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LAWRENCE STONE

THE FAMILY, SEX AND MARRIAGE

In England 1500–1800

ABRIDGED EDITION

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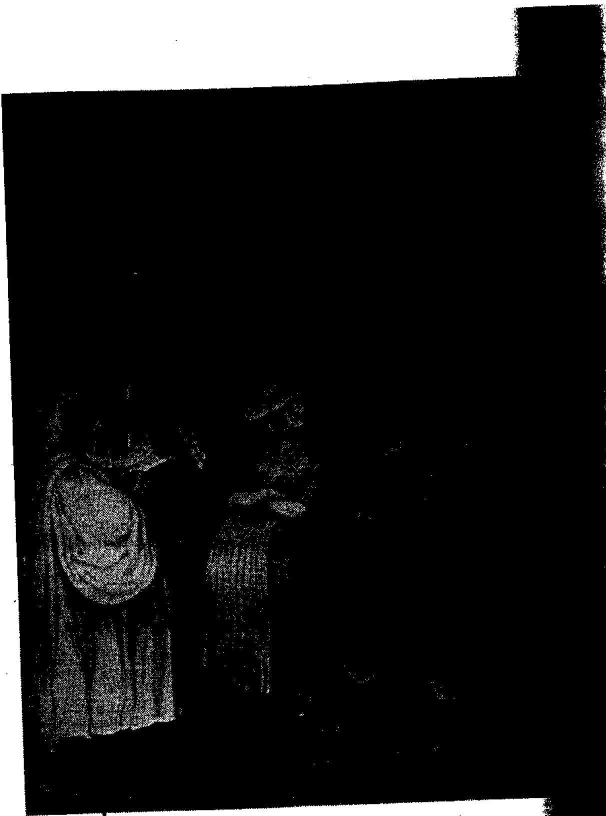

29. Pre-nuptial pregnancy: a shot-gun wedding, 1778.

30. Pre-nuptial pregnancy: a paternity claim, 1800.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Companionate Marriage

'I know or fancy that there are qualities and *compositions of qualities* (to talk in musical metaphor) which in the course of our lives appear to me in her [Mrs Boswell], that please me more than what I have perceived in any other woman, and which I cannot separate from her identity.'

(James Boswell in *Boswell: The Ominous Years, 1774–1776*, ed. C. Ryscamp and F. A. Pottle, New York, 1963, p. 290)

1. THE RISE OF THE COMPANIONATE MARRIAGE

The many legal, political and educational changes that took place in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were largely consequences of changes in ideas about the nature of marital relations. The increasing stress laid by the early seventeenth-century preachers on the need for companionship in marriage in the long run tended to undercut their own arguments in favour of the maintenance of strict wifely subjection and obedience. Once it was doubted that affection could and would naturally develop after marriage, decision-making power had to be transferred to the future spouses themselves, and more and more of them in the eighteenth century began to put the prospects of emotional satisfaction before the ambition for increased income or status. This in turn also had its effect in equalizing relationships between husband and wife.

In 1727, Daniel Defoe complained that still in his own time 'the money and the maidenhead is the subject of our meditations', the result being 'how much marriage, how little friendship'. But he believed that 'matrimony without love is the cart before the horse'. He recognized that this demand for love as the basis of marriage involved a fundamental change in power relations within the family. 'I don't take the state of matrimony to be designed . . . that the wife is to be used as an upper servant in the house . . . Love knows no

superior or inferior, no imperious command on the one hand, no reluctant subjection on the other.' He made the point that 'persons of a lower station are, generally speaking, much more happy in their marriages than Princes and persons of distinction. So I take much of it, if not all, to consist in the advantage they have to choose and refuse.' Defoe and others saw very clearly how a shift of control of marital choice from parents to children would have important effects upon marital relations thereafter.

It is significant of changing attitudes that one of the principal themes of George Farquhar's very successful play *The Beaux' Stratagem*, first produced in 1707, is that of the miseries of an unhappy marriage, in which the husband neglects his wife and spends all his time tippling with male companions. He makes Mrs Sullen give an inimitable description of her intolerable life, buried deep in the countryside with Squire Sullen, who never even speaks to her. 'He came home this morning at his usual hour of four, wakened me out of a sweet dream of something else by tumbling over the tea table, which he broke all to pieces. After his man and he had rolled about the room, like sick passengers in a storm, he comes flounce into bed, dead as a salmon into a fishmonger's basket, his feet cold as ice, his breath hot as a furnace, and his hands and face as greasy as his flannel night cap. O matrimony!' Deprived of friendship, conversation, companionship, sex and sleep by her sottish husband, her successful formal separation at the end of the play, with the enforced return by Squire Sullen of her marriage portion of £10,000, is clearly regarded as no more than moral justice.

For the English middle and upper classes in the middle of the eighteenth century, Mrs Hester Chapone summed up the prevailing opinion about the ideal relationship between husband and wife: 'I believe that a husband has a divine right to the absolute obedience of his wife in all cases where the first duties do not interfere.' On the other hand, 'I believe it . . . absolutely necessary to conjugal happiness that the husband have such an opinion of his wife's understanding, principles and integrity of heart as would induce him to exalt her to the rank of his *first and dearest friend*.' In 1740 Wetenhall Wilkes published *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady*, which ran to eight editions in the next twenty-six years. In it he further developed the view of the married state as an arena of domestic happiness. 'This state, with the affection suitable to it, is the completest image of heaven we can receive in this life; the

greatest pleasures we can enjoy on earth are the freedoms of conversation with a bosom friend . . . When two have chosen each other, out of all the species, with a design to be each other's mutual comfort and entertainment, . . . all the satisfactions of the one must be doubled because the other partakes in them.' Despite this high-flown and idealistic rhetoric, Wilkes took great care to spell out the limits of what was to be expected. 'The utmost happiness we can hope for in this world is contentment, and if we aim at anything higher, we shall meet with nothing but grief and disappointments.' He advised his readers to seek in a husband such qualities as 'a virtuous disposition, a good understanding, an even temper, an easy fortune, and an agreeable person'. He warned against marriage for money or title, stressed that the key quality was 'the temper', and advised that 'the conversation of a married couple cannot be agreeable for years together without an earnest endeavour to please on both sides'. On the whole, the advice Wilkes offered was prudent and sensible, and except for the fact that he avoids altogether the problem of compatibility of sexual tastes and demands, his book does not differ greatly from a modern marriage manual. Its success was symbolic of the new era in family relationships. In 1762 Dr John Gregory, in an equally popular treatise, wrote that 'I have always considered your sex, not as domestic drudges, or as the slaves of our pleasures, but as our companions and equals.' This was an uncompromising statement of the now conventional ideal of wifely status, the contemporary literary apotheosis of which is to be found in Oliver Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* of 1776. An early example of this new ideology among the landed elite is the monumental inscription at Yarnton, in Oxfordshire, to Catherine, wife of the Honourable George Mordaunt, who died in 1714. Her husband had inscribed on the slab a statement of his feelings recorded in marble for all time:

> With unavailing tears he mourns her end,
> Losing his double comfort, wife and friend.

Foreign observers had no doubt that by the second half of the eighteenth century there was a clear trend to companionate marriages, particularly in the upper and the lowest levels of society. Sophie von La Roche, who visited London in 1786, regarded it as a well-known fact that 'so many love-marriages are made in England', and was not at all surprised to learn at the lunatic asylum of Bedlam

that most of the young female inmates had been unhinged by thwarted love. This comment about the poor was supported by others about the rich. The Duc de La Rochefoucauld noted with surprise in 1784 that:

> Husband and wife are always together and share the same society. It is the rarest thing to meet the one without the other. The very richest people do not keep more than four or six carriage-horses, since they pay all their visits together. It would be more ridiculous to do otherwise in England than it would be to go everywhere with your wife in Paris. They always give the appearance of perfect harmony, and the wife in particular has an air of contentment which always gives me pleasure.

He observed that newly married couples immediately set up house on their own, often in a different town away from their parents, and concluded that 'the Englishman would rather have the love of the woman he loves than the love of his parents'.

More concrete evidence of change is provided by the abandonment in many circles of the formal seventeenth-century modes of address between husband and wife of 'Sir' and 'Madam', and the adoption of first names and terms of endearment. When Dorothy Osborne was writing her love letters to William Temple in the middle of the seventeenth century, she began by addressing him as 'Sir', and then later got around the problem by dropping any opening at all once they were formally engaged. At no time did she address him as 'William'. In 1707, immediately after his marriage, Richard Steele addressed his wife as 'Madam', but soon slid into 'Dear creature', 'My loved creature', 'My dear'. Within a few months, however, he was writing to her as 'Dear Prue'. In 1699 the conservative John Sprint objected to the practice of women calling their husbands by their first names, 'as if they esteemed them at no higher rates than their very servants', since it signified a lack of that deference and respect he was so anxious to preserve. His female opponent defended the practice as no more than 'the effect of tenderness and freedom which will banish all the names of haughty distance and servile subjection'. Around 1700 this issue of what to call a husband was clearly a widely debated issue, the conservatives realizing the egalitarian and anti-patriarchal implications of a change to the use of the first name by a wife to a husband.

During this transitional period of the early eighteenth century, the mode of address can be deceptive and may be a poor index of the

true relationship between man and wife. In 1732 Catherine Banks ended her letters to her husband Joseph with 'I am, dear Mr Banks, your most affectionate C. Banks'. Two years later, however, when her husband was in Bath for his health, we find him writing to his 'dear Kitty' six days a week, and when in the same year she gave birth to a boy, he declared 'I . . . hope we three shall make each others' days happier.' The pursuit of personal happiness through domestic intimacy was clearly uppermost in the mind of her husband, despite the continued use on his wife's part of the old formal mode of address. By the end of the century this formality had gone, and in 1797 Thomas Gisborne noted with satisfaction that 'the stiffness, the proud and artificial reserve, which in former ages infected even the intercourse of private life, are happily discarded'. It was, however, to return later.

The hardest evidence for a decline in the near-absolute authority of the husband over the wife among the propertied classes is an admittedly limited series of changes in the power of the former to control the latter's estate and income. The seventeenth century saw a sharp rise in the size of marriage portions paid by the bride's parents to the groom's parents. This rise meant an increase in the economic stakes in marriage, and so enhanced the position of the wife. By her marriage portion she was now making a major economic contribution to her husband's finances. This was because in the eighteenth century the portion was normally invested in land to be settled on the young couple, whereas in earlier centuries it had gone straight into the pocket of the groom's father. Moreover the introduction of the practice of inserting into the marriage contract a clause about pin money now guaranteed the wife an independent fixed income at her exclusive disposal. The property of widows and heiresses was also now more carefully safeguarded against seizure and exploitation by the future husband. After 1620 the Court of Chancery intervened to enforce marriage contracts, and over the next fifty years, by judicial interpretation and practice, it virtually succeeded in creating the legal doctrine of the wife's separate estate. For the commercial classes this was a welcome development, since it provided some protection against total loss from bankruptcy proceedings.

It must be emphasized that these improvements in the legal position of married women only affected those restricted social groups whose marriages were accompanied by a legal settlement, and who

could, if necessary, afford the cost of launching a suit in the Court of Chancery. Even so, the financial position of some of the highest women in the country was very precarious. Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire could secretly run up huge debts for which her husband would be responsible, but she owned nothing of her own. When she wrote her will in 1792 she had to ask the Duke's permission to bequeath a few trinkets to personal friends to remember her by, since 'everything I have is yours'.

For the vast majority of the population, including all the poor, the limited safeguards offered to wealthy women were unknown. As Blackstone put it bluntly, 'the husband and wife are one, and the husband is that one'. As late as 1869 John Stuart Mill could accurately describe the legal position of most women in England as one of total dependence on their husbands. In terms of property, they could acquire nothing which did not automatically become their husbands'. 'The absorption of all rights, all property, as well as all freedom of action is complete. The two are called "one person in law", for the purpose of inferring that whatever is hers is his.' Similarly, by law the children belonged solely to the husband, and even after his death the widow had no rights over them, unless she was made their guardian in his will. If she should desert him, however severe the provocation, she could take nothing with her, neither her children nor her property. Her husband could, if he chose, compel her to return. Or he could at any time seize any income she might earn, or any means of support given to her by others. Only a legal separation, the cost of which put it beyond the reach of the majority, gave any protection to the deserting or deserted wife, and even then, before a change in the law in 1839, she had no claim upon her children unless her husband wanted to get rid of them. Moreover, in other ways the wife remained in a legally inferior status. A man convicted of murdering his wife would be hanged, but a woman convicted of murdering her husband would by law be burned alive. This barbarous penalty was in practice disappearing in the eighteenth century, but a woman was burned alive at Tyburn for this crime as late as 1725.

Although statistical proof is lacking, one gets a distinct impression that wives married to impossible husbands in the upper classes were increasingly seeking formal separations, accompanied by adequate financial provisions which allowed them to continue to live active and satisfying social lives. Formal separations certainly

became more common, and in January 1766 the newspaper gossip alleged – as usual with exaggeration – that seventeen couples in the world of fashion were on the point of breaking up. Paradoxically enough, the rise of separations in the eighteenth century, like the rise of divorces in the twentieth, is an indication of rising emotional expectations from marriage. In periods when expectations are low, frustrations will also be low. Nor were separations always taken too seriously by high society when they did occur. In the 1760s Lady Sarah Lennox reported that 'The Duke and Duchess of Grafton are absolutely parted; he allows her £3,000 a year. She has the girl and the youngest boy with her, and they say that the reason of their parting is only that their tempers don't suit.' The extremely generous terms of the separation, with the mother keeping the girl and the youngest child and so handsome an allowance, led Lady Sarah to think 'they would soon be friends again'.

One revealing indication of the rise of the concept of privacy and the rise of companionate and sexually bonded marriage is the new definition of the old word 'honeymoon'. Previously taken to mean no more than the month after marriage, characterized by goodwill and perhaps sexual passion, it was now re-defined as a period during which the newly married couple were expected to go away together and to be left totally alone in order to explore each other's bodies and minds without outside support or interference. In upper- and middle-class society where so much stress was laid on pre-marital virginity, the bridal night in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been surrounded with ritual, much of it public. The pair were brought to the bedroom in state by the relatives and friends, often accompanied with horse-play and ribald jests, and were only left alone (perhaps for the first time in their lives) once the curtains of the four-poster bed were closed and the last wedding guest and maid had withdrawn. Even then the ritual continued, for it was apparently customary on this occasion for the bride to go to bed in gloves. When in 1708 a protesting girl sent a letter to the correspondence column of *The British Apollo*, she was told that 'since it is the custom and fashion to go into the bridal bed with gloves on, we think it not genteel to go to bed without'. One assumes that the gloves were subsequently removed, to symbolize the loss of virginity. The details of that loss were something about which the pair could often expect to be closely questioned the next morning. The concept of the honeymoon as a period of holiday travel certainly existed by the end

of the eighteenth century, but it is far less certain that there was general recognition of the importance of privacy and isolation, which is central to modern ideas about this experience. An early example occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century, when Mr West told Mrs Elizabeth Montagu how William Pitt and his new wife were living privately by themselves at Wickham for a few weeks for 'the free course of those pleasures which for a time at least possess the whole mind, and are most relished when most private'.

In some wealthy and near-wealthy aristocratic circles, however, marriage and its aftermath in the eighteenth century were as much a public affair as they had ever been. In 1756 John Spencer, the wealthy heir to the Spencer barony, married Margaret Georgiana Poyntz, and the groom's mother insisted on the most extravagant display. After the wedding, the party set out from Althorp for Lon-don in three six-horse coaches accompanied by two hundred horse-men. So alarming was the cavalcade that villagers on the road assumed that it was a French invasion, and either turned out with pitchforks to fight the enemy, or barricaded themselves in their houses. It is significant, however, that all this publicity was 'quite disagreeable to both the young people'.

All this was a far cry from the very private wedding of Mary Thackeray to Mr Pryme of Cambridge in 1813, followed by a lengthy, solitary honeymoon in hotels in London, Brighton and Worthing. But even then this isolation was unusual, and a chaperone was common. When Elizabeth Robinson married Edward Montagu in 1742, they were accompanied on their honeymoon tour by her sister Sarah, and late eighteenth-century novelists confirm the persistence of this pat-tern in wealthy circles. Thus Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park* makes Mr and Mrs Rushworth go to Brighton for some weeks after their marriage, the latter being accompanied by her sister Julia, 'each of them exceedingly glad to be with the other at such a time'. The need for supportive female assistance in this time of psychological and physiological crisis shows how strong was the social attraction of each sex for its own company, even in those days of the companion-ate marriage. It was not until 1846 that an upper-class marriage manual commented, as a relative novelty, that 'the young couple take their journey, as is now the fashion, in a tête-à-tête'.

2. EARLY FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

The companionate marriage demanded a reassessment of power relations between the sexes since it depended on a greater sense of equality and sharing. Consequently, the early feminist movements have a place in this story, even if one concludes in the end that they were largely abortive and without much influence in changing public attitudes.

During the Civil War of the 1640s, women played a very promi-nent role in the host of radical sects which based themselves on the extreme interpretation of the doctrine of Grace. In these independent churches, women were at last allowed to debate, to vote, to prophesy when moved by the Spirit, and even to preach. Many left the former family church without the consent of their husbands, and some even abandoned their unregenerate spouses and chose new mates who shared their new-found faith. Their opponents saw these developments as a threat to family subordination, claiming that they were demanding sexual equality of rights:

> We will not be wives
> And tie up our lives
> To villanous slavery.

What is more remarkable, however, is the way the breakdown of royal government in 1640, the prolonged political crisis between King and parliament of 1640–42, the Civil Wars of 1642–8, and the emergence of many extremist independent sects and of a genuinely radical political party, stimulated the women of London and else-where to unprecedented political activity. On 31 January and 1 and 4 February 1642, women, operating without help from fathers, hus-bands or other males, took independent political action on the national level as women, for the first time in English history: they petitioned the Houses of Lords and Commons for a change of public policy. They numbered some four hundred or more, and were ap-parently composed of working women, artisans, shop-girls and labourers, who were suffering severe financial hardship as a result of the decay of trade. When the outraged Duke of Richmond cried 'Away with these women, we were best have a Parliament of women', the petitioners attacked him physically and broke his staff of office.

Another crisis came in April and May 1649 when very severe economic hardship coincided with a political showdown between the army and Parliament and the London-based lower-middle-class radical movement of the Levellers. Once again masses of women assembled at Westminster, complaining of the economic crisis and demanding the release of the Leveller leaders who had been imprisoned. This time the House responded with disdain, telling the women that they were petitioning about matters above their heads, that Parliament had given an answer to their husbands, who legally represented them, and that they should 'go home and look after your own business and meddle with your housewifery'.

By now, however, the women were not satisfied with these patronizing replies and were making statements which revealed the development of a wholly new level of feminine consciousness. 'The lusty lasses of the Levelling party' were now claiming equal participation with men in the political process, and were backing up their claims with petitions signed, so they said, by up to ten thousand women. In 1642 the petitioners had humbly emphasized that women were not 'seeking to equal ourselves with men, either in authority or wisdom', but merely 'following the example of the men which have gone ... before us'; moreover, they frankly admitted that their intervention 'may be thought strange and unbeseeming our sex.' By 1649, however, they were rejecting the idea that they were represented by their husbands: 'we are no whit satisfied with the answer you gave unto our husbands'. They coolly faced a barrage of criticism that they were claiming to 'wear the breeches', and that 'it can never be a good world when women meddle in state's matters ... their husbands are to blame, that they have no fitter employment for them'. In reply the women quoted the example of Esther from the Bible and even rewrote history to argue that 'by the British women the land was delivered from the tyranny of the Danes ... and the overthrow of episcopal tyranny in Scotland was first begun by the women of that nation'. They claimed an equal share with men in the right ordering of the Church 'because in the free enjoying of Christ in his own laws, and a flourishing estate in the Church ... consisteth the happiness of women as well as men'. This principle they then extended to the state: 'we have an equal share and interest with men in the Commonwealth', a claim which logically led to a demand for female voting rights. But 1649 was the apogee of this movement towards women's political liberation, and it is very

noticeable that even the Leveller leaders always excluded women from their proposals for a greatly enlarged suffrage. This feminine agitation at a time of temporary breakdown of law and order should, therefore, best be seen as a symptom rather than as a cause. The episode is significant as the first emergence on a mass level of feminist ideas among an artisan urban population, but it was a movement without a future.

New claims concerning the status and rights of women were set in motion by the repudiation of monarchical patriarchy in the state in 1688, and were publicized by a handful of zealous feminists at the end of the seventeenth century. Most notable among them were Hannah Woolley, Aphra Behn, Mary Astell and Lady Chudleigh.

Few were as savage as the last, in her poem of 1703 addressed 'To the Ladies':

> Wife and servant are the same,
> But only differ in the name
>
> . . . .
>
> When she the word 'obey' has said,
> And man by law supreme has made,
>
> . . . .
>
> Fierce as an Eastern Prince he grows
> And all his innate rigor shows.
>
> . . . .
>
> Then shun, oh shun that wretched state
> And all the fawning flatterers hate.
> Value yourselves and men despise:
> You must be proud if you'll be wise.

The rise of the blue-stockings a century later as leaders of salons which included the most distinguished intellects and wits of London is proof of how at any rate some women were now forcing themselves upon male society and holding their own there. At the same time, inspired first by the American and then by the French Revolution, there emerged a new wave of feminists far more radical in their demands, their personal behaviour and their religious attitudes than their predecessors had been a century earlier. The most prominent among them was Mary Wollstonecraft, who probably did the cause of women's rights positive harm, for her passionate claim to sexual equality, together with her sympathy for the French Revolution and her irregular personal life, merely alienated the support of all but the most tolerant of men. It was this combination of radicalism in both

national and sexual politics that drove Horace Walpole to describe her as 'that hyena in petticoats'.

It is hard to see that any of these feminist movements of the seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries had much effect in changing attitudes towards relations between the sexes. Consciousness of the problem of sexual equality was certainly aroused by them, but the fears engendered in men by these indignant women may have inhibited change rather than speeded it up.

3. THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN

In view of the greater degree of companionship in marriage that was developing in the eighteenth century, it is not surprising that considerable, and in the long run successful, efforts were made to improve the quality and quantity of female education among the upper classes.

When serious pressure for a better education for women began in about 1675, it was led by a group of middle-class women, with a little male help from John Locke, William Law and Jonathan Swift addressing the gentry and from John Dunton and Daniel Defoe addressing the bourgeoisie. Mrs Woolley, who had herself been the mistress of a school, a governess, and the wife of a free-school usher, expressed her feelings on this subject in a bitter pamphlet in 1675: 'Vain man is apt to think we were merely intended for the world's propagation, and to keep its human inhabitants sweet and clean, but, by their leaves, had we the same literature, he would find our brains as fruitful as our bodies ... Most in this depraved age think a woman learned enough if she can distinguish her husband's bed from another's.' In 1706 Mary Astell put forward the argument that men were destroying the possibility of marital companionship by depriving girls of a good education. 'How can a man respect his wife when he has a contemptible opinion of her and her sex ... so that folly and a woman are equivalent terms with him?' These women were no wild-eyed political or moral radicals, but devout Christians of impeccable virtue, and loyal subscribers to the standard doctrines about the naturally subordinate role of wives. All they wanted to see was their sex better prepared to be companions with their husbands.

One of the few late seventeenth-century male advocates of a more academic education for women was John Locke, who geared his plan

not to companionate marriage but to improving the capacity of women to educate their children for the first eight or ten years. He therefore wanted them to be able to 'read English perfectly, to understand ordinary Latin and arithmetic, with some general knowledge of chronology and history'. But in upper-class households, the education was often left to governesses and tutors, and even Locke was forced to admit that there was 'an apprehension that should daughters be perceived to understand any learned language or be conversant in books, they might be in danger of not finding husbands, so few men, as do, relishing these accomplishments in a lady'.

Naturally enough, most men who publicly advocated a better education for women preferred Mrs Astell's argument that it would be to the benefit of husbands. 'I would have men take women for companions, and educate them to be fit for it,' said Defoe. He foresaw a millennium of domestic bliss that would result from improved female education. 'A woman well bred and taught, furnished with the additional accomplishments of knowledge and behaviour, is a creature without comparison ... She is all softness and sweetness, peace, love, wit and delight. She is in every way suitable to the sublimest wish, and the man that had such a one to his portion has nothing to do but to rejoice in her and be thankful.'

It is very doubtful whether this barrage of propaganda had much effect on improving female education before the middle of the eighteenth century, even though it was based on the self-interest of husbands. Male education had been shifting from the intensely scholarly classical education of the late sixteenth century to the shallower and more aesthetic training in the seventeenth century of the 'virtuoso', a dabbler in many arts and sciences. Similarly, the standard female education among the aristocratic elite had also become more purely ornamental. In the 1670s Anne Barrett-Lennard, who came from a very wealthy noble family, was regarded as very well bred. She had been taught singing by the famous Signor Morelli, and she could speak and read French and Italian. Her cousin Roger North considered her a highly educated woman, even though she apparently knew nothing of the classics, history, mathematics or the sciences. What he admired was her 'exceeding obliging temper' and 'a more than ordinary wit and fluency of discourse'.

Boarding-schools for girls had been fairly common in the seventeenth century, specializing in training in the social graces which it was thought would enable women both to attract husbands and to

occupy their leisure hours once they were married. At a school run by a Mr Playford at Islington, 'the young gentlewomen may be instructed in all manner of curious work, as also reading, writing, music, dancing and the French language'. The 'curious work', which tended to bulk so large in the curriculum in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, consisted of embroidery and needlework, paper-cutting, wax-work, japanning, painting on glass, patchwork, shell-work, mosswork, feather-work, and similar time-consuming trivia, while the arts of housekeeping and polite conversation also figured prominently. It was a busy education, but not an intellectual one, being rather concerned with 'everything that was genteel and fashionable', and designed to provide time-consuming occupations for women of infinite leisure.

Like the private schools and academies for boys, which were growing rapidly in number throughout the eighteenth century, boarding-schools for girls also increased, so much so that it was alleged that in 1759 around London '2 or 3 houses might be seen in almost every village with the inscription "Young Ladies Boarded and Educated"' written in gold letters on a blue signboard. But the education these little schools provided in the early eighteenth century was no more intellectual than that of the seventeenth century. It was still primarily concerned with instruction in the social graces and such lady-like pastimes as embroidery and needlework.

Writing in the 1820s, Lady Louisa Stuart thought that in the first decades of the eighteenth century, 'the education of women had then reached its lowest ebb, and if not coquettes or gossips or diligent card-players, their best praise was to be diligent housewives'. The old school of seventeenth-century gentlewomen had been brought up to believe that they should occupy all their leisure time with needle-work. The new generation of the early eighteenth century were still taught some of these skills, but tended to abandon them once they were out of school. They were as ignorant as their grandmothers, but now devoted themselves to parties, visits, cards, and the theatre – pursuits that characterized a far more leisure-oriented and pleasure-loving society. In 1714 an angry woman wrote bitterly about the life-style of her young nieces. 'Those hours which in this age are thrown away in dress, plays, visits and the like, were employed in my time in writing out recipes or working beds, chairs and hangings for the family. For my part I have plied my needle these fifty years, and by my good will would never have it out of my hand.

grieves my heart to see a couple of proud idle flirts sipping their a for a whole afternoon in a room hung around with the industry f their great-grandmother.' She was deploring the decline of the uritan ethic of useful work among gentlewomen in the early ghteenth century, but had no vision of how their endless leisure ours could be put to more rewarding use.

One reason for the persistence of deportment in the boarding-chool curriculum was that some of these establishments were now lling up with the daughters of the prosperous London bourgeoisie nd professional men, and what these parents were seeking in return or their money was precisely training in the manners, graces and kills of a lady. By 1775 it was alleged that some of these schools ow catered for the daughter of 'the blacksmith, the ale-house keeper, the shoemaker etc, who from the moment she enters these walls becomes a young lady'. Satires like D'Urfey's *Love for Money, or the Boarding School* of 1691 were quite incapable of stopping the rend, and indeed Defoe's plans in some ways tended in precisely his direction.

There is good reason to think that slowly over the eighteenth century their recommendations took effect, and the success of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* in the first decade of the eighteenth century roves that there was a market, female as well as male, for semi-erious periodical literature on subjects of current interest. By 1770 he feminine reading market was now so large that there appeared he first successful women's periodical, *The Ladies' Magazine, or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex*, while the sales and circulation of novels, written mostly for and often by women, continued to soar. 'All our ladies read now, which is a great extension,' commented Dr Johnson in 1778. As a result, he believed that 'the ladies of the present age ... were more faithful to their husbands, and more virtuous in every respect than in former times, because their understandings were better cultivated'.

Contemporaries were well aware that things had improved. In 1753 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu contrasted favourably the current educational advantages of her grandchildren with those available in her own day. One of the best late eighteenth-century schools for girls was that run by the Misses Lee at Bath. Sarah Butt, the daughter of a wealthy naval doctor, was sent to the school in 1798 at the age of fifteen. It was a big school with fifty-two boarders and over twenty day-girls, a permanent staff of five and other specialist teachers. The

curriculum covered the traditional areas of feminine deportment, namely music, dancing, drawing and needlework. But equal stress was laid on the more academic aspects of the curriculum, which included writing and grammar, arithmetic, geography and French. So seriously was French taken that it was the only language which was allowed to be spoken during working hours. This was because 'to speak French is necessary in order to appear genteel'.

By the end of the eighteenth century a consensus was emerging about the ideal education for women from the landed classes and from the higher ranks of the bourgeoisie. She was neither the frivolous, party-going, neglectful mother and possibly adulterous wife of the aristocracy, nor the middle-class intellectual blue-stocking who challenged and threatened men on their own ground of the classics. She was a well-informed and motivated woman with the educational training and the internalized desire to devote her life partly to pleasing her husband and providing him with friendship and intelligent companionship, partly to the efficient supervision of servants and domestic arrangements; and partly to educating her children in ways appropriate for their future. The girls stayed under her care for a prolonged period, so that she was well placed to mould them into her own useful but subordinate sex-role; the boys stayed until the age of seven, when they passed under masculine control of tutors and schoolmasters. The education of women now covered a broad sweep of subjects, including history, geography, literature and current affairs, and some women were now boasting, with reason, of the positive superiority of their education over the narrow classical linguistic training of their brothers. In 1790 *The Ladies Monthly Magazine* claimed that 'many women have received a much better education than Shakespeare enjoyed'. 'Boys at grammar school,' remarked Mrs Eliza Fox, 'are taught Latin and Greek, despise the simpler paths of learning, and are generally ignorant of really useful matters of fact, about which a girl is much better informed.' The change in women's consciousness from a humiliating sense of their educational inferiority in 1700 to a proud claim to educational superiority in 1810 is little short of revolutionary. Men also admitted the change, and in 1791 *The Gentleman's Magazine* could observe that 'at present ... the fair sex has asserted its rank, and challenged that natural equality of intellect which nothing but the influence of human institutions could have concealed for a moment'. The standard male attitude towards women's intel-

ctual capacities had also been significantly modified over the evious half century.

It seems likely that this broader education of women must have ayed its part in leading to demands for greater freedom of choice mate-selection and a greater share in family decision-making. It rtainly resulted in a greater capacity to participate in the life and oblems of the husband, and it probably also resulted in a more laxed attitude toward sexuality within marriage, and a greater esire to restrict births. On the other hand, it presupposed a growg number of women wholly withdrawn from productive work and ith a great deal of enforced leisure on their hands. There is no oubt whatever that large numbers of bourgeois and even lower-iddle-class wives were now being educated like their social periors for a life of leisure, and were being withdrawn from useful onomic employment in their husbands' businesses. As Dr Gregory plained in 1762, 'the intention of your being taught needlework, nitting and such like is not on account of the intrinsic value of all ou can do with your hands, which is trifling, but to enable you ... fill up, in a tolerably agreeable way, some of the many solitary ours you must necessarily pass at home'.

The improved education of upper- and middle-class women during e eighteenth century transformed English culture, stimulating not ly the novel, but also the provincial theatre and the circulating rary. It greatly increased the companionship element in marriage, w that wives were as well read as their husbands in all fields ex-pt the classics. But it carried a cost in increased female idleness d withdrawal from the world of work. This may not have mat-ed too much to happily married women, but to the growing mber of life-long spinsters, it was a catastrophe.

4. CASE HISTORIES

e study of intimate domestic relations involves probing into an ea of the human psyche where it is extremely difficult, and some-mes impossible, to distinguish reality from image, fact from fiction. is is particularly the case when, as is usual, there has survived only one-sided record of the relationship, sometimes written down im-diately in a diary or in letters, and sometimes reconstructed later an autobiography. Even if the facts are accurately reported, human

feelings are so changeable and evanescent that interpretation of them is a most hazardous exercise.

Take, for example, the bare facts – which are all we know – of the story of the two marriages of Captain Yeo in the mid-eighteenth century. Most of the period of his first marriage was spent at sea, where he reached the rank of captain in command of a ship. In the home, on the rare occasions he was there, he was 'a bashaw, whose single nod of disapprobation struck terror into the whole family'. And yet when he heard that his wife was dangerously ill at Plymouth, he steered his ship immediately for harbour, in defiance of Admiralty orders. He arrived at Plymouth just too late, for his wife was dead and her funeral had taken place a few hours earlier. He promptly indulged in the romantic gesture of having the coffin dug up again and opened so that he could take one last look at the face of his dead wife. For the serious breach of naval discipline by directing his ship to Plymouth without permission, Captain Yeo was punished by having to wait for nine years before again being given a command at sea.

So far, the story appears to be one of remarkable marital devotion, exercised at the cost of the ruin of a professional career. A mere nine weeks later, however, he married again, with 'a giggling girl of nineteen' who bore him five more children. It is an extraordinary story, and it is hard to know how to evaluate the motives of the captain and his true feelings for his first wife and the children he had by her. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that we only know the story as it is told by his daughter, who actively disliked her father.

There is good reason to suppose that Oliver Goldsmith's model of the ideal companionate marriage first developed as a norm among the more pious, often nonconformist, middle-class families of the late seventeenth century. The Presbyterian Richard Baxter and his wife married one another, not with a view to worldly advancement, but for their personal qualities. When his wife died in 1681, Baxter wrote her biography, in which he departed wholly from the traditional patriarchal attitude to women of early seventeenth-century society and of most of his contemporaries. He freely admitted that in practical matters, 'her apprehension ... was so much quicker and more discerning than mine ... I am not ashamed to have been much ruled by her prudent love in many things'. He even confessed that she told him – rightly – that he wrote too much, too superficially. He

was also unusual in giving her free control of the disposal of her own fortune. When it was all over and she was dead, he wrote that 'these near nineteen years I know not that we ever had any breach in the point of love, or point of interest'. The Baxters clearly enjoyed a most intimate spiritual, intellectual and emotional relationship.

When the struggling Grub-street writer Richard Steele married in 1707, his affection for his new wife knew no bounds and broke through all the barriers of austere seventeenth-century convention. 'There are not words to express the tenderness I have for you,' he wrote in 1708. Two years later, 'I know no happiness in this life in any degree comparable to the pleasure I have in your person and society.' In 1716, nine years after marriage, he was still telling his wife 'I love you to distraction', including his four children in a paean of praise for the pleasures of domestic felicity. Unfortunately, however, these emotions were not fully shared by his wife, who soon became exasperated by Steele's financial irresponsibility, and the last years before her death in 1718 were full of tension caused by what Steele over-optimistically brushed aside as the 'little heats that have sometimes happened between us'. For all this, however, Steele's frank and open demonstrations and assertions of love over a long period of years are clearly not hypocritical and are in striking contrast to the formal relations that were so carefully maintained in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. What makes them historically important is his influence in moulding eighteenth-century squirarchy attitudes to love and marriage through the pages of *The Tatler*.

An important distinction has to be made between the life-style and familial arrangements of smallholders, shopkeepers, artisans and the labour aristocracy on the one hand, and the masses of the propertyless labouring poor on the other. The former group, anxious to preserve its precarious economic foothold one rung above the poor, were probably more concerned with capital and property accumulation as a motive for marriage than any other group in society except the highest aristocracy. Prevailing affective relations between spouses were symbolized by the customary behaviour of the nineteenth-century French peasant, who gave 'his arm to his wife the day of their marriage for the first and last time'. The small shopkeepers, tradesmen and artisans in the towns were equally dependent on capital to get a start in life, and therefore equally influenced by material as much as affective considerations in marriage. Moreover,

this was a social group much at the mercy of economic circum-
stances, which could very easily go wrong, and as a result plunge the
whole family into embittered misery. Financial disaster was ex-
tremely common among them in the eighteenth century, the debtors'
prison was an ever present threat, and the consequence of imprudent
marriage could easily be

> a smoky house, a failing trade
> Six squalling brats and a scolding jade,

as the late eighteenth-century caricaturist James Gillray described
Les Plaisirs de Marriage.

Some indication of the complexities of the situation is provided
by the story of Thomas Wright. A poor Methodist, Thomas Wright's
first attempt at courting was when he visited a young woman 'after
the family were gone to bed', while his companion wooed the maid-
servant. It was not a pleasurable experience and years later Wright
remembered that 'I was terribly embarrassed to keep up the con-
versation, she not being a very talkative girl.' She was probably dis-
appointed at Wright's lack of sexual enterprise during the long night
for she later became pregnant by another suitor, followed by a
forced wedding, unhappy married life, and early death: 'Farewell
poor Nancy Hopkinson.' Wright's next, more serious, attempt at
courting turned out no better. The girl became pregnant by an ap-
prentice, but her parents refused to let her marry him. The child was
born but fortunately died. She later married and had six children,
but cuckolded her husband, who therefore left her, went off to Lon-
don and bigamously married another wife, which was easy enough to
do in the eighteenth century. Despite overtures from two girls and
one widow, Wright finally fell in love with an eleven-year-old, Miss
Birkhead. He waited several years for her to grow up, although at
some point he was also courting another girl. But in 1766, when she
was still only nineteen, he proposed to Miss Birkhead and was ac-
cepted. Since her parents were opposed to the marriage because of
Wright's lack of financial prospects, the pair ran away to Scotland
and were married in an inn by a minister for a fee of two guineas.

The marriage turned out badly. His wife's parents never forgave
him for the elopement, particularly since they found themselves
obliged to lend him £100, interest free, to buy a lease of a small
farm. But they succeeded, according to Wright, in alienating his
wife's affection for him, while to add to his matrimonial troubles she

took to drink, so much so that at one stage a gallon of rum a week
was being consumed in the house. In 1777, eleven years after he
married her, she died of galloping consumption, having given birth
to seven children, three of whom died young.

After a lot of trouble with two thievish and drunken housekeepers
who cost him some £50, Wright finally realized that he had no
option but to remarry. The motives which guided his choice were
illuminating:

> Some people advised me to marry an old woman that would have no
> more children, and talked in such a manner as if they supposed that I
> might accommodate my fancy and affection to any old creature, with as
> much ease as I might choose a joint of meat to get my dinner upon. These
> people seemed to think, that if a person has been married once, and got
> some children, he must have lost all the finer feelings of the human heart;
> or, at least, that he could be justified by no other motives to a future mar-
> riage, than those mean and sordid ones, interest and convenience . . . I
> therefore chose to take a young woman whom I could love, and with
> whom I could be happy, though attended with almost a certainty of being
> encumbered with more children, rather than take an old woman, to avoid
> that inconvenience, whom I could not love, and with whom I could not
> be happy.

So in 1781 after four years of widowhood and at the age of forty-
five, he married the fifteen-and-a-half-year-old daughter of a neigh-
bouring farmer, who 'had got a tolerable education, had very good
hands, was very ingenious, solid and sensible'. The growing family,
and the total hostility of the parents of his first wife, helped to drive
him into deeper financial difficulties than ever, but he claimed that
he judged them worth it. As Wright tells the story, the desire for love
and affection were uppermost in his mind in both his marriages, even
if the first disappointed his expectations, and the second added to
his financial troubles.

The picture of married life among the lower-middle classes as pre-
sented in this randomly preserved record is a reasonably consistent
one, in which economic calculation played an important part, but in
which much weight was given to the often thwarted expectation of
domestic felicity. This is a view supported by George Crabbe, the
poet. He thought that although romantic love was almost unknown
among the rural smallholder, companionship was common enough.
He approvingly described a couple

Blessed in each other, but to no excess,
Health, quiet, comfort form'd their happiness.
Love, all made up of torture and delight
Was but mere madness in this couple's sight.

The same he thought was true of the more substantial tenant and freehold farmers.

Our farmers too, what though they fail to prove
In Hymen's bonds the tenderest slaves to love
. . . .
Yet, coarsely kind and comfortable gay,
They heap the board and hail the happy day.

The urban tradesmen and artisans and the rural smallholders of the late eighteenth century were thus probably largely unaffected by the new demands of love, generated among their betters by the romantic movement of the age, although they had recognized the need for companionship as well as for economic partnership. As Crabbe pointed out, they therefore avoided some of the inevitable disappointments that accompanied the sharp rise among the upper-middle classes in expectations from the married state. In *Mansfield Park*, Jane Austen makes Mary Crawford, as the spokeswoman for worldly wisdom, declare that 'there is not one in a hundred of either sex who is not taken in when they marry. Look where I will, I see that it is so, and I feel that it *must* be so, when I consider that it is, of all transactions, the one in which people expect most from others and are least honest themselves.' There was undoubtedly a good deal of truth in her diagnosis of the practical results of romantic aspirations upon marriage arrangements. There was a very marked contrast between mid-seventeenth-century patriarchy and late eighteenth-century romanticism, and the result among the upper classes was confusion and a wide diversity of ideal models of behaviour. Lower down the social scale, the contrast and the confusion were far less severe.

It is not hard to find examples of affectionate couples among the upper squirarchy and nobility at any time in history; indeed, it would be surprising if this was not the case. But a purely subjective impression – and it can be no more – is that the proportion of such couples increased in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in the last half of the eighteenth century. But since we are dealing with real life, most cases are full of ambivalence. For example, Elizabeth and Richard Leigh of Lyme addressed each other in the fondest of terms in the 1660s – 'my dearest dear', 'my dear dear', etc., – but they had no compunction whatever twenty years later in putting very great pressure on their daughters to make loveless but financially and socially advantageous marriages.

Another case concerns the Duke of Newcastle and Henrietta Godolphin, whom he married in 1716. Despite the fact that this was a purely arranged marriage for money on the one side – the Duke had heavy debts to be liquidated – and for the social prestige of a dukedom on the other, the subsequent relations between the couple turned out exceptionally well, at any rate for Newcastle. The latter's political business kept him mostly in London and therefore often separated from his wife, but within two years he was writing the most affectionate letters to 'my dearest girl'. In 1759, after forty-four years of childless marriage, the now elderly pair had a serious quarrel, and the Duke wrote to 'Harriot' in near despair. 'Be the same to me as you ever was. For God's sake, my dear, consider the many happy years we have by the mercy of God had together, how much our mutual happiness depends on each other. You know, you must know, how much, how sincerely, I love and esteem you. You must know that if once your affection, your dear warm heart, is altered to me, I shall never have a happy moment afterwards. All other uneasiness and affliction I can get over; from that I never can, and that is *the most solemn truth*.' This was a marriage that began as a mere mercenary arrangement, but turned out to be truly companionate, except that the pair were separated for very long periods, she in the country occupied with music and card-playing, he in London absorbed in political patronage manipulation.

By the late eighteenth century, arranged marriages for money had fallen into disrepute. In 1776 Lady Sarah Lennox commented on an unhappy marriage that 'he had no more business to marry a girl he did not like than she had to accept of a man she was totally indifferent to'. This was a position to which she had arrived by bitter experience, having married at seventeen a man she could cheerfully accept and with whom she got on reasonably well. But there were no children, and her husband, though very fond of her, yet loved his racehorses more. She became dissatisfied and flirtatious, and, after six years of marriage, she eloped with a lover, only to leave him within a year to live in seclusion with her daughter by him.

A final example of the companionate marriage of the eighteenth

century is that of Mary Hamilton, who was born in 1756. At the age of seventeen when she first came onto the marriage market, her guardian gave her some sound advice: not to accept the first suitor for fear of never having another and in hopes that 'love is to come afterwards', 'never to enter into engagements without the consent of her parents and friends', but also never to 'take the man her friends desire without consulting her own heart'. Hotly pursued by the Prince of Wales (later George IV), she rejected his amorous advances, but agreed to be his platonic friend and adviser. Finally, at the age of twenty-eight, she fell passionately in love with a suitably rich and virtuous young man, John Dickinson. She told him 'how much I love you', and a year later in 1785, soon after they married, she wrote, 'I love you as much as it is possible for one human creature to love another.' When a daughter was born a year later, she lavished similar affection and attention on 'our dear girl'. It was a most happy and enduring union, and after some fifteen years of married life, in about 1800, John Dickinson wrote to her that 'I have only time to say that I love you dearly – best of women, best of wives and best of friends.' Here was the epitome of the new companionate marriage among the upper classes of the late eighteenth century, exuding a warmth and an emotional commitment that is so very hard to find in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, especially among men. There are fashions in love, as in everything else, and the Dickinsons were undoubtedly influenced in their use of language and in the sentiments they expressed by the rise of the romantic novel.

By way of contrast to these enduringly successful companionate marriages, it is fitting to conclude with one which began well, but eventually turned sour. It concerns Lord William Russell, younger son of the Duke of Bedford. In 1817 he made a socially suitable marriage with Miss Elizabeth Rawdon, with whom he was genuinely much in love. His father the Duke expressed his pleasure that 'you have every prospect of being happy with Miss Rawdon', and six years later, in 1823, Lord William told his wife, 'I love you more than anything in the world.' The evidence suggests that she was quite fond of him but had little respect for him, and there is little doubt that she invested all her emotional capital in her children. At the age of two in 1822, 'the child breakfasts, dines and lives with us as if he were 20 years old, to the horror and amazement of English mothers', and a year later was still sleeping in his parents' room, in his own

bed, at any rate when they were travelling. As late as 1829, after twelve years of marriage, Lord William was still telling himself, perhaps to keep up his morale, that 'there is no happiness like that derived from wife and children, it makes one indifferent to all other pleasures'. It was not until 1830 that there was the first sign of marital tension, due to Elizabeth's imperious ways and her single-minded devotion to her children at the expense of her husband. It also seems that she was very anxious to limit the number of her children, and was very discontented in 1828 when she found herself pregnant with a third (surviving) child. Her husband's abject apology suggests that he may have forcibly raped her in his frustration, or failed to withdraw in time. 'I regret the affliction and mortification my fatal sin has brought upon you . . . I think and hope I can never again be wicked.' They did indeed have no more children.

In 1835 Elizabeth became increasingly discontented with life in England, and to please her Lord William gave up his career in the army and parliament in order to go to live abroad with her. After all this, it is hardly surprising that soon afterwards, in 1835, he fell head over heels in love with a rich German Jewess, with whom he carried on a liaison without even pretence of concealment. Thereafter the pair in practice went their separate ways, with only fleeting visits home by the father to see his children. By 1846 Lord William was dead, as dead as his marriage had been for many years.

5. SINGLE PERSONS

This rise of the companionate domesticated marriage was accompanied by a rise in the proportion of unmarried in the society, caused partly by the postponement of marriage to a later and later age, and partly by an increase in the proportion who never married at all. The problem of adolescence, and the nuisance it causes to society, were familiar enough to Europeans since the fifteenth century, especially as the time-lag between sexual maturity and marriage got longer and longer. The shepherd in Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* must have struck a familiar chord when he remarked, 'I would there were no age between sixteen and twenty-three, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting.' The idea that adolescence, as a distinctive age-group with its distinctive

problems, was a development of the nineteenth century is entirely without historical foundation.

During the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a very high proportion of lifelong bachelors among younger sons of the nobility and gentry. Unless they were lucky enough to catch an heiress, many could not afford to get married and still maintain themselves in the life-style to which they were accustomed. By this time, the property arrangements of the elite had hardened into custom: younger sons were now pushed out into the world with a small life annuity and some patronage leverage, rather than being given, usually for two lives but sometimes in perpetuity, one of the ancestral estates on which to live like country gentlemen. Failing this, many took to peripatetic professions such as the army, or remote and isolated ones such as service in the colonies where white women of the appropriate status were in very short supply. The result was that the proportion of sons (including some eldest sons, so that is a substantial underestimate for younger sons) who were still unmarried at fifty from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries was between one in four and one in six of the whole (Graph 2, p. 41). At the same time, the median age of marriage among children of the upper and professional classes was rising, reaching twenty-eight by 1800 (and thirty by 1870), so that even those who did eventually marry remained bachelors for some twelve or thirteen years after the time of sexual maturity (Graph 3, p. 43). In 1773 *The Lady's Magazine* complained that nowadays 'the men marry with reluctance, sometimes very late, and a great many are never married at all', the explanation offered being fear of the expense, now rendered insupportable by women's passion for caprice and extravagance. In 1799 it was alleged that 'Railing at matrimony is become so fashionable a topic that one can scarcely step into a coffee-house or a tavern but one hears declamations against being clogged with a wife and a family, and a fixed resolution of living a life of liberty, gallantry, and pleasure, as it is called.'

One possible consequence of a system of very late marriage and a large number of permanent bachelors is the development of a violence-prone society of bachelors who take out their sexual frustrations in military aggression. 'I am drunk with unsatisfied love. I must rush again to war . . .', wrote William Blake, perceptively. Not only did these groups have a strong economic incentive to war and imperial conquest, but they also had a psychological incentive. Early

nineteenth-century doctors were worried about the situation, and in the 1850s Dr William Acton wrote that 'I have daily cause to regret that in the present civilized age pecuniary considerations render the marriage tie so frequently beyond the reach of our patients.' All he could advise as a remedy for frustrated sexual desire was 'low diet, aperient medicine, gymnastic exercise and self-control'. It is no accident that the English Public School of Thomas Arnold tried all these expedients, for Arnold was advised by Dr Acton. The results were clear enough. Wayland Young has persuasively argued that

> If every value and every force surrounding an adolescent tells him that his bodily affections must at all cost be transformed and sublimated into physical effort, intellectual prowess, competitive zeal, and manly prowess, how can he not found empires?. . . The nineteenth-century British Empire was not acquired in a fit of absence of mind, it was acquired in a fit of absence of women.

As a result of the shortage of suitable males, owing to the low level of nuptiality among younger sons and to the rise in the cost of mar-riage portions, there developed in the eighteenth century a new and troublesome social phenomenon, the spinster lady who never mar-ried, whose numbers rose from under five per cent of all upper-class girls in the sixteenth century to twenty to twenty-five per cent in the eighteenth century (Graph 2, p. 41). As Moll Flanders complained, 'the market is against our sex just now'. This was especially true in the towns, and particularly London, where the sex ratio, due to the influx of young women from the countryside and perhaps the greater vulnerability of males to the plague, was thirteen women to ten men at the end of the seventeenth century. As a result, a London marriage broker of the period carried 'a catalogue of women wanting mar-riage, some young, some not, all tame as a city cuckold chid by his wife'. In economic theory, such an excess of supply over demand should have cheapened the price, but it did not work this way among the landed classes, where marriage portions continued to rise, caus-ing many fathers to prefer to keep their daughters off the market altogether.

Another result of this situation was that in upper-class circles in the late eighteenth century, manoeuvres to marry off a daughter turned into a desperate man-hunt. A fictitious letter from a young girl to *The Lady's Monthly Museum* in 1798 gives some hint of the frantic quality of this traumatic experience:

My pappa and mamma have been trying for the last three years to match
me, and have for that purpose carried me from our country seat to Lon-
don, from London to Brighton, from Brighton to Bath, and from Bath to
Cheltenham, where I now am, backwards and forwards, till the family car-
riage is almost worn out, and one of the horses is become blind, and an-
other lame, without my having more than a nibble, for I have never yet
been able to hook my fish. I begin to be afraid that there is something
wrong in their manner of baiting for a husband or in mine of laying in the
line to catch him.

It was not until the very end of the eighteenth century that an-
other occupation opened up for well-educated spinsters from decent
homes, when 'accomplished girls, portionless and homeless' could
become governesses in wealthy households to young children under
seven. But even this new opening offered no more than a frustrating
and peripatetic career with few prospects or enduring satisfactions,
since the emotional bonds with the children were constantly being
broken as the latter were transferred to the care of a male tutor or
went off to school. Moreover, governesses suffered from both econ-
omic hardship and social stigma. They were usually very badly paid,
sometimes as little as £12 to £30 a year, although those who knew
French and had the right graces and connections might earn up to
£100 a year 'in a family of distinction'. The work was very hard, for
they were on duty seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. 'more a
prisoner than any servant in the house'. Worst of all was that their
equivocal social status deprived them of any companionship or sense
of belonging. 'A governess is almost shut out of society, not choos-
ing to associate with servants, and not being treated as an equal by
the heads of the house and their visitors.' Not a relation, not a guest,
not a mistress, not a servant, the governess lived in a kind of status
limbo. By reason of her position, she was also treated as almost
sexless. Not a lower-class servant and so open to seduction, not a
daughter of the house and so open to marriage offers, she was noth-
ing. 'There are three classes of people in the world', remarked an
anonymous writer in 1836, 'men, women, and governesses'.

One should be careful not to exaggerate the predicament of any
social group on such fragmentary evidence as is at present avail-
able. But there can be no doubt that the spinster in the early
eighteenth century, when the problem first became of serious pro-
portions, enjoyed a reputation for malice and ill-temper. 'If an old
maid should bite anybody, it would certainly be as mortal as the

ite of a mad dog,' remarked Defoe in 1723, and from then onward
he ill-natured old maid became a permanent feature of the English
ovel, and a subject of hostile comment by all writers of domestic
andbooks. In 1774 Dr John Gregory warned his daughters about
he forlorn and unprotected situation of an old maid, the chagrin
d peevishness which are apt to infect their tempers'. Eleven years
ter William Hayley declared that the worst feature of the condition
as 'that coarse and contemptuous raillery with which the ancient
aiden is perpetually insulted'.

The three obstacles to any solution to the spinster problem were
ocial snobbery, which made most business occupations beyond the
ale for a girl of genteel upbringing; the non-vocational educational
aining of women; and the lack of openings in the professions, or
ven as clerks. In the early nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill saw
he defects of female education as the root cause of the spinster
roblem. 'Women are so brought up, as not to be able to subsist in
he mere physical sense, without a man to keep them ... They are
o brought up as to have no vocation or useful office to fulfil in the
orld, remaining single ... A single woman, therefore, is felt both
y herself and others to be a kind of excrescence on the surface of
ociety, having no use or function or office there.'

6. CONCLUSION

he three most significant physical symbols of these profound shifts
n psychological attitudes among the elite are the ha-ha, the cor-
idor and the dumb waiter. The ha-ha, the substitution of an in-
isible sunken ditch for high brick walls, marked the triumph of
omanticism, for it destroyed the seventeenth-century concept of the
arden as an orderly symmetrical area of enclosed space, as man-
ade and artificial as the house itself. In the eighteenth century, the
ooms became more secluded and more private, but the external
ew from the windows was now thrown open to carefully contrived
rkland and grazing cattle and sheep. The corridor, which was a
ature of all new houses in the eighteenth century and was progres-
vely added to older buildings, made a major contribution to the rise
f physical privacy by removing the ever-present and inhibiting
reat of a stranger walking through one's bedroom to reach his
wn room. Four walls and a door are a better protection of privacy

than the curtains of a four-poster. The dumb waiter, used in the small private dining-room, made possible the intimate family meal-time conversation, not only away from the crowd of servants in the great hall, but also free of the surveillance of waiters serving at table. The desire to give the false impression of nature in the raw lapping around the portico of the Palladian villa, the desire for privacy in the bedroom, and the desire to reinforce nuclear family bonding by excluding both servants and strangers at meal-times were the factors which stimulated the invention of these three convenient devices. All three, together with the abandonment of the suite of rooms and the removal of the bedrooms upstairs, the rise of maternal breast-feeding, the use by children into adolescence and adulthood of the words 'Mamma' and 'Papa', the use of first names between husband and wife, the opposition to flogging, and some limited but significant improvements in female education, were symptoms of a whole set of new attitudes towards nature, natural instincts, privacy, the affective character of the nuclear family and the education of children. Contemporaries were well aware of this major shift in human relations. 'The behaviour of ladies in the past age was very reserved and stately. It would now be reckoned ridiculously stiff and formal.' Even public figures like admirals now boasted on their tombstones of their domestic virtues, such as 'filial reverence, conjugal attachment and parental affection'.

Against these positive advances, there have to be set some serious negative features. In the first place, the series of developments from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, including the rise of the state, the rise of Puritanism and then the rise of individualism, had the effect of stripping away from a marriage one by one many of those external economic, social and psychological supports which normally serve as powerful reinforcing agencies to hold together the nuclear family. Among the landed classes the assistance and/or interference of the kin were largely reduced, though not removed; the importance of property exchange, patrimony and dowry was undermined in all but the highest aristocracy by the quest for personal happiness. Among the middling and lower ranks, the social support of the neighbours was lessened as the intrusive and inquisitorial functions of village or parish community declined. All that was left of the old external props was the indissoluble nature of the marriage contract, and that could be evaded by concubinage by the rich or desertion and bigamy by the poor.

The nuclear family was thus left to stand far more than ever before its own bottom, with little to hold it together but its own internal hesion. There can be little doubt that in many cases this was not ough. Among the upper classes, the demand for romantic love and ual fulfilment was stimulated – especially among women – by the ding of romances and love stories, which created exaggerated pectations of marital felicity which were very often frustrated. As ly as 1712, long before the romantic movement got under way, e *Spectator* was complaining that the result of the 'half theatrical d half romantic' style of courting was to 'raise our imaginations to at is not to be expected in human life' (Plate 9). In the mid cen- y Oliver Goldsmith was still more convinced of the damage sed by the exaggerated expectations raised by novels. 'How de- ive, how destructive, are those pictures of consummate bliss. ey teach the youthful mind to sigh after beauty and happiness ich never existed, to despise that little good which fortune has ed up in our cup, by expecting more than she ever gave.' To make tters worse, the readers of novels mostly came from the middle ks, while the subjects were usually drawn from the squirarchy or bility.

Wives of the middle and upper ranks of society increasingly ame idle drones. They turned household management over to wards, reduced their reproductive responsibilities by contracep- measures, and passed their time in such occupations as novel- ding, theatre-going, card-playing and formal visits. This was cause they had been taught to cultivate 'that refined softness and icate sensibility which renders its possessor incapable of perform- g the active duties of humanity'. The result was that the custom of ning wives into ladies 'languishing in listlessness as ornamental tus objects spread downward through the social scale. It was not g before more and more women found themselves utterly frus- ted. In 1853 Marietta Grey complained in her diary that 'ladies, missed from the dairy, the confectionery, the store-room, the l-room, the poultry-yard, the kitchen garden and the orchard, e hardly yet found themselves a sphere equally useful and im- tant in the pursuits of trade and art to which to apply their ndant leisure'.

This erosion of outside supports involved a reduction of socia- ity, of contacts and emotional ties with persons outside the clear group. Friends, neighbours and relatives all receded into the

background as the conjugal family turned more in upon itself. Moreover, the decline of the kin involved a serious loss of identity with the lineage, with the concept of oneself as a link between past and future generations. Fewer and fewer knew who their great-grandfathers were, and fewer and fewer cared. There was a fragmentation of the familial aspect of the Great Chain of Being, leaving the individual as an atomized unit without a past. He was no longer linked to a piece of property or to tombstones in a graveyard, or to names in a family Bible, and it is not mere romanticism to argue that he lost his past in the process of achieving his autonomy and self-fulfilment in the present.

Moreover, a new tension now emerged to threaten the peace of domesticity. Many wives found themselves torn between the two sets of new affective responsibilities, towards their husbands and towards their children. This conflict appears again and again in the surviving records. Some wives were left behind by their husbands, who were pursuing their professional careers at sea or abroad, and solaced their loneliness by devoting themselves obsessively to their children. Others, faced with a choice of living with their husbands in London or with their children in the country, opted for the latter. Yet others never much cared for their husbands anyway, and lavished all their attention on their children, even to the point of hardly ever leaving them to go out to dinner or the theatre for years on end. But one way or another, this conflict between duty to a spouse and duty to children was a source of great domestic tension in the eighteenth century, and one which particularly affected wives.

A special manifestation of this tension must have been generated by the spread in upper- and middle-class circles of the practice of mothers breast-feeding their own children. This had always been recommended by doctors, who were equally insistent that resumption of sexual relations during lactation would spoil the milk and endanger the life of the child. Since sexual relations were an important component of the new companionate marriage, the dilemma of these unfortunate women torn between their husbands and their children must have been a cruel one. Nor was it one which could be resolved by contraception through *coitus interruptus*, since it was sexual excitement itself, not even leading to intercourse, which was thought to spoil the milk. Perhaps the growing doubts of doctors about the truth of this medical theory helped to solve this agonizing dilemma by undercutting its alleged scientific foundations.

Another reason for the frustration of many women was that this ift of motives for marriage from the concrete ones of power, atus and money to the imponderable one of affection probably rked to the benefit more of men than of women. This was because cial custom dictated that the initiative in the courtship process ould be with the male and not the female. The former was, there- e, free to follow his personal inclinations wherever they might d him, but the latter was, at any rate in theory, restricted in her oice to those who made advances to her. She had great latitude to courage or rebuff, but she could not formally initiate a courtship. John Gregory pointed out this problem to his daughter in a lume published posthumously in 1762. If a man 'should become tremely attached to her, it is still extremely improbable that he ould be the man in the world her heart most approved of. As, erefore, Nature has not given you that unlimited range of choice t we enjoy, she has wisely and benevolently assigned to you a eater flexibility of taste on the subject,' by responding to any monstration of interest by any man. 'If attachment was not excited your sex in this manner, there is not one of a million of you that ld ever marry with any degree of love.' Even under the new ar- gements, successful marriage thus depended on the docility and ptability of the woman, as it had always done in the past, which one of the reasons that some women were so vociferous in their appointment and frustration in the eighteenth century.

A further reason for the discontent of some wives in the hteenth century was that the rise of the concept of the affective rriage, like that of the seventeenth-century 'holy matrimony', ght the more independent-minded women in something of a uble bind. This dilemma was made crystal clear by Defoe's liber- ed heroine Roxana, when she discussed the proposals of her Dutch itor. He argued that where there was mutual love there could be bondage; that there was but one interest, one aim, one design, d all conspired to make both very happy. Roxana would have none this. 'That is the thing I complain of,' she retorted, 'the pretence affection takes from a woman everything that can be called her- : She is to have no interest, no aim, no view, but all is the erest, aim and view of the husband. She is to be the passive ature.' It was no good for the suitor to try to tell a woman like xana how lucky were the wives of rich men. 'The women had noth- to do but eat the fat and drink the sweet ... They had indeed

much the easier part ... spending what their husbands get.' Roxana did not want to lead the life of an idle drone, and suspected that her husband's power of the purse would give him power over her will.

It was almost inevitable that the trend towards greater emotional and sexual freedom for elite women in the late seventeenth century should give rise for a while to a good deal of overt misogyny, as expressed in popular male fantasies. Thus one of the most successful plays of the period was Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, whose hero, or antihero, was that insatiable adulterer, Horner. But Horner was a prisoner of sex. He derived no sensual pleasure from his conquests, only sadistic satisfaction at the seduction and then betrayal of his victims: his gratification came from their private humiliation and public ruin. That for thirty years fashionable audiences should have found this sexual cruelty so attractive to see upon the stage indicates some of the tensions and anxieties aroused by the first tentative steps towards the greater liberation of women in the late seventeenth century.

Another problem that led to much marital unhappiness was caused by the education given to wealthy women. The girls were brought up permissively at home by nurses and governesses and not taught to curb their tempers or their tongues. In infancy and youth, boys were spoiled at home by doting mothers, sisters, nurses and governesses. They were then packed off to the rough-and-tumble male world of public school and college, and so deprived of experience of female company, apart from lower-class prostitutes and tavern girls. The anonymous female author of a marriage manual for the upper-middle-class young girl, published in 1846, warned her of the shock she would experience when 'her delicate and shrinking nature discovers the real and intense coarseness of the male character'. This was not a discreet allusion to the brutality of the male sexual drive, but rather to masculine selfishness, desire for autocratic domestic authority, and contempt for common little politenesses in the treatment of a wife: 'the courtesies of life soon – too soon – after marriage are changed into a careless and fluctuating attention'. A young married woman was advised to obey her husband, even if under protest, not to cry, to put on a cheerful expression and not to complain, *never* to refer to 'the rights of women', to curb her tongue and to try to avoid a quarrel, not to criticize her husband's friends or relatives, not to keep him waiting, and to be neat and elegant without being over-scrupulously fussy. It is the advice of

[...]eone with fairly low expectations of marital behaviour from a [...]band, and it describes a world far removed from the notions of [...]ied life supplied by the romantic novels of the time. The general [...]lusion is that wives make husbands unhappy through 'perverse [...]ers and cold hearts' and that husbands make wives unhappy [...]gh 'careless neglect', tyranny and adultery (Plate 10).

[...]is symptomatic of unresolved problems in the more companion[...]marriage that in the second half of the eighteenth century many [...]th sexes still felt more at ease in the company of their own sex, [...]ence of which is the persistence of the custom of the withdrawal [...]e women from the dining-room to the drawing-room after din[...] (Plate 13). In the 1720s Swift remarked that 'it has sometimes [...]ed me with pity to see the lady of the house forced to withdraw [...]ediately after dinner ... as if it were an established maxim [...] women are incapable of all conversation'. He attributed this [...]l custom to the inadequacies of female education, which left [...] uninterested in discussing anything but clothes. Even in the [...]nd half of the eighteenth century the custom persisted, despite [...]improvement in female education. One possible explanation is [...] it was customary in England for chamber-pots to be kept in the [...]boards in the dining-room and for the men to relieve themselves [...]ly while their companions went on drinking (Plate 12). Under [...] circumstances it was clearly desirable for the women to with[...]w, to use close-stools or chamber-pots elsewhere in the house. [...]her possible explanation was the reluctance of well-bred women [...]sten to masculine postprandial bawdy conversation and to par[...]pate in their heavy drinking. Whatever the cause, the facts are [...]r. In 1762 it was reported that 'their drawing-rooms are deserted [...] after dinner and supper the gentlemen are impatient till they [...]re'. Another commentator remarked that 'the gloom that hangs [...]r an English company while the ladies remain, and the reciprocal [...]raint that each sex seems to be upon the other, has been fre[...]ntly a subject of ludicrous observation to foreigners'. In the [...]0s Mrs John Parker saw relatively little of her husband while [...]y were in London, although they were only recently married. She [...]kfasted upstairs in her room, he downstairs in the breakfast[...]m. And later, 'Mr Parker likes to play his game of whist at [...]dles almost every evening, so that I have nothing else to do.' At [...] Duke of Bedford's seat at Woburn Abbey in 1820, a female [...]mber of the house-party reported that 'in the evening the men

play at whist or billiards, and we sit in the saloon all very well together'.

A subject which still needs much further exploration is the way in which close female bonding persisted in the eighteenth century, parallel to the familiar bonding of the men. Males of the upper classes spent much of their waking hours at their work among men, and their leisure in all-male dining clubs and stag dinner parties. Their sanctums were the billiard-room, the smoking-room and the stables, and much of their time was spent with men, horses and dogs in the hunting-field. As we have seen, even the dining-room tended to become a male preserve, at any rate as soon as the main meal was finished. Female sanctums were the drawing-room and the boudoir, where they spent much of the day in feminine company, gossiping, doing needlework, playing cards, and exchanging endless visits. Many very close female friendships developed, closer in many cases than those with husbands. On the other hand, the ubiquitous and time-consuming habit of card-playing was a bisexual leisure activity, as was attendance at assembly-rooms, balls, masquerades, visits to the theatre and the performance of amateur theatricals at home. The development after about 1780 of the intellectual salons, hosted by a number of blue-stocking ladies and attended by the cultural elite of London, was a further step towards the social integration of the sexes at this somewhat exalted level. In 1765 Almack's Club was founded, which was open to members of high society of both sexes, the men elected by the women, and vice versa. This was apparently the first bisexual private club in London. More important were the assembly-rooms, which were springing up in the mid-century in so many provincial towns, and which provided a meeting place for both sexes which had not previously existed, thus facilitating the new mating arrangements based on prior knowledge and affection. In 1760 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was satisfied that 'the frequency of assemblies has introduced a more enlarged way of thinking; it is a kind of public education, which I have always thought as necessary for girls as for boys'. There is therefore evidence that the sexes were mingling far more freely than before within the squirarchy, although the growth of exclusively male London clubs and the habit of ejecting the women from the dining-room after dinner remained as significant exceptions to this trend.

One clear victim of change was the aged. The decline in patriarchy involved not only a loss of authority by the old, but also a philo-

phical re-evaluation of the role and value of old people generally. e fate of King Lear at the hands of his daughters foreshadowed a ntury of change and uncertainty in family and societal attitudes wards old people. Finally, the growing independence of the nuclear up tended to destroy vertical family ties. In 1828 a foreign ober noted that 'grown-up children and parents soon became ost strangers, and what we call domestic life is therefore applice only to husband, wife and little children living in immediate pendence on their father'.

There are thus many reasons to believe that the institution of rriage was undergoing very severe stresses – perhaps even a major isis – as a result of the profound changes in domestic relationships hich were taking place at this time. Affective individualism brought sts as well as benefits.