thority and the success and ambiguities of political actions carried on informally through female "influence." For eighteenth-century feminists of a republican stamp, the character of women's power in monarchies illustrated what was worst about royal government and aristocratic society. Could women share fully in the "manly virtue" of citizenship in a republic? In the last years of the ancien régime, a few women and men would answer this question in the affirmative, even while others were arguing that it was only in religion that women could find their rightful place.

N.Z.D.—A.F.

1

Women, Work, and Family

Olwen Hufton

WHEN THE ESSAYIST Richard Steele sought in 1710 to define woman, he did so in a terse but, by the standards of the day, fully acceptable manner: "A woman is a daughter, a sister, a wife and a mother, a mere appendage of the human race . . ." (*The Tatler,* no. 172).

A good woman, one such as to merit the praise of men, might find herself commemorated as did the Elizabethan noblewoman Marie Dudley on her funeral monument in St. Margaret's Westminster:

> Here lyeth entombed Marie Dudley, daughter of William Howard of Effingham, in his time Lord High Admiral of England, Lord Chamberlain and Lord Privy Seal. She was grandchild to Thomas Duke of Norfolk . . . and Sister to Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham, High Admiral of England by whose prosperous direction through the goodness of God in defending his lady Queen Elizabeth, the whole fleet of Spain was defeated and discomforted. She was first married to Edward Sutton, Lord Dudley and after to Richard Monpesson Esquire who in memory of his love erected this monument to her.

From the moment a girl was born in lawful wedlock, irrespective of her social origins she was

defined by her relationship to a man. She was in turn the legal responsibility of her father and her husband, both of whom, it was recommended, she should honor and obey. Father or husband, it was assumed, served as a buffer between her and the harsh realities of the violent outside world. She was expected to be the economic dependent of the man who controlled her life. The duty of a father, according to the model, was to provide for his child until her marriage, when he, or someone on his behalf, negotiated a settlement for his daughter with a groom. A husband expected to be compensated at the outset of marriage for taking a particular woman to wife. Thereafter he was responsible for her well-being, but her contribution at the moment of marriage was critical in the establishment of the new household.

This model had rigorous application in upper- and middle-class society throughout the early modern period. Marriage settlements for children were interpreted, in the language of the day, as "the weightiest business" a family could undertake. Ideally, the money and resources that a female child took from her family purchased her future well-being and enhanced the standing of her kin through the new alliance. A woman's dependency was a closely negotiated item.

For most women, the model could not be so completely applied. Women of the working classes were expected to work to support themselves both when single and when married. "Consider, my dear girl," runs *A Present for a Serving Maid* (1741), a work aimed at the adolescent, "that you have no portions and endeavour to supply the deficiencies of fortune by mind. You cannot expect to marry in such a manner as neither of you shall have occasion to work and none but a fool will take a wife whose bread must be earned solely by his labour and who will contribute nothing towards it herself." In short, the notion of the totally dependent daughter and wife was called into question by the limited resources of both her father and the man she could hope to marry.

Notwithstanding the obligation to labor in their own support, society did not envisage that women could or should live in total independence. Indeed, the independent woman was seen as unnatural and abhorrent. It was assumed that father and husband would provide her with a home and hence contribute in some degree to her maintenance. This assumption was reflected in customary female wages: a woman could be paid less for her labors because a man put a roof above her head. If a woman could not find work to keep her in her own home before marriage, a substitute protective environment must be sought for her. She must enter her employer's home. He would assume the role of protective male figure and be responsible for the costs of feeding and sheltering her and would stand *in loco parentis* until she left to work elsewhere, to return home, or to marry. The wages he paid her would reflect the fact that she was fed and sheltered. Ideally, she would spend as little of these wages as possible, and her employer would save them for her and place them in her hands when she left his home.

Working Life

The target of the single woman's working life was thus explicit: while sparing her own family the cost of feeding her, she was in the business of accumulating a dowry and work skills to attract a husband. When no more than a child, she was taught by her family and the society in which she lived that life was a struggle against grinding poverty and that for long-term survival she needed a husband to provide shelter and aid. Such realizations were what impelled about 80 percent of country girls to leave home at about age twelve—two years before their brothers did so—to begin equipping themselves for the time when they might hope to marry. From the moment of her departure, the average European girl began a ten- or twelve-year phase of her working life, upon the success of which her future depended. The prospect may have been daunting and frightening, and the pitfalls were known to be many. Childhood was brief for the daughters of the poor.

Agricultural Labor

The female children of smallholders, agricultural laborers, or odd-job men commanded few skills beyond those transmitted by their mothers—perhaps no more than the ability to sew, spin, perform simple farm tasks, or care for younger children. Demand for work as a residential farm servant was very high, far outstripping the supply. Residential work for women in the agricultural sector was limited to large establishments, especially dairy farms, where milking and cheese and butter making were the work of women. There

was great competition for farm jobs because they offered servant girls the chance to remain near their families and to avoid an abrupt change in their way of life. Sometimes, however, help was hired only year by year or even for part of a year. In Britain, some hiring was done at fairs. A body of statutes mandated that the unemployed proceed at Martinmas (November 11) to the nearest market town, implements in hand, and offer themselves for work. On such days servant girls and male farm workers, dressed in distinctive garb, bore the tools of their trade and tried to catch the eye of a would-be employer: the experienced cook carried a spoon in her apron, the dairymaid a stool. They bartered their services with a prospective employer, and once work had been secured, the day was turned into a festival. Daniel Defoe, depicting the hiring fairs in the early eighteenth century, described female workers as "eminently impudent" in drawing attention to their talents, and a substantial body of literature bemoaned the cost of agricultural labor as a result of the bartering techniques employed at the hiring fairs.[1] These sources, however, probably exaggerate the importance of the fairs in determining the value of labor and in introducing workers to employers. Memoirs and diaries suggest that family contacts and acquaintances served to recommend most servant girls to their employers and that, once the girls were hired, the two parties rubbed along together for years.

Throughout Europe, family contacts accounted for most placements in farm jobs. In some regions of France, such as Champagne, the spread of cottage industry led to an increase in the number of farm servants because it made possible ancillary industrial labor that contributed to a girl's keep during the dead season. The availability of farm work thus varied from region to region. But overall, by the end of the eighteenth century this kind of work became increasingly scarce, in part as a result of demographic growth, in part as a result of the emergence of larger commercial farms and greater regional specialization. In other areas the overproliferation of smallholdings as a result of population growth reduced the keeping of livestock and the ability to maintain a female servant. When the cow was missing from the landscape, there were few female farm workers.

Domestic Service

The girl who could not find farm work near home looked townward, although she did not necessarily have to go very far; the nearest town of five or six thousand might afford her work as a maidservant, ranging from the lowest resident drudge, who carried heavy loads of laundry to and from the local washplace or loads of vegetables from the market and emptied privies, to cook and cleaner. The demand for urban domestic service appears to have increased considerably throughout the early modern period, reflecting both growing affluence in some sectors of urban society and the cheapness of the labor on offer. Again, the best jobs came through family and village contacts.

The potential for local jobs was usually exhausted before a young girl ventured farther afield. When she did so, it was usually along a well-established route, and at her destination she would find neighbors' daughters and kinsfolk in the vicinity. In short, young girls were rarely pioneers. Sometimes they followed an established migratory flow set up by male seasonal migrants, like the girls of the Massif Central who went down to Montpellier or Béziers to work as servants and whose brothers came down every year to the region to pick grapes; or those of South Wales who stayed in the London area as maidservants after accompanying their male relatives to work in the market gardens of Kent and who made contacts while ferrying fruit and vegetables to Covent Garden.

Female servants constituted the largest occupational group in urban society, accounting for about 12 percent of the total population of any European town or city throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Patrick Colquhoun speculated in 1806 that London had as many as 200,000 servants of both sexes but that there were twice as many women as men.[2] Seventeenth-century censuses such as those taken in Wurzburg and Amsterdam show that the influx of young female adolescents gave a distinctive shape to the age distribution of the population. Some of these migrants then left in their twenties, perhaps to return home with their savings and marry in their villages. Contemporary observers believed that smallholding societies produced the greatest number of temporary expatriates because the prospect of setting up on a small farm lured the young back to their native villages. Young people from areas of large farms were likely to leave forever, and adolescent girls from these regions to bloom into townswomen. Probably a great deal depended upon whom one met in the town as well as upon the prospects back in one's native village.

Types and conditions of service must have varied widely. Much depended upon the status of the employer. Servants were an in-

dicator of social standing, and since female labor was cheap and abundant, it was one of the first luxuries even a modest family permitted itself. But although certain ducal families such as the House of Orleans or the Dukes of Marlborough counted their household servants in hundreds, it was unusual for even the most extensive aristocratic household to employ more than thirty servants of both sexes. The gentry and affluent merchants in the great cities might have six or seven. Indeed, one definition of a poor noble throughout the period was someone who had only three servants. In seventeenth-century Amsterdam, however, which had more than its share of wealthy merchants, one or two servants was the norm; and this was perhaps the commonest urban model. The fewer the number of servants, the likelier it was that all the servants would be women.

In the hierarchy of employees of both sexes maintained by an aristocratic household—cooks, coachmen, footmen, butlers, ladies' maids, chambermaids, laundrymaids, grooms, scullery maids, and so on—women held many of the jobs at the bottom. Modest households employed a maid of all work—for which there is an equally cumbersome phrase in most European languages. Tradesmen might employ a girl both to work in the shop and to run errands delivering and picking up work; tavernkeepers employed girls as barmaids, waitresses, and washers up; busy housewives helping in family businesses such as cookshops and bakeries employed girls to do anything from turning a hand in commercial food production to taking the family's washing to the washplace, carrying or pumping water, or lighting and maintaining ovens and fires.

The best jobs were gained through contacts and by ascending the servant hierarchy as one acquired experience and skill. However, a great deal depended upon good fortune and the kind of qualifications one had at the outset. Employers were concerned that a girl have an honest background and would not open the door to a pack of thieving relatives or disappear into the night with the family silver. Aristocratic households traditionally staffed their urban residences with girls from the country estate of the owner. In some parts of France, notably Brittany and the Cotentin, the seigneur's wife, who usually served as godmother to all village girls, was expected to provide a reference, or the priest would be called upon to vouch for a girl. Others looked to relatives living in towns who were or had themselves been in service and who would accompany a girl when she presented herself for the first time to an employer or the housekeeper. The relatives would stress, as Deborah's aunt did to Mrs. Samuel Pepys, the rigorous moral upbringing of the girl and such education as she had had. In Spain throughout this period, employers satisfied themselves with inquiries about a girl's *gobernia,* which included parental formation and the inculcation of basic skills such as sewing and religious training. They did not expect literacy. But by the end of the eighteenth century in northwestern Europe, notions about what a servant girl's education should be had become more sophisticated: a girl seeking a position in a substantial household who hoped to advance beyond basic kitchen drudgery must be minimally literate and nicely spoken as well as competent with the needle.

Charity schools, village schools, and *petites écoles* (as the French called their primary schools), which arose in the mid-seventeenth century, may have been responsible for raising the educational attainments of girls who offered themselves for service. Certainly in Britain the charity school girl enjoyed some solid advantages over other seekers of posts in affluent households. Her education had vaunted the virtues of cleanliness and a neat appearance. Given the housing conditions of the poor and the difficulties of obtaining water and maintaining a change of clothing, the ideal was not easy to achieve. Thus the most persuasive weapons at a young girl's disposal when she presented herself at an employer's door were a clean dress (however darned), a starched collar and apron (however old), stockings without holes, and shoes that had been polished. In the world of domestic service, initial success could depend on the effective use of a couple of teaspoons of cornstarch. The charity school girl had also been taught deference and a respect for honesty and sobriety. In domestic service, these were attributes that counted.

The girl who entered a multiple-servant household at the bottom could expect to come by a variety of skills in kitchen service and in laundry work, tending and repairing linen. After a few years of washing dishes and scrubbing floors, lighting fires, and fetching and carrying coal, water, and slops, if she maintained a neat air and had a degree of good looks and a trim figure, she might advance to parlormaid. With a measure of good luck, which might include resisting the advances of employer or, more probably, fellow servant, she might find her way upstairs to chambermaid or lady's maid.

However, at each stage of the upward journey, she faced competition or came up against the limited demands of the household of which she was a member. If she was ambitious she must move "for her preferment." Hence the intense mobility within the world of domestic service by the end of the eighteenth century and the fading image, much bemoaned and exaggerated by the affluent, of the long-term retainer. Mobility was made possible by contact and recommendation and, in Britain, the newspaper. However, competition at the upper end of the scale was intense; one advertisement for a lady's maid would bring scores of applicants.

There were many girls, however, who could not compete in the career structure of service, and the immiseration of certain regions as a result of demographic growth in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries brought many from the countryside into the towns. These girls were chronically poor, undernourished, rickety, pockmarked, dirty, and lice-ridden. They lacked the training that fitted them for employment in even a modest household. Girls from entire regions—and, in the case of Ireland, from an entire nation—who arrived in British cities seeking work were automatically excluded by the very poverty of their backgrounds from anything approaching a respectable situation as a servant.

Service, then, embraced a vast range of conditions. For a small minority it had a career structure, and in her mid-twenties a maidservant who had managed to become a chambermaid or lady's maid would have a respectable capital sum, the amount depending upon her ability to accumulate without cutting into her wages to help her family or to cope with periods of illness or unemployment. At the other end of the scale were the vast majority of women whose work was wretched, volatile, dependent upon the honesty of the employer and upon staying constantly in work so that they did not eat into their reserves. A maidservant who became pregnant was simply dismissed. In the middle were those who by their mid-twenties might have fifty pounds to their names, a modest sum but a personal triumph.

Industrial Labor

In some industrial areas, which relied on a reservoir of cheap female labor, the domiciled servant was in fact the resident textile worker. Cheap female labor was critical in the development of European textile industries, such as the silk industry at Lyons. Silk was a costly delicate fabric intended for the wealthy and prepared from start to finish in urban workshops under the supervision of a master. Female labor was used to empty the silk cocoons, twist the thread, wind the shuttles, and draw them through the loom to achieve patterned effects of great complexity. The work of men was to set up and pull the loom. Every workshop included a minimum of three to four girls, a male apprentice, the master, and his wife. Over the industry as a whole, female workers outnumbered males by five to one. Girls were recruited from the surrounding villages, the barren Forez, and the hilly Dauphiné into the master's dwelling, which also served as workshop. They slept in cupboards and under looms, and their wages were saved by their employers. Girls of twelve and fourteen started work in the lowest job, that of cocoon unwinder, sitting over basins of scalding water into which they plunged the cocoons to melt the sericine, the sticky substance binding the cocoon together. Their clothes were continually damp, their fingers lost sensitivity, and tuberculosis was rampant. Still, if she could survive without long periods of unemployment—during the frequent slumps, girls were unceremoniously shown the door—and advance to draw girl, then after about fourteen years a female silk worker had not only a sum of money but also a wide range of industrial skills. She was the ideal wife for the ambitious apprentice because she could provide him with the lump sum to pay for his mastership and contribute to the running of a new workshop.

The lace industry, too, could be organized on a resident basis to help young girls accumulate a dowry. From the purchase of raw thread through the actual fabrication to the sale of the finished product to the wholesaler, the lace industry tended to be entirely in the hands of women—an unusual state of affairs in European handicrafts. Lace was the costliest textile commodity in Europe. By the mid-eighteenth century silk sold at about ten shillings a yard; an equivalent amount of lace cost about twenty pounds. The value lay entirely in the handiwork, and many years were required to learn the skill. Yet the remuneration was at the lowest level of female wages: in France a day's labor might provide a couple of pounds of bread. In lace areas tens of thousands of women were involved in production. In some of these areas, notably in Flanders, where the best lace was made, and in the Pays du Velay in France, philanthropic effort achieved the seemingly impossible and converted lace production into a small dowry-raising enterprise. In

Flanders convents taught lacemaking to children for nothing and, when they were proficient, put aside a little of their wages to help them accumulate a small lump sum. When they married they could become outworkers or come to the convent workshops, where they did not have to pay lighting and heating costs. In the Velay there were no such convents, but groups of pious women called Béates, backed by some philanthropic money, ran lace dormitories in the city of Le Puy free of charge and negotiated the sale of work with the merchants to see that the lacemakers got the best price. After a small deduction for food, they held onto the proceeds of the sale to help the girls accumulate their precious dowries. After marriage these young women could work at home, and the Béates, by invitation of the villages, ran communal houses where the village women could congregate and share lighting costs and a common soup pot.

Silk and lace production were thus tailored to bring girls into the towns, teach them a craft, and help them with their dowries. By about 1600, however, women in two kinds of circumstances were beginning to break with the notion that a woman needed a dowry in money to attract a husband, regarding the acquisition of a skill, backed perhaps by a few assets such as linen and furniture, as sufficient. This perception gained ground both in villages where income from rural industry was steadily outstripping income from agriculture and in the towns among the lower artisan and service sectors.

In the industrial village, unmarried women would stay with textile production in their homes only if they believed the work could offer them long-term security. The financial rewards had to be higher and more constant than the proceeds from seasonal cottage industry, such as the spinning of wool or linen in winter. The young men and women of a parish stayed there if they were confident, first, that they could set up house or could, after marriage, live with their parents on sufficiently high industrial earnings; and, second, that they could secure any equipment they needed from a merchant or manufacturer to whom they sold their goods on completion. If the industry then took a downward turn, one or two generations might be caught in poverty, with the young couple clinging to the notion that an upward turn might reestablish them. In time, however, their progeny were forced back into domestic service or into another region with more flourishing industry. Perhaps eventually another industry might develop in their village, as in Devon, where serge production gradually died and button production took its place. But such developments were by no means inevitable. When the Languedoc woolen industry faded at Clermont de Lodève in the eighteenth century, this hive of industry became a virtual ghost village.

Industrial villages were remarkably endogamous, and when the industry was thriving marriages took place early because there was no need to wait for the accumulation of a sum to hire and stock a farm. When an industry took a downward turn, marriages were postponed, and the birthrate fell.

Except in a few industrial cities, a girl born of working-class parents in a town or city was unlikely to become either a domestic servant or a textile worker. Instead, as censuses make clear, she pursued one of a limited number of options in the garment trades (as seamstress, mantua maker, milliner, glove stitcher, embroiderer) or service trades (as washerwoman, street seller, stall operator). Or, perhaps most commonly, she contributed to a family business, working at home.

In most European towns girls' work options were limited by the restrictions of the guilds, which regulated the urban world of skilled work with varying comprehensiveness. The daughters and wives of tradesmen involved themselves in aspects of artisanal production, but most guilds resisted women's attempts to enter their specialties. Resistance to women in guild-regulated production often came less from the masters than from their workmen, who were afraid that women would work for less and hence undercut journeymen's wages. When work was plentiful and labor scarce, the guilds were relatively tolerant and turned a blind eye to women's activities in their sphere; but when times were hard, attitudes changed. Thus in the sixteenth century the tailors of Augsburg, who in easier times had tolerated women's production of outer garments, suddenly resisted their right to make anything except aprons and lingerie.

By the late eighteenth century the guilds were fast disappearing in Britain and France. Even so, women existed most easily in newer trades such as millinery and mantua making, which had no medieval antecedents. During the eighteenth century work became more plentiful, particularly in the garment trades, but as the number of women seeking such employment increased, the work became identified as "women's work," and wages fell accordingly. *Campbell's Directory of London* in 1762 placed all the garment

trades practiced by women in the category of pauper work, exposing the incumbent to dire necessity and providing the recruiting ground for prostitution.

At a somewhat lower level than that of the solid artisan family the mother was more likely than the father to shape the choice of a daughter's job. The washerwoman's daughter became a washerwoman, the seamstress' daughter a seamstress, and the innkeeper's daughter stayed at home and served the beer and victuals. The tendency of urban parents to absorb their female children into a work pattern perhaps explains the relatively small number of recorded formal apprenticeships for women. Indeed, those who sought such apprenticeships were likely to be either orphans, on whose behalf orphanages sought guaranteed work and protection, or girls whose parents were in work that could not absorb them and who lacked relatives such as a seamstress aunt who could provide structured help. These two categories sought formal apprenticeship not because the training would guarantee a girl a better job but because they needed assurance of continuous training leading to regular employment. In seventeenth-century Geneva, contracts of formal apprenticeships for girls were made to lacemakers, buttonmakers, and makers of watch chains, clock keys, and small screws for clocks. Orphanages and British charity schools, however, regarded such training as uncertain even with the nominal guarantee; they considered that domestic service offered better prospects for an orphan girl. Such schools refused to put their girls into textile manufacture because the vagaries of trade could land them resourceless on the streets. In their view a woman's security was best guaranteed by a relative or, when a relative was lacking, by sturdy, honest, and structured employment as a maidservant.

Marriage

Most women in fact married as the model insisted they should. Between 1550 and 1800 the proportion of women who died above the age of 50 in the celibate state varied from 5 to 25 percent. The highest levels occurred in the mid-1600s but fell dramatically over the next century; permanent spinsters constituted something under 10 percent of the population by the end of the eighteenth century. In the seventeenth century more French women married than English women, but thereafter the number of French spinsters began to rise, and by 1789 about 14 percent of those dying over the age of 50 had never married. In the seventeenth century, English women married on average at the age of 26, but by the end of the eighteenth century at just over 23. In France, women's average age at marriage at the beginning of the seventeenth century, 22, rose gradually to 26.5 on the eve of the Revolution.[3] Demographers explain these dissimilar patterns as being determined by the behavior of the rural masses: lower ages at marriage reflected easier employment situations, better wages, and the availability of farmsteads. Falling real wages in late eighteenth-century France pushed up the age of marriage: couples had to work longer to raise the wherewithal to hire and stock a farm. Higher wage levels in Britain and steady agricultural prices in the early eighteenth century had the reverse effect, reducing the number of the permanently celibate and lowering the age at marriage. Such Dutch evidence as we have suggests that prosperity throughout much of the seventeenth century encouraged earlier marriage, whereas more difficult agrarian conditions and industrial depression in the second half of the eighteenth century led to later marriages and an increase in the permanently celibate.

Fewer aristocratic and middle-class women married than did those of the working class. By the eighteenth century more than a third of the daughters of the Scottish aristocracy and almost as many from the British peerage were permanent spinsters. The mounting cost of marriage portions explains part of this trend; to provide for more than one female child severely taxed even the wealthiest families. One or two female children were married to establish alliances and increase the family's status, but the rest were kept at home or, in later life, maintained in modest style in properties that would upon their death revert to the family. Whereas men of noble stock would marry wealthy commoners, noblewomen did not marry outside their caste. Because a wife assumed the status of her husband, such marriages would have brought dishonor upon their families and themselves. Middle-class women from large families also faced limited opportunities. The eldest daughter would find a husband, and widowed aunts might seek to help another, but resources were limited. Moreover, there was less adequate provision for those women who did not marry than for aristocratic spinsters.

In families in which women were responsible for the accumu-

lation of their own dowries, there was little to prevent all the female children from finding partners. However, hard times, low wages, high rents, or the unavailability of farmsteads could lead to postponed or late marriages. Hence the rector of Bletchley described the plight of a young couple in his parish thus:

> Will Wood junior, wants to be married to Henry Travel's Daughter, the prettiest Girl in the Parish, being uneasy with his grandmother [who can't afford to settle him] . . . The Times are so hard, small farms so difficult to be met with, the spirit of inclosing and accumulating Farms together, making it very difficult for young people to marry, as was used; as I know by experience this parish, where several Farmers, tho' much wanting to marry and settle, for the want of proper places to settle at . . .[4]

Clearly, this young couple was forced to wait for a vacancy. In areas where rural industry was well established and young people could conceive of an existence without much capital to sustain them, age at marriage tended to fall. Even so, the couple would hope to have enough put by to purchase rudimentary furniture, bed coverings, cooking implements, chickens, and a goat or a pig. Below a certain level of society, economic considerations had no part to play in marital choice, because neither party had any ostensible reserves other than his or her potential earning power. In an English or Scandinavian village such couples might find their marriage opposed by the community (including the vicar and the justice of the peace), since such a marriage could lead only to a greater burden on the poor rate.

In the towns there was little to stand in the way of such resourceless marriages. However, the couple in question, whatever the genuineness of their affections, were hostages to fortune. Unless engaged in industrial work in a period of buoyant growth, they must inevitably become paupers. Such a prospect must have been a powerful deterrent to and perhaps the ultimate corrosive of a lasting human relationship.

Whom one married depended upon one's class, in some instances upon birth position—the oldest daughter of an upper-class family usually had priority—and upon the size of one's dowry. Most women did not marry beneath themselves. An aristocratic heiress had the pick of the market. The daughters of clergymen, doctors, and lawyers married men in the same profession as their fathers and thus cemented business connections. Farm servants married farm laborers and hoped to set up with their accumulated resources on a small farm. Sometimes girls who had gone to work in town as servants returned home with their little sums and set up as smallholders' wives. But those who had emigrated to town from an area of large farms were unlikely to return to their native villages. The children of the Beauce, for example, had little opportunity for local employment. Adolescents from the region were driven first toward Chartres (limited in its demands for labor), to Orleans (more promising), and inevitably toward Paris with its seemingly endless resources.

Of the young people who did not return home to marry, a minority of servant girls married other servants, and of these a minority may have remained in service, although demand for a resident couple was limited. The logical course for a servant girl upon marriage was to use her portion and her husband's contribution to set up in business of some kind, running a drink shop or a café bar, or for the pair to go into the catering business. Often the maidservant's main social contacts with the opposite sex had been with apprentices delivering goods to the back door. Tavern servants married construction workers. Other servants married tradesmen and opened lodginghouses. In industrial areas, spinners married carders or weavers. The large unskilled and largely urban female work force of flower sellers, peddlers of haberdashery, load carriers, and the like who had no dowry on marriage, or those who had failed to amass a dowry because of illness or unemployment, were not precluded from finding a marriage partner; but, lacking capital or a substitute skill, they could expect to marry only a man in a similar position.

The evidence everywhere points to economic considerations as the main determinant in the choice of partner, although this fact need not have precluded romantic considerations as well. Marriage was interpreted as an institution designed to furnish succor and support to both parties, and a clear perception of economic imperatives was essential to survival.

Marriage was seen not merely as woman's natural destiny but also as a metamorphic agent, transforming her into a different social and economic being as part of a new household, the primary unit upon which all society was based. The husband's role was that of provider of shelter and sustenance. He paid taxes and represented the household in the community. The role of the wife

was that of helpmate and mother. At the highest levels of society, women became mistresses of houses with servants to organize, estates to manage with the help of stewards and agents, and hospitality to proffer on their husband's behalf. The appearance and dignity of the wife confirmed the status of the husband. The wives of professional men such as clergymen also had a defined complementary role. For the farmer's wife the provision of support services in the family economy could entail a wide range of obligations, depending upon the affluence of the household. Tending livestock, growing vegetables, keeping bees, sewing, mending, preserving, lending a hand at harvest, and exploiting the family's gleaning rights in the community were among the services ancillary to the holding that could fall to her.

Generally, although the labors of a wife were deemed essential for the well-being of a family and an idle wife was seen as a curse upon her husband, her work was rarely estimated in monetary terms. Even in areas where countrywomen were able to work in domestic industry, in agriculture, or even on the roads for pay, they were seen not as generators of money but as providers of largely unremunerated support services within the family.

Married countrywomen with children and encumbered with the work of a holding did not take on more paid work than they regarded as strictly necessary to the subsistence of their families. They defined need by reference to an adequate diet, warmth, and the ability to ward off debt. In short, they sought outside work only when the family was in need. Otherwise the arduous, long, and physically unpleasant work related to family and holding was paramount. Women carried water to steep mountain terraces in areas where the terrain was difficult and water scarce. In many cases the terraces themselves had been constructed from earth carried there in buckets by women. They cut and dried turf, collected kelp, firewood, weeds by the roadside to feed rabbits. They milked cows and goats, grew vegetables, collected chestnuts and herbs. The commonest source of heating for British and some Irish and Dutch farmers was animal turds, which were gathered by hand by women and received their final drying out stacked near the family fire. Haymaking and harvesting involved heavy spells of work, and weeding had to be done in all weather. Small wonder that women liked spinning: it gave them the chance to sit down for a few hours while productively occupied.

By the end of the eighteenth century the work patterns of the countrywoman had changed in many areas. One reason was population growth, which reduced the number of available subsistence units, depressed wages in the agricultural sector, pushed up prices, and inspired commercially minded landlords to curtail commons and gleaning rights. Growing numbers of married women tried to become casual daylaborers, hoeing and weeding vegetables on large properties in the appropriate season. In Britain, however, the introduction of heavier farm tools curtailed their labors as harvesters. Everywhere a potential labor force of married women seems to have been anxious to perform industrial work, leaving the running of the smallholding to husbands and perhaps abandoning the keeping of livestock or time-consuming agricultural work.

By the end of the eighteenth century, too, domestic industry increasingly reflected regional specialization. Some industries offered opportunities only to women and thus separated the work space and preoccupations of the sexes. In lacemaking communities in Buckinghamshire or in the Pays de Velay, women sat at their lacework—usually in groups in a specified house to share lighting costs—for twelve to sixteen hours a day while the men farmed their minuscule properties or tended sheep. In other cases, such as worsted production in the North Riding of Yorkshire or cotton manufacture around Barcelona, Rouen, and Troyes, both partners absorbed some industrial work, and industry gradually supplanted agriculture as the dominant source of income. Cottage rents rose to reflect not the real value of the land but the value of living in an area where the potential for industrial income existed.

There was, however, nothing inevitable about the establishment of industry in barren areas with a large reservoir of female laborers. In the Massif Central, the Pyrenees, many Alpine villages, the Welsh interior, most of southern Ireland, and the Scottish Highlands, which lacked extensive rural industry, adults were forced into significant migrations. In most cases the men left home and the women remained behind, but there were exceptions: Welsh women and their children walked to Kent and the market gardens of the Home Counties to pick fruit and vegetables and carry them into Covent Garden during the summer season; Highland women joined laboring gangs with their husbands on Lowland estates; the women of Massat in the Pyrenees walked their children into Toulouse during the winter months to beg on the steps of Saint Sernin while their husbands worked as itinerant tinsmiths in the Ebro Valley in Spain.

Generally, when farms in arid or mountainous regions could

no longer feed a family, women assumed responsibility for the farming for months or even years while their husbands worked as seasonal laborers or even emigrated for a time. Sometimes the woman ran the farm only between planting and harvest, and when the man returned from his seasonal job as, say, a chimney sweep, he performed the more difficult chores. Occasionally migration occurred in winter: peasants from Auvergne, Savoy, Tuscany, the Pyrenees, or Ireland went to the city—Paris, Bordeaux, Saragossa, Valladolid, Livorno, or London according to the traditions of their region—and looked for work on the docks or hauled coal or wood. Others went off in the summertime, like those peasants of the Massif Central who traveled south to Mediterranean regions to help with the grape harvest. Sometimes they stayed away for several years. In Corrèze and Aveyron a considerable number of married men as well as bachelors walked to Spain to offer their services in the ports. Their wives took over all farm work. Irish peasants also left for long periods, but of course potato farming was work that could easily be done by women. The men's remittances would pay the rental on holdings and the return fare across the Irish Sea, but the work of the farm was done by women. Everywhere, women's activity was deemed needful to hold a farmstead together and feed the children.

The role of married townswomen in the family economy does not lend itself to easy generalization; much depended on the town and the potential it offered. There, too, however, most married women filled roles complementary to their husbands'. In a family business, such as a printing shop or a drapery, a woman might function as an organizer, a fellow worker (mixing ink, cleaning letters, measuring cloth or ribbon), or, more often, a bookkeeper. Many mercantile houses in cities such as Amsterdam and London drew on the bookkeeping services of the merchant's wife. Even Mr. Thrale, the eighteenth-century brewer who would not allow his wife to work in the kitchen, saw nothing demeaning in letting her control the books, since she was a far more competent business manager than he.[5] Lower down the social scale, women appear to have virtually monopolized the actual sale of objects made by their husbands. Or they operated in their own right as petty traders in the market or shop or merely on street corners. In many towns, married women were prevented through borough custom, guild regulations, or municipal laws from trading in their own right. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Oxford, for example, only free men of the borough or their widows could do so. Nevertheless, women did the actual work of selling even though the shop or stall was leased in their husband's name. Hence the fishwives of Amsterdam, Marseilles, Paris, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and London dealt with customers in the market while the fishmongers handled the wholesale trade. While butchers were responsible for slaughtering cattle and preparing joints of meat, their wives and daughters were frequently involved in taking the money from customers and in selling tripe, sausage meat, and black puddings (blood sausages). Covent Garden and Les Halles were packed with women selling all kinds of food, from eggs and cheese to fruit. They also played a role in the sale of grain and flour. When George Morland chose to paint a "higgler"—a picturesque term for someone who drove a bargain with a farmer and then retailed the produce—he depicted a woman. In 1699 thirty-one licensed female breadsellers operated in the Terreiro de Paco in Lisbon; five of them had very large businesses and a virtual monopoly over the sale of bread in this major square. Probably their husbands were circumventing guild controls by baking outside the city.

One form of selling in which married women were preponderant and which was quite independent of the activities of their husbands was the secondhand clothes trade. The importance of this traffic in early modern Europe should not be underestimated. A substantial proportion of the population did not purchase new clothing. Children wore hand-me-downs or cut-down adult clothing. In times of hardship, the poor parted with their clothes (outerwear first) and acquired others from secondhand dealers when times improved. Paris in the 1760s had 268 registered secondhand clothes dealers, all of whom were married women or widows. The business needed little capital input and involved transactions primarily among women. Mothers exchanged children's clothing with appropriate compensation to a middlewoman; maidservants bartered employers' castoffs; the clothes of a deceased person were exchanged for money or other garments by the inheriting relatives. These businesswomen seldom encountered opposition from male guilds. However, in the difficult economic conditions of the mid-1500s the municipal council of Augsburg, under pressure from the peddlers' guild, tried to restrict door-to-door selling by women and also to exclude them from selling secondhand goods. Such measures, however, were temporary; when better times came, the limited profit margins involved in the secondhand clothes business relocated it in women's hands.

Contemporary advice literature counseled maidservants that

the best long-term use for a dowry was investment in a small business independent of a husband's, to serve as a resource to fall back on should they be widowed.[6] Typically these enterprises took the form of taverns, drink shops, or little *buveries*, the tea or coffee houses fashionable in English and Dutch towns, confectioneries, or services providing cooked meals—the last two limited in certain towns by guilds. Sometimes these businesses involved little more than preparing meals in one's own kitchen for sale to a neighboring household or making dripping or black pudding for the people in one's street.

Many married women in town and country were multioccupational, with no single aspect of their work occupying them full-time. They might operate as saleswomen only on market days, or as washerwomen by arrangement with specific families only a few times a month. Other responsibilities always waited: caring for children, shopping, carrying water, and perhaps organizing older children into some kind of remunerative activity, such as selling pies or commodities made by the parents. Frequently entire families performed one set of tasks during the day and another in the evening—like the Spitalfields silkworkers who made fireworks when they went home or the silk seamstresses of the Leicester area who supplied fine condoms for Mrs. Phelp's mail-order service.[7] In the economy of expedients that characterized the way most families lived in early modern Europe, the woman was likely to be the pivotal figure. While her husband performed the single job of agricultural laborer or casual worker she might be engaged in very different tasks at different seasons. Unlike her husband's tasks, which were clearly demarcated and began and ended (unless at harvest) at a specific time and usually permitted him some leisure to spend in the tavern or village square, "a woman's work was never done." If her man fell ill, was suddenly unemployed, failed to return from his seasonal migrations, or died, her work must expand to cover the deficit created in the family economy. In his lifetime she may have been an ancillary worker, but she was nonetheless crucial to the survival of the family unit.

Motherhood

The purpose of marriage, along with companionship and succor, was the reproduction of the species within a sheltered environment designed to ensure that a woman was not left to rear her child in isolation and that a man did not escape the responsibility of maintaining his offspring. Children represented the perpetuation of property, and the ultimate protection of aged parents in a violent and troubled world. Viewed in rational abstract, if woman had a role in adult life, it was as mother and procreator.

Oddly, we still do not have a convincing history of maternity. Traditionally, historians have asserted that in the early modern period the relationship between parent and child was not a caring one, that parents were hostile or at best indifferent to the young child, whose interests were regarded as subservient to that of the family as a whole. Motherhood has been presented as a negative state. More recently, however, the harsh prescriptive literature generated by clerics and physicians has been tested against diaries, memoirs, and ego-documents and found wanting.

A great variety of factors, such as seasonal migration, harvest failure, or epidemics, might determine family size among ordinary working people or the poor, but typically their advanced age at marriage ensured that families were small, with four to five children born at just over two-year intervals, two to three of whom would reach adulthood. Aristocratic and middle-class families were larger, owing to the lower age at marriage and the suppression of the natural depressant on reproduction in women, prolonged lactation; these two groups put their children out to nurse.

Infancy was a perilous period, but a child born healthy and nurtured on breast milk absorbed some of the mother's immunities. The next substantial risks would not occur until weaning, sometime around age two. In preparation the child's diet was supplemented by a starchy pap of boiled bread or the child was given crusts to suck upon. Many mothers agonized over this transition. Ann d'Ewes in the mid-seventeenth century lost a child already prone to fits at the weaning stage. Her husband reported their joint grief at the loss of a child she had so carefully nurtured "and whose delicate favour and bright grey eye was so deeply imprinted in our hearts, far to surpass our grief for the decease of his three elder brothers, who, dying almost as soon as they were born, were not so endeared to us as this was."[8] Popular sayings suggest that mothers were aware of the dangers of premature weaning. Infant mortality was a recurrent fear at all social levels. Catholic mothers arranged scapulars around their children's necks to ward off evil during the day and recited incantations over the

infant in the cradle to avert sudden death in the night. A famous seventeenth-century Dutch print titled *Nightmare* depicts a child being snatched from the cradle by the figure of death. Diaries and memoirs recount anxieties over coughs and fevers, listlessness and croup. Herbals attest to an abundance of folk cures and rituals to cope with the maladies of childhood: gentian for thrush, goose grease for a wheezy chest, camomile to calm the overactive. The loss of a child was a painful experience, and the older the child, the greater the loss. Educated women left a testimony to their grief denied to the illiterate. "Every man knows," claimed Dorothy Leigh in the seventeenth century, that a mother's love for her child was "hardly contained within the bounds of reason."[9]

A mother's role was that of nurturer. A baby's place when not in the cradle was in her arms. It was her job to keep the child warm, fed, and clean according to the standards of the day. During our period swaddling, believed to form the child's limbs properly, was gradually abandoned. Children of all social levels were not washed or changed as frequently as their modern counterparts. Nevertheless, mothers were expected not to allow their children to lie in stinking, unchanged, or damp hay or to let their bodies become oververminous. In seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting the title "mother's work" referred unobliquely to delousing a child's hair, a gesture used to symbolize her control over the child's mind as well as its body. In the criminal courts a woman lost any chance of a good character reference if it was revealed that she had left her child dirty or unfed or had allowed it to wander.

A child cried, it was believed, to make its wants known. At birth a child cried on leaving the shelter of the womb; at baptism a bawling babe suggested the fitting renunciation of the devil as the sign of the cross was made on its brow. A baby crying in the night had been frightened in its sleep by troublesome dreams and needed the comfort of its mother.

Coroners' inquests reveal that overlying, defined as suffocation in the parents' bed, was cited as the commonest cause of infant death. In fact these were probably what today we call crib deaths, since it is now seriously questioned whether a child can be suffocated in a bed. However, clerics and medical men made impassioned pleas for children to be kept in cradles. They also blamed women for children's deformities, early death or character defects. Culpepper, the famous medical authority on childrearing, criticized women for prolonging breastfeeding, for overfeeding, and for ignoring modern medical recommendations such as bleeding in favor of ancient superstitions. Their rancorous prescriptions make clear that the survival of the species was safer with women than with these male professionals.

A contentious issue in medical and philosophical treatises, which emerged in the late seventeenth century and gained prominence over the next fifty years, was that of wetnursing. Historians have seized upon this phenomenon as an indicator of maternal indifference to the young. However, the probable motives of two of the three groups of women who put their children out to nurse contradict this view. For aristocratic women, social obligations and possibly taboos on sexual intercourse during lactation seem to have been important. Middle-class women living in cities seem to have been motivated by a belief, confirmed by mortality statistics, that the city was not a healthy environment for a child. Finally, for working women in occupations in which suckling a child was rendered impossible by the working environment, the need for the mother's full-time labor services and the hazards of an artisan's workshop for a baby were the most obvious justifications for employing a wetnurse. The number of infants put out to nurse was never more than a small fraction of the total number born. Moreover, in the course of the eighteenth century the number of babies from the first two categories who were wetnursed seems to have fallen markedly as propaganda attacking the practice as unnatural mounted. However, among working women in industries such as silk production in Lyons, where looms and dangerous vats of scalding water were part of the living and working environment and the mother was the organizer of an immigrant work force, the practice continued because the family had no real alternative. Thus use of a wetnurse seems to have reflected social or economic imperatives rather than parental indifference.

There were different categories of wetnurses. Affluent families tried to find a healthy, well-nourished woman who had recently weaned her own child and who lived on a comfortable farm. Either the baby would be sent to her to care for there, or she was paid to live in the family's household. Further down the social scale, those seeking wetnurses were obliged to use poor women. Over time—and this rather than the attacks by philosophers may have explained the decline in the practice—only women who could find no other source of income would take in a nursling. Hence the practice tended to become concentrated in the poorest areas such

as the Morvan or the Cevennes. At the very bottom of the hierarchy of wetnurses were women who served the foundling hospitals, and these were much at risk from children carrying sexually transmissible diseases. Thus wetnursing became part of the economy of expedients of the poor in certain regions; aristocratic infants were increasingly maintained in the nursery of the parental home and fed, often lethally, on substitutes for mother's milk if their own mothers could not, or would not, feed them.

If her child survived infancy, a mother assumed the role of educator, although what that meant varied with social class, time, and place. A mother taught her child to negotiate the world in which they both lived. Notwithstanding the battery of servants, nannies, nurserymaids, and governesses available in aristocratic households, memoirs of aristocratic mothers frequently reveal concern for the advancement of their daughters and for equipping them for the marriage market. A daughter's success reflected upon the mother: in addition to some acquaintance with vernacular literature she needed to know how to present herself, dress, manage a household of servants, dance, embroider, play a musical instrument, and speak French. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu considered the upbringing of three daughters a full-time occupation. A middle-class girl accompanied her mother on charitable errands, learned how to keep household accounts, and knew about pickling, preserving, and other methods of food preparation appropriate to the season even if she herself was not the cook. A daughter reflected the image of the household.

A literate mother invariably had literate children, and unless she was from the highest social class, she usually taught her children their letters herself before they went to school. The availability of village schools varied enormously with the locality. The English dame school was often little more than a child-minding service in which a little reading might also be inculcated by the good lady who sat with her spinning wheel. Some seventeenth-century French schools run by teaching orders operated only during the dead season. Others regarded the teaching of reading as less important than basic needle or textilemaking skills. Whatever the quality of the local educational fare, however, a mother's educative role remained crucially important for her daughters. She taught them all she knew in the way of cooking skills. From corners of Dutch genre paintings children watch their mothers chop onions, peel carrots and apples, scour milkpans, turn cheese, make pancakes, knead dough and leave it before the fire to rise. The rituals of food production and of meals in traditional societies were extremely important. For the masses, bread and bread-based soups strengthened by a little salt pork or lard and improved by herbs and vegetables constituted the bulk of the diet. Even so, considerable ingenuity often went into food production. Growing vegetables, keeping hens, and feeding a pig (a task reserved exclusively for women and often included in a dowry) were important means of survival that female children had to acquire. Innumerable observers record mothers and daughters gathering weeds together at the side of the road for goats and rabbits, plundering hedgerows for berries, gathering mushrooms and herbs, and amassing firewood and animal turds. Christmas, Easter, and certain feast days such as that of Saint Catherine, which entailed the preparation of Cattern cakes, all demanded the making of special dishes. A legacy of kitchen knowledge appeared in unexpected sources. When the Inquisition attacked the Conversos, people of Jewish descent who had intermarried with Christians, it tried to locate their Jewishness in ritual and belief. Very often, however, it emerged that the beliefs had been lost and all that remained was a way of preparing dishes, the use of oil, or abstention from ham or sausage, all handed down from mother to daughter. The greater the range of cooking, pickling, preserving, and cheese- and butter-making skills that came her way, the better the daughter's chances of a good post in service.

Along with cooking, a mother was expected to teach her daughter needle skills. Fine needlework marked a great lady. A woman, however high her rank, was expected to produce baby bonnets and layettes and embroidered waistcoats to offer at Christmas to her husband or brother. Lower down the social scale, the emphasis was on hemming, seaming, mending, and darning. Shirts, petticoats, children's garments, and smocks were all made by women at home. Girls were also taught all tasks designated as female around the home. They assisted in the care of younger children. They helped to prepare food for their brothers and stitched their clothing.

The 1570 census for Norwich indicates that girls were much more readily absorbed into urban domestic industry than their brothers. Four-fifths of the girls, compared with less than one-third of the boys aged six to twelve, were working. Another third of boys were at school. Lacking as yet the physical strength to take on man's work and perhaps less dexterous at this age than

their sisters, only a very small minority of boys were employed at spinning or knitting, which engaged the majority of girls. Similarly, the 1814 census of Bruges underscores that although girls were making lace by the age of ten, their brothers were not gainfully employed.

At the lowest levels of society the expedients for maintaining a frail livelihood involved close cooperation among family members, but the partnership between mother and daughter in the work force was perhaps the most striking. Girls learned survival skills from their mothers. Mothers and young daughters together sold milk, crockery, and vegetables in the markets; they also begged together. The economy of the poor was invariably a delicate balancing act, and those who lost their footing and fell into the ranks of the destitute were numerous. Where to turn in hard times was valuable knowledge.

Although the domestic conduct books of the sixteenth century made the inculcation of certain moral and behavioral values incumbent upon both parents, over the next two hundred years theologians and moral commentators alike became increasingly persuaded that female morality at least was a maternal inheritance. A daughter was what her mother made her. A witch could only beget a witch (referred to in English as "the witch's get"); a woman of low morality who begot bastards would produce a bastard-bearer. A virtuous woman, defined as one who impressed the virtues of chastity, cleanliness, and sobriety upon her child, would do conspicuously better in this scale of judgment.

Mothers were also critical in the transfer of popular beliefs. They told their children tales, warned them against witches and devils, taught them to leave bowls of milk for mischievous fairy folk, put them on their guard against what they perceived as evil.

Most European parents parted with their children in their early teens. How much contact was sustained between the two thereafter must have varied with literacy, proximity, or contact at second hand through immigrant connections. Perhaps the lower one was down the rural social scale the more conspicuous the severance. Nevertheless, evidence of a significant return rate among young men and women who had served an apprenticeship or been in service elsewhere, to a fragment of land in their native snowclad Pyrenees or the barren Maremma Toscana bears witness to the tug of family considerations.

Historians of the nineteenth century are now making us aware of a phenomenon they believe to be crucial to an understanding of the relationship between mother and daughter, which they label "dowry bonding." This has much deeper roots. Every mother knew that her daughter needed material assets on marriage and that the more she had, the higher her standing would be in the community and in the eyes of her husband's family. To assist in the important process of dowry accumulation, mothers put aside some of their work profits when they could, perhaps from the sale of eggs, a pot of honey, or a fattened pig that had been the runt of the litter, as a cumulative contribution. Or mother and daughter might rear rabbits on hand-picked weeds for the same purpose. Many mothers directed their young daughters' needlework toward making quilts and household articles either from scraps or from bits of raw wool picked from hedgerows and converted over the years into cloth. This collaboration in the accumulation of a dowry helped to cement the mother-daughter relationship and perhaps also helped it to survive physical distance.

Certainly modern sociologists consider the bond between mother and daughter to be commonly the strongest of those between members of the nuclear family. In the past such bonding emanated from complex considerations that may have included household management teaching, shared views on negotiating the system, continuing dependence over childbed advice and infant care, and perhaps sometimes a feeling of solidarity against the putative inadequacies of husband and father. Many upper-class women went to their mother's house for their lying-in, and mothers might well make use of their seniority, as Mme. de Sévigné did, to take to task a daughter's husband deemed unreasonable in his demands. How common such practices were at a lower social level is impossible to know. There are indications, however, that the ogre of the interfering mother-in-law of music-hall jokes has a long history among men in western European society, though not in southern Europe, where a wife upon marriage entered her husband's family's household and hence had to encounter her mother-in-law as a potential critical force.

Widowhood

Parents were aware that their chances of seeing their children reach adulthood were not high. The orphaned child, particularly the

orphaned female child, was perceived as particularly at risk not only by fiction writers but also by philanthropists and writers of moral treatises. A widower's duty was to find a substitute mother for his children by remarriage, by bringing an unmarried female relative into his home, or by sending his children to a sister's home. The stepmother is traditionally a fearful figure, deemed in lore likely to prefer her own offspring to her stepchildren. Another alternative was for the father to substitute his eldest daughter in the role of mother and household manager while the role of the son remained unaltered. This may have reduced the daughter's ability to work on her own behalf to accumulate a dowry and placed upon her the expectation that as long as the father lived, she would tend to his wants. In many ways, the death of a mother was more to be feared than that of a father. On the other hand, a widowed mother also had to place new burdens upon her daughters.

The loss of a husband in a society that defined a woman in terms of her relationship to a man was obviously an event that carried immense social, economic, and psychological consequences for a woman. The higher the social standing of the family, perhaps the less the upheaval. An aristocratic woman was, at least theoretically, in command of her jointure, the income guaranteed to her when she brought her dowry into the marriage to sustain her in her lifetime in the event of her husband's death. Furthermore, the aristocratic widow was usually delegated rights in the wardship of her children. Hence she passed into a directorial capacity and became arbiter of her own destiny, unrestrained by any tutelage.

An abundance of evidence indicates that wealthy widows thrived when their husbands died. In the eighteenth century, for example, Mrs. Delaney, Lady Granville, the victim of a positively unpleasant match arranged by her family, blossomed as the doyenne of London etiquette, watching with tastefully concealed restraint the pursuit of her wealth by a string of suitors while retaining her independence.[10] There were Hester Thrale and the Duchess of Leinster, who, after less than harmonious marriages, married a second time gloriously and defiantly below their rank, according to personal choice. Mrs. Thrale lost many friends, including the sanctimonious Samuel Johnson, when she married her children's Italian tutor, Piozzi. The Duchess of Leinster was widely deemed to have married her son's tutor in unseemly haste—she waited only a month after the Duke's death—but her women friends at least were sympathetic. The letters, diaries, and tracts of the period reveal a hysterical obsession among middle- and upper-class males: In the event of their death, would their widows squander their wealth on impoverished gigolos who excited their physical interest? The best monument to the theme is in Samuel Richardson's *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions* (1740), titled "Letters from a Gentleman strenuously expostulating with an old rich widow about to marry a very young gay gentleman."

Churchmen also dwelt on the widow's follies in the advice literature of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Post-Tridentine reformers sought to channel widows' funds to philanthropic ends and to provide the widows themselves with a meaningful lifestyle through church-based activity. In these efforts they achieved some success. Many widows became founders of religious orders, using the wealth they had acquired through marriage. Louise de Marillac, widow of the de Gondi and foundress of the Sisters of Charity, and Jeanne de Chantal, widow and foundress of the Visitandines, are two conspicuous examples, but there were many more of lowlier origin. Other wealthy widows found occupation as *salonnières,* patrons of *philosophes,* and English bluestockings.

Most widows, however, were left in middle age with adolescent families and insufficient means to indulge their whims. Society expected the widow to bury her husband with decorum or honor; doing so might entail expenses that she could ill afford. The Irish wake, for example, which demanded that the widow give hospitality to a mourning village in commemoration of her lost husband, was widely decried by clerics, from the Bishop of Cashel downward, for ruining many poor women. Thereafter society's expectations of the widow were limited to an exercise of fortitude and an ability to pick up the pieces so as not to become with her children a burden on the parish.

The funeral over, the widow's debts were not necessarily paid. The guilds generally allowed a widow to continue production in her husband's name, provided that she paid the dues for doing so. Crucial to her survival in business was permission from the guild to retain apprentices, who were the cheapest form of labor. Few guilds allowed a widow to take on new apprentices, but if she was also prohibited from continuing with those indentured by her husband, she would almost certainly have to close shop.

No one ever assumed that a widow could do as well as her

husband had done. Hence journeymen and servants to whom debts were due now demanded settlement, adding further to the widow's problems. Many had to default, and the most conspicuous sufferers were servant girls, who failed to realize their accumulated wages. Once debts had been paid, the widow had to decide at what scale she could continue to operate. If the business demanded male physical strength, she was obliged by the guild to employ journeymen. British and Dutch women, for example, might try to carry on a family printing business, but the rules of the Stationers' Company insisted that a journeyman pull the press. Women could continue to run an undertaker's shop but had to employ men to carry the hearse. In any case a male presence was required in the rituals of death. In Geneva, the assembling of clocks had to be a male business, but the widow could keep the manufacture on her premises and take a role in the making of parts or the engraving of cases. Taken overall, the need to make good the husband's labor by paying for a substitute probably stripped over 90 percent of artisans' widows of the ability to keep their husband's business fully functioning.

Best tailored to cope with the eventuality of a husband's death was the family economy that included a small business, especially a tavern, a café bar, a victualler's shop, cake, pie, or muffin production, or a lodginghouse. Most of these activities lay outside guild regulation. The maidservant who on marriage did exactly what advice books recommended with an eye to an uncertain future and took on a small business was best protected, since these activities fell outside guild regulation. If, in the husband's lifetime, the business was only an ancillary part of the family economy, upon the death of the male partner the widow could look to the business for support, and the children could contribute to the enterprise. Hence a large number of taverns, cabarets, and refreshment stands were run by widows, with large numbers of widows' children selling hot pies and sweetmeats from trays in the street.

The widow thrown back on the work of her hands with children to support probably sank as low as it was possible to sink in the European economic hierarchy. She was heavily represented on poor lists and records of charities, and if charity was to be had—and there was nothing automatic about this—she was the most conspicuous candidate whose claims were universally acknowledged.

Spinsterhood

Permanent spinsters were not much better off than widows unless they had family members to provide support. The low level of female wages precluded an independent existence. Many single women clustered in towns, sharing garrets and sparse lodgings and serving as support networks to one another. Their exiguous wages left them with little or nothing to buttress them during sickness, unemployment, or old age. Some might find shelter in a brother's dwelling or serve as mother substitute to a relative's orphaned family, but the prospects were bleak, even for those with more than a rudimentary education. Mary Wollstonecraft considered the opportunities to be limited to governess, housekeeper, lady's companion, or mantua maker. Like a growing number of desperate middle-class women, Wollstonecraft turned to the pen; but the number of women who succeeded in making a living from their writings, even by the end of the eighteenth century, when Fanny Burney, Mme. de Stäel, and imminently Jane Austen had raised, or were transforming, the standard of female literature, can be counted on the fingers.

Outside the family and the allotted roles of daughter, wife, and mother, women existed against considerable odds. Independence, as Virginia Woolf observed much later, depended upon a private income and a room of one's own. The insistent location of "natural" woman within the family created enormous problems for women who had no family or who found the family inadequate to support them. In the long run, and increasingly by the end of the eighteenth century, it was the women who could or would not conform to the model roles imposed upon them who would force the pace of change. The happy ones or the ones who saw no alternative to their lot were not to be the history makers.