of status both for men and for women. The young man was expected to be presented at Court by his *wife's* most important relative, to show his new connection at its best. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century the idea of young girls being presented at Court and 'coming-out' did not exist, but by mid-century it was becoming clear that being presented to the Queen was less a family-type visit and more a 'passport into Society'. Mary Bloomfield (daughter of Sir Arthur Bloomfield the architect) became notorious later in the century when she was presented at Court by shouting 'Votes for Women' and being escorted out of the royal presence. Invitations to State Balls at Buckingham Palace or other royal entertainments were much sought after, as also was the attendance of a member of the royal family at a dinner or other function (this could immediately 'make' the hostess's social reputation). The Ladies in Waiting to the Queen, or the Ladies of the Bedchamber, could give those unfamiliar with protocol a lead as to how to behave, and they could 'take up' new sets of people. It cannot be over-emphasised how much it meant to those involved to be on 'the inside track' of Society life. (Those who think such snobbery is long past should consider the current jockeying for invitations to functions attended by British royalty throughout the world.)

To what extent the aristocracy was shorn of much of its power and excessive privileges by the rise of democracy from 1832 is still debatable, but political power had little to do with social supremacy; and those who gained political power and economic fortune were generally avid to be accepted into aristocratic society. As Arthur Ponsonby M.P. wrote,

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

There can be no greater error than to dismiss the fact of (the aristocracy's) social dominance as negligible. In some ways social supremacy is a stronger force than the positive and ostensible powers of legislation and administration. The social standard that is set of morals, habits, and fashions forms in itself an ideal which a very vast number of people are constantly endeavouring to reach, and whatever may be the laws to which they have to conform, the influence of the social ideal is the main factor in governing their conduct and forming their ambitions...the leaders of society exercise an influence far in excess of that which the bare numerical strength of their class would justify (Ponsonby, 1912).

In the setting of those morals, habits and fashions aristocratic *women* were pre-eminent; and it never for one moment crossed their minds that it could be otherwise.

The gradual diminution in the authority of the upper class in nineteenth-century England was slower than might have been expected because of their public popularity, expressed in the saying, 'The English dearly love a lord.' Charlotte Brontë expressed this in the 1840s when she wrote, 'I like high life. I like its manners, its splendours, the beings which move in its enchanted sphere.' The wife of the American Ambassador to London wrote in the 1840s,

The subjects of conversation among women are more general than with us, and they are much more cultivated than our women as a body...they never sew, or attend as we do to domestic affairs, and so live for social life and understand it better (Bancroft-Davis, 1904).

For the rest of the century, rich Americans admired and emulated English upper-class life.

Lady Dorothy Nevill (a Walpole) wrote of the 1850s (Nevill, 1919):

The social power wielded by great ladies (such as Lady Jersey and Lady Londonderry), seems almost inconceivable today, their easy leisured arrogance was taken more or less as a matter of course, and they would have been very much astonished had it aroused any criticism; small wonder, when they were brought up to think they were the very salt of the earth.

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

Lady Dorothy recalled how Lady Londonderry in middle age in the 1850s used to hold a sort of Court at Holderness House (later Londonderry House). Seated on a gilded chair with a gold brocade baldachin (canopy) over her head, she received her guests and then generally ignored them. 'In her own house her manner was polite and well-bred but stately and frigid such as invariably inspired awe in those who were introduced to or had occasion to pass her,' wrote Sir Archibald Alison. Born Frances Anne Vane-Tempest, this Lady Londonderry was a great heiress. She married Lord Castlereagh's half-brother in 1819, as his second wife (he took her surname and was created Earl Vane), becoming a great political hostess when her husband succeeded to the Londonderry title, and ruling London Society until her death in 1865. After bearing her husband a son and a daughter, she conducted a dramatic love affair with Tsar Alexander I, whose superb gifts of jewellery were added to the Londonderry collection without anyone batting an eyelid (at the time her husband was British Ambassador in St Petersburg); later the Shah of Persia wanted to buy her. She was not insensible to merit, and when Disraeli met her at a ball in 1835 (when he was 30 and she 35), he realised the value of her patronage and asked permission to write to her. Their correspondence lasted for twenty-six years until 1861, full of malicious gossip but without bedroom talk, and Lady Londonderry did all she could to push him on in politics, an enterprise in which she was joined by Lady Jersey. After her death Disraeli called her, 'the *grande dame* who was kind to me when I was a youth, though she was a tyrant in her way'. Earlier he had written of her, 'she is half ruffian—half great lady'. Her daughter was another *grande dame*—she became Duchess of Marlborough and mother-in-law of Jennie Churchill, who wrote of her, 'She ruled Blenheim and nearly all those in it with a firm hand... At the rustle of her silk dress, the household trembled' (Lady Randolph Churchill, 1908).

Another *grande dame* who was ruling Society in the 1850s was Lady Chesterfield, who had the distinction of refusing her hand in marriage to two men who subsequently became Prime Minister (the 14th Earl of Derby and Disraeli). Lady Dorothy Nevill described her as 'a high-born lady of the old school—so aristocratic and always so kind... She knew a great deal about Art, pictures etc.—as well she might, as Bretby was a treasure-house of all that was beautiful.' Lady Chesterfield's daughter,

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

Lady Carnarvon, later continued the cultured *grande dame* tradition by giving frequent house-parties at Highclere for people of conspicuous talent, parties permeated, as one visitor said, 'by an intellectual and social charm which was largely due to the personality of the hostess'. Frequent visitors were Sir Stafford and Lady Northcote, Dean Stanley, Lord Derby, Sir Alexander Cockburn and Disraeli.

London Society in the 1850s, declared Lady Dorothy Nevill, was akin to a large family party where people went to meet one another and talk. But the old aristocracy 'really did rule England' then, she believed, and stood apart from the newly ennobled families who were classed 'a little above the Tom, Dick, and Harry rabble, for which the real aristocrats entertained a great, if good-natured, contempt'. She admitted that some of them had been absurdly overbearing, even imbued with 'an unconscious hauteur which amounted almost to a religion', but she did not like 'the encroachments of democracy' and the dilution of the aristocracy by 'a mob composed of persons whose only claim to social consideration consisted in money-bags'. Most people would doubt her belief that 'in the old days Society was an assemblage of people who...had no ulterior object beyond intelligent, cultured and dignified enjoyment, money-making being left to another class which, from time to time, supplied a selected recruit to this corps d'elite', since the English aristocracy was always enormously interested in making money by any means available. But certainly the nineteenth century saw the advent into Society of large numbers of *nouveaux riches* by whom the aristocracy felt threatened. Yet the calm assurance of the aristocracy was unruffled: speaking of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Lady Ottoline Morrell, sister of the 6th Duke of Portland and mistress of Bertrand Russell, a critic of her class, said the unquestioning, unimaginative arrogance of aristocratic life had a power of impressing itself on her as 'The Thing'; it was the supreme life, besides which all other existences were simply insignificant and unimportant. Assurance and freedom were accompanied by great luxury.

Margot Asquith, wife of the Prime Minister and heiress to a great industrial fortune, continued the *grande dame* tradition into the early twentieth century. Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan said of her,

It was difficult not to feel oppressed by her assumption of superiority, which on occasion even prevented the progression of

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

friendships she wished to cultivate. For in recounting her conversations with celebrities, she invariably capped their most brilliant sallies—a forensic (sic) victory few can forgive.... Impatient and intolerant of stupidity, Margot often reduced people to an embarrassed silence, failing to appreciate the genuine qualities they might have possessed.

But in her *Autobiography* Margot left for posterity wonderfully indiscreet information about the great and famous (though it is less than candid about herself and her husband). Of Dr Jowett, Master of Balliol College, Oxford, she wrote, ‘He was extremely simple-minded and had a pathetic belief in the fine manners, high tone, wide opportunities, and lofty example of the British aristocracy. It shocked him that I did not share it’ (Asquith, 1944). She wrote of a world of extreme artificiality that has now disappeared and seems very remote. But Society was still the important apex of wider society down to the First World War, and in the period 1880 to 1914 Margot and her fellow ‘Souls’ (as her set was called) gave Society a slight shift of emphasis, making intellectual and artistic considerations count, for despite all their affairs and constant letter-writing, most members of late Victorian and Edwardian Society seem to have been bored. For example, the Marchioness of Ripon (Gladys de Grey) was the first aristocratic patroness of Covent Garden Opera; once a year she invited all its stars to a party as her personal guests, along with other titled friends; and she gave musical parties at her house, inviting performers such as Melba and Caruso. She also helped make the visit of Diaghileff’s Russian Ballet to London a success.

ARISTOCRATIC WOMEN IN POLITICS

Political power reflected the ownership of property and, although women did not sit in Parliament, they expected to exert direct influence over their friends who did, and gain patronage for their protégés. What one historian has said of eighteenth-century society continued down to the Victorian Age:

If government patronage controlled the more lucrative, private patronage controlled the more numerous appointments: most church-livings, salaried county, borough and parish offices, merchants’ and lawyers’ clerks, chaplains, secretaries, tutors and

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

governesses, and the whole pyramid of domestic service... At all levels, patronage, the system of personal selection from amongst one's kinsmen and connections, was the instrument by which property influenced recruitment to those positions in society which were not determined by property alone (Perkin, 1969, pp. 44–5).

Obliging a friend was not something to be ashamed of; it was a matter of pride and principle. And women played well and with confidence the game of asking their friends to oblige them, and of distributing patronage in return.

The royal mistresses were perhaps the prime example of this, in the early nineteenth century manipulating the patronage and favour of the King and the royal Dukes. According to Mrs Arbuthnot's *Journal*, and this is confirmed by Creevey, Mrs Fitzherbert's influence kept the Prince of Wales away from Devonshire House and his Whig friends from 1805 onwards. Apparently Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, had refused to give Mrs Fitzherbert the deference she expected (as secret wife to the Prince) and which the Prince wished for her. Mrs Arbuthnot also reported of a later mistress to the Prince (then George IV), Lady Conyngham, that she was jealous of the Duke of Wellington's influence with the King and resented the Duke getting Court appointments for his relations: so the King had asked the Duke to speak to her about various matters, and make his peace with her.

Caroline Norton got her husband a job as a London stipendiary magistrate, as a result of her friendship with Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister. Following the death of her father, William Godwin, in 1836, Mary Shelley wrote to Caroline asking her to use her influence with Melbourne to have Godwin's pension continued to her stepmother. Melbourne said he could not legally award Mrs Godwin any part of her late husband's income, but that he would find some other assistance for her (he made the Royal Bounty available to Mrs Godwin for some years). Mary Shelley and Caroline Norton grew to be intimate friends and confidantes.

The active involvement of influential women in the lives and careers of their husbands and children is documented in countless memoirs and diaries. One of the most interesting examples was the mother of Winston Churchill, of whom he wrote:

My mother was always on hand to help and advise... She soon

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

became my ardent ally, furthering my plans and guarding my interests with all her influence and boundless energy... We worked together on even terms, more like brother and sister than mother and son.

Constantly Winston reminded his mother, 'You must get people to do things for me', and she never stopped doing that (Churchill, 1930).

The greatest families, whose wealth distinguished them from the inferior ranks of landed society, kept large town houses and used them as centres of national politics. Many of the wives had a passion for politics; for example, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century Lady Holland was as important as her husband in attracting men of culture to their salon at Holland House; many are the tributes to her beauty, personality, and brilliant conversational powers. However diverse the sentiments of her guests, they said they felt they were meeting on neutral ground. As she grew older she grew more tyrannical as a hostess, to the point where Macaulay said, 'The centurion did not keep his soldiers in better order than she did her guests.'

Mrs Arbuthnot (1794–1834) was the granddaughter of the 8th Earl of Westmorland and second wife of Charles Arbuthnot, M.P. Politics was her major interest in life, and she indulged this both through her husband and through her close friendship with the Duke of Wellington. She clearly loved being 'in on' secret political discussion, and it seems the Duke made her a real confidante, judging by the elaborate details she reported in her *Journal* of their conversations and letters (including a full account by the Duke, with maps and illustrations, of the Battle of Waterloo). Frances, Lady Shelley, had a similar close friendship with the Duke, also receiving long accounts of political manoeuvrings and discussions, and seriously being asked for advice. When the 2nd Marquess of Londonderry (better known as Lord Castlereagh) committed suicide in 1822, Mrs Arbuthnot reported that he had been:

the kindest and most affectionate of husbands, paid her [his wife] the greatest possible attention and had unbounded confidence in her... He had a natural slowness of constitution of which he himself was aware, and used his wife as confidante and also to help him explain things clearly.

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

Cambridge House, the home of Lord and Lady Palmerston from 1850 until his death in 1865, including his Premiership, was called ‘the mansion, hallowed by a mighty shade, Where the cards were cut and shuffled when the game of state was played.’ The functions were said to owe much to the grace and suavity displayed by Lady Palmerston, who knew well the value of asking to their Saturday soirées the wives of MPs likely to give her husband trouble in the House. After years of enmity, Lady Palmerston and Caroline Norton became friends, and when Lord Palmerston died, Caroline wrote to her,

It was my dream when I thought to marry and live among the men who influenced their time, to be what I think you were, in this, the only reasonable ambition of women...to have so far added to the happiness and security of a career of public usefulness and public elevation... (Airlie, 1922).

Caroline Norton envisaged women’s power and influence to operate through men, but nonetheless saw it as real and effective.

That aristocratic men in England were tolerant of women’s interest in politics was affirmed by Flora Tristan. She was no fan either of England or the upper classes; a feminist, a socialist and visionary, she published a blueprint for a world-wide Workers’ International which anticipated the *Communist Manifesto* by five years. But after dressing up as a man and visiting first the House of Commons and then the House of Lords (and being recognised as a woman in both places), she said of the Lords:

The manner of these gentlemen was far superior to those of the representatives of trade and finance. They kept a respectful distance when they looked at me, and their smiles were friendly. I could see that I was in the presence of true gentlemen, indulgent towards ladies’ caprices and even making it a point of honour to respect them (Tristan, 1840).

Harriet, Duchess of Sutherland (1806–68) was interested in many philanthropic causes, and it was at Stafford House, her London residence, that a group of English women met to frame a protest against American slavery in 1853.

Louisa, Duchess of Manchester, was more politically ambitious for her lover, Lord Hartington, than he was for himself, though she was an

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

ardent Tory and he a Liberal; she prodded and drove him, and warned him of Gladstone's ambitions. Margot Asquith said of Louisa that she was 'a woman whose social ascendancy eclipsed that of anyone I have ever seen or heard of in London Society' and called her:

the last great political lady in London society as I have known it. The secret of her power lay not only in her position—many people are rich and grand, gay and clever, and live in big houses—but in her elasticity, her careful criticisms, her sense of justice, and her discretion. She not only kept her own but other people's secrets, and she added to considerable effrontery, intrepid courage and real kindness.

Jennie Churchill helped her husband Lord Randolph write his political speeches, and he is said to have relied on her intuitive judgment of people. When as Secretary of State for India he had no time or energy to work for his re-election to Parliament, Jennie supervised the campaign and personally canvassed the thousand voters. She wrote,

Revelling in the hustle and bustle of the Committee rooms, marshalling our forces, and hearing the hourly reports of how the campaign was progressing, I felt like a general holding a council-of-war with his staff in the heat of battle.

Randolph won the election, and Jennie was congratulated on her work by a number of senior politicians (cf. Wolff, 1908).

Disraeli wrote in old age, 'I owe everything to women; and if in the sunset of life I have still a young heart, it is due to that influence.' For twenty-seven years he corresponded with Frances, Lady Londonderry; in his later years he kept up a voluminous correspondence with two sisters, Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield, and called his especial women friends 'The Order of the Bee'. His last novel, *Endymion*, published in the year of his death, has as its main theme the beneficent role of women in politics. Some of the electorate agreed: Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan told this anecdote of her neighbour in Oxfordshire (when she was Duchess of Marlborough about 1900):

Lady Jersey was a witty and cultured lady and a fine public speaker; the Earl of Jersey had been Governor-General of Australia and on

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

one occasion was greatly put out by a rude heckler who shouted, 'We've had enough of you, bring out the old girl!'

The beautiful Countess of Warwick known as Daisy Brooke, who inherited the fortune and lands of her grandfather Lord Maynard, and dominated the Prince of Wales for nine years as well as wreaking havoc in the lives of several other lovers, became unusually sympathetic (for her class) to the vast world of suffering poor around her, and in 1895 got herself elected a trustee of a workhouse. She interested the Prince of Wales for a time in the lives of the poor he would one day govern, but he was shocked when she declared herself a feminist and a socialist, terms he abhorred. The Countess financed out of her own purse a number of philanthropic schemes to help the poor and unemployed (cripples' schools, women's hostels, agricultural training centres), to the point where in 1898 her annual income of over £30,000 slid down to £6,000. She joined the Social Democratic Federation, and Hyndman wrote in 1905,

We are having fine meetings with the Countess as speaker or in the chair. There is, of course, a lot of snobbery in this, but what matter? People come to see and hear her who would never come to see or hear you or me.

She played an important part in the propaganda campaign for free school meals, accompanying Sir John Gorst and a famous children's doctor on a surprise visit to a Lambeth school and then writing a vigorous and influential article on the subject in the *Fortnightly Review* (Leslie, 1973).

SEXUAL MORALS

The English upper classes were sexually permissive throughout the nineteenth century, not (as is often suggested) only in the Regency period; and women generally expected the same sexual freedom as men after they were married. What changed during the century was that they became much more discreet about it. The Regency aristocracy did as they liked: as Dorothy Marshall wrote,

Indifference to the pain of others and sexual laxity were accompanied by a verbal coarseness and frank acceptance of

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

bodily functions which the middle class of the time, and later generations, found deeply shocking (Marshall, 1973).

Miss Pamela Fitzgerald wrote to a friend in 1816 that, ‘the vices are wonderfully prolific among the Whigs’ (most of the great families of the day being Whig), and that the aristocracy ‘are a free-spoken promiscuous lot whose daughters are comfortable girls who like a dirty joke’ (White, 1963).

However, in the early nineteenth century the moral climate was changing; Evangelical Christianity with its emphasis on sincerity, earnestness and personal responsibility became the dominant religion. The moral lead passed from the aristocracy to the powerful middle classes who made the ideology of Evangelicalism their own. Some aristocrats adopted its values but most of them continued to live their private lives with little regard for middle-class mores. According to the Duchess of Sermonetta, ‘Mr Locke (sic) raised £8,000 to settle on his daughter [Bessie] and the marriage [to Lord Wallscourt] took place in September 1822.’ Mr Lock acquired a bizarre son-in-law:

Lord Wallscourt...liked walking about the house with no clothes on, and at his wife’s suggestion carried a cow bell in his hand when in this state of nudity, so that the maidservants had warning of his approach and could scamper away (Sermonetta, 1940, p.319).

Aristocratic wives were as likely as their husbands to have extra-marital affairs; indeed, ‘emotional space’, as we might term it, was a feature of the marital relationship. The unspoken understanding was as follows: the wife was expected to be a virgin when she married, and she took it as part of the marriage bargain that she would produce an heir or two for her husband before she ‘played around’. Good breeding demanded that the outward conventions of marriage should not be violated, but few questions were asked about what went on below the surface, and scandals were glossed over by the acquiescence of husband and wife, if that was at all possible. Anything openly shocking was regarded with horror—not on account of the immorality but of the publicity. The open scandal of Caroline Lamb’s intrigue with Lord Byron was totally incomprehensible to her mother-in-law Lady Melbourne, who had herself been a libertine but a discreet one. The children of sexually

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

permissive parents usually knew nothing of their parents' extra-marital affairs and sheltered daughters often went straight from schoolroom to marriage in one Season. Lady Cowper (later Lady Palmerston), not known for her own strict morality, wrote to her brother in February 1821, recommending as a wife for him a Miss Jones, niece of Lady Tierney: 'She is very young and probably may be formed to anything, has a good temper and has been very regularly, strictly and religiously brought up...' Furthermore, Lady Cowper said, she had a fortune and 'no train of vulgar relations'.

These young women learned the ways of the world fairly quickly, however, for evidence that throughout the nineteenth century aristocratic women had extra-marital affairs is not hard to find. According to Frances, Lady Shelley, her husband Sir John Shelley was for twelve years before marriage in 1807 the devoted admirer and lover of Lady Haggerstone, much older than he and a sister of Mrs Fitzherbert. She said Lady Haggerstone was married to 'a foolish, rich old man who cared nothing about her proceedings'; she did not wish to lose her lover when he married, looking upon Frances as a mere country girl who could be managed under her skilful guidance. But Frances had her own fortune and other ideas about her future, so the liaison was eventually broken off. Apparently Lady Boringdon was also in love with Sir John Shelley; she was sister to Lady Jersey, and according to Frances was 'married to a man she despised' (later she ran off with Lord Arthur Paget). In September 1829 prim Mrs Arbuthnot wrote in her *Journal*,

I must say I think it will be rather a good thing if the ladies will pull up a little and set their faces against the sort of barefaced liaisons that are becoming the fashion. It is bad enough Lady Strachan living with Lord Hertford, though he's such a miserable cripple that any real impropriety is out of the question, but Mrs Fox and Lord Chesterfield is too bad. It is all the King's fault, he has let down the royal dignity, has received at his Court the Duchess of St. Albans and Mrs Manners Sutton, both *des femmes entretenues*, and now one is almost laughed at if one objects to receiving any woman, however atrocious her conduct.

As an example of how little Evangelical principles affected upper-class circles in the 1830s, consider the early loves and friendships of Disraeli with women almost invariably older than himself, and all

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

married: e.g. Sara Austen, Clara Bolton, Mrs Brydges Williams and Henrietta Sykes. The affair with Lady Sykes was well known in Society at the time (1833–6) but was afterwards concealed (Blake, 1969). Through Henrietta, Disraeli met influential figures in the Conservative Party, as the old Tory Party was beginning to be known. Indeed, there was a scandalous rumour that Disraeli encouraged Henrietta to become Lord Lyndhurst's mistress, in return for political patronage for himself; true or false, the rumour clouded his reputation long into middle life. Henrietta eventually left Disraeli and went to live with the artist Daniel Maclise.

Royal mistresses were often upper-class married women. The Prince of Wales in the late eighteenth century worked his way through Lady Augusta Campbell, Harriet Vernon, Lady Melbourne, the Duchess of Devonshire and the actress Mrs Robinson, before he reached the age of 21. Later he went on to Mrs Armistead, Mrs Billington, Mrs Crouch, then Mrs Fitzherbert whom he married (illegally). Lady Jersey succeeded Mrs Fitzherbert, then came the Prince's legal marriage (after which Lady Jersey still acted as his mistress, until he returned to Mrs Fitzherbert for a time). Lady Hertford succeeded Mrs Fitzherbert, and she in turn was supplanted by Lady Conyngham, who was known as the Vice-Queen when the Prince became George IV, and who survived as mistress until the King's death. All these women sailed around in glory as long as they were favourites; they had great power and were very proud of their situation; they collected money and jewellery, found jobs for their friends and relations, and married off their children and relatives advantageously. They were acting no differently from any other upper-class person with patronage. And this tradition was revived later in the century by the mistresses of Queen Victoria's son, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales.

Queen Victoria herself denied that the English upper classes became more virtuous during her reign. In December 1867 she wrote to her daughter,

The higher classes—especially the aristocracy (with of course exceptions and honourable ones) are so frivolous, pleasure-seeking, heartless, selfish, immoral and gambling that it makes one think...of the days before the French Revolution. The young men are so ignorant, luxurious and self-indulgent—and the young women so fast, frivolous and imprudent that the danger really is very great... Bertie [her son, the Prince of Wales] ought

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

to set a good example on these respects by not countenancing ever any one of these horrid people (Fulford, 1971).

Needless to say, Bertie did *not* do as his mother wished.

The code of conduct developed by the Prince of Wales and his friends in the period 1870 to 1910 governed extra-marital relationships in Society. Anita Leslie said she had the code described to her by her grandmother Lady Leslie (a sister of Jennie Churchill) (Leslie, 1973). When, after a few years of marriage, the Prince began to have affairs with noble ladies as well as with actresses, guidelines were laid down for others to follow. The main aim was to maintain the dignity of family life, and not to embroil one's spouse in scandals; unmarried girls were not considered fair game, since their marriage chances were not to be impaired; nor were young married women until they had produced a child or two by their husbands to carry on the family name and inherit the estate. However, when the nursery was well-stocked, a husband was likely to turn a blind eye to his wife's amours, so that he could look at other men's wives. Jealousy, desperate passion, public ruin of reputations, did occur (the Prince himself was involved in several court cases, though not as co-respondent), but these cases were rare. Many upper-class men were interested in women of their own class with whom they could have friendship and conversation as well as sex; and the number of married women they found willing to cooperate suggests that women, too, had frustrated sexual and romantic desires.

A stunning example of how a mid-Victorian aristocratic woman could 'get away with it' was Louisa, Duchess of Manchester, who in 1852 married Viscount Mandeville, as he then was. Queen Victoria said disapprovingly of the German-born Louisa that she had 'done more harm to Society from her tone, her love of admiration and her fast style, than almost anyone'. But Louisa continued to do as she liked, entertaining in great style at Kimbolton Castle in Huntingdonshire in the winter (where her lover, the famous Liberal Lord Hartington, who remained unmarried, enjoyed fox-hunting) and in the summer at Manchester House in London. What the 7th Duke of Manchester did is obscure. He rode to hounds, gambled, dabbled in politics, fathered Louisa's five children and lived in Hartington's shadow. He must have thought it enough to be a duke and to have the most

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

beautiful wife in England; and perhaps he was grateful to have another man divert some of her abundant energy. Louisa was powerful enough to risk the displeasure of the Prince of Wales; when the latter was angry with Lord Randolph Churchill and announced that he would enter no house which received Churchill, Louisa said, 'I hold friendship higher than snobbery' and would not be ruled by the Prince.

She was probably the most feared and most successful woman of her time. Many men referred to her in private letters as 'stupid', but that meant only that she did not agree with their views. Sir Charles Dilke regarded her political manoeuvrings with contempt, but W.E. Forster (author of the 1870 Education Act) was her friend. She was certainly clever enough to keep Lord Hartington single and in tow for over 30 years, in a (fairly) secret love affair, before she was widowed and able to marry him, thus becoming 'the double Duchess' because he had in the meantime become Duke of Devonshire.

For the period 1870 to 1910, love affairs between aristocratic men and women are well documented, as in the case of the Bloomsbury set which has been described *ad nauseam* and the 'Souls' who are less well known. The latter considered themselves an intellectual elite, interested only in discussing 'the worthwhile'. But they had bodies as well as souls. One member of the group was Lady Elcho, whose love affair with Arthur Balfour (Prime Minister under Edward VII) ran from 1883 to 1922; he also loved Lady Desborough equally well (though it was said he liked being loved more than he liked loving). Laura Tennant said cattily of Mary Elcho that 'her affection for Hugo (her husband) is strangely mixed up with her affection for the man she knows can, will and does help Hugo more than anyone else does.' Lord Elcho had love affairs, too—Hermione, Duchess of Leinster was in love with him, and after she died he found a suitable soul-mate in a married woman 14 years his junior (Lady Angela Forbes, half-sister of Daisy Warwick) said to be a tough, vibrant personality whose language would make a trooper blush. Years later Edith Sitwell described Lady Angela as 'an elderly gorilla affected with sex-appeal', but her husband had to share her both with Lord Elcho and Lord Ribblesdale. Lord Desborough, scholar and athlete, seems to have welcomed Balfour for his conversation and ignored the affair with his wife. Lady Cynthia Asquith related a pertinent conversation with Lady Desborough:

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

We discussed 'lovers' and their compatibility with happy marriages. She said she was not monogamous in the strict sense of the word, and had never been in love in the way which *excluded* other personal relations. To be at her best with one man she must see a great many others (Asquith, 1968).

Cynthia Asquith was the daughter of Hugo and Mary Elcho, and she frankly described the foursome of her mother with Balfour, and her father with Lady Angela Forbes. Cynthia said she herself depended on masculine admiration, though she remained devoted to her husband. She had two lovers to whom she wrote daily when they were in the trenches in the First World War—Lord Basil Blackwood and Lord Alex Thynne. Both were killed in the War. Her husband, Herbert Asquith, often ill but always struggling back to the front, survived. Clearly, most aristocratic women who committed adultery did not 'pay a price' in terms of loss of social prestige or the break-up of their marriages.

Referring to sexually permissive ladies, the anonymous author of *Society in London, by a Foreign Resident*, 1885, wrote,

Look at the exquisites whom one will encounter in London theatres and clubs, known till recently as 'mashers'. They are ripe for any folly or dissipation, but their physiognomy is severity itself.... They might, when they are not exchanging innuendoes with each other, be mutes at a funeral.

If husbands and wives got 'a little mixed up', continued the author,

duels do not ensue because the dominating idea is not the cultivation of virtue, but the prevention of scandal... The real significance of this interesting phenomenon is the extreme sensitiveness of the ladies and gentlemen prominent in London society to the public opinion of their inferiors...and society regards as, in some sort, an enemy and a traitor to itself, the man or woman who puts it openly to the blush.

The author thought aristocratic women must be 'absolutely sure of their positions, and must have the art, which only natural powers can develop, of never violating appearances or offending decorum,' and went on, 'It is the rarest thing in the world for any one of these to make openly a *faux pas*.'

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

Of course, many aristocrats were educated to high standards of morality, conscientiousness and a serious life. The Countess of Meath (both she and her husband were staunchly moral and upright) deplored in the *Morning Post* in 1906 the self-indulgent luxurious life of the Edwardian upper class, saying it was 'not the fashion nowadays to teach the young lessons of self-denial—on the contrary one point insisted upon is that they should have a very good time,' and her view is confirmed by a letter Lord Selborne wrote to his wife in August 1910 about his stay for a time with members of the 'smart set' at Crag Hall, Macclesfield. Except for one couple, it was 'exclusively a party of wives without husbands and husband without wives, most characteristic of the set' (*Selborne Papers*, 101/192, 199).

The Countess of Fingall wrote that she once remarked to Sir Francis Jeune (the famous Divorce Judge) in the 1880s that he must see a lot of the seamy side of life. 'Oh yes, my dear Lady,' he said, 'But not half as much as they see in the Probate Court! People don't break their hearts nearly so much for love as they do for money!' (Fingall, 1937).

ARISTOCRATIC ATTITUDES TO CHILDREN

There is evidence in aristocratic memoirs and diaries of both harsh parents and loving parents. The anguish of mothers became explicit if and when they were forcibly separated from their young children, with little chance of seeing them, as in the case of Caroline Norton, or when children died. It is clear that to most aristocrats children were not simply an investment in the future; their upbringing was a major source of pleasure and worry, though the parents did not expect to spend the whole of their time on child-care.

Childbearing experiences of aristocratic women varied tremendously: a modern study of forty-eight aristocratic women showed that five of them died in their twenties, but fourteen lived to be 80 or more *and* had an average of nine children (higher than the general average for all marriages of completed fertility), so Queen Victoria was not so unusual as is sometimes supposed. The longest-living woman in the study, Elizabeth, Marchioness of Westminster, died in 1891 at the age of 94, having borne thirteen children (Lewis, 1983). On the other hand, a large minority of the aristocracy had no children. One demographer has estimated that 18.6 per cent of aristocratic

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

marriages were childless, compared with 10 per cent to 15 per cent of all marriages (Hollingsworth, 1964).

Lewis surmised that half of her sample who had a second child soon after the first did not breast-feed (though they probably employed wet-nurses, since they were aware of the dangers of artificial feeding). This is probably true, yet cartoons from the early nineteenth century suggest that it was becoming fashionable for upper-class women to breast-feed, and Fanny Kemble the actress wrote to her friend Saadi in 1838, 'Nursing a child, I mean suckling it, is an unspeakable delight...' (Kemble, 1878).

Women of the upper classes enjoyed better health generally than their less privileged contemporaries, due to superior nutrition and hygiene, and they had a life expectancy six years longer than women in the general population, though they suffered similarly from birth-induced complaints. Queen Victoria ignored her own good health record in childbearing when she expressed regret in February 1870 that her daughter was pregnant again: 'I believe the poor Duchess of Argyll's illness is entirely the result of over exhaustion from having twelve children. Lady Lyttelton the same (twelve children), also Lady Hardinge (eight children in eight years) and Lady Louisa Brooke (seven children).' The latter three women died comparatively young. In another letter to her daughter in March 1870, the Queen gave a glimpse of maternity fashions of the day.

And now one of the new fashions of our very elegant society is to go in perfectly light-coloured dresses—quite tight—without a particle of shawl or scarf...and to dance within a fortnight of their confinement and even valse at seven months!!! Where is delicacy of feeling going to? Sybil St Albans danced a quadrille under these circumstances (Fulford, 1971).

Clearly, some aristocratic women were not in awe of the Queen's disapproval.

Upper-class Englishwomen in the nineteenth century rarely expressed any guilt or sense of personal deprivation about leaving their children in the care of nurses, nannies and governesses; nor were they criticised for finding mother-substitutes and sharing child-care. They sent children off to boarding schools where discipline was often as harsh as in prisons or workhouses, since that was supposed to build character of a kind the upper classes admired, and the wealthy middle-

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

class followed their example. Aristocratic women were not domesticated either, and saw no virtue in doing housework themselves; they employed men as well as women to do the cleaning, shopping, cooking, gardening, and to perform personal service for all members of the family. But in the large establishments they had a high managerial function. Beatrice Webb described the London Season in the years between 1870 and 1900 as the complement for womenkind of the masculine world of large-scale enterprise, with each offering opportunities for adventure and an assumption of power. Together with its derivative, country-house visiting, the London Season was regarded by wealthy parents as the equivalent, for their daughters, of the university education and professional training afforded their sons, 'the adequate reason being that marriage to a man of their own or higher social grade was the only recognised vocation for women not compelled to earn their own livelihood'. The organisation of massive entertainment usually devolved upon the women of the household. There was the London house to be selected; a stable of horses to be transported; a wardrobe to be purchased; dinners, dances, picnics and weekend parties to be arranged; deer forests and shooting boxes to be provided (Webb, 1926). In this social world women had enormous power to include or exclude guests, and they enjoyed exercising it. In the 1890s the Countess of Warwick (who called herself a Radical) gave the following advice to novelist Elinor Glyn, who was newly married into the aristocracy, about entertaining at her country house:

Army or naval officers, diplomats or clergymen might be invited to lunch or dinner. The vicar might be invited regularly to Sunday lunch or supper if he was a gentleman. Doctors and solicitors might be invited to garden parties, though never, of course, to lunch or dinner. Anyone engaged in the arts, the stage, trade or commerce, no matter how well connected, could not be asked to the house at all (Glyn, 1955).

It was not true that outstanding theatre people were not received in great houses, though it was perhaps less common in the country than London; Sarah Bernhardt and Lillie Langtry were invited everywhere as favourites of the Prince of Wales, who also—according to the Kaiser—'went boating with his grocer' (Sir Thomas Lipton, the millionaire tea merchant). But people lower down in the social scale, such as professional men, were probably not accepted unless they were

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

famous writers, artists or the like. There was in fact no rigid rule and, since the main aim of Society was to keep itself amused, anyone famous for any kind of talent or merely with good looks might well be 'lionised'. The extent to which *women* decided who was socially acceptable can be judged from the following: the Countess of Fingall said she attended a party at Stafford House in the 1880s, given by the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland; she asked the Duke who a particular lady was, and 'He stared at me: "My dear lady! It's no use asking me. You must ask Millie [his wife]. I don't know who *any one* is. Why, I hardly know who *you* are!"' (Fingall, 1937).

FREEDOM FOR FRIENDSHIP

Once she was married, an upper-class woman could travel or visit without a chaperone, and she could have friendships with men other than her husband. It was not automatically assumed that such a friendship was based on a sexual relationship, though such accusations were often made. Mrs Arbuthnot said in her *Journal* that she got anonymous letters accusing her of being the Duke of Wellington's mistress, and that she dealt with them by showing the letters both to her husband and to the Duke; the three of them agreed that in public they would not talk much together, but would go on as before in private. In the 1830s the courts decided that Caroline Norton's friendship with Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister, was not adulterous, though it was close. Mrs Arbuthnot also related in January 1826, having returned from a long stay over Christmas and New Year with friends at Apethorpe, that,

Burghersh found out the other day that, tho' we were 24 at dinner, everybody what he called slept in the middle of their beds! that is to say, there was no married pair. Ladies Barnard, Melville and Caroline Powett were there without husbands and Mr Arbuthnot had come home the day before. It certainly was odd enough that in such a large party, with so many married women and men, there was not one pair.

Even Lady Melbourne, famous for her *amours*, thought friendship between men and women possible: in a letter to Lord Byron dated 29 September 1812 she wrote, 'if circumstances should not stop it entirely our Friendship will be very pleasant to both... Once you told me you did not understand Friendship. I told you I would teach it you, & so I

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

will, if you do not allow C(aroline) to take you quite away.’ Caroline was Lady Caroline Lamb, Lady Melbourne’s daughter-in-law, who was having her notorious love affair with Lord Byron at the time.

Writing of the 1850s, Lady Dorothy Nevill said in a letter to Lady Airlie, ‘I have never forgotten those pleasant days when Lord Ellenborough exalted me to be one of his closer friends’ (Nevill, 1919). In the 1860s the Countess of Fingall went to London alone for part of the Season. She was happily married, but her sisters-in-law apparently pointed out to her husband that it was very dull at Killeen for anyone so young and gay, and her husband readily consented to the trip. She said that on Sundays,

The Achilles Statue was the great meeting-place. There you found your friends—by appointment—and walked with them. Usually you went on to lunch somewhere or you brought someone back to lunch... I met Lord Coventry—there had been no failing in our friendship since the night when we sat beside each other at dinner at Dublin Castle. Or I met Charlie Burn... Or it was Horace... Or Alexis Roche... Or Denis Lawless... Or many other friends.

Notice the lack of concern for her reputation in reporting that most of the friends who took her about were men, yet it has never been suggested that the Countess was unfaithful to her husband. Indeed, her friend Lord Coventry was considered by the Prince of Wales to be a prig, just because he had said, ‘it made him ashamed to see great men often so fuddled with wine that they were unable to join the ladies after dinner...and that card-playing bored him’ (Fingall, 1937).

FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN

Friendship between women of the upper classes was clearly important in their lives, as can be judged from their letters to each other in countless memoirs, and evidence of frequent meetings. Older women taught younger wives the ways of Society, the social rules and etiquette, and how to handle their husbands. Sisters aided each other, as when Lady Louisa Stuart offered her widowed sister Lady Portarlington a large share of her fortune (Stuart, 1895). According to the letters of Jane Carlyle, she and Lady Ashburton were friends, despite their rivalry over their salons and Jane’s envy of aristocratic privilege in general and her husband’s friendship with Lady

THE GLORIOUS LICENCE OF A WIFE

Ashburton in particular. Relations between mothers and daughters was often close and loving, as evidenced by the correspondence of Queen Victoria and her eldest daughter (Fulford, 1964), or that of Lady Byron and her mother (Mayne, 1929). There were famous and well-documented cases of lesbian relationships between aristocrats, such as 'The Ladies of Llangollen', and various members of the Bloomsbury Set such as Vita Sackville West, Violet Trefusis and Virginia Woolf.

CONCLUSION

At no time during the nineteenth century could it be said that most aristocratic women were stereotypical 'angels in the house'—vapid, passive, clinging, unintelligent and uninterested in the world outside the home. They were not reared as shrinking violets; almost without exception they were brought up in the country, outdoor life being considered more important than other forms of education. But these half-educated, horse-loving girls often married young and became great hostesses in London. They were considered among the most politically minded women in Europe. They learned from their elders, but had their own views and expected to air them. Contemporary accounts make nonsense of the idea that they were generally browbeaten or considered themselves inferior to their husbands; most were robust and defiant individuals. What made them different from the middle-class ideal of womanhood was their power to distribute patronage, their economic independence of their husbands, their total self-confidence in their abilities and their own ideas, and their determination to live private lives free from the restraints of middle-class morality. It is not the intention of this chapter to justify their elite class position, but to make clear that most aristocratic wives in nineteenth-century England were liberated beyond the wildest dreams of middle-class wives and had no understanding of why legal reforms were needed.

Nevertheless, for a minority of aristocratic women life was very different. A harsh and brutal husband was no more bearable because he was a so-called gentleman, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

THE PROVOKED WIFE

Marriage à la mode when things went sour is well described by Byron in *Don Juan*, *Canto the Second*:

Alas! the love of Women! it is known
To be a lovely and a fearful thing
For all of theirs upon that die is thrown,
And if 'tis lost, Life hath no more to bring
To them but mockeries of the past alone,
And their revenge is as the tiger's spring,
Deadly, and quick, and crushing: yet, as real
Torture is theirs—what they inflict they feel.
They are right; for Man, to man so oft unjust,
Is always so to Woman; one sole bond
Awaits them—treachery is all their trust;
Taught to conceal, their bursting hearts despond
Over their idol, till some wealthier lust
Buys them in marriage—and what rests beyond?
A thankless husband—next, a faithless lover—
Then dressing, nursing, praying—and all's over.
Some take a lover, some take drams or prayers,
Some mind their household, others dissipation,
Some run away, and but exchange their cares,
Losing the advantage of a virtuous station;
Few changes e'er can better their affairs,
Theirs being an unnatural situation,
From the dull palace, to the dirty hovel,
Some play the devil, and then write a novel.

THE PROVOKED WIFE

How right was Byron? Being a romantic, he assumed that women had no other dimension to their lives but passion. He outlined correctly some of the ways found by aristocratic women to compensate for unhappy marriages, but he was not telling the whole story. His essentially passive picture of women was not even borne out of his own confidences to Lady Melbourne about his aristocratic adorers and their rebellious behaviour. Lady Frances Webster openly announced at his dinner table that she would no longer share a bedroom with her husband—and the husband confided in Byron that Frances declined to bear him any more children. But the wife provoked into rebellion was not always treated so leniently.

Byron's own marriage was a failure, and his wife eventually walked out on him. According to his wife's written testimony, Lord Byron had had an incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh, about which he told his wife on their honeymoon, though for a long time she refused to believe it. Annabella also said, 'There is no vice with which he has not endeavoured to familiarise me,' and that Byron had wished to renew his relationship with his half-sister after his marriage, but Augusta refused and Annabella 'had to pay' for that. A month after their child, Ada, was born in December 1815, Lady Byron took the baby and left her husband's house for ever (Mayne, 1929). Her aunt, Lady Melbourne, believed that where possible a family's dirty linen should not be washed in public, and wrote to Annabella's parents,

I am miserable to think what A. must have suffered before she would have resolved to bring such an appeal before the world... I wish it could have been settled amicably—and not brought before a tribunal like the World where everything of the sort is discussed and represented with levity, indifference and derision, and without regard to the pain it may give.... Everything that passes between Husband and Wife ought to be sacred—the strongest reasons can hardly justify a departure from this rule.

But Annabella had different ideas, and her parents supported her. The child Ada was educated rigorously in mathematics, Lady Byron's own passion, and marriage in 1835 to the dull man who became the first Earl of Lovelace, followed by three children and endless internal ailments, did not dim her enthusiasm for the subject. In 1843 she wrote the 40 pages which gave her a posthumous

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

reputation as ‘the world’s first creative expositor of a computing machine’ (Baum, 1986).

Some aristocratic marriages survived on very strained terms. The impetuous behaviour of Caroline Lamb is well known, and after three years of marriage her husband (later Lord Melbourne) noted in his *Diary* for 1810,

Before I was married, whenever I saw the children or the dogs allowed, or rather encouraged to be troublesome in the house, I used to lay it all to the fault of the master of it, who might at once put a stop to it if he pleased. Since I married, I find that this was a very rash and premature judgment.

The marriage was disastrous, for reasons much more important than an unruly household, but it was many years before the couple actually separated and lived in different houses, and even then they seemed emotionally locked together.

Other marriages continued without separation, but on far from happy terms. For example, Mrs Arbuthnot reported in her *Journal* for June 1822 that the Duke of Wellington had told her of his distress that his wife ‘could not enter with him into the consideration of all the important concerns which were constantly occupying his mind’. He said she made his home so dull that no one would visit them, and he was driven to seek comfort and happiness elsewhere. Explaining the circumstances of his marriage, the Duke said he had proposed to Catherine Pakenham when they were young, and she had refused him, but eight years later he returned from India and proposed again, when she accepted him—but he had regretted it ever after. But what of the Duchess? According to Lady Shelley, she lacked common sense, was ignorant of the world and was obstinate about trifles in which she could have pleased her husband, had strong religious opinions, belonging to the Low Church, and a Calvinistic view of duty. However, the Duchess told Lady Shelley she had warned the Duke of all these things before they married. When he proposed a second time, she told him she had grown old and lost all her good looks since he had met her years before, and was a different person from the girl he had loved earlier. Since he had insisted on going through with the arrangement, she did not think she had to accommodate to her husband’s views. She refused to ‘direct’ their sons to useful pursuits, or urge them to read, instead seeking out for

THE PROVOKED WIFE

them trivial and childish amusements (as the Duke saw them). She was not interested in housekeeping; Mrs Arbuthnot reported,

She does not comply with any of his fancies in the arrangement of his house, and in truth it is so bad a menage it is quite disagreeable to be in the house... She is like the housekeeper and dresses herself exactly like a shepherdess, with an old hat made by herself stuck at the back of her head, and a dirty basket under her arm.

Everyone agreed that the Duchess had the greatest admiration for her husband, but that she was frightened of his abrupt manner, and they were clearly mismatched. The interesting point is that the Duchess was never bullied into becoming the sort of wife that her husband wished her to be, despite his eminence as the saviour of Europe, as 'the Iron Duke', and as Prime Minister. She obviously had a mind of her own.

A similar relationship was that of Edwin Lutyens and his wife Lady Emily in the late nineteenth century (Lutyens, 1985). Sex was a source of contention from the start, and after seventeen years of marriage she was no longer prepared to put up with him in bed, saying 'How could you ever have found pleasure in what you knew I hated?' The marriage survived, and on surprisingly good terms, because for long stretches they seldom slept under the same roof and scarcely spoke when they did. Lady Emily never interfered in his architectural work, retreating into theosophy and mysticism, and he thrived on his artistic freedom.

The wish to maintain a façade of respectability at all costs led occasionally to situations which chilled even the most hypocritical. Theresa, Marchioness of Londonderry, married in 1875 and within ten years fell in love with Harry Gust, the 'lady killer' of the century. Harry kept her love-letters, in which she mocked her husband, and left them lying around in his home; another married lady, Countess de Grey, who was also in love with Harry, found the letters and had them delivered to Lord Londonderry. He read them, re-wrapped them, enclosed a note, 'Henceforth we do not speak' and had the parcel laid on his wife's dressing-table. For the next thirty years Lord Londonderry did not address a word to his wife except necessary public pronouncements; they continued to receive guests together at political receptions at Londonderry House, but always arrived and

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

departed in separate carriages. It seems to have been the blow to his *amour propre* by his wife mocking him that caused the rift, rather than the affair itself.

As the Countess of Fingall remarked in her memoirs, 'How little we know of the life beyond other people's walls, whether those walls are the material ones, or the walls we build about ourselves so that we may hide within them.' She said of the life of Hermione, Duchess of Leinster, who married in 1884 and died of consumption at the age of 31, that to outsiders it seemed so beautiful, yet the Duke and Duchess were totally incompatible; in a fit of rebellion she had written (before the old Duke died, and she was still Lady Kildare), 'Kilkea Castle and Lord Kildare/Are more than any woman can bear.' So bad had it been that she welcomed the news that she was dying of consumption and had only a further year to live. And Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan gave a chilling account of a turn-of-the-century marriage of convenience; dinners without guests at which her husband the Duke of Marlborough

had a way of piling food on his plate; the next move was to push the plate away, together with knives, forks, spoons and glasses—all this in considered gestures which took a long time; then he backed his chair away from the table, crossed one leg over the other and endlessly twirled the ring on his little finger... After a quarter of an hour he would suddenly return to earth...and begin to eat slowly, usually complaining that the food was cold!... As a rule neither of us spoke a word. I took to knitting in desperation and the butler read detective stories in the hall (Balsan, 1952).

Wife-beating occurred in aristocratic circles as in all other classes, as so did other forms of ill-treatment. A bullying and brutal husband was not restrained because he was called a gentleman. Mrs Arbuthnot reported in her *Journal* in 1824 that Sir Bellingham Graham was 'a horrid man who had treated his wife cruelly and turned her out of doors two years ago without reason'. She also wrote of a visit in 1826 from her friend Mrs Fox, who told her that after two years' separation from her husband he, who had previously loaded her with every sort of abuse, was proposing to return. Mrs Fox was wondering what to do, and Mrs Arbuthnot strongly advised her to accept his offer but 'to contrive some money arrangement which may be beneficial to her children, and also secure some

THE PROVOKED WIFE

provision to her should she be again driven away by him'. The novelist Susan Ferrier wrote to her friend Miss Clavering (printed in the Introduction to her novel *Marriage*, 1818):

There arose [at dinner with Lady Charlotte Campbell] a question whether a woman of a right way of thinking would not rather be stabbed as kicked by her husband... I am for a stabber, but I dare say you will be for putting up with a kicker... I maintain there is but one crime a woman could never forgive in her husband, and that is a kicking.

Wife-beating was generally out of favour by the early nineteenth century, and families who no longer approved of their female relatives being abused often intervened to stop it. However, the following story shows that material considerations could prevail over moral ones: according to Anita Leslie her forbear Christina Leslie was in the 1850s married to 'that fox-hunting thug, the Revd. Lord John Beresford'. He handled his wife so roughly that she threatened to leave him, and the Leslie brothers rushed off to help her. As they arrived, John's elder brother, the Marquis of Waterford, broke his neck out hunting and John succeeded him. The Leslie brothers now thought again about the benefits of separation. Eventually they persuaded Christina to accept the glories of being a Marchioness in magnificent Curraghmore. She seems to have made up for her own ill-treatment by beating her brood of children fiercely. Lord Charles Beresford always swore he carried permanently the mark of a gold coronet on his mother's hairbrush on his backside, as a steer carries a brand (Leslie, 1973).

THE LEGAL CONSTRAINTS ON ARISTOCRATIC WIVES

Despite what has been said earlier about aristocratic wives being the most liberated group of women in nineteenth century England, if an aristocratic marriage went sour, and the husband wished to exert his legal rights, he had some powerful legal holds over his wife. Private law could not be used to circumvent three areas in which wives were vulnerable: child custody, control of earnings, and access to divorce. Let us look at these three areas in turn.

No wife had *any* legal rights over her children prior to 1839; if the parents separated or divorced the father could keep the children and

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

refuse to let the mother see them. This could be a powerful source of emotional blackmail, preventing wives from walking out on unhappy marriages. And it provided the means whereby a vindictive husband could punish a wife he disliked. Lady Sarah Pennington claimed in her book, *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice... (with) Additional Letter on the Management...of Infant Children* (1817 edition), that when her father left her an independent fortune her husband was so angry that he separated from her 'on suspicion of her adultery', and kept her from seeing her children. Novelist and politician Edward Bulwer took his children away from his wife Rosina, having first allowed her to keep them when they separated (Devey, 1887). One reference has been found to a case in which a wife used private law to prevent her husband taking her children from her, but this was an extremely vulnerable man. In 1825 Mrs Arbuthnot reported in her *Journal* the death of Mrs Long-Wellesley, eldest daughter and co-heir of Sir James Tylney-Long, and 'one of the greatest fortunes in England'; she had married in 1812 the only son of the man who later became 3rd Earl of Mornington, and he assumed his wife's surname as well as his own. According to Mrs Arbuthnot, Mrs Long-Wellesley was:

an amiable tho' weak woman who had borne with her odious husband as long as it was possible. She was, however, worn out and was in the act of obtaining a divorce when she died. By her death £10,000 goes to her eldest son. She has made her children wards of Chancery so that they are out of the power of their father... He is so in debt he cannot come to England without the danger of being arrested.

Much more typical of separated mothers in general were the hundreds of women who signed the Petition for the Infant Custody Act of 1839, or wrote to Caroline Norton telling their own sad stories similar to hers (see Chapter 1).

As to their control of their earnings, it is sometimes assumed that upper-class women did not need to earn money, and made no attempt to do so. However, we know that many women who made money by writing in the nineteenth century were daughters of the aristocracy, the upper middle class or the professions. They did not sweep the literary market. Richard Altick said the proportion of women writers to men remained steady at about 20 per cent between

THE PROVOKED WIFE

1800 and 1935 (Altick, 1962), but some were remarkably successful. For example, the novelist Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan) had saved £5,000 from her literary earnings when she married in 1812, afterwards making more (Paston, 1902). Caroline Norton turned to literary work to bring in an income when she parted from her husband, and became one of the most popular literary figures of her day, writing poetry, plays, novels, articles, short pieces of criticism, the words and music of many songs, and editing fashionable women's magazines and gift annuals. Anna Jameson, celebrated author of *Characteristics of Women*, said she turned to writing when her husband urged her to maintain herself by making capital out of her writing talent.

Aristocratic women also earned money by service to Royalty; in the early nineteenth century Lady Charlotte Lindsay, daughter of Lord North, said she retained her position as Lady-in-Waiting to Princess Caroline in order to earn some money to assist her husband (son of the Earl of Balcarres) who, according to Lady Cowper, was worthless and a spendthrift.

Some upper-class husbands, such as Lady Morgan's, made no attempt to touch their wives' earnings: others were like Caroline Norton's husband, who subpoenaed her publishers under Common Law to hand her earnings over to him. Thus some aristocratic women were anxious to see a change in the law to give them control of their own earnings.

In general, the aristocracy disapproved of divorce because the material and emotional repercussions were very inconvenient, and down to 1857 it required an Act of Parliament which cost a great deal of money. In 1810 the 1st Marquess of Anglesey (then Lord Paget), after being divorced by his first wife, married Lady Charlotte Wellesley, divorced wife of the Hon. Henry Wellesley (brother of the Duke of Wellington); Henry Wellesley was awarded £34,000 damages against Paget for 'criminal conversation'. So although high society was riddled with adultery and marriages were rarely romantically happy, broken marriages were comparatively few. Nonetheless, they did occur, and some were very dramatic. In 1829 Mrs Arbuthnot reported the break-up of Lord Ellenborough's marriage, saying,

There has been an explosion at last in the house of Lord E. He has found out all or at least a part of the improprieties of her conduct.

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

Her lover Prince Schwarzenbergh is gone back to Austria and at just the same time, Lord E. took her to her father's and refused to live with her any longer.

Jane Elizabeth, known as 'lanthe', had married Lord Ellenborough as his second wife in 1824, when she was 17. She was divorced for adultery in 1830 and that year became the mistress of Ludwig I, King of Bavaria. She later married Baron de Venningen, Prime Minister of Bavaria, who committed suicide when she left him. Her third husband, Sheik Medjwal el Mizrab, was an Arab general in the Greek army. Now, this was the woman whom Lady Holland had described in 1824 as 'a poor girl who has not seen anything of the world'!

Divorce was more difficult for a wife to obtain than it was for a husband, since she had to prove more aggravating offences than simple adultery. The first application for divorce by a woman in modern times was made in 1801 (134 years after the first Act 'to relieve a husband' was passed). Mrs Arbuthnot reported that her cousin Lady Augusta Fane, daughter of Lord Westmorland, had divorced her husband Lord Boringdon, 'whom she had married early in life and always detested'. Lady Augusta afterwards married the Hon. Sir Arthur Paget, third son of the 1st Earl of Uxbridge, in 1809, and was afterwards said to be content. Some divorces had less happy sequels: Lady Aldborough's granddaughter Elizabeth Johnstone left her husband in 1823 because she could not bear to be a poor man's wife. She fell in love with Lord Brudenell, heir of the 6th Earl of Cardigan, and her husband divorced her, but her subsequent remarriage to Brudenell was a disaster. In 1807 Lady Anne Wombwell wrote to Lady Melbourne about the sorrows of her sister, Lady Lucan, who had allowed herself to be divorced in 1794 by Bernard Howard, later (1815) Duke of Norfolk, for the sake of Lord Lucan, and now found the latter 'did not care if she had a bed to sleep on'. Yet, according to Lady Bessborough, the Lucans had lived together fairly happily for ten years and produced four children, then started to quarrel about stinginess and flirtations, which led to their eventual separation. The husband removed the children from their mother and set up house with his sister. The next Countess of Lucan (sister of Lord Cardigan) also found her husband too tyrannical to live with (though she was described as a tyrant

THE PROVOKED WIFE

herself). While he struggled with his farms, she lived in fashionable society in London, and by 1854 they had parted.

As the century went on, a few aristocratic divorces continued to occur. In the *Commons Journal*, 1837–1852 there were listed four divorce acts against titled women, none of which made much of a stir.

Henry R. Mitford against Lady Georgiana Jemima Mitford 1842

William Watson against Hon. Catharine Georgiana

Watson 1843

Edward Hill against Hon. Georgiana Charlotte Hill 1849

Earl of Lincoln against Hon. Lady Susan, Countess of

Lincoln 1850

In 1850 Disraeli mentioned in a letter to Lady Londonderry that Lady Lincoln, recently divorced, had married M. Opdebeck of Brussels, but he made no derogatory comment. As far as social stigma was concerned, there was a difference between the view of the circle that surrounded the Royal Family, which refused throughout the century to allow divorced people to attend Court, and the view of London Society which was much more tolerant. In 1880 Ellen Miller-Mundy (granddaughter of the 7th Lord Byron) had been married for seven years and had one small daughter. She fell in love with the 20-year-old Earl of Shrewsbury and they eloped to Paris. Her husband divorced her, and she and the Earl were married in 1882, their son being born shortly afterwards. They were banished from Court but continued their life in the country and in Society, and the Countess lived on to the age of 90.

Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan wrote that in 1906 she and the Duke of Marlborough wished to be free of each other, but she was told that:

In Edwardian circles divorce or separation was not recognised as a solution to marital discord. Husbands and wives who could not get on together went their separate ways and in the great houses in which they lived practised a polite observance of the deference each owed the other.

(Balsan, 1952). She went on,

To the present generation [i.e. post Second World War] the disgrace then attached to divorce will seem strange—indeed even a legal separation presented difficulties and made life alone in a

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

great house, with a great name, a complicated problem for a young woman still in her twenties.

She said she eventually realised, however, that ‘although separated couples were not received in Court circles, London Society would not be so governed’. Perhaps she should have realised that sooner, since her mother-in-law had divorced *her* husband (as Lord Blandford, before he inherited the ducal title) when in 1876 he ran off with Lady Aylesford, and she had not been socially ruined. Nor was the social life of Consuelo’s relative by marriage, Jenny Churchill, who divorced her second husband George Cornwallis-West in 1914, affected by the divorce.

Divorce among the nineteenth-century English aristocracy was not common, but it was not unknown, and the social consequences were not as dire as is sometimes claimed.

Part II

*RESPECTABLES AND
ROUGHS*

Chapter 6

ANOTHER LAW FOR THE POOR

At the other end of the social scale from the *grandes dames* and licensed libertines of the aristocracy and the non-landed rich were the wives and mothers of the working classes. Like their upper-class sisters, both the ‘respectables’ and the ‘roughs’ were legally subject to the Common Law with all its disabilities. A wife had no legal existence separate from her husband, the wife’s earnings belonged to her husband, as did the children; the courts would not oblige a man to support his wife, though she could pledge his credit and the Poor Law authorities could sue a husband whose wife became chargeable on the rates either as a workhouse inmate or by receiving outdoor relief which was much cheaper. But also, like upper-class women though for totally different reasons, working-class women were almost wholly beyond the reach of the civil law. This was obviously not because they had a system of private law built up by their families to protect them and their property from greedy and negligent husbands. On the contrary, since they had little or no property to protect and, where they had, they and their husbands had neither the resources nor the know-how to appeal to the courts, they were effectively outside the scope of the law. When husbands deserted their wives they rarely took the children with them, so there were few disputes about child custody. And the deserted wife of a man who was not ‘credit-worthy’ could not find traders willing to let her run up bills, since they knew they had little chance of recovering the money.

The law did not control the interpersonal relations of husbands and wives, which depended on individual wills and temperaments.

Hannah Mitchell, who grew up in the 1870s in Derbyshire, said that her mother, a respectable and god-fearing farmer's wife, had a violent temper which her husband could not combat, though 'he could handle a savage horse or face an infuriated bull'. Sometimes she made her husband and children spend the night in the barn, sleeping on the hay. Her husband was always the first to leave the house and the last to return, when his wife got in a rage (Mitchell, 1977, p.40). Annie Kenney, factory girl, trade unionist and suffragette, born 1879 as fifth of eleven children of an Oldham, Lanes, cotton operative, said her mother was 'the boss of the household', and when she died in 1905 'the cement of love that kept the home life together disappeared' (Kenney, 1924, p.26). And Kathleen Dayus described her mother, a matriarch in the roughest part of Birmingham around 1900, as a regular tyrant whose husband was terrified of her (Dayus, 1982). At the other extreme were brutal husbands such as those in the 'Kicking District' of Liverpool, which in 1874 provided magistrates with some 3,000 cases of crimes of violence and the coroners with 160 verdicts of 'Found Dead' (described by Sergeant Pulling in *Transactions*, 1876, of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science). To the working classes, the law meant either the criminal law which they saw as not for their benefit but only for the punishment of wrongdoers of their class, or the dreaded poor law which, especially after 1834, was the last resort of the desperate, at the cost in the workhouse of breaking up the family altogether.

The law and the courts were things to be avoided wherever possible, and as far as marital relations were concerned only came into play *in extremis*, when disaster struck in the shape of life-threatening violence, uncovered bigamy, a sick, dead or convicted spouse, or the abyss of poverty. An Act of 1878 gave the courts power to grant a separation order with maintenance to a woman whose husband had been convicted of an aggravated assault upon her, and in 1886 the Maintenance of Wives (Desertion) Act gave magistrates the power to grant maintenance orders, for a weekly amount not exceeding £2, to women whose husbands were guilty of desertion and neglect. But the courts were too ineffective in recovering money from absconding husbands to be very useful to working-class wives. Legal divorce remained a comparatively unusual solution to the marital problems of the working classes, being too expensive both before and after 1857. It was also the case

that the working class did not think it respectable to seek divorce. In 1909, in evidence to the Royal Commission on Divorce, the representatives of the Women's Co-operative Guild, representing the intelligent and thrifty working class, said it was commonly thought that women wished marriage to be irrevocable and there was no reason for reform of the divorce law. They said only a minority suffered so acutely from marriage that they found it unendurable, and this minority had not made its wishes known because of the feeling that divorce was shameful. Selina Cooper, trade unionist and political activist, said she stayed married in Nelson, Lanes, in the 1920s, 'for respectability' (Liddington, 1984, p.289). Some couples separated by merely living apart and taking another partner (usually in another place)—a form of divorce without the assistance of the court. Bigamy was illegal but not uncommon, especially in the form of *serial* marriage, according to newspaper reports, and prison sentences for it were light. Sales of wives, sometimes called popular divorce, were usually good-humoured affairs in markets where a wife was sold to her lover by pre-arrangement with the husband, who might spend what he got for her on drinks for all to celebrate the occasion. It was a form of public exchange, not very frequent, but documented in local newspapers in Bristol in 1823, in London and in Carlisle in 1832, in Bolton and in Birmingham in 1850 (Menefee, 1981). It scandalised the middle classes, but magistrates and judges seem to have been reluctant to intervene, and those cases brought to court were really warnings to others of the illegality of the custom. But the working classes themselves began to rebel against the practice, a common form of popular justice being to pelt the seller and his wife with mud, rubbish, stones or dead dogs and cats. And organised groups of working women began to disrupt the sales.

So much was true of the whole working class, but few other generalisations can be applied to them. For the working *classes*, as they should properly be called in the nineteenth century—or the 'lower orders' as they were still called in the early years of that century—were not a single class but a congeries of different groups and sub-classes with different lifestyles and outlooks which changed not only between levels of income, but between town and country, between different regions of the country, and, not least, between different periods throughout the 'long' nineteenth century. The working classes were very different from the middle and upper

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

classes, in that they were generally poorer, lived differently, dressed differently, ate differently, even smelled different. The manual workers, according to Patrick Colquhoun at the beginning of the century, constituted two-thirds of all families, and according to Dudley Baxter in 1867 they were three-quarters. In the 1801 Census, one third of families were allocated to agriculture; two-thirds to manufacture and commerce. Despite the prevalence of early death in this as in earlier periods, the population of England and Wales doubled between 1801 and 1851, from 9 million to 18 million, and doubled again by 1911, to 36 million. This involved an explosion in the number of people comprising 'the lower orders'. It is hard to be precise about incomes in the early nineteenth century, since there are no reliable statistics for poverty, but Baxter's statistics of income distribution in 1867 are useful for showing the wide differences *within* the two broad groupings and the narrow gap between the lower middle class and the higher skilled labour class (See Table 1).

Table 1

<i>Upper & middle classes</i>	No. of assessments	% occupied population
Class I. Large incomes:		
(1) £5,000 & upwards	8,100	0.07
(2) £1,000 – £5,000	46,100	0.4
Class II. Middle incomes:		
£300 – £1,000	163,900	1.4
Class III. Small incomes:		
(1) £100 – £300	947,900	8.6
(2) below income tax – under £100	1,159,000	10.5
Total:	2,200,000	20.07
<i>Manual labour class</i>		
Men's average wages:		
Class IV Higher skilled labour		
£50 – £73	1,260,000	11.4
Class V Lower skilled labour		
£35 – £52	4,377,000	39.9
Class VI Agriculture and unskilled labour		
£10.10s – £36	3,270,000	29.8
Total	8,907,000	81.2
Grand Total	10,960,000	

Total population of Great Britain was estimated at 24,152,000 in 1867 *Source:* R.D.Baxter, *National Income* (1868) p.64.

ANOTHER LAW FOR THE POOR

Within the great mass of the social pyramid designated the 'manual labour class' the differences in living standards, in conditions of work and play, in conduct and morality were, since they spanned the whole gamut from modest comfort to dire squalor, more significant than in the classes above. Skilled workers might earn up to twice as much as unskilled, agricultural labourers in the north of England and up to twice as much as those in the south, factory workers on the same or lower rates of pay might, because of their more regular work, earn far more on average per year than dockers or other casual workers, and even highly paid miners, printers or building craftsmen, being in seasonal trades, might find themselves in poverty at certain times of year. The middle class thought a working man should totally support his wife and children, but in the precarious circumstances of their lives only a few of the highly skilled, the 15 per cent or so belonging to the 'aristocracy of labour', were able to do that. Most wives and older children—over the age of 8–10 at the beginning, 12–14 at the end of the century—

had to work to help maintain the family. To some extent this changed over the century in both directions. While the wives of the more skilled in the stable and expanding trades, like blacksmiths or engineers, increasingly hoped to stay at home, others like wives of agricultural workers (who lost their own home earnings from 'by-employment' such as spinning or hand lace-making) or of handloom weavers (whose incomes fell in competition with the factories) were increasingly forced to look for paid work outside the home to keep their heads above the poverty line.

Whether or not a family remained in poverty did not only depend on the total wage of all its members. It also depended on how competently the family income was managed, which in most cases meant the competence of the wife—how the money was laid out, on nourishing food or 'luxuries', on warm clothes or 'frippery', on fuel or drink, rent or gambling, and so on. There were of course levels of income on which even the best manager could not 'make do', and when everything of value had been pawned there was no escape from the workhouse. But the ideal wife for a working man was above all a 'good manager'. If a woman was temperamentally or physically incapable of managing the household and rearing the children, the husband could not hope to overcome the financial difficulties that arose. For her part, a woman faced the risk of marrying a man who was totally incapable of supporting a family.

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

A woman often contributed significantly to the family's well-being by the savings she brought to the marriage. These could take the form of money saved from her earnings as a domestic servant or factory worker, or of household goods purchased over the years for her 'bottom drawer'. Although the word 'dowry' was never used at these levels of society, setting up a home was recognised as a joint endeavour by both partners, with the groom contributing the first month's rent and the bride most of the household goods. This accounts for the long engagements so frequent in the Victorian working class. Even those who were 'married but not churched', who 'lived tally' or 'over the brush', faced the same kind of expenditure in setting up a home, to which the woman was expected to contribute her share. The comparative thrift and affluence of the bride or 'common law' wife could therefore make all the difference between a comfortable marriage and a poverty-stricken one.

Yet family income and efficient expenditure alone did not exhaust the differences within the working population. Perhaps the most important division of all, certainly the one the working people were most conscious of in their own neighbourhoods, was the line between the 'roughs' and the 'respectables'. It was not a horizontal line, between the higher and the lower paid or between the skilled and the less skilled. It was a diagonal line which cut across all the economic layers. There were more 'respectables' at the top end amongst the skilled aristocrats of labour, but even there there were some drunken craftsmen or violent miners who ill-treated their families and kept them short of necessities. There were more 'roughs' at the bottom end, amongst the casual labourers and nearly unemployables of Marx's 'lumpenproletariat', Mayhew's street-folk or Charles Booth's distressed 10 per cent, but even among them there were self-respecting Primitive Methodists and some of the Catholic Irish who struggled to keep their families from contamination by the roughs. The line corresponded to some extent with the division between the church- and chapel-going workers and the hard-drinking pub-goers. But this division would be a gross oversimplification unless we recognised that some church-goers, especially the Anglicans and Catholics, took an occasional drink, and many of the pub-goers went to the chapel anniversary or the Easter communion. It was the dedication and fervour of the church and pub attendance that made the difference, not the mere fact.

The world of the chapel was a powerful minority in the working

classes. Evangelicalism and Methodism were a formidable combination of religion, ethics and ideology whose virtues of reverence, sobriety and prudence had taken hold on a substantial section of the early nineteenth-century working class, according to observers such as Francis Place (Place, 1972). Also a widely observed passion for respectability, which G.M.Young called the secular side of Evangelicalism, had begun in the latter twenty years of the eighteenth century and reached its height between 1840 and 1885 (Young, 1936). What was required to be respectable were all the virtues of a sober, godly and righteous life, but they could be practised by people who were not actually deeply religious. There was a large section of the working class which made great efforts to distance themselves from those who ‘gave no thought for the morrow’ and went in for riotous living, and also from those among the poor who gave up their apparently unequal struggle to make ends meet, lived on parish relief, and regularly lapsed into drinking to escape from the grim reality of their lives. The main way the former demonstrated that difference was by their adherence to the canons of respectability. They may not all have gone regularly to church or chapel, but most of them sent their children to Sunday school to learn the values of hard work, duty to family, duty to others, the evils of drink and the perils of sinfulness. They called themselves the ‘respectable’ working class and they called the others the ‘roughs’.

Nonconformist religion mounted an incessant critique on the feckless, pleasure-seeking and irreligious, and especially on those who spent money on drinking that could have been spent on their families. Drinking customs pervaded all aspects of life in many sections of the working-class—at meals, markets, festivities, rites of passage, and also at work. At weekends the results of intemperance were only too obvious. Saturday night, Sunday and sometimes ‘Saint Monday’ were given over to prolonged drinking. The temperance movement, concerned to curb drinking, began in 1829–30 among middle-class, Evangelical-type reformers, and was at first limited only to abstinence from spirits. But in the early 1830s dissatisfaction with this moderate policy (which permitted beer and wine drinking and which even supported the 1830 Beer Shops Act as providing an alternative to the gin palace) led to the introduction of the teetotal pledge to abstain from all forms of intoxicants. Born in Preston, Lancashire, among working-class and Methodist reformers (though not exclusively a working-class movement), ‘teetotalism’—total

abstinence from all forms of alcohol—became the dominant form of the temperance movement and an integral part of the nonconformist world. The Band of Hope for young people, begun in 1847, was closely associated with Sunday school work. Teetotalism strengthened the tradition of self-help and self-respect among an elite of working men and women, emphasising their distance from the feckless drinkers. Women had a very strong stake in teetotalism. If a husband could be weaned from spending money on strong drink, with its other pressures and temptations, and its propensity for inducing violence against women and children, a family's well-being could be transformed.

The significance of religion, however, changed over the century: church attendance was falling at least from 1851 onwards, especially in the large cities, so that it became less vital for the respectable to attend in order to clinch their status, while pub-going gained a more defiantly low-grade reputation as the temperance movement increased its hold and spread its antagonism from spirit drinking to the once acceptable consumption of beer. The line between respectables and roughs changed over time, too, as the aspirations of some groups rose and others fell, and the demands and appurtenances of respectability increased for some with expanding affluence and cheaper consumer goods: lace curtains, 'stoned' doorsteps, aspidistras and even pianos. In fact, it was not so much a line any more as a graduated frontier zone, on either side of which each family earned a label of relative respectability according to its members' place of residence, appearance, conduct and standing in the local community. Social status could change rapidly with every event or alteration in the family's conduct or possessions: a change, or loss, of a job, new curtains or furniture, a clean rent book, the lack of 'marriage lines'; a lad getting into trouble with the police, or a girl getting into trouble with a lad; or a domestic row spilling over into the street. In Robert Roberts's Salford at the end of the century the urban village matrons constantly reassessed each family's respectability: pursed-lipped and censorious, the matriarchs surveyed the scene, soaking it all in, shocked by the vulgarity of it all unless, of course, their own families were involved. Then, later, heads together and from evidence submitted, they made grim adjustments on the social ladder (Roberts, 1971, p.10 and 1976).

Working-class women's experience of marriage, therefore, differed even more than that of their upper- and middle-class sisters,

and cannot be dealt with as a generalised whole. It differed systematically as between three major groups: the respectables and the roughs of the industrial working classes, who increasingly sorted themselves out in distinct areas of the growing towns; and the 'lower orders' of the countryside where roughs and respectables lived cheek by jowl and in even closer association. Amongst all three there were changes over time. Before the factories came and for a long time after, most of the industrial workers worked at home alongside their wives and children, often in industrial villages rather than the towns. This was true not only of textile workers and miners in Lancashire and Yorkshire but also of cutlers in Hallamshire around Sheffield, nail and chain makers in the Black Country north of Birmingham, boot and shoe makers in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, furniture makers along the Thames Valley, and so on. It took generations, more than the whole of the long nineteenth century, to bring the major trades into the factory. In the early 1900s the 'sweated trades' held up for villification by the *Daily Mail* and the popular press—cheap dressmaking, furniture manufacture, fur pulling, cardboard box making, etc.—were merely the remains of the old domestic outwork system which had once been the almost universal system of manufacturing.

As modern industrialism and the population grew not only did the bulk of the occupied population move into factories and workshops, it moved into the towns. At the beginning of the nineteenth century only about a quarter of the people lived in towns of any size: by 1851 half did so, and by the end of the century it was over three-quarters. The transition from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban population was more than a change of life-style, from small mixed communities to large, differentiated ones, segregated by class and sub-class. It brought both gains and losses. On the one side, release from the oversight of squire and parson, more freedom to choose one's religion and politics, to join a trade union or a radical movement, a new range of sports and leisure activities, and a new camaraderie of the street and the pub. On the other side, the claustrophobia of overcrowded sprawling towns, the dirt, disease and squalor of industrial housing, the moral and social pollution of wider urban opportunities for crime and vice, the social control of nosey neighbours. The transition was not always so dramatic—there were mill villages in the countryside, like Samuel Greg's Styal or Robert Owen's New Lanark, where rural paternalism thrived, and

there were factory towns like W.H. Hornby's Blackburn or the Woods' and Sidebothams' Glossop where the mill-owners controlled the morals and religion of their workpeople. Harriet Kidd described a silk mill master in Leek, Staffs, who in the 1870s 'felt responsible for the souls of his "hands" (Life, 1977, p.75). On Sunday mornings he would round up the men standing at street corners, drive them to Church, and seat them all under his eye in his own pew.' But it is easy to see that the benefits of the change to urban life—religious and political freedom, sport and leisure—accrued more to the men, and the drawbacks—the dirt and claustrophobia of the narrow streets of row houses—affected women's lives more. To maintain the difference between the rough poverty-stricken areas where life was a constant struggle to survive, and the often surprisingly comfortable, if dull, respectable areas, was the ground-beat of many women's lives. Marriage for the two major divisions of the industrial working classes was so different that it can only be treated separately.

It was different again for the dwindling but still significant rural population. It was never exclusively agricultural, but it became increasingly so as rural industry moved into the towns and factories. In 1801 about a third of the occupied population had some connexion with farming. By 1851, although the absolute numbers had increased, the proportion had shrunk to one fifth. By 1901 the numbers had decreased both absolutely and relatively, to no more than one in eight of the working population. At the same time the countryside and the labourers' families had become more exclusively agricultural. The new urban industrialism increasingly took away the by-employments of the labourers and their wives and children—the spinning, knitting, hand lace-making, basket weaving and other tasks which had supplemented their minuscule farm wages. In the northern counties farm labourers' wages were kept up, by the competition of the mines and factories, to something like the level of those of town labourers—barely at the poverty line but up to twice as much as farm wages in the lush agricultural south. In the south and south-west, furthest from London and the factory towns, farm wages could be desperately low, far below the poverty line and only bearable if supplemented by the tiny wages of wives and children, from whatever work they could get, *and* by poor relief in the early years before the harsh New Poor Law of 1834 and charity afterwards. The southern farm labourer was the last to

benefit from the affluence of industrialism, and still the least even by the end of the century.

The wives of farm labourers were the hardest pressed of all the married women of England. Their lives were one long round of scrimping and saving, making do and mending, begging scraps and used tea leaves from the 'big houses', often working in the fields in all weathers, and coming home to damp, draughty cottages with scarcely enough fuel to cook their meagre meal, let alone to warm themselves. At the same time they bore more children than any other group in the population except miners' wives, and more of their children died in infancy. As late as 1913 Seeböhm Rowntree and May Kendall found a majority of them living in poverty, far beyond the proportions found in York and London. These wives deserve a chapter to themselves.

Before moving on to look at the differing marriage experience of women in the three sections of the working class, however, we should first look at what they had in common with each other. Marriage was the aim of the majority of women in the English working classes of the nineteenth century, however harsh the lives of couples they saw around them. They regarded it as a matter of course, the natural thing to do. In the first half of the century the mean age of first marriage for males and females was 25.3 and 23.4 respectively, and this rose slightly in the last third of the century (Wrigley and Schofield, 1981). Yet not every woman got married, and even for those who did marriage was not a life-long provision. As Barbara Hutchins pointed out in 1911, although marriage was 'the most important and extensively followed occupation for women', it was only for twenty years (between ages 35 and 55) that as many as three-quarters of women could be said to be provided for by marriage, even on the assumption that all wives were provided for by their husbands. Put another way, of women aged from 20 to 35 only two out of every four were married, the rest being mainly single (some widows); of women aged 35 to 55 three in every four were married; of women over 55 only two in four were married, most of the others being widowed (Hutchins, 1911). A sizeable percentage of people at the bottom end of the working classes did not take the need for formal marriage seriously, though many of them lived in permanent or semi-permanent relationships.

A working-class woman married for reasons similar to those of women in other social classes, although she did not aspire to the

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

middle-class ideal of being an ‘angel in the house’—she wanted the higher status marriage conferred in the eyes of her neighbours, a home of her own, a spouse to love and share her life, legitimate sex, children. The prospect of remaining single was harsh for a woman who (because women’s wages were so low) could not usually afford to live on her own and would nearly always have to share someone else’s home. Young women doing particularly hard work sometimes hoped by marriage to get away from that life. As the collier lass sang in a nineteenth-century broadside (Phillips & W.S. Tomkinson, 1927):

My name is Polly Parker, I’m come o’er from Worsley.
My father and mother work in the coal mine,
Our family’s large we have got seven children,
So I am obliged to work in the same mine,
And as this is my fortune I know you feel sorry
That in such employment my days I shall pass,
But I keep up my spirits I sing and look merry
Although I am but a poor Collier lass....
I am now growing up fast some how or other
There’s a collier lad strangely runs into my mind
And in spite of the talking of father or mother
I think I should marry if he was inclin’d
But should he prove surley and will not befriend me,
Another and better chance may come to pass
And my friends here I know, to him will recommend me
And I’ll be no longer a Collier Lass.

Life was insecure and uncertain, with little protection against calamities, but most working-class women decided to pool their resources with a husband and take their chances on a reasonable life together. Reasons for marrying given by women late in the century were probably valid for earlier decades. Mrs Wrigley said that in 1884, ‘My young man wanted to get married for he had no mother’ (he was 27 and she was 26); Hannah Mitchell said that in 1895 she and her young man were both tired of living in lodgings and felt that their own hearth, however humble, would be more comfortable (Life, 1977, p.60; Mitchell, 1977, p.88).

Once married, most working-class women faced a life of unremitting toil and the possibility of continual childbirth. Some

doctors early in the century believed that the working-class women had an easier time in childbirth than the rich because their lifestyle was less civilised, and therefore healthier, than that of their betters. The statistics do not bear out their belief. Nor do personal accounts of childbirth between 1900 and 1914, such as those in *Maternity: Letters from Working Women* (Maternity, 1978). Childbirth was dangerous for all women, and the poor women suffered more long-term maternal complications than the well-to-do, said a *Lancet* article in October 1828. Life expectancy at birth for English females was only 41.8 years in 1838/54, and 47.8 in 1891/1900. The official maternal death rate was high in that, measured against live births, 6 women per thousand died in 1847. The two major causes in 1847–54 were ‘accidents’ (3 per 1000) and ‘puerperal fever’ (1.7 per thousand). These figures probably under-represent the true situation, since some deaths were not correctly attributed to complications from childbirth, and there were wide regional variations in effective registration. Yet until it became clear that most of their children would survive infancy, the idea of limiting their families seemed incomprehensible to many of the poor. Early in the century women popularisers of political economy, such as Jane Marcet and Harriet Martineau, followed Malthus in advising working-class audiences on the need for ‘moral restraint’ (i.e. sex only for reproduction) in marriage, but their advice was generally ignored. There were at the same time attempts to educate the poor in birth control methods. Francis Place put out handbills on the subject, specially written for the working class, emphasising the benefits for women of smaller families, and the books of his disciple Richard Carlile enjoyed a wide circulation in the 1820s. But family limitation was not adopted for decades. There was a decline in the overall number of large families between 1870 and 1915, yet the birth-rate in the working class did not fall substantially until well after 1900. The first census of family size in 1911 showed that families of labourers were almost twice as large as those of professional people, and those of the working class generally were nearly a third larger than the non-manual middle class (Glass and Grebenik, 1954, p.3).

It seems doubtful that the late Victorian decline in marital fertility was tied to the employment patterns of married women. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century married women had been *withdrawing* from the regular workforce, and their participation in it was probably at its historical low point as

fertility began to decline (Glass, 1938). McLaren argues for the central importance of abortion for those who wanted fewer children, citing the easy availability of folk remedies and the advertisements in most newspapers of abortifacients under euphemistic descriptions, despite the fact that it was made illegal in 1803 for anyone to assist a woman to procure an abortion (McLaren, 1984, ch.5). But it seems likely from other studies (Gittins, 1982) that informal contraception (*coitus interruptus*) was more important. Family limitation began first among the higher social classes and textile workers, and it was not adopted uniformly by all groups of workers. The percentage gap between the classes with the smallest and the largest families, the professional group and miners, had risen by the 1880s from 24 to 60 per cent (Population, 1949, p.28). In other words, unskilled and agricultural workers were having more than three children to the professional family's two, and miners nearly twice as many.

Hard evidence about what the working class in the early nineteenth century thought about their own marriages is difficult to find, particularly the views of women. But it can be inferred that the tens of thousands of women who got involved in public agitation in defence of Princess Caroline in the 1820s, raising petitions on her behalf and protesting against husbands who did not fulfil their part of the marriage bargain (see Chapter 2), favoured traditional marriage based on an ideal of mutual comfort, support and responsibility for children, and they disapproved of a husband who flagrantly and cruelly refused to live with his wife or maintain her, and exerted his legal right to part her from her child. It also seems likely that only when such a *cause célèbre* publicised the legal rights of husbands did the common people become aware of them. The wife of a poor man knew that she was essential to the well-being of the home, and she generally expected to work to earn money to supplement the family income. That money was usually spent immediately on necessities, and there was little dispute about who legally owned the wages. In that sense the relationship between working men and their wives was more a partnership than was the case in the other classes.

In the next three chapters we shall deal with what marriage meant for the more affluent, respectable working-class women, for the roughs and others on or below the poverty line, and for the hard-pressed wives of the rural labourers. Theirs is a story not much

ANOTHER LAW FOR THE POOR

touched by the law of matrimony and divorce, but rather by their own customs and attitudes, which for them were often more compelling than the law itself. They differed profoundly, however, between the three major groups, and to all three in order we must now turn.

Chapter 7

A LIFE OF WILLING SACRIFICE

The English working class was never an undifferentiated mass, and it was not united by a common aim and culture. Life was much more complex than that. There was not just one working-class life apart from the other classes, but many different working lives apart from each other. In large towns and cities there were thousands of tiny separate communities, whose members distinguished differences in status between different streets, or even between two ends of the same street. Women who were houseproud looked down on those who were not. Women who regarded themselves as socially superior to their neighbours 'kept themselves to themselves'. The most important distinction between sectors of the working class, in terms they used themselves, was between the 'respectables' and the 'roughs'. Mary Hollinrake in her unpublished autobiography (Burnett, 1984, p.219) described her home town of Todmorden, Lanes, in the early twentieth century: 'There were untidy families, even dirty families and feckless ones, and there were respectable, upright families who knew they were the salt of the earth' (she made it clear that she belonged to the latter). To some extent, segregation was based on distinctions between families of skilled craftsmen, skilled and semi-skilled factory workers, and the unskilled labourers. These differences counted for a lot, since the skilled worker might be paid twice as much as the unskilled, and craftsmen earned as much or more than many lower-middle-class people such as clerks or school teachers. And in many skilled families, unlike the middle class, both

husband and wife worked and their joint income lifted them still higher. It was not simply a question of one group earning more than the other, but of values, attitudes, lifestyles and leisure patterns. It was difficult but not impossible to be both very poor and respectable. On the other hand, men with reasonably high incomes who drank heavily were classed as 'roughs' by their neighbours.

To be respectable working class in the nineteenth century meant not living a riotous life, not drinking or gambling heavily or using bad language, not going in for rough sports and pastimes, believing in chastity before marriage and fidelity afterwards, and not getting into debt. What really distinguished respectables from roughs were their aspirations for themselves and their children, their willingness to sacrifice pleasure for duty, and their capacity for building collective organisations to cover the contingencies of their lives. They admired thrift, clean living, pride, independence of spirit, the hiding of misfortune, making the best of things. Francis Place (1771–1854) began as a tough and unsentimental working-class Radical who possessed and extolled the virtues of thrift, industry and self-reliance. Without self-pity, he made clear in his *Autobiography* (Place, 1972) the terrible pressures that drove him and his wife to be so concerned with those virtues. Respectability was not an external matter—the good repute that other people accorded them—but an internal disposition. It meant having a good self-image, a sense of one's self as a self-respecting being. Dressing respectably and keeping up respectable appearances helped to sustain this. The alternative was ruin, which Place saw all around him in people who lost their respectability.

Their lives seemed drab and colourless to outsiders unable to understand the satisfaction and sense of moral superiority it gave to those who kept their distance from the reckless and feckless. Maud Pember Reeves, who liked and admired them, knowing that they were independent, resourceful, hard-working, respectable, but poor, since they were bringing up their families on wholly inadequate incomes, described Lambeth mothers in 1913 as quiet, decent, 'keep-themselves-to-themselves' kind of women. Their children were the most punctual and regular scholars, and the most clean-headed children in the area. The streets they lived in were monotonous and dreary, empty except when people were going to or from work, or the children were going to or from school. A kind of dull aloofness seemed to be the order of the day, the inhabitants watching the

doings of the other people from behind window curtains, recording and criticising (Reeves, 1979, p.3). It was by so living that the respectable working class had for a century kept their distance from their near-neighbours, the 'roughs'. They did not think of themselves as imitating middle-class respectability: they thought of their culture as separate and indigenous, grounded in their own version of Evangelical religion, mutual support and the collective help of extended families or neighbours. They paid insurance premiums for a decent burial, joined mutual aid societies to cover emergencies or to save a little for old age. Using Co-op shops, owned by the members, was a favourite method; the shops did not give credit or 'tick', so co-operators were respectable people who did not want to get into debt. Beatrice Webb said the Co-op manager in Bacup told her, 'Females look pretty sharp arter that,' referring to getting good and cheap articles and also the dividend of 12½ per cent on money spent in the shops (Webb, *My Apprenticeship*, p.182). Many believed in improvement through education, but they did not necessarily want to join the middle class or have to be deferential to them.

The respectable working class also went in for its own form of philanthropy. Although they spoke disparagingly of the 'undeserving' poor, many of them had relatives in that category, or lived on such close terms with them that they would not refuse to help them. Mrs Layton (Life, 1977, p.8) told how her mother in the 1850s used to get into debt by buying food for a sick neighbour, when she had 14 children of her own to feed, and how in the 1880s in London poor people gave clothes for children of poorer families clad only in pieces of sacking. Henry Mayhew related (Mayhew, 1984, p.345) how, after a man's death, neighbours subscribed 25 shillings for his widow to open a greengrocer's shop (it failed after five years, but by then her children were able to earn enough money for the family to manage on). Mrs Wrigley (Life, 1977, pp.61-2) told of good neighbours in Oldham helping her in the 1870s when she had a baby, and of times she helped her neighbours. And Mrs Layton (Life, 1977, p.51) explained that when the Prince of Wales' Fund in 1917 decided not to give any maternity relief to unmarried mothers, 'lest the feelings of respectable married women should be outraged', she spoke to the Executive on behalf of the Women's Co-operative Guild, 'representing 30,000 respectable women who understood the lives of those poorer than themselves and sympathised with them', and the Fund agreed to treat unmarried mothers the same.

RELIGION

The respectable working class approved of organised religion. The Religious Census of 1851 showed that 40.5 per cent of the population attended a place of worship on the particular Census Sunday. Attendances were lowest in London, large towns in Lancashire (except Wigan and Rochdale), the woollen towns of Bradford and Leeds, the hardware towns of Sheffield and Birmingham, every large coal town except Wolverhampton. It is believed that the middle classes (around 25 per cent of the population) were more zealous church attenders, but clearly a large number of the working population also went to church or chapel. The depth of religious commitment clearly varied among families, but for the majority Christianity provided an ethical framework for life. The growing number of children who attended day-school imbibed a lot of religious teaching from the voluntary Church Societies, which were the main providers of schooling for the working classes until almost the end of the century, and in the post-1870 public elementary schools daily Bible-reading was almost compulsory. In religious families, Sunday was a time for them to get dressed up and put themselves on show in church or chapel. It was gloomy for children not allowed to play or read anything but the Bible, but churchgoing had an important social function for women who neither went to music halls, public houses, dances or other places of entertainment, in allowing them to meet people outside their own families. The Evangelical idea of a special mission for women, controlling a home which was a seat of moral goodness, and where orderliness, punctuality, self-control and sobriety were practised, was attractive to many working-class women. They saw in it a possible way to tame men, control their vices, control the number of children they had, control the family purse, and control the lives of their children. By this special mission they validated their lives.

Methodism was at first feared and later looked down on by the upper class in England. This can be taken as a sign that the lower classes approved of it. It is estimated that at John Wesley's death in 1791 there were nearly half a million adherents in a population of 11 million. By 1850 about 2 million people were under direct Methodist influence—a tenth of the total population, with strong regional groupings in Cornwall and Yorkshire, for example. Wesleyan Methodism was conservative, shunning radicalism or disloyalty

(especially after 1815), but the breakaway connexions, like the Kilhamites, the Primitive Methodists and the Brianites, were radical in politics. And Methodism had a liberal and democratic spirit, since it was essentially a lay person's religion in which both women and men were local preachers, class leaders, trustees, stewards, and Sunday-school teachers. George Eliot portrayed her aunt, a woman Methodist preacher whom she clearly admired, as the heroine Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede*. Chapel membership tended to involve the whole family, not just the men as was the case with trade unions, friendly societies, mechanics' institutes and many other forms of self-help. While the Wesleyan Methodists by the Victorian age had become predominantly a middle-class body, the Primitive Methodists had a pronounced working-class flavour and adapted their religion to suit labouring men and women who felt more at home with a local preacher who spoke in their idiom than in the parish church with its upper-class priest and its liturgy and ritual: 'I found the church too stiff and conservative,' said Mrs Layton (Life, 1977, p.34). They were encouraged to lead a temperate, thrifty, hard-working life, but friendship, social life, marriage partners, help and support in time of need, a sense of security and personal worth, were available to Methodists whose lives centred around the chapel. They were not supposed to enjoy worldly amusements, or waste their time at public houses, but their worship included music, singing, spectacle and dramatic preaching which won many converts. Women played a big part in chapel singing, which they could not do in church services where men and boys formed the choirs. Methodist services were emotional, which women also liked. Salvation was especially high drama, climaxing in the moment of redemption—the sinner saved, the taking of the true path of righteousness, the coming to Christ and the acclamation of the congregation. To be counted among the saved brought happiness, a cheerful conviction that in God's providence there was a place for everyone, however humble, and that each individual was part of God's plan for the universe. For Charles Shaw, born 1832 in Stoke-on-Trent, the Methodist Sunday School was an oasis in the desert of his childhood. It was a benevolent institution of progress and emancipation, not an instrument of narrow discipline and social control (Shaw, 1977).

When respectable parents did not themselves attend church, it was usual for them to send their children to Sunday school, to 'learn

A LIFE OF WILLING SACRIFICE

the difference between right and wrong', to mix with 'a better class of child', or just to keep them out of mischief. The majority of the 6 million children who attended Sunday school just before 1914 did not go on to become adult church-goers but they probably lived their lives according to the sense of duty they learned as children (Laqueur, 1976, p.246). Some young people continued to attend church recreational meetings on weekday evenings, such as Bible classes or the Band of Hope. Selina Cooper said she attended the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Brierfield, Lanes, in the 1880s not because she was religious but because 'there wasn't much else to get connected with in those days' (Liddington, 1984, p.24).

MARRIED WOMEN'S WORK

The impact of industrialism on the lives of working people has been much disputed. In the period 1830–50 there was created a legend of the working-class home under early industrialism which is still the basis of 'golden age' thinking by both radicals and conservatives. It starts with the peasant or domestic worker's family of pre-industrial days when it was largely a self-sustaining economic unit. The family home was the workshop, there was division of labour between members of the family, but women did all sorts of skilled work from which they were later barred; education, training and discipline were the responsibility of the parents. God was in his heaven and all was right with the world, apparently, despite women's subordinate legal and economic status. When agriculture was commercialised and the textile trades went into the factory, men, women and children went out to work and the family disintegrated. It was claimed there had been four main effects: (a) members of the family were physically separated for 12 to 14 hours a day, so that the family was only together for purposes of sleeping, eating and recreation on Sundays and holidays; (b) when a married woman went out to work her efficiency as a wife and mother was greatly reduced, since she did not have time to do the housework, sewing, and cooking except in the evenings, when she was tired, and on Sundays (when she should have been at church), and her children were neglected when she was not at home; (c) unmarried girls who worked in factories had no time to develop housewifely skills and were encouraged into sexual immorality by the conditions of mill life; (d) the married man's position in the family was weakened when his wife and children

became separate wage-earners, and he could not exercise the necessary control over them. Peter Gaskell, a Manchester surgeon, wrote that in working-class marriage chastity was little known, husband and wife sinning equally (Gaskell, 1833). Engels, who followed Gaskell closely, wrote in 1844 that ‘next to intemperance in the enjoyment of intoxicating liquors, one of the principal faults of English working men is sexual licence’ and that ‘the social order makes family life almost impossible for the worker’—though he himself ‘lived in sin’ with a female cotton worker and, when she died, with her sister (Engels, 1962). Disraeli, writing in 1845 (Disraeli, 1904, p.228) said incest and infanticide were common in the working classes and that ‘the domestic principle wanes weaker and weaker every year in England’. All these writers mixed gross exaggeration with an element of truth: all assumed that the vices they heard about and embroidered were unknown before the factories came.

Clearly this was not the whole story. Unemployment, poverty, the parish apprentice system, largely arose from the population explosion of the period and from the failure of the *agricultural* revolution to provide enough jobs for the surplus workers. The virtues of the domestic system of manufacture were more apparent to middle-class outsiders than to those who worked in it, as Francis Place made clear in his *Autobiography* (Place, 1972, p. 116):

It is but too common for a man and his wife whose circumstances compel them to be almost constantly together in the same room to live in great discomfort... Nothing conduces so much to the degradation of a man and woman in their opinion of each other, and of themselves in all respects; but most especially of the woman; than her having to eat and drink and cook and wash and iron and transact all her domestic concerns in the room in which her husband works, and in which they sleep.

Samuel Bamford, the weaver poet, had a rosier view of domestic industry: of the period 1813–15 he wrote,

Having, on my leaving Manchester, secured plenty of material for the loom, my wife and myself working in one place, she soon became an expert weaver, and we were as happy, probably, as two human beings of our condition could be; our little girl, the light of our eyes, and the joy of our hearts, playing beside us.

A LIFE OF WILLING SACRIFICE

But Elizabeth Smith, aged 26, living in Nottingham with a husband who was out of work as a jobbing labourer, told the Children's Employment Commission in 1843 (*Parliamentary Papers*, 1843, XIV, part 1) that as a lace runner working in her home (a cellar for which she paid 10d a week rent) she worked 12 to 14 hours a day, and had ruined her eyesight, to earn 5s. a week in summer and 2s. 6d a week in winter (Children's Employment Commission, 1843). As Ivy Pinchbeck made clear in 1930, with abundant documentation, little of value was destroyed when domestic work was transferred from insanitary, overcrowded cottages. It was a blessing for the housewife and beneficial to the health of the family, since a workshop/home could be very squalid and often the air was full of fluff or dirt (Pinchbeck, 1981).

In 1850 the trades that were still in the home—including lace finishing, straw-plaiting, glove making, framework knitting, nail making, mainly done by women—were performed in appalling conditions that allowed no ease, peace or comfort to the family. Domestic industries which had been very respectable at the beginning of the century became the sweated industries of the later part of the century. As the Webbs said:

Home work has, to the philanthropist, certain sentimental attractions. There is no breaking-up of family life. Husband and wife can work side by side at a common task, whilst the babies frolic around, and the child from school prepares its lessons under the father's eye. No peremptory factory bell summons the wife and mother from her housekeeping or family care.... Unfortunately, the facts of the home worker's life in no way correspond to this Utopian picture (S. and B. Webb, 1920, pp. 540–2).

It was further found, by the House of Lords' Committee on the Sweating System in 1890, that the standard earnings of home workers were far below those of skilled workers in factory industries.

For decades after the advent of factories only a minority of workers were employed in them (even in the heart of industrial Lancashire in 1851 more than half the labour force did not work in factories but in artisan, trading and labouring occupations). With regard to the separation of families, it is clear that textile workers resisted change and succeeded until the 1820s in maintaining a sort

of family relationship in the factories. Mule spinners, for example, often employed their own children as big and little piecers. It was more difficult after the 1820s when the longer mules were introduced. The operatives' support for a 10-hour day for children (hoping this would ultimately mean a 10-hour day for adults) resulted in the Factory Act of 1833, which limited children's labour to 8 hours a day but made possible a relay system whereby adults continued to work long hours, assisted by different shifts of child helpers. This certainly broke up the family unit. From 1833 the operatives demanded first an 8-hour day for all, then a 12-hour day including the children, and finally settled for a universal 10½ hour day, which would have meant extending the hours of children. Successive Factory Acts in 1844, 1847 and 1851 strengthened the 1833 Act by separating still further the hours and conditions of children from those of adults. But the practice of children going to work in the same factory or workshop as a parent was common throughout the century. Life was bleak and hard for both parents and children in the working class, wherever they worked and at whatever occupation.

Women's work raised questions about the quality and nature of family life. In the cotton districts in 1851, about 30 per cent of all married women were employed, and of these almost two-thirds were textile operatives. In North Staffordshire the proportion of married women working in the potteries was about the same. Arrangements had to be made for looking after the home and the children; the most convenient solution was to have a grandmother or young daughter not in the factory to look after the babies and do a little cooking and cleaning. Or it was possible to hire a young girl of age 7 to 11 to do these chores. There were also relatives and neighbours who could be paid to care for babies in their own homes during working hours. Children of working mothers often had to be weaned early, in contrast to those of non-working mothers who breast-fed their babies for as long as possible, believing (correctly) that this would delay another pregnancy for a time. But some women had their babies taken to the factory by the childminder, so that the mother could feed the child in breaks from work. Infants whose mothers worked for pay, either in a factory, by casual work or under the continuing domestic system, did not get much attention by modern standards, and in many homes 'pacifiers' were liberally administered. A chemist testified that large quantities of opium

preparations were sold in the poorer parts of Nottingham in the 1840s, and Elizabeth Smith, Sarah Johnson and Mary Colton all said it was common for mothers in that town to give Godfrey's cordial (an opium preparation) to infants to keep them quiet whilst their mothers worked at lace-making (at home) to earn money (Children's Employment Commission, 1843, part 1). There is no evidence that relatives and neighbours acting as childminders did not do their job well, according to the standards of the day (though baby-farmers and foundling hospitals were another matter entirely). They were often genuinely fond of their young charges, and in close communities people 'got a bad name' if they treated children badly. Childminding was a job for which a mother paid a reasonable amount of money, so a minder in charge of several children made a tidy sum to help her own finances.

Elizabeth Roberts's study of respectable working wives in three Lancashire towns in the period 1890–1940 shows that they were committed to a life of incessant toil, often with a double burden of housework and a wage-earning job outside the home. One of the commonest expressions used by her respondents in Preston was, 'It was bed and work all the time.' They were subject to the strong discipline of respectability and keeping up appearances, devotion to the work ethic, and the religious background of their childhood.

HOUSING

Industrialism gave some workers, especially the skilled, rising wages and improved standards of life, but it also brought new insecurities. Although industrialism did not impoverish and demoralise workers whose lives had hitherto been secure and carefree, the rapid growth of towns posed problems of health and housing on a scale previously unknown. Respectable or rough, there was no escape for working-class women in nineteenth-century English towns from crowded living space and a polluted environment. Overcrowding was the result of population increase outrunning the housing stock. Even in towns where industrial pollution was not severe, house fires produced a pall of smoke over the area and the streets and rivers were filthy and polluted by excrement from humans, horses and other animals. It is difficult now to comprehend the dirt, decay, disease and desolation that the sanitary movement of the early nineteenth century confronted, let alone understand the minds of their

opponents. The sanitarians promised that improved sewage disposal, greater ventilation and better medical services would lessen epidemic diseases, lower the death rate and increase life expectancy. But from 1830 to 1870 sanitary reform was just holding the line.

In 1842 Edwin Chadwick published a *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Working Classes* which revealed a horrifying mass of squalor and disease in new industrial and old commercial and administrative towns alike. Little was done about it. For example, Pipewellgate, centre of the Irish immigrant community in Gates-head, had three privies for its 2,000 inhabitants in 1843. The contents of privies were carried away by 'night men' who took the effluent to large communal cesspits or to the nearest river, which might still provide the drinking water. According to the *Lancet* for 3 May 1848, Croydon had no sewerage system for its 13,000 inhabitants and only rudimentary drainage. Among the poor courts there was one privy to every three crowded houses, and the excrement of children was scattered over the courts and yards. The privies of the town were clustered over the open ditch which ran through the centre. And in the boom town of Dudley there was still no piped water in 1852—people took water from the canals, which sometimes meant a walk of two miles. The great clean-up began when central government carried the Health of Towns Act of 1848 to enable local authorities in England and Wales to levy rates to establish drainage schemes and water-supply systems. However, ratepayers throughout the country exploited the provision of the Act which required a two-thirds majority for its adoption, to fend off increases in local rates which they said would 'give non-ratepayers benefits they had done nothing to deserve'. So by late 1853 only 164 areas had adopted the Act, and cholera-ridden Newcastle refused to adopt. London remained in insanitary and legal chaos, though by the 1850s the replacement of cesspools by sewers was under way, and the 'night men' had nearly disappeared (as one of them remarked to May hew, 'there's always someone of the working classes being ruined'.) One of the great divisions between the respectable and the unrespectable was whether parents taught their children to relieve themselves in the house or yard in a closet or pot, or simply sent them outside to the nearest alley, lane or field. Toilet rolls were an unknown luxury and until newspapers became cheap even that was not an alternative.

The first attempts to solve the problem of excrement removal by

installing sewers caused a different problem: sewers reduced deaths from some diseases but increased deaths from others because they poured their contents into rivers and thus contaminated the drinking water. In some areas the 'conservancy' or 'pail-and-tub' system of sewage disposal continued on into the twentieth century. At Rochdale in 1896, with the exception of 750 water-closets in 'the better houses', wooden pails made from petroleum casks cut in two were used. In Manchester the pail system did not replace the midden until 1871, but by 1898 water-closets were being introduced. It was well on in the century before running water was brought to working-class homes, and even then it did not run above the ground floor; before that people had to carry their water from nearby standpipes. Consider what all this meant to the hard-working housewife, struggling to keep house and clothes clean.

In the 1840s doctors were complaining (not for the first time) that their poor patients stank. It was not surprising when they had so few washing facilities. Imagine the problem for women of coping with menstruation, when disposable sanitary towels were unknown and old rags had to be used. Or think of the constant problem of washing babies' nappies, often known as 'clouts'. It cannot be said that all the poor were uninterested in opportunities for cleanliness. According to a contemporary, Bootle had become by 1853,

A wholesale Washing Station; myriads of 'the unwashed' from the purlieu of Liverpool repair to this spot, and at high water boldly advance into the sea, male and female promiscuously, each supplied with a square piece of yellow soap fastened to the right hand by means of a piece of string, and set to work scrubbing themselves and each other in a manner truly gratifying to behold:—the mighty ocean is frequently tinged for miles, after one of these operations, with mud and soap-suds (Glazebrook, 1853, p.8).

Males and females swam nude together in river and sea—in 1857 the Marquis of Westmeath tried to introduce into Parliament a bill to prevent women from bathing nude, but it got nowhere. The public wash-house movement was first launched in Liverpool in 1842 by Mrs Catherine Wilkinson, a poor woman, and the first of several Public Baths and Wash Houses Acts was passed in 1846. The soap excise (3d a lb from 1815, which was prohibitive for the poor, until

1833 when it was halved) was removed in 1853, which helped the public bath habit; the wholesale price of soap fell by one-third and consumption doubled between 1841 and 1861. Mayhew reported that 96,726 baths were taken in the George Street Baths in Euston Square in 1849; the labouring classes could have a cold bath for 1d, or a warm shower or vapour bath for 2d, each service including a clean towel. The problem was that not enough such public baths were available. But a concern with cleanliness, order and tidiness was an abiding preoccupation of the respectable working class, distinguishing them from the roughs. They had to wash in cold water or heat water in pans on the fire. Miners had to bath each day after work, using a tin bath in the living room, but other people usually settled for a bath once a week. When the wife struggled to keep her house and children clean, it involved a colossal amount of effort beside which twentieth-century efforts to keep up high standards, using modern household appliances, seem puny. The houseproud mother who 'kept up appearances' even when her resources were small, who made sure that her family did not descend to the level of those who 'had no standards', fought a symbolic fight with the powers of darkness in the world, and the battle had to be fought daily against the physical dirt and 'dirty' behaviour which was all around them. It was a moral battle which gave a strong sense of purpose to the life of the working-class mother, as well as demonstrating her love and concern for her family.

Despite the difficult physical conditions described, most respectable workers were not living in slum housing, of, course. Many lived in comfortable, well-kept houses, particularly in the North of England, as Samuel Bamford found (Bamford, 1844). Sizeable numbers of working people began to own their own houses, thanks to the building societies. In 1871 a representative of the Birmingham Building Society told a Royal Commission that 13,000 houses in Birmingham belonged to working men earning around 30s a week. Leeds Permanent Building Society reported in 1884 that the society had enabled 7,000 working men to buy houses. Seebohm Rowntree found in 1899 that nearly 6 per cent of working-class families in York owned their own homes. Strong-minded and thrifty Mrs Layton (Life, 1977, p.47), saved up shares in the Co-operative Building Society, attended an L.C.C. course of lectures on health and sanitation, and decided to have a house built to her own specifications, which surprised the builder a great deal.

A LIFE OF WILLING SACRIFICE

She also surprised her husband by putting the mortgage for the house in her own name, because, 'The education I got in the Guildroom made me understand more about the laws of the country.' Her husband thought that, although she herself earned and saved the money for it, the house should be bought in his name. 'He thought it did not look respectful for a woman's name to be put on the deeds when she had a husband alive. I thought different, and so the house is mine,' she wrote.

FOOD

Food for the working classes in the early nineteenth century was poor, and this added to the difficulties for women of providing tasty meals and a varied diet. Meat was sold in at least four grades, and there was an enormous trade in offal and diseased meat to the poor. Wherever possible people kept pigs in pigsties built against their houses; objectionable as they were to middle-class reformers, they were efficient disposers of waste and gave good value in cash and calories, bacon being the meat most often eaten by the working class. According to the *Journal of Public Health and Sanitary Review*, in 1856 the Dudley Board of Health sought to ban pigs within the city limits, but the town revolted in the interests of 'the liberty of the subject', and the Board was unable to enforce the order. Fresh fish was generally unavailable outside fishing villages until the 1850s, when power boats and the railways helped distribution. Salt fish was too dear for the workers.

Food adulteration was common, which also added to the problem for a poor housewife of providing nourishing food. Bread, a basic food for most people throughout the nineteenth century, varied enormously in quality; brown bread was despised because it was tough, sour and gritty, so alum and chalk were used illegally to whiten the flour. Butter was adulterated, but working people liked the cheap, strong salt butter from Ireland which could be kept up to five months in the winter. Ordinary cheap tea was sold mixed with hawthorne and elm leaves, though by 1861 it was mostly genuine. Only after an anti-adulteration campaign of the mid-1850s was the enrichment of chocolate with Venetian lead discontinued (it caused frequent outbreaks of vomiting in children). Milk was diluted by dairymen, and again by the shop or local roundsman. It might have been less dangerous if clean water had been used, but it was usually

drawn from the milkman's well or polluted town supply. Mrs Layton said that behind her home in Bethnal Green around 1860 there was a large shed where a dairyman kept forty milk cows, but poor people could not buy milk in quantity: 'In my own home milk was only used for tea when company [visitors] came', she said (Life, 1977, p.3). And she said of the 1870s, when she looked after poor women in childbirth, that their food consisted of gruel and toast, and 'milk was an unheard of thing' (ibid, p.31). In fact, most of the food people ate was adulterated up to the 1880s, yet the diet of most people slowly improved and the output of milk and milk products rose between 1870 and 1900 by about a third.

Looking after the health of herself and the family was a prime concern of the mother, and it has been pointed out that the absence of alternative painkillers and anxiety-relievers caused opium itself to become 'the opium of the masses' (Berridge and Edwards, 1981). Between 1830 and 1860 each person consumed on average 127 therapeutic doses of opium each year. 'Soothing syrups' were readily available for babies, all containing opiates. An 1851 report by the Registrar General, into the causes of the 420,977 children's deaths registered in England in 1847, said that drugs played a part in the death of large numbers of children each year from convulsions and teething. Doctors believed that even when the children survived early use of drugs, they were likely to be addicted to patent medicines of similar type throughout their lives. But the working class was not the only section of society that used opiates: in 1857 Dr Robert Dick wrote in *The Connection of Health and Beauty* that many women, because of 'the pressures of society' needed artificial sedatives or stimulants, such as opium, morphia, prussic acid, musk or valerian. And Mr Gladstone regularly dosed himself with laudanum before his major speeches.

Standards of comfort in nineteenth-century working-class homes could not have been very high by modern standards, whether the family was respectable or rough, and whether or not the wife worked inside or outside the home to earn money. They were all small, badly furnished and lacked privacy, compared with middle-class homes, though bugs were a house problem common to all levels. The number of children in the family made a vast difference to the degree of overcrowding and possible comfort, although when the older children went to work they contributed to the family income. The variety of food poorer people could afford was limited, cooking

utensils were few. Before the advent of gas cookers, cooking was done over an open fire or in an oven attached to the fireplace. Cleanliness was the one standard that a respectable wife could uphold by her own efforts without spending much money, and it became a major symbol of respectability. Hard physical labour was needed to keep rugs free from dust by taking them outside and beating them over a line. Not every woman could keep up the relentless battle against dirt that exhausted so many, and many husbands and children felt that a little untidiness was more comfortable than excessive cleaning, but a clean house and clean clothes were important to the respectable ideal.

Washing clothes was a major operation for a housewife who wanted to keep a respectable home. Water had either to be heated on the fire or in a boiler for hot water on the side of the fire, or in a boiler with a hearth under it, in the back kitchen. Washing day was an ordeal for everyone. The clothes were put to soak the previous evening, in a large dolly-tub. Early next morning the boiler fire was lit and the clothes were rotated vigorously with a dolly—an implement with three legs and a stout handle with a cross-bar (acting like the agitator in a washing-machine). Dollying was said to induce a miscarriage when a woman was in an advanced state of pregnancy. The clothes were rubbed where necessary, boiled for half an hour, rinsed, blued and starched. This process was repeated for different kinds of clothes and household linens, ‘whites’ coming first, ‘coloureds’ next, and heavily soiled working clothes last of all. On fine days the clothes were dried outside, on wet days they decorated the living room which had the only fire. Ironing began as the clothes dried, and was another major operation as irons had to be heated by the fire. When running water and gas were installed in working-class homes, and incomes increased so that women could have a gas boiler instead of a brick boiler, a gas cooker instead of cooking over an open fire, it was comparative bliss. But even then the respectable working class battled on, without vacuum cleaners, washing machines or refrigerators, to uphold standards of cleanliness which they believed were next to godliness. Between husband and wife it was generally accepted that husbands who brought home their wage-packets regularly were not expected to share routine housework, though they might mend shoes, repair household articles, or dig the allotment. Rarely was there any variation in this demarcation of roles. On Fridays in Haworth, Yorkshire, husbands cleaned the outsides of the

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

windows, then 'swilled' the whole street—pavement, and roadway, but this was fairly unusual (Burnett, 1984, p.219). Children of both sexes had vital jobs to do in the house, however.

Women did the housework and the cooking, and brought up the children because that was expected of them and taken for granted. What is not so obvious is why they were so often the financial managers. One simple answer might be that they understood money, knew how to handle a limited budget, how to barter and to deal with tradesmen, this information being passed on from mother to daughter but also learned by experience in domestic service, keeping accounts in small businesses or as shop assistants. Girls also earned less money than boys and did not so readily find ways to dissipate all their earnings (being excluded from pubs and other forms of recreation.) A more cynical view might be that a husband 'turned up' the bulk of his wages to his wife, knowing it was not enough to provide for the family's needs, and then left her to make the best she could of it, thereby shrugging off further responsibility. But there was also an important psychological reason why mothers undertook the financial control of the household budget, and later in the century often opposed state intervention in family problems. It was expressed by Anna Martin when she wrote:

The women have a vague dread of being superseded and dethroned. Each of them knows perfectly well that the strength of her position in the home lies in the physical dependence of husband and children upon her, and she is suspicious of anything that would tend to undermine this. The feeling that she is the indispensable centre of her small world is, indeed, the joy and consolation of her life (Martin, 1911, p.30).

ACCOUNTS OF WORKING-CLASS LIFE

The best-known accounts of working-class life in nineteenth-century England were written by well-meaning and sometimes censorious middle-class observers such as clergymen, teachers, doctors, employers, journalists or charity workers who gave evidence to countless official and unofficial investigations. They left vivid, if often stereotyped and prejudiced, impressions of 'how the poor lived', usually with advice on how they could best be

helped to help themselves out of their difficulties. And as Beatrice Webb perceptively observed (*My Apprenticeship*, 1926, p. 136) they often regarded the working class as an undifferentiated mass: 'Mere philanthropists are apt to overlook the existence of an independent working class, and when they talk sentimentally of the "people" they mean really the "ne'er-do-wells." 'What historians have most wanted to know was what members of the working class themselves thought about their lives and predicaments, and in the past twenty years a large number of hitherto unpublished autobiographies have been uncovered, adding to a substantial number of published autobiographies that had been overlooked (Burnett, 1974 and 1984; Vincent, 1981; Burnett *et al.*, 1984). Also oral history has become a respectable academic exercise, resulting in reams of fascinating material (Roberts, 1984; Thompson, 1978). In all accounts, whether written or oral, there is the difficulty of knowing whether people tell the whole truth, how much they suppress, how distorted are their memories. Few like to 'speak ill of the dead' or rake over family skeletons. The working class were as prejudiced and ill-informed about groups to which they had no access, or those they regarded as inferior, as middle-class observers were. Nor may they have known for certain what their parents thought about things, or how they behaved, or what actually happened in their own neighbourhoods. Nancie Hewlett remarked of her parents, in an unpublished family record covering 1860–1922: 'What their thoughts, hopes and aspirations were I never knew, so did I ever really know them at all? I wish I had known them as people as well as parents' (Burnett, 1984, p.231).

We do not have much first-hand evidence about what working-class women thought about their marriages in the early nineteenth century, though there is more evidence later in the century. Of 142 autobiographies written in the period 1790 to 1850 by children of working-class families, very diverse in occupation, who remained working class, only six were written by women, one of whom did not marry (Vincent, 1981). A respectable urban working-class housewife in Stockport, married to a skilled factory labourer, described her domestic situation in 1833 as follows (Factory Inquiry Commission, 1833). Her conditions were thought to be about average for working families. Mrs B. was aged 40 and had five children. She herself did not work outside the home, but her eldest daughter aged 14 had been her spinner father's piecer for three years

(her labour being worth 4s 6d a week). Her husband gave her 25s a week, keeping 3s pocket money for himself, though Mrs B. said he scarcely had any drink. Her rent was 3s 6d a week, coal 1s 6d, soap and candles 1s. She made her own bread, and they had fresh meat only on Sundays. Many meals were based on porridge and milk. They ate a lot of potatoes and some bacon, and drank a quart of milk a day (for a family of 7) with an occasional egg and a bit of cheese. She had 6s 11d a week to spend on clothing, sickness, schooling. Her house consisted of four rooms. They had two beds, four chairs, one table, boxes to put clothes in, two pans and a teakettle, a gridiron and a frying-pan, 6 large and small plates, four pairs of knives and forks and several pewter spoons. They paid 1d a week for each child in a funeral club. Two of the children went to school at 3d a week each—they were taught reading but not writing. They had a few books, such as a Bible, hymn-book, and several prizes from Sunday school, which four of the children attended.

The small amount of writing left by working-class women was due to differential literacy, lack of self-confidence (women were excluded from male self-improvement societies) and a feeling that their lives were too trivial to report. When encouraged they could write impressively, as did Mima Bamford, wife of Samuel the weaver poet and Radical leader, reporting what she saw and experienced when she went on the march to St Peter's Field in Manchester in 1819 which resulted in the Peterloo massacre. It is a moving testament to her support for her husband and the political cause he led. She wrote, 'I was determined to go to the meeting, and should have followed, even if my husband had refused his consent to my going with the procession' (Bamford, 1893). It is a pity there is not more written evidence from some of the women who took part in the political movements of the day. According to Bamford women Voted with the men at the Radical meetings', and they formed female political unions in 1818 (*Annual Register*, vol. LX1, p.348). These women were not so much interested in women's rights as people's rights, and Lord Castlereagh suggested when introducing the Seditious Meetings Prevention Bill in November, 1819 that they had 'no innate decorum'. Working women joined their menfolk in the movements for Parliamentary Reform and against the New Poor Law of 1834. Although women were marginalised in the Owenite movement of the 1820s and 1830s, many were attracted to

A LIFE OF WILLING SACRIFICE

meetings which stressed moral improvement, family participation, music, temperance and education. Women took a major role in building up a national network of 'rational' Chartist activities in the 1830s and 1840s. Besides organising the Chartist Sunday schools, social teas and dances, women attended and sometimes addressed meetings, formed their own political associations, signed petitions and engaged in boycotts of shopkeepers who disapproved of Chartism (Thompson, 1976). There was also, of course, a far less respectable side to Chartism, consisting of noise, bands, banners and meetings by torchlight, which appealed to a different section of the working class. Later in the century working women joined the Women's Co-operative Guild and some worked to get the vote for women: Mrs Wrigley, who took in sewing to supplement her husband's small wage as a platelayer, said, 'I joined the Suffrage, because having had so hard and difficult a life myself, I thought I would do all I could to relieve the sufferings of others.'

When Mrs Pember Reeves reported on respectable mothers' lives in Lambeth in 1913 (Reeves, 1979) she found similar conditions to those of Mrs B. in 1833 (above):

Mrs P. is under thirty, and, when she has time to look it, rather pretty. Her eldest child is only ten. The tightest economy reigns in that little house, partly because Mr P. is a careful man and very delicate, and partly because Mrs P. is terrified of debt. It was she who discovered the plan of buying seven cracked eggs for 3d. As she said, it might lose you a little of the egg, but you could smell it first, which was a convenience. She is clean, but untidy, very gentle in her manner, and easily shocked... Her mother rents one of her rooms, and, much beloved, is always there to advise in an unscientific, inarticulate, but soothing way when there is a difficulty. The children are fair and delicate, and are kept clean by their tired little mother...

Mrs O. lived in two rooms and had two young children; her husband kept 5s a week for himself out of his 25s wages, and expected 4s 4d of the housekeeping to be spent on extra food for him. He liked the house to be kept clean, and could not see that his wife ever needed to go out except to buy food. He believed women were extravagant in dress, and did not encourage his wife in such nonsense.

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

About courtship, marriage and marital relationships most working-class writers were reticent. Women and men alike seemed to think it improper and unnecessary to write about their own emotional lives. They thought personal details would not be interesting to strangers, marital discord was a sign of personal failure, and they did not wish to embarrass their children. We cannot conclude that the working class did not feel passion or grief or love. But although physical attraction clearly played a part in courtship, married love is written about in totally unphysical terms. Respectability often led not only to the condemnation of sexual unconventionality but also to the condemnation of sex itself. In Elizabeth Roberts's study (1984) women stressed their fear and ignorance before marriage about sex: one of them said, 'We were as innocent as the grave.' There was almost total reticence on the part of parents in discussing sexual matters with children, and strict control of relationships between boys and girls. Sex outside marriage was universally condemned, though not all girls managed to keep out of trouble. We cannot conclude that women who were virgins when they married were necessarily traumatised by sexual experience, or that they always behaved in the privacy of their bedrooms as respectability dictated they should. It seems unlikely that most working-class wives were constantly forced by their husbands to have sex which they hated, though for some women that was the case. *Maternity: Letters from Working Women*, written in 1914, presents a moving record of the strength of feeling for husband and children which often survived the most adverse conditions. It presents an extraordinary account of courage, endurance and love. Working-class women in *Round About a Pound a Week* spoke well of their husbands, though their children seemed to fill their lives. One woman said, 'My young man's that good ter me I feel as if somethink nice 'ad 'appened every time 'e comes in' ('young man' being the generic term for a husband). Other women said, 'E's all right' and probably meant a lot by that brief opinion. Another commented of a husband who drank, 'E's a good 'un. 'E ain't never kep' back me twenty-three bob, but e's that spiteful Satterday nights I 'as ter keep the children from 'im.' Women's judgement seemed to be passed on husbands according to the amount he gave them in money: if he gave less than 20s they expected explanations of why they were getting so little; at 20s nothing was said except that it wasn't much but they couldn't grumble; over 20s was a splendid week. To manage a

husband and six children in three rooms on a pound a week (as some did), needed much wisdom and loving kindness.

THE RESPECTABLE WORKING CLASS AND THEIR CHILDREN

Since children did not ask to be born, it was accepted in all sections of the working class that they had a right to be fed, clothed and sheltered and, to some extent, educated. In return, they had to contribute work to the household as soon as they were old enough to be useful. In the nineteenth century some worked alongside their parents in the system of domestic outwork, others in agriculture, and others were employed from an early age in mills, mines or factories. In 1833 employment in textile factories for children under 9 was forbidden, and for those between 9 and 13 a maximum of 8 hours a day was laid down. But the great majority of child workers were outside the control of this Factory Act, in agriculture, potteries, workshops and domestic industries. A general prohibition of work under the age of 10 was passed only in 1876, though from 1870 the Education Acts began to extend compulsory schooling to 12, 13 or 14 in local areas. Not until just before the First World War was the duration of working-class childhood generally lengthened to age 13. Families living on the edge of starvation used every bit of labour they could command. Both boys and girls also had to perform regular tasks at home. Autobiographies show that children were well aware of their parents' predicament, even when they resented having to do so much. In respectable homes the children had to be occupied because 'the devil found mischief for idle hands to do'. A puritanical view of children which lasted most of the century was that they were naturally sinful and had to be redeemed by discipline and grace. Severe corporal punishment became less acceptable as the century advanced, but in the working class a smack or the strap was a spontaneous reaction to misbehaviour.

Low income and constant anxiety about maintaining a family no doubt blunted the emotions of some parents, but it would be wrong to conclude that the poor were always less affectionate, cared less for their children or grieved less when a child died. Autobiographies do not provide a simple consensus. They do not suggest that childhood was particularly happy or unhappy, and there were both loving and unloving parents in the working class.

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

The close-knit, affectionate family seems to have had a better chance to develop where the home conditions were more comfortable (less overcrowding, enough food and clothes) and parents had more time to foster loving relationships, but there was no simple cause and effect. Doris Frances was not surprised to hear as a child that her mother before marriage had been a 'General', since her discipline was so harsh. Only later did she realise that her mother had been a 'General Servant' (Burnett, 1984, p.233). Kathleen Dayus (1982) and Hannah Mitchell (1977) each said her mother did not like her and 'picked on' her, but each thought this unfair enough to comment on.

Charles Shaw (1977, p. 107) described a time in 1842 when his family had to enter the workhouse, his father having led a strike and been unable thereafter to get work. Known as the Bastille, the workhouse was harsh and punitive. Sunday afternoon brought an hour of unspeakable joy, when the children who had mothers were permitted to go to the women's room for an hour:

It can easily be imagined what happened then. Bedlam was let loose for an hour. Wild joy, frantic exclamations, every conceivable form of speech possible to such people under such circumstances were employed. Love went mad in many cases. But all did not give way to the wild revelry of passion. Some mothers and children hung together in quiet, intense endearments. These were conveyed more by soft pressures of hands, embraces, and lips, than by words. Even among the poor many stand worlds apart. This was the one sweet merciful relief in the harsh discipline of the workhouse.

In the autobiographies there is evidence of great care for children's health towards the end of the century, including getting the smallpox vaccination for them, though many were struck down by pneumonia, diphtheria, scarlet fever, smallpox or consumption. Lilian Slater said of working-class life in Bradford, 'looking back makes me realise what care and attention was lavished on many children—in my case there was no limit!' (Burnett, 1984, p.54). There was considerable suspicion of doctors, however, and in any case poorer people could not pay for their services. Home remedies were used, such as brimstone and black treacle for 'clearing the blood' in the spring, eating onions

to cure colds, using sheets of brown paper smeared with tallow or goose-grease to prevent winter chest complaints. As Alice M. Collis said, 'they smelt horrible, but were subsequently useful as fire-lighters' (Burnett, 1984, p.56). The knowledge that diseases were bred and spread by dirt was firmly accepted by the respectable working class, so cleanliness was both next to godliness and important for health.

What emerges from many working-class autobiographies is the greater affection children generally felt for their mothers. There are some exceptions, such as Kathleen Dayus (1982) and Hannah Mitchell (1971) who preferred their fathers to mothers with violent tempers, but they are rare. Fathers were often remote from their children because of their long hours away from home on work, or on drinking sprees. Mothers carried the main burden of budgeting a small income, and usually put the needs of the family before their own. Mrs Burrows (Life, 1977, p.113) said her mother in the 1850s never asked for or received charity, and never once ran into debt: 'Scores of times I have seen her sit down to a meal of dry bread, so that we might have a tiny mite of butter on our bread, yet she never complained.' Mrs Layton (Life, 1977, p.37) said, 'No-one outside my door ever knew how often I was hungry or how I had to scheme to get my husband nourishment.' Mrs Wrigley (Life, 1977, p.63) determined to let her sons have music lessons in 1894: 'I have gone without my dinner for their sakes, and just had a cup of tea and bread and butter.'

Getting into debt was not socially acceptable to the respectable working class, and generally speaking they would do anything to avoid it. But there were certainly hard times when many families had to resort to forms of credit (though wives often used them without their husbands' knowledge). Mrs Bosanquet perceptively said some saw the pawnshop as 'an efficient and legitimate way of equalising the [irregular] income and the claims made upon it'—though *she* believed thrift to be the better solution (Bosanquet, 1898, p.98). The depression of 1884 was marked by a large increase in the number of wedding rings pawned. One woman told Elizabeth Roberts that she pawned her wedding ring three times, 'each time I was caught with babies' (Roberts, 1984).

But whether the mother 'cut her coat according to her cloth' and made do with the small income, or found ways to supplement the family income by her own work, or used credit to balance the fragile

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

family budget, it was generally at the expense of her own health and enjoyment of life. Mrs Burrows (Life, 1977, p. 112) expressed a common feeling, describing her home in the Fens in 1850–60:

My mother's life was one long life of loving sacrifice. It might be asked how it comes about that with such a mother we, as children, should have had such a hard life of it. But the reason was not in any fault of my mother's. No woman in the world ever strove more earnestly for her children's welfare than my mother did.

FIGHTING FOR BETTER LIVING CONDITIONS

Some respectable working-class women eventually found a way to speak out for better living and working conditions through membership of the Women's Co-operative Guild, founded in 1883, a working-class organisation which they controlled and which they believed understood their needs. Women stood up and fought for better housing, maternity benefits, easier divorce for the poor, educational opportunity, national insurance, and votes for women. Virginia Woolf attended one of their conferences in 1913, and was amazed at the difference between their lives and concerns, and her own as an upper-middle-class wife. She wrote:

They did not stroll through the house and say, that cover must go to the wash or those sheets need changing. They plunged their arms in hot water and scrubbed the clothes themselves. In consequence their bodies were thick-set and muscular, their hands were large...their faces were firm and heavily folded and lined with deep lines...their lips never expressed the lighter and more detached emotions that come into play when the mind is perfectly at ease about the present... They were indigenous and rooted to one spot... Of course they wanted baths and ovens and education and...freedom and air... (Introductory letter, Life, 1977).

The gap in living standards between the working classes and the upper and middle classes was probably at its highest in the Edwardian age, but for the majority of married women in the working class conditions of life had improved by the early twentieth century in that they had some share in the general rise in living

A LIFE OF WILLING SACRIFICE

standards. Better food, better sanitation, better housing, led to longer and healthier lives, and the cheapness of manufactured goods made them available to a wider range of the population.

We have so far been looking at the lives of the respectable working class, who had the energy and determination to marshall their meagre resources and steer clear of debt, drunkenness and what they called 'low living'. A very thin dividing line separated them from the 'roughs' they sometimes despised, frequently looked down on, but close to whom they lived. To this group we will now turn.

Chapter 8

ROUGH AND READY WOMEN

The rough working class were both more and less than the 'Labouring Poor' at the base of the social pyramid. These in 1803 amounted to over a third of the total population, a million of whom were said to be in receipt of poor relief, casual or permanent, because they were 'destitute of the means of subsistence' (Patrick Colquhoun, 1806). And they were not exclusively those poorest people (river-side casuals, workhouse in-and-outs, bar-room loafers) whom Mrs Pember Reeves identified in Lambeth in 1913 as 'anxiously ignored by respectable persons' (Reeves, 1979, p. 2). The rough working class were part but not all of that quarter to a third of the population who lived below the poverty line in the 1890s (Booth, 1903; Rowntree, 1903). Any family was so labelled by the respectable working class if it spent its income recklessly, paying no heed to the morrow, if the father and/or mother drank heavily, or if it constantly got into debt. In other words, a family, poor or not, which did not subscribe to the canons of respectability was considered rough. However, there were large differences between families who earned a reasonable income but spent it carelessly, those with such small or irregular incomes that they were always on the edge of poverty, and those who had to resort to begging, scrounging, thieving, blackmailing or pimping to keep themselves alive. The last were decidedly the bottom of the heap. What united the roughs was that they all tended to be drinkers, gamblers and fighters, living in the streets and going in for riotous living and disorderly amusements whenever they could. They chose a leisure culture that was hedonistic, ribald and sensational—they watched blood sports,

boxing, wrestling, pantomime, theatre, circuses, early music-hall in the form of 'free and easies', and visited fairs and pleasure gardens. Foreign visitors were often horrified by the English addiction to violence, and uneasy at the licence of the lower orders, with its appetite for beer and sensation, celebration of the war between the sexes, and refusal to be serious or rational. Yet although audiences were rowdy and riotous, they were not generally mocking authority *per se*—they derided wicked squires, usurpers, those who abused power (such as the Prince Regent when he ill-treated his wife—see Chapter 2). Sexual permissiveness, drink and riot were all associated with popular festivals, fairs and recreations. Mumming, in which men and women exchanged clothes and visited each other's houses at New Year, was said to be the occasion of much debauchery, as was also the custom of going into the woods the night before May Day.

Organised religion spearheaded attacks on these customs, though clerical opinion was divided. Francis Place was convinced that a revolution in popular manners had taken place by the end of the 1820s. He said the dissolute patterns of behaviour normal among tradesmen and their families in his youth—such as drunkenness, improvidence, uncleanness, theft, violence, gambling, promiscuity, coarse language and addiction to obscene songs, prints and books—had become confined to an underworld of unskilled workers, professional criminals and those in poverty (see his copious material on 'Improvement in Manners and Morals of the People', British Library, Add. MSS 27825, pt 2, etc.). However, respectability did not triumph as rapidly and completely as Place thought, and it seems certain that a vigorous and bawdy plebeian culture co-existed with artisan respectability and was closely intermingled with it, for the rest of the century and beyond. This culture mainly catered for male tastes, though many women were involved as entertainers, barmaids and whores, and from early in the century married women went to drinking places and music-halls.

To the English middle classes, the marital relationships of the poor were incomprehensible and a source of continual debate. They were sometimes naive and hypocritical in suggesting that wife-beating, intemperance, prostitution, infant mortality and deviant sexual patterns were restricted to the lower orders. But gender relations *were* generally different in the rough working class, where most women were neither ladylike nor deferential, where men struggled to exert authority over the women, and where antagonism between the

sexes was openly acknowledged. Some idea of this can be gained from the broadside ballads of the period up to 1830 which show wives as rebellious, scolding and shrewish, handling the household finances more skilfully than the husband, in active roles such as cuckolding him, preventing him from committing adultery, or driving him out of the house when he does. On the whole, marriage is treated lightheartedly, as a common hazard with its rewarding moments, and more as a convenient way of life than as an emotional union. There is a robust attitude towards sex, showing women with strong sexual drives, and women recommending to each other sexually experienced men as husbands. It has been argued that this kind of literature strengthened husbandly authority by inverting it, but it is equally plausible that plebeian marriage was much more egalitarian than Common Law dictated. In the music-hall songs of the later part of the century, too, the battle of the sexes is a common thread, with a woman constantly outwitting a man. The main reason why in this stratum of society men's power over women was constantly challenged was the precarious economic position of the man and his dependence on his wife's earnings and ability to manage the budget.

The lower orders were generally unmoved by the agonies over sex that their betters went through. It is thought that thousands of rough working-class girls and women went through phases of prostitution and gave it up when they married (Ware, 1969). Limited employment opportunities and underemployment drove large numbers of women to prostitution, as a way of making ends meet or providing themselves with small luxuries. Substantial numbers of people lived together without being married, and they did not think it a serious matter to have an illegitimate child, according to Henry Mayhew (Mayhew, 1851). They were not much affected by the teaching of the Churches as regards marriage and sexual morality. Charles Booth concluded in the 1890s that although legal marriage was 'the general rule, even among the roughest class, at least at the outset of life non-legalised cohabitation was far from uncommon among those forming unions later in life' (Booth, 1903). And in evidence to the Divorce Commission in 1910, representatives of several Poor Man's Lawyer organisations confirmed that very little importance was attached to the marriage tie by the people they advised, and there was no shame in acknowledging irregular sexual arrangements (Divorce Commission, 1912-13, p.201). There is no

way of telling the actual extent of Common-Law marriage but one estimate is that in the early nineteenth century as much as a fifth of the population may, at one time or another in their lives, have lived in an illicit relationship—most as a prelude to legal marriage but some as a substitute for it (Gillis, 1985, p.219).

People's reasons for not legally marrying varied over time. Between 1754 and 1837 Dissenters and Catholics could legally marry only in the Church of England, and this many refused to do, especially if no property inheritance was involved. Many people objected to paying marriage fees because they put money into the pockets of clergymen. Others objected to the calling of banns for three weeks before a wedding could take place, thus laying them open to constant teasing by their neighbours. Some women seem to have preferred to retain possession of property and earnings by not marrying. Up to 1834, a woman could claim maintenance for a bastard child by swearing the paternity of it: as Samuel Bamford found, Lancashire women often preferred such payment to marriage. Other women thought men treated wives worse than women to whom they were not legally tied: Booth commented in the 1890s that 'rough labourers...behave best if not married to the woman with whom they live'. And when Lady Bell was conducting her survey of working people in Middlesbrough (Bell, 1907) she met women who feared that getting married would alter the balance of power in their relations with a man, and others who thought it best for a woman to remain an unmarried mother than marry a worthless or dangerous man. Margaret Loane, a nursing visitor, quoted a woman living with a man who would gladly have married her, who steadily refused because 'she didn't choose to be knocked about, or see her children treated bad', Loane said living tally often caused gossip or quarrels, but rarely resulted in permanent ostracism in rough working-class communities (Loane, 1911).

Henry Mayhew described the lives and attitudes to marriage of some roughs. Costermongers, who bought food wholesale and sold it at a stand or on a round, were proud and independent, with their own dress, public-houses, slang and social gaieties; they frequented 'two-penny hops' and were fond of gambling, singing, fighting and their donkeys. Their habits were 'not domestic' and it was important for both men and women costers to know 'how to work their fists well'. Mayhew thought that only one-tenth of costermongers were formally married since they accounted it a waste of money to go

through a wedding ceremony. There was no honour attached to marriage and no shame to concubinage. Couples set up home and work together when very young (a boy of 14 and a girl of 16 was commonplace). They did not recognise any difference between legitimate and illegitimate children. Neither the married nor the unmarried were faithful to each other; even if otherwise faithful, at the pinch of poverty a woman might earn money from casual prostitution and this was not regarded as shameful. Many men left their stockmoney with their women, taking out a few shillings for drink or gambling. When quite young, a coster child was placed out in the care of a neighbour, so the mother could go out to work; a fond mother would visit the child during the day, or have it brought to a meeting point so that she could suckle it. When the child was old enough s/he passed the day in the care of an older sister, in the playground or the gutter, among other children, and eventually a girl came to keep guard over younger siblings or earn money by looking after someone else's child. Few children received any education, though some went to Ragged Schools 'to save the mother the trouble of tending them at home'. Everything had to be sacrificed to earning a living, and at an early age children were sent out in the evenings to sell nuts, oranges, flowers etc. in any public place where they could find a pitch.

Mayhew judged that not one in twenty London dustmen was married, though they all lived with a woman. Their homes were cramped and cheerless, almost without furniture, but they spent little time there. The women said they earned half as much as the men, doing the same work, but that they spent half their joint income on drink; they complained that many men abused their 'wives' and beat them, especially when they were drunk. Mayhew wrote about the costermongers:

The costermongers...can understand that it is the duty of the woman to contribute to the happiness of the man, but cannot feel that there is a reciprocal duty from the man to the woman. The wife is considered as an inexpensive servant and the disobedience of a wish is punished with blows. She must work early and late, and to the husband must be given the proceeds of her labour. Often when the man is in one of his drunken fits—which sometimes last two or three days continuously—she must by her sole exertion find food for herself and him too. To live in peace

with him there must be no murmuring, no tiring under work, no fancied cause for jealousy—for if there be, she is either beaten into submission or cast adrift to begin life again—as another’s leavings (Mayhew, 1851, vol.1, p.43).

Mayhew described the worst cases, and underestimated the ability of many coster women to stand up to their men. But many women were so bullied, and this raises the difficult question of why the large number of women living tally with costers and dustmen stayed with such men, when they were not obliged by law to do so and the men had no legal claim on their earnings, so the women had some choice in the matter. Children were obviously a consideration, and women did not usually earn enough on their own comfortably to maintain a home. But economic and emotional dependence were clearly intertwined, the law playing no role. Perhaps Mayhew’s understanding that ‘a dustman will not think of sitting down for a spree without his woman’ showed some sense of equality that appealed to her (Mayhew, 1984, p.359).

Though a substantial number of the rough working class lived ‘tally’ (without being legally married) throughout the nineteenth century, by far the majority did marry. Their motives and needs were probably not much different from those of the less conventional, but family and community pressures for marriage were stronger, especially among those who grew up in rural areas. Attitudes to marriage changed among the rough working class during the century, but not due to any growth of romantic feeling about it. The clauses with respect to bastardy were among the harshest of the 1834 New Poor Law. Unwed mothers were stripped of their right to outrelief. It was no longer possible for her to claim maintenance from the putative father by swearing the paternity—she had to provide corroborative evidence of the man’s involvement. In order to obtain any assistance she had no choice but the workhouse. The law was reversed in 1844, but women had a hard time tracking down a man in an increasingly urban and mobile population. The long-term effect was to discourage motherhood outside marriage, and in the 1840s the illegitimacy ratios began to decline. From the 1850s onwards women were increasingly forced out of higher paying jobs, which made it less possible for them to keep themselves and more essential for them to share a home with a man. The Poor Man’s Lawyer organisations told the Royal Commission on Divorce in

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

1910 that 'women feel compelled to be legally married to the man they live with, due mainly to the legal hold over her husband which marriage gives a woman, rather than to any sense of the sanctity of marriage or to the recognition of the immorality of the union.' A host of benefits, such as payments on insurance policies, from trade unions or mutual insurance funds, or charitable handouts, were available to married women but not always to Common-Law wives. At the beginning of World War 1 in 1914, unwed women found themselves unable to get the payments made to legal dependants of soldiers, though later in the War children's allowances were granted if the father admitted paternity (Davies, 1963, p.90). Apart from such changes in the law, there was the unremitting pressure of moral vigilance campaigns throughout the century, as a result of which married women came to regard themselves as superior to the unmarried (or at least more farsighted). Most women eventually pretended to be legally married even when they were not, even in the rough working class.

Members of the rough working class often married only when the woman was pregnant. Couples sometimes set up housekeeping in anticipation of marrying, but put off the ceremony until a time economically convenient to both parties. Sexual fidelity within marriage was not always considered very important. If marriage turned out really badly the partners often separated and went to live with someone else, or committed bigamy, or went in for 'sale of wives' (a form of 'popular divorce'). Wife sales were less common in cities, where people could separate and remarry without anyone knowing or caring. The courts seemed reluctant to treat bigamy or wife sales seriously, and very light sentences were given to those found guilty (Menefee, 1981).

MARRIED WOMEN'S WORK

The central and most important feature of a woman's married life in the rough working class was that she would probably always have to do some work to earn money, as well as looking after the house and children, and budgeting the income which her husband produced. This was also true of many of the wives in the respectable working-class, since only about 15 per cent of the most skilled and highest paid 'aristocrats of labour' could earn enough regularly to be the sole breadwinner. But for the poorest sections of the working class there

was no choice for the wives but to work or starve. About half of working men were unskilled, and poorly paid even when in full-time employment. Few could regularly maintain their families; fewer still could provide for their old age. Many worked in seasonal trades, for only part of the year, and the wife had to become the breadwinner for the rest of the year. For the totally destitute there was the workhouse, but that was not a choice that people made if they could possibly avoid it.

Around 1800 there was a great deal of unemployment among women, their opportunities for productive work at home or employment in the older domestic industries having diminished. This was constantly noted as the poor rates increased: 'The circumstances most to be regretted in the state of the labouring classes is the want of constant and suitable employment for women and children,' wrote Sir Frederick Eden in 1796 (Eden, 1796, vol.iii, p.704). Some new domestic industries were introduced, to provide work for women, and a new class of female day labourers developed in agriculture. In the towns the factory system provided an ever-widening field of employment for women and, although some objected to the regularity and discipline of factory work, by the 1840s working women of the industrial areas of the North were thought to be more independent and self-reliant than those elsewhere, and they earned better wages. From the 1830s some factory women combined in an effort to raise their wages to the level of men's, and although they succeeded only in one instance (in the textile industry, where if men and women weavers did the same work they received the same wages) they were less exploited than most women workers. It was in the coal mines that women (and men too) had since the Middle Ages performed the most difficult and dangerous work, as the Report of the Coal Mines Commission made clear (the employment of women and children underground in mines was banned in 1842). Women working at home, such as nailworkers and lacemakers, were powerless to get a decent wage from greedy and dishonest middlemen, and even worse were the conditions of London dressmakers and milliners, of whom the Children's Employment Commission said in 1843, 'there is nothing in the accounts of the worst conducted factories to be compared with the facts elicited in the present inquiry.' The wages of domestic servants and needleworkers were depressed by the large number of women seeking work in occupations considered less rough than factory

work (Pinchbeck, 1981, pp.308–9). We have no idea how many married women earned money by doing casual work such as taking in washing and ironing, nursing the sick, dressmaking, looking after children, doing housework for others, though it is rare to find a nineteenth-century autobiography which does not mention the mother doing some such work. But since women's labour in the home was taken for granted and never given a high value, they were not well paid for doing similar work in other people's homes.

Throughout the nineteenth century the need for poorer married women to supplement the family income did not change, but from the 1830s and 1840s the position of women in industry and their suitability for wage-earning occupations outside the home became subjects for public discussion. Shocked by the conditions under which women worked, many upper- and middle-class Victorians took the extreme view that women's place was in the homes, that they would be better off there, and that women should be excluded from factories. They did not believe the evidence that if these women stayed at home, many would die of starvation. Nor did they notice that domestic servants, dressmakers, milliners and needlewomen, doing work considered suitable for women, were just as exploited as factory workers, and some more so. More moderate reformers concentrated on securing measures of protection for women workers in some factories, but this unfortunately had the effect of making women's work appear less arduous than men's, which provided a rational reason for paying women less. Also, some women complained that they were by legislation removed from some of the best paying jobs, such as mining and night work in factories.

At the end of the century many wives still had to earn the family income when their husbands were unemployed; for instance, gas workers were laid off in the summer, whereas building workers were unemployed in the winter (Jones, 1971, pp.40–1). Illness or injury, without sickness or injury payment, also left many men dependent on their wives for survival. When a pound a week was reckoned the absolute minimum on which a wife could budget, Sir Robert Giffen estimated (1892) that there were 2 million families (roughly 8 million people) whose total income did not exceed a pound a week. Philip Snowden showed from Board of Trade returns that half the adult male workers did not earn 25s 9d a week, and most labourers earned less than a pound a week (Snowden, 1912). As the Lady Commissioners commented in their 1895 Report, 'The wives and daughters of men of

small producing and earning power have at all times been obliged to be breadwinners.' The problem was that their training and sex did not enable them to get high earnings in the labour market. According to the Board of Trade Report on Earnings and Hours for 1906, the average earnings of an adult woman in a full working week ranged from 18s 8d in the cotton industry (where women earned the highest wages) down to 11s 3d in food and tobacco. About one-third of the whole body of working women earned less than 12s a week. Sidney Webb estimated that the average net earnings of an adult woman throughout the year were 10s 10½d (allowing for an average of five weeks' lost time in the year through unemployment, sickness, etc.) compared with 25s 9d for an adult man. But many women were reduced to doing outwork in their own homes, for pitiful wages which grossly exploited their labour. The *Daily News* Sweated Industries Exhibition of 1906 revealed the wretched working conditions of needlewomen, cardboard boxmakers, artificial flower makers, brush-makers, who earned about 1d an hour (Drake, 1984, p.44). The 1914 Report of the Departmental Committee on Sickness Benefit Claims under the National Insurance Act said,

Secretaries of societies have expressed themselves as astounded by their realisation for the first time, on the coming into operation of the Act, of the kind of work done by women in certain occupations, and of the amount of sickness entailed by the conditions under which they live.

There are many reasons why women were so badly paid and so inadequately organised, why male trade unions did not, for example, press for equal pay as the best means to deal with competition from women workers, or try to enrol more women as members. Suffice it to say that most male workers seem to have been satisfied to be defined as the principal breadwinners, and used this from the 1830s onwards to press for better wages for themselves and to exclude women from employment whenever there was a shortage of work. As Barbara Drake wrote in 1920, 'A belief in the divine right of every man to his job is not peculiar to kings and capitalists, and men in organised trades are not disposed to share these advantages with a host of women competitors.'

Not all married women in the rough working class worked and not all who did were *obliged* to work. Clementina Black's

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

investigators in 1915 (Black, 1983), found there were four identifiable groups: (a) those who, although the family income was inadequate, did not earn (it was in this group, said the authors sternly, that gossipers at doorways, frequenters of public-houses and neglecters of children were to be found); (b) those who, because the family income was inadequate, did earn (the authors thought these the most over-worked, hardest pressed and unhappiest of working women); (c) those who, the family income being adequate, did not earn (this group was not represented in the book); and (d) those who, although the family income was adequate for the supply of necessities, yet earned (this was the group of whom the feminist authors most approved, and their evidence showed overwhelmingly, they claimed, that 'the mental effect upon the women themselves of being wage-earners is good'.) Other evidence suggests, however, that far fewer married women were registered as working in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—probably less than half—than in the mid-nineteenth century (Hewitt, 1958, p.19). In 1911, when the Census first gave data on married women workers as a group, the proportion who worked was 10 per cent. That figure did not include wives doing casual work, home workers, or those who chose not to admit to the enumerators that they were working, in case it affected their claim to poor relief or charitable hand-outs. But by 1911 many married women had accepted the view that they should work only when it was essential. It seems clear that by then the male breadwinner family model, with its concomitant sexual divisions of labour, was accepted by working-class men and women as well as middle-class observers and policy makers.

HOUSING

The roughs lived in the worst of the housing available to the working class. The sanitary conditions of London were described in a vast and compendious report for the years 1848–9 which excited great alarm, and some slums were cleared by opening up new thoroughfares, but that simply crowded the poor even more into what housing was left. They were crammed in the kind of central slums, rookeries, dilapidated ancient houses, described by Mayhew in 1851, by Dickens in novel form in 1852 (*Bleak House*, and *Our Mutual Friend*) and by Andrew Mearns in *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883). In Birmingham in 1911 nearly half the population lived

within a mile of the city centre, which had been transformed by late Victorian improvements. But around the central shopping and business district there was a 'garland of poverty' consisting of overcrowded slums. A typical slum court consisted of five back-to-back houses, containing perhaps 50 people, with no mains water supply and few with a sink. There were two wash-houses with coal-fired boilers for household laundry, and five dry privies shared by ten households (Victoria County History, 1964). Surprisingly, there were no riots in England concerning bad housing, and the Social Democratic Federation made entirely unsuccessful efforts to organise rent strikes.

Some wealthy philanthropists tried to improve the living conditions of the urban poor. 'Model cottages' were built in large numbers in various parts of England, the earliest in 1844, and by the early 1880s over 50,000 people in London were living in model dwellings of various types (Owen, 1964, p.385). The model buildings were generally attacked for their ugly appearance and locations. The very poor could not afford the rents for these houses, yet the philanthropic societies did not make profits and the schemes did not expand, though appeals to assist in housing the worthy poor continued throughout the century. Social reformer Octavia Hill (1838–1912), on the other hand, designed a system of housing for the very poor. She believed that character as well as homes must be reformed. Her means of doing this was to employ rent collectors of gentle birth to supervise and improve the lives of the poor. Her system was much praised, but her efforts had no discernible effect on London's housing problem.

The state was reluctant to intervene in the housing market, but the crowding together of the poor in slums was seen to be dangerous to health. Housing Acts in 1885 and 1890 eased local authority borrowing for housebuilding, and from the early 1890s the newly formed London County Council built the first large modern housing estates in the country, followed by Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool and Bradford. In comparison with the size of the problem, however, only small improvements were achieved, and in 1915 the problems of overcrowding and homelessness remained as great as in 1900 (Gauldie, 1974). Yet, as Mrs Pember Reeves remarked of Lambeth in 1913, 'Less ultra-respectable neighbourhoods may have a certain picturesqueness, or give a sense of community or of careless comradeship, with their untidy women

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

chatting in the doorways and their unoccupied men lounging at the street corners' (Reeves, 1979, p.3).

FOOD

As was pointed out in the last chapter, the food of the working classes was poor in quality throughout most of the nineteenth century. The very poorest had a dull and unvaried diet because they could only afford the cheapest of ingredients such as bread and potatoes. Up to the 1880s most of what they ate was adulterated. Yet the diet of most people slowly improved, and output and sale of milk and milk products rose by about a third between 1870 and 1900.

The rough working class did not consist only of the poorest and most destitute. In Henry Mayhew's accounts of London in the 1850s both working men and working women purchased their meals day after day in the streets. The coffee-stall supplied a warm breakfast of coffee and bread and butter; there were stalls selling shellfish of many kinds, hot eels or pea soup, hot potatoes, sandwiches, meat puddings, trotters, nuts and oranges, cakes and tarts, for midday or evening meals, and other stalls selling 'sweet stuff' such as lozenges and candies, and drinks such as tea, coffee and cocoa, ginger-beer, lemonade, Persian sherbet, curds and whey, and rice milk. In some of the parks people could get fresh milk from a cow, though Mayhew was told in 1851 that the costermongers 'reckon milk sickly'. Costermongers (of whom there were as many women as men) had a completely 'out-door diet', eating breakfast at the coffee stall, and for dinner either buying 'block ornaments' ('small, dark-coloured pieces of meat') which they cooked in a tap-room, hot meat, fruit pies or saveloys with a pint of beer or a glass of neat gin (Mayhew, 1984, pp. 116–20).

Other large towns and cities, too, had their street stalls and shops selling prepared food, which proved a boon to many married women working outside the home. Lancashire was famous for the origins offish and chip shops, tripe and cowheel shops and so on. The sale of sheep's trotters, as a regular street-trade, was apparently confined to London, Liverpool, Newcastle-on-Tyne and a few other big towns. It began in the 1830s when glue and size became cheaper, and it paid the fellmonger better to dispose of trotters as an article cooked for the poor, than to the glue-boiler.

ROUGH AND READY WOMEN

SEX AND CHILDBIRTH

In the rough working class the crowded conditions of everyday life made sex an unavoidable fact. Beds and bedrooms were shared by parents and children, and although parents did not discuss sex with children they overheard the gossip of others. Robert Roberts wrote of incest as a fact of rough working-class life in early twentieth-century Salford, though he was quick to note that it was regarded as 'the ultimate disgrace.' (Roberts, 1971, 1976). Childbirth was difficult and dangerous for all women throughout the nineteenth century, but the poor suffered more long-term maternal complications than the well-to-do (see Chapter 6). It was reported to the Factory Commissioners in 1833 that the lives of women married to unskilled men were unremittingly harsh. Married between ages 15 and 19, it was considered quite natural for pretty girls to lose their looks 'about two months after marriage'. They worked up to the date of confinement and returned to work about two weeks later. They had frequent miscarriages. Elizabeth Taylor, a midwife who had begun her profession when she was 12, said when she attended women in Nottingham she often had to beg a light from the watchman because there was neither fire nor candle in the house; her patients seldom had any tea, sugar, gruel or other necessities, and often not a bed to lie on. Mrs Lay ton, who in 1902 got a certificate as a *bona fide* midwife, said of the 1870s,

When I remember the methods adopted to carry out childbirth [then] it seems wonderful to me that so many mothers lived to bring a large family into the world. In some cases the poor unfortunate patient was not allowed to have her face and hands washed for days... Then, after the trying ordeal they had gone through, they were not allowed to go to sleep for some hours (Life, 1977, p. 31).

Attempts from the early nineteenth century onwards to encourage the poor to limit their families were not successful. The average family size in 1871 was six surviving children, though one in five marriages produced ten or more. By 1914 the birth-rate was declining in the upper levels of the working class, though the dramatic fall in family size occurred only after the War. The working class limited its family size when it was ready to, using information

gained from peer groups, workmates, friends and relations; *coitus interruptus*, called 'not going all the way', seems to have been the most widely practised method, or abstinence, as Kathleen Dayus realised when she heard her mother one night saying, 'No! You can put it away! I've already had a baker's dozen. I'm 'avin' no mower so yow can get to sleep!'

In 1914, one hundred and sixty members of the Women's Co-operative Guild wrote letters which were published in a book, telling of childbirth and death, of exhaustion and self-sacrifice, of totally inadequate pre-natal care and abortion (Maternity, 1978). Their experience was summed up in bald statements at the end of each letter: 'wages 14s, three children, two stillbirths, two miscarriages'; 'wages 18s-22s, eight children, two stillbirths'; 'wages 20s-22s 6d, five children, five stillbirths'. There were frequent references to incompetent doctors or midwives. The births took place at home, attended by a doctor if they could afford one (usual fee 21s) or otherwise a midwife at 10-12s. Concern about the high infant mortality rate led to the introduction of the Midwives Act of 1902 which required the training and registration of midwives (implementation was delayed to enable some of the untrained to acquire qualifications). Almost every letter to the Guild stressed lack of food, overwork before confinement, and excessively quick return to outside work or household chores, as the prime causes of stillbirth and miscarriage, and sometimes lifelong disablement for the mother. One woman whose husband earned 28s a week had seven children, three stillbirths, four miscarriages, and wrote, 'I looked after my husband and children well, but I often went short of food myself, though my husband did not know it. He used to think that my appetite was bad and that I could not eat.' Mention of birth control was infrequent, but a surprising number of women mentioned abortifacients, which they always called 'drugs'. The most dangerous were those based on a lead substance (diachylon) which could be legally bought at chemists (according to reports in 1905-6 in the *British Medical Journal*). The information was handed from woman to woman by word of mouth, like other household remedies. There is fragmentary evidence about abortion. Ethel Clark talked of 'the joy of a miscarriage which helped a woman back to happiness again' in her village of Woolaston, Gloucestershire in the early twentieth century, Faith Osgerby's mother had taken gunpowder to try to abort a child. Margaret Perry's mother had tried to induce an

ROUGH AND READY WOMEN

abortion by drinking gin, soaking in hot baths, and jumping off the copper (Burnett, 1984). E.Lewis Faning estimated that 10 per cent of conceptions in women married before 1910 ended in miscarriages or abortions (Faning, 1949).

The Co-operative Guild had a sustained campaign to improve the virtually non-existent maternal and infant care then available to the poorer woman; its pressure had helped secure the inclusion of 30s maternity benefit in the National Insurance Act, 1911, and in 1913 the benefit was accepted as legally the property of the mother. The quest for national efficiency and the regeneration of the race, following evidence at the time of the Boer War that working-class recruits were unhealthy and underfed, resulted in many politicians being sympathetic to interventionist procedures. In 1915 the Guild realised that more attention was likely to be paid to the mothers of the 'nation's assets' in wartime, and it urged the government to pressurise local authorities and health authorities to use already existing powers to provide maternity and infant welfare centres, free extra nutrition for needy mothers, home help services and 'pure milk' depots. Some authorities were dilatory, but pressure was kept up for a new system of social welfare for mothers. Despite the considerable evidence of continuing severe poverty, national death rates continued the trend of decline discernible from the 1870s, and infant mortality began to fall decisively, for the first time in British history, from an average of 152.2 per thousand live births in England and Wales in 1898–1902, to 111.8 in 1908–12.

ATTITUDES TO CHILDREN

If the poor had been prudent and careful they would not have had children at all; they could have lived on their wages and put a little by for old age. But the fact was that they wanted to have children. Kathleen Dayus said most women in pre-World War 1 Birmingham slums wanted a large family—'the more the better' they used to say. Comparatively few of even the poorest of families deliberately neglected a sick or weakly child or accepted the survival of the fittest theory, though lack of means determined access to medical care. But there was an economic level below which the struggle for life had to come before other considerations. Most of the early nineteenth-century reports of Commissioners on conditions of labour argued that parents as much as other employers were responsible for illegal

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

and excessive employment of children, intense poverty and starvation being the reasons. In 1831 employers other than parents were protected against legal responsibility for too early employment of children due to falsification of certificates of age by parents or guardians. In 1833 parents of a child or 'any person having benefit from the wages of such a child' employed in a cotton mill were made to share responsibility with employers for illegal employment outside prescribed hours or without the part-time school attendance. Boys and girls earned money for their parents when very young, by work in the home, casual work outside, or factory work, and when elementary education became general around 1880 many children played truant to help out at home.

In many autobiographies the closer relationship of children to their mothers is stressed, but Kathleen Dayus for example preferred her father, who talked and listened to his children, gave them occasional treats, and moderated his wife's ill-treatment.

RELATIONS BETWEEN HUSBANDS AND WIVES

The image of all working-class wives as delicate, passive, immobile victims of massive, brutal husbands, which was used in campaigns against wife-beating, was not accurate for most of the roughs. Husbands were often up to four inches shorter than upper-class men and small and wiry; wives tended to be stout, heavy domestic labour having developed their shoulders and biceps. Female patience and meekness were not generally noticeable, though women were usually weaker fighters, and received severe injuries from their domestic fights, which were often over money or food or men's drinking habits. However, there *were* over-strained, exhausted mothers with drunken, brutal husbands who blighted the lives of their wives and hungry, miserable children. By the middle of the nineteenth century British consumption of alcohol was prodigious, and the adulteration of beer sold for public consumption had very serious implications for health and behaviour and domestic relations in the rough working class. According to Oddy and Miller, concerned doctors noticed around 1830, when the Beer Act opened the way to the spread of beer-shops, the use of *nux vomica* (strychnine, which in small repeated doses is an hallucinogen) and *occulus indicus* (a bitter poison which can act convulsively on the central nervous system and induce confusion) to compensate for the dilution of the beer with

ROUGH AND READY WOMEN

water. Some workmen liked the adulterated beer: pure beer, they said, 'just went down and they felt nothing of it' (Oddy and Miller, 1976). This adulteration may explain some of the degradation and brutality that pervaded rough lower-class life. In 1866 the Commissioner of Inland Revenue reported that 'acts of violence and crime were especially prevalent in those counties where adulterated beer is known mostly to be found'. Adulteration of beer died away in the 1880s (by 1896 salt was the major additive). The campaign against drink began in the 1820s, at first urging moderation by private choice and prohibiting only 'ardent spirits'. By the 1840s 'temperance' had come to mean total abstinence, and in an effort to save the family by redeeming the drunken husband the evangelical churches and groups like the Women's Christian Temperance Union produced a huge literature of salvation. The campaign was not conspicuously successful, *per capita* beer consumption reaching its peak in 1874, but excessively heavy drinking declined towards the end of the century.

In the rough working class the initial affection on which most marriages were based was soon dampened by the struggle for survival. Many marriages endured because there was no practical alternative, the partners finding ways to live together but not necessarily getting closer.

WHAT CONSTITUTED A GOOD HUSBAND

According to Mrs Pember Reeves, in 1913 a man who gave his wife a regular sum of money for housekeeping was considered a good husband. The regularity of the sum was considered more crucial than its total. Such men were rarer in the rough than in the respectable working class. Some historians stress the deceit and tensions and domestic violence generated by scarce financial resources (Ross, 1982). Wives in the rough working class had to be prepared to stand their ground against their husbands, to make sure they got as much as possible of his wages and to prevent him drinking away their income. Wives probably both accepted and resented male domination. A good husband was also a man who was not too sexually demanding, and who 'never laid a finger on the children', though a certain amount of wife-abuse was tolerated. A foreign visitor had pointed out in 1826 that the symbolic English husband was Punch, who in side shows beat his wife to death

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

(Puckler-Muschau, 1828). The Punch and Judy show became part of the English seaside holiday by the 1890s, amusing adults and children alike with its cheerful brutality. Frances Power Cobbe wrote in 1878 that an assault on a wife by a husband 'seemed to be surrounded by a certain halo of jocularity', and that it was sometimes excused on the grounds that a man had a right under Common Law to chastise his wife if she had nagged or scolded, been a slattern or was in the habit of getting intoxicated (Cobbe 1878). Magistrates and the police were loathe to interfere in cases of domestic violence, believing that most cases settled themselves, but that is not to say that ordinary people approved of men beating their wives mercilessly. In Leeds about 1870 there was a custom called 'Riding the Stang', when a procession of men beating trays and cans preceded a man carried high on two poles who recited a poem levelled at 'Nick Wilbur', a notorious local drunkard and wife-beater. It promised vengeance on anyone who followed his example by neglecting his children or consorting with loose women, and was obviously an attempt by the community to enforce morality (Burnett, 1984, p. 244). The 1878 Matrimonial Causes Act gave magistrates power to grant a separation order with maintenance to a wife whose husband had been convicted of aggravated assault upon her. Despite the difficulty of enforcing payment of maintenance, of which women were well aware, between 1897 and 1906 the courts granted 87,000 separation and maintenance orders. Obviously a substantial number of women were unwilling to continue to endure violence for the sake of having a home.

THE WIFE MANAGING THE BUDGET

For a wife to make ends meet when the family was in or near poverty was an almost impossible task. At the end of the century some people still used old flour bags as pillow cases and towels, old sacks and coats for blankets, orange boxes for furniture. Working-class women were often criticised for choosing a limited and unbalanced diet. But as Rowntree recognised in the 1890s, the adoption of an economical and nutritious diet required considerable changes in established customs. With good reason, considering the state of what they could afford to buy, the English urban working class had a prejudice against raw fruit, vegetables and milk, and it lasted well into the

twentieth century. It may have been inability to afford other foods that led to a concentration on bread and butter and potatoes, but they were cheap and filling, which is what the poor wanted. As Elizabeth Roberts has shown, working-class women in Lancashire were good cooks who did wonders with the cheapest ingredients, when they could afford them. But some of the poorest families had bad cooking facilities and few implements, and in 1889 the London School Board concluded that 12.8 per cent of children attending London schools were permanently undernourished; by 1905 there were 300 charitable feeding institutions in Britain, providing free or cheap meals for schoolchildren. The Education (Provision of Meals) Act became law in December 1906, permitting (but not requiring) local authorities to provide facilities for meals for needy schoolchildren, to be financed by voluntary contributions, charges on parents, or as a last resort from public funds. In 1914 a new Act made the provision of meals compulsory for all local authorities, provided an Exchequer subsidy, authorised feeding during school holidays and left determination of need to the school medical officers who were to assess need purely on grounds of health rather than parental income.

For the very poor whom the middle-class called 'undeserving' (of aid from them) the best hope in times of real need was the concern and friendship of relatives or neighbours only slightly better off than themselves. This kind of mutual aid had no visibility and was often overlooked and discounted by outside observers. The poor helped each other in times of illness or catastrophe; women called the midwife and assisted each other in childbirth, suggested remedies for aches and pains, organised neighbourhood-based charitable exchanges and lent each other food and small sums of money. 'Were it not for the mutual kindness of the people among themselves, it would be utterly impossible to carry on the management of the poor with any degree of comfort and efficiency,' Thomas Chalmers told the Church of Scotland in 1822. Extended family support, given from affection or duty or in the expectation that those who helped would some day need similar help themselves, has been documented throughout the nineteenth century in Lancashire (Anderson, 1971).

The poorest families sought credit from ordinary shopkeepers, getting their goods 'on tick' or 'on the strap'; this meant shopping at small corner shops which charged much higher prices than, say, the Co-op shops which did not allow credit. Men never asked for such

credit, preferring to send their wives or children for it. Margaret Loane observed that men were notoriously poor shoppers, so well aware that they could not 'make the money go round' that a widower would hand his wages over to a 16-year-old daughter 'who knew what her mother used to do' rather than attempt the job himself (Loane, 1909, p. 183). The poor thought all shopkeepers made a fortune out of their businesses, but it was not so; Mayhew described how in the 1850s a widow running a small greengrocer's shop was completely ruined when two customers died owing her debts between them of 30s. Some poor people paid their debts conscientiously, but others simply took their custom elsewhere, when pressed for payment. Many small shops failed for that reason. Not paying bills was one way to balance the budget; not paying the rent, and then 'doing a moonlight flit' by leaving one house and renting another (possessions being few, this was an easy operation), was another ploy of the wretchedly poor in the cities. It was more difficult to do this in small communities where the landlord could find them, but even then the landlord knew he could not 'get blood out of a stone' and that it was not worth pursuing a tenant who was broke. Alice Foley described how her mother gave birth to her in 1891 after trudging with two children from Bolton to Manchester, her husband and three boys having piled their beds and few sticks of furniture on to a cart and jolted off leaving rent and paltry debts unpaid (Burnett, 1984, p. 100).

The expansion of credit facilities in the late nineteenth century provided opportunities but also pitfalls for the unwary housewife. We do not know how many women sought credit loan, but it is thought to have been substantial: the most acceptable form, to which no stigma attached, was buying from a door-to-door salesman who sold £1 of goods to be repaid over 21 weeks at 1s a week. Tallymen or 'scotch hawkers' often sold inferior and expensive goods, but ticket clubs were used to purchase better goods from stores. Women handled the transactions with pawnbrokers. It needed skill and experience to know which shops paid best for pledges of different goods, and how to get the maximum value. Many families pawned a bundle regularly each Monday, retrieving it on Friday. George Sims, a journalist, said of women in the East End of London in 1907:

From home to the pawnshop and from pawnshop to the public house is the conventional Monday morning trip of a vast number of poor married women... The women meet their neighbours at

ROUGH AND READY WOMEN

the pawnshop and adjourn to the public house for a glass and a gossip.

Some families were so poor that they had nothing to pledge for credit. Mrs Wrigley told of such a neighbour with five children to keep, who went out washing and cleaning to add to her husband's earnings of 18s a week, but still needed some money for food. She 'borrowed' a marble timepiece from her employer's house, when they were away for the summer, and pledged it for a few shillings, meaning to take it back when her employers returned. But her employers came back unexpectedly, and had her arrested when she could not produce the clock; the next day, her husband's employer lent them the money to retrieve it. But, said, Mrs Wrigley, 'the neighbours turned against her' (Life, 1977, p. 62). The pawnbroker's trade did not decline until the period between the two World Wars.

The least respectable way to borrow money was from a moneylender: A World War 1 study found that those with a clean rent book would borrow a lump sum of about a pound from which between 1s 6d and 5s would be deducted in interest. The very poor might borrow 1s or 2s on which they paid a penny in the shilling weekly interest. The first loan was often taken to escape a pauper funeral, to tide the family over illness, or to buy children's shoes. But the spiral of debt was hard to check, when people had such small resources.

POOR RELIEF

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 intended that those physically capable of work should have no option but to support themselves. Public aid was given only to those—the aged, disabled, etc.—who could be supported neither by their own labour nor that of their families. Between the 1830s and 1860s the Poor Law administrators in practice operated with considerably varying degrees of harshness or generosity. Some, contrary to the spirit of the 1834 Act, supplemented wages and gave outdoor relief to the unemployed (as they had done before the Act) recognising that jobs could not be found; others offered only the workhouse. The situation was highly anarchic. Expenditure rose by 40 per cent between 1850 and 1870, faster than the rate of population growth, and the response was a tightening up of Poor Law policy from 1871.

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

Wherever possible, out-relief was cut back, 'deserving' cases were referred to charities, and the 'undeserving' were placed in workhouses. There was more stringent investigation of applicants for and recipients of outdoor relief. Mothers on out-door relief were encouraged or forced by the threat of withdrawal of relief to send some or all of their children into the workhouse so that the mother could support herself by work. These changes of policy hit women particularly hard. A punitive approach to the poorest survived accumulating evidence that much poverty was not self-inflicted. Small wonder that in 1870 and still in 1900 support from poor relief was the least sought and the last resort of the poor.

LEISURE ACTIVITIES FOR MARRIED WOMEN

Popular culture in the nineteenth century, much of which—like the pub and the fair—survived from pre-industrial England, though new forms arose in response to popular demand, such as the popular press, the music hall and spectator sports, was neither godly nor rational. The leisure industry mainly catered for male tastes, but rougher women went to the drinking and gambling places, 'penny gaffs' (back-street theatres) and music-halls. In the late 1860s Thomas Wright described the 'roughs' who sat in the galleries of theatres as:

those who came with unwashed faces and dirty attire, who brought bottles of drink with them, who *would* smoke despite the notices that smoking was prohibited, who favoured the bad with a stamping accompaniment and took the most noisy part in applauding or giving 'the call' to the performers.

The females of the class, he said, were generally accompanied by infants who were sure to cry and make a disturbance at some interesting part of the performance (Wright, 1867). By the 1880s many theatres became more respectable and raised their prices, so excluding the poorest, but there were still large numbers of roughs who could afford tickets for the music-hall, which was the best attended of popular amusements at the end of the century (the London halls alone sold around 25 million tickets annually). The attractions of pub, fair or music-hall were enhanced by the limited comfort of their homes. Kathleen Day us told how before the First

World War her mother used to follow her husband to the pub, calling out, 'Mine's a pint' as she entered, and getting it because 'they all knew what Mum was like when she was in one of her moods...' Mrs Lay ton expressed a respectable working-class woman's attitude towards roughs and their amusements in the 1880s in these terms (Life, 1977, p. 48):

The [Co-operative Women's] Guild's training altered the whole course of my life. When I look back and think what my life might have been without its training and influence, I shudder. I was living in a house with two other families whose only ideas in life were work and sleep, and, for recreation, a visit each evening to the public-house or a cheap music hall. They tried very hard to induce me to go with them, and possibly if I had not been connected with the Guild, when my baby died I might have fallen a victim to the drink habit.

Domestic servant Hannah Cullwick, on the other hand, described going out alone to public-houses late at night, 'in her dirt' and wearing rural-style bonnets and shawls, walking through crowds of drunken men without fear, and wandering at night across fields and waste ground, and all without being molested or harassed. She did not think of herself as particularly unusual in these habits, saying that many other lower-class women and girls did rough, sordid or dirty work and were likewise free of the constraints applied to Victorian 'ladies' (Cullwick, 1984).

Despite the appalling physical conditions of their lives, the rough working class were not all depressed, dejected, or downcast. In their leisure pursuits the women were often as raucous, riotous and roistering as the men. They believed in a short life and a merry one, if they could get it. Beatrice Webb said of the Whitechapel tenants of a housing block which she managed in 1885, 'They seem light-hearted enough, in spite of misery and disease' and of casual workers she said they were 'drunken, thieving and loose in their morality', but also 'generous hearted and affectionate'. She was uncomfortable among the street crowds, saying their 'ceaseless, sensual laugh, coarse jokes and unloving words' depressed her, as did 'the regular recurrence of street sensations, quarrels and fights; the greedy street-bargaining and the petty theft and gambling'. She called it a 'monotonous and yet excited life' and thought the bright

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

side of East End life was the sociability and generous sharing of small means (Webb, 1926, pp. 261, 267).

STATE INTERVENTION AND SURVIVAL

Publicly-financed welfare grew at local and national level but still by 1914 the very poor survived primarily by their own efforts and by the help of family and neighbours. Charity was also very important. The expanding network of social policies, particularly after 1900, obliged working-class parents to adopt new and different standards of parenthood, but because of their lack of individual resources such state intervention often exacerbated the difficulties of poor wives and mothers. They therefore expressed little faith or interest in them. There was widespread hostility to measures which entailed closer control over, and intrusion into, their lives. They were suspicious of health visitors, who criticised their housekeeping and child-care. School attendance officers were disliked for failing to understand some families' need of children's help or income. What the poor really wanted was improved income and welfare without strings. There is no doubt that poor women would have welcomed free access to medical attention for themselves and their children. From the 1890s the Independent Labour Party demanded family allowances paid to the mother, but these did not come until 1946, and even then they were opposed by trade unions who thought them a cheap substitute for higher wages (Hall, et al., 1975 pp. 184–6).

What generally made the lives of wives in the rough working class bearable was the hope that bad times would be followed by good: wages might improve, food prices might fall, employment might be more available, children would grow up and begin to earn. As Rowntree pointed out in 1899, 'the life of a labourer is marked by five alternating periods of want and comparative plenty': he or she was poorest when a child in a large family, as the parent of a large family, and in old age; he or she was best off in the ten years or so between childhood and marriage, earning a wage, and again in middle age after the children had grown up and were earning, or had left home. Even the poorest woman could hope that some better times would come.

Chapter 9

THE COUNTRY WIFE

At the beginning of the nineteenth century most of the population of England and Wales lived in the countryside: only a quarter lived in towns. By 1851 half lived in each, and by 1900 over three-quarters were town dwellers. In the 1801 Census, one third of families were allocated to agriculture, two thirds to manufactures and commerce. By 1851 only a fifth worked in agriculture, by 1901 only an eighth. Throughout the century the village community consisted not only of farmers and landless labourers but also of craftsmen such as farriers, carpenters, thatchers and shoemakers. Before the factories took them over many were engaged in domestic handicrafts, especially textiles, lace-making, straw-plaiting and basket-weaving. Some were self-employed, independent masters, but most worked for a merchant under the domestic outwork system. In some areas workers continued for decades after the first mills came to make a living in this way, but some domestic industries disappeared early. Hand spinning, the most common occupation for women in the countryside, became unobtainable, and many had to turn to field labouring.

Most labourers, husbandmen and artisans in rural areas married brides from their own villages or nearby. A Cheshire saying, 'Better wed over the mixon than over the moor', meant it was better to marry at home or in the near vicinity where the parties knew each other (Wade, 1825). 'Mixon' was the dungheap in the farmyard, while the road from Chester to London went over the moor. Prudent young people who wished to marry were expected to wait

until there was a house or cottage available, or until the squire granted permission to build one on the common. Before marriage could be contemplated, somewhere had to be available—either a small-holding, a joinery, a loom or other property—where the young couple could provide for themselves and any children they might have. Until they had some means, they expected to remain unmarried and live with their parents or siblings. Wade also quoted the saying, ‘Marry, marry! and who is to manage the house?’ being applied to foolish young country people who ‘talk of marriage before they are capable to undertake the cares and expenses of wedlock’. But not everyone could be prudent. There was little full-time paid work for single women. The average labourer’s daughter had little to look forward to but hard domestic service, and after 1814 even this prospect was uncertain, for farmer’s wives were inclined to employ as servants pauper girls for whose keep they could get help from the overseers of the poor. The lives of country girls were often dreary and without much comfort, pleasure or interest, and it is understandable that many drifted off to the towns. Yet large numbers chose or drifted into marriage with men like their fathers, and grinding poverty of the kind their mothers endured, rather than accept spinsterhood or an uncertain future among strangers. Married life was hard enough, but it must have been clear to every woman that if she was widowed with young children she would enter the severest poverty. Even if she could find a full-time job she would have a poor chance of supporting a family on a wage one-third to one-half that of a man. Widows with children formed the largest group of paupers receiving poor relief or entering the workhouse. But most women hoped for better luck than that, and were willing to take a chance on marriage.

Pre-marital sex was common in rural areas. A poor, pregnant woman was generally under pressure to marry. Up to 1865, if she ran away she could be sent back to her home parish by overseers of other parishes who did not want responsibility for her. Under an Act of 1733, any man charged by a woman as the father of her illegitimate child had either to contribute towards its maintenance, marry the woman, or submit to imprisonment. Samuel Bamford, the Radical weaver, did not marry the Yorkshire girl by whom he fathered a child around 1807, but she was apparently happy with her weekly allowance from him, as long as he paid it regularly. He also had a child out of wedlock in 1810, by Jemima whom he married a few months later. If a man did not keep up his

THE COUNTRY WIFE

payments, parish officials intervened; a Poor Law Commissioner said: 'The officer of the parish upon default of payment under the order of maintenance sometimes takes the woman in one hand and the warrant in the other and gives the man the option of going to church or to gaol.' If the father had disappeared, the parish gave higher allowances for bastards than for legitimate children, so a widow could be worse off than an unwed mother.

Among the respectable it was often considered unthrifty and unnecessary to marry a girl who had not given evidence of fertility, but it was taken for granted that marriage would take place when the girl was pregnant, community pressure and not the law providing the coercive powers. Rev. John Skinner said of girls marrying when heavily pregnant in the period 1803–34, 'this frequently happens among the lower classes of society'; he lost his cook when he chased her lover from the kitchen, and his maid left when refused permission to attend a local disorderly Revel (Skinner, 1930). Another clergyman told the Poor Law Commissioners in 1834 that, out of every twenty poor girls for whom he performed the ceremony of marriage, nineteen were already pregnant on their wedding day. And a fenwoman said her husband-to-be had asked in the early twentieth century, 'What you got under your apron? I got to see if you're any good. I aint going to buy a piggy-in-a-poke' (Chamberlain, 1983, p. 72).

When the parish officials ceased to force and fund the marriages of the poor after 1834, and it became more difficult to establish paternity, the situation of pregnant unmarried women was more precarious. If a girl was 'let down' the results could be tragic; the Rev. Francis Kilvert described in his *Diary* of country life in the West Country in the 1870s the inquest on a pregnant barmaid in Hay on Wye who had committed suicide by drowning herself in the river, presumably because the man refused to marry her (Kilvert, 1986). Writing in the 1870s, Richard Jefferies said he thought a large number of girls in Wiltshire produced babies and then applied for paternity orders, preferring to remain unmarried, get money from the father, and continue working in the fields (Jefferies, 1981). In the north and west unwed mothers often supported themselves by working and with the help of their families. Shotgun weddings were far less common there than in other parts of the country, and women seemed to be more independent of mind (and men) than in the south. Stella Davies's grandmother, living in Rossendale, Lanes, had three illegitimate children before she was 20, by different fathers. She

disappeared shortly after giving birth to the third child in 1857, leaving her parents to bring up the children. She re-appeared in 1902, dripping with rings and necklaces, having married a wealthy mill-owner and been living in Russia (Davies, 1963, p. 65). Illegitimacy was a common rural phenomenon, though there were wide differences in the illegitimacy rate between regions and between different groups of women. Virginia Woolf wrote in 1912 that the proportion of illegitimate children in Sussex was 'quite amazing' (Woolf, 1975, p. 497). Yet such births per thousand unmarried women aged 15–44 (England & Wales) had dropped from 15.1 in 1871 to 8.1 in 1911.

On the whole, however, the rural poor were a marrying class, even though, according to Mrs Lynn Linton, writing about Cladbeck, Cumberland, where her father was vicar from 1814 to 1855, many marriages occurred only when the pregnant condition of the girl was too manifest to be concealed. In the countryside the ordinary squire, aided by the parson and the farmers, tradesmen and artisans who were constables, churchwardens and members of the parish vestry, tried to control the morals and behaviour of his tenants and villagers. But as a contemporary put it in the 1850s,

Young people come to a distinct understanding with each other to cohabit illicitly, until the woman becomes pregnant, the man promising to 'make an honest woman of her' as soon as that takes place... They meet occasionally and are thus relieved at least of the responsibilities and duties of housekeeping (Kitteringham, 1975, p. 130).

This was as true of the respectables as of the roughs. The mildly censorious but also indulgent attitudes are shown in the following exchange between a girl who had recently arrived in Barrow from rural Cumberland, found herself pregnant and had to get married. One of her relatives remarked: 'Ah, Anna, thou hast been tasting soup before it was ready.' To which she replied, 'Yes, and I found a carrot in it' (Roberts, 1984, pp. 76).

The difficulty of generalising about rural morals can be illustrated from the experience of Mandell Creighton (later a Bishop) when he took the living of Embleton in Northumberland, comprising five villages and a number of farms, in 1874. Morals varied from one village to another, he said, though all the people were strong-minded

THE COUNTRY WIFE

and independent, with none of the feudal feeling of the south. There was no touching of hats or pulling of forelocks, no bob or curtsy. The farming community, whom the Vicar found reserved, almost unapproachable, indulged freely in fornication and adultery with neither shame nor apology, and with no great expense when the consequences arrived: on the farm there was always plenty of milk, plenty of food, plenty of work; a new member of the family need not be a burden. Better housing made no difference, he said gloomily, for even when roomier cottages were built the sport continued. On the other hand, at the fishing village of Craster, in crowded one-roomed cottages, illegitimacy was unknown, the people's attitudes towards fornication being austere, although the Vicar thought they had 'the most heart and the most imagination'. Their livelihood was the herring industry, and the women worked in the curing yards, dressed in oilskins, cleaning, salting and packing the fish to be sent to Spain and Italy as Lenten fare. A fisherman's wife had a hard life, and the Vicar's wife was told that it was seldom that love led a man so far to forget prudence as to choose a wife who had not been brought up to it (Lochhead, 1964, pp. 102-4).

The very poor in the early nineteenth-century countryside were isolated, hidden, inarticulate, and this was especially true of the wives. Women at home saw only their own families, occasionally a neighbour who came to ask for or give help, the village midwife (if there was one) and the parish officials when they applied for relief. Arthur Young, who approved of enclosures and agricultural improvements but was not indifferent to the fate of the cottagers, described a cottage on the borders of Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire in 1800 (Young, 1898, p. 330):

In one which was almost tumbling down, the wind blowing through it on every side, on a bed which was hardly good enough for a hog, was a woman very ill and moaning; she had lately been brought to bed, and her infant was dead in a cradle at the bedside. What a spectacle! She had four children living; one a little girl was at home, and putting together a few embers on the hearth. My heart sank within me at the sight of so much misery, and so dark and cold, tattered and wretched a room.

Conditions did not improve much by mid-century, judging by William Howitt's *Rural Life in England* (1840) or Charles Kingsley's

description of the lot of an English labourer's family in *The Bad Squire* (1847): the family diet was usually potatoes, bread and tea; most children were employed as soon as they could walk, minding younger children, scaring birds from fields, or opening gates for travellers; at the age of 10 or 12 the boys might get some field work, and girls were either taken on as maid-servants on farms, or they drifted away to the towns.

In the countryside, the respectable poor and the rough poor were less geographically separate than they were in the towns, though there were definite divisions between them. The respectable made every effort to avoid the need for charity or poor relief: the roughs were thought both to seek it and to rely on it. For many, there was really no choice. Married women in rural areas did any and every kind of work they could get to earn money. Hannah Mitchell said her paternal grandmother had been toll-keeper, midwife and general help to all the farmers' wives in a Derbyshire dale in the 1840s and 1850s, and that she reported having walked five to six miles to do a day's washing in return for a can of milk. She described her mother, wife of a small farmer in Derbyshire, as a 'superior cottage housewife' and fond of dress, who had been in domestic service and carried her love of cleanliness to the point of absurdity, as when she used her left-over soap-suds on washing days to scrub and wash the pigs they kept. She was not a good wife for a farmer because she had no love for animals or the constant round of milking, feeding calves, poultry and pigs, and the dirt brought into the house drove her frantic. When first married she and her husband were toll-keepers (Mitchell, 1977).

One of the rare accounts by a countrywoman of her married life is that of Lucy Luck, born in 1848 and married in 1867 (Burnett, 1974, pp. 68–77). After a sad childhood in a workhouse, she had a succession of wretched jobs and was orphaned at age 15. A few years later she was living in a village near Luton, plaiting straw and making children's clothes to earn money, and she was courted by a farm labourer on whom she at first looked down. But a kindly friend advised her to marry him, saying he would make her a good husband, 'and he will never hit you'. Lucy said,

He had been a steady, saving chap; if he had not got a few things together I could not have done so, so we settled it to be married about Christmas time. His master had a cottage to let at 2s a week,

THE COUNTRY WIFE

so he took it a few weeks before Christmas and got as much furniture as he could afford. I could not realise having a home of my own; I could not have thought more of it if it had been a palace... God alone knows how proud I was of it.

She explained, 'My husband's money was only 12s a week... I worked on as hard myself as ever I had done, so we got along very well, adding a little more to our home whenever we could.' Lucy said nothing about her personal relations with her husband, but apparently her married life was happy and she reared seven children as well as working continually in straw-plait work. She was proud that none of her children ever brought them 'any sorrow or disgrace'. A few years later the Lucks moved to London, where her husband got a better-paid job as a horse-keeper for a railway company and Lucy continued to work. She wrote, 'I always liked my work very much and although I had trouble with it when I first learnt it, it has been a little fortune to me... In busy seasons I have worked almost night and day.'

Agricultural labourers and cottagers were among the poorest groups in early nineteenth-century England. Competing with them for employment were the small farmers who had lost their hold on the land and were reduced to working as day labourers. Labourers' wives had to add to the husbands' meagre incomes when they could, and this was not—as is sometimes believed—a new thing in 1834. As Ivy Pinchbeck makes clear, the majority of women in the rural population were employed in agriculture in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Women had always worked in the fields at certain times of year, for spring weeding, summer hay-making, and autumn harvest work. After enclosures the big farms offered them work most of the year round—regular weeding and clearing of the fields was needed, and the new root-crops needed frequent hoeing. There was also work in setting, transplanting and gathering crops in nursery gardens. The Napoleonic War drained the male population, and women's employment was especially high between 1807 and 1814. But at the end of the war, in a period of agricultural depression, women were the first to be sacked, and in some areas they became totally dependent on their husband's earnings and some parish relief. 'The wives and daughters of farm labourers in agricultural districts are already become almost entirely destitute of employment,' wrote William Marshall (Marshall, 1814, p.245). But in some areas,

especially the North, women's employment never ceased; witnesses before various Parliamentary Inquiries both in connection with the distressed state of agriculture and the Poor Laws made fairly frequent reference to the employment of women. Much depended on the way the old Poor Law was administered. Where possible new domestic industries were introduced by philanthropists and parish officers to take the place of the old, such as lace making, straw-plaiting, glove-making, tambouring, lace-running and button-making, though women were very ill-paid for long hours of work (Pinchbeck, 1981, ch.3).

Things were worse in the South of England than in the North. In the North, real wages were higher due to the competition of mines and manufactures. Less had to be spent on food and the food was better. More labourers still possessed a little land and a cow or pig; they ate little meat but milk and vegetables were available. The housewife could afford to make clothes for the family. Furze, heath and brushwood could be obtained inexpensively, for heating and cooking. In the South, free fuel had disappeared with the commons, and fuel prices were high, so many labourers' wives were prevented from doing any cooking at home and had to use the village bakehouse. Since they could not afford to lay in stores of provisions, they had to buy in village shops which charged exorbitant prices for poor goods. Their diet was often reduced to a monotonous one of bread and tea, potatoes and a little cheese or fat bacon, and even that was threatened by increasing prices of wheat. Rising prices and stagnant wages during the Wars overwhelmed the labourer's family in the south and east of England, and they had no reserves against old age, sickness, or unemployment. After the Wars overpopulation and depression made jobs scarce and under-employment normal. Faced with an impossible struggle for independence, parish relief in aid of wages became essential.

In areas, mainly in the south and east, where the Speenhamland system of poor relief (aid given according to the price of bread to bring wages up to subsistence level) was given it was very difficult for the family of a farm labourer to better their lives. If the wife and children worked and earned it did not improve the family income, since relief was reduced accordingly, so there was no inducement to do so; if a labourer left one job it was unlikely that anyone else would employ him, and he could not move to another part of the country because ratepayers and overseers in every parish were on the watch

THE COUNTRY WIFE

to keep out poor families which might become a charge on them. One way to get more income was to have more children, since the scale of relief was in strict relation to the number in the family, and Malthusians argued that labourers got married early with this in mind. Yet the houses available to labourers were much too small for large families. When cottages were built by speculation and let to labouring families, they were often as insanitary as those in the new towns. High rents were charged because the old Poor Law gave increased allowances for rent; when later under the New Poor Law the allowances were reduced the labourer was stuck with the high rent. A surprising product of the Speenhamland system was noted in the Suffolk area of Bosmere and Claydon in 1832, where all the men were found to be unemployed and receiving relief and their wives were doing agricultural work. Women were offered work at lower rates than were paid to men, and had to accept it; the men received the basic rate of relief and the family income was slightly higher than if the man had worked. The farmers were happy because they were paying lower wages for more docile and as productive labour. The ratepayers were apparently unhappy, but we do not know what the working wives thought about it (Pinchbeck, 1981, p.76).

The abolition of allowances in aid of wages in 1834 meant that the wage-earning power of the whole family had to be mobilised, whatever their health and circumstances, and even so there was no guarantee that they would avoid starvation. The Second Report of the Poor Law Commissioners in 1835 said approvingly that in Sussex,

the custom of the mother of the family carrying her infant with her in its cradle into the field, rather than lose the opportunity of adding her earnings to the general stock, though partially practised before, is becoming very much more general now [and] it is by no means uncommon to see the father of family, with his wife and some of his younger children (even the females) engaged in the (now well-paid) employment of stone-breaking (Pinchbeck, 1981, p.85).

The Government Inquiry into the Employment of Women and Children in 1843 found that women were working at the chief tasks in agriculture in all counties, although the kinds of work done depended on the season of the year and the custom of the particular area. Some tasks were becoming almost entirely men's work, partly

due to women themselves objecting to doing them (leading horses at the plough and milking, for example).

Under the old Poor Law the allowances paid for children had often enabled parents to afford the small weekly sums needed to send children to dame schools or those of the Lancastrian Association or the National Society. The children of the very poorest were ruled out, although fees for labourers' children were sometimes reduced or paid by others. But according to a witness before the Lords Committee on Poor Laws in 1818, the lower classes in Somerset would 'suffer great distress in order to send their children to school'. And in Northumberland parents made such an effort to procure education for their children that there was more literacy among the agricultural classes there than in any other county (Agriculture, 1843, xii, pp.219–20). Far fewer girls than boys were sent to school, however, because education was felt to be less necessary to them and because they were more useful in the house. As a result few women in the agricultural classes could read fluently or write correctly. Lack of education was one reason why rural women's labour was even more exploited than men's. After 1834 many agricultural labourers could no longer afford to send their children to school, the small wage they could earn being too essential. Very small children were sometimes sent to school as a way of having them looked after when the rest of the family was out at work, but as soon as the child was old enough to scare birds or watch cattle, or any suitable work became available, education had to cease apart from Sunday school. As a general rule boys were earlier employed in the fields than girls (in towns and especially in factory districts the opposite was the case).

In the Eastern Counties exclusively there developed the gang system under which a farmer contracted with a gang master to supply labour for a specific sum. The gang master selected men, women and children and sent them to a farm under an overseer whose business was to accompany them and supervise their work. Physical hardship and fatigue were caused not only by the work but by the long journeys and hours involved. The gang system was condemned in the 1843 *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture*. The father of an 11-year-old girl said, 'I'm forced to let my daughter go, else I'm very much against it...she is sometimes so tired, she can't eat no victuals when she comes home' (pp.276–7). But gang work continued and increased. Mrs Burrows wrote of her childhood in the Fens around 1850–60 that on the day she was 8 she

THE COUNTRY WIFE

left school and began to work fourteen hours a day in the field, with forty or fifty other children of whom she was the eldest: 'We were followed all day long by an old man carrying a long whip in his hand which he did not forget to use.' She said that after four years of this work it 'felt like Heaven to me when I was taken to the town of Leeds, and put to work in the factory' (Life, 1977, p. 109). To the Children's Employment Commission of 1867 (Evidence PP xvi) Rachel Gibson said,

My children shan't go to (a gang) if I can help it, as long as I and their father are alive...there are many mothers who send their children into gangs who would not if they could help it, and say so... Harvest work is different; you are not under a gang master...and at harvest much more money can be made; a woman may make 2s 3d. in a day, and that comes nice to any one.

Anna Seal said, 'When I was young, thirty or forty years ago, there were no gangs; it is a very bad thing that ever they came up... it's ruination of a girl's health.' All the women worried about the effects of bad weather, hard work, immorality and bad language in the gangs. The end of the system began when the Gangs Act of 1867 precluded employment of children altogether and the employment of men and women in the same gang. The Education Act of 1876 made it illegal to employ any child under 10 years of age in agricultural work. The introduction of agricultural machinery also began to make it possible to do without gangs.

Jefferies described how men and women workers controlled their own work situation to some extent, and infuriated their masters by stopping work whenever a pedlar or van came past, discussing all the probabilities as to who the passers-by were, and where they were going, or pausing often to exchange the latest gossip. He said they were a slow set, never in a hurry, and they took every opportunity of leaning on the prong-handle, standing in the shade, or taking a long dinner hour (Jefferies, 1981). Sympathetic though he was to their hardships, on the whole, Jefferies as a farmer could not see that it was of no particular advantage to the labourer to hurry over the work, and since there was so little happening in the countryside, passers-by were a major source of interest, and gossip the major form of entertainment.

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

The amount of women's earnings as agricultural labourers depended on how fast they could work and what work was available. Some were employed all year round, some the whole of summer, but the majority got casual work. Nowhere were wages high and they were always uncertain. As to whether the wife's earnings were important, a Commissioner reported (*Agriculture*, 1843, p. 143), 'Their earnings are a benefit to their families which cannot be dispensed with without creating a great deal of suffering.' By the end of the nineteenth century women had almost ceased to be employed as wage earners in agriculture; except where there was no other work available women themselves seem to have 'made up their minds that it did not answer, and that they would not encourage their children to take to it' (*Agriculture*, 1868-9, xiii, p.54). However, Maud Davies found in 1909 that in Worcestershire wives 'working under a farmer' took as much share of farm work as had their grandmothers; many families lived in 'tied cottages', rent free on condition that the wife worked for the farmer (Black, 1983).

Where domestic employment could be obtained, such as shirt-button making or lacemaking in Dorset and Devon, or knitting stockings, jackets and caps in Yorkshire, it was usually preferred to farm work by married women, however badly it was paid. In rural Wiltshire in 1909, Maud Davies found married women homeworkers, making gloves, who earned only about 2s a week, but needed the money to eke out a labouring husband's low wage of around 12s a week. In rural Essex, she found married women working for the tailoring industry, with cloth sent from Manchester, East London and Leicester to be made up. Their pay of around 7s a week was a significant addition to the husband's earnings of 12s to 15s a week.

FOOD

In years of scarcity and high prices there were harrowing accounts like that of Thomas Carter, who recalled the famine year of 1800 in Colchester, when bread was 1s 10d for a quartern loaf (4lb 5½oz.) and his father's wage of 10s 6d a week was supposed to provide for a family of six; at the time the family's main food was 'potatoes with a little melted suet poured over them' (Carter, 1845). In another bad year, 1846, John Castle, a silk weaver from Colchester, was often unemployed for weeks together and his family of three made their

THE COUNTRY WIFE

dinner off 'a pennyworth of skimmed milk thickened with flour' (Burnett, 1984. p.262). In the countryside, before the 1850s, poor people did not eat meat. For hungry people, something simple could make a memorable feast; Mrs Burrows recalled the bitterly cold day when a country woman took in cold and hungry children from a work gang and fed them on what she could spare, which was hot boiled potatoes (Life, 1977, p.111). Richard Jefferies described the diet of people in rural Wiltshire in the 1870s as consisting of vegetables, potatoes, large quantities of bread, occasionally a piece of bacon or mutton, and weak tea to drink (Jefferies, 1981). For most of the nineteenth century milk had been used for making butter and cheese in local farms, leaving buttermilk which could be bought by the farm labourers, but by the 1870s milk was being sent to London for sale to the urban population, so farm labourers rarely got any. Each day wives needed to find and gather sticks for the fire and often had to fetch water from long distances. Country women wore linsey or cotton dresses rather than the smock-frock which had been common in earlier times when they did the milking. Their boots were nailed and tipped much like the men's, and in rough weather they wore corduroy gaiters.

The proportion of the population living in the countryside, which had been declining throughout the century, fell still more from the mid-1870s as a result of severe agricultural depression due to a decline in demand for British produce, and increased imports of cheap food from abroad. The resulting fall in food prices was beneficial for wage-earners in towns, but caused unemployment in the countryside. There was no compensatory increase in work for women. Since the migration to towns was mainly of young people, the age structure of many rural areas shifted towards a predominance of old people, thus increasing the proportion of rural poor.

There were no specific surveys of rural poverty until 1912, when Seebom Rowntree and May Kendall drew up a map of the average total weekly earnings of ordinary agricultural labourers in the counties of England in 1907 (Rowntree, 1913). They varied from less than 12s a week in Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire (the motto of one Oxfordshire village was, 'We don't live, we linger') to 20s and above in Middlesex, London, Derbyshire, Lancashire, Westmoreland, Durham, Cumberland and Northumberland. One-sixth of the earnings represented payments in kind, and extra

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

earnings. Wages varied *within* counties, of course, depending on whether alternative work was available. The real wages of agricultural labourers actually declined between 1900 and 1911. The diet they could afford, said Rowntree, was more austere than that provided in any workhouse in England. It comprised no butcher's meat, only a little bacon, scarcely any tea, no butter or eggs. F.G.Green said food in the country cost *more* than food in the towns (Green, 1913). There was no money for tobacco, beer, newspapers, amusements, railway fares, emergencies, or luxuries of any kind. A family of five persons whose total income did not exceed 20s 6d and whose rent was 2s, was living below the 'poverty line', said Green, yet in only five northern counties were earnings higher than 20s 6d. The surprising fact is that after Joseph Arch's short-lived attempt to organise agricultural labourers in the 1870s the countryside was more quiescent than the towns from the mid-1880s.

RURAL HOUSING

In 'closed parishes' where the squire wanted to keep down the poor rate, cottages were pulled down early in the nineteenth century, and to prevent immigrants from obtaining settlement rights landowners often prevented the building of an adequate number of cottages for the rural population. So in other parishes small proprietors provided cheaply built cottages at exorbitant rents, which the poor were obliged to take. As these were open to all comers they were known as 'open parishes' as distinct from the 'closed parishes' in which settlements were not allowed. To get work, people in the open parishes had often to travel long distances, and thus the iniquitous gang system of labour developed in the Eastern counties. The remedy lay in the hands of landowners, to provide cottages and allow labourers to live in the parishes in which they were employed, but this was not done until after 1865, when an alteration in the law of settlement, effected by the Union Chargeability Act, induced landowners to supply more cottages.

Jefferies said rural cottages were on the whole 'wretched places' in the 1870s, though a few of the slightly better-off labourers had managed to build a tiny cottage on a piece of land enclosed by squatting, parallel to the highway. The family bought materials and built the cottage themselves, usually a single-storey dwelling with two rooms and a small shed for odds and ends. The roof was often

THE COUNTRY WIFE

half-hidden by rank grass, moss and sillgreen which grew on top. Provided the neighbouring farmers did not object, the labourer was summoned to the court-leet of the manor, and assessed a quit rent of perhaps fourpence or a shilling a year, which gave him title to the cottage. If possible the family grew vegetables and flowers, fruit bushes and herbs, and often kept a pet rabbit, bird or dog. How clean and tidy the place was depended on the energy of the wife. In addition to household tasks the woman often worked in the fields, especially at harvest time. Babies and small children stayed in the shelter of a shock of corn, watched over by an older child, while the mothers worked. But Jefferies said bluntly, 'the Arcadian innocence of the hayfield, sung by poets, is the most barefaced fiction'. The language used there was broad and coarse, and it did not stop at language only if the master was out of sight. Matrons and young girls alike came in for an equal share of the jokes, and were a match for the men in returning them. The women endured the labour as stoically as the men, consuming large quantities of liquor to sustain them. Women often earned almost as much as men at harvest time, but they rarely received their own wages because it was paid in a lump to the father or the husband.

In contrast to urban slums, the plight of rural labourers received less publicity. But throughout the Victorian period there was a steady stream of evidence from government and private inquiries, that rural housing was as bad or worse than housing in towns. The biographer of Joseph Arch, the farm workers' union leader, wrote in 1872, 'Having regard to picturesque effect, we may pronounce most English villages to be successes; but having regard to light, air, pure water, cleanliness, decency, and health, nine out of ten of them must be pronounced failures' (Rubinstein, 1974, p.220). The government reports of 1843 and 1893-4 sound all too much alike, despite being fifty years apart, each deploring rural overcrowding and misery (Agriculture, 1843, p. 19-21; Labour, 1893-4, pp.84-5). The 1893 report said:

In nearly every parish there are so-called houses which are so structurally defective that they can never be converted into comfortable healthy dwellings... These old places are built of a timber frame-work, studded outside with laths, and daubed over with plaster, or with a mixture of clay and chopped straw... The floors downstairs usually are of brick, and are almost invariably

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

damp, often indeed reeking with moisture... To obtain some slight degree of comfort bits of board are laid down and several thicknesses of sacking and mats are laid upon the floor. These have to be renewed periodically, as the damp causes them to rot and become useless.

It was impossible for a woman to keep her home clean and tidy in such conditions, or to keep children healthy when they played on such a floor.

Mrs Layton discovered when she visited her uncle, a farm bailiff, in Cambridgeshire in 1862 that country life was not simply the clean air, animals, flowers and birds that filled her with joy; when she played with village children living in dilapidated dwellings that lacked proper sanitation, she realised that few lived as did her relatives. Cottages that looked pretty outside turned out to have dark rooms with small windows, one room up and one down for a family (Life, 1977).

How to improve the labourer's home proved as intractable a problem in the country as in the town. Although the Housing Act of 1890 made it easier for urban local authorities to build houses, in rural areas the cumbersome legal process was only partly modified by the Housing Act of 1900. Almost nothing was done. Rowntree said in 1913 that country cottages of the picturesque kind found on Christmas cards were usually dark and damp and rat-infested. Preferable for those who lived in them were the hideous brick cottages whose windows were larger and whose walls were less mouldy. Rider Haggard the novelist carried out a detailed study of the English countryside in 1901–2, and concluded that rural slums could only be cleared by government assistance to local authorities and private landlords. Little was to happen for many years.

FAMILY RELATIONS

Jefferies thought the marriages of agricultural labourers were sober, dull, tame, clumsy and colourless, getting drunk being the one social pleasure of the marriage-day. Now, Jefferies did not know for certain the inside of these people's relationships, but there were few obvious excitements in their lives. Perhaps typical of many rural couples were the Bettsworths. Her friend George Bourne thought Lucy 'too unlovely to love' (perhaps the same could be said of the husband) and

THE COUNTRY WIFE

said the marriage was 'a kind of dogged comradeship—I can find no better word for it—(which) is what commonly unites the labouring man and his wife; they are partners and equals running their impecunious affairs by mutual help'. Marriage made little difference to Lucy's life: born to field work, she continued to do stoop labour when she could get it; motherhood made no demands on her because her two children died (Bourne, 1913). Jefferies thought the rural labourer brutal towards his children, regarding them as his absolute property; not without affection towards them, but believing in thrashing them into obedience. He thought rural wives were less often beaten up than town wives, but that few women escaped the occasional blow. If the husband became a confirmed drunkard his wife's life was almost impossible. A not uncommon tactic was for a wife to search the drunken husband's pockets for odd coins, then hide them to buy food the next day. But some men deposited money at the ale-house and then drank their way through it, so they were not usually carrying money in their pockets.

Fortunately, not all countrymen were rough and brutal towards their wives: when the barely literate farm labourer James Bowd wrote in 1889, 'For I was as fond of my wife Has a Cat is of New Milk', it suggested considerable affection (Bowd, 1955). Mrs West (Study No. 111, Rowntree, 1913) said of her husband 'You'd never hear a word from him in the way of grumbling; he's a Christian man. We've been very happy together, and never had a word amiss: he just takes things as they come.' They were living, man, wife and five children, on 12s a week. The hard circumstances of their lives sometimes made men and women somewhat callous towards each other's feelings, and strict with their children whose work and earnings they needed. But the affection of mothers for their children comes out clearly in the testimony on gang work (Children's Employment Commission, 1867): Elizabeth Dickson said, 'They come home so soaked that... I have often been obliged to take my flannel petticoat off and roll it round a girl's legs and iron it with a warming pan to take off the pain and misery of the bones and let her get to sleep.' Autobiographies suggest that love lasted longest between the mother and her daughters.

We know very little about what rural women really thought about marriage, except that it was the obvious thing to do if they wanted a home and children. Many probably thought as Flora Thompson's female neighbours, 'Better a bad husband than no husband at all.'

But others thought there was more to the bond than simple economic necessity, and that there was a 'Mr Right' for each woman, which is really a very romantic concept. When Flora Thompson said she had no intention of marrying, the village women said, 'All right, my girl, I've heard that tale before. You wait until Mr Right comes along. When he says "snip" you'll say "snap" fast enough, I'll warrant' (Thompson, 1979, p. 193). Kate Taylor said that when a young man wanted to marry her sister Rose, he wrote to her agricultural labourer father that their love was mutual. Kate said she had never heard that word before, asked Rose what it meant, and that her sister's face lit up as she said, 'It means Tom loves me as much as I love him.' Romance was not unknown among the rural poor in the nineteenth century (Burnett, 1984, p.289).

Marriage was a desperate risk for the rural poor, even if the couple were fortunate enough to find a cottage and had saved something towards the furnishing or the purchase of a pig (assuming they were allowed to keep a pig, for if the man was in charge of cows or horses his employer might not want any risk of cross-infection). Rowntree reported one north-country labourer as saying, 'the farm man who marries without having saved anything is done' (though in many cases the claims of parents or siblings for financial help made saving before marriage impossible) yet he also said, 'there seems to be more fatalism, a more complete acceptance of child-bearing as natural and inevitable, in the country than in the town' and it is certainly true that the family size of agricultural workers was larger than that of most industrial workers. In the early twentieth century, as a hundred years earlier, only the earnings of wife and children could raise the family above absolute poverty level and avoid the need to claim parish relief. The villagers Rowntree studied were very particular about having the children neat, clean and 'like other children', and strove not to get into debt: 'I'd rather go without myself than be owing,' said Mrs Bell (Study VII), but most of them got into debt sometimes, with the consequent worry of how to pay it off. Mrs West (Study 111) with a husband and five children, was living on 12s a week: 'I don't know how we manage; the thing is to get it past,' she said. They depended on private charity to see them through, and there was not much of that. Mrs Godwin (Study XIII) was a woman who just could not manage on her meagre income; as her neighbours said, she was not 'contriving', no hand at making the pastry which the rural poor found more filling than bread, and she could only

THE COUNTRY WIFE

make a rabbit last one meal. Her extravagance vexed her prudent neighbours, but they were aware that 'if she contrived and considered and did the utmost with every halfpenny, it isn't [income] enough.' The man was earning 10s a week, there was a son earning 5s, another son 1s; total income was 16s a week for man, wife and six children. The wife earned an extra 18s a year and the husband an extra 6s. Two elder girls out in service helped by sending cast-off clothes, and they got some clothes from charities. Rowntree thought that women preferred if possible to do work which earned ready cash, such as washing, picking stones, sewing, rather than invest in livestock and their keep, though some families kept a pig or some hens. And women grew food in the garden, if there was one, or on an allotment if one was available.

As in other sections of the working class, country folk helped each other in times of need. Mrs Carr of Berkshire (Study VI) said she could not have managed at all if a neighbour, not herself rich, had not sent her a pint of milk a day. Kate Taylor said of her childhood in Suffolk around 1900,

Village folk, all being equally poor, tended to help each other. Mother was midwife to a number of other wives, helping too in illnesses...she was very well up in first aid. She said district nurses or casualty wards were 'an unheard-of luxury' and that when her father suffered a bad axe cut on his leg, 'being a pauper the local doctor couldn't be bothered with him' (Burnett, 1984, p.290).

This confirms what Richard Jefferies said about Wiltshire wives in the 1870s, that they helped each other in sickness and hard times. Few had a medical man present at their confinements, using instead a village nurse, and few could make provision beforehand, so they had to rely on parish relief or the help of the clergyman's wife to equip the baby. He also pointed out that a rural cottage was too small to allow the woman in labour a room of her own. Mrs Leigh of Oxfordshire (Study IV) said the doctor's fee for attending her confinement in 1906 had been 21s (the family income was 13s a week) and was not yet paid, though she was pregnant again.

RECREATION

There was a tremendous gulf between the lives of urban and rural workers in the nineteenth century, for there were none of the regular amusements in the country so readily accessible to the poorest in the towns. Whereas the urban poor women could go to the theatre occasionally, or take a stroll in the pleasure gardens, the rural poor women living in small and isolated communities had little entertainment except gossip and beer-drinking at home and the occasional fairs and festivals. Women were excluded from much of the physical recreation of the men. Many old customs and rituals continued in the countryside. Superstition was as important as organised religion for the labouring poor, and rural rituals accommodated these beliefs better than church services. Rural culture remained attuned to men and women's work; the holidays either fell in pauses between work or were celebrations of its completion. Plough Monday and harvest suppers were payment in kind. Fairs marked such holidays or were held for the purpose of hiring male and female labour. Blood sports were a shared focus with the gentry, who on the whole felt that popular recreations were harmless enough (poaching was, of course, quite a different matter.) Village feasts often consisted only of a few gipsies standing by the side of the road selling ginger-beer, nuts and toys, with an Aunt Sally to throw at and time to drink more beer. In the 1870s the arrival in villages of showmen's vans, nut and gingerbread stalls, merry-go-rounds and cheap Jacks involved beating of drums, squalling of pigs, blowing of horns, neighing of horses and the roar of the crowds, which made for excitement in people's lives. However, Jefferies thought fairs were the chief cause of immorality in women—servant girls drank too much and were seduced, and married women looked for sexual adventures.

The English agricultural workers of the nineteenth century had no passion plays, no peasant plays, no rustic stage and drama, though the men enjoyed the somewhat tuneless ditties they sang in the ale-house which was largely a male preserve, and so an important part of their lives. Mrs Lynn Linton described Cladbeck, Cumberland, where she grew up, as having no school, but for every 18 of the 300 population there was a public-house or jerry-shop. The man who did not get drunk would have been the black swan which the white ones would have soon pecked to death,' she wrote. Her father, the vicar,

THE COUNTRY WIFE

had no success in curbing the drinking habits of his parishioners. Women who drank beer did so at home, when working in the fields, and at mops and fairs. Jefferies said in one cottage he visited, where three brothers lived with their aged mother, there were four separate barrels of beer, all on tap, one for each brother and one for the mother, so there should be no dispute between them.

The use of drugs as painkillers or for pleasure was not purely an urban phenomenon. Mrs Burrows said that in Lincolnshire in the 1850s many people took opium and laudanum, chemists in the nearby towns supplying any quantity a person could afford. She knew a child whose duty it was each day to fetch Is worth of opium, nicknamed 'stuff', and she remembered one poor old woman, Betty Rollett, who cut her throat because she did not have enough money to buy opium (Life, 1977). Jefferies said that in the 1880s snuff was not being taken by women agricultural workers nearly as much as formerly, though some of the old women were very fond of it.

RESPECTABLE RECREATION

Not all country folk were hedonistic: in all rural communities there were upright, stern-featured people with puritan values who tended to keep aloof from their neighbours and were never seen at the alehouse or fairs. They preferred to attend chapels or cottage services with their own kind rather than the parish church. Hannah Mitchell said of her childhood on a farm in Derbyshire in the 1880s that on Sunday mornings the family took turns reading from the New Testament, a substitute for Sunday school in a remote area. She remembered the annual love-feast, an ancient religious festival held in summer in their barn, when worshippers from far and wide came to sing hymns and pray, and then with fervour bear testimony to their faith.

On the whole, the ordinary rural working class was too preoccupied with the needs of day-to-day living to spend much time on the niceties of religious doctrine. Their sympathies were determined by the location of churches and chapels, the extent of religious charities, the availability of schools and the degree of influence exerted by landlords, farmers and other employers. Rural Methodism developed most in 'open' parishes where no landlord was supreme, and the labourers lived a more independent life. Populous mining areas such as Cornwall, East Lancashire, West

RESPECTABLES AND ROUGHS

Yorkshire and Durham were good ground for the Wesleyans because the Anglican clergy, using an unchanged parish system, could not cope with their needs. Rural attendance at parish churches was very patchy, being better in smaller parishes than larger ones because it was easier to get to the church. The poor did not like cold, large churches and appropriated pews. Horace Mann, in his analysis of the religious census of 1851 (Mann, 1854) found that rural districts had only a little better church attendance than the towns (28.1 per cent of the best-attended services, as against 23.9 per cent). Rowntree said in rural Southern England around 1906 the poor did not go to church because they could not afford to give a collection. But the rural working class were not actively anti-religious, and their children attended Sunday school 'to learn the difference between right and wrong', and to enjoy the concerts and picnics which were part of its programme.

CONCLUSION

The lives of farm labourers' wives were harder even than those of the urban poor. Jobs were less varied, food and housing worse, sanitation no better, amusements fewer. People were more subject to the scrutiny of employers and neighbours. They had fields to walk in and fresh air to breathe, when they had time to enjoy them, but that did not compensate for everything. The more adventurous left the countryside and went into towns.

Things were worse in the rural South than in the rural North, where competition from factories raised agricultural wages. But everywhere it was essential for rural wives to work for extra income, and even then they could rarely avoid the need for poor relief or charity. Life was harsh and hard. Yet the marital fertility of agricultural labourers remained high during the late nineteenth century relative to other social groups, and this, together with their low levels of infant mortality, resulted in a large average family size. Whether this was insurance against old age or due to lack of other amusements, we do not know. Women certainly took pride in their children and in managing the family budget, helping each other in times of trouble. Their main recreation was gossip with neighbours and families, and the occasional fairs and celebrations. Relations between spouses varied as in other levels of society, from deep affection through dogged comradeship to indifference and even

THE COUNTRY WIFE

violence. Observers thought country people fatalistic in the extreme, but Mrs Bell (Study No. VII) who thought 'so many children were allotted to everyone' also had a comforting theology that the rich could not take their money with them when they died, and that 'them that have least now will have the most then. We've got hell here, *we* have; *we* shall get something good! But I believe hell's their place what don't look after the poor.' Her faith in immortality was unquestioning, and she looked forward keenly to getting more than even with a good many people in the future life (Rowntree, 1913).

The lives of rural wives could not have been more different from those of the middle-class married women who endlessly discussed and debated how to change their legal, social and economic status, and to whom we will now turn.

Part III

THE GILDED CAGE

Chapter 10

THE CRUSADE AGAINST MARRIAGE

To many in the middle ranks of society in the Age of Reason before and after the French Revolution the gilded cage of bourgeois marriage was a relic of the dark ages. Among the exciting and dangerous new ideas circulating in England at the turn of the eighteenth century were hostility to Judaeo/Christian marriage and the laws and social customs which upheld it. The political thinker William Godwin and the poets Shelley, Byron and Southey hated the institution (though they all eventually succumbed to it) because of its relations with religion and property. The marriage contract, they said, gave the partners property rights in each other's persons as well as in other forms of property. The Judaeo/Christian emphasis on monogamy and sexual relations only within marriage they regarded as cruel and unnatural. Their fervent belief in unrestrained sex coloured and confused the love ideals of succeeding generations of English men and women. The idea that free love was necessary to individual freedom and happiness took deep root in the romantic psyche. Byron touched a chord in women's private fantasies about wild, abandoned passion, as his correspondence with some of his women admirers shows (Paston and Quennell, 1939). James Lawrence's *The Empire of the Nairs: or the Rights of Women* (1811), a popular Utopian romance which first appeared in Germany, described a matriarchal kingdom where marriage was regarded as foreign to the needs of human nature, free love was the rule, and chastity was not identified with celibacy. A pirated edition of Shelley's *Queen Mab* was prosecuted for seditious blasphemy in

1821, as much for its immorality as for its irreligion. *The Times* wanted to prevent the plea for free love contained in the poem's notes from passing into popular circulation (22 October 1821, p.3). Nonetheless, the work became a formative text of the nineteenth-century crusade against marriage.

From around 1813 Robert Owen's writings and Utopian views provided the bedrock for changed attitudes towards all the institutions of society. He addressed his views primarily to the working class, and linked the emancipation of women with that of workers. His main interests were national education, community life, co-operation, trade unionism, the abolition of property and other radical projects (Owen, 1830, 1927). Influenced by Frances Wright, he added Marriage to Private Property and Religion in his list of evil customs distressing society. Though he said nothing about alternatives to marriage for some time, he eventually advocated not the abolition of marriage but a wedding ceremony without religious oaths and a simple, cheap system of divorce at the wish of either of the partners (Owen, 1836). He condemned 'single-family arrangements' as the chief source of competitive values and the main institution responsible for the transmission of private property, and approved of living in communities; but he had little to say against the power of the husband or the father over wife or daughter, and did not envisage male participation in traditionally female tasks. In his *Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the old Immoral World* (delivered in 1835, before the passing of the new Marriage Act, but published in 1838), Owen declared marriage to be 'a Satanic device of the Priesthood to place and keep mankind within their slavish superstitions, and to render them subservient to all their purposes'. It was more a broadside against religion than a call for married women's emancipation. To his surprise, he was accused of supporting free love (Jones, 1839; Brindley, 1840).

Frances Wright, born 1795 in Scotland, was a supporter of Robert Owen and the most Radical female opponent of the constraints of marriage of her day. Her great-uncle was James Milne, professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow University. She believed that married women should have control of their own property; that women needed access to greater educational opportunity so that they would cease to be at the mercy of superstition and quackery; that they should be able to break an unsatisfactory marital tie; and that they should be able to enter into sexual relations with all the freedom that

men had. To the latter end, she believed that birth control practices were to be encouraged, so that family size could be restricted and women freed from endless pregnancies (Rossi, 1973). Frances Wright saw that until women assumed a place in society equal to that of men, human improvement would be slow to come. She had an agenda that women would still be fighting for at the end of the twentieth century. Drawn to the United States whose egalitarian principles she thought corresponded with her own, she lectured on these subjects there in the period 1820–30; she was the first woman to do so publicly, and her Radical ideas caused a sensation (Stanton *et al.*, 1881). Her views made her famous but not widely popular. To her admirers she was a bold apostle of liberation and equality in an age of prudish sexual mores; her enemies called her ‘the great Red Harlot of Infidelity’ and ‘the whore of Babylon’. In 1825 Fanny Wright became the first woman to act publicly to oppose slavery in America, founding a commune in Tennessee to demonstrate that slaves could be educated and responsibly freed. For her accomplishments she was called by John Stuart Mill, ‘the most important woman of her day’, and she also received warm praise from Thomas Jefferson, Jeremy Bentham, the Marquis de Lafayette, Mary Shelley and Walt Whitman (Eckhardt, 1984). But her life was not a success story.

Fanny Wright saw herself as the champion of rationality and peace, yet almost from the start she was regarded as the advocate of anarchy, atheism and free love. Regarding sexual desire as ‘the noblest of human passions’, she imagined an ideal society in which ‘affection shall form the only marriage tie’; and she went so far as to call religion ‘the perverter of human virtue’. Such statements, reported in *The Free Enquirer* in New York which she published and edited jointly with Robert Dale Owen (son of Robert Owen), provoked angry responses from preachers and more conservative newspapers, particularly since she was suspected of having illicit affairs. Her endorsement of miscegenation roused a storm of protest, and she was accused of advocating ‘sensuality in its most loathsome form’. Praise for her anti-slavery efforts was drowned by outcries against her ‘licentiousness’. For a time Fanny Wright enjoyed being the Radical everyone loved to hate, but in time the barrage of stinging invective against her, combined with personal misfortune, drove her into embittered isolation. Her views continued to be discussed, and disseminated, but not widely adopted.

THE GILDED CAGE

Utopians Anna Wheeler and William Thompson had very harsh things to say about marriage in their book, *An Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, against the pretensions of the other half, Men*, first published in 1825 (Wheeler and Thompson, 1970):

Two circumstances—permanent inferiority of strength, and occasional loss of time in gestation and rearing infants—must eternally render the average exertions of women in the race of the competition for wealth less successful than those of men. The pleasant compensation that men now affect to give for these two natural sources of inferior accumulation of wealth on the part of women (aggravated a thousand degrees by their exclusion from knowledge and almost all means of useful exertions—the very lowest only excepted) is the existing system of marriage, under which, for the mere faculty of eating, breathing and living, in whatever degree of comfort husbands think fit, women are reduced to domestic slavery, without will of their own, or power of locomotion, otherwise than as permitted by their respective masters.

Wheeler and Thompson could see no way to secure for women the political, economic and sexual rights they believed were their due, save in a co-operative form of social order in which marriage should not exist. Nothing could be easier, they said, than to put the political and civil rights of women on terms of perfect equality with those of men; but changing the laws would not give women equal happiness with men, because unequal powers under free competition must produce unequal effects. Their analysis was prophetic: despite the laws passed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to give married women some legal rights, women have not achieved perfect equality. The career problem for women needing to take time out for childbearing and child-rearing has not been solved; women's earnings are generally far lower than those of men, even in comparable jobs (with exceptions in some professions); and the dual burden of domestic responsibility plus work outside the home still curtails women's involvement in political activities. (Sadly, the situation is little different in societies which have abolished capitalism and free market competition.) Wheeler and Thompson looked forward to a society in which mutual cooperation and joint possession would supersede restless and anxious individual

THE CRUSADE AGAINST MARRIAGE

competition, and women would be completely equal to men, but no such society has yet emerged. Their suggestion that marriage should be abolished altogether was not taken seriously by many people in their own time or later, though their writings certainly drew attention to the political and marital subordination of women.

In the late 1820s the Radical Richard Carlile and some of his 'Zetetic' followers began to reassess orthodox sexuality both in theory and in practice. The outcome was more libertarian than libertine. Their conversion to contraception, feminine equality and even free love was an extension of the liberal Enlightenment ethic of individual freedom and social utility, and did not challenge prevailing middle-class beliefs in moral respectability. The sexual values they expressed were not equated with licence or promiscuity, and Carlile hated pornography because it degraded women.

In 1832 Robert Owen founded the penny newspaper, *The Crisis*, which ran until August 1834, being succeeded by *The New Moral World*; both newspapers contained numerous articles on the social position of women. One was Mrs Anna Wheeler's translation from a French journal of a powerful demand for equality, including the sentence, 'Let us reject as a husband any man who is not sufficiently generous to consent to share with us all the rights he himself enjoys.' The article evoked little response, but may have sown seeds of rebellion in some women's minds.

The New Moral World reported a lecture in Manchester in September 1838 by Owenite Mrs Frances Morrison, on 'The Influence of the Present Marriage System upon the character and interests of females, contrasted with that proposed by R.Owen' (Morrison, 1838). Having (inaccurately) credited Robert Owen with first suggesting a system calculated to free women from social bondage, she remarked that it had become fashionable to scorn and neglect women. Mrs Morrison complained of the foolish education women received, the heartless condemnation of large numbers of women to prostitution as a means of survival, the wickedness of a dual code of sexual morality, and the cruelty of the means of redemption undertaken by the Church. A woman needed 'to arouse herself at once from the lethargy in which she has so long been slumbering, and to point the attention of her fellow-sufferers to the only system which promises them protection, independence, and happiness'. She therefore recommended 'community, equality of the sexes and the abolition of the present laws of marriage'. Such heady

sentiments apparently caused amazement to the readers who responded, but we do not know how many others secretly supported her views.

In the 1830s W.J.Fox, the Unitarian minister, began to suggest in *The Repository* and elsewhere liberalisation of the divorce laws. It may be doubted whether he would have been so ardent an advocate if his own marriage bonds had been less irksome. He suggested that the sacramental nature of marriage should be abolished, and a civil contract substituted, thereby allowing rational divorce. All this was too much for most Unitarians, and it eventually led to his exclusion from the Church. Readers of *The Repository* were further shocked by Fox's publication of an article 'On the Condition of Women in England' by 'Junius Redivivus' (William Bridges Adams). Adams was a successful manufacturer of railroad equipment, whose lively writing was admired by John Stuart Mill. Adams declared that in all ranks of society women were slaves, though in different fashions: 'the poor man seeks an efficient working slave, the rich person, an agreeable and well-taught harem slave. The man of middling circumstances endeavours, if possible, to combine both.' He thought that in the upper classes, marriage was a matter not of love but of bargain and sale, a legally sanctioned species of prostitution. In the middle classes females were made to play a double part, housewives on ordinary occasions, and fine ladies when required. Among the poor, conditions of poverty destroyed any vestiges of refinement, and nothing could be done to help poor women until their physical circumstances were improved. Englishmen required only one virtue of a wife, Adams thought, and that was chastity; but the men decreed for themselves the power to break the marriage vow of monogamy. Women could only be freed from their slavery by making marriage a civil contract, dissoluble like any other contract.

Adams's melodramatic picture of marriage did not win many converts. Nor did an essay by Sarah Flower Adams, his wife. Entitled 'An Odd Subject', and published in *The Monthly Repository* in 1833 (vol.9, 1835, 795-802), it compared the little boxes in which performing fleas were taught to submit to captivity to the 'torture boxes' that human beings were confined to—Toryism, Episcopacy, Legal injustice, Social law—from which they could not escape. The worst box of all, she said, was the box of marriage—'and for this reason, that it is the evil of all others which inflicts the deepest injury on posterity'. Society demanded that a

married couple be bound for life, no matter how unsuited to each other husband and wife might turn out to be. The world, 'by perpetuating the error of a mistaken marriage, changes it into a crime against society of the worst possible consequences.' The *Repository* had a small circulation, but its prosperous middle-class readership was influential and its record on the emancipation of women far in advance of the majority opinion of its day. Although most of its readers did not agree with the views of Mr and Mrs Adams, they nonetheless discussed them, and this contributed to the slow stream of thought which wanted to liberalise the divorce law and free women from their economic dependence on men.

The English ideal of women's role in life underwent a remarkable change in the 1830s. 'Kate', the Owenite writer who in 1835 deplored the neglect of the woman question, wrote in 1839 in *The New Moral World* that sentiments had undergone a considerable change. She may have been unduly optimistic, yet concern for abused wives was high at that time, and the strong backlash against changes in the marriage law shows that these ideas were being widely debated. People do not bother to refute arguments which are being ignored. By 1840 it seemed that the emancipation of women was a natural part of Socialist programmes; opponents of emancipation were prone to mock both the free woman and Socialism, suggesting that those who favoured any reform in the situation of women were enemies both of marriage and of traditional morality. Not all Owenite women supported marriage reform, however, and a number of them were uneasy about sexual liberation. These women stressed 'Reason over Passion', condemned sexual exploitation and had little notion of women positively enjoying sexual relations. They stressed that women had a unique *moral* vision, an argument that was used by anti-feminists, too. Owenite beliefs in female emancipation coming about through living in co-operative communities eventually died out, for Owenism was replaced later in the century by a different form of socialism seeking collective goals through organised state intervention. Women's rights became a separate movement.

The French socialist doctrines of Saint-Simon and Fourier came to public notice in England around 1830 (though Saint-Simon had first appeared as an author in 1801). Addressing their views to the middle classes, the Saint-Simonians and Fourierists preached social regeneration in the form of a society dedicated to hard work, social purpose, co-operation and association—as opposed to a society

THE GILDED CAGE

dedicated to the inalienable right of amassing property, to inheritance, to free markets and competition. Much was said of the position of women in such a new order, the Saint-Simonians in particular worshipping a mystical ideal of womanhood; they believed that love should guide the actions of men into co-operation, and since they thought women had a special talent for loving, women should be specially revered for it. They early subscribed to the policy of freeing women as an accompaniment to freeing the proletariat, and they rejected the Christian idea of female subordination to men. But their ideal of womanhood placed woman on a pedestal and emphasised her superiority to men in some respects, rather than her potential for equality with men. When they did eventually announce their support for the equality of men and women, it was in conjunction with monogamy and holy marriage, though they expressed their wish to put an end to 'that shameful traffic...that legal prostitution which so often goes under the name of marriage'. In other words, they did not want women to marry just to get a meal ticket. Fourier was outraged by the legal, moral and social oppression of women; he said that their condition in a society was the true criterion by which the state of that culture should be judged.

Anti-marriage sentiments continued to reach England from other parts of the Continent, and were being discussed in the 1840s. In June 1846 Jane Carlyle wrote to her sister Helen Welsh:

(Miss) Bolte is returned from Germany all agog with something that she calls the new ideas—above all quite rabid against marriage. Varnhagen, Bettina, all the Thinkers of Germany, she says, have arrived at the conclusion that marriage is a highly immoral institution as well as a dreadfully disagreeable one (Huxley, 1924).

In considering whether these Continental philosophies had any direct influence in England, two strong strands can be traced. One is that in 1869, in a letter to Dr Gazelles, translator of his book *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill paid tribute to the success of the Saint-Simonians and Fourierists in forming enlightened views on the part to be played by women in society, and their influence on his own views. The second influence was not what the French socialists had intended, but it was a powerful ideal: Saint-Simonian reverence for women's special ability to love became the basis of 'the angel in

THE CRUSADE AGAINST MARRIAGE

the house', the concept of a separate sphere where woman reigned morally supreme.

FREE LOVE

Swedenborg was another Continental thinker whose influence permeated English free thought in the early nineteenth century. His doctrine of conjugal love implied the eternal, spiritual affinity of a man and a woman; and (though he did not advocate free love), he made it a matter of conscience 'to inculcate the propriety and duty of dissolving all false and merely legal relations to form more perfect and therefore permanent connections'. Swedenborgians did not think the law should be involved in such decisions and thus love became free for them and no longer restrained by the marriage bond.

The most widely read of all foreign authors in England (except perhaps Goethe) was the French writer George Sand, though the middle class was afraid of her neutral presentation of free, in the sense of illicit, love. By the 1840s free love in England was associated in the public mind with Bohemian circles. Bohemians, originally meaning gipsies, had come to mean 'those of Society who lived outside society'. There were rumours and much speculation about the 'Phalanstery' at Royal Hill House, Queen's road, Bayswater, where in the 1840s George Henry Lewes and his wife Agnes were said to have lived in a co-operative household run on Fourieresque principles with the Thornton Hunts, the Gliddons, and the Samuel Laurences. The writer Eliza Lynn Linton was introduced to the Phalanstery when she came to London in 1840, but she did not describe the arrangements in detail. She wrote,

At the time I first knew these people they were living in a kind of family communion that was very remarkable. Sisters and cousins and brothers—some of the women married, and with yearly increasing families to which they devoted themselves; others single and of general domestic utility all round—clubbed together their individuality and their resources and made a kind of family.

The lack of convincing evidence about sexual relations between the members of the commune makes it difficult to know whether free love was practised or not.

Certain it is, however, that Agnes Lewes, daughter of an M.P., fell

THE GILDED CAGE

in love with her husband's close friend and partner Thornton Hunt, and in 1850 bore Hunt's son. Her husband George seems to have been a man of progressive ideas, tolerance and compassion, for he accepted the situation; but when Agnes bore a second child by Hunt the following year, Lewes decided that any meaningful life with her had come to an end. Having condoned her adultery once, however, he was thereafter barred from suing for divorce on those grounds. Jane Carlyle wrote perceptively and prophetically of the Lewes family in 1849,

In the most honey marriages one has only to wait—it is all a question of time—sooner or later ‘reason resumes its empire’ as the phrase is. I used to think the Leweses a perfect pair of love-birds, always cuddling together on the same perch—to speak figuratively—but the female love-bird appears to have hopped off to some distance and to be now taking a somewhat critical view of her little shaggy mate!

George Henry Lewes, as is well known, lived with the writer George Eliot for 24 years from 1854. Mary Anne Evans (Eliot's real name) had as Marian Evans translated Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* from the German, and was influenced by Feuerbach's belief that marriage was not conferred by the blessing of a priest, but was ‘the free bond of love’, sacred in itself by the very nature of the union,

For a marriage the bond of which is merely an external restriction, not the voluntary, contented self-restriction of love, in short, a marriage which is not spontaneously concluded, spontaneously willed, self-sufficing, is not a true marriage, and therefore not a truly moral marriage.

Eliot and Lewes certainly regarded their own relationship as a true marriage, though it was never blessed by the Church or acknowledged by the State.

The Eliot-Lewes partnership was not the kind of free love union that some sex radicals had in mind, that is, a time-bargain made to last either for a fixed term, or simply as long a time as the partners pleased, in which men and women simply lived together until mutual disgust or weariness on the part of one or the other separated them.

THE CRUSADE AGAINST MARRIAGE

The slavery of blacks in the Southern USA provided the sex radicals with a great living metaphor for the sex slavery of women; women and slaves were seen as suffering from the same oppressor—the white male. But not every woman who advocated the abolition of slavery was in favour of free love, of course.

What distinguished the new free-love doctrine from ‘acceptable philandering’ was its demand that women should have the sexual autonomy normally enjoyed by males. Apparently in contradiction to the well-documented sexual freedom of aristocratic women and of the less respectable women of the lower orders, middle-class women and ‘respectable’ working-class women suffered from a sexual double standard, upheld by law and custom, which condemned women more than men for indulging in sex outside marriage. ‘Free-lovers’ challenged sexual orthodoxy in the name of greater freedom for both men and women. On the question of contraception they did not all agree; some thought full coition could be justified only for the purpose of procreation, and recommended *coitus interruptus* as an exercise in self-discipline if procreation was not desired. Others thought full coition was good as long as it was sanctified by love, and they approved the use of any contraceptive method. Many free-lovers thought that marriage actually contravened love, echoing earlier myths of courtly and precious love which had traditionally misesteemed marriage. Free love in the full sense of the term postulated the complete freedom of both partners from economic factors, and social provisions for the upbringing of children. Such propositions struck at the prevailing laws and social customs of England, and most people were horrified by them.

One woman who tried to live as a sex radical was Mary Ellen, daughter of the novelist Thomas Love Peacock, who in 1848 married the writer George Meredith. He was 20, she 27 and already a widow with a child. Mary Ellen was well educated; later she and Meredith claimed they were too clever and high-strung for each other, and, judging from Meredith’s sonnet sequence *Modern Love* (which shocked most readers), they did not have a good sex life:

By this he knew she wept with waking eyes:
That, at his hand’s light quiver by her head,
The strange low sobs that shook their common bed
Were called into her with a sharp surprise,
And strangled mute, like little gaping snakes,

THE GILDED CAGE

Dreadfully venomous to him. She lay
Stone-still, and the long darkness flowed away
With muffled pulses. Then, as midnight makes
Her giant heart of Memory and Tears
Drink the pale drug of silence, and so beat
Sleep's heavy measure, they from head to feet
Were moveless, looking through their dead black years,
By vain regret scrawled over the blank wall.
Like sculptured effigies they might be seen
Upon their marriage-tomb, the sword between;
Each wishing for the sword that severs all.

At the age of 36, Mary Ellen fell in love with Henry Wallis, a painter nine years younger than she, and she left Meredith. She apparently intended to be independent, and earn money to keep herself, but this proved impossible and she died in poverty at the age of 40, in 1861. Her love affair with Wallis had not been a success, either.

SPIRITUALISM AND FREE LOVE

In the 1840s there sprang up in North America, and quickly spread to England, the cult of spiritualism; this was direct communication with the spirit world, and it allowed every person to be in touch with the hereafter without the assistance of clergy. The rank and file of spiritualists came largely from those with no close connections with organised religion; spiritualism was regarded as an opposing doctrine to Christianity, though there were also Christian spiritualists. In England in 1851 only 40 per cent attended church or chapel (according to the Census of Religious Worship), leaving a wide field for conversions. Spiritualism also offered scope for female power and leadership; the first public lectures and speakers about spiritualism were women, and in the Spiritualist Church women were the high priests. The biblical teachings in regard to the relations between men and women and their duties were reversed in spiritualist teaching. Spiritualism took the USA and England by storm.

Spiritualism and free love lodged together for a time; the spirits revealed to adherents that social bonds should be assumed or abolished according to individual spiritual revelation. This doctrine, called spiritual affinity, swept the ranks of spiritualism in the early

THE CRUSADE AGAINST MARRIAGE

1850s. Based on Fourier's theory of personal attraction and the harmonial philosophy of Andrew Jackson Davies, the doctrine claimed that certain individuals had an attraction for each other that was based on complementary spiritual aura, and this made them 'natural mates'. Thus affinity superseded the bonds of legal marriage, allowing an escape from what many spiritualists considered the brutality and dullness of marriage and family life. As voices from this world and the next announced new possibilities for the affections, the spiritualist and free-love causes merged their identities in the popular mind. However, when the causes parted company, their affinity for each other was soon forgotten. Just as the Mormons began to overlook their early support for polygamy, so the Spiritualists overlooked their early links with the free-love movement (Moore, 1977).

QUESTIONING THE ETHIC OF MARRIAGE

Adherents of the pre-Raphaelite movement revived in the 1850s and 1860s the criticism of coercive sanctions on sexual unions that had been voiced earlier in the century. By the mid-1850s the free-love system, or 'anti-marriage movement' as it was alternatively called, was thought to be gaining ground in so far as marriage was widely criticised and even mocked and derided. Free-lovers were blamed for the questioning of marriage relations which was taking place quite independently among people who had no intention of abolishing the marriage institution, but wanted to free it from coercive sanctions founded on authoritarian and dogmatic traditional religious grounds. It was far from the minds of the latter critics that 'Lust should be the only Law', and 'Passion the sole guide to human conduct.' But opponents skilfully linked Socialism, free love and *any* criticism of marriage together; support for any one of these positions was said to prove support for the others, and this created much confusion, to the point where many women stopped listening to advocates of women's rights because they were afraid of being labelled free-lovers or Socialists. This was probably the most effective if misleading criticism of women's rights that opponents could have made, and it largely explains the slow pattern of change in reforming the marriage laws. On the other hand, the availability of easier divorce after 1857 confounded many of the sex radicals; by providing a safety valve against being trapped without hope of

THE GILDED CAGE

release in an unhappy marriage, it ensured the perpetuation of the conventional form of marriage. People no longer argued so vigorously against marriage when they saw it as less constricting.

Annie Besant, famous women's activist and advocate of contraception, approved of easier divorce but not of free love. In her 1850 pamphlet, 'Marriage as it was, as it is, and as it should be' (Besant, 1878), she said:

The fleeting connections supposed by some Free Love theorists are steps backwards and not forwards; they offer no possibility of home, no education of the character, no guarantee for the training of the children. The culture both of father and of mother, of the two natures of which its own is the resultant, is necessary to the healthy development of the child; it cannot be deprived of either without injury to its full and perfect growth... Freed from the union which injures both, the man and the woman may seek for their fit helpmeets, and in happy marriage may become joyful servants of humanity, worthy parents of the citizens of tomorrow. Men and women must know conjugal, before they can know true parental, love; each must see in the child the features of the beloved ere the perfect circle of love can be completed...men and women...will be bound by love instead of by law.

This was a confirmation of traditional marriage, though with some important changes in the relationship between husbands and wives. But the fact that Annie Besant so wrote about free love and its consequences shows that this was being widely discussed in the 1850s.

Libertinism was believed to have taken root in England and to be flourishing in the 1860s. In 1867 Francis Newman, Cardinal Newman's brother, wrote in *Fraser's Magazine*:

That libertinism of the most demoralising character flourishes in London, in Paris and in New York, cannot be a secret; nor that it is confined to no grade of society. But alas, the chief cities do but impress the imagination more, by the scale of the evil.

Newman was partly referring to prostitution, but also to adultery and seduction. He said that what made the evil more intractable was that the offenders often appealed 'to a theory that has arisen on both

THE CRUSADE AGAINST MARRIAGE

sides of the Atlantic, concerning “free love” which, however variously applied, in every case would supersede marriage’. Newman thought some who invoked the theory did so because they honestly considered sexual union a private affair with which the state had no right to interfere; but he thought that more often it was used as an excuse for ‘the free indulgence of passion’.

Free love was frequently discussed throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and on into the next. Beatrice Webb did not approve of it, but she pointed out that it was the subject of many popular theatre plays. In *Our Partnership* she wrote,

March 1910—I went to Granville-Barker’s *Madras House* this afternoon. After listening to this and to G.B.S.’s [George Bernard Shaw] *Misalliance*, one wonders whether these two supremely clever persons are not obsessed with the rabbit-warren aspect of human society. G.B.S. is brilliant but disgusting; Granville-Barker is intellectual but dull. They both harp on the mere physical attractions of men to women, and women to men, coupled with the insignificance of the female for any other purpose but sex attraction, with tiresome iteration. That world is not the world I live in, or indeed, think to exist outside a limited circle—at the top and at the bottom of the social strata. In the quiet intermediate area of respectable working-class, middle-class and professional life, and in much gentle society, there is not this over-sexed condition. The women are as intelligent as, and certainly a good deal more spiritual than, the men, and their relations to the other sex are those of true friendship and intelligent comradeship in the transaction of the affairs of life, and in the enjoyment of the interest and beauty of life. (Drake and Cole, 1948, p. 447)

Beatrice Webb was right in saying that in respectable circles people did not openly discuss their sexual passions, but she was wrong in assuming that this meant that people did not indulge such passions (as is clear from the diaries and memoirs of the period). She also wrote in her *Diary*, with greater perception of the practical difficulties she foresaw:

October 18th—H.G. Wells gave an address to the Fabian Society on socialism for the middle-class, ending up with an attack on the family.... Since then I have read *The Days of the Comet*, which

THE GILDED CAGE

ends with a glowing anticipation of promiscuity in sexual relations. The argument is one which is familiar to most intellectuals—it has often cropped up in my own mind and has seemed to have some validity... You do not get to know any man thoroughly except as his beloved and his lover... but there remains the question whether, with all the perturbation caused by such intimacies, you would have any brain left to think with... Regarding each individual as living in a vacuum with no other obligations than the formation of his or her own character, I still reject ‘free love’ as a method of development.

An interesting later entry in her *Diary* for 30 November 1910 also referred to the subject of free love.

H.G. Wells...admitted that he thought free-er love would be the relation of the sexes when we had got over the sordid stage of the masculine proprietorship of the woman. At present, any attempt to realise this free-er love means a network of low intrigue, assumes and, therefore, creates an atmosphere of gross physical desire—but this is only an incident of a morality based on the notion of private property in women. No person has a chance of experimenting in free-er love today—the relations between men and women are so hemmed in by law and convention. To experiment you must be base; hence to experiment starts with being damned.

Whatever Wells was saying to his Fabian friends at the time, he was certainly ‘experimenting’ with free-er love affairs, and his wife was apparently complaisant as long as he told her all about the affairs. The women with whom he got involved were New Women, but they all hoped that he would divorce his wife and marry again (for example, Rebecca West, by whom he had a son in 1914). But Wells was having his lovely cake and eating it, and had no wish to go through the inconvenience of a divorce (West, 1985). Beatrice Webb, not very interested in free love herself, found it difficult to believe that her friends might be.

Of the Bloomsbury set, the most influential literary and artistic group of the early twentieth century, whose lives, loves and bizarre behaviour are endlessly recalled and never cease to amaze and rivet those who read of their exploits, Quentin Bell wrote (Bell, 1972, vol. 1, p. 170) that their world was transformed around 1910 when

THE CRUSADE AGAINST MARRIAGE

it became not only licentious in speech but in conduct (or rather, licence was no longer the privilege of its homosexual component). Vanessa Bell (sister of Virginia Woolf) gave the lead by proposing a libertarian society with sexual freedom for all, though sex had to be sanctioned by passion.

Confirmation that towards the end of the nineteenth century Christian ideals about marriage were not always getting even lip-service came from the novelist Mrs Margaret Oliphant when she reviewed Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and two novels by Grant Allen under the title, 'The Anti-Marriage League' in Blackwood's *Edinburgh Review* for January 1896. Deeply conservative herself about marriage, she asserted the following;

- (1) The sex act was being written about openly, which she considered shameful and dangerous.
- (2) Love and romance unconnected with sexual passion were regarded as passé.
- (3) Some women were depicted as having strong, sensual passions.
- (4) Other women were depicted as using or withholding sexual favours to gain a hold over a man (she seemed to object to them being active agents).
- (5) Some men were becoming passive puppets for women, and were consequently unmanly.
- (6) Other men were victims who lost their wives and children when the wives grew tired of them.
- (7) Children were becoming victims of their parents' wish to separate when boredom with each other predominated.
- (8) Marriage was seen by many women as bondage rather than protection.

Mrs Oliphant further claimed that conversation in drawing rooms was already 'most sensibly affected' by novels which proposed that people should not feel bound by their marriage vows of faithfulness for life, but should follow their inclination when they fell in love with someone else. 'Things are discussed freely and easily which it would a few years ago have been a shame to mention or to think of,' she wrote. Such things *had* been written about and discussed for decades, but Mrs Oliphant was right in saying that discussion had previously been less free and open in 'respectable' middle-class

THE GILDED CAGE

society. What concerned her were those who regarded marriage as a tyranny oppressing all free women (and men); and those who admired Herminia, the heroine of Grant Allen's story *The Woman Who Did* (1895) who rejected a proposal of marriage because:

I know what marriage is—from what vile slavery it has sprung; on what unseen horrors for my sister women it is reared and buttressed; by what unholy sacrifices it is sustained and made possible. I know it has a history. I know its past; I know its present... I must keep my proper place, the freedom which I have gained for myself by such arduous efforts. I have said to you already, 'So far as my will goes, I am yours; take me'... But more than that—no. It would be treason to my sex. Not my life, not my future, not my individuality, not my freedom.

The 'New Woman' of the 1890s seemed to want no formal marriage; no bondage of continual faithfulness; no obligatory staying together when love vanished; the right to choose a man to father a child, outside the bonds of marriage. Some women joined organisations to promote 'bachelor motherhood' (a startling phrase for the time) and answered advertisements in journals offering vacancies in shorthand-writers offices to 'the girls who do' (cf. *The Adult*, vol.2, no.5, 1898). But women of such avant-garde ideas were only a tiny minority of unusual women.

Reflecting the views of many more women, perhaps, was Mona Caird's book, *The Morality of Marriage* (Caird, 1897) which claimed that:

While marriage remained practically the only means of livelihood for women, there was little danger of their seeing too clearly the seamy side of the arrangement; for to see that would be to see the alternatives of selling themselves for a livelihood, and starvation; or in milder cases, between social failure and a marriage which would never have been thought of without this worldly motive. Respectable women therefore buttressed their self-respect by never thinking at all about the conditions of marriage under which they lived, and what would happen if they married a bad man.

She accepted that not every woman was a dauntless heroine,

THE CRUSADE AGAINST MARRIAGE

choosing the hard and thorny path of remaining unmarried and keeping herself, in preference to the apparently smooth one offered by marriage (even if it later turned out badly). The pressure of public opinion urged her strongly in the direction of marriage. Society, religion, her own common wisdom, urged her to take the chance on marriage (which some might say was a braver path to take). Society tended to say,

Marry, and ask no questions: who are you that you should criticise an institution which has lasted for centuries? Marriage is your natural career, your own highly-developed conscience must tell you so. If you do not adopt it, well, we fear you will find cause to regret your decision. If you can't secure a husband, we can but regard you as a failure, a supernumerary who has no proper place in the world.

Yet on entering marriage young people paid little attention to the conditions attached to it, said Mona Caird in an article entitled 'Is Marriage a Failure?' in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1887:

The right of private contract is a right very dear to a liberty-loving people: yet in the most important matter of their lives, they have consented to forego it! So long as the idea holds that a husband and wife must, in assuming that character, consent or subscribe to a set of conditions decided by some other persons—dead and gone for centuries—and that if these conditions are not assented to, honourable union (as society considers) is impossible, so long will freedom be lacking in the most important relation in life, so long will the right of private contract be denied.

The solutions she suggested are still being sought today: equal rights between the sexes; economic independence for women; the ending of the patriarchal system and establishment of real freedom in the home. Her article provoked 27,000 letters to the newspaper, a selection of which Harry Quilter used in a book (Quilter, 1888).

In *Marriage as a Trade*, Cicely Hamilton thought marriage so humiliating that no woman at all should get married; everyone should get a paid job and keep herself. She was clearly thinking of middle-class occupations for women, apparently having little knowledge of the lives of working-class women and the rates of pay

THE GILDED CAGE

available to them. Like most feminists of the period, she had little sympathy for married women who wanted paid jobs, and saw no possibility of them combining marriage and paid work successfully (Hamilton, 1909). Christabel Pankhurst used fear of venereal disease to warn women against marriage. In a widely circulated pamphlet of 1913 she quoted,

the best-informed and most experienced medical men as saying that the vast majority of men exposed themselves before marriage to sexual disease, that only a quarter of those men escaped infection, and that the disease was difficult if not impossible to cure.

She thought votes for women would end the problem: we now know that antibiotics are more effective.

THE ULTIMATE REBELLION—REFUSAL TO MARRY

The Census of 1851 revealed that as many as 30 per cent of women between the ages of 20 and 40 were unmarried, and almost as many men. Unmarried women were generally regarded as social failures, and treated with alternating pity and contempt. But most of all, perhaps, they were regarded as anomalies who challenged the notion that being a wife and mother was the natural expectation of women.

There were only about 6 per cent more women than men in the age group, so it was a puzzle why so many women should remain unmarried. Since there was a surplus of half a million women over males, it was clear that not all women could find a husband, but over a million women remained unmarried in 1851. There seemed to be a breakdown in the general social system. Many men who did not marry said they could not afford to, and this was accepted as an understandable if regrettable reason. But people found it hard to believe that some women remained unmarried from choice; despite the ferment of discussion about the relative legal position of married women and single women (the latter being so much more independent), and the novels and conduct books which laid bare the trials of married life, it was still generally assumed that marriage was preferable to being single.

Yet in the nineteenth century it was *not* the aim of all women to marry. Some believed marriage was incompatible with a higher life

THE CRUSADE AGAINST MARRIAGE

of the spirit; the religious revolt was an old one, usually practised by nuns and sisters in religious orders. But many other women just did not want to marry. For example, Mary Russell Mitford declared in a letter to a friend in 1810, when she was 23:

I shall not marry Sir William Elford, for which there is good reason; the aforesaid Sir William having no sort of desire to marry me; neither shall I marry anybody. I know myself well enough to be sure that if any man were so foolish as to wish such a thing, and I were foolish enough to answer 'yes', yet a timely wish of wisdom (caprice some might call it) would come upon me, and I should run away from the church door... (Brimley Johnson, 1925).

She happily devoted herself to looking after her adored but irresponsible father, who was recklessly extravagant, addicted to gambling, and had lost the family fortune. She took the responsibility for earning the family income by writing. Charlotte Williams-Wynn wrote ironically in 1845:

Keep your daughter's intellect back. Let her draw, sing, study botany, languages etc. etc. but do not urge her to think... [or she may] desire to find a husband to whom, in strict justice, she can look up, instead of doing so as her duty...whether he deserves it or not (Williams-Wynn, 1877)

She herself never married.

An alternative to marriage, for many women, was to become mistress of a father's or a brother's house. If it was on a grand scale, it meant social power. For example, Mary Berry, the elder of the two accomplished ladies whom Horace Walpole once called his 'twin wives', and who wrote *Journals and Correspondence covering the years 1783 to 1852* (published 1865), took complete charge of her father's affairs when she was 16 years old. She described her father as a gentleman of independent means and 'a yielding indolent character'. Her mother had died when she was still an infant. She never married. She early took to authorship, but her books were published under her father's name for propriety's sake, and her authorship was not acknowledged until 1844.

Dorothy Wordsworth, sister of the poet William, was his 'Perfect companion' who inspired him in success, without whom he could not

have been a poet, he said, because of the contribution she made to his poetic imagination. The *Journal* she commenced in 1798 recorded everyday impressions and seemingly trivial events with a wonderful vividness. It also recorded the agony she felt when William married in 1802; but she and Mary had been friends from infancy, and they lived together with William in perfect harmony, sharing the upbringing of the five children and the copying out of William's poetry.

Some women remained unmarried to pursue a career: Harriet Martineau said in her *Autobiography* (1877) that when she had been engaged she wondered if she had the strength to go through with a marriage that would distract her from her path of duty (her writings). She said she had never suffered any sense of loss in relation to love and marriage (her fiancé had died before the marriage could take place). Hannah More portrayed in her novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* the perfect passive wife whom she was apparently determined herself not to become (More, 1808). She had a more important personal mission in her writings and work for Sunday and day schools for the poor. Jane Austen was another famous woman who did not marry, perhaps because of her sharp observation of other people's marriages. She also felt it more honourable not to marry just to get a meal ticket for life, so she remained single and earned her own living.

Florence Nightingale's spinsterhood seems to have sprung from her unyielding opposition to the bonds of family life, for she received proposals of marriage and seriously considered marrying Monckton Milnes. But she chose to identify with hordes of wounded soldiers and make the nursing profession respectable, by her life transfiguring the Victorian myth of womanhood, though she said she was 'brutally indifferent to the rights and wrongs' of her own sex.

Charlotte Brontë remained a spinster for many years from choice; she recorded three proposals of marriage which she refused on the grounds that she did not wish to make marriage the principal object of all her actions, and anyway she did not find her suitors attractive enough! Of one she said, 'each moment he came near to me, and that I could see his eyes fastened on me, my veins ran ice'. She had decided that there was 'no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman who makes her own way through life quietly, perseveringly—without support of husband or brother'. Later she married, but within months died of consumption aggravated by pregnancy (Gaskell, 1857).

Ann Richelieu Lamb wrote a spirited defence of remaining single (Lamb, 1844):

THE CRUSADE AGAINST MARRIAGE

The unmarried woman is *somebody*: the married, nobody! The former shines in her own light; the latter is only the faint reflection of her husband's, in whom both law and public opinion suppose her 'to be lost'... Surely the state of the much-ridiculed spinster is better than this very equivocal position, in which there is a great risk of losing our very identity...

Why, she asked, since there was no disgrace in being a bachelor, was it considered disgraceful to be a spinster? She thought the unmarried women amongst her friends were the most kind-hearted, happy, and intelligent women she knew, and that many married women would have been better off remaining spinsters. However, she pinpointed the heart of the matter when she said that the reason many unmarried women were unhappy was not because they were old maids, but because they were poor. The problem of how unmarried women could earn a living concerned Frances Mary Buss (b. 1827), who grew up in a lower middle-class home. Her father was an engraver and illustrator, and they lived in Camden Town, then an artists' enclave. Her mother did much of the housework herself, and Frances, the only daughter, helped with it. When she was 14, she and her mother started a little school, to help out the family income. When she was 20 she became a student at Queen's College in Harley Street, going there each evening for classes (and walking to and from Camden Town). She later wrote (Ridley, 1895):

As I have grown older, the terrible sufferings of the women of my own class, for want of good elementary training, have more than ever intensified my earnest desire to lighten...the misery of women brought up 'to be married and taken care of, and left alone in the world destitute.

When she became a fully qualified teacher, she founded the North London Collegiate School for Girls, transformed her school into a pioneer educational institution and devoted herself to improving the education and job opportunities of needy lower middle-class girls.

Mary Anne Hearne, born in 1834, was such a woman. She grew up in a Kentish village where her father was a small tradesman and also served as village postmaster. She was at the lowest end of the lower middle-class and they employed no live-in servant at all. When

THE GILDED CAGE

her mother died she was 12 years old, and had to leave school to look after the home. Her sense of being stunted because of her sex, and her search for a role model, is well described in her autobiography (Farningham, 1907):

In one of these [Sunday school monthlies] there was a series of descriptive articles on men who had been poor boys, and risen to be rich and great. Every month I hoped to find a story of some poor, ignorant *girl*, who beginning life as handicapped as I, had yet been able by her own efforts and the blessing of God upon them to live a life of usefulness, if not of greatness. But I believe there was not a woman in the whole series.

Clearly a young woman of determination, she studied late into the nights, and eventually her father allowed her to help him with his business so that she could make a little money and go to school part-time. She wavered about religion for a time, but at the age of 15 was converted and became a fully fledged member of the Particular Baptist Church. She became a teacher and a writer, editor of *The Sunday School Times*, and wrote several improving books for young people, including *Girlhood*, an advice book which was popular for several decades (1869 to 1895 when a second edition was published).

Constance Maynard (b. 1849), on the other hand, was an upper middle-class woman whose feelings of revulsion against the man who proposed marriage are clearly reflected in her diaries (her later love affair was with a woman). In the 1880s she founded Westfield College, 'to amalgamate the intellectual values of Girton with the self-sacrificing, other-worldly values of Evangelical Christianity'. She never married, and had no economic need to.

Frances Power Cobbe wrote a buoyant picture of spinsterhood:

The 'old maid' of 1861 is an exceedingly cheery personage, running about untrammelled by husband or children; now visiting at her relatives' country houses, now taking her month in town, now off to a favourite pension on Lake Geneva, now scaling Vesuvius or the Pyramids. And what is better, she has found, is not only freedom of locomotion, but a sphere of action peculiarly congenial to her nature.

She later wrote her autobiography 'to show how pleasant and

THE CRUSADE AGAINST MARRIAGE

interesting and useful a life was open to an unmarried woman'. It is clear that she never needed to earn her own living, having a substantial private income; but she wrote and campaigned on behalf of women less fortunate than herself. At the end of her long life she said the world she had entered was a very different place from the world she would shortly leave, and most markedly so, 'as regards the position of women in it and of persons like myself holding heterodox opinions, and my experience practically bridges the gulf which divides the *ancien regime* from the new' (Cobbe, 1894).

Elizabeth Haldane, in her memoirs, identified her long single life (1862–1937) with history's mutations:

This book shows how a woman passed from the restrictions of one century to the interest of another. It may also show how she may have a perfectly happy and full life, though devoid of some of the ameliorations that novelists and psychologists tell us make life worth living.

She quarrelled with G.M.Young's insistence that representative institutions and the family were the two unassailable Victorian institutions, writing: 'I should be inclined to say it was the development of the democratic spirit, that is the Spirit of Liberty, that was the predominant influence' (Haldane, 1937, p.208). She thought the family was less an article of faith than a repressive impediment to civilisation in the age in which she, like Young, came to consciousness.

These examples are of middle-class women either of independent means or with the ability to earn a decent living for themselves without the aid of a husband. There were also working-class women who opted against marriage and kept themselves in respectable employment. But it is clear that not all unmarried women had *chosen* to be spinsters: and for the poor seamstress, governess and teacher, or the genteel spinster in her fragile dependency, there was no grandiose sense of rebellion or escape from domestic responsibility. Mrs Maria Grey (1818–1906) a reformer of girls' secondary education, who worked in close partnership with her unmarried sister, Emily Shirreff, was full of praise for spinsters, saying she knew of no class of the community whose service was so valuable as that of unmarried daughters in whom fathers and mothers found comfort in their declining years, elder sisters who took a lost mother's place, and maiden aunts who stepped into every gap in the household. She quoted

THE GILDED CAGE

a maiden aunt of hers who had told her in childhood (around 1830): ‘My dear, if you don’t marry, you will find that you have on your shoulders half a dozen husbands, and as many families of children’ (Grey, 1889). It was not a prospect that most married women would have envied.

CONCLUSION

The many strands of opposition to marriage in the nineteenth century provoked continuous discussion and debate. Belief in women’s right to unfettered free love mingled with other heady ideas about women’s legal, political and social rights. Some saw hope for radical change in a new order of society, but there were few successful attempts to translate the hope into action. In the middle class, complete rebellion against marriage was practised by a few Bohemians and a substantial number of women who refused to marry at all. But marriage was widely mocked and derided, and as a result strong support developed for changes in the traditional legal relations between husbands and wives, and for the possibility of divorce where a marriage had totally failed. In softening up public opinion to accept such changes, the crusade against marriage had far-reaching consequences.

Chapter 11

THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

The gilded cage of bourgeois marriage was occupied by between a fifth and a quarter of the population. Bessie Rayner Parkes calculated that the middle ranks were about three times as numerous as the upper ranks, and that, 'of thirteen units, one would represent the aristocracy, three the middle ranks, and the remaining nine would stand for the masses' (Parkes, 1865). At the top end, part of the upper middle class mingled with aristocratic Society. One example would be the family of the immensely rich businessman, Richard Potter, father of Beatrice Webb. At the bottom end, the lower middle class overlapped in income, though not necessarily in lifestyle, with the prosperous working class from which many of them had been recruited. In between was a middle middle class with sufficient financial security to place them socially above the lower middle class but insufficient wealth for them to mingle with Society. Some of the nuances and differences can be judged from concrete examples. Millicent Garrett Fawcett described her mother's married life in the 1830s and 1840s (Fawcett, 1924). Millicent's grandfather was an Islington inn-keeper but her mother was a strict Evangelical. Her parents borrowed money from her grandfather and started a pawnbroking business in East London, but later moved to Aldeburgh in Suffolk, where Newsom Garrett built up a prosperous business as corn merchant, maltster and brewer (he built The Makings at Snape near Aldeburgh where the Benjamin Britten Festival is now held). With ten children, the mother had no time to take further part in the business, but she was 'the centre of the family' and kept meticulous accounts of her housekeeping,

cooking, baking, laundry and dairy, while training the young female servants. The Garrett children were not expected to take part in household tasks, and were among the first generation of middle-class children to be brought up in a more segregated nursery setting. But this was a very prosperous family; in other middle-class homes the older children would have had to do much more. For example, Isaac Taylor, engraver and Independent Minister, trained each of his nine children as they reached their middle teens in the early decades of the nineteenth century to help with engraving; boys and girls were not treated exactly alike, since the boys had regular schooling denied the girls, and only the girls did domestic work. The household contained two adults, two or three apprentices and pupils, eventually nine children, and usually only one servant, so there was a heavy burden of domestic work for the mother and the daughters (Armitage, 1939).

Beatrice Webb described her husband's lower middle-class family in detail: Sidney's forbears were traders and fisher-folk, neither rich nor poor, and when in 1854 his parents married, his father was a public accountant and his mother kept a retail shop in central London. The Webb parents were the last word in respectability, the intellectual atmosphere of the home being made up of the Radical politics of the father and the broad Evangelical religious feeling of the mother, and the family 'kept itself to itself by having few friends and remaining as inconspicuous as possible. There was no margin of income for entertaining, since at considerable sacrifice they sent their two sons first to a Swiss school to learn French and then to a German family to learn German (these accomplishments led to Sidney getting into the first division of the Civil Service and his brother becoming foreign correspondence clerk in Marshall and Snelgrove). According to Beatrice Webb, they were good, honest, kind and public spirited, but their home was cramped and ugly, and they neither admired nor objected to social superiors—they ignored them (Webb, 1948). Beatrice Webb had of course 'married down' socially, as also did Virginia Woolf, who commented unfavourably in 1912 on the 'hideous furniture' in her mother-in-law's house in Putney (Bell, 1972, vol.2, p.3).

The middle classes guarded their hierarchical boundaries very carefully. There were infinite gradations of status, expressed not only in religious affiliation, education, forms of leisure, dress, style and location of house, number of servants employed, but also in who

spoke to or called on or dined with whom. Women were the staunch defenders of these status differences. Demarcations were as strict at the bottom end of the middle class as at the top, and the professional middle class felt superior to the business middle class. But all the middle ranks lived in fear of bankruptcy or loss of a salaried position, the death of the breadwinner or illness of any member of the family; any of these calamities could plunge the family into debt or actual poverty. Middle-class life was therefore much more precarious than it sometimes seemed to be.

The middle classes are sometimes described as 'the servant-keeping class, as if it was impossible for a family to cling to middle-class status if they could not afford a servant. Yet Patricia Branca makes a persuasive case in that, of families conventionally defined as middle class, those with an income of over £300 a year represented a small minority and their numbers expanded less rapidly between 1803 and 1867 than those of families who made between £100 and £300 a year, and the even larger number of families who made under £100 a year (that is, no more income than the skilled working class). To keep a servant out of such an income would have been very difficult, and life for the lower middle-class wives of lesser clerks, corner shopkeepers, elementary school teachers, and shop assistants, was very hard as they tried to live 'a cut above' the working class, to keep their distance from them, and to stop their children mixing with them (Branca, 1975). Helen Corke described such a life in the 1890s: her father kept a retail shop, her mother was caring rather than spontaneously loving, wanting her children above all to be neat, tidy, and well-behaved. They lingered on the grass verge, watching other children play in the sand, which their Mamma said was dirty, envying them but feeling superior (Corke, 1975). Nonconformist respectability pervaded the household; self-control was what mattered, and no emotions were displayed. Helen went through a pupil-teacher apprenticeship and at age 20 got a teaching appointment; she longed to enter one of the higher professions but knew it was financially impossible.

Mrs Layton said of her childhood in Bethnal Green, London, in the 1850s and 1860s that her father was 'employed in a government situation', his position compelling him to keep up an appearance which an ordinary workman, earning the same wages, would not have had to do. He always went to business 'in nice black clothes and a silk hat', making him very conspicuous

THE GILDED CAGE

amongst his neighbours. He went to church and voted Conservative in politics. As the family grew to fourteen children, while the father's wages stayed the same, her mother had to find ways to earn some extra money, and she worked for a local clergyman's wife as a nurse. The children too earned money by cleaning steps, running errands and minding babies. When she went by train with her aunt, to spend time in the country, she was hidden under her aunt's crinoline when the ticket-collector came round, to avoid paying for her. Mrs Scott described her parents keeping a draper's shop in Stockport, Cheshire, for eleven years; she said the years bred in her a horror of debt, for every Christmas there were rates, promissory notes, etc. falling due. Neither of her parents had a business mind, and they were not keen on asking customers to settle their debts, so she had to go round collecting on Saturday afternoons, which she hated (Life, 1977, pp. 1-55, 82).

THE MIDDLE-CLASS IDEAL OF MARRIAGE

Despite continuous criticism of marriage and its legal disabilities for women, most middle-class women wanted to marry and did so. They married for personal, human reasons as well as economic and social ones; most middle-class women seem to have hoped for emotional satisfaction from marriage, or at least a greater emphasis on love as the basis of marital happiness than women of the upper and lower classes.

As in other classes of society, middle-class girls wanted to marry men of their own social level or slightly above, though this was not always possible. Women who married downwards generally struggled to give their children the advantages they had themselves received as children. Whether religious or not, they were greatly influenced by the teaching of the Christian Church on the subject of marriage. This was that matrimony was ordained for three objects: firstly, for the procreation of children; secondly, to avoid the sin of fornication; thirdly, for the mutual society, help and comfort that the one partner ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and in adversity. Christian teaching regarded marriage as an inviolable contract between one man and one woman, terminable only by death; sex outside marriage was regarded as morally wrong, and married couples were expected to practise monogamy. Although these teachings were constantly flouted, the ideals dominated and

determined the standard of acceptable, respectable behaviour in nineteenth-century England, and lip-service was paid to them until the 1960s. The ethic was also supported as an ideal by people without strong religious faith, and even accepted by most religious unbelievers.

Nineteenth-century observers said that church-going was almost restricted to the middle and upper classes. A layman, *Why are our Churches Closed?* (1858) referred to 'the upper and middle classes (whom we term churchgoers)'; A. Mackenall, in *Sermons Preached to Working People* (1867), said of the middle classes, 'it is one of their traditional proprieties to be associated with some place of worship. But there are not wanting indications that many come into all our churches who would not be found there, were they less influenced by the respectabilities.' And Kathleen Chorley said of Edwardian upper middle-class Manchester, 'I would not like to say how many were assiduous because church-going was still a normal and mannerly activity of society and how many for more relevant reasons' (Chorley, 1950). But it cannot be denied that Christian teaching on marriage dominated the lives of the middle class; open rebellion against religion seemed to destroy people's credibility in other areas of their lives, and so the majority were outwardly conformist whatever their inner beliefs.

Within a broadly religious framework, however, it was possible for people to take two different viewpoints on marriage: one was to regard it as a contract, and to argue that if one or both partners broke the terms of the contract it was no longer valid; the other was to regard marriage as a sacrament, a contract between a man, a woman and God which could not be broken for any reason. The contractual relationship was based on free choice, voluntary consent, reciprocal duties and obligations; the identities of the partners did not merge; marriage was seen as a vehicle for self-discipline and self-restraint. The sacramental relationship was modelled on the union of Christ and his Church; the mystical union of two souls as one included the absorption of each other's identity. Each viewpoint distinguished between profane and sacred love: the basis of profane love was as Herbert Spencer described it in 1855, 'the human impulse for physical gratification'; sacred love was analogous to the spiritual love one felt for God. Most people did not subscribe wholeheartedly to either of the ideals of marriage; attitudes ran in a continuum between the two models, which allowed for constant debate about

THE GILDED CAGE

the circumstances in which a marriage could be dissolved. Some of the Puritan sects were more opposed to the dissolution of marriage than was the Roman Catholic Church (which had for centuries annulled marriages in certain circumstances).

MARRIAGE AS CHRISTIAN DUTY

The instincts, prejudices and inclination of most English women in the nineteenth century favoured making the best of their marriages, by making their lives useful and purposeful to themselves and to others, even when their relations with their husbands seemed completely stultifying. It is unjust to regard women who stuck with a bad bargain as craven or without spirit: in their eyes the cowardly thing was to run away from one's duty, however unpleasant that might be. Duty was a meaningful concept: duty to God, duty to one's husband, children, family and friends. There was even a certain pleasure in martyrdom, in placing the needs of others above one's own. Self-indulgence was something base, something to be treated with contempt. Late twentieth-century women who thrill to the bad life find it difficult to understand nineteenth-century women who thrilled to the good life; but we shall never understand those women unless we realise that so many of them were enthralled by saintly lives of self-abnegation, service to God and/or mankind, and sublimation of sensual gratification. Most of them were totally unable to empathise with women whose lives were dominated by 'Primal emotions'; indeed, they despised them for having no self-control or dignity. And when they read about their lives it was to reassure themselves that such imprudent behaviour led inexorably to calamity.

An example of such a middle-class wife was Anne Jemima Clough's mother (1820s onwards):

She was very fond of reading, especially works on religious subjects, poetry and history...the sufferings of the martyrs, and the struggles of the Protestants were among her favourite subjects. There was an enthusiasm about her that took hold of us and made us see vividly the things she taught us... She was truly religious, and early taught us about God and duty.

She was not, however, a paragon without fault: Anne Jemima noted

that she was critical and hard to please, laughed unmercifully at the weaknesses of others, and had few friends, though she was affectionate to her husband and children. The husband was a Liverpool merchant, not well fitted for business and not successful at it, who liked society and amusement and did not care for reading, but was 'very tender to his wife and children' (Clough, 1897).

We saw in the last chapter that by the 1830s there was widespread discussion about women's role in society, and the ideal of marital duty was being questioned. But writing in 1842, Sarah Ellis in *The Daughters of England* contrasted the feminist ideal of self-expression with the religious ideal of self-sacrifice:

In one case the aim is to secure for yourself all the advantages you can possibly enjoy, and wait for the satisfaction they produce, before you begin the great business of self-improvement. In the other, you look without reserve to [others'] claims, and, having made them habitual, reap your reward in that happiness of which no human being can deprive you, and which no earthly event can entirely destroy.

There was no doubt in Ellis's mind, or that of most of her readers, that the path of self-sacrifice was the more ennobling. Those who opposed easing the divorce law in the 1850s were not unaware that marriage was often unpleasant and difficult; they opposed divorce because the union was made by God and was not to be put asunder by men. This was the force and the passion behind much of the opposition to divorce. At a more mundane level, indissoluble marriage was held by many to be vastly superior to marriage under, say, Moslem law, where a woman could be divorced against her will at any time, should the husband wish it.

The production and upbringing of children was likewise a carrying out of God's will, and for middle-class families a major source of both pleasure and worry, since they thought it their duty to produce sons who would become future leaders of local communities, priests, lawyers, doctors, teachers and business men, and daughters who would reproduce and give moral training to the succeeding generation of worthy men. Personal pride was mingled with the belief that they were making England a better and more secure country. When from the 1850s it became evident that middle-class families were limiting the number of children they had, it was a

THE GILDED CAGE

source of acute anxiety to those who wished to see the middle class increasing in size and power. H.B.Gray compared the state of England in 1913 with Gibbon's account of the fall of the Roman Empire, saying:

Therein are chronicled all the same evils which beset England today; the same decay of agriculture following the aggregation of landed estates in a few hands; the same predominance of town over country life; the same deterioration of physique and general health, the same growth of luxury and desire for bodily comfort; the same increasing distaste for the burdens of married life; the same decline in the birth-rate (Gray, 1913, p.11).

Gray quoted the Report of the Committee on Physical Deterioration, 1904, as saying there had been a sharp decline in the birth-rate in the twenty years from 1881 to 1901 (from 34.7 to 28.4 per 1000).

Contemporary major and minor writers alike confirmed Evangelical Christianity, which the middle class made its own, as one of the most important influences in Victorian society. Evangelicalism is said to have reached its apogee in the 1830s (Halevy, 1949–52) and by then to have grown 'complacent, fashionable, superior' (Young, 1936) but it still exerted a powerful influence for the rest of the century—perhaps partly for the very reasons Young mentioned. In the 1850s and 1860s there was a rigorous and demanding social ethic, without the support of religion or the warrant of utility, sustained by what came to be called 'unsectarian evangelicalism'. George Eliot said, 'Evangelicalism had brought into palpable existence and operation...that idea of duty, that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self, which is to the moral life what the addition of a great central ganglion is to animal life.' Eliot herself found the idea of God inconceivable, the idea of immortality unbelievable, but the idea of duty peremptory and absolute (Myers, 1881).

MARRIAGE AS A MISSION

Duty underwrote the sense of mission that sustained so many women in their marriages, whether or not they were deeply religious. This notion had support from both radical and conservative women writers. Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of*

Women, 1792, addressed 'the middle class, because they appear to be in the most natural state', and she castigated 'the *ladies* of Society who spread corruption through the whole mass of society'. Her views on marriage were reforming, not revolutionary, and they were stimulating to many women who did not understand her passion for political rights. She told wives they had mental powers which it was their duty of cultivate; she said a married woman should 'make herself respectable and not rely for all her happiness on a being subject to like infirmities with herself—independence, not humble dependence on a husband, was 'the grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue'. She discerned the falseness of 'the doll's house' (using the very phrase that Ibsen was later to immortalise in his play), pointing out that women were degraded when men refused to look on them as human beings. She told women to judge things for themselves, since dependence made them slaves, and slavery degraded the master as well as the abject dependant. In any case, she said, women could not by force be confined to domestic concerns for, however ignorant, they would 'meddle in more weighty affairs and disturb by cunning the orderly plans of reason that rose above their comprehension'. Sentiments such as these were not unpleasing even to women of conservative disposition. Mary Wollstonecraft raised many problems concerning marital relationships that were to echo down the nineteenth century, and were discussed by both radicals and traditionalists, though few acknowledged that the dialogue was with her writings.

Another writer who advocated similar ideas to those of Mary Wollstonecraft, and around the same time, was the more conservative and Evangelical Hannah More. She also castigated ladies of fashion for their idleness, and she favoured the education of boys and girls equally, wanting women to 'realise their potential as human beings'. Like Mary Wollstonecraft, she was concerned about women who were unlikely to find a husband to keep them, and hoped they would take training to enable them to make their own livings. She found no incompatibility between a woman having a knowledge of Latin and also carrying out domestic duties. An amusing passage of her novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809) is a description of Coelebs dining with a friend, and finding dinner so ill-cooked that, having read that a study of dead languages made a woman useless in the kitchen, he concluded that his hostess must be greatly accomplished in Greek and Latin.

THE GILDED CAGE

Discovering, however, that she knew neither language and read only romantic novels, he realised that an absence of education in a wife was no guarantee of domestic accomplishments. Hannah More made it clear that she thought educated women could pursue studies, contribute to scholarship, and also raise families, though she herself remained unmarried.

Sarah Ellis wrote books for middle-class women

who belong to that great mass of the population of England which is connected with trade and manufacture, as well as the wives and daughters of professional men of limited income; or, in order to make the application more direct, to that portion of it who are restricted to the services of from one to four domestics—who, on the one hand, enjoy the advantages of a liberal education, and, on the other, have no pretension to family rank.

Her potential readership was about a quarter of the female population, she thought, and she called for ‘a fresh exercise of moral power on their part’. Her first book, *Women of England* (1838) went through 16 editions in the first two years, and was republished in 1843, 1844 and 1846. Obviously she was writing what women wanted to hear. First, she warned her readers against aping ladies who had nothing more to do than give orders (it is interesting that she called her readers ‘women’ rather than ‘ladies’); they had to be careful not to indulge in ‘looseness in minor morals’, in order to keep ‘the dark beast of coarseness and brutality out of their homes’. She called the married woman ‘the guardian of the citadel of respectability’, saying men were too preoccupied with making money to think of the higher things of life, and disregarded the message of Christianity even when they were regular church attenders.

It is not always realised what a battle those crusading middle-class women of England had to fight in the first half of the nineteenth century in order to civilise their menfolk. The coarseness of male society as it had been in the days of George IV, and still was in the early days of Victoria’s reign, is difficult to appreciate. In the literature of the time we are conscious of a world outside the home where drunkenness, crude bawdry, and a gross sort of masculine good-fellowship went unchecked. Francis Place described it vividly in his *Autobiography*. Queen Victoria set about cleaning up the

THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

court. Women in countless homes all over England set about turning their homes into 'sanctuaries from vice'.

One year after publication of Ellis's first book, Sarah Lewis published *Women's Mission* (1839); by 1849 it had gone through 13 editions and was widely read and approved by women. The book began as a translation of a work by Louis-Aime Martin (*L'Education des Mères*, 1834) in which he presented a Rousseauist view of woman as man's spiritual guide. Lewis eliminated the references to male profligacy and re-wrote the book from a female viewpoint. It began by extolling maternal love as 'the only truly unselfish feeling that exists on this earth', but went on to say that women also had a mission to establish peace, love and unselfishness not only in themselves and their children but also in 'the poor, the ignorant, the domestic servant'. Women, equally with men, were responsible for spreading the Christian gospel. She said a Christian woman was 'no longer the slave of man, but the servant of God', and that Christian virtues were 'more easy of practice to women than to men, because women have fewer worldly interests, and are by nature and education less selfish'. Lewis wanted women to regenerate society: 'Most great men have had extraordinary mothers', she said, and it was through the training of children that women would achieve the greatest results. She did not, however, stress the need for a loving relationship between mother and children. She thought women should

have much to do with politics...as moral agents; as representatives of moral principle; as champions of the right in preference to the expedient; by their endeavours to instil into their relatives of the other sex the uncompromising sense of duty and self-devotion which ought to be *their* ruling principles.

Her views did not appeal to feminists who wanted greater autonomy and the means of earning their own livelihoods; but her model did not exalt decorative idleness and clinging dependency, and it provided a respectable set of reasons for women to involve themselves actively in other than household concerns. The concept of 'women's mission' developed as a counterpoint to more radical demands for women's rights and emancipation, and for the rest of the century and beyond it was a widely held view of women's role.

Even adventurous, strong-minded women believed it more womanly to exert authority without proclaiming it ostentatiously. For example, Isabella Bird wrote to her sister in 1873 saying,

THE GILDED CAGE

I have seen a great deal of the roughest class of men, both on sea and land, during the last two years, and the more important I think the 'mission' of every quiet, refined, self-respecting woman—and the more mistaken I think those who would forfeit it by noisy masculinity or fastness.

She was the most daring explorer of her time, the first woman to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, and a renegade from domestic responsibilities. But she still held to the view that women's mission was to civilise men. At age 50 she married a doctor ten years her junior, stayed at home until his death five years later, then went off exploring again (Bird, 1879).

The concept of a special mission for women was one of the most powerful themes used against campaigners for women's rights, and it needs to be asked why it had such a wide appeal. One possibility is that affluent and energetic middle-class wives felt unsure of their domestic value and needed to be reassured. Larger-scale production in factories and other central points of manufacture made it unnecessary to make beer, bread or clothes at home. The invention of the home sewing machine around mid-century cut down on mending and hemming. When families ceased to 'live above the shop', fewer wives took an active part in the business and they knew less of their husbands' working lives. The education of their children was more likely to take place in boarding schools or day schools. And as the century progressed it became more common for the affluent middle class to employ servants: in 1851 there were more than a million domestic servants (more than double the number of women and girls then employed in all the textile trades); on the eve of the First World War domestic service was still the largest single occupational group for women. A pre-Victorian handbook, *The Complete Servant* by Samuel and Sarah Adams, suggested spending a quarter of the family income on servants' wages, except at the lowest rate of income (for example, a family with £100 a year could not afford to spend £25, but at most 5 to 10 guineas for one girl). Isabella Beeton said a family with £1000 a year needed a cook, upper and under-housemaids, and a man servant; with £500 a year they needed a cook and a maid; and with an annual income between £150 and £300 they should have only a maid-of-all-work; below that income women had to be prepared to do their own housework (Beeton, 1861). Newly affluent Northern families usually treated servant-keeping as a luxury they

could do without, especially since servants were hard to obtain where there was alternative factory employment; in Bradford in 1851 only 5 per cent of all families kept live-in servants. Wives had to be hard-headed and hard-working, and help their husbands in their careers (Koditschek, 1985).

How, though, was the middle-class wife with servants to do most of the work to make a respectable occupation for herself in the home? The answer was for her to organise the household as rationally and efficiently as her husband did his business. A wife's economy and carefulness could contribute a great deal to the surplus income of the family, which could then be available for luxuries. Examples of careful, thrifty wives are not hard to find, but Jane Carlyle described her role in minute detail. She may have been unusual in knowing every detail of Thomas Carlyle's earnings and spending, and in being in charge of the finances (by mutual consent, since Thomas hated to be bothered with financial problems). But Jane was thrifty and kept scrupulous accounts, enjoyed a haggle over prices, and was prepared to appeal to the Tax Inspector against what she considered an exorbitant tax demand. Income Tax, levied during the Napoleonic Wars and repealed in 1816, was reintroduced by Sir Robert Peel in 1842. During the Crimean War it was raised to Is 4d in the pound—double what it had been previously—and this was a serious problem for a writer whose income fluctuated from year to year. Jane decided to beard the Commissioners of Inland Revenue. She must have been a persuasive supplicant for they took £100 off the bill. Her first reaction was, what a mercy her husband had not gone himself! But Jane had an allowance within which she had to budget the household expenses, and if she wanted an increase they usually had what she called 'a money row'. In 1855, when food prices rose and income tax was doubled, she found that her allowance would not pay the household bills, and as she dreaded a scene with her husband she prepared a statement on the lines of a Parliamentary Budget, hoping Carlyle would be more amused than enraged. She went through her expenses, and offered to do without Christmas and birthday presents or cut down her dress allowance, in return for an increased housekeeping allowance. Carlyle was pleased by her ingenuity and agreed with her proposals. Although Jane had all the worries of their finances, she was not trusted to spend money without her husband's approval, and she was not an equal partner in their relationship. But she obviously felt that she contributed in no

small measure, by her thrift and economy, to the family's wellbeing (Holme, 1965).

Knowing what tasks needed doing in a home, and organising servants to do them, was an art that many newly affluent women needed to learn, and there was a ready market for books and articles on the subject. Sarah Ellis said that she wanted to 'combat the false notions of refinement which were rendering the young middle-class women less influential, useful and happy than their mothers' (Ellis, 1843). She was not simply imagining that earlier in the century women of the 'comfortable middle ranks' had taken more part in household tasks. For example, Diana Sperling made delightful sketches between 1816 and 1823 of her life with her parents at Dynes Hall, an imposing country house near Halstead in Essex. The family belonged to the ranks of the substantial gentry, the sort of well-to-do squires who dominated village affairs. One of the pictures shows Diana's mother standing on the windowsill of the drawing room, swatting a cloud of flies, while the maid attempts to catch the dead bodies in a basket; since the room is almost empty of furniture and ornaments, she and the maid were obviously giving the room a thorough cleaning (Mingay, 1981). Many country houses had a home farm attached so that fresh produce could be close at hand, but the stables, dairies, pigsties and barns in close proximity to the house were a potent source of flies in summer. Changes in attitude were noted by Margaretta Grey, who said in her diary for 1853, 'Ladies, dismissed from the dairy, the confectionery, the store-room, the still-room, the poultry-yard, the kitchen-garden, and the orchard, have hardly yet found themselves a sphere equally useful and important' (Butler, 1869).

Ellis in 1843 was not advising her middle-class readers to do the servants' work for them, or even to help them with it: she told them how to *manage* their servants, warning,

It can never be said that the atmosphere of the kitchen is an element in which a refined and intellectual woman ought to live; though the department itself is one which no sensible woman should think it a degradation to overlook. But instead of maintaining a general oversight and arrangement of such affairs, some well-intentioned women plunge head, heart and hand, into the vortex of culinary operations, thinking, feeling and doing what would be more appropriately left to their servants.

THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

It worried Ellis, however, that some women looked upon their servants as a kind of household machinery, and she advised them to behave towards them with kindness blended with dignity. 'Treat them like human beings,' she said firmly, 'human beings with hopes and feelings, and for whom you have some responsibility.' Women who employed servants spent more of their lives with them than with any other group, not excluding their husbands and children. Jane Carlyle's letters document forty years of struggle, from the 1820s to the 1860s, with a succession of servants who almost always got the better of her (though her obsession with thrift and her sharp eye for badly done cleaning caused her to worry more than many other women might have done). In 1861, when obliged by ill-health to increase her domestic staff, she wrote, 'So now I am the mistress of two servants, and ready to hang myself (Lochhead, 1964, p. 191).

Beeton's book was really a manual for the upper middle-class domestic manager, comprising

information for the mistress, housekeeper, cook, kitchen-maid, butler, footman, coachman, valet, upper and under housemaids, lady's maid, maid-of-all-work, laundry maid, nurse and nurse-maid, monthly, wet and sick nurses etc., also sanitary, medical and legal memoranda: with a history of the origin, properties and uses, of all things connected with home life and comfort.

The usefulness and appeal of this book can be measured by its sales: an 1172-page book, price 7s 6d (more than half what some agricultural labourers at the time earned in a week), it sold more than 2 million copies by 1870. Beeton was treating household management as a job requiring skill, thought and planning: 'As with the commander of an army or the leader of an enterprise, so it is with the mistress of a house. Her spirit will be seen through the whole establishment.' Middle-class women relished the role of full-time domestic manager, and the sense of purpose it gave to their lives, for cleaning their homes was a symbol of cleaning up lives and the nation's spirit.

In fact, it was extremely difficult to achieve high standards of cleanliness in any homes in nineteenth-century England. In 1814 a Mr Phair had said that water-closets were in general use in gentlemen's houses; but even in many of the best houses a cesspit for effluvia persisted to the 1850s—it might be in the yard, or inside the house, even below the living-room floor (the contents had to be

THE GILDED CAGE

carried away in buckets by 'Night men'). Running water, when it came, rarely ran above the basement: it was later piped up to the kitchen sink, but had to be carried further upstairs. Until around 1870 the bath and wash basin were portable affairs: well-to-do people had wash-stands in their bedrooms, the water being carried upstairs and slops downstairs by a maid. Houses were frequently plagued by mice, rats, bugs and flies, and professional rat-catchers and bug-destroyers advertised their services in newspapers. Tiffin & Son were bug-destroyers to Her Majesty at Buckingham Palace, specialising only in upper-class bed bugs.

Flora Tristan remarked how badly planned London middle-class houses were, with the kitchen in the basement, the dining room on the ground floor, the drawing room on the first floor and the bedrooms on the second and third floors. She saw that this led to inefficient use of servant labour (Tristan, 1840). The standard London terraced house, built about 1860 'for the better class', had only two rooms of importance on each of its four or five floors, the space being adequate but ill-organised. Servants had to toil up and down the stair-well at the call of a bell, carrying buckets of coal, cans of water and trays of food. When servants became unavailable, these houses were unworkable. Middle-class women may have said there was more to life than making money, but they wanted things that only money would buy. These became available in the nineteenth century, in the shape of new machines that made domestic work easier, new foods, household supplies, factory-made and cheaper furniture and goods, water closets and piped water, gas, electricity and cheaper forms of transport.

By the 1850s the middle-class housewife was acknowledged mistress of her own sphere; that sphere was subordinate to that of her husband, but it had become 'her kingdom where she exercises entire control' (Smiles, 1910) and the doctrine was not meant to be demeaning to women. The interesting and contradictory fact is that while Victorians such as Ruskin and Coventry Patmore were glorifying the perfect lady who was purely decorative and submissive, the popular conduct books were constructing an ideal of a wife who was as efficient and successful in running her domestic sphere as her husband was in running his business or profession. Having found what it believed was an honourable and satisfying function, many mid-Victorian middle-class women could not understand feminist

THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

arguments about women's role, marriage and divorce. Not all women were longing to enter the world of paid work, even if opportunities had been available. The governess, in one of the few occupations open to middle-class women, was envied by no one (Mary Wollstonecraft and Charlotte Brontë had miserable lives as governesses).

Domesticity was popular with many middle-class women. Some of the most talented writers rejected the use of a literary or other vocation to avoid the responsibilities of home life. According to Elizabeth Gaskell,

No other can take up the quiet duties of the daughter, the wife, or the mother, as well as she whom God has appointed to fill that particular place...nor can she drop the domestic charges devolving on her as an individual, for the exercise of the most splendid talents that were ever bestowed.

Not everyone would have agreed with such sentiments, but a surprising number of strong-minded women writers flaunted their domesticity and genuinely seemed to enjoy it. Harriet Martineau bragged that she could sew shirts and make puddings (*Autobiography* 1, 1839) and praised housework in her novel *Deerbrook*. George Eliot kept careful records of the asparagus nippers and the second-best blankets. Frances Power Cobbe enthused about her china cupboard. Dinah Mulock insisted that 'the best housekeepers, the neatest needlewomen, the most discreet managers of their own and others' affairs, are ladies whose names the world cons over in library lists and Exhibition catalogues.' (Mulock, 1858, p.56). The rebellious Geraldine Jewsbury prided herself on her housekeeping. Jane Carlyle wrote, after being her house-guest, 'I should like to see the perfectly rational proper Mrs Ellis of a woman that could have managed as well with me as this poor little authoress of a questionable *Zoe* has done.' And the editors of the *English Woman's Journal*, a magazine devoted to finding employment for middle-class women, believed with the majority of their contributors that women ought to concern themselves with housework and not shift it all off on to servants (11 August 1858). They raised the valid point that if the work was degrading for one class of women, it was degrading for all.

UNDOMESTICATED MIDDLE-CLASS WIVES

It would, however, be a mistake to think that all middle-class wives were the domesticated and dutiful paragons that didactic writers wanted them to be. Prescriptive literature telling women to accept an inferior role in marriage, putting their husbands' interests first and sacrificing themselves to those concerns, was undermined from an unexpected quarter. Affluent, middle middle- and upper middle-class girls received an education that developed social graces designed to win them admiration and notice (as well as husbands). Before marriage, the woman was given a spot in the social limelight, and she was not inclined after marriage to assume a submissive role as a staid and dull person. Social butterflies were not willing to go back to the chrysalis stage; the marriage market had the unintentional consequence of providing a breeding ground for rebellion against the traditional role prescribed for wives. These women were not necessarily interested in political or legal justice for women. They were the type of whom Jane Austen wrote (ironically as usual), 'Imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their charms'; but such imbecility was often a sham, and the women were not such idiots as to welcome taking a backseat after marriage, so many resisted the transition. This view can be substantiated by considering the vast number of books that had to be written in each generation, reinforcing the ideal of the submissive wife; if women had been behaving as required, such books would have been unnecessary.

Another aim which ran counter to their 'postponed gratification' morality was the attempt by some of the middle class to emulate upper-class lifestyles. Most of them were influenced by the manners, fashions in clothes, furnishings and house designs of the great and famous. *The Lady's Magazine*, issued between 1770 and 1837, gave endless advice on how to conduct oneself, as well as information on the fine arts, music, drama, literature and fashions. Clearly this advice was not aimed at the upper class, since they set the fashions. It was aimed at the socially aspiring such as the wives of farmers who had prospered as a result of the agricultural revolution, who took less responsibility for the household and dairy and had more time to lead a genteel life. Arthur Young, in *Annals of Agriculture*, criticised 'foolish farmers' wives' around 1800 for their pretensions, as he saw them:

THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

I see sometimes, for instance, a piano-forte in a farmer's parlour, which I always wish was burnt; a livery servant is sometimes found, and a post-chaise to carry their daughters to assemblies; these ladies are sometimes educated at expensive boarding-schools, and the sons at the university, to be made parsons: but all these things imply a departure from the line which separates these different orders of beings.... Let these things, and all the folly, foppery, expense and anxiety that belongs to them remain among gentlemen. A wise farmer will not envy them.

Perhaps not, but apparently his wife and daughters did, and got their own way in following their lifestyle.

The effect of boarding-school education on girls was socially important; there the less wealthy mixed with the daughters of the very rich merchants and manufacturers, and learned their attitudes (which included despising domestic chores). They were not given an education of the intellect, or any training useful to them if they needed to earn a living. They imbibed the idea of being 'ladies of leisure', the female equivalent of the leisured gentleman. As with the latter concept, leisured did not necessarily mean 'idle', although the right to be idle was part of the concept. Middle-class women imitated what they thought was the lifestyle and manners of 'those who mattered in Society', rather than what that lifestyle really was; some thought complete idleness was the emblem of 'the perfect lady' and tried to live that way, for others it mattered to appear idle even if they were in fact industrious. It is clear there were wide differences between the lives and outlook of the aristocracy and the middling sort. The fashionable world went in for hard drinking, gambling, blood sports, and the keeping of mistresses: the middle classes went in for making money and investing in property which would appreciate in value, on the whole disapproving of wasting their hard-earned money by aping the vices of the aristocracy, even though they admired their taste in 'the fine things of life'. Sarah Ellis wrote in 1843:

What would England gain...by the middle classes aspiring to imitate the manners, and adopt the customs of the aristocracy? No: let her shopkeepers still—her farmers, and the wives and daughters of such honest, manly and honourable citizens of the

THE GILDED CAGE

world, let them no longer blush to owe the comfort of their homes to the profits of well-conducted trade.

Ellis despised ladies of fashion, but admitted that many middle-class girls were just as undomesticated (Ellis, 1843).

As early as 1814 it was possible for middle-class women to perform few domestic functions for themselves. There were a host of occupations providing services to the increasingly affluent and consumer-oriented families of doctors, apothecaries, architects, dancing masters, musicians, schoolteachers, attorneys, secretaries, clerks, as well as the minor clergy. They could buy china, furniture, paintings, clothes, musical instruments, from merchants and tradesmen who exchanged goods across the country via the good road and canal system. They patronised the theatres, the music rooms, the print shops, the circulating libraries, read newspapers, magazines and novels. That all women did not enjoy domestic tasks and child-rearing is clear from the unceasing flow of books, articles and poems that appeared in each succeeding generation throughout the nineteenth century, urging them to be less flighty, more socially responsible and better mothers. Some women admitted not liking children. It was said of the Countess of Westmorland in 1801, 'She is again breeding, which greatly vexes her, for she hates children.' Queen Victoria, as shown earlier, did not like her children much. And throughout her life, Elizabeth Gaskell maintained that maternal love was not the natural attribute of every woman, that she could give birth to a child she detested, and that it was possible for the idealised love of parent and child to be established between strangers or distant relations (her Aunt Lumb had become her own substitute mother). It was love that defined the relationship between mother and child, not an act of birth, she said, explaining that her own growth to maturity in the security of love was a tribute to her aunt and her relations at Holland Park. In fact, as is clear from her letters, Elizabeth Gaskell loved her own children dearly, though she did not think this was natural to all women. And she quarrelled with Florence Nightingale for saying that 'if she had influence enough not a mother should bring up a child herself; there should be creches for the rich as well as the poor. If she had twenty children she would send them all to a creche, seeing, of course, that it was a well-managed creche,' This seemed to Gaskell to indicate a want of love for individuals (Chappie and Sharps, 1980, p.xii). Yet Florence

Nightingale's suggestion was sensible for any woman who did not enjoy being a constant childminder.

One way to deduce what was actually going on in homes, as opposed to what the didactic literature told women they *should* do, is to look at what the moral improvement books advised against, disapproved of, or held up as models not to be emulated. The unpopularity of housework was mentioned by Ellis; she blamed middle-class women for giving up 'the constant employment of their hands' because household tasks were 'incompatible with modern notions of refinement'. Younger women were said not to like housework, sewing or handiwork, to have sickly sensibilities, to be constantly pining for excitement, eager to escape from individual duty, unable to adjust to a lower standard of living if that became economically necessary, generally unwilling to help others, and no longer 'diligent and thoughtful readers of books' (Ellis, 1843). It may be wondered where were all those domesticated women of legend.

A German observer wrote in *Household Words* on 26 January 1856: 'The culinary condition of the English is so bad that nothing but a root-and-branch reform will ever do them any good.' A later article in the same magazine (27 April 1859) entitled 'A Good Plain Cook' lamented the fact that:

The young ladies of the leisure classes...keep an uncompromisingly tight hand over the milliners and lady's maid. They can tell to a thread when a flounce is too narrow or a tuck too deep... But her 'good plain cook'—when the damsel is promoted to wedlock and owns one—passes unrepined for the most heinous offences... These crimes, from their frequency and the ignorance of 'the lady of the house' remain unpunished.

Continuing evidence of bad housekeeping can be found in the 1860s; we do not know whether books on domestic management such as Beeton's were bought by husbands for their wives, or bought by women for their servants, but according to 'What is Women's Work?', an article by Eliza Lynn Linton in the *Saturday Review* of February 1868, housekeeping had then fallen into 'unreasonable disrepute'. She said in families earning £400 or £500 a year the wife who was an active housekeeper was the exception rather than the rule. Women would not 'see to anything

themselves' but left the maids to do the best they knew or the worst they would! This wasteful way of housekeeping was thought to be analogous to English cooking—'a revolting poverty of result with flaring prodigality of means... For one middle-class gentlewoman who understands anything about cookery...there are ten thousand who do not.' The 'snobbish half of the middle-class' were accused of regarding housewifely work as degrading, 'save in the trumpery pretentiousness of "giving orders" '.

Linton was exaggerating her case, she was obviously concerned only with that part of the affluent middle class which employed servants, and she probably based her observations on those with whom she associated in London, paying little regard to regional variations in women's lives. She continued her attack in an article in the *Saturday Review* (14 March, 1868, pp.339–40) when she accused fashionable middle-class girls of behaving like prostitutes by their overtly flirtatious and sexually assertive behaviour. 'The Girl of the Period', she said:

is a creature who dyes her hair and paints her face...a creature whose sole idea is fun: whose sole aim is unbounded luxury; and whose dress is the chief object of such thought and intellect as she possesses. Her main endeavour is to outvie her neighbours in the extravagance of fashion... The imitation of the *demi-monde* in dress leads to something in manner and feeling, not quite so pronounced perhaps, but far too like to be honourable to herself...it leads to slang, bold talk, and general fastness; to the love of pleasure and indifference to duty; to the desire of money before either love or happiness; to uselessness at home, dissatisfaction with the monotony of ordinary life, horror of all useful work... No-one can say of the modern English girl that she is tender, loving, retiring or domestic... The legal barter of herself for so much money, representing so much dash, so much luxury and pleasure—that is her idea of marriage...and if her husband thinks that he has married anything that is to belong to him...the sooner he wakes from his hallucination...the less severe will be his disappointment. She has married his house, his carriage, his balance at the banker's, his title; and he himself is just the inevitable condition clogging the wheel of her fortune, at best an adjunct, to be tolerated with more or less patience as may chance.

THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

'The Girl of the Period' article was not an isolated broadside. Week after week Linton poured her (anonymous at the time) scorn on modern mothers, fashionable women, nymphs, weak sisters, grim females, widows, spoilt, doll-like and sphinx-like women, *femmes passées*. She said women grumbled at having children, expressed their envy of men's lives, refused to acknowledge that running a house was little less boring than the jobs many men did. What were they doing with their time? Novel-reading, fancy-work, visiting, letter-writing. Her accounts were taken to be accurate if somewhat exaggerated and brought out into the open the fact that many women no longer accepted, even as an ideal, a wifely role which involved their being tender, loving, retiring or domestic.

Feminist Mary Taylor wrote in *The First Duty of Women* (1870):

As her means increase every wife transfers every household duty involving labour to other hands. As soon as she is able to afford it she hires a washer-woman occasionally, then a charwoman, then a cook and housemaid, a nurse or two, a governess, a lady's maid, a housekeeper—and no blame attaches to any step of her progress, unless the payment is beyond her means.

Clearly only the affluent could employ others, but the undomesticated woman was clearly visible to contemporaries then and at the end of the century. In an item in *The Young Woman* magazine, 1897/98, there is a list of 'Women who should never marry': the woman who thinks that men are angels and demigods; the woman who expects a declaration of love three times a day; the woman who thinks she can get £1000 worth of style out of a £200 salary; the woman who would rather nurse a pug dog than a baby; the woman who thinks that the cook and the nurse can keep house; the woman who proudly declares that she cannot hem a pocket-handkerchief, never made up a bed in her life, and adds with a simper that 'she has been in society ever since she was fifteen'; the woman who buys bric-a-brac for the drawing-room and borrows kitchen utensils from her neighbours; the woman who wants things just because 'other women' have them.

From various sources there thus emerges a picture of a substantial number of middle-class women who, throughout the nineteenth

THE GILDED CAGE

century, were far from fitting the stereotype of the passive, docile 'angel in the house', and far from being the good household managers that they were supposed to be. We will go on to look at some of the strategies wives adopted in order to lead their lives on their own terms.

Chapter 12

A LIFE OF ONE'S OWN

How did most married women survive the constraints on their behaviour due to their legal subordination? The truly abused minority are not the focus here: the fight to change their lot will be dealt with in the next chapter. A room of one's own was hard to find in the gilded cage, even in the happiest of marriages; a life of one's own still harder. The majority of women professed not to know they were living in subjection, did not care about lack of political rights, believed change was unlikely and would involve considerable risk if it came, or just did not have the stomach for the fight. Yet they were not all passive or apathetic creatures. They made the best of their lives and the opportunities that came along, and they developed strategies for defending their personal autonomy.

Middle-class women considered themselves more upright and less corrupt than either the upper class or the working class, and many did philanthropic work. That their purpose was primarily religious (though unsuccessful) does not diminish the value of their local charitable work for the poor, or their part in suppressing brutality and cruelty to children and animals. All the great moral and social changes of the nineteenth century were pioneered by private activity and benevolence. Women played an important part in all those campaigns, and as well as the few great and famous there were vast numbers of little-known women all over the country who did the grassroots work. Baroness Burdett-Coutts prepared in 1892 a report, *Women's Mission: A Series of Congress Papers on the Philanthropic work of women by eminent writers*, containing 32 pages and an appendix summarising the work of over 220 organisations and individuals in England, 52 in Ireland and 44

THE GILDED CAGE

overseas. It is an illuminating and sometimes touching account of that much-mocked figure, the Victorian Lady Bountiful.

HUSBAND MANAGEMENT

Nineteenth-century middle-class husbands may have believed that in marriage they would be the masters and their wives their servants, but the legally subordinate partners often simply worked out a technique of cajolery and persuasion that was more subtle and more effective than an outright and independent wilfulness. As slave-owners found down the ages, the master could become so dependent that the slave could manipulate the owner. Home must always have been a contest of wills, with family life (as now) a continuous cycle of tension and accommodation, though Victorians were loathe to admit publicly to any discord. The injunction of the marriage service, that the man was to rule and the woman was to obey, was not a rule that most women accepted without a fight.

The easiest way for a middle-class married woman to make sure her personal wishes were considered and often fulfilled, was for her to learn to 'manage' her husband. If he could be persuaded to believe that a plan was his own, rather than hers, it saved a lot of argument. The art of knowing when to ask for something was cultivated. The wife made sure that her husband was relaxed, well fed and feeling comfortable when he was approached for approval of some plan of which he was likely to disapprove. Wives learned not to contradict their husbands too frequently, and above all not in public. As Sarah Ellis said (Ellis, 1843), it was inadvisable for them to appear to be more intelligent than their husbands, even if that were the truth of the matter. Long regarded as the epitome of conformity, Ellis was really quite complex and propounded apparently contradictory ideas. Having told wives they should accept their innate inferiority to men, she wrote:

In the case of a highly gifted woman, even where there is an equal or superior degree of talent [than that] possessed by her husband, nothing can be more injudicious, or more fatal to her happiness than an exhibition of the least disposition to presume upon such gifts. Let a husband be once subjected to a feeling of jealousy of her importance...and her peace of mind and *her free agency* are alike destroyed for the rest of her life; or at any rate, until she can

convince him afresh, by a long continuance of the most scrupulous conduct, that the injury committed against him was purely accidental and foreign alike to her feelings and her inclinations.

It is interesting that Ellis accepts that some women are more intelligent than their husbands, and that a wife has 'free agency'—a woman's realm which is separate, distinct, and also out of the reach of men. Much of her advice about accepting men's superiority appears to be ironic, for she wrote, 'they are more apt than women to act as if they were created to exist of, and by, themselves;... They are, in fact, their own alpha and omega—beginning and end.'

Ellis set out to show women 'the trials of married life' and how to come to terms with them. She described the bad-tempered husband; the idle husband 'sitting slipshod at noontime, with his feet upon the fender, occasionally jarring together the whole army of fire-irons with his foot'; the 'ruinous propensity of some men to spend their own money, and sometimes the money of their friends, in vague speculations and visionary schemes'; the man who was cruel to animals; a man's propensity to be out of humour about his food, if some trifling indulgence was missing; and men who 'waged open and determined war on domestic arrangements such as washing days or spring-cleaning'. There were unpunctual men who hated unpunctuality in others; husbands who read the newspaper while their breakfasts waited for them; men who set out on journeys without having told their wives they were leaving. Ellis said that men liked the feeling of power and decision this gave them. These were shrewd comments on everyday relationships, though Ellis saw no solution except for the wife to bear with them as best she could. How important the temper of even kindly fathers was to the cordial relations of the family was confirmed by Lady Dorothy Nevill. When she was young in the 1840s her mother used to indicate to the family, by crossing her cutlery at the table, that her husband was in a bad mood and was best not argued with at that meal!

More seriously, Ellis discussed what she called the two most painful trials of married life—intemperance and unfaithfulness. She was at a loss what to suggest about drunkenness—the wives of drunkards were to be met with in every grade, she said, yet society did nothing to help them. Regarding unfaithfulness, she distinguished between unfaithfulness arising entirely from estranged

THE GILDED CAGE

affection, and unfaithfulness arising from attraction towards 'a different object'; from the point of view of keeping a marriage together, she thought the former was more a danger than the latter. Like most moralists of the time, Ellis put the blame for the breakdown in marital affection squarely on the shoulders of the wife, holding her totally responsible for failing to 'keep' her husband. She gave long instructions about how to cultivate 'the means of promoting social and domestic happiness, with which every woman who enters upon the duties of a wife ought to make herself acquainted', though she advised women against binding themselves to 'the worst of all slavery, the fear of a husband'. Since Ellis felt obliged to spell out in great detail this very one-sided relationship, it seems probable that many women did not readily accept such unequal relations. Telling wives with unfaithful husbands not to 'look elsewhere for comfort', she touted the idea of moral superiority: 'how infinitely preferable is the feeling of having borne unfaithfulness than of having been unfaithful ourselves!' Not all women would have agreed.

Jane Carylye spent forty years of marriage from the 1820s onwards keeping 'on the right side of her husband'. Thomas was clearly a difficult person to live with—he disliked boring people, was disturbed by any change in his routine, small things annoyed him such as the noise of cocks, dogs or pianos, or any noise in the house after bedtime. He suffered from dyspepsia and constipation, and the treatment of these ailments dominated both their lives. Jane wrote about all these things, often humorously and with exaggeration, to her close relations who knew and understood the household well. Early in their marriage Thomas complained that Jane never talked to him: later he said she had a tongue which would take skin off at a touch. But she wrote lively, sparkling letters, and must have been warm and sympathetic because so many people came to her for help. Caryle suggested sourly that she should advertise their house as a home for stray cats and dogs. She was also popular with Carlyle's literary friends, some of whom came to see her rather than him (Carlyle, 1924).

Thomas Carlyle wrote that 'the true destiny of a woman...is to wed a man she can love and esteem, and to lead under his protection, with all the wisdom, grace and heroism that is in her, the life prescribed in consequence.' From her letters and journals, Jane Carlyle does not seem to have enjoyed without reservations

her life of nurturing her husband's genius. She accepted that he ruled the house, but as she wrote in 1835 to John Sperling, 'In spite of the honestest efforts to annihilate my I-ity, or merge it in what the world doubtless considers my better half; I still find myself a self-subsisting and alas! self-seeking me.' Throughout her life she retained that sense of separate identity, and doubtless she spoke for many of her sex.

Around 1867, the influential writer Eliza Lynn Linton told middle-class wives how to become the dominant influence in their husband's lives (Linton, 1886): all it needed, she said, was 'a little love, a little listening, a little patience, a little persistence and the game is won.' This seemed to confirm Coleridge's statement in *Social Confidence*, earlier in the century, that:

Caresses and endearment on this side of sickening fondness and affectionate interest in all that concerns himself, are what every man loves, whether he be communicative or reserved, staid or sanguine. All men, even the most surly, are influenced by affection, even when little fitted to excite it.

Linton said that the shy, modest girl who had 'no thought but a dance, no will but her mama's, no particular preference for anything, became after marriage capable of changing completely the habits of her husband, moulding his tastes, and bending his character to her own'. The first move was to isolate the husband from his men friends; a woman had to appeal to her husband's protection, pretend to being so helpless that she needed all his attention. When the husband learned the pleasure of being an authority to his wife, he would be less anxious to spend evenings at the club, since at home he would always have a good listener to his ideas. Silence enabled a wife to triumph over her husband; when he rebelled against married life being so cramped and confined, the wife should not answer back and he would soon feel he was being cowardly and tyrannical. Likewise, if a man denounced something his wife had done, she was to wait until he ceased to complain, and then go out and do it again. Another method of getting her own way was by 'nagging'; in the long run the wife wins:

The son goes to Harrow, though reason has proved a dozen times over that the family can only afford Marlborough; the family gets

THE GILDED CAGE

its Alpine tour, though logic and unpaid bills imperatively dictate the choice of a quiet watering-place.

This kind of advice, whimsical and ironical, but doubtless based on observation of how many wives manipulated their husbands, is reminiscent of Emily Eden's novel *The Semi-Attached Couple*, written in 1830 and published in 1860:

'There!' said Ernest, as Lord Teviot walked off to the billiard room, with his arm round his wife's waist. 'Now, that is just what I want—somebody who knows which way the wind blows, and who will tell me what I may or may not do, and will make me stay at home when I want to go out, and vice-versa. Just see how it has improved Teviot; he used to look as black as thunder on the slightest contradiction, and now he is the mildest of men, and looks radiant when Helen vouchsafes to snub him. It is strange.'

In another *Saturday Review* article entitled 'Ambitious Wives' Linton pointed out that, denied direct exercise of their capacities, women made their husbands the conductors of their ambitions. It was pure theory, she said, that women were peaceful domestic beings, with no object beyond household cares. Many a man was no more than the representative of an aspiring wife; the wife received her award in a second-hand way, but it was still a glory of sorts—the wife became a leading lady in a provincial town, perhaps, and in the Season in London was asked to houses she was eager to enter. As a result she had a thousand ways of displaying social power.

DISSIMULATION

Like any other group with limited control over their lives, women have always resorted to deceit as a survival technique. In the Victorian age deceit in matters large and small was a socially prescribed form of middle-class female behaviour. Women were encouraged to hide their affections for a man before marriage (in case it led to pre-marital sex), and even in marriage to conceal their bodies and bodily functions (such as menstruation and pregnancy) and hide or feign sexual pleasure with their husbands (depending on which advice manual they were following). Their education in deceit started when they were very young. Whether being educated at home

or at a boarding school, they were subject to strict discipline and control over behaviour and correspondence, so they developed cunning ways to circumvent authority, developing private codes of speech and writing and finding ways to evade censorship, such as getting servants to post letters or deliver them by hand. The parents' aim was to keep girls free from sin, and the main sin was sex, though it was rarely mentioned. Girls were trained in repression, concealment, and self-censorship, and this made most of them unwilling to write down their true, or even imaginary, feelings. As Jane Vaughan Pinchkey said in *Tacita Tacit II* (1860):

Women are greater dissemblers than men when they wish to conceal their own emotions. By habit, moral training, and modern education, they are obliged to do so. Their very first lessons of infancy teach them to repress their feelings, control their very thoughts (Brightfield, 1968).

Women's attempts to be more natural were frowned upon. Critics lamented the coarseness of unconventional language in women's writings—the 'damns' in *Jane Eyre*, the dialect of *Wuthering Heights*, the slang of Rhoda Broughton's heroines, the colloquialisms of *Aurora Leigh*, or the vein of 'perilous voluptuousness' that one critic detected in *Adam Bede*. It was stiff and unemotional prose that won approval.

For most women, dissimulation was restricted to goals lying within the domestic sphere that could be achieved through half-truths or evasions. Deceit about amounts spent on housekeeping was the only weapon open to a woman without resources of her own who wanted a little money to spend as she wished—whether on herself, her children, her friends, charities, or settling debts she did not want her husband to know about for fear of a row. Always to be a supplicant was not a role that any woman cherished, however generous the benefactor. Arguments over money were as deep a cause of marital disharmony in the nineteenth century as they are today. As the expenses of a household rose, with extra children, rises in servants' wages, rises in food prices, etc., the household allowance frequently stayed the same until a husband could be persuaded to increase it. Much ingenuity was needed for a wife to make sure she had a little money set aside for emergencies. But since 'good women' were not supposed to have the mental equipment necessary to concoct plots,

THE GILDED CAGE

they got away with a lot of devious behaviour. So accepted was the idea that women had to get their own way by stealth that Eliza Lynn Linton said in 'Women and Her Critics', a *Saturday Review* article in the 1860s, that a woman who went 'on the boards' (i.e. took up an acting career) was only doing, under very favourable circumstances, what she did every day with less notice and applause:

On the stage she is natural, simple, affecting—
It is only that when she is off she is acting.

Obviously, women were not the only sex that went in for deceit and evasion, but few men felt they had almost always to obfuscate their true wishes and exercise duplicity, which was how women were recommended to behave.

TOWARDS EQUALITY IN MARRIAGE

Mary Wollstonecraft was a firm believer in marriage, calling it 'the cement of society' (Wollstonecraft, 1792), but she took the unsentimental view that 'Love, from its very nature, must be transitory', and that either indifference or friendship would succeed it. She suggested that friendship should be cultivated as a bond that would endure between husband and wife longer than sexual passion. When a wife had her husband's friendship, she believed, she would no longer need to practise the arts of coquetry and would therefore be on greater terms of equality with him.

The feminist Margaret Fuller said thoughts of marital equality were beginning to diffuse themselves in four ways (Fuller, 1844). First was the *household partnership*, where a woman looked for a smart but kind husband, the man for a capable, sweet-tempered wife. The man furnished the house, the woman regulated it. Their relation was one of mutual esteem, mutual dependence. Their talk was of business, their affection showed itself by practical kindness. They knew that life went more smoothly and cheerfully if each aided the other; they were grateful and content. The wife praised her husband as a good provider, the husband, in return, complimented his wife as a capital housekeeper. Next came a closer marriage tie which took the form of *mutual idolatry*. The parties weakened and narrowed one another, living in a cell together. To themselves, they seemed wise; to everyone else, they seemed steeped in infatuation.

The third form of marriage was *intellectual companionship*, which she thought had become more frequent. Men engaged in public life, literary men, and artists, often found their wives companions and confidantes in thought and in feeling. And, as the intellectual development of women had spread, they shared in their husbands' work. She cited the examples of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Goodwyn and Catherine Barmby, William and Mary Howitt. But she said community of employment was not essential to partnership: 'Harmony exists in differences, no less than in likeness... women should write and speak, if they feel need of it, from having something to tell.' Margaret Fuller was the originator of the phrase 'Woman the heart, Man the head!' which was taken up so enthusiastically by proponents of the doctrine of separate spheres—though that was not a concept of which Fuller would have approved.

The fourth and highest grade of marriage was the *religious*, which could be expressed as pilgrimage toward a common shrine. This included all the virtues of the other marriages: home sympathies and household wisdom, for these pilgrims knew how to assist each other along the dusty way; intellectual communion, for how sad it would be to have a companion with whom you could not communicate your thoughts and aspirations as they sprang to life. Margaret Fuller argued that man could not realise his true potential unless woman could realise hers; she did not take it for granted that love died with marriage, but she was thinking of love rather than romance. She was unorthodox for her time in saying that Christianity had so far kept wives in an inferior position to their husbands.

Ideas about equality in marriage were naturally more popular with women than with men. Fanny Kemble's husband, Pierce Butler (an American), complained in the late 1840s about:

the peculiar views which were entertained by Mrs. Butler on the subject of marriage and her unwillingness to abide by the express and inculcated obligations of that contract. She held that marriage should be companionship on equal terms—partnerships in which if both partners agree, it is well, but if they do not, neither is bound to yield—at no time has one partner a right to control the other.

Fanny left her husband because she disapproved of his owning slaves (Kemble, 1878).

THE GILDED CAGE

A strand of idealism, in favour of fundamental equality between husbands and wives, was not new; it had been common since the seventeenth century at least, in dissenting religious thought, and perhaps most advanced among the Quakers. In the nineteenth century there were famous examples of couples who put their marriage relations on a basis of greater equality. When, after twenty years of an unconventional triangle between Harriet Taylor, her husband and John Stuart Mill, her husband died and she married Mill, they did their best to equalise their relations. Mill was the first Member of Parliament to propose women's suffrage and he later wrote the influential *Subjection of Women*, which he said reflected his wife's views as much as his own. In 1851 he put on record his disapproval of the legal marriage relations then in force, and publicly promised never to use his powers as a husband in any circumstances. The Mills were probably the most idealistic married couple in nineteenth-century England, and their relationship seems to have been superbly happy.

Elizabeth Gaskell, married to a Unitarian clergyman, saw marriage as a working partnership between individuals with different tastes and inclinations. Married in 1832, she felt free to send occasional grumbling letters to friends and relations about marriage and her husband, which suggests she had a fairly stable relationship with him, though she never pretended it was ideal. Her husband and children annoyed her often, but she loved them deeply. Husband and wife were drawn together by participation in each other's work. She helped in his social work, giving classes for working girls in her home, and organising relief in the cotton famine, and it was his recognition of her creative genius that led Elizabeth Gaskell to become a professional writer. He corrected her proofs and helped to collect material, and he never questioned her right to express views and opinions that were at variance with his own. He knew that two prominent members of his congregation burned his wife's novel *Ruth* as unfit for family reading, but he defended her liberty to publish and write as she saw fit—and Unitarian society did not hold him responsible for his wife's opinions. She spent more time away from home than did her husband, travelling on the Continent with friends, and neither partner thought of marriage as a union in which the wife's being was subsumed by the husband. In 1850 Elizabeth Gaskell showed that she was not a militant feminist by nature, and also revealed her relationship with her husband, when she confided to her friend Tottie Fox:

A LIFE OF ONE'S OWN

I long (weakly) for the old times where right and wrong did not seem such complicated matters, and I am sometimes coward enough to wish that we were back in the darkness where obedience was the only seen duty of women. Only even then I don't believe William would ever have *commanded* me.

The Gaskell marriage was not without tensions, but it endured with affection and respect to the end. Her last business transaction in the year of her death (1865) was to buy a country house to which she hoped to retire with her husband and family (Haldane, 1930).

Beatrice Webb described the companionate relations of her parents Richard and Laurencina Potter, which lasted from their marriage in 1843 to the 1870s (Webb, 1926).

Notwithstanding frequent absences, my father was the central figure of the family life—the light and warmth of the home. How well I remember how we girls raced to the front door when we heard the wheels on the carriage drive...he worshipped his wife, he admired and loved his daughters; he was the only man I ever knew who genuinely believed that women were superior to men, and acted as if he did; the paradoxical result being that all his nine daughters started life as anti-feminists! He made his wife and daughters his confidantes in all his undertakings, or at any rate seemed to do so.

Yet Beatrice realised that her father controlled the family destinies, so the marriage was not an equal partnership. She said, 'My mother lived where it suited him to live, and he came and went as he chose; his daughters married the sort of men he approved, notwithstanding many temptations to the contrary.' She also understood her father's struggles to be the upright man he wanted to be:

His insistence on his daughters' company whenever he went abroad was, I think, partly due to a subconscious intention to keep out of less desirable associations. In his struggle with the sins of the world and the flesh (he was never tempted by the devil of pride, cruelty or malice) he had two powerful aids—his wife and his God. His wife was puritan and ascetic, and he adored her.

Laurencina had also been adored by her wealthy widowed father, who insisted on her brothers regarding her as a paragon of virtue,

THE GILDED CAGE

beauty and learning; she had visualised life as one of close intellectual companionship with her husband and his friends, and in this regard was disappointed when she got a nursery full of children and a husband who was often away. However, with money to pay servants to look after the children she was able to spend much of her time 'poring over books in her boudoir' and she had many intellectual friends, including the lifetime devotion of Herbert Spencer. She certainly impressed Michel Chevalier, a French economist whose essays she translated. He described her to his friend Taine, the historian, who wrote the following in his *Notes on England* (1872).

M.—, being invited to the country, discovered that the mistress of the house knew more Greek than himself, apologised, and retired from the field; then, out of pleasantry, she wrote down his English sentence in Greek. Note that this female Hellenist is a woman of the world, and even stylish. Moreover, she has nine daughters, two nurses, two governesses, servants in proportion, a large, well-appointed house, frequent and numerous visitors, throughout all this, perfect order, never noise or fuss; the machine appears to move of its own accord. These are gatherings of faculties and of contrasts which might make us reflect. In France we believe too readily that if a woman ceases to be a doll she ceases to be a woman.

Josephine Butler wrote movingly of how her husband, an educational reformer, had shared her values, admired her talents and helped her find her vocation as leader of the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts (Butler, 1892). He supported her commitment against the hostility of male-dominated Oxford, telling her to pity his colleagues because they knew no better. It was for her a new light on Oxford, for she had previously thought the gifted men she met there were authorities on spiritual and moral questions. Of her husband, she wrote, 'The idea of justice to women, of equality between the sexes, and of equality of responsibility of all human beings to the Moral Law, seems to have been instinctive in him. He never needed convincing.' Other couples who worked to achieve similar partnerships were Millicent and Henry Fawcett, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and her husband, the Pethick-Lawrences, the Pankhursts and the Webbs.

When Beatrice Potter married Sidney Webb in 1892 she resigned her own career for a time. Her private income enabled him to abandon his intention of living by journalism, and he got busy with the Fabian Society and its activities, and his work as Chairman of the London County Council (L.C.C.) Technical Education Committee. Beatrice had stepped out of her upper-class milieu, and it was to involve some sacrifices; some of her friends thought she was mad to marry beneath her and to marry a Socialist (and an ugly one at that). Charles Booth (her cousin) and his wife severed connections with her over it, and her old friend Herbert Spencer was horrified. But Beatrice accepted the changed position, entered Sidney's friendships, joined the Fabian Society and found she had made a good marriage. They seemed to enjoy their joint work of research and writing, but they did it in moderation; contrary to popular belief, the Webbs did not believe in over-work. In *Our Partnership* Beatrice outlined their plan of life: 'living according to plan is a surer basis for happy marriage than the perpetual shifting desire for self-expression...[it] is an automatic aid to continuous comradeship'. But, she went on, a plan of life was not merely a method but 'an object to be sought, and as far as possible, attained, as the result of our living. This is what is sometimes called a philosophy of life. Fundamentally, we agreed about this' (Webb, 1948). Beatrice Webb was practical, but also had a sense of humour: 'The fact that our marriage proved to be childless made easy what other people called our "financial disinterestedness". We [also] had no objection to receiving...the few hundreds of pounds a year which...accrued from the sale of our solid but unreadable books.' The Webbs had a remarkably affectionate marriage. A year after the wedding, she recorded that 'my husband and I grow nearer to each other each hour of the day. A beautiful pact, marriage. Personal love and tenderness, community of faith, fellowship in work...a divine relationship.' In a 1911 entry in her diary she recorded that Sidney was 'the most perfect of lovers, by night and by day, in work and in play, in health and in sickness'. And in the preface to *Our Partnership* (1948) she said, 'The days of his absence are weary to get through: and the sleepless hours of the night are haunted, not by the fear of death, but by the dread of life without him.' These are touching tributes to a relationship from which her friends had predicted disaster.

FANTASIES AND READING

The lives of most middle-class women were not full of agony, but many were bored and dissatisfied with their lot. Marriage did not always bring the rewards they hoped for, and the reality was usually much less romantic than they had expected, with husbands too busy to take them out or even appreciate their wives' organisational skills in the home. These women had time to brood over their discontents, and if they were not interested in good works or constant socialising they often escaped into a fantasy world of reading, to indulge longings and feelings which contradicted socially accepted behaviour. These were the women Sarah Ellis described as 'pining for excitement, eager to escape from practical and individual duty, with sickly sensibilities, feeble frames and useless habits' (Ellis, 1843). In an autobiographical sketch, *Cassandra*, (1852) Florence Nightingale said she believed all middle- and upper-class women indulged in day-dreams; they were women's 'plans and visions', indeed their 'very life, without which they could not have lived'. She may have misjudged working-class women, who perhaps fantasised as much as she, but she drew attention to an alternative reality, constructed by frustrated women, which enabled many to survive.

Middle-class women read novels in quantity. Rebellious heroines had to pay a price for any serious break with convention, and that was a comforting thought for readers not willing to take such risks themselves, wanting only to enjoy such adventures vicariously. Characters of independent mind were admired; females in Jane Austen's works took risks or were very outspoken by the standards of the time, and did not always suffer. Lydia Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* was rescued after she eloped, and the young man bribed to marry her and restore her good name. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was passionate, proud and independent. Emily Brontë's Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights* did not give a fig for the conventions of her day. In the first half of the nineteenth century women writers' awareness of each other and of their female audience showed a kind of covert solidarity that sometimes amounted to genteel conspiracy. Conservative Sarah Ellis wrote in *The Daughters of England*, in regard to what we should today call 'networking':

What would we think of a community of slaves, who betrayed each others' interests? of a little band of shipwrecked mariners

upon a friendless shore who were false to each other? of the inhabitants of a defenceless nation, who would not unite together in earnestness and good faith against a common enemy?

She expected her female audience to read between the lines and refrain from betraying what they deciphered.

Few women writers used fiction to advocate open revenge against patriarchy, and they would not have been able to sell their work if they had. Mrs Oliphant wrote feelingly in her novels of the lack of communication between many spouses and the boredom, fretting, and chafing of women; she showed the difficulties and realities of marriage and warned of the pitfalls. But she disliked divorce and opposed those who questioned the institution of marriage. In her witty novel *Miss Majoribanks* (1865–6). Lucilla Marjoribanks was a Victorian anti-heroine, large, strong, unsentimental, insubordinate to men and with a hearty appetite, who bossed everyone around and eventually married a man she could regard as a partner. Oliphant also started the trend of having male characters in her novels who inevitably disappoint or let down their womenfolk; there were alcoholics, wastrels and physically ailing men, a sad galaxy who reflected Oliphant's own family experiences. So many novels were published in which men were physically disabled that in 1866 a male novelist complained.

The sensational fiction appearing in the 1860s recorded family patterns in which hatred and contempt were so deep that accommodation among its members was impossible. Marriage was portrayed as a cage, heroines expressed hatred for husbands, parents and siblings. Stories of domestic murder were common (the actual number of women executed for murder between 1830 and 1874 was small, but half of them had indeed murdered their husbands) (Hartman, 1977). Women lined up at Mudie's Select Circulating Library for sensational bestsellers such as the bigamy novels of Mary Braddon, Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne*, and Rhoda Broughton's *Cometh Up as a Flower*; in these novels, the death of a husband came as a welcome relief to the wife, and if death did not occur the wife sought remedy in flight, adultery, divorce or murder. Justin McCarthy, reviewing sensational fiction for the *Westminster Review* in 1864 ('Novels with a Purpose', vol. 82) noted that 'The institution of marriage might almost seem to be...just now upon its trial.' The possibility that underneath the respectable façade of middle-class life

lurked women's unlawful passions and forbidden desires was very troubling to those who believed wives were perfectly happy in their separate domestic sphere. Against this background of popular fiction, Ruskin's 'Of Queen's Gardens' (1864), sentimentalising angelic women, seems a kind of desperate propaganda, and Lynn Linton's article, 'The Girl of the Period', sounds less exaggerated. Female novelists always denied they were writing about sexuality, and these disclaimers were necessary concessions to Victorian propriety, but writers knew what appealed to readers and libraries knew which books were in most demand. Women in those novels who went off the rails always came to a bad end, but the sinners got a good run for their money and were rarely wholly unattractive characters.

Too much can be made of the possible effect of these novels on women's actual behaviour, or even of their wish to emulate the heroines. After all, most women who today watch TV soap operas in which rape, incest, murder, adultery, violence, are everyday occurrences, do not actually seek such experiences. A minority of nineteenth-century middle-class women risked everything for adventure, and not all of them 'paid for it', but they would probably have done the same whether or not they read novels. Those who wanted real adventure pursued it; those who preferred vicarious experience read fantasy novels.

Apart from novel reading, middle-class women read magazines in large numbers; in the second half of the nineteenth century fewer of the periodicals were religious, and one of the few, *The British Mothers' Magazine*, constantly bemoaned the decline of religion among 'the fair sex'. It is strange that the image of most Victorian women as pious and religious continues to persist, for the hundreds of magazines published for women dealt with the problems of this world rather than preparation for the next. Discerning editors realised that middle-class women were more cut off from family networks than women in other classes, as affluence and better transport enabled them to live in outlying suburbs. It was more difficult for them to make close friends of whom they could ask personal advice, and they were often insecure about what was normal or acceptable. Letters to magazines, and the replies printed, were of tremendous value to such women. The magazines raised standards of housekeeping and child-rearing because their advice was solicited, welcomed and followed. Of course, magazines also

persuaded women to purchase new things; women were, then as now, the target for advertisers, who realised their powers as consumers. Not that middle-class women were slow to accept the wonders of technology. Laments in the 1850s that the sewing machine would destroy handicraft failed to impress women who hated mending and plain sewing, and women probably made more dresses with the aid of a machine. They welcomed innovations like gas lighting, gas cookers, and piped hot water, as emancipation from boring chores. Those who thought women should stick with the old ways were regarded as conspiring to keep women in domestic bondage.

INVALIDISM

A well-recognised way by which a wife could avoid unwanted sex, domestic responsibilities or social life, was to pretend to be ill or 'delicate'. This is not to deny that serious illness was a reality for many women, but others positively 'enjoyed' ill-health. Elizabeth Sandford observed in *Female Improvement* (1836):

An invalid wife must be a great trial to a husband; but greatly is that trial increased where there is...no effort to overcome langour, to make the best of returning ease, to shake off the habits which indisposition has contracted... There is no reason why dependence should become helplessness.

She described in detail the helpless wife: 'unable to put forth a hand to help herself, who 'cannot stir without support, reclining on a sofa, establishing no claim on others but her own incapacity'. An example of the type was Lady Bartram in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. But it should also be noted how many women writers born after 1800 were invalids: Caroline Clive, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Anne Manning, Mrs Henry Wood, Eliza Cook, Anna Sewell, Dora Greenwell, Christina Rossetti, Rosa Nouchette and Margaret Fairless Barber.

Wives sometimes used ill-health as a pretext to get away for long periods from bad marriages. Mark Pattison, Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, and his much younger wife Francis (said to be the models for Dr Casaubon and Dorothea in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*), had a marriage which was a torment to both partners. Each

was temperamentally unable to accept, still less satisfy, the needs and demands of the other. Each thought the other egotistical, considering everything in terms of his/her own interests rather than the partner's, and emotionally cold. The disintegration of the marriage started early on, but it was not until much later that the underlying causes were fully revealed. For some time increasing ill-health (which would now be regarded as largely psychosomatic) had caused Mrs Pattison to spend periods away from Oxford and her husband, usually in London. In 1875, however, she had crippling arthritis and her doctor's remedy was for her to pass the entire winter in the more favourable climate of the south of France. The Rector's reaction—conditioned by earlier friction—was a revelation of egotism; pity only for himself, not at all for his wife, and his sentiment towards her was resentment, none the less vindictive for appearing childish. Mrs Pattison told the story in letters to her friend Ellen Smith, saying the Rector's reaction to the prospect of her wintering abroad was an outcry; 'my home is broken up and all my dream of happiness in the closing years of my life vanished. I am reckless and don't care what I do...' He believed his wife had persuaded the doctor to recommend her wintering abroad. He taxed her with actually making herself ill 'on purpose to get away from him, or be in town [London]'. Mrs Pattison chose what was best for her health and went to live in the South of France. She wrote long and regular letters to her husband; he ignored them (not even telling her of his movements) and then complained to others about not hearing from her. The reason he gave for not writing to her was that it cost too much (his meanness was famous). When she returned to Lincoln College during the summer, he kept her in the dark about his plans, or would suddenly change those he had already made, so that it was impossible for her to make arrangements of her own. Such petty restrictions were given a sharper edge by the Rector's financial hold over his wife. She was beginning to establish her own reputation and career as an art historian, but by keeping her short of money he made it difficult for her to do research. The emotional conflict had its sexual basis, as is clear in letters she sent from Nice in early 1876:

There is but one side of the life with you into which I do not enter and that is so distasteful to me that the fear of its renewal has often preoccupied me to the exclusion of all other consideration. It is a physical aversion which always existed, though I strove

hard to overcome it, and which is now wholly beyond control (Askwith, 1969).

The Rector's capacity for emotional expression was limited, as he acknowledged himself towards the end of his life, and as others were aware (in an otherwise appreciative obituary on 21 July 1884 *The Times* called him 'singularly stiff and freezing'.) In passing, we may note that both the Rector and his wife sought and found emotional consolation elsewhere, he with a much younger woman and she with Sir Charles Dilke whom she later married and passionately defended over the famous divorce case of Mrs Crawford (Nimmo, 1978).

USE OF ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

Early in the nineteenth century Lord Byron outlined in *Don Juan* some of the various ways women reacted to unhappy marriage, and said some took to drink and drugs. Drugs were widely used throughout the nineteenth century, as pain-killers and anxiety-relievers. Opium was not illegal, and 'soothing syrups' containing opiates were given to babies and small children, accounting for large numbers of deaths from convulsions and teething. Even when the children survived the drugs, they were likely to be addicted to patent medicines of similar types throughout their lives. Dr Robert Dick, in his health manual *The Connection of Health and Beauty* (1857) remarked that many women, because of 'the pressures of society', needed artificial sedatives or stimulants, such as opium, morphia, prussic acid, musk or valerian. In 1870 a letter in the *Englishwomen's Domestic Magazine*, from 'A Sufferer of Low Spirits', asked advice from other women on her depression and alcohol problem and suggested that the problem was a common one. In 1875, Dr John Hadden published an article on 'Intemperance in Women, with Special Reference to its Effect on the Reproductive system', saying that the principal cause of alcoholism among women was domestic problems. In health magazines, women were often warned about the ill effects of alcohol.

Most middle-class women were not, of course, intentional alcoholics or drug-takers, but considering that so many of the home remedies found in manuals and periodicals, and a large number of patent medicines sold over the counter in the grocer's shops as well as pharmacies, for headaches and sleeplessness, contained strong

THE GILDED CAGE

dosages of opiates, it seems that many women might have become dependent on them. Women often took a small amount of brandy 'for medicinal purposes' or port wine 'to build up their strength'. As Dr Dick suggested, 'Many women would pass the most indifferent night...in others the chagrin of life would prey too severely... did they not deaden the poignancy of suffering, actual or remembered, by the 'drowsy syrups'...or by something analogous.'

Mrs Layton told how her lower middle-class mother, having had fourteen children and a very hard life, was advised by an old doctor to take a little spirits: 'She was afterwards so often without money, and so often in want of a little drop of spirits' that as a child Mrs Layton earned money by running errands and minding babies, to buy her mother her 'medicine'. It was in fact gin (Life, 1977). Temperance advocates had reason to decry the effects of alcohol on family life, claiming that drunken husbands neglected and abused their wives and children. But court and prison records show that women, too, resorted to alcohol and violence under economic and personal stress.

SEX IN MARRIAGE

The ideal of female passionlessness dominated public discourse on sexuality from the 1820s onwards. Before that time, writers had accepted sexual activity after puberty as both normal and necessary, and the notion that women had no interest in sex was a complete reversal of earlier beliefs in women as temptresses, always avid for sexual activity and unable to control themselves or their desires. Each of these extreme blanket views of women's sexuality now seems indefensible, there being a continuum of possible sexual needs. It is clear from nineteenth-century women's writings that strong sexual feelings were not unknown, and restraint was discussed rather than absence of feelings. But public writing maintained that overt sexuality was demeaning in 'nice' middle-class women. Sex was civilised by ignoring it; features of the strategy were to ban sex from conversation, to hide it in dark bedrooms, to conceal the shape of women's bodies, to censor sex in books (for instance, when Mudie's circulating library opened in 1842 it refused to stock a book if it had the faintest suspicion of sex in it). In addition, some doctors warned of disease and disintegration for those who transgressed the rules of

proper sexual behaviour, and hideous instruments were sold to prevent masturbation. The *evils* of sex were endlessly discussed.

Virginity being the most prized virtue in a middle-class bride in nineteenth-century England, mothers protected their daughters from unsuitable entanglements, teaching them that proximity to men was dangerous and flirting an invitation to possible disaster (without specifying what the danger was). *The Lady's Magazine* in 1818 advised: 'Such is the depravity of human nature that in certain situations the purest of men can scarcely be trusted.' It was however made clear that responsibility for controlling the situation with delicacy and restraint rested with the woman.

Ignorance of sex started off many middle-class marriages in an atmosphere of horror for each partner. Harriet Taylor (later wife of John Stuart Mill) married her first husband in 1825, when she was 18. In what can be regarded as an autobiographical note, she later complained, 'in the present system of habits and opinions, girls enter into what is called a contract [of marriage] perfectly ignorant of it, and that they should be so is considered absolutely necessary to their fitness for it!' Among others who referred to their ignorance of sex when they married was Annie Besant, who told how in the summer of 1866 she became engaged to a clergyman and married him 'with no more idea of the marriage relation than if I had been four years old instead of twenty. My dreamy life... kept innocent of all questions of sex, was no preparation for married existence' (Besant, 1893). She left her husband in 1873. And, incredible as it might appear, the famous sex reformer Marie Stopes was so innocent when she married aged 31 in 1911 that it was not until two years later that she discovered (from a book) that her husband had failed to consummate the marriage. By 1917 the marriage was annulled. She wrote the book *Married Love* to help others avoid the problems she had experienced. It sold 2000 copies within two weeks, and by 1918 a sixth edition was available. Letters requesting advice on sexual matters came to her throughout the 1920s and 1930s and as late as 1944. Altogether she received 5000 letters from people of all social classes.

Perhaps mothers thought their daughters would find it easier to control their relationship with suitors if they knew nothing about sex. A problem was that some young women got very curious about the unnamed dangers, and were avid to sample such delights as a stolen kiss. But they could get confused about the significance of a

THE GILDED CAGE

kiss. Ellen Terry the actress told George Bernard Shaw how, in 1863. she thought when the painter George Frederick Watts kissed her that she would get pregnant.

Then I got ill and had to stay at Little Holland House (Watt's home)—and then—he kissed me—differently—not much differently but a little, and I told no-one for a fortnight, but when I was alone with Mother she looked so pretty and sad and kind. I told her—What do you think I told the poor darling? I told her I *must* be married to him *now* because I was going to have a baby!!! and she believed me!! Oh, I tell you I thought I knew everything then, but I was nearly 16 years old then—I was *sure*, THAT kiss meant giving me a baby.

By the time the relieved mother found that her daughter was not pregnant, the marriage of her 16-year-old daughter to the 46-year-old Watts was arranged. The marriage was not a disaster, but it lasted only a few years.

Evidence of middle-class women enjoying sex is not easy to find, unless one counts the negative fact that most women stayed married and probably did not hate it. Sarah Ellis recommended that before marrying, every woman should consider 'the duty of a wife [that] no woman was ever yet able to render without affection' (Ellis, 1843). She was not suggesting that sex was impossible without love, but at least she did not tell women to lie back and think of England, and at the time it was probably bold of her even to hint at the subject. In discussion about female masturbation later in the century, girls were told that it would dull their sense of sexual enjoyment after marriage. This suggests that girls were expected to find sex in marriage enjoyable.

Not all well-brought-up young girls were ignorant about sex, as is clear from the case of Madeleine Smith an upper middle-class girl whose trial for the murder of her lover (and subsequent acquittal) caused a sensation in 1857. She had conducted a long correspondence with Emile in which they pretended to be married, and it was clear that sexual relations had taken place. The servant girl who acted as go-between for them was herself bringing her fiancé into the Smith house for sexual purposes. Madeleine never described love-making in any but the most general terms, never referred to the sex organs, never used any expression that might have

been called vulgar. She employed euphemisms for menstruation (she was 'ill') and for intercourse she used the word 'love' underlined. Her most explicit language was coy and suggestive:

It was a punishment to myself to be deprived of your *loving me* for it is a pleasure, no one can deny that. It is but human nature. Is not everyone that *loves* of the same mind: Yes, I did feel so ashamed of having allowed you to see (any name you please to insert).

Elsewhere she wrote, 'You are a naughty boy to go and dream of me—and get excited.' Such admissions and expressions were startling from someone in her station, though she was no believer in free love, and her view of relations between the sexes was very conventional. She originally seems to have wanted a romantic adventure, and along the way discovered that sex was fun. Later she wanted to marry someone of her own class, but could not persuade Emile that the relationship was over. His subsequent death, apparently by poisoning, led to the murder trial. Contemporaries remarked that women were declaring a moratorium on writing love letters after Miss Smith's letters were made public (Hunt, 1950).

Evidence of another middle-class girl's sexual longings comes from the Diary of Frances Grenfell, who married Charles Kingsley. Before marriage, Fanny wrote about Charles kissing her, 'my blood boils and bounds as I recall it'. In 1842 she wrote how she longed passionately for the man she called her husband, and lay in bed imagining 'delicious nightery' when they would lie in each other's arms 'and I will ask you to explain my strange feelings'. Sometimes those feelings became so strong that she hardly knew what to do with herself. She longed to wring her hands, groan, roll on the floor, scream, run until she dropped. She consulted a doctor because of her heart 'which stops beating every five minutes in a strange way'. Nonetheless, when they married they decided not to consummate their marriage for the first month. After that time they found themselves physically attuned from the start, and Fanny got pregnant immediately. Theirs was a long love match, though they did not always get on well. In 1854 Fanny wrote, 'When you go away I am in such blind agony that I can see and learn nothing...' But in 1849 Charles had written 'I long to be back in your arms, while all you long for, you cruel, cold, darling beauty is, I find, to sleep by my

side.' Fanny was growing less enthusiastic for sex, probably on account of her ill-health at the time (Chitty, 1974).

The marriage of Effie Gray to John Ruskin also demonstrates that a healthy young woman did not welcome being married to a man who abstained from sex. On 6 March 1854 Effie told her parents in a letter that in six years of marriage it had not been consummated, and she begged them to assist her to get released from 'the unnatural position in which I stand to Him [*sic*]'. She had never been told by her parents what to expect when she married, did not blame them for not preparing her, but her instincts apparently told her she was not leading a normal married life, and she eventually forced Ruskin to discuss the matter. He pleaded hatred of children, religious motives, a desire to preserve her beauty, but finally told her the true reason—'that he had imagined women were quite different to what he saw I was, and that the reason he did not make me his wife was because he was disgusted with my person the first evening of our marriage in 1849'. Upon gaining an annulment she married the painter John Millais and enjoyed a long but stormy marriage in which she produced eight children.

In a revealing series of articles on 'Love and Marriage' in the magazine *The Young Woman* (October 1897—September 1898), Ella Day said that three insuperable barriers to happy wedlock were drunkenness, weak intellect and immorality. She said drunkenness in middle-class girls was rare, but not unknown, since intoxicants were sometimes prescribed 'to strengthen them'. On the question of intellect, she said 'a woman who has to be pampered and coddled, who says she cannot understand business, who weeps in face of domestic duties and responsibilities, is not fit to prop the domestic roof.' On the question of immorality she wrote:

I have reason to fear that among young women in towns, and living an exposed life, an absolutely clean record is more exceptional than could be wished. On the cruelty of the temptation and the depth of the fall in certain cases I have no wish to pronounce judgment.... I have known of women confessing—after an engagement had been made and announced—their lapse from virtue, and throwing themselves on every inch of chivalry a man had got, because they were self-accused.

Ella Day thought, like most of her generation, that a woman's lapse

was 'more difficult' than a man's, but it is interesting that she made it sound so commonplace.

Whether the middle class in nineteenth-century England had more or less sex than their counterparts in previous ages, we do not know, but the sexual aspect of life was obviously important to them. The Victorian middle class went in for double beds (twin beds were not considered 'nice' until the 1930s) and they therefore—in George Bernard Shaw's words—combined the maximum of temptation with the maximum of opportunity. The religious justified sexual love within marriage as a way of carrying out the will of God and providing the means of procreation. As long as they did not 'cheat' God by using contraceptives or practising *coitus interruptus*, the partners could be as loving as their instincts allowed them to be. This was unfortunately a Catch 22 situation for many women; they could only indulge in loving sex provided they took the risk of constant pregnancy, and for many women this was neither feasible nor good for their health. Until they came to accept planned parenthood as a valid moral position, couples who wished to limit their families had to exercise sexual self-restraint and self-discipline to an unnatural degree. Shaw attended in the 1890s a marriage conference organised by Hugh Price Hughes, an eminent Methodist divine. No women were invited, but Shaw said it gave him a staggering revelation of what respectable men understood by married life. They all thought the marriage ceremony inaugurated a life-long honeymoon, and it seemed entirely proper and natural to them to 'live the lives of old men contentedly', sleeping every night with their wives.

We do not know how many wives disliked sex, or how many accepted it as obligatory but unsatisfying. Few women wrote in detail about their sexual experiences, and they were more likely to do so if they were unhappy. The majority of women, even those innocent about sex when they married, were able to come to terms with it, for most women did not run away from their husbands on that account, nor did they all scream for help. If the spouse was sensitive and supportive, many women discovered a cheerful side to sex. For example, Virginia Woolf, after saying she felt no physical attraction for her husband when they married in 1912, learned to like something about him, for in 1923 she wrote:

I lie and think of my precious beast, who does make me more happy every day and instant of my life than I thought it possible

THE GILDED CAGE

to be. There's no doubt I'm terribly in love with you. I keep thinking what you're doing, and I have to stop—it makes me want to kiss you (Bell, 1972).

BIRTH CONTROL

The most important technique developed by middle-class wives was control over the number of children they would bear. Only when this was possible could most women hope to achieve some sense of personal emancipation. There is no data permitting more than guesswork about what happened before the 1850s; the only general data on fertility and class trends for nineteenth-century England is Volume 13 of the 1911 Census, the 'Report on the Fertility of Marriage.' This showed clearly that in the 1860s the middle class was restricting the number of children they had, and that some segments of the class were practising birth control as early as the 1850s. The large family was almost eliminated between 1870 and 1925, and the one- or two-child family became the most usual (Glass and Grebenik, 1954). Factors associated with growing industrialisation, urbanisation, lessened ecclesiastical authority, and ideas of greater freedom for women, all played a role in the spread of contraceptive practices. When family size began to fall, around mid-century, various causes were suggested by contemporaries, and some were confirmed by later historians. Some people thought infanticide was being widely used: there was a *Saturday Review* article to this effect by the Rev. William Scott, in the issue dated 9 August 1856. Others suggested that abortion was an important method: although abortion had been criminalised in 1803 (having clearly been common before then) the practice was thought to have continued unabated (McLaren, 1977). There was an article in the *Saturday Review* for 14 March 1857 which described methods of inducing miscarriages, and some doctors asserted that women would go as far as to poison themselves with lead to induce abortions. It could not be said that procuring abortions was confined to the lower classes of society. Mary Stanley, wife of the second Lord Alderley, found herself pregnant in 1847. Her husband was appalled to hear the news, saying he hoped it was not the beginning of another flock, 'for what to do with them I am sure I know not'. His wife wrote back to him, 'A hot bath, a tremendous walk, and a great dose have succeeded... I am

reassured for the future by the efficacy of the means' (Mitford, 1938). This was a pious aristocratic Victorian lady.

Eliza Lynn Linton noted the trend towards limited motherhood, and attributed it to women's own reluctance to rear children (cf. 'Modern Mothers' in the *Saturday Review* of 29 February 1868, and 'The Fashionable Women' in the issue of 8 August 1868). The press later began to analyse 'the emancipated woman's flight from maternity'. The *Saturday Review* (9 September 1871) remarked that there was 'a decided diminution among women in reverence for parents, trust in men, and desire for children'. What Dr Acton called in 1875 'the spirit of insubordination in wives to fulfil their conjugal duties' was blamed on John Stuart Mill's book *The Subjection of Women* (1869). But the sensational novels of the 1860s had attacked the cult of motherhood, too, even if indirectly—vivid accounts of difficult childbirth were very offputting. So were apparently innocuous calls in conduct books for women to 'accept the trials of married life' and to resolve to bear them even when the woman was 'crushed in spirit'.

Upper- and middle-class women should have had the easiest time in childbirth, since they could afford the best treatment. But the ignorance of surgeons about childbirth was profound, and an abnormal presentation or still birth usually provoked a crisis. Doses of tincture of ergot or digitalis were the usual remedies. If the mother's life was in jeopardy most doctors did not hesitate to destroy the child to save the mother. The most dangerous part of the delivery came with the expulsion of the placenta, since the doctor could do little to stop extensive haemorrhaging. Measured against live births, the maternal death rate was 6 per thousand in 1847 and 4.8 per thousand in 1901, the major causes being registered as 'puerperal fever' and 'accidents'. There was no simple correlation with class: within London, wealthy parishes such as Hampstead or St George's, Hanover Square, had higher puerperal fever and general mortality rates than St Giles and St George's in the East.

In the realm of family planning, then, there seemed a chance for women to assert themselves as individuals and fight for a better chance of healthy life. Contraception was potentially the greatest liberating force for women, and it had been written about openly since the end of the eighteenth century. Jeremy Bentham had advocated the use of the sponge method in 1897, a year before Malthus published his *Essay on Population* (Himes, 1936). Malthus

THE GILDED CAGE

wanted everyone to postpone marriage until they could afford to support any children they might have. Francis Place, a self-taught workingman and successful businessman, thought Malthus's policy would never be adopted, and he was the first person to venture, alone and unaided, upon an attempt to educate the masses in birth control methods. In 1822 he published his *Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population*, and he and his friends distributed contraceptive hand bills not only in London but in the industrial districts of the North. They were reprinted in several radical journals of the period, such as Carlile's *Republican*, T.J. Wooler's *The Black Dwarf*, and Carlile's *Every Woman's Book*. One of Place's handbills was addressed 'To the Married of Both Sexes in Genteel Life,' and showed clearly that he considered the matter of family planning of equal importance to women as to men; his recommended method of contraception was a piece of soft sponge, attached to a narrow ribbon:

Among the many sufferings of married women, as mothers, there are two cases which command the utmost sympathy and commiseration. The first arises from constitutional peculiarities or weaknesses. The second from mal-conformation of the bones of the Pelvis. Besides these two cases, there is a third case applicable to both sexes: namely, the consequences of having more children than the income of the parents enables them to maintain and educate in a desirable manner. The first named produces miscarriages, and brings on a state of existence scarcely endurable... The second is always attended with immediate risk of life. Pregnancy never terminates without intense suffering, seldom without the death of the child, frequently with the death of the mother, and sometimes with the death of both mother and child.

[It is revealing that Place wrote to a newspaper editor: 'I have taken pains in my enquiries on this subject...amongst intelligent elderly women, and especially with two respectable, clever women who are or were matrons at public lying-in hospitals.' Clearly he respected the expertise of the women.]

The third case is by far the most common...in the middle ranks, the most virtuous and praiseworthy of efforts are perpetually

made to keep up the respectability of the family, but a continual increase of children gradually yet certainly renders every effort to prevent degradation unavailing, it paralyses by rendering hopeless all exertion, and the family sinks into poverty and despair.

Place thought the middle ranks were finding it difficult to raise their children without financial problems, though this might just as easily have been due to rising expectations.

The most intrepid follower of Place was Richard Carlile, the radical and freethinker. His *Every Woman's Book: or, What is Love* was published first as a pamphlet in 1825, and as a book which went to a fourth edition in 1826. It was castigated as more frank than refined by certain periodicals, but caused widespread discussion. The contraceptive methods recommended were partial withdrawal, the sponge and the condom. There is no reason to believe that this book had much immediate effect on the English birth-rate, and the phenomenal increase in population in the nineteenth century was more the result of declining death rate than of an increasing birth rate. But it seems fair to say that the contraceptive propaganda of the 1820s set in motion a remarkable social movement which was discernible from the 1850s, albeit in a small section of the middle class.

In his book *Moral Physiology* (New York, 1830), which sold 75,000 copies by the time of his death in 1877, Robert Dale Owen recommended *coitus interruptus* as a form of contraception, citing its wide use in France as a guarantee of its practicability. To the objection that men controlled this method, Owen naively remarked that 'the only effectual defence for women is to refuse connexion with any man void of honour; if this were done, a public opinion regardful of the rights of women during the sexual intimacies would gradually be developed.' Just how respectable women were supposed to find out before marriage how sexually honourable a man was, he did not say. Charles Knowlton's *Fruits of Philosophy* (New York, 1834) was a more detailed treatise on contraception than Owen's and sold 10,000 copies by 1839. He recommended douching, pointing out that using a syringe gave control to women, where it ought to be. The pamphlet was also printed in England, selling about 1,000 copies a year up to 1876; it was after its prosecution in 1877-9 that it achieved real notoriety. George Drysdale occupies a

significant place in the medical history of contraception; although his *Elements of Social Science* (1854) contained only a short account of five techniques, the book ran to 35 editions and was translated into at least ten European languages. He was actually less interested in contraceptive methods than in building up the medical and economic case for birth limitation, but one thing was difficult without the other.

In 1877 Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh re-issued Knowlton's pamphlet in order to settle the legality of selling it; the publicity attending their prosecution changed the limited percolation of contraceptive knowledge into a veritable flood. This is sometimes believed to be the start of middle-class use of contraception, but Census evidence suggests that it was earlier. It is difficult to date exactly the use of improved birth control techniques, but 100 types of vaginal pessary were developed for uterine disorder, and doctors found they were being used for contraceptive purposes. The vaginal diaphragm, or cervical cap, became popular with the vulcanisation of rubber in 1843. By the 1880s contraceptive methods were being advertised in women's magazines and health manuals, stressing improvements in the methods, which shows that they were well-known before that time. And by the end of the century there was a wide variety of contraceptive methods for women available. The condom continued to be popular, but it is thought that middle-class women preferred to use the sponge, the douche or the vaginal diaphragm, methods over which they had control. Decisions about how many children to have were probably made by mutual agreement between the spouses, but it seems to have been part of the Victorian middle-class woman's growing sense of self-worth that she wanted to be in control of her body. Lawrence Stone has argued that before contraception is practised in a society, it must be theologically and morally acceptable to make such a choice (Stone, 1979, p.261). In that event, no family limitation would have taken place in nineteenth-century England, since the Church of England (down to 1925) and all other churches, as well as the medical profession in general and most moralists, totally disapproved of it. For that reason most feminists avoided advocating birth control, in case it lost them support for other issues such as education, jobs or suffrage. Birth control was almost certainly practised first by that section of the middle class for whom religion had lost some of its mystical meaning, and for whom belief that all happenings were due to the

will of God was being replaced by the feeling that many ills could be ameliorated by human action. And it was done by marriage partners whose private wishes overrode the exhortations of moralists and priests.

FRIENDSHIP WITH OTHER WOMEN

This was an important and positive safety valve for many wives. But how were married women able to write special confidences to their friends and relatives if, like Mrs Gaskell, their husbands read all their letters before they sent them? Mrs Gaskell waited until her husband was away from home and then wrote in secret to her sister-in-law as well as other women writers. Jane Carlyle did the same, writing to her family and keeping up a voluminous correspondence with author Geraldine Jewsbury. T.H.Huxley's wife Henrietta poured out her marital troubles in letters to her sister-in-law Lizzie in the USA. When in 1899 Elspeth Thomson married the writer Kenneth Grahame (of *The Wind in the Willows* fame), she found she had a husband set in his bachelor ways who could not adjust to a wife. For advice she wrote to Emma Hardy (wife of Thomas), and in response Emma trumpeted the wrongs she felt she had suffered:

I can scarcely think that love proper and enduring is in the nature of men... There is ever a desire to give but little in return for our devotion and affection—theirs being akin to children's—a sort of easy affectionateness—& at fifty, a man's feelings often take a new course altogether [but] he gets over it usually somehow, or hides it, or is lucky! (Gittings, 1978).

Married women also had women friends whom they saw regularly, confided in, and with whom they formed networks of support. This is why they did not like going too far away from parents and friends when they married, for letters were useful but getting answers took much longer than seeing someone for a chat. And when women engaged in reform or betterment work, they often felt they were joining a sisterhood of kindred spirits who were righting a world that men had wronged.

It is unlikely that more than a small minority of middle-class married women engaged in overt lesbian relationships, but emotional and physical closeness between women was normal and unremarkable. At a

THE GILDED CAGE

time when heterosexual indulgence was declared by doctors to be dangerous both to social standing and to health men formed intense friendships with other men and women developed emotional relationships with other women. Thoreau observed in his mid-nineteenth-century essay, *Friendship*, that intimacy was much more possible between two of the same sex than between the sexes. The term 'romantic friendship' was used to describe these relationships.

FRIENDSHIP WITH MEN OTHER THAN THEIR HUSBANDS

It was socially possible for a married woman to be friendly with men other than relatives, whereas that was impossible for unmarried women. This was another way in which middle-class wives weakened their emotional dependence on one man. Jane Carlyle gave vivid accounts of such friendships; one evening when Carlyle was dining out and she stayed at home, not feeling well, Tennyson and his friend Moxon arrived. Tennyson was usually ill at ease with women, but Jane got out pipes and tobacco, brandy and water and 'a deluge of tea', and Tennyson, with an apology for polluting her room, sat smoking 'for three mortal hours, talking like an angel, only exactly as if he were talking to a very clever man, which being a thing I am not used to—strained me to a terrible pitch of intellectuality'. Erasmus Darwin also called on her when she was alone, and Jane flirted with many of her husband's friends. Leigh Hunt, characterised her affectionate greeting in a poem:

Jenny kiss'd me when we met,
Jumping from the chair she sat in;
Time, you thief, who love to get
Sweets into your list, put that in!
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
Say that health and wealth have miss'd me,
Say I'm growing old, but add
Jenny kiss'd me.

Around 1843 she greeted Charles Terrot, future Bishop of Edinburgh, with a kiss, telling her husband in a letter, 'I sprang into his arms, and I believe almost stifled him with the ardour of my embrace.' She said the good man not only accepted but returned her

embrace 'with more sympathy than was to have been anticipated' (Lochhead, 1964, p. 194).

When he was away on his voyages, Charles Darwin's true love Fanny Owen married Robert Biddulph and found herself trapped in an unhappy marriage. She continued to write to Darwin and expected to keep up their friendship. In October 1833 she wrote, 'I am become a steady stupid old matron [but] I assure you I still look forward to some pleasant times again when you are cured of your roving turn, and settle quietly with the little wife in the little Parsonage' (Burkhardt and Smith, 1986) And as we have seen, Beatrice Webb's mother Laurencina Potter was a life-long friend of Herbert Spencer, who was devoted to her and often stayed with the family.

MARRIED WOMEN TAKING LOVERS

Such positive escapism as pursuing an extra-marital affair was probably confined to a minority of middle-class women. The relationship in the 1830s and 1840s of Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill was certainly a love affair, but there is no evidence that it was of a sexual nature. Rather, it was a very unusual triangle in which Harriet lived with her husband, and with his agreement saw Mill regularly and even went on holiday with him. The relationship was thought by contemporaries to be very uncommon.

It is not easy to document examples of middle-class women who entered into sexual love affairs with lovers while remaining married *and undetected*. Taught to hide their feelings, unwilling to write down incriminating evidence, and not usually financially independent, women who took lovers did not trumpet it to the world. Some indirect evidence exists in the writings of men who catalogued sexual adventures with middle-class married women, some of whom they barely knew—Frank Harris and Lloyd George, for example. And it is interesting that Eliza Lynn Linton wrote ('The Revolt Against Matrimony', *The Forum*, January 1891):

The married woman who is content with marriage, maternity, and domestic life alone, is as rare a being as the black swan of the past. It all depends on her temperament where she seeks her distractions—whether in art, politics, philanthropy, money-making, or love. In any case, marriage is of the nature of an

THE GILDED CAGE

episode rather than the completed drama of her life; and even as an episode it is one of which she wearies sooner than the man.

Of extra-marital love-affairs she wrote, 'Many a woman falls, not from the coarseness of animality, but from the more delicate seduction of sentiment, the more vaporous suggestions of romance, the mischievous misleading of vanity.' Whether or not Linton was right about the reasons for married women committing adultery, she took for granted that such affairs were common.

It is easy enough to find evidence of married women who took lovers and in consequence left their husbands or were divorced. Disraeli's mistress was a married woman who lived with him openly for two years from 1839, and they were accepted in London society. George Henry Lewes's wife Agnes left him to live with his partner Hunt in the 1850s. Robert Louis Stevenson had two romantic affairs, the first in 1873 with Frances Sitwell, married but estranged from her husband, and the second with Frances Osbourne, an American divorcee ten years older than he, whom he eventually married in 1882 (Furnas, 1951). John Galsworthy fell in love in 1895 with Ada, the wife of his cousin Major Arthur Galsworthy; for some years they lived together whenever they could, in London or on holiday. He was cited in the divorce case of 1904, and married Ada shortly afterwards. Ada was the model for Irene Forsyte, though most people agreed that Major Galsworthy was not a likely model for Soames Forsyte (Pike, 1969).

CONCLUSION

It is a mistake to try to generalise about middle-class marriage in nineteenth-century England. The husband-manipulation that was to independent-minded women so demeaning and degrading was for most women simply a bargaining tool they knew how to use. Not all Victorian wives were poor, downtrodden creatures, for that does not square with the accounts in memoirs and diaries of formidable mothers, grandmothers and aunts. Boisterous girls turned into meek young women when they were considering marriage: after marriage they turned into robust Mamas.

For every example of marital adjustment, another can be found to indicate conflict in marriage, ranging from irritation to extreme discord. Yet despite all the difficulties, most women seem to have

found a *modus vivendi*, if not contentment in marriage, by working out survival techniques. Some women controlled their worlds by sheer force of personality, others by manipulative charm or feigned sickness. Others opted out of reality, into the fantasy world of novels. Even happy marriages did not satisfy all the needs of many middle-class women, and they turned outside the marriage for friendship, support and wider interests. Through visits and letters, friendships and sometimes passionate relationships, women discussed their problems and got advice on ways to cope with their lives. Others found scope for their energy and talents through involvement in philanthropy, social science or political campaigns.

In an age when divorce was exceedingly rare, most middle-class wives accepted marriage 'until death us do part', and set out to make the best of it. By hook or by crook, by 'management' and manipulation, they learned how to survive.

Chapter 13

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

The campaign to reform the laws of marriage was a middle-class movement for the very good reason that middle-class wives had much more to reform. It was like the Battle of Jericho: it needed a determined army and a very loud trumpet to bring the walls of male privilege tumbling down. Middle-class women in Victorian England felt more trapped in the gilded cage of marriage than the majority of women in other social classes. Without the trust funds, marriage settlements and consequent economic independence of an upper-class woman, and with expectations of being totally dependent for maintenance on her husband which were not shared by many working-class wives, the middle-class wife and mother felt more vulnerable and circumscribed. The Manchester feminist Lydia Becker (1827–1890) articulated this view:

What I most desire, is to see married women of the middle classes stand on the same terms of equality as prevail in the working classes and the highest aristocracy. A great lady or a factory woman are independent persons—personages—the women of the middle classes are nobodies, and if they act for themselves they lose caste! (Rosen, 1974).

She failed to understand how hard and unrelenting were the lives of most working-class women, but she put her finger on the key assumption of bourgeois life, that most middle-class women would be kept either by a husband or a male relative such as father or brother.

An otherwise liberal middle-class husband who thought it unnecessary for his wife to have some money of her own was Charles

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

Kingsley. When he married Frances Grenfell in 1844 she brought a settlement of £300 a year, and the men in her family (her parents being dead) insisted that he should settle £100 a year on Fanny, to which he would not have access. Charles thought this a slur on his dignity and wrote to Fanny: 'I have determined to prove that I am more trustworthy than they think by never touching a farthing of your money' (Chitty, 1974, p.85). So presumably Fanny had more financial independence than her family had expected. Elizabeth Gaskell said that her husband locked up her business letters when he went wandering off in Ireland, and he banked the money she earned from her writing (Chappie and Sharpe, 1980). She once wrote to her friend Eliza Fox that 'William composedly buttoned up in his pocket' the cheque she had received from *Household Words* for 'Lizzie Leigh'. But Elizabeth Gaskell in fact had remarkable independence for a middle-class wife of the 1850s and 1860s—for example, she went away from home frequently, with apparently no check placed by her husband on where she went or how long she stayed. And that she had the *disposal* of her earnings, particularly when they increased dramatically, is also clear from her correspondence, where her arrangements with publishers and applications for advance royalties for specific purposes such as trips abroad, are fully recorded. Nonetheless, married women's lack of control over their own earnings, unless their husbands allowed it, had by the mid-nineteenth century become a sufficiently burning issue that in March 1856 a Petition was submitted to the British Parliament asking them to amend the Common Law. It is worth looking in detail at the background to the Petition, its clauses, and Parliament's response.

There had been endless debate in the early nineteenth century about marriage and the subordinate position of women, as seen in Chapter 10, but only one piece of legislation had dented the legal rights of husbands—the Infant Custody Act of 1839. Many lawyers, however, had become convinced of the need for a fusion of the two systems of property law existing side by side (Common Law and Equity). There was confusion on all sides and resentment of one law for the rich and another for the rest of society—a situation less acceptable in a reforming age. Married women's property law seemed an excellent proof of the need to fuse the two systems. The laws needed amending not only for the sake of women but for the sake of lawyers themselves, the state of muddle and injustice being felt to be a discredit to English law and honest lawyers. A change in

the law on inherited property alone would not have greatly improved the lot of middle-class and working-class women, but when the concept was enlarged to include a married woman's earnings it became of potential value to women of all classes. Not all judges approved of Common Law doctrine on wives' earnings. The well-known and successful writer Charlotte Elizabeth (Phelan, afterwards Tonna), born in 1790, explained how her first husband, from whom she was separated, tried to get her large earnings from her writings for himself. Only the fact that she wrote under her Christian name and not under her husband's name enabled the Court which heard the case to decide in her favour (Tonna, 1854).

The Law Amendment Society (Society for Promoting the Amendment of the Law) founded by Lord Brougham in 1844 was the mainspring of -the movement for law reform; Lord Brougham was keenly aware of the significant role women could play in politics after he enlisted their support in the anti-slavery campaigns and saw how they formed abolition societies all over the country. He encouraged Barbara Leigh Smith, following publication in 1854 of her *Brief Summary of the Laws relating to women* (discussed in Chapter 1), to call together in 1855 a committee of like-minded women to gather support for legislative action on married women's property. The Petition was submitted in 1856 in the names of two older married members of the Committee—Mrs Jameson and Mrs Howitt. It was signed by 3,000 people, including Barbara Leigh Smith who drew it up, Jane Carlyle, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Harriet Martineau and Madame Mohl. Elizabeth Gaskell signed, despite her pessimism that no bill could actually protect a wife's property: '...a husband can coax, wheedle, beat or tyrannise his wife out of something and no law whatever will help that I can see,' she wrote to Tottie Fox on Christmas Day, 1856. The Petition formed the basis of seventy similar petitions, signed by over 24,000 people.

The first paragraph of the Petition made it clear that all married women were in the same boat as far as earnings were concerned:

That the manifold evils occasioned by the present law, by which the property and earnings of the wife are thrown into the absolute power of the husband, become daily more apparent. That the sufferings thereupon ensuing, extend over all classes of society. That it might once have been deemed for the middle and upper ranks, a comparatively theoretical question, but it is so no

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

longer, since married women of education are entering on every side the fields of literature and art, in order to increase the family income by such exertions.

A *Westminster Review* article entitled 'The Property of Married Women', written by Caroline Cornwallis and published in October 1856, mentioned several cases which aroused public sympathy. One was Mrs Glover, the famous actress, who was abandoned by her husband when he went to live with another woman. Mrs Glover went on the stage to earn a living for herself and her children, and received a good salary. The husband applied to the manager of the theatre to have the salary paid over to him. The claim was resisted and went before a Court of Law, which upheld the husband's rights, though the judge expressed his regret. Another case mentioned in the article was of 'a north country gentleman' who failed in business; his wife set up a fashionable millinery establishment and not only kept herself and her husband but made a considerable fortune. After a time, her husband died and left a will in which he bequeathed his wife's property to his illegitimate children; the will was upheld. In yet another case, a woman deserted by her husband set up as a laundress and saved a considerable amount of money in a savings bank. The husband chanced to hear of this, went to the savings bank and demanded that the capital should be paid to him. The wife only discovered this when she next went to the bank and discovered she was penniless.

The Petition continued by describing the private system of law explained in detail in Chapter 3:

That it is usual when a daughter marries in these ranks [middle and upper] to make, if possible, some distinct pecuniary provision for her and her children, and to secure the money thus set aside by a cumbrous machinery of trusteeship, proving that few parents are willing entirely to trust the welfare of their offspring to the irresponsible power of the husband, to the chances of his character, his wisdom, and his success in a profession.

That another device for the protection of women who can afford to appeal, exists in the action of the Courts of Equity, which attempt, within certain limits, to redress the deficiencies of the law...

THE GILDED CAGE

But Equity Courts had become cumbersome and time-consuming, and Chancery was a byword for delay and procrastination. Confusion encouraged the unscrupulous husband, the unscrupulous trustee and the unscrupulous lawyer.

Neither system protected the earnings of married women, and the Petition made this a central point:

That it is proved by well-known cases of hardship suffered by women of station, and also by professional women earning large incomes by pursuit of the arts, how real is the injury inflicted.

That if these laws often bear heavily upon women protected by the forethought of their relations, the social training of their husbands, and the refined customs of the rank to which they belong, how much more unequivocal is the injury sustained by women in the lower classes...[employed in] multifarious occupations which cannot here be enumerated...newspapers constantly detail instances of marital oppression, 'wife-beating' being a...crime against which English gentlemen have lately enacted stringent regulations... But for the robbery of his wife's hard earnings there is no redress...

As pointed out earlier, working-class married women working outside the home as well as within it were not a new phenomenon springing up from the Industrial Revolution. The 1832 Sadler Report, though principally concerned with children, began the exposure of the wrongs of factory women; the 1842 Report of the Royal Commission on Women and Children's Work undermined the comfortable middle-class idea that wives should be kept by their husbands by making it brutally clear that large numbers of married women had no choice but to work in order not to starve, since their husbands did not generally earn enough or regularly enough, to provide for them. Those who signed the Petition took the view that by depriving a mother of her own earnings the law deprived her 'of the power of giving schooling to her children, and in other ways providing for their moral and physical welfare'. Juries were more impressed by a husband's legal rights, as can be seen in the following case. The *Manchester Courier* reported in February 1878 the case of Thomas Harlow, 39, striker, Dukinfield, indicted for the manslaughter of his wife Ellen Harlow, 45 years old, in November 1877; on the morning of her death the wife went out hawking (street

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

selling) as usual, returning around twelve midday. Her husband had been at home drinking beer, and after dinner he slept until five o'clock, then asked his wife for twopence to go out drinking. She replied that she didn't have twopence, and had had enough trouble that day, having been out hawking in the rain. Their lodger gave Harlow twopence to avoid trouble, but he sent out for coal with the money and started a further altercation with his wife, ending in him striking her a violent blow under the right ear, felling her to the floor. She died a few minutes afterwards, of brain concussion. The jury found the prisoner guilty, but recommended him to mercy on account of the provocation he had received (the provocation was presumably his wife's refusal to hand over her earnings).

The Petition went on to consider the drawbacks for husbands in Common Law:

That there are certain portions of the law of husband and wife which bear unjustly on the husband, as for instance that of making him responsible for his wife's debts, contracted before marriage, even although he may have no fortune with her. Her power also, after marriage, of contracting debts in the name of her husband, for which he is responsible, is too unlimited, and often produces injustice.

As pointed out earlier, the drawbacks were not as arduous as at first sight appeared: few women could run up large debts before marriage if they had no personal assets, so a man was very unlucky indeed if he married a debt-ridden women without separate property; a husband could rebut his liability for goods obtained by his wife after marriage if he could prove that they were ordered without his authority; and a wife from the 'lower orders' usually found that her husband was not credit-worthy.

The Petition went on to say that times and responsibilities had changed:

That in rendering the husband responsible for the entire maintenance of his family, the law expresses the necessity of an age, when the man was the only money-getting agent, but that since the custom of the country has greatly changed in this respect the position of the female sex, the law of maintenance no longer meets the whole case. That since modern civilisation, in

THE GILDED CAGE

indefinitely extending the sphere of occupation for women, has in some measure broken down their pecuniary dependence upon men, it is time that legal protection be thrown over the produce of their labour, and that in entering the state of marriage, they no longer pass from freedom into the condition of a slave, all whose earnings belong to his master and not to himself.

In those statements, the Petition was not accurate about the past. The law may have tried to make the husband responsible for the maintenance of his family, but it is difficult to think of a time when the man was 'the only money-getting agent' (except in the technical sense that he was legally entitled to any money earned by his wife and young children). Even queens and ladies in medieval pictures are usually shown carding, spinning or weaving; cloth-making was the most important of women's occupations from the fourteenth century onwards, spinning being the women's usual job before the days of the factory system, and machine weaving became a largely women's occupation in the nineteenth century. But women spinning in the sunshine at the cottage door, a vision beloved of romantic historians and poets, worked long hours for poor pay. The pre-industrial woman was involved in a painful struggle for mere existence, and investigations of the lives of hand-woven weavers between 1834 and 1840 revealed hardships that had long existed. The Elizabethan Poor Law made the husband and wife jointly responsible for the support of their children. Over the following three hundred years many wives and mothers had to work hard at home under the domestic outwork system, or later in factories, mills or fields, helping to earn the family living; for that reason homes and babies were liable to neglect long before the Industrial Revolution. In the 1750s a famous saying was that only a fool of a man would marry a woman whom he had to support entirely by his own labours. Nonetheless, the idea that a wife should receive her own earnings continued to be regarded by most men as 'an affront against nature'.

The last paragraph of the Petition said that other countries had different laws on married women's property from those of England, and that the fabric of those societies was not being torn apart: 'That the laws of various foreign countries are in this respect much more just than our own, and afford precedent for a more liberal precedent than prevails in England...' The Petitioners referred to the example of the United States of America which, having first adopted the

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

Common Law of England in regard to the property of married women, had recently repealed it in most of the States. Vermont had taken the lead in 1847 by enacting that:

The rents, issues and profits of the real estate of any married woman, and the interest of the husband in her right to the same, whether acquired before or after marriage, shall be exempt from attachment or execution for the sole debt of the husband; and no conveyance of the husband during coverture of such right or interest shall be valid, unless the same be in deed executed jointly by the husband and wife. Married women may devise their real estate, or any interest therein, descendible to their heirs.

In 1848 New York followed Vermont's example, but extended the principle still further, and it was soon adopted by Pennsylvania, New England, Texas, California and the newly-settled States. By a further law, New York in 1854 enacted that:

Any married woman whose husband, either from drunkenness, profligacy, or any other cause, shall neglect to provide for her support, or for the support and education of their children, and any married woman who may be deserted by her husband, shall have the right in her own name to transact business, to receive and collect her own earnings and the earnings of her minor children, and apply the same for her own support, and the support and education of her children, free from control and interference of her husband.

Practices in some European countries were explained by Annie Besant in her mid-century pamphlet *Marriage as it was, as it is, and as it should be* (Butts, 1879). In Germany the law varied in different states; under one system, known as *Gutemeinschaft* (community of goods) there was no separate property for husband and wife, all being merged in the common stock over which the husband had no more right than the wife. The husband administered the stock as representative of the community, not as husband, being head partner but with no extra personal rights; he could be dispossessed of even this limited authority if he was wasteful; he could not alienate or mortgage any of the common lands or rights without his wife's consent—a privilege which extended not only to the lands she herself

brought to the marriage, but also over those brought by her husband to the marriage. The control of the wife over the immovables was, for parts of Prussia, extended in April 1850 over movables as well, for the husband was forbidden to dispose not only of immovables but of the whole or part of the movable property, without the consent of his wife. Nor could the husband by himself make donations *mortis causa*; such arrangements took the form of mutual arrangements between the two spouses respecting their claims of inheritance on one another.

In Austria married couples were more independent of each other. The wife retained her rights over her own property, and could dispose of it as she liked, and sue or be sued in respect of it, without marital authorisation or control; and just as she had free disposition of her property, so she could contract with others as she pleased. A husband was unable to alienate any of his wife's property in her name, or to lend or mortgage it, or to receive any money, institute any law-suits, or make any arrangements in respect of it, unless he had her special mandate. If no stipulation was made at the marriage, each spouse retained his or her separate property, and neither had a claim to anything gained or in any way received by the other during marriage.

There was no mistaking the profound and universal interest in the Petition. In June 1856 a public meeting was held, at which Sir John Pakington presided and the Law Amendment Society took a prominent part. The subject was referred to the latter's Committee on Personal Laws for full and comprehensive examination, a report was compiled and a bill carefully prepared, which Lord Brougham presented early in February 1857 to the House of Lords, and Sir Thomas Erskine Perry presented in May 1857 to the House of Commons, to give married women control of their own property and earnings. But the confused state of thinking can be seen from the attitude of Perry, who made it clear that he was not supporting married women's right to work, since he believed 'the fitting place for woman was not engaged in a struggle with man for her bread... [but] enshrined in her own home, however humble, a place of light and joy to her husband'. He wanted to correct cases of hardship which arose when brutal husbands wrested away the earnings of their wives, and hoped this would undermine demands for easier divorce which in his opinion would lead to 'the corruption of morals'. The likelihood of a successful outcome seemed good,

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

though *Punch* reported there had been a good deal of laughter in Parliament when women's wrongs came up. There was not only laughter, however, the women who organised the Petition had no idea what bitter passions they would arouse, no concept of the personal abuse they would suffer when they supported legislation which struck at society's ideal of man and wife as one flesh. 'Is there a plague in England or Egypt worse than the strongminded woman?' screamed the *Saturday Review* and referred to them indelicately as 'a species of vermin'. It was an irrational outburst from a paper which at the same time took the line that women's grievances over property were too trifling for the serious consideration of the nation, and that the bill simply concerned 'redressing all the hitches which occur about money matters between married people'.

Despite strong opposition, Perry's bill was approved on a second reading, but it was checked by a promise from the Government to bring forward a measure of its own. That promise was unredeemed, though during the debates preceding the Divorce Act of 1857, Lord Lyndhurst secured the insertion of a section providing that a woman who was deserted by her husband without cause and who was supporting herself by her own industry or property could apply either to a local court or to the Divorce Court for an order to protect herself against her husband, his creditors, or any person claiming under him any property which she became possessed of or entitled to after his desertion. During the existence of the protection order she was to have the same property rights as an unmarried woman; if her husband seized her property he was liable to be sued by the wife, who could obtain a sum equal to twice the value of the property seized. Perry's bill to give all married women control of their property dropped from sight; as he recalled later, 'the Divorce Bill took the wind out of our sails'. It was a bitter disappointment to Barbara Leigh Smith and her co-workers, and it was to be many years before the issue was raised again.

Passionate assertions that the English laws concerning married women were *morally* wrong were clearly not enough to effect change; what stirred people most was the concept of the wronged wife and mother. By mid-century there was accumulating evidence that, although the majority of husbands did not treat their wives badly, there were many more cruel husbands than was generally acknowledged. The widespread agitation in support of Queen Caroline (see Chapter 2) and the revelations in the 1830s and 1840s

of Caroline Norton and others (see Chapter 1) about ill-treatment at their husbands' hands, had raised people's consciousness of the problem. When Parliament gave control of their own property to deserted wives they dealt with the worst abuses but effectively sidestepped the issue of principle. Men's fears were expressed by Sir Richard Bethell, Attorney General. He warned that such a reform 'must involve a material change in the social and political institutions of a nation' and tend to 'the placing of the women of England in a strong-minded and independent position which so few chose for themselves' (as if they *had* any choice). Such a position, rendering them 'accountable for every thing which they might say and do', was not one which 'the best and most amiable women of England were anxious to occupy'. The influential *Saturday Review* went further, concluding that 'there is besides a smack of selfish independence about it which rather jars with poetical notions of wedlock'. That paper showed no understanding that it seemed equally selfish for a man to insist on having sole control of his wife's property. As *The Englishwoman's Journal* remarked in August 1858:

As the law now stands, protection is afforded to the earnings and property of a wife deserted by her husband, but it makes provision for no case where desertion has not taken place, thus leaving unprotected a large class of sufferers who are subjected to the daily loss of their property or earnings by the presence of a dissolute or unprincipled husband. It also leaves untouched the anomaly in our law which arises from the different mode in which Courts of Common Law and Courts of Equity deal with questions relating to the property of husband and wife.

The same issue of the magazine reviewed the second edition of Coventry Patmore's poem 'The Angel in the House', and the reviewer sadly remarked that those sentiments seemed to meet the public mind of the day, since a backlash against women's rights was setting in.

Nonetheless, attitudes towards divorce were changing considerably, along with a weakening of belief in orthodox religion. Women had access to divorce, though on less favourable terms than men. The 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act did not introduce any *new principle* of divorce; its purpose was to make the civil system of divorce, established by the House of Lords in 1696,

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

more widely available. As the Attorney General emphasised when moving the second reading of the bill, in all other respects the laws of England upon the subject of divorce would remain what they were (Hansard, 1857, vol.147, cols. 718f). The main features of the Act were: a new Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes was created (sitting only in London), to which was transferred all jurisdiction in matrimonial matters previously exercised by church courts; divorces 'from bed and board' were abolished, and decrees for judicial separation were substituted (the grounds had previously been adultery or cruelty, and to these the Act added desertion without cause for two years or upwards); and the Court was given power to grant a full divorce (*a vinculo matrimonii*) for the same causes that had merited a divorce by Private Act of Parliament. In a husband's petition, simple adultery sufficed; but a wife was required to prove not only adultery but the additional aggravation of desertion, cruelty, incest, rape, sodomy or bestiality. Connivance, collusion or condonation were to be absolute bars to a petition for divorce.

Many observers in 1857 believed that the State had by this Act abandoned the previous principle of indissolubility of marriage, and this misrepresentation continued well into the twentieth century. But the granting of *any* divorces before 1857, however few, had breached the church's principle of indissolubility. Gladstone said in a Parliamentary debate on 31 July 1857 that in the thirty-four years between 1765 and 1799 ninety-five divorces had taken place, from 1799 to 1830 eighty-two, and from 1830 to 1857 ninety-nine divorces. That made a total of 276 divorces in the period 1765–1857. What the 1857 Act did was to alter the procedure for obtaining a divorce, cheapen the procedure and thus make it available to more people. But for the rest of the century the Act was criticised by reformers on two grounds: firstly, that by making divorce easier for men than for women it sanctioned two standards of morality; secondly, that even the cheaper procedure was too costly for working people.

In the battle for women's rights, the election of John Stuart Mill to Parliament in 1865 was a signal for renewed activity. In 1867, the year of the first women's suffrage amendment, a group of women prepared a memorial which they addressed to the Council of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, with which the Law Amendment Society had amalgamated in 1864. It was decided that a bill embodying similar provisions to those in Sir Thomas Erskine Perry's measure a decade earlier should be

introduced into Parliament. In 1868 Mr J.G.Shaw-Lefevre introduced it, supported by John Stuart Mill, Jacob Bright and Russell Gurney. A committee known as the Married Women's Property Committee had been formed, with Mrs Josephine Butler as Treasurer and Miss Wollstenholme as Secretary, to educate public opinion on the bill and to influence Members of Parliament by means of petitions. Twenty-nine petitions were collected, bearing 33,000 signatures, but the bill did not get further than a second reading. It was reintroduced by Russell Gurney in 1869, the same year that saw the publication of Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, but fared no better than the first bill. A third attempt in 1870 was more successful, and, although the bill was amended beyond all recognition its backers believed it must eventually lead to fuller measures. The Married Women's Property Act of 1870 secured to a married woman as her separate property the earnings she had acquired since the commencement of the Act in any employment carried on separately from her husband or through the exercise of any literary, artistic or scientific skill, as well as income from certain specified investments, personal property which descended to her as an heiress, the rents and profits of any real estate which came to her in the same way, and any sum of money not exceeding £200 which came to her by will or deed. The rights in any other property were vested in her husband according to Common Law, unless it was her separate property under an equity settlement. Erna Reiss's explanation for this half-hearted measure (in *The Rights and Duties of Englishwomen*, 1934) was that it made it possible to change English law and yet retain the legal fiction of the unity of man and wife and the disabilities of coverture.

The recognition of a wife as a separate person worried many men more than the idea of divorce; after all, few got divorced but the majority of men had a wife. Change was very slow because men feared that giving women control of their own property and earnings would end wifely obedience and their social world would collapse. It shows a strange lack of faith in men's natural superiority that MPs stuck to the view that a man's authority rested on his legal control of his wife's property. But however truncated, the measure was an advance on previous law. In 1878, when 'A Small Society for the Promotion of Legal Education of Women' was formed in London, the *Englishwomen's Review* remarked that women needed legal knowledge more than formerly, because they were more independent

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

agents and had acquired rights and responsibilities apart from their husbands which it was of the greatest consequence they should understand. The Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1873 were said to have given women 'a novel sense of independence' and this of course explained the powerful opposition to their passage.

It soon became clear that an anomaly remained; a married woman could, under some circumstances, sue—but no machinery was provided whereby she could be sued without joining her husband. In a letter to *The Times* of 14 March 1878, Mrs Ursula Bright (wife of Jacob Bright, MP) put the position clearly:

The effect of that obscurity upon the credit of respectable married women earning their own and their children's bread, in any employment or business carried on separately from their husband; the inconvenience and risk to their creditors, is, as you have most ably pointed out, great; but the injury to honest wives is far greater. It puts them at a considerable disadvantage in the labour market and in business. A married woman, for instance, keeping a little shop, may sue for debts to her, but has no corresponding liability to be sued. If the whereabouts of the husband are not very clearly defined, it is evident she may have some difficulty in obtaining credit.

Mrs Bright pointed out that an employer could not sue a married woman for breach of contract, since she could not legally make such a contract, and this made it more difficult for a married woman to enter some forms of employment; and that a wife still need not pay her debts contracted before marriage, which had the effect of making it more difficult for women to obtain credit.

Not until 1881 was the question of married women's property again debated in Parliament. A bill received the Royal signature in 1882 which secured to a woman married after the commencement of the Act, as her separate property:

all real and personal property which shall belong to her at the time of the marriage, or shall be acquired by or may devolve upon her at the time of the marriage, or shall be acquired by or devolve upon her after marriage including any wages, earnings, money and property gained or acquired by her in any employment, trade or occupation in which she is engaged or which she carries on

THE GILDED CAGE

separately from her husband, or by the exercise of any literary, artistic or scientific skill.

Middle-class husbands could by this time see considerable advantages in their wives holding separate property—for example, a husband's creditors could not claim for his debts or property held separately by the wife, and this became a family insurance against possible business disaster. Equity to a settlement had no significance with regard to women married after 1882, but paraphernalia and pin-money were still important since they secured an income for a wife out of a husband's income if she had none of her own. The Act did not in every respect give a married woman the status of a *feme sole*; it was held in 1887 that it did not remove the disability placed on a married woman by the Gifts for Churches Act, 1803, which forbade her to make a gift for the purpose of erecting or providing any church or chapel without her husband's consent. This disability was removed by an Act of 1891. But the 1882 Act entirely abrogated the old Common Law doctrine of unity between man and wife, as far as property *inter se* was concerned.

CHANGING ATTITUDES TO DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1884 gave a woman certain rights over her person; if a woman refused to comply with a decree for restitution of conjugal rights the husband's remedy was to try to get a judicial separation on the ground of her desertion without reasonable cause. But the Act did not wholly dispose of a husband's right to keep his wife at home by force; that question was only finally settled in 1891 when the Court of Appeal heard the case of a Mrs Jackson. Having refused to return home when ordered to do so by the court, she was forcibly seized by her husband as she was leaving church and kept a virtual prisoner. The case caused great excitement, and in spite of Eliza Lynn Linton's support for the husband (in the *Saturday Review*) it became clear that most people disapproved of his action. Lord Halsbury gave his opinion that Common Law had never supported such a right, and he overthrew both the proposition that a man had a right to imprison his wife and the proposition that he had a right to beat her.

According to Sir William Blackstone in the eighteenth century, a

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

man could give his wife ‘moderate correction...by domestic chastisement’, just as he could chastise his children and apprentices. That did not mean society approved of men beating their wives mercilessly, though that did occur at all social levels. Charlotte Brontë wrote to a friend (Gaskell, 1985, p.208):

You remember Mr. and Mrs.—? Mrs.—came here the other day, with a most melancholy tale of her wretched husband’s drunken, extravagant, profligate habits. She asked papa’s advice; there was nothing, she said, but ruin before them. They owed debts which they could never pay. She expected Mr.—’s instant dismissal from his curacy; she knew, from bitter experience, that his vices were utterly hopeless. He treated her and her child savagely... Papa advised her to leave him for ever, and go home, if she had a home to go to. She said, this was what she had long resolved to do; and she would leave him directly, as soon as Mr. B. dismissed him...

The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1859 gave the courts power to inquire into the existence of ante-nuptial and post-nuptial settlements and order the property to be applied for the benefit of wife and children. An Act of 1878 gave the courts power to grant a separation order with maintenance to a woman whose husband had been convicted of an aggravated assault upon her. A further Act of 1884 said that where a suit for restitution of conjugal rights was brought by a wife, the court could decree payment of maintenance; and in 1886 the Maintenance of Wives (Desertion) Act gave magistrates the power to grant maintenance orders, for a weekly amount not exceeding £2, to women whose husbands were guilty of desertion and neglect. In 1895 the Summary Jurisdiction (Married Women) Act further extended rights to enforce maintenance, and in 1902 and 1925 yet other grounds were added for obtaining a maintenance order.

But dissatisfaction was expressed in 1906 by the President of the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division in the case of *Dodd v. Dodd*. Lord Gorell said in his written judgment:

That the present state of the English law of divorce and separation is not satisfactory cannot be doubted... Whether any and what remedy should be applied raises extremely difficult

THE GILDED CAGE

questions...for they touch the basis on which society rests, and principle of marriage being the fundamental basis upon which this and other civilised nations have built up their social systems....

Lord Gorell chaired the Royal Commission on Divorce and Matrimonial Causes in 1909, which recommended a number of changes, but none was hastily enacted. The Matrimonial Causes Act, 1923, placed men and women on an equal footing by empowering a wife to obtain a divorce on the single ground of her husband's adultery; a further Act of 1937 allowed divorce to either partner on grounds of adultery *or* desertion *or* cruelty *or* insanity (a wife could also claim on the grounds that her husband had been guilty of rape, sodomy or bestiality).

Changes in administrative procedure in 1914, 1920 and 1926 made divorce more available for the poor by decentralising the court and by providing for financial aid. But divorce remained a comparatively unusual solution to marital problems until after World War 1. The number of divorce decrees did not exceed 1,000 a year until 1918. By comparison, legal separation orders (from magistrates' courts) were applied for between 1909 and 1914 at the rate of over 10,000 a year; this seems to have been preferred by the working class, who were the majority of the population.

WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

The passing of the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883 changed the methods of electioneering in Britain, and gave women the opportunity to get more directly involved in politics. Before that date canvassing and other subsidiary work of elections had been done by men specially engaged and paid for the job, and, with the exception of a few of the candidate's relatives, and the occasional aristocratic lady who traded kisses for votes, no women had taken an open part in elections at all. The new Act limited the amount spent and all that changed. The work had still to be done, but might no longer be paid for, and what more than natural than for men to realise that such work could be women's work? A whole new technique of election machinery came into being, and with the appearance of volunteer women workers the modern type of electioneering began.

So successful and so eager were the women allowed to take a share

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

in this new work that the political parties soon saw advantage in securing their services permanently, and within a few years the Primrose League and the Women's Liberal Federation made their appearance. The former body, which set up its Women's Council in 1885, made no pretence of wanting women's help in any but the practical affairs of the Conservative Party. The Women's Liberal Federation, similarly, was called together by Mrs Gladstone 'to help our husbands', and the same uncritical support was expected, though radical women were less easy to manage. Leaving aside their political effectiveness, the mere existence of these associations did a great deal for women in both the great Parties. In the new sphere to which they had been summoned women proved themselves of immense value, and by doing so broke down the old belief that politics was exclusively a man's job. The notion that the rough and tumble of elections was unfit for women could not survive their universal employment as canvassers, and the experience of taking part in such activities (for however personal or obedient reasons) awakened the canvassers themselves to social realities and consideration of possible solutions.

THE EXTENT OF LEGAL REFORM ACHIEVED

By the early twentieth century married women in England had secured the legal right to their own personal property and earnings. They had some rights over children and over their own bodies, and there were greater opportunities to get out of 'holy deadlock'. They could no longer be called 'the last legal slaves', as John Stuart Mill had described them in 1868 (in *The Subjection of Women*). Nothing had changed quickly; each reform was endlessly examined for possible weakening of the 'natural' order of things in which a husband was legally dominant in the marriage relation. But as Frances Power Cobbe had pointed out, the emancipation movement was really a process of substituting new ideals for women in place of those which had satisfied a previous age (Butler, 1869). Change was not necessarily a break; it could be a shift of emphasis. But since the new ideal could not stand too far off from existing conditions, opposing ideals could exist side by side for a time. The need for continuing change was recognised by the Royal Commission on Divorce in 1909, which commented that there was 'no satisfactory solution of the problem...as to the personal relations between

husband and wife...except by placing them on an equal footing...’ Saying it was one thing; doing it another. At the end of the twentieth century the problem has still not been solved.

What in 1914 and beyond was the situation of the wife with no property or private income who did not work outside the home or earn any money by her exertions? She remained totally dependent on the moods, humours and antipathies of her husband, however generous he may have been in practice. Until 1964, any money a wife saved from her housekeeping allowance was not hers to dispose of legally, since it belonged still to her husband; thereafter, she was entitled to half the savings. Men understood *for themselves* that ‘Nothing would be more unbearable than if we had to depend upon favour for everything we need; it would be the lot of a beggar!’ (von Jhering, 1913) but most of them did not understand that a wife might feel the same.

Major contemporary debates centre on why the legal reforms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries failed to change marital relations as much as the reformers hoped. Most women continued to be allotted and to accept a subordinate role to their husbands until the eruption of the women’s movement in the 1960s. The roots of women’s subjection in marriage had to be looked for in deeper causes than could be dealt with by simple legislation. But those causes were felt to be oppressive first by Victorian middle-class women, who not surprisingly pioneered such legislative freedom and equality as all women in Britain possess today.

CONCLUSION

‘Marriage must be a relation of sympathy or of conquest,’ wrote George Eliot (Collet, 1902, p.24). Yet those legally subordinate wives in nineteenth-century England who did not get sympathy from their husbands were not necessarily conquered. At the extremes of behaviour they could be abject slaves or outright rebels, but in between they were rarely completely loyal subjects.

Most women expected to marry: they wanted love and affection; they wanted children; they were sexually and economically vulnerable; they desired respectability and security. They expected to stay married, unless the marital relationship proved unbearable. Law and custom made separation rare, divorce was expensive and it complicated family and property relations. The consequences of remaining single, if women had no private income or means of earning a decent living, were economic hardship and social marginality. The duration of marriage was very uncertain, and it was likely that one or other spouse would die before all the children left home. Childbirth remained dangerous to women of all classes throughout the century, and many wives, unlike today, predeceased their husbands. The average marriage may have lasted fourteen years.

What this book has tried to show is how and why a considerable body of wives, whether contented or dissatisfied with things as they were, came to terms with their lives, provided justification for them, or discovered survival tactics. They could not all adopt the same tactics since, apart from individual differences of character and temperament, women’s lives, status and opportunities varied sharply according to their social class. Class was the basis of extreme differences in lifestyle, life chances and possibilities for independent action in marriage. There was no ‘representative family’ which had a

CONCLUSION

lifestyle and experience shared by all the classes. Although all women shared some legal disabilities such as lack of custody rights of their children and inability before 1870 to control their own earnings, all women were not inferior in status to all men. Aristocratic women had enormous economic and social power over middle- and working-class men, and middle-class women had a lesser but similar power over working-class men.

The upper classes, representing less than one per cent of the population, dominated social life in Society, and this was almost entirely controlled by women. *Marriage à la mode*, the fashionable, tolerant, free and easy form of almost open marriage which allowed the partners to have their own friends and go their own way, was at the heart of that lifestyle. The English aristocracy was the focal point of envy, admiration and gossip, representing for many people the lifestyle they most wished to imitate. Aristocratic women were to the general public in England then what film stars became in the mid-twentieth century and television and rock stars are today—a spectacle of ‘enchanted beings’, as Charlotte Brontë described them, far removed from the restrictions of the common herd. They remained throughout the century effortlessly superior to everyone else, not only inheriting wealth but making or marrying money wherever they could and only grudgingly admitting to their charmed circle those few of the *nouveaux riches* they approved or hoped to gain from.

Upper-class women were ostensibly subject to the same Common Law as other wives, but the majority had supportive families who protected them by a body of private law which enabled them to have separate income and property to which their husbands had no access. They were thus financially independent and self-confident, and they behaved pretty much as they liked, subject only to the mores of their class and the increasingly bourgeois moral pressures which made total discretion necessary. They were not generally concerned about a woman’s right to work in competition with men, or a husband’s right to claim his wife’s earnings, though this was the grievance of a few upper-class women writers such as the influential Caroline Norton. Some of them suffered from cruel and abusive husbands, too, and were glad to seek the protection of a reformed public law.

The working classes represented three-quarters of the population. They were not a monolithic group united by a common experience and culture. They did not have one ‘life apart’ from the middle and

CONCLUSION

upper classes, but many different lives apart from each other. There were differences according to the area of the country they lived in, differences between urban and rural communities, differences of status between the skilled, the semi-skilled and the unskilled workers. Above all, there was the difference most important to themselves, between the 'respectables' and the 'roughs'. It was not simply a matter of how much money they earned, but of how they lived their lives, kept up appearances and raised their children.

Industrialisation, with the accompanying growth of towns to a point where Britain became the most urbanised country in the world, had a striking effect on the family life of the majority of the population. The benefits of modern industry were not immediately obvious to the working-class family, which was encouraged—indeed often forced—to stand on its own feet even when it could not obtain the means to do so. Their 'betters' exhorted them to thrift and self-help throughout the century, but also made legislative attempts to deal with one social problem after another in an *ad hoc* fashion. They always laid blame for poverty on the victim's fecklessness or individual misfortune, and not until the very end of the century on the political, social and economic system. The growing class of industrial wage labourers courted more independently and married oftener than their forebears, though the age of marriage remained high. The percentage who went through a marriage ceremony rose during the nineteenth century, partly because the practice of 'common law marriage' declined (Gillis, 1985, pp.234–5).

Once married, most working-class women faced a life of willing sacrifice. Below the labour aristocracy, most wives knew that their husbands were unlikely to be able to earn enough, or regularly enough, to keep a family, so women expected to contribute to the family income by full-time, part-time or casual work. This made for a rough kind of equality between husbands and wives. Wives had the crucial role of managing the expenditure, and seem to have been the linchpin of most homes. The reality of working-class marriage depended more on the personalities of the partners than on who controlled the meagre resources of the family. Brutal, drunken husbands were not uncommon, and increasingly the law tried to give abused wives a small measure of protection. 'Till death us do part' was the reality for the respectable working class, and they made the best of a bad job if that was the way marriage turned out. The rough

CONCLUSION

working class took marriage less seriously. It was not uncommon for a discontented spouse (more often the husband) to run away, to emigrate or commit bigamy, and sale of wives was not as infrequent as was thought by scandalised readers of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Menefee, 1981).

How different was the gilded cage of bourgeois marriage. The middle class took marriage more seriously than any other, because it did not have the same escape routes. The affluent middle-class family became the greatest of all Victorian success stories, though autobiographies, diaries, letters and novels present a running commentary on its weaknesses as well as its strengths. Strengthened by industrialism's prosperity and increasing amounts of paid domestic service, it benefited from a revolution in living standards and comfort not needed by the aristocracy and not accessible to the working class until the mid-twentieth century. Middle-class wives expected their husbands to maintain them (although some had private incomes that enabled them to pursue separate interests) in return for their services as housekeepers and partners. Despite their belief in the angel in the house with her special mission of raising the moral and material standards of the home and in the outside world, some women found their total dependence irksome. If, exceptionally, they earned money it legally belonged down to 1870 to their husbands. It was in this group that some women felt the most frustrated, had the time and energy to plan action, and were the most articulate in pressing for legal reforms.

Yet not all middle-class wives were discontented with their lot, and most found ways to survive. Comparatively few marriages went so seriously wrong that separation was the preferred alternative. Most middle-class women were not interested in having powerful positions in public life, since they did not think this would bring them greater contentment. The tiny few who were storming the citadels of male domination were admired, revered, much talked about, envied even. But they were not role-models for the majority of married women, who accepted that they belonged where they were and would live out their days in a dignified if sometimes dull routine. Some of them sought purpose for their lives through dedication to religion, to husband and children, or to local philanthropy. Some ruled their separate sphere by manipulation, by devious behaviour, or by outwitting their husbands in a continual cold war of the sexes. Others retreated into invalidism, or into a fantasy world of escapist

CONCLUSION

and protest novels. Though few of them identified themselves openly with the cause of women's rights, all middle-class women benefited from the legal changes for which their stronger and more independent-minded sisters fought.

An anti-marriage crusade continued throughout the nineteenth century, provoking both a backlash of glorification of marriage and also sustaining campaigns to change the legal relations between husbands and wives. In 1914, as in 1800, most people took it for granted that legal unions called marriages, for the purpose of establishing a family, would continue. Marriage remained for most women and indeed for men the preferred form of pair bonding. Socialist and agnostic writer George Bernard Shaw, reputedly an advocate of free love, wrote in 1906 in the Preface to *Marriage* that the only people who did not marry were 'those who actually avail themselves of it by pretending to be married when they are not, and Bohemians who have no position to lose and no career to be closed'. In every other case, he said, 'open violation of the marriage laws means either downright ruin or such inconvenience as a prudent man or woman would get married ten times over rather than face'. Shrewdly, he added that illicit unions were often found in practice to be as tyrannical and hard to escape from as the worst of marriages. So Shaw accepted that when a joint domestic establishment, involving questions of children or property, was contemplated, marriage was compulsory for all normal people. 'Clandestine irregularities' were neither safe nor comfortable, he said, which ruled them out for 'normal and decent people'. He therefore proposed that people accept marriage as inevitable, and make it decent and reasonable. Jack Tanner, his free-thinking 'superman', ends by accepting the inevitable and marrying Ann, his innocently devious 'superwoman', who recognises the inevitable from the beginning. The play should have been called 'Man and Superwoman'.

The middle-class feminists who struggled to put legal relations between spouses on a better footing were of Shaw's gradualist reforming mind. Although reforms came gradually, they laid the groundwork for what, in the light of eight centuries of women's subjugation, can only be called a slow revolution in the laws of marriage. That the Victorian revolution did not fulfil all its protagonists' expectations is only one more proof of Goldsmith's adage:

CONCLUSION

How small, of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure
(*The Traveller*, line 427).

Even under bad laws governing relations between husbands and wives, nineteenth-century women of all classes were able to 'make the best of it' in marriage. Under the greatly changed laws of the late twentieth century, are we doing so much better? Relations between spouses will always be the most intimate and inaccessible of human affairs. Who knows the inside of someone else's marriage? Our Victorian and Edwardian foremothers got by by 'doing the best they could', and they managed to lay the foundations of a better life for their descendants. We late twentieth-century English women have still not banished all the inequities and unfairnesses which constrict women's lives, marriages and careers. If we can 'get by' in our personal lives and build for the future as well as they did, we will deserve to say the same *Nunc dimittis*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Place of publication is London, except where otherwise indicated.

- Agriculture (1843), *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture*, xii.
- Agriculture (1868–9). *Report on Children's, Young Persons' and Women's Employment in Agriculture*, xiii.
- Airlie, Mabell, Countess (1921), *In Whig Society, 1775–1818*, Hodder & Stoughton.
- Airlie, Mabell, Countess (1922), *Lady Palmerston and Her Times*, Hodder & Stoughton.
- Altick, Richard (1962), 'The Sociology of Authorship', *Bulletin of New York Public Library*, LXVI.
- Anderson, Michael (1971), *Family Structure in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire*, Cambridge University Press.
- Anderson, S. (1984), 'Legislative Divorce: Law for the Aristocracy?', in *Law, Economy and Society*, G.R. Rubin and David Sugarman, eds, Abingdon, Oxon., Professional Books.
- Arbuthnot, Mrs. Harriet (1950), *The Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1820–1832* 2 vols, ed. Francis Bamford, Macmillan.
- Arch, Joseph (1898), *Joseph Arch. The Story of His Life, told by Himself*, Hutchinson.
- Armitage, D.M. (1939), *The Taylors of Ongar: Portrait of an English Family*, Cambridge University Press.
- Askwith, Betty (1969), *Lady Dilke*, Chatto & Windus.
- Asquith, Lady Cynthia (1950), *Haply I Remember*, James Barrie.
- Asquith, Lady Cynthia (1968), *Diaries, 1915–18*, Hutchinson.
- Asquith, Margot (1944), *Off the Record*, Frederick Muller.
- Austen Letters (1924), *Five Letters from Jane Austen to her niece Fanny Knight*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Austen Letters (1932), *Letters of Jane Austen*, ed. R.W. Chapman, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Balsan, Consuelo Vanderbilt (1952), *The Glitter and the Gold* New York: Harper.
- Bamford, Samuel (1841), *Passages in the life of a Radical*, 2nd ed., Manchester.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bamford, Samuel (1844), *Walks in South Lancashire*, the author, Blackley.
- Bamford, Samuel (1893), *Passages in the Life of a Radical and Early Days*, T.Fisher Unwin.
- Bancroft-Davis, Elizabeth (1904), *Letters from England, 1846–9*, Smith, Elder & Co.
- Baum, Joan (1986), *The Calculating Passion of Ada Byron*, Archon Books.
- Beard, Mary Ritter (1946), *Woman as Force in History*, Macmillan.
- Beeton, Isabella (1861), *Book of Household Management*, S.O.Beeton.
- Bell, Lady (1907), *At the Works*, Edward Arnold.
- Bell, Quentin (1972), *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Benson, A.C., and Viscount Esher (eds) (1907), *The Letters of Queen Victoria: Correspondence, First Series 1837–61*, 3 vols, John Murray.
- Berridge, Virginia, and Edwards, Griffith (1981), *Opium and the People: Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England*, New York: St Martin's Press.
- Besant, Annie (1878), *Selection of Social and Political Pamphlets of Annie Besant*, A.K.Butts, New York.
- Besant, Annie (1885), *Autobiographical Sketches*, Freethought Publishing Co.
- Besant, Annie (1893), *Autobiography*, T.Fisher Unwin.
- Bird, Isabella (1879), *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, John Murray.
- Black, Clementina (1983), *Married Women's Work*, 1st ed. 1915; Virago.
- Blake, Robert (1969), *Disraeli*, Oxford University Press.
- Bolitho, Hector, (ed.) (1938), *Letters of Queen Victoria*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Booth, Charles (1903), *Life and Labour of the People of London*, 8 vols, Macmillan.
- Bosanquet, Helen (1898), *Rich and Poor*, Macmillan.
- Bourne, George (1913), *Lucy Bettesworth*, Duckworth.
- Bowd, James (1955), 'The Life of a Farm Worker', *The Countryman*, vol.51, pt. 2, pp.293–300.
- Branca, Patricia (1975), *Silent Sisterhood: Middle-class Women in the Victorian Home*, Croom Helm.
- Braybon, Gail, and Summerfield, Penny (1987), *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars*, Pandora.
- Brightfield, Myron (1968), *Victorian England and its Novels*, Los Angeles: University of California Library.
- Brimley Johnson, R. (ed.) (1925), *The Letters of Mary Russell Mitford*, John Lane.
- Brindley, J. (1840), *The Immoralities of Socialism. Being an exposure of Mr. Owen's attack upon Marriage in his (Book of the New Moral World)*.
- Brownlow, Countess (Emma Sophia Gust), (1940), *The Eve of Victorianism: Reminiscences of the Years 1802–1834*, first ed. 1868; John Murray.
- Burkhardt, Frederick, and Smith, Sydney (1986), *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin: vol. 1, 1821–1836*, Cambridge University Press.
- Burnett, John (1974), *Useful Toil*, Allen Lane.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Burnett, John (1984), *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s*, Penguin.
- Burnett, John, Vincent, David and Mayall, David (1984), *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An annotated, critical biography*, vol. 1, 1790–1900; New York, 1984; vol. 2, 1900–1945, New York, 1987.
- Butler, Josephine (1869), *Memoir of John Grey of Dilston*, Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas.
- Butler, Josephine (1869), *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, Macmillan.
- Butler, Josephine (1892), *Recollections of George Butler*, Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith.
- Butts, Asa K. (1879), *Marriage as it was, as it is, and as it should be*, New York: A.K. Butts.
- Cadbury, Edward, Matheson, M. Cecile, and Shann, George (1906), *Women's Work and Wages*, T. Fisher Unwin.
- Caird, Mona (1897), *The Morality of Marriage*, George Redway.
- Carlyle, Jane (1924), *Letters to Her Family*, ed. Leonard Huxley, J. Murray.
- Carter, Thomas (1845), *Memoirs of a Working Man*, Knight.
- Chamberlain, Mary (1983), *Fewwomen: A Portrait of Women in an English Village*, 1st ed. 1975; Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Chappie, J.A. V. and Sharpe J.G. (1980), *Elizabeth Gaskell, A Portrait in Letters*, Manchester University Press.
- Children's Employment Commission (1843), P.P. XIV, *First Report*, pt. 1.
- Children's Employment Commission (1867), P.P. XVI, *Sixth Report*.
- Chitty, Susan (1974), *The Beast and the Monk*, Hodder & Stoughton.
- Cholmondeley, R.H., (ed.) (1950), *The Heber Letters, 1783–1832*, Batchworth.
- Chorley, Kathleen (1950), *Manchester Made Them*, Faber.
- Churchill, Lady Randolph (1908), *Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill*, Edward Arnold.
- Churchill, Winston S. (1930), *My Early Life*, Odhams Press.
- Clough, Blanche Athena (1897), *A Memoir of Anne Jemima Clough*, Arnold.
- Cobbe, Frances Power (1878), 'Wife Torture in England', *Contemporary Review*, April 1878.
- Cobbe, Frances Power (1894), *Life of Frances Power Cobbe, By Herself*, 2 vols, Bentley.
- Collet, Clara E. (1902), *Educated Working Women*, P.S. King.
- Colquhoun, Patrick (1806), *A Treatise on Indigence*.
- Corke, Helen (1975), *In Our Infancy: An Autobiography, 1882–1912*, Cambridge University Press.
- Creston, Dormer (1952), *The Youthful Queen Victoria*, New York: Putnam's.
- Cullwick, Hannah (1984), *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick*, ed. Liz Stanley, Virago.
- Davidoff, Leonore (1973), *The Best Circles*, Croom Helm.
- Davies, C. Stella (1963), *North Country Bred*, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dayus, Kathleen (1982), *Her People*, Virago.
- Dayus, Kathleen (1985), *Where There's Life*, Virago.
- Devey, Louisa (1887), *The Life of Rosina, Lady Lytton*, Swan Sonnenschein.
- Disraeli, Benjamin (1904), *Sybil*, Young England ed., R.Brimley Johnson, London and Edinburgh.
- Divorce Commission (1912–13), *Parliamentary Papers*, XVIII.
- Drake, Barbara (1984), *Women in Trade Unions*, 1st ed. 1920; Virago.
- Drake, Barbara, and Cole, Margaret (eds) (1948), *Our Partnership* by Beatrice Webb, Longmans.
- Eckhardt, Celia Morris (1984), *Fanny Wright, Rebel in America*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Eden, Sir Frederick (1796), *The State of the Poor*, 3 vols.
- Ellis, Sarah (1838), *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits*, New York: Edward Walker.
- Ellis, Sarah (1843), *The Wives of England*, London.
- Ellis, Sarah (1843), *The Mothers of England*, London.
- Ellis, Sarah (1845), *The Daughters of England*, London.
- Engels, Friedrich (1962), 'The Condition of the Working Class in England', 1st ed., 1844, *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Britain*, Moscow.
- Factory Inquiry Commission (1833), *Parliamentary Papers*, XX, 1st Report.
- Faning, E.Lewis (1949), *Report of an Inquiry into Family Limitation...during the past 50years*, Papers of the Royal Commission on Population, vol.1.
- Farningham, Marianne [Mary Anne Hearne] (1907), *A Working Woman's Life. An Autobiography* James Clarke.
- Fawcett, Millicent Garrett (1924), *What I Remember*, T.Fisher Unwin.
- Fingall, Countess of (1937), *Seventy Years Young*, Collins.
- Flinn, M.W. (1970), *British Population Growth 1700–1850*, Macmillan.
- Fulford, Roger, ed. (1964), *Dearest Child: Letters between Queen Victoria and the Princess Royal, 1850–1861*, Evans.
- Fulford, Roger, ed. (1971), *Your Dear Letter: Private Correspondence of Queen Victoria and the Crown Princess of Prussia, 1865–71*, Evans.
- Fuller, Margaret (1844), *Women in the Nineteenth Century*, H.G.Clarke.
- Furnas, J.C. (1951), *Voyage to Windward*, Faber.
- Gaskell, Elizabeth (1985), *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, first ed. 1857; Penguin.
- Gaskell, Peter (1833), *The Manufacturing Population of England*, Baldwin & Cradock.
- Gauldie, Enid (1974), *Cruel Habitations*, Allen & Unwin.
- Gillis, John R. (1985), *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages 1600 to the Present*, Oxford University Press.
- Gittins, Diana (1982), *Fair Sex: Family Size and Structure, 1900–1939*, Hutchinson.
- Gittings, Robert (1978), *The Older Hardy*, Heinemann.
- Glass, D.V. (1938), 'The Changes in Fertility in England & Wales, 1851–1931', in L.Hogben, ed., *Political Arithmetic*, Allen & Unwin.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Glass, D.V. and Grebenik, E. (1954), 'The Trend and Pattern of Fertility in Great Britain', *Papers of the Royal Commission on Population*, vol. 6, pt. 1.
- Glazebrook, H. (1853), *Lights along the Line*, Liverpool.
- Glyn, A (1955), *Elinor Glyn, A Biography*, Hutchinson.
- Gray, H.B. (1913), *The Public Schools and the Empire*, Williams & Norgate.
- Green, F.G. (1913), *The Tyranny of the Countryside*, T.Fisher Unwin.
- Grey, Maria (1889), *Last Word to Girls on Life in School and after School*, Rivingtons.
- Haldane, Elizabeth S. (1930), *Mrs. Gaskell and her Friends*, Hodder & Stoughton.
- Haldane, ELizabeth S, (1937), *From One Century to Another*, Maclehose & Co.
- Halevy, Elie (1949–52), *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, 6 vols, Ernest Benn.
- Hall, Peter *et al.* (1975), *Change, Choice and Conflict in Social Policy*, Heinemann.
- Hamilton, Cicely (1909), *Marriage as a Trade*, Chapman & Hall.
- Hartman, Mary (1977), *Victorian Murderesses*, Schocken Books.
- Hewitt, Margaret (1958), *Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry*, Rockliff.
- Himes, Norman (1936), *Medical History of Contraception*, U.S. National Committee on Maternal Health.
- Holland, Lady (1908), *Lady Holland's Journal 1791–1811*, ed. Earl of Ilchester, Longmans.
- Hollingsworth, T.H. (1964), 'The Demography of the British Peerage', Supplement to *Population Studies*, XVIII.
- Holme, Thea (1965), *The Carlyles at Home*, Oxford University Press.
- Hunt, Peter (1950), *The Madeleine Smith Affair*, Carroll & Nicholson.
- Hutchins, Barbara L. (1911), *The Working Life of Women*, Fabian Tract No. 157.
- Huxley, Leonard (ed.) (1924:), *Jane Welsh Carlyle: Letters to her family, 1839–1863*, John Murray.
- Jefferies, Richard (1981), *The Toilers of the Field*, Longmans 1892; Futura.
- Jhering, Rudolph von (1913), *Law as a Means to an End*, U.S. Association of American Law Schools.
- Jones, Gareth Stedman (1971), *Outcast London*, Clarendon Press.
- Jones, Lloyd (1839), *Report of the discussion on Marriage as advocated by R. Owen (in The Book of the New Moral World)*.
- Kemble, Fanny (1878), *Records of a Girlhood: An Autobiography*, Beccles.
- Kenney, Annie (1924), *Memories of a Militant*, Edward Arnold.
- Kilvert, Rev. Francis (1986), *Kilvert's Diary: 1870–79*, ed. W.Plomer, Godine.
- Kitteringham, Jennie (1975), 'Country work girls in nineteenth-century England', in *Village Life and Labour*, ed. R.Samuel, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Koditschek, Theodore (1985), *MS of 'Class Formation and Urban Industry Society, Bradford 1750–1850'*, chap. 9.
- Labour (1893–4), *Royal Commission on Labour: Reports of Assistant Agricultural Commissioners*, PP, vol. XXXV, pt. V.
- Lamb, Ann Richelieu (1844), *Can Women Regenerate Society?*
- Langtry, Lillic (1925), *The Days I Knew*, Doran.
- Laqueur, T.W. (1976), *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780–1850*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lees-Milne, James (1986), *The Enigmatic Edwardian: The Life of Reginald, 2nd Viscount Esher*, Sidgwick & Jackson.
- Leslie, Anita (1973), *The Marlborough House Set*, New York: Doubleday.
- Lewis, Judith Schneid (1983), 'Maternal Health in the English Aristocracy: Myths and Realities, 1790–1840', *Journal of Social History*, Fall 1983.
- Liddington, Jill (1984), *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper, 1864–1946*, Virago.
- Life (1977), *Life as We have Known It*, by Co-operative Working Women, ed. Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Hogarth 1931, Virago.
- Linton, Eliza Lynn (1885), *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland*, 3 vols, Bentley.
- Linton, Eliza Lynn (1886), *Modern Woman*, New York.
- Loane, Margaret (1909), *An Englishman's Castle*, Edward Arnold.
- Loane, Margaret (1911), *The Common Growth*, Edward Arnold.
- Lochhead, Marion (1964), *The Victorian Household*, John Murray.
- Lutyens, Edwin (1985), *The Letters of Edwin Lutyens to his wife Lady Emily*, ed. Clayre Percy and Jane Ridley, Collins.
- Lutyens, Lady Emily, (ed.) (1956), *The Birth of Rowland: An exchange of letters in 1865 between Robert Lytton and his wife*, Rupert Hart Davis.
- Lytton, Rev. Hon. Edward (1900), *Training of the Young in the Laws of Sex*, Longmans.
- Mann, Horace (1854), *Census of Religious Worship in England and Wales*.
- Marshall, Dorothy (1973), *Industrial England, 1776–1851*, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Marshall, William (1814), *Review of Reports to Board of Agriculture*, (Midland Department).
- Martin, Anna (1911), *The Married Working Woman*, National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.
- Martineau, Harriet (1983), *Autobiography*, 1st ed. 1877; Virago.
- Maternity (1978) *Maternity: Letters from Working Women*, ed. Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Bell 1915; Virago.
- Mayhew, Henry (1851), *London Labour and the London Poor*, vols. 1–3; vol.4 appeared in 1861; George Woodfall.
- Mayhew, Henry (1984), *Mayhew's London*, ed. Peter Quennell, Bracken Books.
- Mayne, Ethel Colburn (1929), *The Life and Letters of Anna Isabella, Lady Noel Byron*, Constable.
- McLaren, Angus (1977), 'Abortion in England, 1890–1914', *Victorian Studies*, vol. 20, 1977.
- McLaren, Angus (1984), *Reproductive Rituals*, Methuen.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Menefee, Samuel P. (1981), *Wives for Sale*, Blackwell.
- Mingay, Gordon (1981), *Mrs. Hurst Dancing and Other Scenes from Regency Life*, Gollancz.
- Mitchell, Hannah (1977), *The Hard Way Up*, ed. Geoffrey Mitchell, Faber, 1968; Virago.
- Mitford, Nancy (1938), *The Ladies of Alderley*, Chapman and Hall.
- Montagu, Elizabeth (n.d.), *Elizabeth Montagu: Her Letters and Friendships from 1762 to 1800*, London: Reginald Blunt.
- Moore, R. Laurence (1977), *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology and American Culture*, Oxford University Press.
- More, Hannah (1808), *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, Tegg: Cadell & Davies.
- Morrison, Frances (1838), *The Influence of the present Marriage System upon the character and interests of females contrasted with that proposed by R. Owen in 'The Book of the New Moral World'*.
- Mulock, Dinah (1858), *A Woman's Thoughts about Women*.
- Myers, F.W. H. (1881), *Century Magazine*.
- Nevill, Lady Dorothy (1906), *Reminiscences of Lady Dorothy Nevill*, Edward Arnold.
- Nevill, Ralph, (ed.) (1919), *The Life and Letters of Lady Dorothy Nevill, 1826–1913* Edward Arnold.
- Nimmo, Duncan (1978), *Letters of Francis Pattison in the Bodleian Library*, Oxford. I thank Dr Nimmo for letting me see his MS article on them.
- Oddy, Derek, and Miller, Derek (1976), *The Making of the Modern British Diet*, Croom Helm.
- Oman, Carola (1968), *The Gascoyne Heiress: The Life and Diaries of Frances Mary Gascoyne-Cecil, 1802–39, 2nd Marchioness of Salisbury*, Hodder & Stoughton.
- Outhwaite, R.B. (1973), 'Age at Marriage in England from the late Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, vol. 23, pp. 55–70, Butler & Tanner.
- Owen, David (1964), *English Philanthropy, 1660–1960*, Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Owen, Robert (1927), *A New View of Society*, Dent.
- Owen, Robert (1830), *The Addresses of R. Owen (as published in the London Journals) preparatory to the development of a practical plan for the relief of all classes*.
- Owen, Robert (1836), *The Book of the New Moral World*, Wilson.
- Parkes, Bessie Rayner (1865), *Essays on Woman's Work*.
- Paston, George (1902), *Little Memoirs of the Nineteenth Century*, Grant Richards.
- Paston, George, and Quennell, Peter (1939), 'To Lord Byron': *Feminine Profiles based on unpublished letters, 1807–1824*, John Murray.
- Percy, Clayre, and Ridley, Jane (eds) (1984), *Letters of Edwin Lutyens and his wife, Lady Emily Lutyens*, Collins.
- Perkin, Harold (1969), *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780–1880*, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Phillips, M., and Tomkinson, W.S. (1927), *English Women of Life and Letters*, Oxford University Press.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Pike, E. Royston (1969), *Human Documents of the Age of the Forsytes*, Allen & Unwin.
- Pinchbeck, Ivy (1981), *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850*, 1st edition 1930; Virago.
- Place, Francis (1972), *Autobiography of Francis Place*, ed. Mary Thale, Cambridge University Press.
- Ponsonby, Arthur (1912), *The Decline of Aristocracy*, T. Fisher Unwin.
- Population (1949), *Report of the Royal Commission on Population*, Cd. 7695.
- Puckler-Muschau, Prince (1828), *A Regency Visitor: The English Tour of Prince Puckler-Muschau, 1826–28*.
- Quilter, Harry (1888), *Is Marriage a Failure?*, Sonnenschein.
- Reeves, Maud Pember (1979), *Round About a Pound a Week*, Bell 1913; Virago.
- Ridley, Annie (1895), *Frances Mary Buss and Her Work for Education*, Longmans.
- Roberts, Elizabeth (1984), *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890–1940*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Roberts, Robert (1971), *The Classic Slum*, Manchester University Press.
- Roberts, Robert (1976), *A Ragged Schooling*, Manchester University Press.
- Rosen, Andrew (1974), *Rise Up, Women!*, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Ross, Ellen (1982), 'Fierce Questions and Taunts; Married Life in Working-Class London 1870–1914', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, Fall 1982.
- Rossi, Alice (1973), *The Feminist Papers*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rowntree, B. Seebohm (1903), *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, Nelson.
- Rowntree, B. Seebohm, and Kendall, May (1913), *How the Labourer Lives*, Nelson.
- Rubinstein, David (1974), *Victorian Homes*, David & Charles, quoting the first biographer of Joseph Arch (F. S. Attenborough).
- Sermonetta, Duchess of (1940), *The Locks of Norbury*, John Murray.
- Shaw, Charles (1977), *When I Was a Child*, Methuen, 1903; Caliban Books.
- Shelley, Frances, Lady (1912), *The Diary of Frances, Lady Shelley*, ed. Richard Edgcumbe, John Murray.
- Skinner, John (1930), *Journal of a Somerset Rector, 1803–34*, John Murray.
- Smiles, Samuel (1910), *Character*, 1st ed., 1871; John Murray.
- Snowden, Philip (1912), *The Living Wage*, Hodder & Stoughton.
- Stanton, Anthony, Gage, Harper (1881–1922), *History of Woman Suffrage*, 6 vols., New York: Fowler & Wells.
- Stenton, Doris M. (1957), *The English Woman in History*, Allen & Unwin.
- Stone, Lawrence (1979), *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800*, Harper.
- Stone, Lawrence and Stone, Jeanne (1984), *An Open Elite?* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Stuart, Lady Louisa (1895), *Gleanings from an Old Portfolio*.
- Summary (1854), Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon's *Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws of England concerning Women*.
- Taylor, Mary (1870), *The First Duty of Women*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Thompson, Dorothy (1976), 'Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics', in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley (eds), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Penguin.
- Thompson, F.M. L. (1963), *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Thompson, Flora (1974), *Lark Rise to Candleford*, Penguin.
- Thompson, Flora (1979), *A Country Calendar and Other Writings*, Oxford University Press.
- Thompson, Paul (1978), *The Voice of the Past*, Oxford University Press.
- Tonna, Charlotte Elizabeth (1854), *Personal Recollections*, 4th ed., Seeleys.
- Tristan, Flora (1840), *Les Promenades dans Londres*, Paris.
- Victoria County History of Warwickshire (1964), vol. VII: *The City of Birmingham*.
- Vincent, David (1981), *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, Methuen.
- Wade, John (1825), *Select Proverbs of All Nations*.
- Ware, H. (1969), 'The Recruitment, Regulation and Role of Prostitution in Britain from the middle of the Nineteenth-Century to the present day', University of London unpublished Ph.D. thesis.
- Webb, Beatrice (1926), *My Apprenticeship*, Longmans.
- Webb, Beatrice (1948), *Our Partnership*, Longmans.
- Webb, Sidney and Beatrice (1920), *Industrial Democracy*, 2nd ed., Longmans.
- Weeton, Nellie (1936), *Miss Weeton: the Journal of a Governess*, ed. E. Hall, Cambridge University Press.
- West, Anthony (1985), *H.G. Wells, Aspects of a Life*, New York: Meridian.
- Westminster Review* (April 1889), 'Married Women, An historical sketch'.
- Wheeler, Anna, and Thompson, William (1970), *An Appeal to One Half of the Human Race, Women, against the pretensions of the other half. Men*, 1st ed. 1825; New York: Burt Franklin.
- White, R.J. (1963), *Life in Regency England*, Batsford.
- Williams-Wynn, Charlotte (1877), *Memorials*.
- Wingfield-Stratford, Esme (1930), *Those Earnest Victorians*, New York: Morrow.
- Wolff, Sir Henry Drummond (1908), *Rambling Recollections*, Macmillan.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary (1792), *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1891 ed., Fisher Unwin.
- Woolf, Virginia (1975), *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Harcourt Brace.
- Wright, Thomas (1867), *Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes by a Journeyman Engineer*.
- Wrigley, E.A., and Schofield R.S. (1981), *The Population History of England 1541-1871*, Cambridge University Press.
- Young, Arthur (1898), *The Autobiography of Arthur Young*, ed. M. Betham-Edwards, Smith Elder.
- Young, George M. (1936), *Victorian England: Portrait of An Age*, Oxford University Press.

INDEX

- abortion, 128, 170–1, 282–3
- accounts of working-class life 146–51
- Adam Bede* (Eliot) 134
- Adams, Samuel 244
- Adams, Sarah Flower 212, 244
- Adams, William Bridges 212
- Adelaide, Queen 35, 40
- adulteration of food 143–4, 168, 172–3
- adultery: blaming wife for husband's unfaithfulness 259–60; double standards on 23–4, 260; *see also* sexual behaviour
- age at marriage 30, 313
- Age of Reason 207
- agriculture 124–5, 163, 181, 185–6, 187–8, 189–92, 195, 202
- Airlie, Mabel, Countess of 47, 64–5, 76, 87, 100
- Albert, Prince Consort 5, 35, 41, 42, 43–4
- Albert Edward (Bertie), Prince of Wales, 44–5, 46, 47, 48, 89, 92–3, 94
- Albert Victor, Prince 41
- Alexander I, Tsar 82
- Alexandra (Alix), Princess of Wales 5, 44–8
- Alice of Albany, Princess 46
- Alison, Sir Archibald 82
- Alix of Hesse, Princess 41
- Allen, Grant 223, 224
- alliances, upper-class marriages as 5–6, 60–1, 62, 63–4, 66–7
- Almacks club 79
- Altick, Richard 108
- America 209, 298–9
- amusements: middle-class 252; working-class 156–7, 178–80, 200–1
- Ancaster, Duke of 53
- Anderson, Elizabeth Garrett 268
- Anderson, S. 23
- Anglesey, Henry, 1st Marquess of (formerly Lord Paget) 109
- Anglican Book of Common Prayer 20
- Anglo-Saxon England 1, 20
- Annals of Agriculture* 251
- antagonism between sexes, working-class, 157–8, 173–4; *see also* violence against women, male
- anti-marriage sentiments 7, 207–32, 315
- anti-slavery campaigns 209, 216–17, 294
- Antrim, Anne, Countess of 51
- Antrim, Louisa, Countess of 46
- apprenticeship 15
- Arbuthnot, Charles 86
- Arbuthnot, Harriet 12, 78, 85, 86, 91, 99, 104–5, 108, 109, 110
- Arch, Joseph 194, 195
- Argyll, Elizabeth, Duchess of 97
- 'aristocracy of labour' 119, 120, 162
- Ashburton, Harriet, Lady 67, 100–1

INDEX

- Ashford, Daisy 56–7
 Ashton, Lord 64
 Askwith, Betty 274–5
 Asquith, Herbert 95
 Asquith, Lady Cynthia 57, 94–5
 Asquith, Margot 83–4, 88
 Augusta, Grand Duchess 48
 Austen, Jane 54, 55, 62–3, 73–4,
 228, 250, 270, 273
 Austen, Sara 91
 Austria, women's rights in 300

 Bacon, Anthony 58
 Bagehot, Walter 44, 48
 Balfour, Arthur 94, 95
 Balsan, Consuelo Vanderbilt
 (Duchess of Marlborough)
 63–4, 83–4, 88–9, 106, 111–12
 Bamford, Mima 148
 Bamford, Samuel 136–7, 142, 148,
 159, 182
 Bancroft-Davis, Elizabeth 81
 Band of Hope 122
 banns, marriage by 21, 159
 Baring, Alexander 67
 Baring, Harriet 67
 Barmby, Catherine 265
 Barmby, Goodwyn 265
 Baxter, Dudley 118
 Beard, Mary 18
 Becker, Lydia 292
 Bedford, Duke of 36
 beer 172–3
 Beer Shops Act 1830 121, 172
 Beeton, Isabella 244–5, 247, 253
 Bell, Florence, Lady 159
 Bell, Quentin 222–3
 Bell, Vanessa 223
 Bentham, Jeremy 209, 283–4
 Bentinck, Lord William Cavendish,
 Governor of Madras 51
 Beresford, Lord Charles 107
 Beresford, Lord John 107
 Beresford, Mina 46
 Bernhardt, Sarah 98
 Berry, Mary 227
 Besant, Annie 220, 277, 286, 299
 Bethell, Sir Richard 302

 Bettesworth, Lucy 196–7
 Biddulph, Robert 289
 bigamy 12, 117, 162
 Bird, Isabella 244
 Birmingham Building Society 142
 birth control *see* contraception
 birth-rate 127, 169–70, 239–40,
 285
 Black, Clementina 165–6
Black Dwarf 284
 Blackstone, Sir William 1–2, 15–16,
 18–19, 306–7
 Blackwood, Lord Basil 95
 Blandford, Lord 112
 blood sports 200
 Bloomfield, Lady 68, 69
 Bloomfield, Mary 80
 Bloomfield, Sir Arthur 80
 Bloomsbury Set 94, 101, 222–3
 Board of Trade Report on Earnings
 and Hours (1906) 165
 boarding schools 97, 251
 body of wife, husband's ownership
 of 24–5, 306–7
 Bohemian circles 215
 Bolitho, Hector 42
 Bolton, Clara 91
 Booth, Charles 120, 158, 269
 Boringdon, Lady Augusta *see* Fane,
 Lady Augusta
 Boringdon, Lord 110
 Bosanquet, Helen 153
 Bourne, George 196
 Bowd, James 197
 Braddon, Mary 271
 Bradlaugh, Charles 286
 Branca, Patricia 235
 breach of promise 13 328
 bread 143
 Brett, Hon. Maurice 59
 Bright, Jacob 304, 305
 Bright, Ursula 305
 Brightfield, Myron 263
 Brimley Johnson, R. 227
British Mothers' Magazine 272
 Brontë, Charlotte 56, 81, 228, 249,
 270, 307, 312
 Brontë, Emily 270

INDEX

- Brooke, Frances (Daisy), Lady *see*
 Warwick, Frances (Daisy),
 Countess of
- Brooke, Lady Louisa 97
- Brooke, Lord 63
- Brougham, Lord 28, 37, 294, 300
- Broughton, Rhoda 263, 271
- Brown, John 43
- Brownlow, Emma, Countess 37, 58
- Brudenell, Lord 110
- building societies 142–3
- Bulwer, Rosina 108
- Bulwer, Sir Henry 69
- Bulwer-Lytton, Edward *see* Lytton,
 Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Baron
- Burdett-Coutts, Angela, Baroness
 257
- Burlington, Earl of 52
- Burnett, John 199
- Burney, Fanny (Mme D'Arblay) 38,
 57
- Burrell, Peter 53
- business arrangements, women's
 control of 77–8
- Buss, Frances Mary 229
- Butler, George 268
- Butler, Josephine 268, 304
- Butler, Pierce 265
- butter 143
- Byron, Annabella, Lady *see*
 Milbanke, Annabella
- Byron, George Gordon, Lord 55,
 77, 90, 99–100, 102–3, 207,
 275
- Caird, Mona 224–5
- Campbell, Lady Augusta 92
- Campbell, John, 1st Baron 25
- Campbell Commission on the Law
 of Divorce (1853) 23
- Carlile, Richard 127, 211
- Carlyle, Jane 4, 100–1, 214, 216,
 245–6, 247, 249, 260–1, 287,
 288–9, 294
- Carlyle, Thomas 245–6, 260–1,
 288
- Carnarvon, Evelyn, Countess of
 82–3
- Caroline, Queen 35–40, 128
- Carter, Thomas 192
- case-law 11
- Castle, John 192–3
- Castlereagh, Emily, Lady 79
- Castlereagh, Lord 86, 148
- Cazelles, Dr 214
- Cecil family 51–2, 72
- Chadwick, Edwin 140
- Chalmers, Thomas 175
- Chancery 18, 71, 296; *see also*
 Equity, Courts of
- charitable work 257; *see also*
 philanthropic work
- Charlotte, Princess 42
- Chartism 149
- 'chattels real' 13
- Chesterfield, Anne, Countess of 82
- Chevalier, Michel 268
- child custody 14–15, 26–8, 107–8,
 115
- childbearing, horrors of 41–2, 127,
 169, 170, 283, 284
- childminders 138, 139
- children: and opium preparations
 139, 144, 275; employment of
 138, 151, 171–2, 185–6, 190–1;
 middle-class attitudes to 252–3;
 of factory-employed mothers
 138–9; presumed fatherhood of
 19, 24; upper-class attitudes to
 96–9; working-class attitudes to
 151–4, 171–2
- Children's Employment
 Commission (1843) 137, 139, 163,
 189
- Children's Employment
 Commission (1867) 191
- Cholmondeley, R.H. 78
- Chorley, Kathleen 237
- Church: and marriage ceremonies
 20–1, 22, 159, and middle class
 236–8; inappropriateness for
 poor 202; *see also* religion
- Church Societies 133
- church-goers v. pub-goers 120, 122
- Churchill, Jennie 82, 85–6, 88, 112
- Churchill, Lord Randolph 88, 94

INDEX

- Churchill, Winston 85–6
 Clarendon, Lord 69
 Clark, Ethel 170
 cleanliness, overwhelming
 difficulties of maintaining
 141–2, 145, 248
 Clough, Anne Jemima 238–9
 coal mines 163
 Coal Mines Commission 163
 Cobbe, Frances Power 174, 230–1,
 249, 309
 Cobbett, William, 38–9
 cohabitation enforcement of 24–5,
 306, 307, without legal marriage
 158–61, 162
coitus interruptus 126, 170, 217,
 281, 285
 Cole, Margaret 221
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor 261
 Collis, Alice M. 153
 Colquhoun, Patrick 78, 118
 Colton, Mary 139
 ‘coming-out’ 80
 Common Law 1–2, 5, 6–8, 10–15,
 18–19, 24, 28, 71, 72, 115, 293,
 294–5, 296–7, 299, 304, 306,
 312
 communal life-style 215
 companionate marriage, beginnings
 of 266–9
 Congleton, Caroline, Lady 60
 consent to marriage 12, 18–19
 contraception 42, 127, 128, 170,
 208, 217, 239, 281, 282–7
 contracting, power of 15, 16, 305
 control of marriage arrangements
 64–5
 Conyngham, Elizabeth, Lady 61,
 85, 92
 cooking 145
 Co-op shops 132, 175
 Cooper, Barbara Ashley 51
 Cooper, Selina 117, 135
 Co-operative Building Society
 142–3
 Corke, Helen 235
 Cornwallis, Caroline 295
 Cornwallis-West, George 112
 Corrupt Practices Act 1883 308
 coster mongers 159–61, 168
 cottages, rural 194–6
 Cottenham, Lord 27
 country society 73–4
 Court 79–80
 Coutts Trotter family 61
 Cowper, Emily, Lady (later Lady
 Palmerston) 59–60, 87, 90–1
 Cowper, Minny (later Countess of
 Shaftesbury) 61
 craftsmen 181
 Cranworth, Lord Chancellor
 (Robert Monsey Rolfe) 23–4
 credit *see* debt
 Creighton, Mandell 184–5
 Crimean War 245
 criminal law 116
Crisis 211
 Cullwick, Hannah 179
 Cust, Harry 105
 Custody of Infants Act 1886 27–8

Daily Mail 123
Daily News 165
Daily Telegraph 225
 Daisy, Princess of Pless 46
 Dare, Zena 59
 Darwin, Charles 289
 Darwin, Erasmus 288
 Davies, Andrew Jackson 219
 Davies, Maud 192
 Davies, Stella 183–4
 Day, Ella 280–1
 Dayus, Kathleen 116, 152, 153,
 170, 171, 172, 178–9
 De Mauley, Lord 51
 debt: in middle class 305, 306; in
 working class 132, 153, 175–7,
 198, women’s 14, 15, 19, 72,
 297, 305
 deceit by women, necessity for
 262–4
 Desborough, Ethel (Priscilla), Lady
 94–5
 Desborough, Lord 94–5
 deserted wives 26, 115, 301, 302,
 307

INDEX

- Devonshire, Georgiana, Duchess of 52, 85, 92
distribes against women 253, 254–5, 258, 283, 301, 302
Dick, Dr Robert 144, 275, 276
Dickens, Charles 4, 166
Dickson, Elizabeth 197
Dilke, Sir Charles 94, 275
dirt/squalor of urban environments 139–42, 166–7
Disraeli, Benjamin 63, 82, 88, 91–2, 111, 136, 290
divorce: *a mensa et thoro* 22–3; and upper-class marriages 22–4, 109–12; and working-class marriages 116–17; attacks on law on 25–6, 212–13; by Private Act of Parliament 22–3, 109–11; changes in law on 8, 219–20, 301, 302–3, 308; double standards in 23, 110, 303
Divorce and Matrimonial Causes, Royal Commission on (1909–12) 116–17, 158, 161, 308, 309–10
Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act 1857 301, 302–3
doctors 170, 275, 283
domestic industries 123, 124, 135, 136–7, 163–4, 165, 181, 188, 192, 298
double standards 23–4, 62, 110, 217, 260, 280–1, 303
Drake, Barbara 165, 221
drinking behaviour 121, 122, 150, 172–3, 179, 197, 259
Drysdale, George 286
dustmen 160, 161
duty, masochistic concept of 238–9
earnings, women's: in middle class 29, 236, 293, 294–5, 296; in upper class 108–9; in working class 135–6, 137, 162–6, 186, 187–8, 189–91, 192, 195, 202, 296–7, 298, 313; law on 6, 14, 17, 29, 115, 293, 294–5, 296–7, 298, 304, 305
Eden, Edith 70
Eden, Emily 55–6, 262
Eden, Sir Frederick 163
education: in middle class 250, 251; in working class 190
Education (Provision of Meals) Act 1906 175
Education Acts 94, 151, 191
Edward VII 48, 49
Edward VIII 49
Elcho, Hugo, Lord 94, 95
Elcho, Mary, Lady 94, 95
electioneering 308–9
Elford, Sir William 227
Eliot, George 134, 216, 240, 249, 311
Ellenborough, Jane Elizabeth (lanthe), Lady, 109–10
Ellenborough, Lord 100, 109–10
Ellis, Sarah 239, 242, 246–7, 251–2, 253, 258–9, 270–1, 278
elopement 62–3
emancipation of women, beginnings of 2–3, 8–9, 213, 264–9, 304–10
Empire of the Nairs, The (Lawrence) 207
Employment of Women and Children, Government Inquiry on *see* Children's Employment Commission (1843)
Engels, Frederick 136
Englishwoman's Journal 302
Englishwomen's Domestic Magazine 275
Englishwomen's Review 304–5
entails 66, 68
entertaining 98–9
Equity, Courts of 14, 15–19, 50, 71–2, 76, 293, 295–6
Esher, Reginald, Viscount 59
espousals 20
estates 54; protection of 66; transmission of 51–3; wives' involvement in 77–8
ethic of marriage, questioning of 219–26
Evangelicalism 120–1, 133, 240
Every Woman's Book 284, 285

INDEX

- expectations of marriage 311; in middle class 236–8; in upper class 54–60; in working class 125–6, 159, 161–2
- Fabian Society 269
- factories 123, 137–9, 151, 163, 164, 296
- Factory Acts 138, 151
- Factory Commissioners 169
- fairs 200
- Fane, Lady Augusta (later Boringdon, later Paget) 91, 110
- Fanning, E. Lewis 171
- fantasies of wives 270–3
- farm labourers 124–5, 187–92, 193, 195, 200–1
- Fawcett, Henry 268
- Fawcett, Millicent Garrett 13, 233–4, 268
- feminism 8–9, 13, 208–10, 211, 212, 224, 225, 241, 315
- Ferrier, Susan Edmonstone 54, 107
- Feuerbach, Anselm 216
- financial arrangements: in middle-class marriages 245–6, 263–4, 292–3, 310; in upper-class marriages 65–73; in working-class marriages 6, 119–20, 146, 153–4, 173, 174–7
- Fingall, Earl of 62
- Fingall, Elizabeth, Countess of 62, 96, 99, 100, 106
- First World War 162
- fishermen 185
- Fitzgerald, Pamela 90
- Fitzherbert, Maria Anne 85, 92
- Foley, Alice 176
- food 143–4, 168, 174–5, 188, 192–4
- Forbes, James 57
- Forbes, Lady Angela 57, 94, 95
- Forbes, Sir Charles 57
- Forster, W.E. 94
- Fourier, François 213–14, 219
- Fox, Eliza 293
- Fox, Tottie 266, 294
- Fox, W.J. 212
- Frances, Doris 152
- Fraser's Magazine* 220
- Free Enquirer* 209
- 'free love', idea of 207, 208, 209, 211, 215–19, 220–2
- freedoms of upper-class wives 3–4, 5, 50–1, 76–8, 89–96, 99–101, 312
- freehold property 14, 52; *see also* property, women's
- friendships: among middle class 287–9; among upper class 99–101
- Fruits of Philosophy* (Knowlton) 285–6
- fuel 188
- Fuller, Margaret 264
- Galsworthy, Ada 290
- Galsworthy, John 290
- Galsworthy, Major Arthur 290
- gang system 190–1, 194
- Gangs Act 1867 191
- Garrett, Newsom 233
- Gascoyne, Frances Mary (later Frances Mary Gascoyne-Cecil, Marchioness of Salisbury) 41, 52, 72
- Gaskell, Elizabeth 249, 252–3, 266–7, 287, 293, 294
- Gaskell, Peter 136
- Gaskell, William 266, 267, 293
- gentry 73–4
- George IV (formerly Prince Regent) 35–40, 85, 92, 157
- George V 48–9
- Germany 299–300
- Gibbon, Edward 240
- Gibson, Rachel 191
- Giffen, Sir Robert 164
- Gifts for Churches Act 1803 306
- gifts to women 17
- Gittings, Robert 287
- Gladstone, Catherine 58–9, 309
- Gladstone, William Ewart 58–9, 144, 303
- Glazebrook, H. 141
- Glover, Julia 295

INDEX

- Glyn, Elinor 98
 Godwin, William 85, 207, 265
 'golden age', pre-industrial 135
 Goldsmith, Oliver 315–16
 'good' husband, working-class
 definitions of 173–4
 Gorell, Lord 307–8
 Gorst, Sir John 89
 governesses 249
 Graham, Sir Bellingham 106
 Grahame, Kenneth 287
grandes dames of English society
 78–84
 Granville-Barker, Harley 221
 Gray, Effie 280
 Gray, H.B. 239–40
 Green, F.G. 194
 Greg, Samuel 123
 Grenfell, Frances 279–80, 292–3
 Grey, Margaretta 246
 Grey, Maria 231–2
 Grimston, Katty (daughter of Lord
 Verulam) 61
 Grimston, Lord 67
 Grote, Harriet 13
 Gurney, Russell 304
- Hadden, Dr John 275
 Haggard, H. Rider 196
 Haldane, Elizabeth 231
 Halsbury, Lord 306
 Hamilton, Cicely 225–6
 Hardinge, Mary, Viscountess 97
 Hardy, Emma 287
 Hardy, Thomas 223, 314
 Harley, Lady Charlotte (later
 Bacon) 58
 Harlow, Ellen 296–7
 Harlow, Thomas 296–7
 Harris, Frank 289
 Hartington, Marquess of 87–8, 93,
 94
 Hawkins, Laura 67
 health, concern with 144, 152–3
 Health of Towns Act 1848 140
 Hearne, Mary Anne 229–30
 Heber, Amelia 78
 Heber, Bishop Reginald 78
 heiresses 51–3, 63
 Hertford, Maria Fagniani,
 Marchioness of 92
 Hill, Octavia 167
 Hohenthal, Valeric 43
 Holland, Elizabeth, Lady 76, 86
 Hollinrake, Mary 130
 'household partnership' marriage
 264
Household Words 253
 housework: in middle-class
 marriages 244–5, 246–50, 252,
 253–4; in upper-class marriages
 98; in working-class marriages
 141, 142, 145–6
 housing: in middle-class marriages
 247–8; in working-class
 marriages 139–43, 144–6,
 166–8, 194–6
 Housing Acts 167, 196
 Howard, Bernard Edward (later
 12th Duke of Norfolk) 110
 Howitt, Mary 265, 294
 Howitt, William 185, 265
 Hewlett, Nancie 147
 Hughes, Hugh Price 281
 Hunt, Leigh 288
 Hunt, Thornton 216, 290
 'husband management' 258–62
 Hutchins, Barbara 125
 Huxley, Henrietta 287
 Huxley, Leonard 214
 Huxley, T.H. 287
 Hyndman, H.M. 89
- Ibsen, Henrik 241
 ideological arguments for
 subjugation of women 30, 38–9,
 223–4, 238–40, 248–9, 250,
 258–60
 illegitimacy 160, 161, 182–4
 imprisonment of wife by husband
 24, 306
 incest 169
 incidence of marriage 30, 226
 income, family 119, 135–7, 147–8,
 149–50, 162–6, 185–92, 198–9,
 235–6, 313

INDEX

- income distribution 118–19
 income tax 245
 Independent Labour Party 180
 industrial revolution 123–5, 135–9,
 313
 Infant Custody Act 1839 27, 108,
 293
 infant mortality 170, 171, 202
 infanticide 282
 inheritance 51–3; *see also* heiresses
 ‘intellectual companionship’
 marriage 264–5
 invalidism 273–5
- Jameson, Anna 25, 109, 294
 Jefferies, Richard 183, 191, 193,
 194, 195, 196, 197, 199, 200,
 201
 Jefferson, Thomas 209
 Jersey, 7th Earl of 88–9
 Jersey, Frances, Countess of (wife of
 4th Earl) 92
 Jersey, Margaret, Countess of (wife
 of 7th Earl) 88–9
 Jersey, Sarah Sophia, Countess of
 (wife of 5th Earl) 79, 81, 82
 Jeune, Sir Francis 96
 Jewsbury, Geraldine 249, 287
 Johnson, Dr Samuel 23
 Johnson, Sarah 139
 Johnstone Elizabeth 110
 jointures 65, 66, 67
 Jowett, Dr Benjamin 84
- Kemble, Fanny 25, 56, 97,
 265
 Kcndall, May 125, 193
 Kenney, Annie 116
 Keppel, Alice 46
 Keppel, George 46
 Kidd, Harriet 124
 Kilvert, Rev. Francis 183
 Kingsley, Charles 185, 279–80,
 292–3
 Kitteringham, Jennie 184
 Knebworth estate 68–9
 Knight, Fanny 55
 Knowlton, Charles 285–6
- Lady Commissioners’ Report
 (1895) 164–5
Lady’s Magazine 250–1, 277
 Lafayette, Marquis de 209
 Lamb, Ann Richelieu 228–9
 Lamb, George 64–5
 Lamb, Lady Caroline (née
 Ponsonby) 54, 90, 100, 104
 Lamb, William *see* Melbourne,
 William Lamb, Lord
Lancet 127, 140
 Langtry, Edward 57
 Langtry, Lillie 45, 57, 98
 Law Amendment Society 294, 300,
 303
 Lawrence, James 207
 Leeds Permanent Building Society
 142
 Lees-Milne, James 59
 Leigh, Augusta 103
 Leigh Smith, Barbara (Mme
 Bodichon) 10–15
 Leinster, Hermione, Duchess of 94,
 106
 lesbian relationships 101, 287–8
 Leslie, Anita 47, 59, 89, 93, 107
 Leslie, Christina 107
 Leslie, Leonie, Lady 47, 93
 Lewes, Agnes 215, 216, 290
 Lewes, George Henry 215, 216,
 290
 Lewis, Judith Schneid 96, 97
 Lewis, Sarah 243
 liberation, sexual, arguments for
 207, 208, 209, 213, 217, 220,
 221–3
 licence, marriage by 21
 Lincoln, Lady Susan, Countess of
 111
 Lindsay, Lady Charlotte 109
 Linton, Eliza Lynn 184, 200, 215,
 253–5, 261–2, 264, 272, 283,
 289–90, 306
 Lipton, Sir Thomas 98
 living conditions, struggle for
 improvement in 154–5; *see also*
 philanthropic work
 Lloyd George, David 289

INDEX

- Loane, Margaret 159, 175–6
 Lock, Bessie 90
 London 140
 London County Council 167, 269
 London School Board 175
 London Society 73, 74, 79–84,
 111–12, 312
 Londonderry, 2nd Marquess of *see*
 Castlereagh, Lord
 Londonderry, 6th Marquess of
 105–6
 Londonderry, Frances, Lady *see*
 Vane-Tempest, Frances Anne
 Londonderry, Theresa,
 Marchioness of 105–6
 Lovelace, Ada, Lady 103–4
 Lucan, Anne, Countess of (sister of
 Lord Cardigan) 110
 Lucan, Elizabeth, Countess of
 (formerly wife of Duke of
 Norfolk) 110
 Luck, Lucy 186–7
 Ludwig 1, King of Bavaria 110
 Lutyens, Edwin 105
 Lutyens, Lady Emily 61, 69, 105
 Lyndhurst, Lord 92, 301
 Lyttelton, Mary, Lady 97
 Lyttelton, Rev. Hon. Edward 61–2
 Lytton, Edward Bulwer-Lytton
 (formerly Bulwer), Baron 68–9,
 108
 Lytton, Robert (later Baron) 68–9
- Macaulay, Thomas Babington,
 Lord 86
 McCarthy, Justin 271
 Macclesfield, 2nd Earl of 22
 Mackenall, A. 237
 McLaren, Angus 127–8
 Maclise, Daniel 92
 magazines 272–3
 Maintenance of Wives (Desertion)
 Act 1886 116, 307
 male breadwinner family model
 164, 165, 166
 male society, coarseness of 242–3
 Malmesbury, Lord 35–6
 Malthus, Thomas Robert 283–4
 management of husbands, necessity
 for 258–62
 Manchester, 7th Duke of (formerly
 Viscount Mandeville) 93–4
 Mann, Horace 200
 Marcet, Jane 127
 marital relationships 212; in
 middle-class marriages 217–18,
 224, 245–6, 258–69, 273–5,
 277, 279–80, 281–2; in upper-
 class marriages 55–6, 57–9, 78,
 86, 88, 104–6; in working-class
 marriages 150–1, 157–8, 172,
 173–4, 196–8
 Marlborough, Duke of 63–4, 106,
 111
 Marlborough, Frances Churchill,
 Duchess of 82
 Marriage Act 1753 21–2
 Marriage Act 1836 22
 marriage ceremonies 20–1, 159
 marriage market, upper-class 64–5
 marriage registers 21–2
 marriage settlements 64, 65–9
 Married Women's Property Act
 1870 304–5
 Married Women's Property Act
 1882 305–6
 Married Women's Property
 Committee 304
 Marshall, Dorothy 54, 89
 Marshall, William 187
 Martin, Anna 146
 Martin, Louis-Aime 243
 Martineau, Harriet 25, 27, 127,
 228, 249, 294
 Mary, Queen 46, 48–9
 masturbation, phobias about 277,
 278
 maternal death rate 127, 283
 Matrimonial Causes Act 1859 307
 Matrimonial Causes Act 1878 174
 Matrimonial Causes Act 1884 306
 Matrimonial Causes Act 1923 308
 Maud, Princess 47
 Mayhew, Henry 132, 158, 159–61,
 168
 Maynard, Constance 230

INDEX

- Maynard, Lord 51
 Mearns, Andrew 166
 Meath, Mary Jane, Countess of 96
 Melbourne, Elizabeth Lamb, Lady
 55, 77, 90, 92, 99–100, 103
 Melbourne, William Lamb, Lord
 26, 41, 54, 85, 99, 104
 menstruation 141, 278–9
 Meredith, George 217–18
 Meredith, Mary Ellen 217–18
 Methodism 120–1, 133–4, 135,
 201
 middle-class marriages 4, 207–310,
 314–16; and concept of duty
 238–9, 240; and friendships
 287–9; and housing 247–8; as a
 ‘mission’ 240–50; attitudes to
 children 252–3; crusade against
 207–32; deceit by wives 262–4;
 drug/alcohol use by wives
 275–6; earnings of wives *see*
 earnings, women’s, in middle
 class; emulation of upper class
 250–2; expectations of,
 women’s 236–8; fantasies of
 wives 270–3; financial
 arrangements in 245–6; 263–4,
 292–3, 310; housework in
 244–5, 246–50, 252, 253–4;
 ‘husband management’ in
 258–62; invalidism in 273–5;
 sexual behaviour in 274–5,
 276–82, 289–90; social status in
 234–5; subjugation of women in
 258–61, 262–4, 314–15;
 towards equality in 264–9;
 undomesticated wives in 250–6;
 unhappy 259–61, 273–5, 276;
 vulnerability of wives in 7–8,
 292–302, 306–7
 midwives 170
 Midwives Act 1902 170
 Milbanke, Annabella (later Lady
 Byron) 77, 103
 milk 144, 168, 193
 Mill, John Stuart 209, 212, 214,
 266, 277, 283, 289, 303, 304,
 309
 Millais, John 280
 Miller-Mundy, Ellen (later Countess
 of Shrewsbury) 111
 mill-owners 124
 Milne, James 208
 Milnes, Monckton 228
 Mitchell, Hannah 115–16, 126,
 152, 153, 186, 201
 Mitford, Mary Russell 227
 ‘model cottages’ 167
 Mohl, Mary Clarke 294
 moneylenders 177
 Monson family 61
 Montagu, Elizabeth 54–5
 Montague, Hon. Oliver 46
 More, Hannah 228, 241–2
 Morgan, Sir Charles 57–8
 Mormons 219
Morning Post 96
 Morrell, Lady Ottoline 83
 Morrison, Frances 211
 Mount Stephen, Lord 64
 Mudie’s Select Circulating Library
 271, 276
 Mulock, Dinah 249
 music-halls 156, 157, 158, 178
 mutual aid societies 132
 mutual help among poor 132,
 199
 ‘mutual idolatry’ marriage 264
 names, family 51–2
 Napoleonic Wars 187, 245
 National Insurance Act 1911 171
 Nevill, Lady Dorothy 58, 81–2, 83,
 100, 259
New Moral World 211, 313
 New Poor Law 1834 124, 149,
 161, 177, 189
 Newcastle 140
 Newman, Francis 220–1
 Nightingale, Florence 228, 252–3,
 270
 Normans 1
 North London Collegiate School
 for Girls 229
 Northcote, Sir Henry Stafford 64
 Norton, Caroline 10, 26–7, 28, 62,

INDEX

- 72–3, 85, 87, 96, 99, 108, 109, 312
 Norton, Hon. George 26, 62
nouveaux riches 83, 312
 novels 55–6, 262, 270, 271–2
- Oliphant, Margaret 223–4, 271
Oliver Twist (Dickens) 4
 Oman, Carola 72
 opium preparations 139, 144, 201, 275–6
 oral history 147
 Osbourne, Frances 290
 outwork *see* domestic industries
 overcrowding 139, 145, 166–7, 169
- Owen, Fanny 289
 Owen, Robert 123, 208, 211
 Owen, Robert Dale 209, 285
 Owenson, Sydney (Lady Morgan) 55, 57–8, 108–9
- ‘pacifiers’/‘soothing syrups’ for children 139, 144, 275
- Paget, Henry, Lord *see* Anglesey Henry, Marquess of
 Paget, Hon. Sir Arthur 91, 110
 Pakington, John 300
 Palmerston, Emily, Lady *see* Cooper, Emily, Lady
 Palmerston, Henry John Temple, Lord, 60, 87
 Pankhurst, Christabel 226
 Parkes, Bessie Rayner 233
 Parnell, Henry (later Baron Congleton) 60
 patent medicines 275–6; *see also* opium preparations
 Patmore, Coventry 248, 302
 patronage by women 77, 84–6
 Pattison, Frances 273–5
 Pattison, Mark 273–5
 pawnbrokers 176–7
 Peacock, Thomas Love 217
 Peel, Sir Robert 245
 Pember Reeves, Maud 131, 149, 156, 167–8, 173
 Pembroke, Ann, Countess of 73
- Pennington, Lady Sarah 108
 Perkin, Harold 53–4, 84–5
 permissiveness, sexual 45, 89–96, 157; *see also* ‘free love’, idea of, cohabitation, without legal marriage; liberation, sexual, arguments for
 Perry, Sir Thomas Erskine 300, 303–4
 Perth, Lord 53
 Peterloo ‘massacre’ 148
 Petition on women’s property laws 293, 294–301
 ‘Phalanstery’ 215
 Phelan, Charlotte Elizabeth (later Tonna) 294
 philanthropic work 47, 89, 167, 257–8
 Pierrepont, Fanny 51
 pigs, keeping 143
 Pinchbeck, Ivy 137, 187
 Pinchley, Jane Vaughan 263
 ‘pin-money’ 66, 69–70, 306
 Place, Francis 121, 127, 131, 136, 157, 242, 284–5
 politics: middle-class women’s involvement in 269, 308–9; *see also* anti-slavery campaigns; feminism; philanthropic work; upper-class women’s involvement in 84–9; working-class women’s involvement in 148–9
 pollution, 139–40
 Ponsonby, Arthur 80–1
 Poor Law 116, 177–8, 188–9, 190, 298; *see also* New Poor Law 1834
 Poor Law Commissioners 182–3, 189
 Poor Laws, Lords Committee on (1818) 190
 Poor Man’s Lawyer organizations 158, 161–2
 Portarlington, Caroline, Countess of 60, 100
 Potter, Laurencina 4, 267–8, 289
 Potter, Richard 233, 267–8

INDEX

- poverty 119, 124–5, 132, 144, 151, 152, 153, 162–5, 175–8, 185–6, 187–90, 192–4, 198–9, 202
- Primrose League 309
- Prince of Wales' Fund 132
- Prince Regent *see* George IV
- prohibitions on marriage, legal 12
- property, women's 13, 16, 17, 115, 293–4, 295, 299–300, 304–6
- prostitution 158, 160, 220
- pub-going 120, 122, 179
- Public Baths and Wash Houses Acts 142
- Punch* 43, 300–1
- Punch and Judy shows 173–4
- puritanism, sexual 150, 236, 276–8, 280
- Quakers 266
- Queen Consorts 35
- Queen Mab* (Shelley) 207–8
- Ragged Schools 160
- rape 19
- reading by wives 270–3
- Reform Act 1832 27
- refusal to marry 226–32
- Reiss, Erna 304
- religion: nonconformist 120–2, 133–5, 201–2, women's involvement in 133, 134
- 'religious' marriage 265
- Repository* 212–13
- repression: emotional 262–3; sexual 150, 276–7, 278, 280
- Republican* 284
- 'restraint upon anticipation' 71–2
- Ribblesdale, Lord 94
- Ridley, Sir Matthew White 67
- Ripon, Gladys de Grey, Countess of 84, 105
- Roberts, Elizabeth 139, 150, 153, 175
- Roberts, Robert 122, 169
- Rowntree, B. Seebohm 125, 142, 174, 180, 193–4, 196, 198, 199, 202
- Royal Geographical Society 244
- royal marriages 4–5, 35–50
- Royal Marriages Act 1772 35
- rural population 124–5, 181–203
- Ruskin, John 248, 272, 280
- Russell, Bertrand 83
- Russell, Lord John 37
- Rutland, Elizabeth, Duchess of 78
- Sackville West, Vita 101
- Saint-Simon, Claude Henri, Comte de 213–14
- sale/hire of wives 19, 117, 162
- Salisbury, Frances Mary, Marchioness of *see* Gascoyne, Frances Mary
- Sand, George 215
- Sandford, Elizabeth 273
- sanitation 139–42
- Saturday Review* 254, 262, 264, 283, 301, 302, 306
- savings, women's 119–20
- Seal, Anna 191
- Season, London 6, 98, 262
- Seditious Meetings Prevention Bill 1819 148
- separation 117, 306, 307, 308, 314
- servants, domestic 235, 244–5, 246–7
- sewerage arrangements 140–1, 248
- sexual behaviour: double standards in 23–4, 62, 110, 217, 260, 280–1, 303; in middle class 274–5, 276–82, 289–90; in upper class 89–96; in working class 136, 150, 157, 158, 162, 169, 182, 183–5; permissiveness in/liberation of 45, 89–96, 157, 207, 208, 209, 211, 213, 215–19, 220–3; puritanism/ repression in 150, 236, 276–8, 280; *see also* contraception
- Shaftesbury, 5th Earl of 51
- Shakespeare, William 4
- Shaw, Charles 134, 152
- Shaw, George Bernard 25, 221, 278, 281, 315
- Shaw-Lefevre, J.G. 304

INDEX

- Shelley, Frances, Lady 58, 63, 76–7,
78, 79, 86, 91, 104
Shelley, Mary 85, 209
Shelley, Percy Bysshe 207
Shirreff, Sir John 91
Shirreff, Emily 231
shopkeepers 176
Shrewsbury, Earl of 111
Sickness Benefit Claims under the
National Insurance Act,
Departmental Committee on
(1914) 165
Sims, George 176–7
single women 126, 226–32, 311
Sitwell, Edith 94
Sitwell, Frances 290
skilled workers 119
Skinner, Rev. John 183
Slater, Lilian 152
Smith, Barbara Leigh 294, 301
Smith, Elizabeth 137, 139
Smith, Ellen 274
Smith, Madeleine 278–9
Snowden, Philip 164
Social Democratic Federation 167
social power of wives 78–84, 262
social rank, differences between
spouses 61–2
Socialism 213–14, 219
Southey, Robert 207
Soveral, Marquis de 46
Speenhamland system of poor relief
188–9
Spencer, Herbert 237, 268, 269,
289
Sperling, Diana 246
Sperling, John 261
spiritualism 218–19
stalls selling prepared food 168
Stanley, Mary 282–3
state intervention into working-
class life 180
Statute Law 11
Stevenson, Robert Louis 290
Stock, Aaron 29
Stone, Lawrence 286
Stopes, Marie 277
Stuart, Lady Louisa 51, 60, 67, 100
Subjection of Women, The (Mill)
214, 266, 283, 304, 309
subjugation of women: feminist
attacks on 208–10, 211, 212,
224, 225, 241; ideological
justifications for 30, 38–9,
223–4, 238–40, 248–9, 250,
258–60; in Common Law 2, 11,
13, 14–15, 18–19, 24, 28, 115,
294–5, 296–7, 304; in middle-
class marriages 258–61,
262–4, 314–15; in working-
class marriages 150, 160–1, 172;
necessity for manipulation/
deceit 258–64; ownership of
wife's body by husband 24–5,
306–7; sexual repression/
coercion 150, 276–8, 280;
twentieth-century 210, 316
suitability of husbands/wives 60–4
Summary Jurisdiction (Married
Women) Act 1895 307
Sunday school 134–5, 202
superstition 200
support/maintenance of wives 14,
19, 38–9, 115, 297–8, 307; *see*
also deserted wives
Sutherland, 3rd Duke of 99
Sutherland, Harriet, Duchess of 87
Sutherland, Millie, Duchess of 99
sweated trades 123, 137, 165
Sweating System, Committee on
(1890) 137
Swedenborg, Emanuel 215
Sykes, Henrietta, Lady 91–2

Talfourd, Serjeant 27
'tally', living *see* cohabitation,
without legal marriage *Taming*
of the Shrew, The (Shakespeare)
4
Taylor, Elizabeth 169, 199
Taylor, Harriet (later Mill) 4, 266,
277, 289
Taylor, Isaac 234
Taylor, Kate 198
Taylor, Mary 255
tea 143

INDEX

- temperance movement/
 - 'teetotalism' 121–2, 173
- Tennant, Laura 94
- Tennyson, Alfred, Lord 288
- Terrot, Charles 288–9
- Terry, Ellen 25, 278
- textile industry 138, 163, 165
- theatres 178
- theft, indictment for 13
- Thompson, F.M.L. 65, 66–7
- Thompson, Flora 197–8
- Thompson, William 209–11
- Thomson, Elspeth 287
- Thoreau, Henry David 288
- Thynne, Lord Alex 95
- Thynne, Lord Henry 67
- Times, The* 207, 275, 305
- Tipsley's Magazine* 43
- trades run by women 17, 295, 305–6
- Trefusis, Violet 101
- Tristan, Flora 87, 248
- trusts 70–2; constructive 71
- Turner, Ellen 12
- Tylney-Long, Sir James 108
- unemployment 163
- unhappy marriages 5, 24–7, 28–9, 102–7, 259–61, 273–5, 276; *see also* violence against women, male
- Union Chargeability Act 1865 194
- 'unpersons', married women as 2, 11, 13, 14–15; *see also* subjugation of women, in Common Law
- upper-class marriages 4, 50–75; and divorce 22–4, 109–12; and friendships 99–101; and inheritance 51–3; as alliances 5–6, 60–1, 62, 63–4, 66–7; attitudes to children 96–9; choice of husband in 60–4; control of marriage arrangements 64–5; expectations of, women's 54–60; financial arrangements in 65–73; *see also* Equity, Courts of, freedoms of wives 5, 50–1, 76–8, 89–96, 99–101, 312; male violence in 106–7; marital relationships in 55–6, 57–9, 78, 86, 88, 104–6; political power of wives 84–9; separate estates for wives 70–3; sexual behaviour in 89–96; social power of wives 78–84; unhappy 5, 26–7, 28, 102–7
- urbanization 123–4
- Uxkull, Count 43
- Vane, Charles William (formerly Stewart), Earl 52, 77, 82
- Vane-Tempest, Frances Anne (later Countess Vane, later Lady Londonderry) 51, 52, 77, 82, 88
- variations: in middle class 233–6; in working class 118–20, 122–5, 130–1, 313
- venereal disease 226
- Venningen, Baron de 110
- Vernon, Harriet 92
- Vernon, Lord 61
- Verulam, Lord 61, 67
- Victoria, Princess 47–8
- Victoria, Queen 5, 35, 41–4, 45, 47, 60, 63, 92, 93, 97, 242–3, 252
- village feasts 200
- Villiers, Edith 61, 68, 69
- Villiers, Elizabeth 61
- violence against women, male; in middle class 29; in upper class 106–7; in working class 160–1, 172, 173–4, 197, 296–7; legal condoning of 2, 29, 174, 296–7, 306–7
- Wade, John 2
- Wakefield, Edward Gibbon 12
- Wallis, Henry 218
- Wallscourt, Lord 90
- Walpole, Horace 21, 227
- Ward-Broughton-Leigh, John 52
- Warwick, Frances (Daisy), Countess of (formerly Lady Brooke) 47, 51, 63, 89, 98

INDEX

- Warwick, Lord 78
 washing clothes 145
 washing facilities 141–2
 water systems 140, 141, 248
 Watts, George Frederick 278
 Wayland, Elizabeth 67
 Webb, Beatrice 98, 132, 137, 147,
 179–80, 221–2, 233, 234, 267,
 268–9
 Webb, Sidney 137, 165, 234, 268–9
 Webster, Lady Frances 103
 Webster, Sir Godfrey 76
 Weeton, Nellie 28–9
 Wellesley, Hon. Henry 109
 Wellesley, Lady Charlotte 109
 Wellington, Catherine, Duchess of
 (née Pakenham) 104–5
 Wellington, Duke of 79, 85, 86, 99,
 104–5
 Wells, H.G. 221–2
 Welsh, Helen 214
 Wesley, John 133
 West, Rebecca 222
 Westfield College 230
 Westmeath, Marquis of 141
 Westminster, Elizabeth,
 Marchioness of 96
Westminster Review 295
 Westmorland, Jane, Countess of
 252
 Wheeler, Anna 209–11
 Whigs 36
 White, R.J. 74, 90
 Whitman, Walt 209
 widows 52, 182
 Wilbraham, Randal 63
 Wilkinson, Catherine 141–2
 William IV 40
 Williamson, Ella 64
 Williams-Wynn, Charlotte 227
 Willoughby de Eresby, barony of 53
 wills, women's 14
 Wingfield-Stratford, Esme 58–9
 witnesses 15
 Wollstenholme, Elizabeth 304
 Wollstonecraft, Mary 2, 30, 54, 55,
 240–1, 249, 264, 265
Woman Who Did, The (Allen) 224
 Wombwell, Lady Anne 110
 Women's and Children's Work,
 Royal Commission on (1842)
 296
 Women's Christian Temperance
 Union 173
 Women's Co-operative Guild 117,
 132, 149, 154, 170, 171, 179
 Women's Liberal Federation 309
 Wooler, T.J. 284
 Woolf, Virginia 101, 154, 184, 234,
 281–2
 Wordsworth, Dorothy 227–8
 Wordsworth, William 227, 228
 work: of middle-class women 228,
 229–30, 244, 249, 266, 268–9;
 of rural working-class women
 186, 187–8, 189–92, 195, 298;
 of upper-class women 77–8,
 85–6, 88, 98; of urban working-
 class women 135–9, 162–6; *see*
 also earnings, women's; trades
 run by women; writers, women
 as workhouse 116, 161, 163,
 178; cruelties of 152
 working-class marriages 4, 8,
 312–14; accounts of 146–51;
 and divorce/separation 25–6,
 116–17; and law 115–16; and
 poor relief 177–8, 188–9;
 attitudes to children 151–4,
 171–2; earnings of wives *see*
 earnings, women's expectations
 of, women's 125–6, 159, 161–2;
 family income in 119, 135–7,
 147–8, 149–50, 162–6, 185–92,
 198–9, 313; financial
 arrangements in 6, 119–20, 146,
 153–4, 173, 174–7; food in
 143–4, 168, 174–5, 188, 192–4;
 housework in 141, 142, 145–6;
 housing in 139–43, 144–6,
 166–8, 194–6; leisure activities
 in 178–80; male violence in
 160–1, 172, 173–4, 197, 296–7;
 marital relationships in 150–1,
 157–8, 172, 173–4, 196–8;
 matriarchal 115–16; religion in

INDEX

- 120–2, 133–5, 201–2;
‘respectable’ 6–7, 120–2,
130–55, 313–14; ‘rough’ 7,
156–80, 314; sexual behaviour
in 136, 150, 157, 158, 162, 169,
182, 183–5; work of wives *see*
work
Wright, Frances 208–9
Wright, Thomas 178
writers, women as 27, 28, 108–9,
209–11, 212–13, 220, 224–6,
227, 228–9, 239, 240–2, 243,
246–7, 251–2, 254–5, 258–60,
261–2, 264–5, 266, 277
Young, Arthur 185, 251
Young, George M. 121, 231, 240
Young Woman (magazine) 255, 280