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THE REMEMBERED GATE: ORIGINS OF AMERICAN FEMINISM
The Woman and the City, 1800-1860

by

BARBARA J. BERG

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1976

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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To my husband, Arnold G. Schlanger

- for every possible reason

INTRODUCTION

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T. S. Eliot
Little Gidding

In 1892 Elizabeth Cady Stanton demanded woman's suffrage by claiming the "individuality of each human soul. . . ; the right of individual conscience and judgment. . . ; the rights of woman. . .as an individual, . . .the arbiter of her own destiny. . . ,[and] [h]er rights. . .to use all her faculties for her own safety and happiness." This argument comprised the essential doctrine of the initial campaign for the vote. Structured from the profound conviction that woman, as an autonomous being, deserved to participate fully in the natural rights of humanity, it postulated that woman had important value as an independent person and possessed a nature identical to man's.

Yet, less than seventy years before Stanton's declaration, American women's perceptions of themselves were inevitably shaped by the accepted theories of feminine inferiority which denied them individuality and found their only identity in relation to men. Solely as an appendage of a particular male, as a wife, mother, sister, or daughter, could a woman's life have any dignity or meaning. These confining, custodial tenets received rigorous reinforcement, and women had little choice but to accept a subordinate position. Nevertheless, during the antebellum period, tens of thousands of upper- and middle-class women began, first for themselves but later for the rest of the sex, to question and ultimately to defy the dictates of the monolithic creed of nineteenth century womanhood. What is responsible for this transformation in woman's sense of self?

How did woman, so long thwarted in efforts for self-determination and fulfillment, come to see herself as an individual whose dignity flowed from her common humanity? What mixture of events and circumstances led her to recognize the social roots of her oppression and to claim rights and prerogatives equal to those enjoyed by the other sex? In summary, how did American feminism begin?[1]

These questions have been all but ignored by contemporary scholars. Historians have not actually examined the origins of feminism in the United States, but have directed their attention exclusively to the drive for the vote. In trying to explain the genesis of suffrage agitation, they have looked back only as far as the female anti-slavery societies and have credited abolition with stimulating the nineteenth century woman's movement. This, the prevailing interpretation, limits the perspective of those seeking to understand the history of American women and provides only a truncated analysis of the sources leading to the suffrage campaign. Moreover, the tendency to confuse feminism with woman's rights has been endemic among those attempting to explain woman's past. One historian has written that "the most important involvement of American women in the years between the American Revolution and the outbreak of the Civil War was in the antislavery movement. The woman's rights

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1 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The Solitude of Self," quoted in Aileen Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement 1890-1920 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), pp. 40-41.

was indeed an offshoot of the agitation against slavery, a campaign most of whose soldiers and many of whose officers were women." Another, asking "Why did the feminist movement appear in the United States, in the second third of the nineteenth century?" replies: "The immediate cause was the experience of a few women in the abolition movement. . . .The feminist movement was founded by abolitionists and grew directly out of their experiences within the abolitionist movement." Yet feminism and woman's rights are not the same and the distinction is of great significance.[2]

For the purpose of this study feminism is defined as a broad movement which embraces all phases of woman's emancipation. It is the freedom to decide her own destiny; freedom from sex-related roles; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express fully her thoughts and actions. The evolvement of feminism is interwoven with certain fundamental views of woman's nature. Her complete independence demands the acceptance of woman as an autonomous being with the right to individual conscience and judgment. It necessitates the belief that woman's essential dignity and worth stem from her common humanity and do not depend on the incidental relations of her life as mother, wife, sister, and daughter. Woman's rights implies a narrow demand for particular privileges and

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2 Page Smith, Daughters of the Promised Land (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1970), p. 104 (emphasis added); Aileen Kraditor, Up From the Pedestal, Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), pp. 13-14 (emphasis added); For a different distinction between women's rights and feminism, see: Gerda Lerner, "Women's Rights and American Feminism," American Scholar (Spring, 1971), p. 237.

prerogatives. At different phases of history the rights that women have wanted have varied considerably: the right to vote, the right to equal educational and employment opportunities, the right to be treated by physicians of their own sex, the right to be served at male clubs and restaurants. Each specific request is rooted in the basic ideology of woman's nature as a free and autonomous being but the sum total of rights that women have claimed through the years does not add up to feminism. For feminism is woman's quest for complete emancipation. It is a thorough and compelling movement for human liberty and as such transcends any changing set of demands.

Historians who have linked the advent of feminism with female abolitionist activity have recounted the familiar tales of the prohibitions against addressing mixed audiences met by the Grimké sisters, the World Slavery Convention's refusal to admit women in 1840, and the subsequent friendship of Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Scholars have further argued that the abolitionists "began to ponder the parallels between woman's status and the Negro's status. . . ," and thus came to recognize their own oppression. This analysis has enjoyed a long and widespread acceptance; yet, it has distorted and obscured the rich history of American women, and in so doing, has obliterated the origins of feminism.[3]

The activites of female abolitionists did not form

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3 Kraditor, Up From the Pedestal, p. 14.

a radical departure from antebellum tradition. Indeed, decades before antislavery fervor caught the public imagination, tens of thousands of women in cities throughout the nation insulted custom and authority by forming associations dedicated to helping members of their own sex, including such controversial females as prostitutes and criminals. In numerous and varied ways they substantially expanded woman's sphere and claimed unprecedented prerogatives. Female voluntary associations flourished in urban America after 1800 and their pioneer efforts made it possible for women, years later, to found their own anti-slavery societies. Not only did many leading female abolitionists, including Lucretia Mott, Lydia Maria Child, Abby Hopper Gibbons, and Lucy Stone, participate in these benevolent organizations, but the records of female abolition societies acknowledge their debt to those before them and invoke the activities of earlier associations in defense of their own endeavors. The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, for example, in 1835 insisted upon its right to advertize by declaring that it was merely doing what "other ladies' societies have always done" and pointed to the annual meetings of women's urban associations in justification of its assemblies.[4]

Yet, despite the failure to understand the relationship between anti-slavery and other female associations, the most significant flaw in the abolition-feminist theory is its assertion

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4 First Annual Report of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society (1835), 6; also see: Anna Hallowell, James and Lucretia Mott. Life and Letters (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1896), p. 10.

that women first became aware of their degradation by identifying similarities between their condition and that of the slave. To accept this thesis is to assume that American women failed to perceive their status to be debased until a handful of female abolitionists discovered woman's subjugation. It is to dismiss the compelling volume of writings produced by antebellum women which revealed their distraught existences. It is to discount the importance of the activities and thoughts of countless women between the years 1800 to 1860. And, most significantly, it is to completely ignore the responses of both men and women to the complicated dynamics of social change, particularly urbanization, which created profound alterations in perceptions and ideas, and unwittingly fostered the development of American feminism.

Woman's sense of the oppression of her sex originated in American cities. It matured slowly as upper- and middle-class women understood and assimilated the meaning of their intense involvement both with one another and with the destitute of their sex. Only through close contact and shared experiences with females of all social and economic levels could women appreciate the depth, intricacy, and pervasiveness of a pernicious ethos which affected each differently but impinged upon every feminine life. While endorsing abolition, urban women in voluntary associations repeatedly called on those females "ready to devote wealth and energy to the emancipation of Southern slaves [to remember also]. . .suffering women. . .

[the] hundreds and hundreds of their own sisters. . .fettered to their cold hearth-stones by a bond of eternal toil more oppressive and quite as unjust as that which binds the slave. . . ." Antebellum women understood what twentieth century scholars have since forgotten: that woman's awareness and recognition of the privations, responsibilities, duties, and rights of her sex could only be gained through intimate association with women of every background.[5]

Abolition neither inaugurated nineteenth century feminism, nor did it generate the suffrage campaign. Those who have asserted a causal relationship between anti-slavery activity and the fight for the ballot have noted that several of the same women were active in both causes. To be sure, some women dedicated to freeing the slaves later agitated for woman's right to vote, but many early suffragists, including Susan B. Anthony, Ernestine Rose and Amelia Bloomer had little or no involvement with abolitionist activities. Moreover, the drive for enfranchisement, although invigorated by its leaders, did not actually commence with the activities of specific individuals, but grew out of fundamental changes in woman's conceptions and understanding of herself, the rest of her sex, and her society. The philosophy behind the agitation for the vote, that woman, as a complete and valuable person, had claim to all the natural rights of humanity, shared a common etiology

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5 Ladies' Wreath (1846), I, 106; also see: Golden Keepsake (1851), I, 72, 185.

with the demand for expanded economic and social opportunities. These were all just different facets of women's on-going quest for emancipation. The movement for woman's rights evolved from the feminist ideology which originated and developed in American cities between 1800 and 1860.

CHAPTER I

AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

What tho' we read in days of yore
the woman's occupation,
Was to direct the wheel and loom
not to direct the Nation;
This narrow-minded policy
by us both met detection;
While woman's bound, men can't be free
nor have a fair Election.

by "A Woman" 1796
in a New Jersey Newspaper

Do you suppose the mind of woman the
only work of God that was made in vain?

by Elizabeth Southgate,
a Colonial Author, age 18

The status of American women deteriorated dramatically between the colonial period and the early decades of the nineteenth century. Beginning slowly, the decline gained momentum as the youthful nation faced the arduous challenges of a growing republic. Intricate social changes, accompanying the transition from provincial sovereignties to an increasingly urban and industrial republic, profoundly altered the texture of American life and had significant consequences for the female population.

Women's standing in society worsened with the kaleidoscopic transformations of the antebellum era. The implications of these changes, ultimately shaping the development of American feminism, can, perhaps, best be illuminated by analyzing the position of colonial women during the eighteenth century. The dynamic interplay of theory and reality has traditionally defined the extent to which women partake in the functioning of society. Throughout the eighteenth century, philosophy and fact maintained an intimate and genuine association which enabled females to assume a vital role in the founding of the country.

Colonial women derived their prominence, in part, from the compelling needs of the original settlements. In the early communities, where survival depended upon the contributions and cooperation of each member, fortitude and initiative, by either man or woman, had great value. Restrictions on the allegedly inferior sex, diluted by necessity, did not severely limit feminine activity. They enjoyed access to most occupations

and earned respect as effective participants in society.

The imperatives of colonial growth, however, molded only part of woman's place in society. European and American philosophers also exerted a strong influence. The vision of the female as an educable, contributory community member, which found eloquence in eighteenth century liberal ideologies, reflected the reality of her existence.

Yet, as American theorists responded to alterations and accelerations in the emerging nation's social structure, the style and content of the discussion on the nature of woman changed. Formerly open, casual, and even humorous at times, the dialogue coalesced into a strident polemic which tolerated little, if any, disagreement. The loose constellation of ideas crystallized into a stylized formula, monitoring every aspect of feminine life; woman, who in the eighteenth century had been recognized as an important, autonomous being, became the object of repeated denigration which finally destroyed the sense of worth she developed during the colonial period.

For more than one hundred years before the American Revolution, British and French philosophers gave increased attention to woman's condition. Focusing particularly on female capacity for education and training, the debate, which flowed from both religious and secular pens, crossed the Atlantic in a variety of forms: periodical essays, novels, and pamphlets appeared abundantly in America. As the century progressed,

colonial writings demonstrated the influence of European Rationalism, but the earlier discussion, deeply rooted in religious thought, contained frequent references to the Scriptures, as authors sought to buttress their arguments with Biblical authority.

Marie de Gournay, a scholar and protegée of the French essayist, Michel de Montaigne, combined religion with history to support her thesis. Gournay's essay, published in 1622, argued for the equality of the sexes by citing Socrates, Plato, Plutarch, St. Jerome, St. Basil, and St. John's epistle to the Elect Lady. The author asserted that because the Scriptures, in recording that God created man both male and female, did not place one sex above the other, men and women had identical natures and deserved the same treatment. Mademoiselle de Gournay proposed opening all occupations, including the ministry, to women.[1]

Although it is doubtful that Gournay's work found a large audience in America, Cotton Mather knew it and referred to the French scholar in a letter to his sister-in-law: "I have thought that Mademoiselle de Gournay, the Lady, who a while since wrote an essay to demonstrate the Equality of Women to men might victoriously enough defend her problem. . .while she had such as you, as friend, who help so notably to render your husbands useful and considerable."[2]

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[1]Mario Schill, La Fille d'Alliance de Montaigne, Marie de Gournay (Paris, 1910), see pp. 55-77 for text of Egalité des Hommes et des Femmes. Quoted in Mary Sumner Benson, Women in Eighteenth Century America: A Study of Opinion and Social Usage (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), p. 15.

[2]Cotton Mather, Diary (Massachusetts Historical Society Collections Ser. 7, vii-viii 1911-1912), ii, 325.

Works of other European authors, dealing with women, became better known in America than Marie de Gournay's essay. The Pilgrim's Progress, widely read on both sides of the Atlantic, offered spiritual advantages to both sexes. In the second part of the allegory, Christiana, one of the characters, completes the same pilgrimage as her husband. John Bunyan, the book's author, defended this equality by drawing on the New Testament argument also used by the Puritan theorists, Samuel Sewall and Cotton Mather: Mary, through the birth of Christ, had palliated Eve's sin, and woman, who had attended the Savior, had wept as He went to the cross, and had been first with Him at the Resurrection, clearly "shared with [man] in the grace of life."[3]

Richard Allestree, the noted royalist preacher and provost of Eton College, who is generally considered the author of The Ladies' Calling, expressed his belief in the spiritual equality of women. In his book, which reached America through the popular compilation of literature, The Ladies' Library, Allestree argued that women needed a sense of their own worth before the religious life could be effectively cultivated. The author maintained that differences between the sexes in "matters of understanding" could be attributed to the disparity of learning opportunities and did not prove women inferior.[4]

François de Fénelon, Archbishop of Cambrai, although conveying a more moderate estimate of women than Allestree,

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[3] John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress (London, 1792), pp. 364-365.

[4] Richard Allestree, The Ladies' Calling (1677, 5th Impression), quoted in Benson, p. 17.

insisted, nevertheless, on their place in heaven. L'Education des Filles, published in 1687, and known in England through the translation of Georges Hickes, carried the proclamation: "Women constitute half the human race redeemed by the blood of Christ and destined to eternal life."[5]

The interest in female spiritual development, manifest in English and French literature, also found occasional expression in the sermons, tracts, and diaries of New England clergy. Puritans assumed that both sexes could attain salvation; the theoretical position of women, based on a literal interpretation of the Scriptures, reconciled two seemingly different conceptions of womanhood. Eve's actions brought the curse of subjection, but the theologians believed that Mary had glorified her sex and made all women worthy of respect. Cotton Mather, in his widely read Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion, articulated another reason for honoring women:

> The Second, or a privilege not far from the Second Advancement of the Sex may be esteemed, the Share which it has had in writing those Oracles, which make us wise unto Salvation. As one woman is the Mother of Him who is the essential word of God so diverse women have been the writers of his Declarative word.[6]

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[5]François de Fenelon, L'Education des Filles, trans. Kate Lupton (Boston, 1891), p. 13.

[6]Cotton Mather, Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion (Cambridge, 1692), pp. 5-7.
The book had an extended period of usefulness. George Whitefield, the revivalist preacher, read it in 1740 and, recommending it to all women, sent it to Benjamin Franklin for printing.

Mather referred to the songs of Deborah, Hannah and Mary, the prophecy of Huldah, and the instructions of Bathsheba, but he also praised more modern women authors, ". . .for even the Books Published by that sex were enough to make a Library far from contemptible; nor has even New England part of the American Strand been without authoresses that would challenge a Room in Such a Library."[7] The inclusion of a list of distinguished women in the Preface to his book provided further proof of feminine capability, for the author knew that "the petulant Pens of some Froward and Morose Men have sometimes treated the Female Sex with very great Indignities,"[8] although many of Mather's colleagues apparently shared his positive views of women. Puritan sermons, journals, and letters reveal tender feelings for female family members. In a sermon delivered at the funeral of his mother, Thomas Foxcraft thanked the Lord ". . .who has given such Grace, and so many Excellences to a Frail woman,"[9] and Samuel Sewall, who rigorously defended

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7 Mather, Ornaments, p. 5. His reference is most likely to Anne Bradstreet, although he did not mention the gifted poet by name.

8 Mather, Ornaments, p. 2.

9 Thomas Foxcraft, A Sermon. . .after the Funeral of Mrs. Elizabeth Foxcraft (1721), p. iii. Quoted in Benson, p. 106.

feminine religious equality, expressed his thoughts about women in a letter to John Winthrop:

> Besides Hannah in the Old Testament and Blessed Mary in the New, there is a numerous company of Holy Women listed in Christ's Army which renders that sex honourable. And if your sons should be taken away which God forbid, yet, as your worthy ancestours were the builders of the walls of our Jerusalem so you and your daughters will engage in the pleasant and profitable employment of repairing them.[10]

Cotton Mather's diary contains affectionate references to his daughter, and John Winthrop's letters to Ann, his wife, convey deep devotion. Winthrop writes of his impatience to be with her and prays that she "not....be troubled at anything, nor have no uneasy thought."[11]

The New England fathers, although not unconcerned with worldly happiness, clearly centered their attention on female spiritual life. In the Ornaments, Cotton Mather gave more consideration to a woman's religious training than to her intellectual development, but he devoted some space to the latter:

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10 Letter to John Winthrop in Winthrop Papers (Mass. Hist. Soc., Colls., Ser. 6, v), vi, 403.
In Talitha Cumi [Young Woman arise] or An Invitation to Women to look after their Inheritance in the Heavenly Mansions, Samuel Sewall refuted an idea, sometimes found in England, that women had no place in heaven. He cited Matthew 22:30 that there was neither marrying nor giving in marriage in heaven. Three women would certainly rise again, Eve, the mother of all living, Sarah, the mother of the faithful, and Mary, the mother of our Lord. If these three were to rise again, Sewall believed that all women would.

11 Mather, Diary, ii43, 153, 205, 276, 523; Winthrop, Winthrop Papers (1723), 404.

women might study music, language and arithmetic in time left from "Housewifery."[12]

Others in the community also encouraged varied feminine activity and praised special achievement. Deborah Prince's father, pastor of the Old South Church in Boston, proudly claimed that Deborah had enjoyed history, divinity, and especially "Experimental Writing."[13] The daughter of another Boston minister, Jane Colman, also earned recommendation for her prose. At her death in 1735, Jane's husband wrote: "I find that she was sometimes fir'd with a laudable ambition of raising the honor of her Sex, who are therefore under obligations to her; and all will be ready to own she had a fine Genius and is to be placed among those who have excell'd."[14]

New England women from enlightened and successful families, Jane Colman, Deborah Prince and the talented poet, Anne Bradstreet, achieved distinction; most of their sisters occupied a position more obscure but shaped, nonetheless, by theological tenets. Puritan men expected their wives to heed St. Paul's order that they be in subjection to their husbands, but the religion communicated a sense of importance to women which mitigated the harshness of the Biblical decree. Indeed, Cotton

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12 Mather, Ornaments, p. 74.

13 Thomas Prince, A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Mrs. Deborah Prince (Boston, 1744), pp. 21-23. Mrs. Prince's writings were published at the time of her funeral sermon.

14 Benjamin Colman, Reliquiae Turellae, et Lachrymae Paternae (Boston, 1735), pp. 78-79.

Mather believed that through religion women could turn the curse of submission into a blessing and that more females than males had attained salvation.[15]

The theologians who bestowed lavish praise on feminine accomplishments may have sought to cultivate the spirit, but their words had a compelling effect on the mind. By extolling females of intellectual excellence, by accepting that differences in achievement between the sexes related to training, by describing as "laudable" efforts to elevate female honor, and by publicly recognizing creative, effective women, clerical leaders demonstrated their respect for the sex.[16]

Although New England women surely experienced subjugation and deprivation, the pervasive teachings of their religion enabled them to retain their self-esteem. Later generations, for numerous and complicated reasons, would deny women any value as independent beings; however, their Puritan forefathers found cause to believe that men could "safely account the Female sex...more than a little Dignify'd."[17]

Religious precepts defined only part of the eighteenth century inquiry into the nature of woman. Other facets of the debate, articulated by authors of varied backgrounds and

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15 Mather, Ornaments, pp. 44-45; Diary i p. 108 note. In a Boston church of three or four hundred communicants, only one hundred were men; I Timothy 2:II; Corinthians 14:34; Titus 2:5.

16 Colman, Reliquiae Turellae, p. 67, 79.

17 Ornaments, pp. 3-4.

persuasions, emphasized the social and intellectual aspects of feminine life. Approaching the topic from different perspectives, writers revealed their general attitudes about women through specific suggestions on feminine education and behavior. Mary Astell and Daniel Defoe presented their proposals as formal treatises, but others, including Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, expressed their views more casually through periodical essays in The Spectator and The Tatler. These magazines, immensely popular in America, probably exerted greater influence than the respective works of Astell and Defoe; yet the latter, also read in the colonies, are of interest for their progressive views. Mary Astell, pamphleteer and friend of the intellectually prominent in British society, believed that men kept women in submission in order to maintain masculine ascendancy. She asserted, in Essay in Defense of the Female Sex, that there would be no intellectual differences between the sexes if both received similar educations. In keeping with her views, she proposed a lay nunnery where women, divorced from the burdens of the world, could indulge their academic interests.[18]

Daniel Defoe agreed: feminine education desperately required improvement. Women actually suffered doubly. Men kept them in ignorance and then ridiculed the sex for follies a proper education would have prevented. In Essay on Projects, he called such behavior "barbarious."[19]

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[18]Mary Astell, Essay in Defense of the Female Sex (4th edition, London, 1730), pp. 136-139, in Benson, p. 30.

[19]Daniel Defoe, The Earlier Life and the Chief Earlier Works of Daniel Defoe, ed. Henry Morley (London, 1730), pp. 144-145.

Often treating their subjects with good-natured humor, contributors to The Tatler and The Spectator displayed sensitivity to woman's psychological needs. These periodicals, heralded by American booksellers, devoted considerable space to feminine activity. The Spectator, more elevated in style than The Tatler, had an impact on Benjamin Franklin's early work, but the magazine primarily tried to reach women. Steele proclaimed that "there are none to whom this paper will be more useful than to the female world."[20]

The Tatler made a similar appeal to women. In 1709, an essay describing a "lady extremely well known in this town for the quick advancement of her husband and the honors and distinction which her industry has procured him and all who belong to her" would undoubtedly interest female readers, inspiring pride that one of their sex had accomplished so much.[21]

Both magazines attempted to bolster woman's self-image and strongly condemned anything which degraded her. An article in The Tatler criticized the educational system which fostered "an indolent state of body and mind" and made women feel "they were so insignificant as to be wholly provided for when they are fed and clothed."[22] Steele, in The Spectator, hazarded the

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20 For an evaluation of the influence of The Spectator on Benjamin Franklin's writing, see George Horner, "Franklin's Dogood Papers Re-examined", North Carolina University Studies in Philology, Vol. 37 (1940), pp. 501-523; The Spectator no. 10 (1710), p. 77.

21 The Tatler no. 33 (1709), p. 79.

22 The Tatler no. 248 (1710), p. 400.

opinion that women's faults and weaknesses were due to the false standards set for them by men, rather than to any difference in their natures:

> I have often thought that there has not been sufficient pains taken in taking out proper employment and diversions for the fair ones. Their amusements seem contrived for them, rather as they are women, than as they are reasonable creatures.[23]

Steele's defense of women, compatible with the eighteenth century's commitment to rationalism and humanitarianism, placed emphasis upon the female as a reasonable being. Enlightenment thinkers frequently argued that women and men shared a rational nature and should both be subject only to reason. William Wollaston articulated this view clearly and forcibly in The Religion of Nature Delineated which appeared in 1722. His book, a popular deistical work, exercised a profound influence on Benjamin Franklin's Reflections on Courtship and Marriage, which contains shrewd comments about sex-linked roles.

According to Wollaston, marriage, a reciprocal arrangement, required mutual help and love. If the man and woman would "in good earnest resolve to behave themselves as they ought... much comfort and happiness [might] justly be expected..."[24]

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23 The Spectator no. 310 (1710), p. 77. For other articles concerned with helping women, see The Spectator nos. 4, 10, 15, 66, 606 and The Tatler no. 200.

24 William Wollaston, The Religion of Nature Delineated, (London, 1726), p. 155.

Unlike Puritan authors, for Wollaston, proper conduct did not necessarily imply female subordination:

> I have designedly forborn to mention that authority of a husband over his wife, which is usually given to him, not only by private writers but even by laws; because I think it has been carried much too high. I would have them live so far upon the level (according to my constant lesson) to be governed both by reason.[25]

Wollaston's impact on Benjamin Franklin's thinking is evident in the following passage from Reflections on Courtship and Marriage:

> Whatever tyrannick and arbitrary Power the Laws of a Country may give a Man over his Wife, or should they do the reverse, there is no such kind of Dominion derived from the Reason of Nature.[26]

Man's faculties for governing seemed superior, but a faulty education, truncating feminine development, prevented true comparisons. In a tirade against men, who contrived to keep women inferior, Franklin, echoing Defoe and Steele, wrote: "Do we not in general flatter them with a heap of bombast Stuff, and then laugh at them for seeming pleased with it?" The author expressed amazement at "how ingeniously we thus labor to make her a positive and empty, a conceited and fanatical Simpleton." And he added: "Thus modelled, we soon come to dispise her and curse our marriage."[27]

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25 Wollaston, p. 159.

26 Benjamin Franklin, Reflections on Courtship and Marriage: In Two Letters to a Friend, (Philadelphia, 1750), p. 23.

27 Franklin, p. 23; p. 4; p. 15.

Whereas Wollaston and Franklin presented general views on the relationship between the sexes, A Father's Legacy to his Daughter, written by John Gregory, a Scottish physician who considered women "his equal and companions," offered practical advice. Written for his daughter, an intimate friend of Mrs. Elizabeth Montague, the famous bluestocking, the book, which went through seventeen editions after its 1775 publication in Philadelphia, reflected an awareness of the prejudice against intellectual women. "Women with knowledge should keep it a profound secret, especially from men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of. . .cultivated understanding."[28]

Gregory implicitly advised women to accept their fate; yet, as a perspicacious observer, he saw through the superficial embroidery and grasped the underlying reality of woman's misery: "Your whole life is often a life of suffering. You cannot plunge into business or dissipate yourselves in pleasure and riot as men too often do, when under the pressures of misfortunes you must bear your sorrows in silence, unknown and unpitied."[29]

The compassionate spirit with which Gregory wrote was not ubiquitous; a winnowing of Enlightenment thought reveals theories totally unsympathetic to woman. Jean Jacques Rousseau's well known book, Emile, eloquently expounded the argument that

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[28]John Gregory, A Father's Legacy to his Daughters, (London, 1788), Intro. p. 4; 31.

[29]Gregory, p. 11.

feminine subordination be reinforced by a system of education to impress rigorously upon women the aim of their existence: "To please, to be useful to [men]."[30]

Having neither the genius nor the power to study abstract truths, girls should be conditioned, Rousseau believed, for a life of subjugation at an early age:

> This daily constraint will produce the docility that women need all their lives. The first and most important quality of a woman is sweetness. . .[s]he must learn to submit uncomplainingly.[31]

Rousseau's harsh judgments did not go unnoticed: Mary Wollstonecraft vigorously condemned the French philosopher, and Enos Hitchcock and Dr. Benjamin Rush referred to Emile in their respective books.[32]

Rush, the famous physician, member of the American Philosophical Society, and one of Philadelphia's prominent citizens, presented his views in an address delivered at the Young Ladies Academy

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30 Jean Jacques Rousseau, Emilius and Sophia; or, A New System of Education, trans. A Citizen of Geneva (London, 1783), iii pp. 177-178.

31 Rousseau, iii p. 233.

32 Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1967). For Miss Wollstonecraft's criticism of Rousseau, see pp. 53, 58, 60, 66, 88-89, 128-148.

of Philadelphia in 1787. The education of girls should reflect the conditions of the society and government of their country, he stated, and American women, because they married young, had to be taught early and well. Since men's businesses occupied their time, the management of the house, the children and often the husband's property devolved upon women, whose training, therefore, had to be practical and varied. In addition to domestic pursuits, female education should include history, travels, moral essays and poetry.[33]

Enos Hitchcock, a Rhode Island minister and one of Rush's associates, contributed, in Memoirs of the Bloomsgrove Family, the longest work dealing with women written in America before 1800. Hitchcock challenged Rousseau's classification of woman as an inferior species with no natural rights; yet, he concluded that, as there must be a head in society, it should be man. He relegated woman to a subordinate position, not because of intrinsic inferiority, but to preserve the equilibrium of society.[34]

In the highly provocative A Vindication of the Rights of Women, published in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft, though not specifically referring to Hitchcock, vehemently attacked, as "mistaken notions which enslave my sex," beliefs that the

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33 Benjamin Rush, Thoughts upon Female Education, (Philadelphia, 1789), pp. 5-7; 11-12.

34 Enos Hitchcock, Memoirs of the Bloomsgrove Family...containing sentiments on a Mode of Domestic Educated, Suited to...the United States (2 vols., Boston, 1790), ii pp. 15-17; ii pp 17, 44-46. Quoted in Benson, p. 159.

stability of civilization depended upon the mastery of one sex over the other:

> Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers - in a word, better citizens.[35]

Only independence could render a woman good and useful, Miss Wollstonecraft reasoned, "for how can a being be generous who has nothing of its own? or virtuous who is not free?"[36]

Because both sexes enjoyed the "gift of reason," woman deserved full participation in the natural rights of mankind, and her exclusion from these jeopardized the functioning of society. Rights and duties were inexorably linked: "Take away natural rights, and duties become null."[37]

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman stimulated controversy both on the Continent and in the States. Most of the American press responded negatively, attacking the book as an argument for Deism and as an indictment of marriage. But Charles Brockton Brown, often considered America's first novelist, incorporated Wollestonecraft's theories in his book, Alcuin, A Dialogue.

Taking the form of a conversation between a gentleman and a lady, Alcuin, appearing both in Philadelphia and New York

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35 Wollstonecraft, p. 72; p. 224.

36 Wollstonecraft, pp. 213-219.

37 Wollstonecraft, pp. 213; 219; Dedication, p. 4.

in 1798, presented a powerful plea for the extension of women's rights. The lady argued that the present system, by requiring woman's dependence upon man, reduced her to the level of "a beast or an insect" and perpetrated the most egregious form of injustice upon the sex.[38] Mary Wollstonecraft's impact on the book is apparent in the lady's determination to believe in herself despite the deleterious effects of society's degradation:

> While I am conscious of being an intelligent and moral being;...when I see myself...passed over in the distribution of public duties, by those who disdain to assign the least apology for their injustice - what though politicians say I am nothing, it is impossible that I should assent to their opinion as long as I am conscious of willing and moving.[39]

Mrs. Judith Sargent Murray shared Brown's indebtedness to Mary Wollstonecraft, as well as his liberal views on women. Publishing under the name "Constantia," Mrs. Murray wrote several essays on women in avowed imitation of The Spectator. Murray's articles, popularized first in the Massachusetts Magazine, later reappeared in three volumes under the title The Gleaner. The book, published in 1798, contained two plays, a novel, and numerous essays.[40]

In one of the longer articles, Mrs. Murray developed the opinion that any woman, properly educated, could enjoy Mary Wollstonecraft's freedom. Woman, equally as capable as man, had achieved astonishing success throughout history in various fields of endeavor. The author described many occupations

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38 Charles Brockton Brown, Alcuin: A Dialogue, (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971), pp. 13-14.

39 Brown, p. 29.

40 Benson, p. 176.

in which women had distinguished themselves and praised those females whose independent business ventures had brought their families prosperity.[41] Mrs. Murray wrote with glowing optimism. She congratulated her countrywomen on the revolution of thought in recent years which ushered in a "[n]ew and enlightened era in female history." In the new age, "The Rights of Women," just beginning to be understood, would make the idea of woman's incapacity in any area inadmissible.[42]

Thus, by 1800, Americans had, for over a century, shared and absorbed the lessons of an intensive inquiry into different facets of feminine existence. In their efforts to evaluate woman's role in society, theorists combined history, religion, and rationalism as they searched for fundamental precepts of human behavior. Predictably, this admixture of intellectual sources and methods produced conflicts and tensions which, when channeled creatively, envigorated the acutely sensitive dialogue that assumed an increasingly liberal tone as the 1700's drew to a close.

To be sure, conservative opinion existed. Rousseau accurately represented those numerous philosophers who would make woman's entire personal development relative to man's wishes. Yet, a rich body of progressive thought, encompassing an extraordinary variety of ideas, appeared to flourish. Although liberal views of women did not dominate eighteenth century philosophy, theories of feminine competence and value continued to gain impressive adherents and to make important inroads.

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[41]Judith Sargent Murray, The Gleaner, iii pp. 188-224, quoted in Benson, p. 177.

[42]The Gleaner iii pp. 110-13; 261-2, quoted in Benson, p. 177.

Espoused by able and prominent men and women with diverse political, religious, and social views, this agglomeration of theory thwarts facile generalizations. Marie de Gournay and Judith Sargent Murray wished to remove the limitations on feminine occupations; yet Benjamin Franklin, who also deplored female oppression, shared with Cotton Mather the belief in woman's essential domesticity, although the source of his ideas differed from the clergyman's. Dr. Benjamin Rush advocated a more comprehensive system of education, but his plans had little in common with the methods described by either Mary Astell or Daniel Defoe.

Some authors wrote with audacity: Richard Steele, Marie de Gournay, Daniel Defoe, and Benjamin Franklin asserted that men reinforced women's feelings of inferiority; Charles Brockton Brown attacked the existing legal system; and Mary Wollstonecraft insisted that women, as rational beings entitled to natural rights, be granted full equality with men. Other writers tempered their sympathy with caution. Dr. John Gregory, though compassionate, advised his readers to accommodate to their plight, and Enos Hitchcock, who argued from the same premises as Wollstonecraft, ultimately accepted man as the ruler of society.

However eclectic and disparate these elements of thought appear, there is an essential unity. With the exception of Emile, each work previously discussed expresses, either implicitly or explicitly, the belief that woman, an individual with a mind and soul capable and worthy of cultivation and a nature similar to man's, had the potential to make important contributions to

her community and deserved to be respected and valued as an autonomous being. Though the philosophers drew differing conclusions from these assumptions, their basic positive view of woman, replete with significant implications for society, posed a formidable challenge to traditionalist thinking.

This collision of ideas, subtle distinctions as well as blatant disagreements, stimulated and diffused the controversy, precipitating discussion among America's younger population. At the Yale commencement of 1773, two graduates debated "Whether the Education of Daughters be not without reason more neglected than that of sons?" Ezra Stiles, elected president of Yale in 1777, frequently had students explore the benefits of female academies, and one of his favorite themes for Senior essays, "Whether women ought to be admitted to partake in Civil Government, Dominion and Sovereignty," surely encouraged speculation about the desirability of such an extension of female involvement.[43]

Clearly, the question of woman's political activity composed just one aspect of the more compelling dilemma to be faced by Stiles' students: the form of the new government. Yet, the justification for replacing a monarchy with a republic could furnish a persuasive argument to extend women's rights, since these separate, although related, decisions shared similar intellectual origins and evolved from the same premises.

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43 Ezra Stiles, The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, ed. F. B. Dexter, 3 vols., (New York, 1901), iii 315, ii 584, 557; Stiles, ii p. 490, iii p. 15.

In their efforts to explain the revolutionary decades, American polemists invoked the teachings of history and the Scriptures. All past knowledge seemed to converge and to give meaning to the American Revolution, but Enlightenment ideology afforded the most relevant explanation for those colonists who knew, as early as 1768, that "never was there a People whom it more immediately concerned to search into the Nature and Extent of their Rights and Privileges than it does the People of America at this Day."[44]

"Let us study the laws of nature," said John Adams, and his countrymen complied.[45] Through their probing of the philosophy of Rationalism and their scrutiny of the English Constitution and common law, Americans forged a complex interpretation of their revolt. Drawing heavily on Whig theorists, John Locke, Algernon Sidney, and particularly John Trenchard and Thomas Gorden, colonial publicists perceived their struggle as a quest for liberty, defined as that which "exempts one Man from Subjection to another..," with natural law and natural rights, Whig constitutionalism, and virtue forming the three supports crucial to liberty's endurance. The pervasive belief in natural law, a scheme of moral absolutes to be discovered and understood principally through the use of reason, carried

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44 Clinton Rossiter, Seedtime of the New Republic: The Origins of the American Tradition of Political Liberty (New York, 1953), p. 362.

45 [Adams] "Dissertation", Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, ed. Charles F. Adams (Boston, 1850-56) iii p. 462.

important corollaries: the concept of man as an essentially good, educable, social creature; the historical or logical state of nature; "Peace and Security," "the Public Good," "the Happiness of the People," and the preservation of natural rights as the chief ends of government; the doctrine that magistrates are servants rather than rulers of the people; the right of rebellion against leaders violating the laws of nature; and the natural equality of man. These principles constituted the staples of American political theory and produced a fertile ground for liberal thought.[46]

Ironically, however, the soil of the young republic provided little nourishment for progressive ideas about women, and the excoriating literature of the antebellum period, which made a mockery of Mrs. Murray's confident predictions of a "new and enlightened era in female history," could hardly be considered the natural heir of eighteenth century thinking.

The rupture in thought became apparent in the first decades of the nineteenth century: open debates turned into definitive discourse and periods and exclamation points replaced question marks as writers used harsh, instructive tones to drill their demeaning image of woman deep into the nation's psyche. This onslaught all but obliterated liberal ideology which, appearing only sporadically, in anemic form, called forth derisive and scathing criticism. The profound alteration in

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46 Rossiter, pp. 225-226. For feminist activity in Europe, see: Jane Abray, "Feminism in the French Revolution," American Historical Review (Feb. 1975) 80, 43-62.

presentation and message, reflecting deeply rooted social tensions, prevented the logical linear development of a penetrating feminist-oriented analysis of society and ultimately impoverished American thought.

Conservative views of women saturated the young republic. The tenacity of these opinions distorted the relationship between theory and actuality. The eviscerated female, presented with convincing regularity in nineteenth century religious, medical, and popular literature, obscured woman's knowledge of her past and denied the reality of her present, for the wan, dependent creature of antebellum writings bore little semblance to the majority of her contemporaries and surely would have been unrecognizable to her colonial ancestors.

Women in colonial America never attained equality with men, but they enjoyed more freedom than was granted by English law. Under common law, females had many duties, but few rights. Married women, in particular, suffered civil death, having no right to property and no legal standing or existence apart from their husbands:

> Man and wife are one person, but understand in what manner...A Woman as soon as she is married, is called cover, in Latin Nupta, that is veiled, as it were, clouded and overshadowed, she hath lost her streame...To a married woman her new self is her superior, her companion, her master.[47]

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47 The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights; or The Lawes Provision for Women (London, 1632) pp. 124-125.

This concept, known as "femme covert," continued into the nineteenth century, reminding women of their inferior status; yet, in many colonies, the exigencies of life and the scarcity of females diminished the distance between husband and wife, expanded the occupational opportunities of women, and enlarged their legal rights in property, conveyance of land, marriage and divorce, inheritance, contracts, torts, and testimony well beyond the reactionary confines of the law.[48]

In New England, theology blended with necessity to lessen the effect of English legal decrees. Believing industry a virtue and idleness a sin, Puritan authorities punished those who did not work. The town of Salem sent Margarett Page "to Boston Gaole as a lazy, idle, loytering person," and in 1640 the community charged Mary Boutwell with "exorbitancy not working but liveinge idly."[49]

The attitude towards the employment of women is evident in the Bay Colony's laws for 1692-1693. Although every single person under twenty-one years of age had to live "under some orderly family government," an additional provision stipulated that "this act shall not be construed to extend to hinder any single woman of good repute from the exercise of any lawful trade of employment for a livelihood, whereunto she shall have the allowance and approbation of the selectmen...any law, usage or

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48 Rossiter, p. 158.

49 Salem Town Records, quoted in Edith Abbott, Women in Industry (New York: D. Appleton and Company), p. 32.

custom to the contrary notwithstanding."[50]

Town officials expected working women to help defray community expenses. In 1695 a law required "all single women that live at their own hand [to pay a poll tax] at two shillings each, except such as through age or extreame poverty. . .are unable to contribute towards the public charge."[51] But females contributed far more than wages to the development of their colonies. In the populated towns and in the isolated countryside, they performed numerous essential tasks. The women who helped their men carve homes out of the wilderness, toiled incessantly and courageously. Working alongside their husbands, women built log cabins, farmed the fields, and also assumed responsibility for domestic chores.[52] Abigail Foote, a young girl living in Connecticut, recorded the activities of one day in her diary:

> Fix'd gown for Prude, Mend Mother's Riding-Hood - spun short thread - Fix'd two gowns for Welsh's girls - carded tow - spun linen - worked on cheese basket, - Hatchel'd flax with Hannah we did 51 pounds apiece, - pleated and ironed - Read a Sermon of Doddridge's, - spooled a piece - milked the cows - spun linen, did 50 knots - made a broom of Guinea wheat straw spun thread to whiten, - Set a Red Dye, - Had two scholars from Mrs. Taylor's - I carded two pounds of whole wool and felt nationally - spun harness twine - scoured the pewter.[53]

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[50]Province Laws, i, 213, quoted in Abbott, p. 33. (emphasis added)

[51]Quoted in Abbott, p. 33.

[52]Arthur W. Calhoun, A Social History of the American Family from Colonial Times to the Present, vol. II (Ohio, 1918), pp. 105-102.

[53]Abigail Foote's Diary (1775), quoted in Alice Morse Earle, Home Life in Colonial Days (New York, 1899), p. 253.

The physical strength required of pioneer women corresponded to the emotional fortitude made necessary by life on the frontier. Often without assistance, women bore, raised, and educated children; they lived in constant fear of Indian attack and of the wilderness itself. Remote from the codes of civilization, wives and husbands participated equally in the struggles for survival, and reciprocity in the marriage relationship emerged as the natural consequence of their shared adversities.

Women also made significant contributions to their families and to society in the emerging colonial cities. The New England towns, of course, encouraged those members of the community without financial support to work, but even colonies untouched by Puritan theology permitted women to support themselves and their relatives. Social mores throughout populated colonial settlements allowed married women who wished to supplement their husbands' income the freedom to do so. Trade did not negate gentility. The woman merchant, inn keeper, teacher or printer did her work without apology or sense of restriction, knowing she would be judged on her achievements.[54]

The occupations engaged in by colonial women demanded energy, business acumen, and executive ability. As tavern keepers, they gave their skills to operating these important urban institutions which furnished recreational facilities to

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[54]Elizabeth Dexter, Colonial Women of Affairs. Women in Business and the Professions in America Before 1776 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1931), p. 182; Carl Bridenbaugh, Cities in Revolt (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 140; Elizabeth Dexter, Career Women of America 1776-1840 (New Hampshire: Marshall Jones Co., 1950), p. 19.

all classes and provided a focus to town life. No one objected to women selling liquor. Indeed, the tradition seems to have been established early in the colonial period. In 1654, Henry Dunster, president of Harvard College, wrote on behalf of sister Bradish, "that she might be encouraged and countenanced in her present calling for the baking of bread and brewing and the selling of penny beer."[55]

More women than men received permits to run taverns, and they did not think it unladylike to publicize their activities in colonial newspapers, which frequently carried notices of these public houses.[56] Mary Ballard advertised her inn, "for the Entertainment of Gentlemen, Benefit of Commerce and the Dispatch of Business," in the Boston Evening Post; Anne Jones, who ran the Plume of Feathers on Philadelphia's Second Street, utilized the newspaper to notify her debtors to settle their accounts.[57] Female merchants also relied upon newspaper circulation to conduct their businesses. Hannah Cazneau of Boston announced that her latest shipment from London included "a variety of ivory and Bone Stock Fans, the best Pins and Needles, and fine bohea and Green tea," and Cornelia Blau described her interesting assortment of wines and bradies in the New York

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55 Dexter, Colonial Women, p. 49.

56 Bridenbaugh, p. 358.

57 Boston Evening Post, February 26, 1759; American Mercury, June 27, 1728.

Gazette of August 28, 1766.[58]

The commercial spirit, which energized colonial cities and led to social and cultural ties of utmost importance, infused women with confidence in their abilities, verifying Jean de Crèvecoeur's observation that mercantile experience "ripens their judgement and justly entitles them to a rank superior to that of other wives."[59] Mrs. Sueton Grant, a young widow with several small children, acted with self assurance when commercial dealings involved her in litigation. Upon learning of her counsel's dishonesty, Mrs. Grant went to court and argued the case with such dignity and clarity that after a short deliberation the jury decided in her favor.[60]

In New York City, the "She Merchants" who wrote to John Peter Zenger in 1733 vigorously proclaimed their attributes:

> We, the widdows of this city, have had a Meeting, and as our case is something Deplorable, we beg you will give it Place in your Weekly Journal, that we may be Relieved, it is as follows. We are House keepers, Pay our Taxes, carry on Trade, and most of us are she Merchants, and as we in some measure contribute to the Support of Government, we ought to be Intituled to some of the Sweets of it; but we find ourselves entirely neglected, while the Husbands that live in our Neighborhood are daily invited to Dine at Court; we have the vanity to think we can be full as Entertaining, and make as brave a Defense in Case of an Invasion and perhaps not turn Taile so soon as some of them.[61]

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58 New York Gazette, August 28, 1766, quoted in Dexter, Colonial Women, p. 21.

59 Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur, Letters from an American Farmer (Philadelphia, 1793), p. 135-59.

60 Dexter, Colonial Women, p. 33.

61 New York Journal, January 21, 1733.

Trade flourished and the expanding cities created a market for the goods of retail shops. Those in Boston reached the highest degree of specialization, proliferating income opportunities. This petty trade provided a chief means of support to widows, enabling women like Mrs. Hannah Boydell, who sold "Grocery Ware" near the Bunch of Grapes Tavern, to be self sufficient.[62]

Women tried various ways to make their trades successful. They frequently attended night school to learn to keep merchant's accounts, and displayed imagination and determination in efforts to make their enterprises thrive.[63] Mary Spratt, widowed at nineteen, attracted attention and business to her deceased husband's counting house by laying flat stones along the property, thereby creating New York's first sidewalk, and John Peter Zenger's widow did not hesitate to publicly deny the reports of "Some evil minded Persons...[that] the Widow Zenger, Publisher of this Paper, had entirely dropped the printing business."[64]

Other women similarly demonstrated Widow Zenger's commitment to running the family publishing house upon the demise of their spouses. Cornelia Bradford, for eight years and without any assistance, conducted her late husband's business of printing, bookselling and publishing the American Weekly Mercury. Jonas Green's Annapolis Gazette prospered

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62 Carl Bridenbaugh, Cities in The Wilderness (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 343.

63 Bridenbaugh, Revolt, p. 176

64 Dexter, Colonial Women, p. 105; New York Journal, September 14, 1747

under the auspices of his efficient widow, who also did government printing. The Assembly, evidencing their satisfaction with the work, agreed to pay her the annual sum of nine hundred forty-eight and one-half dollars for her services. When Anne Green died in March, 1775, the Maryland Gazette called her "an Example to her Sex."[65]

Female energy provided a multitude of useful services. Women real estate agents, cutlers, coachmakers and ropemakers strengthened the colonial economy, and, with the granting of a legal monopoly, midwifery became recognized as an exclusively feminine occupation in the eighteenth century.[66] The midwife performed her tasks often under the most adverse circumstances. Mrs. Whitman of Vermont, who officiated at more than 2,000 births and never lost a patient, "travelled through the woods on snowshoes...both by night and day to relieve the distressed."[67]

Teaching offered another occupational opportunity to women who had some specialized training. The profession included females with a wide range of knowledge, sophistication and skill: the New England goodwife who taught reading on a regular basis in her kitchen and charged a modest fee, thus establishing a "dame school," differed considerably from a Mistress Rogers whose Young Ladies School in Trenton, New Jersey, emphasized needlework and painting.[68]

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65 Dexter, Colonial Women, p. 171.

66 Dexter, Colonial Women, p. 109; Pennsylvania Gazette, May 23, 1754, August 29, 1754, March 21, 1748.

67 Zadeck Tompson, History of Vermont (Vermont, 1853), iii p. 110, quoted in Dexter, Colonial Women, p. 185.

68 Lawrence Cremin, American Education. The Colonial Experience 1607-1783 (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 129; Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book (Philadelphia: 1935), p. 14.

The amount and type of education colonial children received, largely a function of their parents' economic and cultural background, varied markedly and determined the demand for instructors in any particular area. City boys and girls, until the age of seven, learned elementary reading together at home with their parents or from a school mistress, often the wife of a craftsman. Daughters of wealthy families might then attend a school where the "female embellishments," drawing, wax-work and embroidery, mixed with doses of spelling, arithmetic, history and writing comprised the curriculum, while ambitious daughters of artisans prepared to support themselves by learning cooking or weaving from women dedicated to teaching these skills.[69]

Prosperous parents residing in sparsely populated regions could also take advantage of urban educational institutions. Country families had more of their girls than boys board in the city. The volume of advertisements for girls' schools in colonial newspapers is evidence that fathers shared the interest of Timothy Edwards, the scholarly Puritan, in assuring their daughters proper instruction. After a classical and English education at home, the New England Minister sent his daughters to Boston for completion of their studies.[70] Although private academies for girls increased significantly in the second half of the eighteenth century, women did not compose

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69 Bridenbaugh, Revolt, pp. 176-177; Dexter, Colonial Women, p. 93; Emily Vanderpool, Chronicles of a Pioneer School From 1792-1833, (Massachusetts, 1903).

70 Jonathan Edwards, Works (New York, 1829), i p. 17-18.

a majority of the teachers.

Female labor did, however, provide the backbone of the country's nascent textile industry. In the earliest settlements, women, working at home, did the spinning and weaving for their own families, and additionally for financial remuneration. Many became proficient in the different aspects of textile manufacture, including knitting, lace-making, the making of cards for combing cotton and wool, as well as sewing. Colonial records of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries note sporadic attempts to encourage women in this type of work, but after 1750, communities made more persistent efforts to increase textile production by establishing spinning schools.[71]

In 1770, when Mr. William Molineux of Boston petitioned the legislature for support in his project to instruct and employ "young females from eight years old and upward," a contemporary commented: "The female children of this town...are not only useful to the community but the poorer sort are able in some measure to assist their parents in getting a livelihood."[72] Radical innovations in technology would eventually render the production methods taught at spinning schools obsolete, but during the quarter century before Samuel Slater established the first cotton mill in Rhode Island in 1789, enterprising men attempted to organize and extend the textile industry by the already antiquated means of manufacture.

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71 Abbott, p. 18.

72 Quoted in Abbott, p. 18.

Ambitious residents of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore formed societies "for encouraging Manufacture" and established "manufacturies" which stimulated public interest in industrial development, although they used neither new machinery nor steam power.[73] Philadelphia, in 1775, boasted the formation of the first joint stock manufacturing company in the country, employing over four hundred women. Approximately three hundred women spun linen yarn for the Pennsylvania Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and the Useful Arts in 1787. Although most of these women worked at home, many of the one hundred thirty employed by a similar society in New York did their spinning on the premises.[74]

Because women had long experience with textile manufacture, it seemed only natural that they make the transition from home to factory when technological developments required the change. But other reasons, more significant than historical continuity, fostered the feminine kinship with early industry.

An agricultural nation,believing strongly in the democratic propensities of independent yeoman farmers, did not take quickly to plans for industrialization. Manufacturing could not be at the expense of agricultural interests, and with the abundance of cheap, good land, few men would be induced to leave farming. The resolution to this dilemma depended not only on employing women in manufacturing establishments, but

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73 Abbott, p. 22.

74 Abbott, p. 38.

also on making it a part of the national policy to publicize the benefits that accrued to individual families and to the entire nation from using female labor in industry.

Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Trench Cox, in 1794, replying to the argument that citizens should give all their attention to agriculture, emphasized that women should staff the factories. This, the most profitable use of feminine skills, would not deflect energy from agrarian pursuits.[75] Alexander Hamilton reasoned similarly in the Report on Manufactures: "women and children are rendered more useful by manufacturing establishments than they otherwise would be... the husband-man himself [would experience] a new source of profit and support from the increased industry of his wife and daughters, invited and stimulated by the demands of the neighboring manufactories."[76] The large proportion of women employees in the "infant industries" also proved a valuable protectionist argument in the tariff debates following the War of 1812. Journalists Hezekiah Niles and Matthew Carey frequently incorporated it in their writings, and petitions to Congress called attention to additions in the national wealth and prosperity made possible by using feminine labor in factories, which would "make [the nation] independent of foreign supplies."[77]

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75 Abbott, p. 50.

76 Alexander Hamilton, Hamilton's Report on the Subject of Manufactures, Made in his capacity of Secretary of the Treasury on the 5th of December, 1791. (Philadelphia: W. Brown, 1827).

77 Niles Register, xi, p. 367, xlii, p. 177. Mathew Carey, "Address of the Philadelphia Society," Essays in Political Economy, p. 69, quoted in Abbott, p. 52.

The contributions of female factory operatives received public acknowledgment, but those whose work did not call forth official praise still derived a sense of importance from their labors. Impelled by the vicissitudes of colonial life to utilize diverse skills, women developed confidence in their abilities to alleviate family difficulties and to provide vital community services. As printers, midwives, tavern keepers, pioneer-settlers,and merchants they became an integral part of the diversified economy while supporting themselves and their loved ones.

Of course, all colonial women did not pursue careers; many with financial security chose to remain at home and give all their attention to domestic concerns. Others, no doubt, found their professional aspirations stifled by domineering husbands. Yet women who confined their activities, either by desire or necessity, knew that this limited sphere evolved from individual and specific situations and neither reflected inherent inferiorities in the sex, nor implied that females had to remain at home because they could be effective only within its secure boundaries.

The genuine appreciation and respect that society bestowed on those who made special talents and accomplishments evident through varied enterprises affected all women; examples of female initiative, fortitude, and maturity, elevating woman's status in the community, furnished models of feminine capability and enabled women to feel proud of their sex, regardless of individual circumstances. Through their daily activities,

American women achieved a far greater recognition than that accorded their sisters in Europe and England, but the essential importance of the colonial period in the history of feminism transcended the routines of female life.[78] Although modified by legal, economic, and personal restrictions, many women had the ability to determine their duties and responsibilities, to themselves, to their families, and to society, and in that sense exercised some measure of control over their lives.

The experience of American women in the eighteenth century harmonized with liberal social ideas growing out of political and religious revolutions in Europe and America which tended to substitute individual conscience and judgment for authority. Weaving together the facts and philosophies of those turbulent years forms a fabric rich in potential for the continuous evolution of woman's freedom to determine her destiny. Yet the rights and responsibilities enjoyed by colonial women diminished markedly with each passing decade. The deterioration in position, actual and perceived, received rigorous reinforcement from nineteenth century writers, who, dissolving the boundaries of individuality within their theories, relentlessly set forth universal standards of female behavior, capability and social role.

This phenomenal outpouring of writings aggravated woman's condition and impaired the ability to deal creatively

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78 Rossiter, p. 158.

with her life. The emergence of this body of literature is a startling development in American social history and in feminist thought, but historians have not attempted to explain its origins. Some, however, have tried to account for the diminution of women's participation in society. One historian focused on the "mania for codifying laws" after the revolution, which ended ambiguities and flexibility in legal codes that women had used to their advantage.[79] Another wrote:

> When education began to be institutionalized, the exclusion of girls from higher education was an actual deprivation and implied lower status. Similarly, the access to a variety of occupations enjoyed earlier by colonial women became limited as soon as American society had advanced to a point where professionalization could take place. Professional status was restricted to those who had followed a prescribed course of education within established institutions. Since women were excluded from such institutions, they were automatically excluded from the rising professions...[80]

These explanations are tantalizing: they seem to provide answers, but in reality only raise more questions. Why did codification make the laws more stringent instead of reflecting existing liberal practices, which included the implicit ability of women to vote in most states.[81] Why did the institutionalization of education automatically exclude girls, especially if that education led to a professional life in which women had historically participated or had displayed the inclination

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79 Dexter, Colonial Women, p. 190.

80 Gerda Lerner, "Women's Rights and American Feminism," American Scholar, 40 (Spring, 1971), 238-239.

81 Calhoun, II p. 79. Not one of the original state constitutions explicitly restricted suffrage to men. New York was the first state to add the qualification "male" in 1778.

or talent to pursue?

The answers to these questions are intertwined with other, more basic questions which must be answered before the evolution of feminism in the nineteenth century can be fully understood. If women had been valuable participants in society, usefully contributing their labor and skill, why deny their effectiveness and denigrate their abilities? If they had worked, and would continue to work, long hours in fields and factories, why epitomize the sex as frail and delicate? If women had displayed the same talents and abilities as men, why insist that the sexes had entirely different natures? If females had found fulfillment in diverse occupations, why tell them they should only be happy at home? If women, through individual perceptions of their needs and interests, had assumed responsibility for their lives, why dictate a monolithic code of behavior that imposed a dreary homogeneity on all women and negated feminine worth as independent beings? If viable, liberal philosophies, invigorated by American Revolutionary theory, flourished in the eighteenth century, why stifle their development? And finally, if women had a rich history, why divorce them from it so completely that they remained alienated from their heritage until the galvanizing effects of antebellum urbanization impelled women, slowly and courageously, to fuse their shared life experiences into a vibrant feminist ideology?

A response to these fundamental inquiries requires an understanding of the transformations in society and how men and

women perceived these changes: the fears they evoked, the hopes they raised and often crushed, and the insecurities and tensions they engendered.

CHAPTER II

THE FADING ORDER

Is the Nineteenth Century to be
a contrast to the Eighteenth. . .
Is it to extinguish all the
lights of its Predecessor.

--John Adams to Thomas
Jefferson 1815

The slow one now will later be fast,
As the present now, will later be past,
The order is rapidly fading
The first one now will later be last
For the times they are a-changin'

--Bob Dylan

For we cannot tarry here,
We must march. . .we must bear the brunt of danger
We the youth sinewy races, all the rest on us depend[1]

Walt Whitman, celebrating a rhapsodic faith in democracy, articulated for his countrymen the spirit of crusading optimism that shaped the perceptions and responses of the emerging nation. From the beginning, Americans had shared a sense of mission which imbued their actions with a special significance: the Puritans sought to establish a "city on the hill" and the revolutionary generations struggled to vindicate the natural rights of mankind before the eyes of the world, but those living during the early nineteenth century seemed to be charged with a special responsibility. As the inheritors and interpreters of a precious past, Americans reaching maturity in the early 1800s had the difficult task of guarding and preserving the traditional national goals and character from the ravaging effects of material prosperity and physical expansion.

Jeffersonian thought gave clear definition to the American ideal of a society of democratic farmers who, becoming prosperous through their industry, eschewed all special privilege and unfair practice. Exalting the "native, substantial, independent yeomanry [who] constitute our pride, efficiency and strength;. . .our defense in war, our ornaments in peace," a statesman proclaimed that "no population is more distinguished

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[1] Walt Whitman, "Pioneers! O Pioneers," American Poetry and Prose, ed. Norman Foerster (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957), II, 903-906.

for an elevated love of freedom--for morality, virtue, frugality and independence."[2] The vision of the United States as an abundant garden, inhabited by yeoman farmers, never accurately reflected American society, but the yearning for an uncomplicated, harmonious style of life which gave content to the myth of a pastoral, noncompetitive social order, assumed a special urgency as the strains of growth and change challenged inveterate beliefs about the future form of the nation.

The belief in their country as the harbinger of freedom made Americans deeply conscious of the gravity of their trust. Within the first few decades of the nineteenth century, sensitive citizens expressed uneasiness over a society at variance with their hopes for America's glorious mission. John Adams revealed his disquietude to Thomas Jefferson:

> Let me ask you, very seriously my Friend, Where are now in 1813, the Perfection and perfectability of human Nature? Where is now the progress of the human Mind? Where is the Amelioration of Society? Where the Augmentations of human Comforts? Where the diminutions of human Pains and Miseries. . .? When? Where? and how? is the present Chaos to be arranged into Order?[3]

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[2] Charles Joseph Faulkner, "The Policy of the State with Respect to her Slave Population," Paper read before the Virginia House of Delegates, Richmond, Virginia, January 20, 1832 quoted in Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), p. 152.

[3] John Adams, The Adams-Jefferson Letters (Chapel Hill, 1959), II, 358 quoted in William R. Taylor, Cavalier and Yankee (New York: George Braziller, 1961), p. 2.

The elder statesman's disillusionment reflected the disappointment of a populace which found themselves unwillingly embroiled in a second war with England so soon after the Revolution. The conflict in Europe raged from 1793 to 1815, and for two decades America endured repeated threats to her sovereignty, plaguing the people with almost constant fear. The United States finally entered the battle in 1812 to defend its independence, but the fight took a heavy toll. The war cost the nation the lives of 1,877 of its military men and the good will of some of its statesmen who, opposing the war, called the Hartford Convention in December of 1814 to voice their complaints about the government. News of the Peace of Ghent (1815) led to the dissolution of the Convention; but the Treaty itself, ending the armed combat, resolved none of the issues which had precipitated the clash.

The cessation of fighting did not bring the desired reassurances about the ability of the nation to withstand diverse pressures. In 1819, the country faced a severe inflation caused by wild speculation in Western lands, overextended investments in manufacturing, mismanagement of the Second Bank of the United States, a collapse of foreign markets, and a contraction of credit. Although Southern and Western states experienced the most severe repercussions of this financial crisis, the Panic of 1819 raised widespread doubts about the economic health of the entire country. Concern about the nation's future also attended the conflict following Missouri's application in 1819 for admission to statehood. In the wake

of the controversy, John Adams confessed his fear that such disputes "might rend this mighty Fabric in twain. . ., [producing] as many nations in North America as there are in Europe."[4]

The first twenty years of the nineteenth century gave Americans cause to share their former President's doubts about the durability of national values. A war, an inflation, and a potentially dangerous Congressional dispute brought focus to the country's vulnerability and unleashed a variety of discordant opinions. Within the ensuing decades, the nation began to feel the impact of political, economic, and social change which, obliterating the old ways of life, increasing mobility, and transforming the traditional symbols of status and prestige, appeared all the more frightening because they seemed to destroy the cherished American ideal of a simple agrarian republic. These rapid and often incomprehensible alterations in society generated anxiety and insecurity while heightening the quest for stability and intensifying the search for unifying beliefs.

The transfigurations in the style and extent of political participation challenged conventional assumptions about the kinds of men who would lead the country and the methods of their selection. By 1820 the trend toward universal white male suffrage became apparent. Vermont and New Hampshire led the way in the 1790s, followed by Indiana, Illinois, and

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4 Adams, quoted in Taylor, p. 3.

Missouri. Massachusetts and Pennsylvania permitted all who paid either state or county taxes to vote, and after 1821, New York required merely a small tax, which a referendum eliminated in 1826. By 1850 all states except North Carolina had abandoned property qualifications; a low tax restriction lingered in only six states.[5]

This broad extension of suffrage brought new men into politics and called forth innovative techniques to organize and persuade the enlarged number of voters. Men without prior experience in public affairs took their own conceptions, tactics and ethics into the vote-getting arena. Pragmatic, opportunistic, and often ruthless, these novices accomplished significant changes in the nature of American politics, causing those raised within the ethos of a genteel culture to retreat before the aggressive advances of men they regarded as intensely competitive interlopers. The well-bred elites, who had dominated American political life, slowly disappeared from the scene, leading one historian to note that the names of those who left Southern politics in the early nineteenth century would "compose a Who's Who of Southern intellectual life."[6] Alexis de Tocqueville, the astute social observer, visiting the country in 1831 similarly remarked that "the most affluent classes of society are so entirely removed from the direction of political affairs in the United States, that

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[5] Glynden Van Deusen, The Jacksonian Era (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 10.

[6] Taylor, p. 37.

wealth, far from confering a right to the exercise of power, is rather an obstacle than means of attaining it. The wealthy members of the community abandon the lists," Tocqueville asserted, "through unwillingness to contend, and frequently to contend in vain against the poorest classes of their fellow-citizens."[7]

As the traditional party leaders returned to private life, taking with them conventional methods of conducting elections, new modes of campaigning appeared, conducted by men especially trained to influence the recently enfranchised electorate. The election of Andrew Jackson in 1828 inaugurated the era of the professional politician: Old Hickory owed success largely to the skillful maneuvers of his campaign manager, Martin Van Buren. A consummate politician and an adroit tactician, Van Buren received a thorough political education during his ten years as New York State Senator. He commanded the important Bucktail faction of the New York Republican Party, and his control of the effective political machine, the Albany Regency, enabled Van Buren to reestablish the Old Jeffersonian coalition between New York and Virginia, which immeasurably aided Jackson's efforts. The New York Senator had a genius for organization. Within a period of two years he and his political cohorts, John Eaton, Thomas Ritchie, and Thomas Hart Benton,

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[7] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, ed. Philip Bradley (New York, 1945), I, 22.

created a new, vigorous Democratic Party which demonstrated the effectiveness of the novel campaign methods.[8]

Andrew Jackson had immense appeal; his heroism and personality strengthened the chances of victory, but winning depended upon translating pro-Jackson sentiment into a vote for the Democratic party, and Van Buren and his corps of trained politicians accomplished this task with finesse. Party officials in many states supervised a league of active newspaper editors who carried Jackson's message to their readers. But press coverage, though terribly crucial, still lacked the necessary personal appeal. The Democrats knew that success could only be realized by incorporating the masses of new voters, the common people, into their party. This activity became the special job of the professional politician. Complete with a friendly handshake, a memory for names and faces, the party regular planned parades and picnics, sang political songs, and distributed buttons.[9] The efforts of the professional organizer made the common man feel at home in the Democratic Party. The politician's labors won the vote for Jackson; his achievements extended the benefits of democracy.

Predictably, Old Hickory's victory, aided substantially by the support of the lower classes, aroused anxiety among

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[8] Robert Remini, Martin van Buren and the Making of the Democratic Party (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 11.

[9] Remini, pp. 192-3.

those who had formerly determined the outcome of elections. Financially secure, established men viewed the General with suspicion. Hardly fitting the accepted image of a United States President, Jackson, a poor orphan of limited education and unpolished manners, described himself as a man of the people. And who were these people Jackson allegedly exalted? Certainly not those involved in promotional, financial, or commercial pursuits. Jackson's "real people" composed "the bone and sinew of the country"--the planters, farmers, mechanics and laborers.[10]

Alarmed at what they perceived as the surging power of the poorer ranks of society, members of the traditional elite expressed their agitation. Justice Joseph Story, attending Jackson's inaugural reception, noted that the guests included "the most vulgar and gross [people] in the nation." As the Justice watched the reception turn into a destructive melee, he concluded sorrowfully that "the reign of 'King Mob'" had arrived.[11] The venerable Philip Hone, Mayor of New York City from 1825-1826, worried that Jackson and Van Buren had raised up forces greater than they could control. Hone's diary records his fear of mass violence, of class hatred, and of the "poor and ignorant" intent upon "pulling down the well-to-do

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[10] Marvin Meyers, The Jacksonian Persuasion (California: Stanford University Press, 1957), pp. 21-22.

[11] Life and Letters of Joseph Story, ed. William W. Story (Boston, 1851), I, 563 quoted in van Deusen, p. 31.

and enlightened."[12] The extension of suffrage, the advent of the professional politician with his new techniques and aggressive approach, the election of a President whose rhetoric clearly identified the class enemy of the people as "the money power," all diluted the effectiveness of upper- and middle-class men to control political events and engendered concern over their status in the nation.

As the customary roots of political power eroded in the early nineteenth century, so, too, did the traditional sources of holy authority, as the crests of religious zeal, known as the Second Great Awakening, swept members from the two leading churches of the colonial period: the Congregationalists and the Episcopalians. Orthodox faith had been threatened even before the fires of nineteenth century religious revivalism left their burning imprint on the nation. A first Great Awakening sprung forth from the conflicts between the fear of God's wrath and the lures of the material world in the 1740s; yet, the public response faded and flourished unpredictably as the triumphs of the revolutionary generation, enhancing man's confidence in his ability to control his destiny and to find happiness on earth, gave shape to a new religion. Molded by Enlightenment rationalism and strengthened by the scientific achievements of Galileo and Newton, Deism, a creed which viewed God as a benevolent

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12 The Diary of Philip Hone, ed. Allan Nevins (New York, 1927), p. 142.

diety who governed the world according to established laws, gained popularity.

This reasonable religion won adherents particularly among the urban upper classes of the Massachusetts Congregationalists Church. Known as Unitarianism, this rebel sect included such notables as Theodore Parker and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and wielded an influence greater than its numbers. The first Great Awakening and the appeal of Unitarianism weakened the grasp of orthodoxy, but it remained the work of the famous revivalist, Charles Finney, and his band of itinerant preachers to transform the practice of religion in America. Religious excitement which waxed and waned in the early 1800s reached a crescendo between 1825 and 1837. Within those years, the flames of strenuous evangelicalism ignited New England and criss-crossed western New York with such intensity that the region received the label "The Burned-Over District."[13] Revivalism had a powerful appeal: theology became subordinate to faith; Christian behavior and conduct all but assured salvation; camp meetings imparted a sense of urgency to their participants.

The revivalist preachers' hellfire tactics excited their listeners with fear of eternal damnation, while the orthodox clergy cringed with disgust at the "millions of wretches biting

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[13] Whitney Cross, The Burned-over District. The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York 1800-1850 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 13

and gnawing" their way to salvation.[14] But the searing currents of evangelicalism could not be ignored. The Methodists and Baptists, the most aggressive revivalist sects, grew rampantly, becoming the two largest denominations in the country before the Civil War.[15] Older churches, unable to adapt to the changing conditions, whithered, attesting to the obsolescence of their teachings. Clearly the suggestion that all could be saved had greater compatibility with the democratic tendencies of the antebellum era than the doctrines of predestination and election.

The Second Great Awakening which altered the institutional structure of American Protestantism had subtle but serious implications. The enthusiasm with which men embraced this new and personal religion portended the end of the all-powerful ministry.[16] The clergy had occupied an important place in American society. As the acknowledged interpreters of God's word, they arbitrated morals and defined appropriate behavior. But the methodology of the revivals, shattering the traditional clergy's monopoly on comprehending and communicating the Holy Gospel, divested these symbols of order and authority of their disciplining, integrative role in the community.

Charles Finney, the most intellectually inclined of the evangelicalists, thought it "all a farce to suppose that a

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[14] Charles Finney quoted in Paul Goodman and Frank Otto Gatell, U.S.A. An American Record (New York: Hold, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1972), p. 191.

[15] Goodman and Gatell, p. 191.

[16] Goodman and Gatell, p. 151.

literary ministry can convert the world."[17] Generally, the participants in the revivals "accepted the leadership of itinerant evangelists, men of their own class and order of talents, without superior intellect or learning." Theological training, in fact, might have been more a liability than an asset to such persons, for revivalism tended quite definitely to substitute emotion for reason and enthusiasm for knowledge.[18]

Education, social background, and the respect of one's congregation no longer mattered. The self-appointed preachers who traveled throughout the country demonstrated that they could win souls for God, and, by thus doing, undermined the authority of a respected elite. The deterioration of community cohesion, signified by the diminishing prestige of the learned clergy, seemed all the more certain as the seeds of revivalism sprouted into an unruly garden of sects and utopian schemes. An excess of religious fervor, fostered by the rapid, intense conversion of masses of individuals, particularly in

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17 Western Recorder, VIII(May 10, 1831) 75; Charles G. Finney, Lectures to Professing Christians (New York, 1832), p. 106 quoted in Cross, p. 202.

18 Cross, p. 202; the number of prominent ministers who turned to belles lettres as a means of self-expression and control is evidence of the dramatic shift in the relationship between the minister and his culture in the period from the Great Awakening to the Civil War. For further development of this idea see Ann Douglas, "Heaven Our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States 1830-1860," American Quarterly, XXVI (December, 1974), 49. Examples of literary efforts of the clergy during the antebellum era will be found in Chapters III, IV, V.

the 1830s, flowered into multitudes of spiritual movements and experiments. The more eccentric of these included Millerists, followers of William Miller who preached that the Second Advent would occur in 1843, and the believers in the Fox sisters' ability to communicate with the spirits.

Whitney Cross, historian of American Revivalism, noted that these religious radicals, or ultraists, did not "exhibit profound understanding or trespass upon the threshold of critical thought." Motivated by perpetual excitement, each person received an independent message. "Inspiration came to individuals and each. . .charted his own course."[19] "Disregarding any established authority or institution, ultraists concerned themselves with single souls, their own and others', their standards of piety and morality absolutely fixed by personal holiness."[20]

Ultraists always remained in the minority, but their unusual activities attracted widespread attention which magnified their dislocating impact on society. Horace Greeley invited the Fox sisters to his home, and wrote in the Tribune that "it would be the basest cowardice not to say that we are convinced beyond a doubt of their perfect integrity and good faith."[21] Other spiritualists received similar publicity as innovations in communication and transportation spread the

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[19] Cross, p. 202.

[20] Cross, p. 206.

[21] Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 83.

contagion of the Second Great Awakening throughout the nation.

Rushed on by furious and persistent technological changes, the cumulative momentum of declining political and religious deference, proliferating of utopian communities, each with its own ethics and mores, and the proselytizing of unusual religious crusades, all but destroyed the existence of an orderly country ruled by recognizable elites and organized around clearly identifiable national goals. New modes of travel, accelerating all movement, intensified the chameleonic nature of American society, and further eroded the nation's stability. The revolutionary improvements in transportation increased the tempo of life and accentuated equality. With the advent of steamboats, steam engines, and the building of canals, turnpikes and railroads, average Americans could afford to travel. The majority of vehicles lacked first-class accommodations leading one gentleman to complain that "the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant, the polite and the vulgar, all herd on the cabin floor of the steamer, feed at the same table, sit on each others laps, as it were, in the cars. ...Steam, so useful in many respects, interferes with the comfort of travelling, [and] destroys every salutary distinction in society. . . ."[22] The popular

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22 Recollections of Samuel Beck, ed. H. E. Scudder (Philadelphia, 1877), pp. 276-6 quoted in Douglas Miller, Jacksonian Aristocracy, Class and Democracy in New York 1830-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 9.

song, The Railroad Chorus, written in 1837, also took note of the disparate sorts of men brought together within the public transportation facilities:

> Men of different 'stations'
> In the eye of fame
> Here are very quickly
> Coming to the same
> High and lowly people
> Birds of every feather
> On a common levelling
> Traveling together.[23]

Restructuring the economy with a rapidity both startling and incomprehensible, steamboats, canals, and railroads laced the country together, in the forty years before the Civil War, promoting regional specialization and creating national markets. The steam boat, operated successfully on the Hudson River in 1807, spread to western waters after 1817, linking the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys with the deep South. The existing network of navigable rivers limited the usefulness of steamboats, but by building canals the United States proved it could overcome the obstacles of nature. Between 1820 and 1840 Americans constructed over 3,000 miles of canals. New York initiated the race for the trade of western states with the Erie Canal, joining the Hudson River to the Great Lakes, but other states quickly followed.[24]

In time, enthusiasm for canals diminished, and enterprising men turned their attention to the railroad. The

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[23] John Godfred Saxe, "Railroad Chorus," Frank Luther, Americans and Their Songs (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942), p. 57.

[24] Goodman and Gatell, p. 163.

citizens of Maryland took the lead with the construction of the Baltimore and Ohio in 1828. The dependability and speed of the railroad in the shipment of merchandise enhanced its importance; by the 1840s the United States had 30,000 miles of track, almost twice as much as Europe.[25] The dramatic changes in the means and methods of transport drastically lowered the cost of moving goods. Within one generation, from 1825 to 1855, the price of sending bulky products by land fell 95 percent. Freight rates on the Mississippi-Ohio system decreased about 75 percent for downstream and 90 percent for upstream; the charges for shipment between Buffalo and New York dropped from $100 to less than $8 a ton.[26]

The incredible lowering of rates coupled with a widening national market stimulated the development of industry. As the western farmer's purchasing power grew, he increased his demand for Eastern goods. The businessman, responsive to the changing economy, enlarged the scope of his operations and produced goods more cheaply and efficiently, thus discouraging household production and further broadening the market.

Industrialization, benefiting from the symbiotic relationship between agriculture and manufacture, soon developed an impetus of its own. Textile factories, for example, provided the raw materials for a ready-made clothing industry,

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25 Goodman and Gatell, p. 164.

26 George B. Taylor, The Transportation Revolution 1815-1860 (New York, 1951), pp. 132-139, 173-175.

which in turn supplied the demand and the market for sewing machines. Similarly, the use of machinery in different industries sparked the manufacture of machine tools. By the 1830s, new forms of drills, gear cutters, and dies saturated the market, rivaling European tools in variety and efficiency.[27] Americans also excelled in the production of a wide range of goods, from nails, tacks, bolts, and files to leading in the development of the printing press.

The growth of industry generated tensions in American society. Manufacturing lured increasing numbers away from the farm, foretelling the end of a dominantly rural America. The pastoral myth remained strong, however, and the always widening gap between the reality of life and the national ideal passed on by America's founders, produced guilt at betraying the ancestral heritage and created anxiety that democracy, presumed to be based on an independent yeomanry, could not survive the mercurial changes of an industrializing and urbanizing country.

The velocity of mechanization played havoc with the traditional social structure, deepening status insecurities. Investment in industry rewarded those with ready capital, an enterprising spirit, and an ample supply of good fortune. During the Jacksonian period, a rising industrialist class challenged the hegemony of the old landed and commercial

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[27] Joseph W. Roe, English and American Tool Builders (New York, 1926), pp. 119-123, 129, 217-247 quoted in Van Deusen, p. 15.

aristocracy. The early manufacturers had varied backgrounds: thrifty farmers, skilled craftsmen, retired sea captains, and other men of modest means. With their newly-made fortunes and their recently acquired political power, these rising entrepreneurs posed a formidable threat to the continuing leadership of the elites, who showed no inclination to admit these "upstarts" into their ranks.

Indeed, the older, wealthier segments of the population, ever jealous of their prerogatives, constantly struggled to keep their position. A fundamental change in the nature of American business, the development of the corporation, afforded one opportunity for the elitist groups to retain power. Particularly after the Supreme Court decision in the Dartmouth College Case (1819), which protected corporation charters from the assaults of the state, incorporation became the desired form of business organization, and the state legislatures turned into an arena for battle between new and old wealth. The latter group, with greater experience and money, usually succeeded in influencing the legislatures to pass charters of incorporation favorable to their interest. The resentment of the entrepreneurial class to these special privileges increased as they experienced difficulty obtaining bank credit which wealthier businessmen received with no trouble. Realization of their second class status within the upper echelons of society intensified efforts to assume the coveted top position and, predictably, strengthened the elitest groups' resolve to maintain their ascendency.

Jacksonian society, however, did not only divide men into two groups: the one making their fortune, the other guarding it. The changes in transportation which enabled some to accumulate vast wealth seriously weakened the position of a substantial part of the population. Often channeling discontent into political activity, trade unionism, and public demonstrations, these declining Jacksonians appeared all the more threatening because they sometimes incorporated the foreign born into their ranks.

Western farmers prospered from their innovative methods of travel, but shipments of "western wheat demoralized farmers in the older communities, who were already struggling with declining fertility, low yields, parasitic infestations, increasing costs, and declining prices."[28] Those farmers who were victimized rather than helped by change, generally resided in the older regions of the Middle States, in New England, and in parts of the South.[29]

Along with the eastern farmers, the status of other members of society seemed to be plummeting uncontrollably. During the Jacksonian period, emergence of the merchant-capitalist injured both the master mechanic and the journeyman. This new group "began to invade the mechanical trades and to establish small scale factories which produced goods cheaply and in

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28 Paul Gates, The Farmer's Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860 (New York, 1960), p. 160.

29 Michael A. Lebowitz, "The Jacksonians: Paradox Lost?", Towards A New Past, Dissenting Essay in American History, ed. Barton F. Bernstein (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 72.

large quantities."[30] The mechanic, in an effort to compete with the merchant-capitalist, shifted to a greater use of apprentices as a source of cheap labor instead of the more costly journeymen. This ultimately weakened the journeyman's prestige and induced him to become involved in union activity to prevent the downgrading of his skills. The shifting wealth of the Jacksonian period, little understood and little accepted, in a nation supposedly committed to an equal and noncompetitive society, heightened social anxieties, particularly in those areas where immigrant groups threatened the jobs of American workers.[31]

Between 1828 and 1844, half a million immigrants arrived in the United States, and by 1849 the numbers of arrivals burst into a flood of over 200,000 each year. Harassed by oppression, revolution, high taxes, bitter winters, and food shortages, Germans, Irish, English, Scottish, and Welsh--Pietists, Lutherans, Catholics, and Jews--flocked to American shores.[32] Those with some money and an interest in agriculture sought their livelihood in farming, but many remained in the cities, competing with native labor and adding to the swelling urban population.

Throughout the antebellum era, farm dwellers outnumbered city residents; yet, a definite trend of movement to urban

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30 Walter Hugins, Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class (California, 1960), p. 53.

31 Lebowitz, p. 75.

32 Van Deusen, p. 15.

areas became observable. In 1800 farmers outnumbered those living in the towns and cities of the United States by a ratio of fifteen to one; in 1830 the ratio deteriorated to slightly less than ten and one-half to one; in 1850 it was only five and one-half to one. The rate of urban expansion appeared astonishing. The years between 1820 and 1860 witnessed the most rapid proportional growth of cities in American history.[33] This incredible blossoming of cities exacerbated tensions associated with the national political, economic, and social changes in the years after 1820. Because cities, as the centers of commerce, business, industry, intellectual life, and fashion exercised a dominant influence over the rest of the country, an analysis of the urban response to the alterations of the antebellum era is crucial to an understanding of Jacksonian society, and it provides valuable insights into the ways in which men and women perceived their mutable environment and how they attempted to compensate and adjust to the bewildering transformations.

Nineteenth century American cities tended to resemble one another. All stemming from commercial necessity, they developed parallel institutions and related patterns of response. Their local officials shared methods and techniques

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[33] Van Deusen, p. 7; Richard C. Wade, "An Agenda for Urban History," American History, Retrospect and Prospect ed. George Athan Billias and Gerald N. Grob (New York: The Free Press, 1971), p. 391.

of dealing with the problems inherent in urban expansion. As pockets of homology within the nation, the cities of the Jacksonian period transcended regional differences and fostered a strikingly similar texture of life.[34] The experiences of New York City, therefore, furnish a reliable source for understanding and evaluating the responses of the nation's growing urban centers to the saltatorial antebellum years.

Between 1800 and 1820 New York City stood poised at the threshold of an era of cataclysmic development. Still relatively small and stable, the city showed but a few of the characteristics which would so deeply trouble inhabitants and visitors in the ensuing decades. At the inception of the nineteenth century, New York retained much of the flavor of its early days: a well-regulated society with a strong sense of community. Throughout the colonial period, New Yorkers and residents of the other emerging cities, demonstrated an impressive sensitivity and flexibility to the problems concomitant with town life. As Carl Bridenbaugh illustrated in his massive studies of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Newport, and Charles Town, city fathers handled such critical matters as fire protection, public safety, morality, poverty, and public health with vigorous ingenuity.[35] In New York City, the charter of 1731 granted governmental powers to the

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[34] Richard C. Wade, "Urbanization," The Comparative Approach to American History, ed. R. Vann Woodward (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), p. 190.

[35] Bridenbaugh, Revolt, p. 133.

municipal corporation (the mayor and aldermen), and established the framework for urban services. Drawing upon the British precedent, the members of the corporation adopted regulatory policies, supervised by a regiment of public officials who insured the smooth execution and administration of local ordinances. The continuing provision of adequate services gave the city an atmosphere of order and, in turn, reflected the cohesive community which characterized early New York.

Other stabilizing influences benefited the port city in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Physically compact, New York extended northward only to the triangular-shaped park formed by the intersection of Broadway, Chambers Street and Chatham Street (chosen as the site for the new City Hall building in 1803). And within these limited confines, a fairly homogeneous population, still accepting the wisdom of the traditional elites, fostered internal order. Bolstered by commercial prosperity, New York's first families, secure in their economic, social, and political position, displayed a paternalistic concern for their neighbors. Authority flowed downward from the expected sources: the clergy, the civic leaders, and the men of wealth knit the city into a tight social cloth.

Yet the established institutions of church, local government, and family, once able to integrate and regulate the community, wavered under the multiple pressures of the ante-bellum era. The penetrating national changes reverberated through the Jacksonian cities with a special intensity,

unraveling the social fabric and causing urban life to ricochet erratically as it attempted to find equilibrium in a constantly fluctuating society.

Before the sweeping political innovations of the 1820s which extended suffrage, created the professional politician, and contributed to the election of Andrew Jackson, the antiquated, conservative state Constitution of 1777 restricted New Yorkers' participation in their local government. The document had established a dual electorate, and in New York City, only 62 percent of the adult males qualified to vote for assemblymen, while a paltry 24 percent met the requirements to vote for senators and governor. In addition to the limitation on suffrage, the Constitution provided for a five-man Council of Appointment to select persons for the state's public offices, and a seven-member Council of Revision with the right to veto popular legislation.

The government of New York State, thus effectively removed from the will of the people and lead by the aristocratic Governor, De Witt Clinton, who spoke "the purest brand of Hamiltonianism," aroused the enmity of Martin Van Buren and the Bucktails. Appearing as champions of the populace, the Bucktail faction gained support; it forced the convening of a convention in 1821 to amend the anachronistic constitution. All of the 126 delegates voted to eliminate the Council of Appointment and the Council of Revision, but the question of removing property qualifications for voting provoked "one of

the great suffrage debates in American history."[36] Led by the eloquent James Kent, Chancellor of the State, an eminent group of old-style Federalists vehemently opposed an increase in voting rights. They feared that extension of male suffrage would enable the cities, with their large lower-class population,to rule the State. "New York is destined to be the future London of America," Kent claimed, "and in less than a century that city, with the operation of universal suffrage, and under skillful management will govern this state. . . ."[37]

Democratic sentiment, however, overrode conservative objections; every white male citizen of more than twenty-one years of age who had resided one year within the state and six months within his district, and who paid taxes or worked on the public roads or served in the militia, became qualified to vote. The democratic document, ratified in 1822 with a majority of over 33,000 votes ushered in an era of reform in New York State. The year 1826 saw the last restriction on universal white manhood suffrage removed and the office of justice of the peace made elective. New Yorkers voted directly for presidential electors for the first time in 1828, and in 1833 the citizens of New York City won the right to elect their own mayor, a privilege granted other cities in the state only six years later.[38]

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36 Remini, p. 5; Chilton Williamson, American Suffrage quoted in Miller, p. 12.

37 Miller, p. 13.

38 Miller, p. 14.

Men of wealth and power residing in cities recognized the threat to their position inherent in political reforms, and the fears of distinguished New Yorkers, vivified by the proximity of lower-class urban life, often found expression in private diaries and letters. The civic-minded John Pintard wrote to his daughter that at election time "we have the Working people and Fanny right men [sic] arrayed to level all distinctions to equalize property, abrogate marriage, release children from parental restraint. . . ." These subversive doctrines, he added, "loosen the bonds of society and government." Philip Hone also worried that the masses would be attracted to the ideas of the radical Miss Wright: "Her doctrines are similar to those of Paine and Godwin, and. . . [would] unsettle the foundations of civil society and subvert our fundamental principles of morality. . . ."[39]

Hone greatly feared the breakdown of social order. He believed that fires had been set throughout the city by "wretches" who criticized the aristocracy: "It forms part of the warfare of the poor against the rich; a warfare which is destined, I fear, to break the hearts of some of the politicians of Tammany Hall, who have used these men to answer a temporary purpose, and now find that the dogs they have taught to bark will bite them as soon as their political opponents." The former Mayor repeatedly expressed his dismay at the

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[39] John Pintard, Letters from John Pintard to his Daughter Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816-1833. New York Historical Society, Collections, LXX-LXXXIII (1937-1940) III, 184; Philip Hone, The Diary of Philip Hone, ed. Allan Nevins (New York, 1927), p. 9.

deterioration of respect and decorum in politics. On election day in 1834, he noted in his diary that "[t]here were several riots yesterday in the Sixth Ward, which have been repeated this morning." The disorder could not be controlled and "respectable persons were beaten and trampled in the mud."[40]

Even elected officials received shabby treatment from the urban masses. Philip Hone described a scene at Mayor Cornelius Lawrence's home where the Mayor, in the New York tradition, greeted callers on New Year's Day. "Formerly gentlemen visited the [M]ayor, saluted him by an honest shake of the hand, paid him the compliment of the day and took leave," recalled Hone. But with the extension of democracy "that respectable functionary is now considered the [M]ayor of a party and the rabble, considering him 'hail fellow well met,' use his home as a Five Points Tavern." Hone reported that at ten o'clock the doors of the Lawrences' home "were beset by a crowd of importunate sovereigns, some of whom had already laid the fundamentals of regal glory, and expected to become royally drunk at the hospitable house of His Honor. The rush was tremendous; the tables were taken by story, the bottles emptied in a moment. Confusion, noise, and quarreling ensued, until the [M]ayor with the assistance of the police cleared the house and locked the doors."[41]

Frightened by the absence of order, the upper segments of urban society found themselves caught within the vortex

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[40] Hone, 189, 123.

[41] Hone, pp. 235-6.

of ebbing political power, relentlessly advancing immigration and vociferously demanding workers, while a changing economy produced accelerations and alterations in the social structure which made it equally impossible to control or predict one's future status. New York City's wealth had always been in commerce. Surpassing their old rival, Philadelphia, in 1797, by both exporting and importing more goods than the City of Brotherly Love, New Yorkers asserted their commercial primacy, and, particularly after the war of 1812, made a series of imaginative mercantile improvements which permitted the city on the Hudson to dominate overseas trade. The specialization of business functions, the rise of banking and insurance companies, an efficient auction system, and the first scheduled shipping service to Europe, all seemed to assure important commercial families the undisputed leadership of the city.[42]

New York's merchant-aristocracy, many originally from New England, the Grinnells, the Griswolds, the Lows, the Phelps, the Tappans, and the Pecks enjoyed an unrivalled position in the years before the opening of the Erie Canal. "Let the day be forever remembered with pride, That beheld the proud Hudson to Erie allied," wrote the famous Samuel Woodworth in a song he dedicated to Governor DeWitt Clinton at the joyful inauguration of the canal. The completion of this remarkable man-made river, celebrated in an ebullient style, spurred imaginative,

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[42] Raymond Mohl, Poverty in New York 1783-1825 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 5.

ambitious men to new enterprise. Levi Beardsley recollected that the "canal enlarged the views and removed many prejudices against internal improvements, so that men began to believe things possible which they did not fully comprehend."[43]

Solidifying New York's commercial position, the canal stimulated manufacturing and reinforced the spirit of aggressive optimism which encouraged men to experiment in industry. Clothing, shoe and boot factories, as well as printing and publishing establishments, proliferated after 1825. The new wealth created by these and other industries challenged the traditional elites, while the plethora of newspapers and publications emanating from the mechanization of printing posed a different kind of threat. In the decade following the completion of the canal, a deluge of printed matter resulting from the combination of the steam press, the paper cutting machine, and the transportation revolution, inundated cities across the nation. New types of journals appeared, appealing to those groups in society just gaining recognition. Philadelphia produced the first labor paper in the United States in the Mechanic Free Press (1828) followed by New York's Working Man's Advocate (1829) and the Man (1834). Boston's Morning Post (1831) and Philadelphia's Pennsylvanian (1832) supported Democratic candidates and the Democratic Party's platform. The Irishman (1832), the Irishman and

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[43] Levi Beardsley, Reminiscences (New York, 1852), p. 219; Samuel Woodworth, "The Meeting of the Waters of Hudson and Erie," quoted in Lester Ley, Grace Notes in American History. Popular Sheet Music from 1820-1900 (Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 1967), p. 58.

Foreigner's Advocate (1835) and the Staats-Zeitung (1834) spoke to immigrant groups in New York, while the German population of Cincinnati read the Volksblatt (1836) and the New York Evangelist (1830) became popular with those devoted to revivalism.[44]

With the development of the penny press, the production of published material increased at a phenomenal pace. By 1835, Benjamin Day's New York Sun could print 55,000 papers a day at one penny each, and its rival, the New York Morning Herald, known for its sensational reporting, fared as well. This explosion in the publishing industry fostered the diffusion of information throughout the community. Traditionally, knowledge had been the exclusive property of the established gentry. Respected, educated religious and civic leaders, interpreting and filtering information, effectively controlled the flow of news to the masses, but the printing revolution changed this limited, vertical method of communication. The broad, horizontal dissemination of newspapers, pamphlets, and hand-bills throughout the cities recounted recent events, publicized meetings, and organized dissent. The sweeping circulation of literature, disregarding the wisdom of city fathers, spoke to the different levels of society directly: immigrants, laborers, women and even children had access to a wide spectrum of information.[45] Encouraging the formulation of independent

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[44] Robert Ernst, Immigrant Life in New York 1825-1863 (New York: Ira J. Friedman, Inc., 1949), p. 151.

[45] For an analysis of the effect of the printing revolution on anti-abolitionists see Leonard L. Richards, Gentlemen

opinions and decisions, the profusion of reading material ignored the traditional hierarchical ordering of society, destroying an important elitist source of authority and arousing deep fears of riots and mob activities among residents of cities with large, uncontrollable poor populations; for as Tocqueville observed, "in cities men cannot be prevented from concerting together and awakening a mutual excitement that prompts sudden and passionate resolutions." The French reformer further believed that the "lower ranks which inhabit these cities constitute a rabble even more formidable than the populace of European towns."[46]

The dual impact of antebellum immigration and industrialization greatly increased the size of the "lower ranks" of urban America, while also substantially degrading their position. The shift from handicraft to factory production took place in New York in the two decades between the mid-1820s and the mid-1840s; during these twenty years the merchant-capitalist thrived while the prestige of the wage-worker deteriorated correspondingly. Orestes Brownson, a friend of labor, asked: "[W]ho is most respected, who is considered as belonging to the higher class? He who labors most and is most useful?" He answered: "No. Under the present order of

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of Property and Standing (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 71-73, 166-67.

[46] Tocqueville, pp. 289-290 note.

things, to be respectable you must be idle or be able to live upon the vices or misfortunes of others."[47]

Inevitably, the mixture of declining wages and waning social status impelled laborers, many newly enfranchised, into direct political action. The first city-wide combination of unions, the Mechanics Union of Trade Associations, evolved from a strike of building trade workers in Philadelphia for a ten-hour day. A year later, in 1828, this group formed the Working Men's Labor Party which made impressive gains.[48] Stimulated by the successes of their Philadelphia brethren, New York City mechanics organized politically in 1829 under the leadership of the machinist and radical labor spokesman, Thomas Skidmore. A general gathering of workingmen, called by Skidmore in October 1829, heartily endorsed a plan for independent political action. After nominating a State Assembly slate, the New York Working Men's Party began an intensive two-week campaign for the November election. Although condemned by the Tammany and Masonic newspapers as "atheists," "infidels," "agrarians," and "foreign rabble," the new party did quite well. The election of a carpenter, Ebenezer Ford, to the Assembly and the respectable showings of the other candidates seemed to indicate an increasing labor strength.[49]

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47 Working Man's Advocate, (March 13, 1830), 35 quoted in Miller, p. 32.

48 Miller, p. 39.

49 Miller, p. 40.

The achievements in New York City proved infectious; organizations of "farmers, mechanics, and workingmen" won local elections in Albany, Syracuse and Canandaigua in the spring of 1830, and workers' parties appeared in Schenectady, Rochester, Ithaca, Auburn, Geneva, Batavia, Palmyra, Utica, Kingsbury and Glens Falls. The widespread and vigorous labor activity produced some positive results as many of the workers' demands became incorporated into official policy. In 1832, New York State ended imprisonment for debt, in 1836 the legislature passed a measure which put militia drill on a voluntary basis, and during these years the campaign for free public education made steady progress.[50]

Nevertheless, labor did not win a complete victory. Efforts made to shorten the work day never received governmental sanction, and throughout the 1830s, hours increased steadily while their worsening social and economic status heightened frustrations and added to class consciousness. The rampant inflation and speculation of the thirties, culminating in the Panic of 1837, increased the militancy of labor's demands and, in turn, spread the fear of class warfare throughout urban areas. The leader of the New York Typographical Association declared in 1833: "The time has now arrived for the mechanics of our city to arise in their strength and determine that they will no longer submit to the thraldom which they have patiently borne for many years, nor

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50 Miller, p. 44.

suffer employers to appropriate an undue share of the avails of the labourer to his disadvantage."[51]

Philip Hone reprinted a hand-bill in his diary in 1836 which expressed the depths of labor's outrage at Judge Ogen Edwards for having labeled trade unions as "illegal combinations":

The Rich Against the Poor

> Judge Edwards, the tool of the aristocracy against the people! Mechanics and Workingmen! A deadly blow has been struck at your Liberty! . . .The Freemen of the North are now on the level with the slaves of the South! With no other privileges than laboring, that drones may fatten on your life-blood.[52]

Hone worried that notices, hostile to the upper classes, would excite the crowds and lead to anarchy. In February, 1837 when mass demonstrations against unemployment, high rent and inflated prices of foodstuffs and fuel led the protesters to break into the city flour warehouse and sack the supplies, Hone copied the leaflet announcing the demonstration into his journal:

> Bread, Meat, Rent, Fuel, Their prices must come Down. The Voice of the People Shall be Heard, and Will Prevail. The People will meet in the Park, rain or shine, at four o'clock on Monday afternoon to inquire into the cause of the present unexampled distress, and devise a suitable remedy. All friends of humanity, determined to resist Monopoly and Extortioners, are invited to attend.[53]

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51 Quoted in Miller, p. 45.

52 Hone, p. 211.

53 Hone, p. 241.

The specter of class violence loomed large in the minds of New Yorkers. During one of the periods of economic hardship in the city, diarist George Templeton Strong wrote that "[P]eople talk ominously about rebellions and revolutions on this side of the Atlantic," and the British novelist, Fredrick Marryat, related that New York City's unemployed mechanics had "an air of famished wolves."[54] The menacing demands of the workers, filling their wealthier neighbors with dread, became intensified as the steady influx of immigrants further distended the already swollen labor force and multiplied the suspicions and insecurities of native residents.

Of the five and one half million aliens who arrived in America between 1815 and 1860, more than two-thirds entered through the port of New York, enlarging the city's uncontrollable transient population. Some went to western regions, but many settled in the Empire City; by 1850 foreign-born persons constituted as much as 48 percent of the city's population.[55] The increasing numbers of immigrants arriving from Europe in the 1830s and 1840s, particularly after the Irish famine, glutted the labor market, causing greater unemployment, lowering wages, and aggravating the tensions between the different segments of the city's population. Workers

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[54] George Templeton Strong, The Diary of George Templeton Strong ed. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey (New York, 1952) I, 63; Captain Frederick Marryat, Diary in America with Remarks on its Institutions (New York, 1839), pp. 16-20.

[55] Miller, p. 88; Ernest, p. 129; Miller, p. 96.

resented the foreign competition on the labor market. "Our labouring men, native and naturalized, are met at every turn and every avenue of employment with recently imported workmen from the low wage countries of the world," protested a newspaper reporter in 1844. "Our public improvements, railraods, and canals are thronged with foreigners," he continued. "They fill our large cities, reduce the wages of labor and increase the hardships of the old settlers."[56]

The massive number of immigrants undermined the status of the native laborer and exacerbated his antagonism towards the rest of society, but the American worker shared with his fellow New Yorkers both a sense of superiority to the "foreigner" and a deep fear that his alien customs posed a dangerous threat to the future of the city. Once overwhelmingly English and Protestant, American cities became home to thousands of Irish and German Catholics whose mores seemed to clash dangerously with those of the native population. The disquieting presence of immigrant groups became inescapable in the small "walking city" of the early nineteenth century where all levels of the social strata lived and worked near each other. Before the effects of mass transportation would revolutionize urban life by allowing the affluent to reside away from bustling business areas, and dismal, depressing immigrant neighborhoods, the lives of all city dwellers were

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56 Quoted in Ray Allen Billington, The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860 (New York, 1938), p. 200.

necessarily meshed together within the casement of the compact city.

Visitors to New York often expressed amazement at the strange juxaposition of elegant mansions and broken-down shanties for the foreign born, which, clustering close to one another for security, formed frightening pockets of destitution within the city's wealthier communities. Located in the Sixth Ward, bounded by the fashionable Broadway to the west, Chatham Street to the south, the Bowery to the east, and Canal Street to the north, stood the "Five Points," one of the country's most notorious slums. In this dark, dank, and unhealthy area, on the site of the filled-in Collect Swamp, lived the poorer Irish immigrants. The Old Brewery, erected in 1792 and transformed into a dwelling in 1837, housed several hundred men, women, and children. Living several families in each room, and usually without means of support, the Irish, Black, and later Italian inhabitants of this area experienced the severest deprivation. The filth, poverty, and misery of the neighborhood bred thieves, murderers, pick-pockets, beggars, harlots, and degenerates of every type. Charles Dickens wrote after visiting New York in 1842 that "poverty, wretchedness, and vice," could be found in the Five Points. The buildings of the area "reeking everywhere with dirt and filth," had "coarse bloated faces at the doors," recorded the English author who found them to be "hideous tenements which take their name from

robbery and murder," and house "all that is loathsome, drooping, and decayed."[57]

For many New Yorkers, the Five Points epitomized the devastating effects of immigration on their city, and the Old Brewery emerged as the symbol of a degenerating metropolis of the future, dominated by the foreign-born with their strange and "abhorrent habits." John Pintard communicated to his daughter his belief that "the vice of drunkenness among the lower labouring classes is growing to a frightful excess, . . .and the multitudes of low Irish Catholics, . . .restricted by poverty in their own country, run riot in this." He saw little hope for improvement: "As long as we are overwhelmed with Irish emigrants, so long will the evil abound. . . .Theft, incendiaries and murders which prevail, all rise from this source."[58]

Native New Yorkers, struggling furiously and generally unsuccessfully to minimize the impact of immigration, recoiled in horror at the efforts of Tammany politicians to court the foreign vote. Robert Ernst in his study of immigrant life in New York City described the attempts to incorporate these newcomers into the Democratic Party: "In the thirties Tammany . . .held special meetings for foreigners, who were addressed in their own language, frequently by well-known immigrants who won the confidence of their audiences." Tammany leaders

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57 Charles Dickens, American Notes for General Circulation (London, 1892), pp. 114, 117-118, 123-31, 137.

58 Pintard, III, 51-52.

scrutinized each ward for the "person who could win over the foreign vote and made him a man of power and authority, a minor boss who commanded not only his own henchmen, but the police force in his ward." Ernst attributed most of the violence at the local nominating conventions to the "extralegal form of government" that arose through Tammany's efforts to woo the immigrant into the party.[59]

Those New Yorkers who cherished dreams of a homogeneous, stable, well-integrated population had great difficulty accepting their foreign neighbors. George Templeton Strong forcibly expressed his disdain: "It was enough to turn a man's stomach --to make him abjure republicanism forever--to see the way they were naturalizing this morning at the hall. . . . Wretched filthy bestial-looking Italians and Irish, . . .in short the very scum and dregs of human nature filled the Clerk of C[ommon] P[leas] office so completely that I was almost afraid of being poisoned by going in. . . .";[60] Viewed with hostility and distrust, the immigrants seemed to form unruly enclaves within an increasingly tempestuous society. They adhered to strange traditions, attended their own churches, often spoke an indecipherable language, read their own newspaper and sometimes became the innocent dupes of unscrupulous politicians' attempts to gain power. The foreign population of the cities defied control by the already weakened social institutions; immigrants became the catalysts in the seething cauldron of urban America.

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[59] Ernst, p. 163.

[60] Strong, I, 94.

The desperate condition of the foreign born compelled them to work for paltry sums, unwittingly taking jobs away from native laborers and thus forming the bottom rung in the ladder of an unstable society. American workers perceived their position as jeopardized by the immigrants and struggled to protect their place; traditional elites defended themselves from the rising entrepreneurs, who in turn challenged the status of the master mechanics, whose response to their diminished prestige harmed the journeymen. The nineteenth century cities surely resembled "a great scramble, in which all are troubled and none are satisfied," where "[e]veryone [was] tugging, trying, scheming to advance--to get ahead."[61] Tocqueville wrote of the "innumerable multitude of those who seek to throw off their original condition." He believed that "no Americans are devoid of a yearning to rise." The last lines of a popular song of the era lyrically expressed this belief in the promise of America percolating through the entire nation: "There is success in the future for me, Only an emigrant tho' I may be."[62]

The myth of America as the land of plentitude and the apparent facility of some to accumulate wealth, infused Jacksonians with a restless, insatiable craving to achieve financial and social success, which rendered them acutely competitive as they carefully guarded any miniscule achievement,

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61 Thomas L. Nicholas, Forty Years of American Life 1821-1861 (New York, 1937), p. 195.

62 Tocqueville, II, 290; "Only an Emigrant," Levy, p. 57.

any small symbol of prosperity, from the covetous designs of those beneath them. Particularly in the cities, with their large numbers of transient and resident poor and their increasing populations of parvenus, the perpetual striving for advancement assumed a special urgency and dominated all other concerns.

Yet despite an individual's frenzied struggles to arrive at the pinnacle of society, his success often proved elusive as the political, religious, and economic whirlwinds of the antebellum era, ravaging traditional institutions and leaving a raw, unrecognizable America, swept away man's ability to predict or control his position. Visitors to the United States frequently remarked on the erratic social structure. Tocqueville thought that in no other country in the world were "private fortunes more precarious than in the United States." He wrote: "It is not uncommon for the same man in the course of his life to rise and sink again through all the grades that lead from opulence to poverty.[63] Thomas Hamilton, visiting New York in 1831 and 1832, also responded to the flucuating society: "Rich men spring up like mushrooms," he commented. "Fortunes are made and lost by a single speculation . . . .There is comparatively no settled and permanent body of leading capitalists."[64]

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[63] Tocqueville, II, 201.

[64] Thomas Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (London, 1833), pp. 389-90.

The ever-changing class lines of the Empire City, so dependent upon the vicissitudes of commerce, constantly evoked comment. Alexander Mackay, an English lawyer, noted: "There is a class of wealthy residents, who form the centre of [high society]; with few exceptions it is. . .in a state of constant fluctuation, in accordance with the fluctuating fortunes of commercial life. Its doors are guarded, but they seem never to be closed, and you have a constant stream flowing in and out."[65] "In New York," declared Francis Grund, the German nobleman who emigrated to America in the 1820s, "every new quotation of the exchange excludes a dozen families from the pale of fashion, and creates a dozen new candidates for its imaginary honours." A resident of the city confided to Grund: "Every commercial loss or gain exercises a controlling influence on the happiness and prospects of our families. It changes at once their friends, their associates and often their nearest relatives into strangers. How many ties are thus broken by a single failure in business.!"[66]

But even the knowledge that all effort might be in vain did not deter urban citizens from their frenetic quest for wealth. They constantly sought a status, which, as Tocqueville observed,"perpetually retires from them, yet without hiding itself from their sight, and in retiring draws them on." The chase for a better position continues but

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65 Alexander Mackay, The Western World (London, 1850), I, 205-6.

66 Grund, I, 103-104.

"at [the] moment they think they are about to grasp it, it escapes their hold. They are near enough to see its charms, but too far off to enjoy them; and before they have fully tasted its delights, they die. . . ."[67] Comparatively few Americans realized their quixotic dreams, and the disparity between the tantalizing vision of success and the actual conditions of their lives generated extreme tension over status, heightened by the knowledge that their fierce aspirations for wealth hastened the demise of the idyllic, simple, noncompetitive agrarian republic.

The changing economy kept men in a state of continual agitation. Always jealous and resentful of their neighbors' possessions, city dwellers constantly dreaded being surpassed on the social scale. This preoccupation with status, fraught with significance for males as well as for females, further eroded urban unity as individuals, competing in a febrile contest for uncertain gains, viewed one another with distrust and jealousy. Francis Grund noted that the high society in the United States "think themselves beset by dogs and are continually kicking for fear of being bitten."[68] The comments of one Bostonian, allegedly talking to the German emigré, are expressive of the suspicions aroused by status anxiety: "Every man in this city is a spy on his neighbor, a voluntary unpaid police-agent of the rabble, that pries

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67 Tocqueville, I, 230; II, 165-5.

68 Grund, I, 10, 52, 170.

into all your actions and motives, and is always ready to attribute them to the worst source."[69] Those who did enjoy some social prominence wished to prevent others from reaching their august position. A Philadelphian complained that "every person is too easily admitted into our first society." His companion from Virginia asked: "In what other country would you see a parcel of drummers or clerks admitted into the company of statesmen and legislators?" Predictably, this concern over status intensified hostility towards the immigrant. A contemporary New Yorker asserted: "That's the reason I dislike the Irish so much. They are scarcely a year in the country before they pretend to be equal to our born citizens. I should have no objection to their coming here, provided they would be content to remain servants--the only conditions by the by, they are fit for."[70]

Relentlessly vying with one another for money and position, nineteenth century Americans unwillingly accelerated the deterioration of community cohesion and precipitated the fragmentation of society while the disorienting maelstrom of change forcefully blew the vitality out of traditional social institutions and sanctified religion, splintering the nation into independent, unrestrainable particles. Without the unifying effect of shared beliefs, or the support of recognizable, established sources of wisdom and authority for

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69 Grund, II, 11.

70 Grund, I, 46; 116.

guidance, Jacksonians desperately clung to the chimerical notion that America could remain a rural, stable country, as they consciously sought the new material prosperity which led the nation farther away from its agrarian origins, while, ironically, this retreat into a fanciful past made the present seem loathsome and the future appear frightening. Simultaneously assaulted by the confounding ramifications of the alterations in politics, the revival in religion, the revolutions in transportations and industry, the influx of immigrants, Americans felt profoundly disturbed over the prospective form of their nation and their position in it. Frustration in realizing personal and public goals created doubts about the viability of those basic assumptions which provide the theoretical structure for one's life. The collapse of inveterate values caused men to question the content and meaning of their existences and had a deep and lasting impact on American women.

Jacksonians everywhere attempted to adjust to their chaotic society, but those living in the burgeoning cities had a particularly difficult task; caught in the throes of surging national transformations, the dynamics of urban growth confronted the city dweller with an unprecedented and confusing social context, heightening both his insecurity and his search for integrative principles and beliefs through which he could find stability and a sense of identity amidst profound social transition.

CHAPTER III

CITIES IN COLLISION

I consider you going to such a city as New York for the purpose of going into mercantile business like a young physician going into the midst of pestilence to become proficient in the art of healing.

--Jeremiah Day, President of Yale University to his son, 1826

Cities give us collision. . . .

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

The transformations of antebellum society became magnified in American cities as monumental urban growth in the years after 1820 complicated and confused the city dweller's ability to deal creatively and positively with turbulent change. The unplanned and unmanageable expansion brought a new set of problems and psychic demands. The lack of adequate public services, the atomization of the family, the pervasiveness of poverty and crime, the increasingly heterogeneous population and the inescapable pulsating dynamism of the city, though all tangentially related to the political, social, and economic alterations in American society, developed a compelling momentum of their own and came to be intimately associated with the nation's images of urban life. At once both vulnerable and determinative, the city exaggerated all activity, hardship, and change, while exercising a titanic influence over the rest of the nation as the innovations in transportation and communication accentuated the role of cities in molding thoughts, institutions, and customs of the American people.

By the second decade of the nineteenth century, American cities entered an epoch of zestful expansion. The frenzied growth of these areas, disregarding all boundaries and limitations, and presenting residents with constantly changing

conceptual parameters, introduced a host of seemingly insurmountable problems. Public services, unable to keep pace with the increase in physical size and population, deteriorated dramatically. The unkempt and cluttered streets of New York, with their squalid smells and ever-present menagerie of animals leading travellers to complain of "the inequalities and gaps in the sidewalk," and of "the numberless moveable and immovable incumbrances" became the first indication of urban malaise.[1] With a population swelling from less than 100,000 in 1815 to more than 371,000 in 1845, the restless city quickened its northward march, and in the same thirty year period Twentieth Street replaced Greenwich Village and Houston Street as the northern boundary. Residents responded with amazement: "The city is spreading north. . .out of all reason and measure," wrote George Templeton Strong as he witnessed the growth of the "Jack the Giant-killer's beanstalk of a city" surpass the ability of local government to provide for the safety and comfort of its citizens."[2]

Without a sufficient supply of water or adequate fire and police protection, city dwellers experienced constant harassment, discomfort, and fear. The water supply, furnished by a private company until the 1840s, did not meet the needs of the booming population. New York developed a reputation

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[1] Mr. Hedderwick, Glasgow Chronicle (May 24, 1823) quoted in Bayrd Still, Mirror for Gotham (New York: University Press, 1956), p. 80.

[2] Still, p. 78; Strong, II, 24.

for dirt, with pigs serving as scavengers for garbage well into the nineteenth century. Contemporaries attributed the "terrible havoc" of yellow fever and cholera, which "scattered citizens in all directions" and left an enormous number dead, to the lack of water and improper sanitation facilities.[3]

Numerous fires became another irritant in urban existence. Hone wrote: "The frequency of fires in the upper part of the city has caused serious alarm. Scarcely a night passes without citizens being awakened by the cry of 'Fire.'" Combated by volunteer and sometimes contentious firemen, who served "more for the love of excitement than from any praiseworthy desire for the preservation of property," the blazes often proved too great a match for their amateur opponents and caused vast destruction, human misery, and uncertainty.[4]

Urban residents also had to endure continued threats of violence by rowdy gangs. Bands of youthful criminals roamed the streets, fighting with one another and terrorizing neighborhoods. Philadelphia had its Buffaloes, Blood Tubs, Rugs, and Copper Heads, while the Stringers looted Baltimore. New Yorkers feared the Bowery Boys, Plug-Uglies, Highbinders, Swipers and Dead Rabbits, and the Crawfish Boys of Cincinnati proved that even western cities did not escape this problem.[5] The lack of safety produced consternation. Strong wrote of

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[3] "Recollection of New-York," The Iris (1844) 38.

[4] Hone, p. 54; quoted in Still, p. 138.

[5] Charles N. Glaab and A. Theodore Brown, "A History of Urban America (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 95.

an "epidemic of crime" which induced most of his friends to carry revolvers with them at night, and in 1840 Philip Hone made the following entry into his diary: "Riot, disorder, and violence increase in our city; every night is marked by some outrage committed by the gangs of young ruffians who prowl the streets insulting females, breaking into the houses of unoffending publicans making night hideous by yells of disgusting inebriety, and unchecked by the city authorities--committing every sort of enormity with apparent impunity."[6]

The method of police protection used in the colonial period obviously could not accommodate to the needs of growing cities, but until 1844, when New York became the first city to abolish its antiquated system, every urban area relied on the eighteenth century combination of day policemen and night watchmen to patrol the streets.[7] Yet, the innovations in New York, which substituted a single police force of 800 men for the nightwatchmen and other ineffective law enforcement officers, provided little relief. As late as 1853 New Yorkers called their police "the worst in the world," and thought them to be "partly awed by the blackguards. . .and partly intimate with them."[8]

The prevalence of crime generated apprehension among urban residents. If those who had assumed responsibility for

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[6] Strong, II, 320; Hone, p. 451.

[7] Glaab and Brown, p. 96.

[8] Still, p. 137; Strong II;

the welfare of the city could not or would not protect it, then it seemed as though the foundations of authority had been perverted and all order might dissolve into chaos. Fearing attack on their person and property, residents loathed the criminal and the tensions he produced while the intimacy of the antebellum city highlighted all forms of suffering and forced wealthier citizens into daily contact with devastating poverty and the recognition of its responsibility for so much of the vice. The variegated tapestry of urban life wove all shades of misery and deprivation together with wealth and affluence. James Fenimore Cooper commented that "both a higher and a lower order of men mingle in commerce here than is seen elsewhere. . .nor can the associations well be avoided, until the place shall attain a size, which must leave every one the perfect master of his own manner of living."[9] George Templeton Strong also noted the city's extremes. After describing the luxurious areas of the city he added: "Yet we have our Five Points, our emigrant quarters, . . .our hordes of dock thieves, and our children who live in the streets and by them. No one can walk the length of Broadway without meeting some of the hideous troop of ragged girls, from twelve years old down, brutalized already almost beyond redemption by premature vice."[10]

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[9] James Fenimore Cooper, America and the Americans (London, 1836), *, 173-75, 181, 219-21.

[10] Strong, II, 56-57.

Inescapable scenes of human anguish left a deep imprint on the urban mind: being compelled to witness horrible poverty, and the crime and anti-social behavior that it bred, comprised a shattering experience. A small town might have its poor folk, a local drunkard and perhaps a few beggars, but they could be ignored, tolerated, helped and ultimately absorbed within the social structure of a small, well-regulated community. But, in the frantic nineteenth century cities, the utter magnitude of these problems, the sheer numbers condemned to hopeless destitution, who would steal, beg, prostitute themselves, or turn to the bottle out of desperation, presented the alarming dilemma of a potentially explosive population trapped in a situation beyond the reach of individual comprehension or alleviation.

The city resident, constantly colliding with hideous deprivation, might feel guilt at his own untrammeled pursuit of wealth, while the enormity of urban poverty seemingly defied his ability to give meaningful relief and rendered him virtually impotent to affect social change or influence his society. A visitor to New York City in 1842 recorded the "[b]eseeching looks, begging the comfort and hope [she had] no power to give." She ardently wished to walk the streets "without having misery forced on [her] notice, which [she had] no power to relieve."[11] The enormity of problems confronted the city dweller with the limitations of his effectiveness, while a diverse population, with heterogeneous

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[11] Child, Letters, pp. 94, 193.

values, reminded the individual of his essential isolation and further thwarted attempts to control or ameliorate urban conditions.

Antebellum cities resembled a mosaic of independent worlds of nationality, race, and religion, all clustered around familiar faces and institutions, and their ever-enlarging populations admitting a wide range of personality traits, cultural styles, and occupational interests. Exhibiting a plurality of social standards and relative values not found in rural areas, urban life made consensus difficult and produced a disquieting loneliness. "It is sad walking in the city," remarked author and reformer Lydia Maria Child. "The busy throng passing and repassing. . .offer no sympathy. The loneliness of the soul is deeper and far more restless than in the solitude of the mighty forest."[12]

With few norms common to the entire city, the imperatives of life and livelihood in the urban context required interaction with a greater number of people on an impersonal basis than in a rural environment. In a farming district, a few families might be dependent upon one another for most of their needs while they relied on specific and intimate associates to supply the remainder of their wants. But in the cities, an individual required the services of numerous, but unknown, persons for his necessities and comforts. The division of labor, concommitant with urbanization, demanded from

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12 Child, Letters, p. 94.

the individual an ever more one-sided accomplishment, and made the particular person less important than the task he or she performed. This frequent close contact, coupled with great social distance, produced a "population of strangers." As the Reverend John Todd noted, city dwellers "hardly had time or opportunity to form [the] deep attachments. . . . which we do in country life," and this lack of intimacy accentuated loneliness and isolation in the urban milieu.[13]

Made aware of his insignificance by the anonymous masses of the city, cut off from the security of shared ideals and beliefs by the diversity of the population, challenged at all levels by devastating problems which he was ineffectual to resolve, threatened by violence, fire, disease, and economic failure which he could not control or predict, the male in the urban society became increasingly unsure of his identity and power, especially as the dynamics of urbanization toppled the ancient citadel of masculine authority: the family. In rural or village families, fathers had little difficulty asserting their will. In a stable society, the paths of children's lives would greatly resemble their parents', and fathers felt confident that their wisdom and experience qualified them to educate and prepare their offspring for the future and to command their respect. Expecting obedience,

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[13] Georg Semmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," Classic Essays in the Culture of Cities ed. Richard Sennett (New York: Appleton, 1969), p. 58; Samuel B. Halliday, The Lost and Found or Life Among the Poor (New York: Blakeman & Mason, 1859), p. 182; Todd, pp. 18-20.

fathers usually worked near enough to their families to supervise activities and to see that wives and children followed their directives.

In the cities, however, the uncertainty and the fluidity of life rendered men virtually incapable of finding meaning and coherence in their own lives and thus unable to instruct their children adequately. With fortunes and friends constantly changing, with the moving panorama of humanity always before them, with every nature of social more and habit in obvious display, who could foretell the future? Who knew what knowledge and which ideas would help children to understand an incomprehensible and unpredictable society?

Ironically, children had less difficulty adjusting to the tumultuous environment than their parents, and the defiant assurance of youngsters, causing visitors to express amazement at the obstreperousness of American youth, underlined the waning of paternal authority.[14] Travellers found the American child "too early his own master"; disregarding the admonishment of parents, children thought nothing of "tumbling and dragging about books and cushions and chairs and climbing up and down just as they please," even in the presence of company. Francis Wyse, an English visitor, observed: "There is seldom. . .any. . .restraint imposed upon the youth

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[14] Richard Rapson, "The American Child as seen by British Travelers 1845-1935," American Quarterly (1965), pp. 520-534; for a discussion of children's adaptability to the wilderness in colonial America see Bernard Bailyn, Education in the Forming of American Society (New York: Random House, 1960).

. . .whose precocious intellect brought forth and exercised at a. . . .somewhat premature age. . .has made them generally impatient of parental authority." This lack of regard for parents' wishes is illustrated in the following dialogue reported by Captain Marryat:

> "Johnny, my dear, come here," says his mama.
> "I won't," cries Johnny.
> "You must my love."
> "Come my sweet, and I've got something for you."
> "I won't."
> "Oh! Mr.--do pray make Johnny come in."
> "Come in Johnny," says the father.
> "I won't."
> "I tell you, come in directly, sir--do you hear?"
> "I won't," replies the urchin, taking to his heels.[15]

Without preconceived notions, expectations, or prejudices to bind and restrict their responses, the youth of the nation's cities, infinitely more malleable than their parents, seemed better able to learn the requirements of urban life, giving them a source of independent strength, difficult to accommodate within the family structure. Moreover, the father's absences from home in the city and the assumption of traditional family responsibilities by outside agencies, intensified the difficulty of disciplining assertive children and further eroded the family unit. In rural communities and in

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[15] Quoted in Calhoun, II, 67; Ferenc and Theresa Pulsky, White, Red, Black (1853) quoted in This Was America ed Oscar Handlin (Cambridge, 1949), p. 239; Frances Wyse, America: Its Realities and Resources (London, 1846), p. 295; Captain Marryat quoted in Laurence Cremin, The American Common School (New York, 1951), p. 217.

small towns, men integrated work and amusement with domestic life. The family retained its importance as the focal point of principal activities, and the primary relationships of wife, child, sister, brother, and grandparent, remained the most significant and most intimate. But in the expanding urban areas, a man's occupation took him away from the home, sometimes for weeks at a time. The Monthly Religious Magazine found "the pressure upon. . .men. . .really frightful," for the "necessity. . .of going long distances to their places of duty," combining with the lure of a variety of city recreational facilities, produced "little short of an absolute separation from their families."[16] The transfer of industrial and recreational pursuits to institutions outside the home deprived the family of some of its most historic functions and substituted secondary contacts for the closer kinship ties.

With less time, confidence, and energy for personal supervision of his wife and children, the father's role in the household became somewhat confused and ambiguous, heightening his insecurity and hastening the atomization of the family. In a nation deeply committed to the belief that "a family is society in miniature. . .and [that] whatever destroys its primary features must. . .affect the whole community of which it forms a part," the attenuation of familial ties became particularly disquieting within the context of the unstable city, with its frenzied activity and incessant motion.[17]

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16 Monthly Religious Magazine (1860), quoted in Calhoun, III, 187.

17 Ladies' Magazine (1830), 441.

New York City derived its dynamism in part from the vitality of its fluctuating, effervescent society and in part from the quickening vigor of its commercial life. Timothy Dwight, President of Yale University, remarked upon visiting the city in 1833 that New York resembled a watchmaker's shop which everyone "feels on leaving. . .as if he had been wound up. . . .He hears a clicking. . .on all sides of him, and finds everything he looks at in movement, and not a nook or corner but what is brim-ful of business."[18] Few failed to note the fevered tempo of New York which exasperated and exhausted both visitors and residents. "The hurry-scurry of Broadway and Wall-Street with their driving, jostling, and elbowing," annoyed Andrew Bell, an English traveller of 1835. "Add to this the crashing noises of rapid omnibuses, flying in all directions, and carts (for even they are driven as fast as coaches are with us) and we have a jumble of sights and sounds. . . ." John Pintard had a similar complaint: "Broadway is such a thoro'fare as to render it hazardous crossing the streets. . . ," and Fredrika Bremer, the Swedish social critic wrote: "On Broadway again there is an endless tumult and stir, crowd and bustle, and in the city proper people crowd as if for dear life, and the most detestable fumes poison the air."[19]

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[18] Timothy Dwight, Things As They Are; or Notes of a Traveller through Some of the Middle Northern States (New York, 1834), p. 31.

[19] Andrew Bell [pseud.] A. Thomason, Men and Things in America (London, 1835), p. 20, quoted in Still, p. 81; Pintard, IV, 130; Fredrika Bremer, The Homes of the New World; Impressions of America, trans. Mary Howitt, II, 107.

The relentless vibrancy of life assailed the senses and urged New Yorkers onward in their frantic endeavors.

Desperate for equanimity, but impelled by the unquenchable thirst for status, urban Americans moved from house to house, from job to job and from city to city at a hectic pace. Lydia Maria Child commented: "That people should move so often. . . is generally a matter of their own volition. Aspirations after the infinite lead them to perpetual change, in the restless hope of finding something better still."[20] May 1, the city's moving day, brought forth a flurry of excited motion; carts and wagons filled with household goods crowded the streets, in constant locomotion, as citizens attempted to improve their living conditions. Philip Hone described the city as "undergoing its usual annual metamorphosis." The complete overhaul entailed "many stores and houses. . .being pulled down and others altered, to make every inch of ground productive to its utmost extent."[21]

When urban residents depleted one city's ability to provide them with a livelihood, they moved their families and possessions to another. A recent study of Boston by Stephen Thernstrom and Peter Knights, reveals an extensive outpouring of population from that city between the years 1830 and 1860, and suggests that migration from other nineteenth century cities equaled or surpassed Boston's example. If masses of

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[20] Lydia Maria Child, Letters from New York (New York: C. S. Francis and Co., 1845), p. 286.

[21] Hone, p. 41.

humanity flowed out of as well as into antebellum cities, then the urban areas had populations even more fluid and volatile than has been imagined.[22]

Always restive, the city dweller had little opportunity to form deep or lasting ties to neighbors and associates, many of whom he viewed with jealousy or suspicion. As he watched his influence in the family diminish, his economic condition fluctuate uncontrollably, his ability to affect social change become impeded, his ideals and attitudes rendered ineffective in an unstable and plural environment, the basic assumptions around which he had organized his life began to collapse, leaving the urban resident increasingly insecure and isolated in a nation whose school books taught its children that "the principle of free government adheres to the American soil. . .[and] is bedded in it: immovable as its mountains," and which clung to the belief that ruralism had a special moral significance in a democracy.[23]

Bucolic imagery saturated American culture. The pastoral ideal, articulated by statesmen, philosophers, poets, and novelists, had been used through the nation's history to

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[22] Stephen Thernstrom and Peter Knights, "Men in Motion. Time Data and Speculations about Urban Population, Mobility in Nineteenth Century America," The Journal of Interdisciplinary History I (Autumn 1970-Spring 1971), pp. 10, 23.

[23] Jesse Hopkins, The Patriot's Manual (New York: William Williams, 1828), p. 136.

sanction activities, to explain attitudes, and to articulate hopes. The agrarian vision of the eighteenth century lent itself to encouraging and justifying the conquest of the wilderness, but in the nineteenth century it seemed to define the promise of American life as an ever-expanding, harmonious agricultural paradise inhabited by virtuous farmers. Jacksonians embraced this myth with a growing enthusiasm, especially as the transfigurations of the antebellum era created a world so distant from their idyllic fantasy. Tenaciously clinging to the symbol of a fecund garden, Americans expressed their yearning for a simpler society, their inability to understand or fully acknowledge their present way of life, and their anxieties about the future, through the repeated sentimentalizing of a rural existence they had not known, and would never experience.

Underlying the apotheosis of the country, with its small villages and lovely landscapes, lay the longing for an orderly, cohesive, noncompetitive community where all could share in nature's bounties. James Kirk Paulding's poem The Backwoodsman reveals much of the appeal of agrarianism for nineteenth century Americans:

> To cultivated fields, the forest chang'd,
> Where golden harvests wav'd, and cattle rang'd
> The curling smoke amid the wilds was seen,
> The village church now whiten'd on the green,
> And by its side arose the little school,
> Where rod and reason, lusty urchins rule,
> Whose loud repeated lessons might be heard,
> Whene'er along the road a wight appear'd.[24]

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[24] James Kirk Paulding, The Backwoodsman, A Poem (Philadelphia, 1818), pp. 80-81.

In Paulding's imaginary rustic scene, the church and the school, two important institutions of stability, are conspicuously present; reason and discipline prevail, curtailing mischievous behavior and proclaiming their ascendency in the community.

Other benefits of a rural society also received commendation. Timothy Flint, a Massachusetts clergyman, emphasized the munificence of the country's western lands where "[t]housands of independent and happy yeomen. . .have emigrated. . . with their numerous, healthy and happy families. A lush nature provided "ample abundance that fills their granaries, with their young orchards, whose branches must be propped to sustain the weight of their fruit." The minister's ideal farmers lived "beside their beautiful rivers, and beech woods, in which the squirrels skip, the wild deer browse. . .," and could look forward to the "prospect of settling their dozen children on as many farms about them. . . ." The unspoiled environment, so rank and luxurious, nourished a special kind of humanity. "Farmers and their children," Flint wrote, "are strong, and innocent and moral almost of necessity." Enriched by their plenteous surroundings, "farmers [could] rear their families in peace, . . .and privacy, under the guardian genius of our laws. . . ."[25] Village schools and churches stood as emblems of law, tradition,and order, while the rich tranquility of nature infused citizens with virtue and morality.

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25 Timothy Flint, Western Monthly Review (July, 1827) I, 169-170, quoted in Smith, p. 159.

The creative and nostalgic pastoral image, nurturing the myth of an opulent land dotted with towns peacefully resting under "a lovely sky" and "a cloudless sun" enjoying the fragrance of "a wind that breathes of leaves and flowers," declared the superiority of agrarianism to other ways of life. Authors urged their readers to reside in the country "where no noisy crowd will jostle you in the chase of wealth" and "no overgrown babies of fashion dash against you." If Americans would stay away from the "great city" they would find "a land of happiness," wrote a contributor to the Ladies' Diadem. Timothy Flint found it hard to believe that his fellow countrymen would "be willing to exchange. . .their fee simple empire, their droves of cattle, horses, and domestic animals, and the ability to employ the leisure of half their time as they choose, for the interior of square stones or brick walls, to breathe floccules of cotton and to contemplate the whirl of innumerable wheels for fourteen hours of six days of very week in the year."[26]

Yet as increasing numbers traded country homes for those in the metropolis, the scattered voices of warning against the nation's cities harmonized into a strong chorus loudly chanting a fear and distrust of urban life. The anti-urban attitudes of the nineteenth century did not belong to any one geographic area, philosophy or creed, and did not represent

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[26] Alfred Street, "A Forest Walk," Gift of Sentiment (New York, 1953), p. 27; "The Forest," Ladies' Diadem (1853), 249; Flint, pp. 169-170.

a new theme in American thought. From the nation's earliest days individuals expressed malevolence towards the developing urban areas. Thomas Jefferson, writing to Benjamin Rush about an epidemic in 1800, expressed his hope that "the yellow fever will discourage the growth of great cities in our nation," for Jefferson viewed "great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man."[27]

But as cities grew in size and strength, disregarding disease and other problems concomitant with a concentrated population, the nation, following Jefferson's tradition, seemed unable and unwilling to accept them. Still cherishing the vision of an agricultural utopia, Americans looked upon urbanization with great trepidation, and literature hostile to the city poured forth, articulating and aggravating deeply rooted anxieties. During the antebellum period, fictionalized portrayals of city life gave vent to prejudice and suspicion by descriptions of urban problems, many of which received an exaggerated and sensational treatment. The revolutions in technology and transportation, assuring these works a wide readership, enlivened the farmer's imagination with dread and subjected the city dweller to constant stress. By magnifying the difficulties inherent in urbanization, by reminding him that the founding fathers believed that democracy depended upon independent farmers, by conveying the impression of a pervasive

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27 The Works of Thomas Jefferson ed P. L. Fora (New York, 1904), IX, 146-147 quoted in Morton and Lucia White, The Intellectual Versus the City (New York: Mentor, 1964), p. 28.

national aversion to his way of life, the mass of writings antipathetic to the city, heightened the tensions and doubts of the urban resident and intensified his sense of alienation.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Americans wrote about cities with varying degrees of skill, creativity and aversion. Nathaniel Hawthorne described Rome, the scene of his story The Marble Faun, as a "heap of broken rubbish" and a "long decaying corpse." The hero of Hawthorne's tale, Donatello, the ideal man of nature, tries to escape from the "evil smells," "uneasy streets," and the "wicked," "corrupt" and "blood-stained" pavements of the eternal city by living in a tower. Because cities possessed such lugubrious qualities, Hawthorne believed that "all towns should be made capable of purification by fire, or of decay, within each half-century. Otherwise they become the hereditary haunts of vermin and noisomeness."[28]

Hawthorne depicted cities as "old, musty, unwholesome, dreary, full of death-scents, ghosts and murder stains," but he also indicted them for stifling creativity, for encouraging greed, for sacrificing culture and learning to industry, and for treating humanity callously. In the story The Artist of the Beautiful, the New England author deals with the conflict between a sensitive, idealistic artist and his pragmatic, materialistic town. Ever since childhood Owen Warland "had been remarkable for a delicate ingenuity. Those who watched

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28 "The Marble Faun," Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne (Boston, 1882), VI, 346-347.

him closely sometimes saw reason to suppose that he was attempting to imitate the beautiful movements of Nature as exemplified in the flight of birds or in the activity of little animals." As he grew older he developed both a "love of the beautiful, such as might have made him a poet, a painter, or a sculptor," and a "singluar distaste at the stiff regular processes of ordinary machinery. Being once carried to see a steam-engine. . .he turned pale and grew sick, as if something monstrous and unnatural had been presented to him."

The people of Owen's town, preoccupied with economically remunerative and practical tasks, could not understand the "irregular genius" of this lad who loved Nature, and concluded that he had gone mad. "How universally efficacious, how satisfactory, too, and soothing to the injured sensibility of narrowness and dulness," wrote Hawthrone, to judge and condemn as insane "whatever lies beyond the world's most ordinary scope!" Although the "lack of sympathy" from his neighbors could well have made him mad, Owen continued "wandering through the woods and fields," finding "amusement in chasing butterflies or watching the motions of water bugs and insects," until he finally realized that his inner vision of beauty had greater importance than the understanding and acceptance of society.[29]

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[29] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Artist of the Beautiful," American Poetry and Prose ed. Norman Foerster (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), I, 640-641, 644.

Robin, the "country-bred" youth of Hawthorne's tale My Kinsman, Major Molineux, also learns a significant lesson about urban life. At age eighteen Robin makes his first sojourn to Boston in search of a wealthy relative who had promised to help him become established in a career. As he wanders through a "succession of crooked and narrow streets," he encounters the so-called evils of the city: a tavern, a seductive housekeeper, and an unsympathetic watchman who threatens to put him in the stocks. With no one willing to help him, Robin experiences a "sensation of loneliness stronger than he had ever felt in the remotest depths of his native woods," and asks the ferryman to take him home, saying: "I begin to grow weary of a town life."[30] Hawthorne undoubtedly hoped that Robin's experiences would teach all country folk who yearned for excitement that only peril and isolation awaited them in the big cities.

In The Celestial Railroad, a modern Pilgrim's Progress, Hawthorne used satire most effectively to criticize the inhabitants of the "populous and flourishing City of Destruction," who built a railroad to take them to the Celestial City. The willingness of the residents of this city to sacrifice knowledge and culture to technology is demonstrated when Mr. Smooth-it-away, the director of the railroad corporation, informs the narrator that the "Slough of Despond" had been

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30 Nathaniel Hawthorne, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," Foerster, I, 609, 614-618. It is important to note that pro-urban literature also existed, although it was scant indeed. Walt Whitman described Boston as "joyous, receptive,...magnificently tolerant..." See Walt Whitman Specimen Days (U.S.A.: Signet Classics, 1961) pp. 242, 250.

filled in to allow for construction by "throwing into the slough some editions of books of morality; volumes of French philosophy and German rationalism; tracts, sermons, and essays of modern clergymen; extracts of Plato, Confucious, and various Hindoo sages, together with a few ingenious commentaries upon texts of Scripture." After travelling a few hours, the "train thundered into the ancient City of Vanity" where the narrator noted that "Vanity Fair is still at the height of prosperity." "Conscience" and "Gilded chains were in great demand" at the carnival, where "thousands sold their happiness at a whim. . . .[and] nothing was more common than for a person--whether at feast, theatre, or church, or trafficking for wealth and honors. . .suddenly to vanish like a soap bubble, and be never more seen of his fellows; and so accustomed were the latter to such little accidents that they went on with their business as quietly as if nothing had happened."[31] At the end of the journey, Mr. Smooth-it-away reveals his treachery at having tricked the passengers on the Celestial Railroad; fortunately the hero escapes a dire fate by awakening in time to realize that the entire trip was a bad dream, but the characters of other anti-urban tales are not as fortunate.

Pierre, in Herman Melville's story of the same name, is ruined by the commercialism and cruelty of New York City.

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[31] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Celestial Railroad," Foerster, I, 674-680.

"Born and nurtured in the country, surrounded by scenery whose common loveliness was the perfect mould of a delicate and poetic mind," Pierre is no match for the oppressive city. The author explicitly attacks urban indifference when Isabel, Pierre's half-sister, comments on the impermeable, stone sidewalks of New York. "Are they so hard-hearted here?" she inquires. Pierre replies: "Ask younder pavements, Isabel. Milk dropped from the milkcans in December freezes not more quickly on these stones, than does snow-white innocence, if in poverty it chance to fall in these streets." Assuming responsibility for the support of Isabel, his beloved Lucy, and Delly, the girl they befriend, Pierre becomes a struggling writer, but he is ultimately destroyed by what Melville portrays as the greedy, inhuman city.[32]

In one of Edgar Allan Poe's poems, The City of the Sea (1845), published earlier under the titles The Doomed City and The City of Sin, the metropolis itself is vanquished by water, for in this "Strange city lying alone, Death has reared himself a throne."

> No rays from the holy heavens come down
> On the long night-time of that town;[33]

Suddenly "that wilderness of glass" is shattered by a huge wave, burying the entire city:

> And when, amid no earthly moans,
> Down, down, that town shall settle hence,

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32 White, pp. 46-49.

33 Edgar Allan Poe, "The City in the Sea," Foerster, pp. 272-273.

Hell, rising from a thousand thrones,
Shall do it reverence.[34]

Just as the unsavory qualities of the city could be concealed by immersing the town in water, so too, the waves of humanity enveloping urban areas camouflaged the sinister individuals lurking among the "tumultuous sea of heads." Poe uses the motif of the anonymous city where "men are little known" and "imperfectly restrained" in his story The Man of the Crowd. Set in London, this tale relates the narrator's attempts to follow one man whose countenance conveys "the ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of bloodthirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense--of supreme despair" through the streets of the city. Passing "tall, antique, worm-eaten wooden tenements" and "[h]orrible filth festered in dammed-up gutters," the narrator pursues his subject far into the night where darkness "brought forth every species of infamy from its den." The story-teller finally concludes that the man he followed "is the type and genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd."[35]

Urban criminality provided the material for another of Poe's stories, The Mystery of Marie Rogêt. Based upon the 1841 murder of Mary Roger, a New York tobacco store worker,

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[34] Poe, "City," Foerster, pp. 272-273.

[35] Child, Letters, p. 68; "Man of the Crowd," The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe (Random House, 1938), pp. 478-481.

this tale disputed the official version of Mary's death. The autopsy performed on Mary's body, which had been found in the river, indicated that she had been mistreated and murdered by a gang of ruffians. The case aroused great excitement in the city and called forth demands that citizens be protected against the water-front gangs. In Poe's fictionalized account, which takes place in Paris, Marie is murdered by one of her former lovers, but the author does not absolve the city from blame. His descriptions of Paris as "polluted," "odious," and a "sink of pollution" clearly link crime to the urban environment.[36]

In the late 1830s and 1840s, fictionalized portrayals of city crime increased markedly. Steeped in lurid detail, these exaggerated stories confirmed the country's worst fears of urban social and moral decay, and added to the pressure on the city dweller to understand, accept, and improve his society. Like Edgar Allan Poe, the prolific Joseph Holt Ingraham, who wrote more than seventy "novels" between 1840 and 1849, also departed from the facts in his version of Mary Roger's death. In the Beautiful Cigar Girl, Mary escapes death, but Ingraham's vivid depictions of criminal bands and other "evils of the city" contributed to the growing body of sensational literature that revealed the "true nature" of urban life to the American people.[37]

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[36] "The Murder of Marie Rogêt," Complete Tales, p. 169.

[37] David B. Davis, Homicide in American Fiction, 1798-1860 (New York: Cornell University Press, 1957), pp. 262-263.

"Anyone who is at all acquainted with the mysteries of this city, knows that New York cannot be itself by day," wrote Ned Buntline in The Mysteries and the Miseries of New York (1848). Under the cloak of darkness the "villains," the "misserable courtesans," and the "gamblers" emerge to do their dastardly deeds. These evil doings also comprised the subject matter for George Lippard's New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million. Published in 1853, this book contained graphic accounts of six rapes, seven adulteries and twelve murders.[38]

Denying that they embellished events, writers who featured the poverty and vice beneath the urban exterior of prospering commercial activity, sought to authenticate their descriptions by including letters from city officials in their novels. In Mysteries and Miseries, Ned Buntline published a statement by George W. Matsell, New York's chief of police, verifying that the author had actually witnessed the scenes depicted in his book. The last volume of Newton Mallory Curtis' trilogy, allegedly devoted to urban society, contains a letter from Matsell to Mayor Caleb S. Woodhull prophesizing an increase in the number of "juvenile vagrants." Matsell warned that "children who are growing up in ignorance and profligacy [are] only destined to a life of misery, shame, and crime."[39]

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38 [Edward Zane Carroll Judson], The Mysteries and Miseries of New York by Ned Buntline [pseud.] (New York, n.d.), p. 55.

39 Newton Mallory Curtis, The Victim's Revenge: A Sequel to "The Matricide's Daughter" and "The Star of the Fallen" (New York, N.D.), p. 91.

Curtis' trilogy, which bore the subtitle "A Tale of Life in the Great Metropolis," used the plot of family conflict to alert his readers to the dangers of the city. Detailing none of the traditional catalogue of urban evils, Curtis presents his perception of the real threat of urbanization to the nation in the allegorical form of a feud between two brothers in their wealthy Dutch home during the year 1834. The house, standing "at the upper end of Broadway," "large and old fashioned," "seemed to have been preserved as a memorial of the revolution." Located in "a beautiful yard of native flowers," surrounded by "a garden studded with arbors and fruit trees," the Sydenham mansion seems to have been in the city but not of it. This fine old house represents the promise of America, where the democratic principle, embodied by Floyd, the good brother, must be on constant guard against the rapacity of those in the nation who, by their greed, would destroy the goals of the founding fathers. These grasping citizens are represented in the book by the bad brother, Seymour, who had "given himself up to dissipation and vice."[40] The Sydenham home, a repository of the revolutionary ideals, is destroyed by the evil son's brutal murder of his mother in an attempt to secure her fortune. This dreadful act is of central importance; "The citizens in the street came rushing up the stairs and into the room. Omnibuses and cabs stopped in the street. . . .The ordinary business of the day was

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40 Newton Mallory Curtis, The Matricide's Daughter (New York, n.d.), pp. 106.

suspended, and men came hurrying to the scene of blood and death, looked at each other and asked: 'What has caused this heinous crime?'"[41]

The author's answer to the cause of Mrs. Sydenham's slaying is given to the reader allegorically. While New York City plays a minimal part in this "Tale of Life in the Great Metropolis," the urban influence is represented through the avarice and ruthlessness of the scoundrelly son. The rich mother, of fine Dutch ancestry, symbolizes America's bountiful and precious heritage; her murder denotes the ultimate betrayal of the ideals and aspirations of an earlier, more virtuous and rural nation by the acquisitive residents of the "Great Metropolis," who would sacrifice America's democratic mission at the altar of material gain.[42]

The profusion of literature dealing with city life both reflected and intensified the growing awareness of a people, reluctant to awaken from their agricultural dreams, that inevitably urbanization would prevail. Vividly demonstrating that the urban experience could not be eradicated from the national consciousness, the mass of writings hyperbolizing city problems affected citizens regardless of residence and diluted the efficacy of the agrarian myths to provide Americans with the

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41 Newton Mallory Curtis, The Star of the Fallen (New York, n.d.), p. 81

42 For a different interpretation, see Davis, p. 265.

security, stability, understanding, and sense of purpose they so desperately sought. The anti-urban fiction reinforced rural America's fears and prejudices of the metropolis while heightening the insecurities and anxieties of those living in the cities. The exaggerated presentation of urban poverty, crimes, and greed gave a special urgency to the resolution of these problems, magnifying the individual's feeling of impotence to accomplish the desired social change and yet burdening him with the heavy responsibility of remedying urban ills which supposedly threatened the nation's health.

The literary depiction of the city as the serpent in the garden added to the city dweller's woes. Faced with the diminution of authority and effectiveness both at home and in society, a highly competitive and unstable social structure, a heterogeneous and often volatile population, the loss of a cohesive community and the attenuation of shared beliefs and values, urban residents experienced, more acutely and more profoundly perhaps than other Americans, a crisis in the meaning of their existences as the assumptions around which they had organized and integrated their lives collapsed. Belief in an agrarian utopia which had once imbued the nation with a sense of order, mission, and unity could no longer help the increasing numbers of city dwellers perceive or adapt to urban life. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, bucolic imagery had provided the nation with an outlet for its aspirations and fantasies; even as growing cities, industrialization, and immigration altered the texture of society, the literary

portrayal of idyllic, rustic villages permitted Americans to escape temporarily from the harsh realities of confusing social transition and to indulge their deepest hopes that the nation could and would become an agrarian paradise.

Yet, as relentless urban expansion exacerbated the tensions of the Jacksonian years and produced a body of literature which vivified and diffused the worst aspects of urban life throughout the country, the traditional versions of the pastoral myths lost their soothing effect. For how could images of a rural, harmonious, noncompetitive society, where by sharing fully in the abundant gifts of nature men became endowed with a special virtue, explain or justify the burgeoning cities with their perpetual struggle for wealth, their filth, their disorder, their devastating poverty? How could tales of simple yeomen farmers struggling to actualize America's glorious mission as a great experiment in democracy mitigate the anxieties or assuage the guilt of those made to feel that their way of life was shattering the vision of the founding fathers and betraying the ideals of the nation? Thus, rather than easing the accommodation of Americans to their increasingly urban society, the agrarian myths became an additional source of stress, a constant reminder of a paradise lost by the sins of the cities.

As the old beliefs became irrelevant to a growing segment of the population, Americans, particularly those in the cities, fervently sought a way to absorb their experiences and to assimilate their existences within the framework of a coherent

philosophy which would allow them to cling to the cherished qualities of an exalted past, while yet enabling them to welcome the future wholeheartedly. As they plunged rashly forward on their uncharted course, they needed to adjust old ideas and to develop new theories and values which could help them to comprehend and compensate for their chaotic society. Within the context of nineteenth century urbanization, the complicated search for shared ideals, stability, identity, and security significantly transformed the shape and direction of American thoughts and customs, and dramatically affected the position of women in the United States.

CHAPTER IV

HOMEWARD BOUND

Where lieth woman's sphere? --Not there,
Where strife and fierce contentions
are, . . .
Not in the wild and angry crowd,
Mid threat'nings high and clamors loud;
Nor in the halls of rude debate
And legislation, is her seat; . . .

What then is woman's sphere? The sweet
And quiet precincts of her home;
Home! --where the blest affections meet,
Where strife and hatred may not come!
Home! --sweetest word in mother-tongue,
Long since in verse undying sung!

--Ladies' Repository 1845

Nineteenth century urban Americans viewed their tumultuous environment with a deepening sense of alarm. "We. . . live in the very midst of change and fluctuation," noted the author John Neal, and "are never the same for two minutes together." "The perpetual whirl of excitement" made men afraid that the "disorder and turmoil" would unleash "the flood of desolation threatening to roll over the whole face of society" and caused them to worry" whether despising all forms and distinctions, all boundaries and rules, society shall break up and become a chaos of disjointed and unsightly elements."[1] The frenzied commotion of the cities, breeding fear that all order would dissolve into pandemonium, gave impetus to the quest for an organized body of ideas through which to understand and control a turbid society. Molding the contours of antebellum thought, the theories and ideologies born out of the difficult labors of urban growth were quickly adopted by the entire nation. The insecurities and tensions of the city which begot the fervid search for stability, community, and identity had kin throughout the country, but needed the developing cities to infuse the incipient concepts with life.

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[1] John Neal, "Woman," Boston Book, I (1836), 244; Ladies' Wreath, II (1847-1848), 285; Rev. J. F. Stearns, Female Influence and the True Christian Mode of its Exercise. A Discourse delivered in the First Presbyterian Church in Newburyport (July, 1837), p. 23.

The essential instability of city life became magnified when traditional class distinctions appeared to lose their restraining influence within the antebellum urban collage. "As each class gradually approaches others and mingles with them, its members become undifferentiated and lose their class identity for each other," remarked Tocqueville. Francis Grund also commented on the peculiarity of American society where "gradations not being regulated according to rank and titles," became difficult to discern and impossible to enforce. The German aristocrat believed that because the wealthier groups had "nothing which could mark them as a distinct class," they developed "incessant cravings after artificial distinctions . . . ."[2]

As the mutable population, combining with a fickle economy, kept the parameters of urban society constantly changing, men had little opportunity to form intimate acquaintances. Lacking fixed standards and a definite set of criteria upon which to judge one's neighbors or to measure one's own successes in a society which undermined the conventional signs of prestige and authority, wealth and leisure, conspicuously displayed, became a part of the urban American's quest for stability and security, and emerged as important symbols of status. "In all commercial cities," wrote novelist Mrs. A. J. Graves, "the class. . .whose distinction is solely gained by profuse expenditure and gorgeous display must always be a

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[2] Tocqueville, II, 99; Grund, I, 120, 203, 148.

large one. . . ," for as a contemporary New Yorker remarked: "In this city there is no higher rank in society than that or a rich man."[3] The ostentatiousness of the middle- and upper-classes in nineteenth century cities, a mode advertising one's eminence to the community, also reflected a troubled and ambiguous search for identity as men tried to gain internal dignity, equanimity, and purpose through their ability to purchase exterior finery.[4]

Few failed to note the prodigious luxury of New York City. Lydia Maria Child wrote that "foreign artistic upholsterers assert that there will soon be more houses in New York furnished according to the fortune and taste of noblemen, than there are either in Paris or London." The affluent did indeed radiate a palatial splendor with their "rosewood and satin, mirrors, cabinets and vetu." Sir Charles Lyell, a Scottish geologist, visiting New York in 1841, "saw many houses gorgeously fitted up with satin and velvet draperies, rich Axminster carpets, marble and inlaid tables, and large looking-glasses,

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[3]Graves, Sketches, p. 103; Grund, I, 45; Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class. An Economic Study of Institutions (New York: The Viking Press,), pp. 168, 36.

[4]For a discussion of the function of conspicuous wealth see: Veblen, pp. 196, 36.

the style in general being Parisian." The grandiosity of private homes could only be appreciated by the select few invited to visit within the walls of these august mansions, but elegant and extravagant clothing had the capacity to attract the admiration and attention of people virtually unknown to the wearer.[5]

Urban men dressed well, but feminine fashions, which truly enthralled New York's visitors, became a badge of masculine status. Sumptuous female attire turned the city's avenues into a rainbow of colors and fabrics evoking the praise and amazement of observers. Frances Kemble, the British actress, found the resplendent garments "of the female wardrobe quite extraordinary." She reported that "twenty, forty and sixty dollars [were] paid for a bonnet to wear in a morning saunter up Broadway. . . ," and Mrs. Anne Royall, a Southern visitor to the city, thought it "impossible to give even an idea of the beauty and fashion displayed in Broadway," for "the richness and variety of dress, comprising all that can be conceived of [by] wealth. . . mocks description." William Thackery wrote that even

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[5]Child, Letters, p. 40; Strong, II, 262; quoted in Still, p. 142.

"Solomon in all his glory or the Queen of Sheba when she came to visit him in state, was not arrayed so magnificently as these New York damsels" who wore "[e]mbroidered muslin, of the finest and costliest kind," paid exorbitant amounts "for a single pocket handkerchief," and carried "extravagantly expensive fans, with ruby or emerald pins. . . ."[6]

Conspicuous leisure of women, closely allied to the exaggerated display of material wealth, provided urban men with another effective vehicle for demonstrating their financial and social success. A woman's dress which had such features as to testify "to the wearer's exemption from or incapability for all vulgarly productive employment,"[7] demonstrated to all that her husband or father provided well for his family and that the woman remained the economic dependent of some man who, no doubt, gained a sense of pride and effectiveness from his ability to keep the female members of his family from remunerative employment. The fashions worn by city women, as pictured in Godey's Lady's Book and in other magazines during the antebellum era, prohibited strenuous exercise and probably

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[6]Veblen, p. 181; Frances A. Kemble, Journal (Philadelphia, 1835), I, 55; W. S. Tryon, ed. My Native Land (Chicago, 1952), p. 54; quoted in Still, p. 134; quoted in Still, p. 142.

[7]Veblen, p. 179.

even made walking difficult. The high heels and long, full flowing skirts, heavily trimmed with flouncing and fringes, obviously prevented the exhibitor of these garments from all forms of labor, while hoops and stays, tight corsets, and weighty crinolines further restricted activity. The custom of carrying fans, gloves, and purses indicated that the woman's hands did not have to be free for utilitarian purposes, and indeed, the entire costume, properly exhibited in slow strolls down Broadway, proclaimed the leisure of her existence and the achievements of her husband.

The exhibition of wealth and leisure, immediately recognizable signs of prosperity in the anonymous urban setting, drew attention to a man's attainments and gave him a sense of accomplishment by providing a tangible expression of his successful struggles with a precarious economy. Within a continually fluctuating society which theoretically recognized few distinctions, elegant clothing, jewelry, and furniture gave concrete form to social position and hence afforded a feeling of security as long as the ability to provide material possessions endured. Knowing he would be judged almost exclusively by visible evidence of his accumulated wealth and, perhaps, also sensing that his inner feelings of worth and self-esteem in some way related to his skill in bestowing luxuries upon his family, men in American cities became consumed by the desire to make money. "The great object" of New Yorkers, complained a visiting southerner was "the penny; upon it turns every action of their lives as well as motive of their natures."

The Polish revolutionary, Adam de Gurowski, observed the fevered race to start the day's business activities: "[In] the morning hours, when the New York business population, old and young--and all is business in New York--pours out into the main artery, in Broadway and descends hurriedly 'down town,' nothing in the world could stop or divert the torrent. Even if Sebastopol had been in their way, those men would have run over it at one rush."[8]

Predictably, the emphasis upon observable wealth heightened competition for better jobs and higher salaries. Vying with one another for more lucrative and prestigious positions, men of different social classes jealously guarded their occupations from unwelcome rivals. Unlike colonial towns where the scarcity of workers encouraged entry into the labor market and rewarded individual effort with appreciation and recognition, in the antebellum cities, swarms of able men hunted for employment and status against the backdrop of an unpredictable economy; the surfeit of males anxious to procure and retain jobs created the atmosphere of an arena in which men, continually caught in conflict, became rabidly hostile to female contenders.

No single profession or job monopolized prejudice towards women: discrimination against training and employing females

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[8] Quoted in Still, pp. 133-134; William N. Bobo, Glimpses of New York by a South Carolinian (Charleston, 1852), p. 145; Adam G. de Gurowski, America and Europe (New York, 1857), pp. 371-372.

affected all levels of society. "Are there not enough men in the field already that we must have women competing with us?" asked a male doctor of a young lady who wished to pursue a career in medicine, while others of her sex encountered similar (and worse) intolerance. Desperately impoverished women, compelled to take even the lowest paying jobs, found themselves the objects of bitter resentment. As early as 1820 an "Emigrant's Directory" advised tailors not to come to New York because in that city their trade had been "much injured by the employment of women. . .who work from 25 to 50 percent cheaper than men." Francis Grund similarly remarked that females in the printing offices stole jobs from men and reduced the wages of journeymen printers.[9]

The policy of printers' unions also proved vehemently opposed to the employment of women. In 1832, upon hearing a rumor that a member of the Typographical Society of Philadelphia planned to hire women compositors, the Society protested so vigorously that the member in question felt compelled to write a letter to be placed in the organization's minutes that he had never intended to employ women. The Washington Typographical Society spurred coordinated activities against women in 1835 when a local paper reported "that girls were being employed as compositors in newspaper offices in Philadelphia to break a strike." Letters to Societies in Philadelphia,

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[9] The Three Sisters. A Sketch from Life (London: W. Clowes & Sons, 1856), p. 20; Abbott, p. 218; Grund, I, 150.

Boston, New York and Baltimore warned against this inadvisable and improper conduct and strongly urged their fellow printers not to give jobs to women. Working wives and daughters encroached upon man's prerogative, complained a writer in the Boston Courier of August 25, 1831, and a New York man, urging low salaries for women, wrote an article describing a town where women received good pay with the result that the "town was filled with the most lazy, drunken, worthless set of men I ever saw."[10]

The opposition to feminine participation in the labor force, emanating from the intermingling demands of status, security, and often subsistence, effectively relegated women to the lowest echelon of available jobs, which required arduous effort for scanty wages. Thus unhampered by female competitors, urban men could devote all their time and energy to the rampant struggle for wealth with its enticing promises of self-esteem, social prominence, and emotional tranquility.

But the glittering appeal of Mammon proved to be only "fools gold" as "the young, the ardent, the keen, and the gifted [who] rushed into [the] great marts" soon discovered that despite all their efforts, plans, and hopes only "a few can do it. . . .an amazing proportion fall in the race!"[11]

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[10] Abbott, pp. 250-251; Elizabeth Anthony Dexter, Career Women of America 1776-1840 (New Hampshire: Marshall Jones Co., 1950), p. 214.

[11] Rev. John Todd, The Moral Influence, Dangers, and Duties, Connected with Great Cities (Massachusetts, 1841), pp. 18-20.

Conspicuous wealth and leisure, the coveted prizes in the struggle for recognition, may have satisfied the wealthier community's cravings for a readily observable set of standards to distinguish it from the fluid social classes, but could not palliate the doubts and uneasiness of most men who longed for a sense of identity and security more substantial than the filigreed fans or silk gowns they could sometimes afford to buy for their women. Instead of providing equanimity of spirit, solidity, and a feeling of power, the all-consuming quest for money tended to intensify the frustrations and anxieties of all but the comparatively few highly successful men who managed to keep their fortunes over long periods of time. The absorption with business meant more time away from home and, therefore, less direct authority over one's family; the fluctuating economy rendered man impotent to control his financial position and often caused humiliation before relatives and friends. The constant battle for jobs and success kept him alienated from his neighbors and increasingly isolated from his fellow-countrymen who distrusted his motives and disapproved of his actions.

Both anticipating and exaggerating the plight of other Americans, urban males faced the complex dilemma of reconciling the dual impulses of stability and security, intimately associated with an illusory agrarian past, with the necessity of conforming to the compelling imperatives of the present and with the desire to face an unpredictable future without apprehension. Caught in the tides of sweeping social change,

city men feared they would be battered against the rocks of progress, lost or forgotten among the multitudinous waves of urban humanity, or deposited alone on a distant island. Slowly but determinedly, they hammered words and ideas into a sturdy craft of theories and philosophies that enabled them to navigate the turbulent waters of the antebellum era while always remaining close to the sheltered harbor of the past.

The pastoral ideal, too deeply embedded in the nation's imagination and folklore to be obliterated, had to be adapted to accommodate to an increasingly urban society, and, as transformed, became the vessel by which men travelled between their former ideals and their present realities. Characterizations of Americans as "a people of cultivators, scattered over an immense territory," and boasts that "[w]e are all animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained because each person works for himself," had little relevance to life in the nation's cities and could provide no relief to its residents. As authors warned of the "disorganization and legislative plunder," of the "struggle of factions and civil war," and of "a military despotism, into whose arms all will be driven by the intolerable evils of anarchy and rapine" which surely would occur "when millions shall be crowded into our manufactories and commercial cities. . . ,"[12]

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[12] Crevecoeur, pp. 46-48; The Southern Literary Messenger, II, 277 (March, 1836). Quoted in Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 242.

the need became dramatically apparent for a body of literature which could assimilate the appealing, comforting qualities of pastoral imagery into the urban milieu.

The myriad of writings filling gift books, periodicals, and novels of the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century are expressive of this attempt to harmonize the agricultural tradition with the urban experience. Avoiding tales of peaceful village life, with its traditional churches, orderly schoolrooms and virtuous farmers, a new agrarianism, an urban-agrarianism, developed, focusing exclusively on descriptions of the home and its environs. Invariably nested snuggly amidst "a fine range of green, softly swelling hills," overlooking a "lovely valley through which a stream was glidding, tinged here and there with clumps of trees and shrubs," the simple cottage home presented its quaint charms to urban readers. Poems, stories, and pictures entitled "Home," "Coming Home," "My Father's Home," "We Ne'er Forget Our Childhood Home," dotted the pages of antebellum literature, reminding readers of "the flowery haunts we used to tread," and of the days spent, "chasing the painted butterfly," or roaming "around [the] mountain-cinctured home," plucking "the sweetest flowers."[13]

Repeated images of the "cottage-home--a lonely isle, yet full of beauty," where "nature's hand had spread her choicest

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[13] Graves, p. 179-180; "Home," Forget-Me-Not (1848), 270; Godey's Lady's Book (1840), 80; The Amulet (1846), 281-282; "My Birth Place," Ladies' Diadem (1853), 99.

gifts around," conveyed the blissful serenity of youth. In "The Cottage Girl's Return Home," the author recalled: "I loved its shrubbery, and its vines--I loved its murmuring brooks, I loved its groves and its forest pines," and the poem "Home of Youth," appearing in the Ladies' Magazine of 1829, reminisced about "the clear rippling brook with curls so white," which "went laughing on in sunniest light." One poet confessed: "My heart is in my childhood's home, And by the far-off sunny brae, Where musing once I loved to roam, In early youth's romantic days." The American Literary Emporium memorialized the "home in the beautiful country, amid tree-crested hills, where the streams, gushing from their mountain sources, leaped and danced." "Nor shall I ever forget," vowed another contributor to the Literary Emporium" the happy days that followed while I made my home there."[14]

Nostalgic visions of home, clothed in rural imagery, served a significant function for urban Americans. The "happy homes of the deep valley. . .the symbols of youth and a happy liberty,"[15] embraced all the virtues of an ideal agrarian past. Portraying peace, serenity, harmony, and nature, descriptions of the home encapsulated the precious qualities of an earlier

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14 Mary Grant "Home," Forget-Me-Not (1848), 270; "The Cottage Girl's Return Home," Ladies' Magazine (1830), 104. "Home of Youth," Ladies' Magazine (1829), 229; Catharine Sedgewick, "Love of Nature," American Literary Emporium (1848), 28; American Literary Emporium (1848), 183.

15 Sedgewick, American Literary Emporium (1848), 28.

time and became the literary device through which Americans made the transition from an exalted bygone age to a difficult present. The panegyrizing of childhood homes in poems and stories simultaneously represented an individual's longing for youth and a people's yearning for the glorious days of America's infancy. Yet, implicit in this urban-agrarianism which returned to "My Father's Home," and to the "Home of My Youth," was the realization that adulthood had come: the mature man would never be a child again and the nation could not regress to its original state.

Youth could not be relived, but by visiting one's place of birth, by savoring and paying homage to early beliefs, it became possible to exist in the present without losing ancient ideals. The past receded from them, but city dwellers managed in subtle and complex ways to preserve the qualities they valued most. By perceiving the home as the embodiment of all the worthy characteristics of a former era, they could leave the agricultural society behind, assured that stability and security would have a domicile in urban America.

The endowment of home with transcendent attributes, part of an intricate web of ideas which enveloped American women, reflected the Jacksonians' desperate need to superimpose order upon their chaotic society and enabled accommodation to the present without completely relinquishing the past, for the apotheosis of the household, admitting the ubiquity of ante-bellum insecurity, also acknowledged that Americans, no longer idealized yeomen farmers, endured, in increasing numbers, the

perplexing difficulties of city life. The exemplary home, a paradigm of serenity and harmony, posed a dramatic contrast to its tempestuous surroundings. Envisioning their dwelling as a refuge from a bruising world, urban men insisted that "Home," celebrated in verse and glorified in prose, be an enclave securely sheltered from strife, and asperity; the nineteenth century home called forth gushing praise and provided an important antipode to the urban environment.

"Let us have a place of quiet, and some quiet minds which the din of our public war never embroils," begged Horace Bushnell. The abodes of men should be "a realm into which the poor. . .fighters, with their passions galled, and their minds scarred with wrong--their hates, disappointments, grudges, and hard-worn ambitions--may come in, to be quieted and civilized . . . ." "It is this that gives repose to the anxieties of the statesman and soothes his troubled breast amid the bustles and turmoil of political strife," wrote William B. Taylor in his essay "Home," for "when man is stung by the insults, or the ingratitude of a selfish world, he may find in the bosom of his family, a balm for every wounded feeling--. . . ." Donald Grant Mitchell, in Reveries of a Bachelor, told men that at home "your errors will meet ever with gentlest forgiveness; . . .there your troubles will be smiled away."[16]

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[16] Horace Bushnell, The American National Preacher (1840), 107; William B. Taylor, Esq., "Home," Ladies' Garland (1839), 243; Donald Grant Mitchell, Reveries of a Bachelor; or a Book of the Heart (New York, 1850), p. 59.

Giving literary form to antebellum tensions, and attesting to the rigors of urban life, the demand that home be a haven removed from the real world received repeated expression. "From the corroding cares of business, from the hard toil and frequent disappointments of the day, men retreat to . . .their families. . . ," claimed William Eliot, for returning home is like the "healing oil poured upon the wounds and bruises of the spirit." Paradisiacal domiciles allowed the masculine world to "recompose. . .courage and settle again . . .mental and moral equilibrium." Because "we go forth into the world amidst the scenes of business and of pleasure, we mix with the gay and the thoughtless, we join the busy crowd," male authors argued their need to escape to "the sanctuary of home," where the "soul renews its strength and again goes forth with fresh vigor to encounter the labors and troubles of the world."[17]

This inordinate craving for home dictated the specific sublime qualities required to heal man's lacerated feelings. To enable him "[t]o recover his equanimity and composure, home must be a place of repose, of peace, [and] of comfort." As an antidote to the confusion of "our streets, and caucuses and courts--the haunts of selfish cares, of discordant tongues, of hollow forms, and busy bustling feet," men urged that their

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[17] William G. Eliot, Jr., Lectures of Young Women (Boston, 1880 [first published in 1853]), pp. 55-56; Ladies' Depository (1843), 54; Bushnell, p. 138; Ladies' Magazine (1830), 217.

domestic shrines be models of tranquility. Timothy Shay Arthur, author and social critic, described his visit to an ideal home where "everything was conducted with the utmost regularity. I was never sensible of any little inconveniences," he wrote. "All was system and perfect order." A paragon of harmony, organization, simplicity, and quietude, the stereotyped nineteenth century home eased the psychic transition from an exalted agrarian society to a nation of surging urban growth. Yet, the vision of home, inspiring profusely adulatory sentiments, did not conjure up images of bricks and logs. When Jacksonian Americans asked: "What gives light and life to that home, what binds us by an indissoluble, sacred tie to that altar; what calls forth the full, warm gush of grateful affection; what imparts existence, name, worth to those domestic virtues?" They answered resoundingly, "Woman!"[18]

Emphasis upon woman's essential domesticity completed the transfer of the pastoral legend to the urban environment. The insistence that woman's sphere be limited to the home, having ominous implications for the female population, arose from the tensions and insecurities of antebellum America, and became a prevailing dogma of nineteenth century faith. "To render home happy is woman's peculiar province, home is her world," claimed a contributor to the Ladies' Magazine in 1830,

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[18] Ladies' Depository (1845), 54; Timothy Shay Arthur, Baltimore Book (1839), 107; Nathaniel W. Chittenden, Influence of Woman Upon the Destinies of a People (New York, 1837), p. 16.

while James Fenimore Cooper in The Crater wrote: "It is seldom that [woman's] wishes cross the limits of the domestic circle which to her is earth itself, and all that it contains which is most desirable." "Women are domestic creatures--naturally," declared an article in the 1837 issue of Ladies' Garland. "The female on whom has devolved the sacred duties of a wife and mother. . .thinks that nothing will go right at home unless she is there." The Reverend J. W. Jackson believed that "Mother! Home! Heaven!" formed a "sacred trio of words linked together in the heart's vocabulary," and Dr. Charles Meigs told a class of medical students that "[t]he household altar is [woman's] place of service."[19]

By the repeated assertions that in "every domestic circle woman is the centre," responsible for "the good government of families which leads to the comfort of communities and the welfare of State," and by the constant declaration that the "strength of the country is found. . .in the quiet influence of the fireside," women became identified as the special guardians, not only of the home, but of democracy itself and of all morality. "It is the power of women," wrote Reverend Samuel Miller of New York City, "by constantly exhibiting the dignity of virtue, and the attractions of piety, to repress the impertinence, to polish the roughness and to. . .[correct]

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[19] Ladies' Magazine (1830), 441; James Fenimore Cooper, The Crater; or Vulcan's Peak (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1855), II, 89; Ladies' Garland (1837), 90; Dr. Charles Meigs, Lecture on Some of the Distinctive Characteristics of the Female (Philadelphia, 1847), pp. 10-15.

the vices of the other sex." And his colleague, Reverend J. F. Stearns, speaking before the First Presbyterian Church in Newburyport, on July 30, 1837 told women: "Yours it is to decide. . .whether we shall be a nation of refined and high minded Christians, or whether. . .we shall become a fierce race of semi-barbarians before whom neither order, nor honor. . .can stand."[20] Similarly, children's schoolbooks emphasized woman's special role: "It is in the inculcation of high pure morals. . .that in a free republic woman performs her sacred duty; and fulfills her destiny," wrote G. S. Hillard in A First Class Reader. The Literary Reader for Academies and High Schools carried an analogous message:

> Her effect
> Lies not in voting, warring, clerical oil
> But germinating grace, forth-putting virtue.[21]

Both absolving males from guilt that their unbridled pursuit of wealth might be injurious to the fabric of the nation and providing replacement for the allegedly democratic proclivities of yeoman farmers, women replaced nature as the complete repository of ethicality and goodness.

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[20] Ladies' Literary Cabinet (1822), 141; Eliot, pp. 55-56; Rev. Samuel Miller, A Sermon. . .for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children (New York, 1808), pp. 18-19; J. F. Stearns, Female Influence and the True Christian Mode of its Exercise (Newburyport, 1837), p. 23.

[21] G. S. Hillard, A First Class Reader (Boston: Hickling, Swan and Brown, 1856), p. 485; Miss A. Hall, The Literary Reader for Academies and High Schools (Boston, John P. Jewelt & Co., 1850), p. 352.

In her domestic role, idealized and fantasized, woman embodied all the attributes of bountiful nature. Untainted by the corrupt world, she soothed, purified, and nurtured. In a home atmosphere as serene as the rural landscape, woman became the succedaneum for "Mother Earth" as the nourisher of her family. Woman's sensitivity to the natural order allowed her to "discern that there can be no happiness. . .where there is a perpetual struggle for power," for "no. . .force" existed strong enough "to. . .foster woman into an independent and rival power, man's jealous competitor."[22] She shielded her home from strife, and shunning all competition with her husband, emulated the peaceful garden idyllically free from the vying for money, power, and position which characterized American cities.

The literary and psychological substitution of images and perceptions of woman for the sustaining insouciance of nature gave impetus to the argument that women remain at home. But the demand that 'she must be a 'keeper at home,'" the obdurate decree that "[s]he must be a 'mother at home.'" the commandment that "her feet must abide within her own dwelling,"[23] also reflected other deeply rooted tensions of the era. Remanding the female's intellectual, emotional and physical life to the limits of home, nineteenth century

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22 "The Social Position and Culture due to Woman," Two Addresses Before the Maternal Association (New York: John Gray, 1846), p. 23.

23 Hints and Sketches (New York: John S. Taylor, 1839), p. 28. (emphasis added)

men sought to make woman a ballast on their unsteady journey into an urbanized America. In a world of motion, where fortunes, friends, homes, populations, and beliefs changed perpetually, the reiterated delineation of a specific sphere of feminine activity provided a sense of comfort and a modicum of stability. As urban men, increasingly consumed by the demands of business, spent less and less time at home, the enjoiner that women stay within the domestic realm performing prescribed functions enabled fathers and husbands to direct specific activities and exercise control over their families.

Blithely overlooking the thousands of women forced to work for paltry sums, the frequent declarations that "home is to her--a place of habitation, . . .[she] has no call to forsake it," or that she is "encumbered with no avocations or business which force her away from this scene. . .of her enjoyment," further satisfied the requirements of an insecure, status conscious society.[24] The repetitious portrayal of woman demurely sitting at home, enhanced man's image as an effective provider who could gain status by his wife's conspicuous leisure. Emanating also from the fear of economic competition, the consignment of woman to the domestic province, enabling society to ignore the plight of working women, restricted the entry into the labor force of all but the most destitute females. The imperious insistence that home comprise the essence of feminine existence, at once obfuscating

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[24] Ladies' Depository (1842), 110.

woman's history and distorting her present, became one strand in the rope which bound the energies, activities, and thoughts of nineteenth century women.

The need to keep women at home, one manifestation of the strains of social change, joined with other nineteenth century tensions to unleash a torrent of literature defining appropriate masculine and feminine behavior. The relentless repetition of social roles, always emphasizing the differences between proper actions for males and females, represented part of the quest for security and identity. Tocqueville believed that "[in] no country has such constant care been taken as in America to trace two clearly distinct lines of action for the two sexes. . . ." The magazines, novels, and gift books of the Jacksonian period proliferated with assertions and descriptions of the divergent spheres of man and woman. "Man profits by connection with the world; but woman never," claimed an article in the literary annual Forget-me-not, while William B. Taylor, writing for the Ladies' Garland of 1839, believed that the "active scenes in which the attention of man is. . . engaged are unsuited to [woman's] gentle character," and that "her natural delicacy will shrink from the rude contact of such boisterous occupations."[25]

Totally unlike "the delicate and tender form of woman," man was made for "the rougher and more exacting labors. . .of

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[25] Tocqueville, II, 212; Forget-me-Not (1848), 105; William B. Taylor, Esq., "Female Influence," Ladies' Garland (1839), 187.

mechanism, and of commerce," claimed the author of The True Woman. Man "may appear upon the stage of public and professional life. . . .But woman, timid, shrinking, retiring woman was formed for kindlier labor, where delicate sentiment. . . can soften the asperities of life." Similarly, a contributor to the Ladies' Magazine (1831) wrote: "Men are destined to the public stage: women to domestic life. Men must force their way by resolution and activity, women win most by modesty and retirement. Man must mingle with the temptations of life, must leave his home, must sometimes cross the seas, must encounter danger of foreign enterprise and foreign climes," the article continued, "but woman must adorn the circle, guide the house. . . ."[26]

The Daughters Own Book advised young women that "man is destined to stand forth in the bolder walks of society," while "woman has her station alloted her more exclusively, amidst the retired scenes of domestic life," and Reverend Hubbard Winslow, in a discourse delivered in the Bowdoin Street Church of Boston, told the parish: "The more severe manual labors, the toils of the field, the mechanics, the cares and burdens of mercantile business, the exposures and perils of absence from home, the duties of the learned professions devolve upon man; while the more delicate and retired cares and labors of

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[26] Jesse Peck, The True Woman; or, Life and Happiness at Home And Abroad (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857), p. 343; Ladies' Magazine (1831), 511.

the household devolve upon woman." "Let the nation rule itself, let wise and experienced men enact laws and correct them," admonished the author of the Female Monitor, "for a woman's kingdom is her house. . . ."[27]

While implicitly denying the varied activities and achievements of colonial women and explicitly inhibiting the ambitions and professional aspirations of antebellum females, the constant ingemination of sex-linked roles and responsibilities, inexorably tied to basic rights, flowed from one's nature, and nineteenth century authors did not fail to explore the ramifications of their insistence upon different spheres for men and women. Woman was relegated to the home, because the "characteristic endowments of women, are not of a commanding and imposing nature such as man may boast of and which enable him to contend with the difficulties and danger, to which, both personally and mentally he is liable," wrote a contemporary author. Man could rule the world because he "is swayed more by. . .intellect, woman by the affection and moral sentiments." "Her springs are infinitely delicate and differ from those of man. . . ," claimed "Sherlock" in the Forget-me-Not, and the Ladies' Garland of 1837 printed the verse:

> Man is a rugged lofty pine
> That frowns on many a wave-beat shore;
> Woman's the slender, graceful vine

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27 Daughter's own Book (Boston: Lilly, Wait, Colman, & Holden, 1833), p. 30; Rev. Hubbard Winslow, A Discourse delivered in The Bowdoin Street Church (Boston: Weeks, Jordon & Co., 1837), p. 8; The Female Monitor (Printed at the Mentorian Press, 18), p. 23.

Whose curing tendrils round it twine,
And deck its rough bark sweetly o'er.[28]

The arguments of nineteenth century theorists alternated between the decree that women remain at home because of their "feeble," "diffident and confiding" natures and the declaration that women had fewer abilities because domestic life required only a small number of skills." The science of legislation, of jurisprudence, of political economy. . .the abstruse researches of erudition, the inexhaustible depths of philosophy . . .these and other studies, pursuits, and occupations, assigned. . .entirely to men, demand the efforts of mind endowed with the power of close and comprehensive reasoning, and of intense and continued application, in a degree in which they are not requisite for the discharge of the. . .offices of female duty," wrote Charles Butler in The American Lady (1836). He continued: "It would therefore seem natural to expect, and experience. . .confirms the justice of the expectation, that the Giver of all good,after bestowing those power on men with a liberality proportional to the existing necessity, would impart them on the female mind with a more sparing hand." Whether nineteenth century writers described woman's limited sphere as the cause or as the effect of her weaker nature, they completely agreed that "there is a natural difference in the mental as well as the physical constitution of the two [sexes]."[29]

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28 Ladies' Depository (1842), 146; Chittenden, p. 16; Sherlock, "Woman," Forget-Me-Not (1828), 46; Ladies' Garland (1837), 16.

29 Charles Butler, The American Lady (Philadelphia: Hogan and Thompson, 1836), pp. 20-21; Stearns, p. 14.

"There is a decided inferiority of intellectual strength in women," wrote one author; others cited specific examples to impress females with their lack of acumen. "The great administrative facilities are not hers. The strength of Milton's poetic vision was far beyond her fine and delicate perceptions," asserted Dr. Charles Meigs and he asked rhetorically: "Do you think that a woman. . .could have developed in the tender soil of her intellect the strong idea of a Hamlet or a Macbeth?" The author of Woman in her Social and Domestic Character (1842) commented that the "Chefs d'oeuvre of the sculptress need the polish of the master chisel; and the female pencil has never yet limned the immortal forms of beauty. The mind of woman is. . .incapable of the originality and strength requisite for the sublime." "She has not yet equalled Homer or Shakespeare or Milton," reminded one theorist, while another wrote that woman did not have "the disposition for studied research and laborious investigation."[30]

The continual demarcation of the feminine sphere and the repeated delineation of female responsibilities and abilities comprised an important response to the insecurities of ante-bellum life. Imputing women with innately inferior qualities strengthened the male's self-esteem. Whether rich or poor, native American or immigrant, he automatically became superior

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[30] Virginia Cary, Letters on Female Character (Virginia, 1828), p. 43; Meigs, p. 9; Elizabeth Sandford, Woman in her Social and Domestic Character (Boston: Otis, Broaders & Co., 1842), p. 13; Position of Woman, p. 10; Ladies' Magazine (1828), p. 195.

to a large segment of the population whose presence served as a constant reminder of his more excellent attributes, and the repetitive stipulation of proper behavior and duties for women by men fostered the image of females as totally passive, dependent beings whose actions had to be determined by the other sex.

Horace Bushnell believed that "[women] have never in any one case shown. . .authority and capacity of rule in themselves"; this view received rigorous reinforcement: "Women are born to slavery or submission," wrote Joseph Segur, and another author asserted that "woman is dependent" for "her sphere [is] distinct from and subordinate to that of man." The Female Monitor noted the value of "humility and meekness in a woman," and thought "submission. . .her duty." George Templeton Strong admired feminine "talent for obedience and submission to. . .authority," and the leading characters in James Fenimore Cooper's The Ways of the Hour endorsed Strong's sentiments: "I declare, John Wilmeter," vowed Anna, "I should almost despise the man who could consent to live with me on any terms but those in which nature, the church and reason, unite in telling us he ought to be the superior." "[Woman] was not formed for independence," wrote a contributor to the Ladies' Magazine, "but [she is] endowed with those peculiar properties which enable her firmly but steadfastly to adhere to her natural protector." "In everything. . .that women attempt they should show their consciousness of dependence," because nature "has assigned her a subordinate place as well

as subordinate powers," advised the instructive volume Woman in her Social and Domestic Character (1842).[31]

The unwavering recitation of woman's natural submissiveness enhanced the masculine feeling of power. Frustrated in his attempts to impose order on the unstable cities, thwarted in his efforts to dominate the changing national economic, political and social scene, and overwhelmed in his efforts to alleviate urban poverty, or to prevent fires, crime, and epidemics, men, desperate to exercise some measure of control over their existences and environments, finally found an outlet for these emotions through their domination of women. Conforming to the imperatives of an insecure era, the prevailing views of woman in antebellum America, insisting upon feminine inferiority and subordination, also decreed that woman's nature, like her sphere, remain rigid, impervious to time and circumstance. The Christian Wreath, likened the "true character of woman," to "the beacon-tower, she is fast-anchored--immovably fixed upon the elements of her nature. . . ."

"Woman needs fixedness--fixedness both in character and place," proclaimed a speaker before a Maternal Association in 1846, and Washington Irving in The Broken Heart wrote that "woman's is comparatively a fixed, a secluded life. . . ." Praise of woman's amaranthine qualities often focused on the constancy of her love. "If there be any thing on earth that is truly holy and sublime, it is the deep, enduring, unchanging watchfulness of woman's love," remarked the Ladies' Garland in 1839; the Album of Love also extolled feminine affection:

Bushnell, p. 120; J. A. Segur, Influence, Rights and Appeal of Women (Albany, 1842), p. 10; Winslow, p. 4; Female Monitor, p. 79; Strong, I, 179; James Fenimore Cooper, The Ways of the Hour (New York: J. Fagan, 1836), p. 204; Ladies' Magazine (1820), 559; Sandford, p. 15.

> Oh! Woman's love is a holy light
> Which when once kindled can not die
> Though time and treachery and slight
> To quench the deathless flame may try[32]

The static definitions of woman, crucial to nineteenth century theories of feminine nature, arose from the troubled search for identity in a social context which prevented all but casual and often ephemeral attachment to beliefs, institutions, places, and persons. In highly mobile urban America, different classes, particularly the middle and upper segments of society, had "no fixed standard by which to govern their actions, either with regard to themselves or their fellow beings." As Francis Grund observed, they had "no manners, customs, modes of thinking. . .of their own, no community of feelings, nothing which could mark them as a distinct class. . . ."[33] For those living in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the combined effects of political democratization, evangelicalism, urbanization, industrialization, and immigration radically altered the social structure and seemed to make class distinctions meaningless.

In the Jacksonian era, a poor man could become president and a laborer could vote, an uneducated itinerant preacher could save thousands of souls, and the enterprising son of an immigrant could become a wealthy man. Politics, religion, and

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32 Christian Wreath (1847), 268; Washington Irving, "The Broken Heart," Ladies' Literary Companion (1820-1821), 12; Maternal Association, p. 27; Ladies' Garland (1839, 54; Album of Love (1853), 65.

33 Grund, I, 202.

even the economy seemed determined to prove the essential equality of the masculine world. As it became increasingly difficult to claim natural differences among men, the male sense of personal identity crumbled, and men reached out for inner direction and self-awareness, which they ultimately realized through the creation of complicated theories about women. Confused and unsure of themselves, men found a foil for their own ambiguous identities through the specific and stagnant qualities they ascribed to women. The paralyzing definitions of woman provided males with a fixed standard by which to evaluate their own behavior and attributes, for women in the nineteenth century formed the negative imprint of the desirable male self-portrait. Men of the antebellum era may not have known who they were or what characteristics they had, but by insisting that woman possessed all the weak and inferior traits, they at least knew what they were not.

Woman's nature, perceived as the mirror image to man's, gave clear expression to the elusive male identity, and the alleged and exaggerated differences between the sexes substituted for the absence of rigid class distinctions in the first part of the nineteenth century. Because masculine security depended so heavily on the distance he set between himself and woman, every effort had to be made to indicate vast differences in the natures of the two sexes. As any area of similarity, any small degree of likeness in feeling, interest, or aptitude might be used to prove that men and women should have the same responsibilities, enjoy the same

activities, and, did indeed, possess the same qualities, an elaborate philosophy of womanhood developed which, insisting upon woman's total dissimilarity to man, defined her entirely through her feminine gender and dictated that the rights, duties, and responsibilities of woman were totally a function of her sex.

The ideas and attitudes about women merged into a rigid theory, propounded with relentless vigor, ineluctably molding custom and practice, as its scrutinizing, judgemental, and instructive tenets came to be widely accepted. For these prevalent views of feminine nature, perhaps more than any political ideology, religious creed, or interpretation of the nation's future, gave antebellum Americans, searching for coherence and unifying values, a systematic set of beliefs to share.

CHAPTER V

THE WOMAN-BEAU IDEAL

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an heritage;

To Althea from Prison
Robert Lovelace

An intricate chain of myths imprisoned the nineteenth century American woman, defining the boundaries of her existence and imparting content to her life. The implaccable presentation of these views, emanations of a troubled era's search for stability, shelter, and identity, etched a static, monolithic image of womanhood deep into the nation's mind. Nourished by insecurity, prejudice, and ignorance, a tirade of writings on feminine nature flooded antebellum America. Torrents of polemical literature, explaining and delimiting female capabilities and behavior, poured forth from clergy, physicians, and writers who sought to give authority for the relegation of woman to the domestic sphere, substance to the doctrines of feminine weakness, inferiority, and submission, and support to the theory that males and females possessed totally different natures.

Authors wishing to provide theological evidence for woman's subservient position used quotations from the Bible in their writings, lectures, and sermons. The Reverend J.F. Stearns devoted a substantial portion of his discourse delivered before the First Presbyterian Church in Newburyport to remind women that the first Epistle to the Corinthians admonished them to "keep silence in the Churches, ... if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the churches."[1]

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[1] Stearns, p. 16.

Stearns further noted that the Epistle to Titus advised teaching "young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, (and to be) good and obedient to their own husbands... ."[2]

The seemingly irrefutable scriptural argument quoted with ever-increasing frequency and force in the antebellum period harmonized with the teachings of science as expressed by Dr. Chandler Gilman in an Introductory Address to the medical students of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1840. Although women had "an inferiority of the locomotive apparatus," Gilman believed that "it is in the nervous system that the peculiarities of the female are most marked and have the most prevailing influence on her moral nature." The doctor carefully detailed the physiological roots of feminine character: "The great nervous center, the brain, is both absolutely and relatively smaller in woman than in man. But the nerves...pervade her structure to a much greater extent, and bear a much larger proportion to the rest of her body than they do that of man." This uniquely female nervous system"gives to every part a susceptibility so acute, that the impressions made, and the sensations excited, are always of the most vehement character; and these being less under the control of the brain, woman becomes from the very necessity of her nature, a creature rather of impulse than of reflection, of feeling than of thought, of passion than of reason."[3]

The aspiring doctors also learned that women had a greater "abundance of soft and semi-fluid cellular tissue" than did men. This characteristic,

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[2] Stearns, p. 15.

[3] Chandler Gilman, M.D., Introductory Address to the Students in Medicine of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of the University of the State of New York (New York, 1840), pp. 15-17.

" by rendering the whole fabric more soft and delicate, contributes to impress a like character of softness and delicacy on the mind; the weakness of her apparatus of action, while it unfits her for powerful effort or long-continued exertion, has a necessary tendency to give her mind a character of non-resistance, of passivity, which...is developed...into that habit of self-sacrifice, that readiness to concede, that total absence of selfishness, which is the best trait in the character of...women."[4]

Emboldened by the prestigious support of religion and science, an assorted array of writers and theorists diffused the vitiated image of woman throughout the nation. Woman's "spirit of impulse and action, her passion of novelty and adventure predominating over cool discretion and cautious judgement...is one essential reason why God requires that she shall 'learn in silence with all subjection' and does not 'suffer her to teach nor to usurp authority' over man," wrote Reverend Hubbard Winslow of Boston in 1837.[5] George Burnap, articulating the "sphere" and "duties" of woman, believed that a "state of high intellectual culture and social refinement (was) unfavorable to physical health." Because of her fragile system, Burnap wrote, woman "is made to live in the regions of the sentiments and imagination."[6] An address before the Pittsford Young Ladies' Institute carried the meassage that "the impulses of woman are constitutionally quicker and her feelings more intense than those of man,"[7] while Charles Butler, in The American Lady, explored the ramifications of the female emotional and

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4 Gilman, pp. 15-17.

5 Winslow, p.5.

6 George Burnap, The Sphere and Duties of Woman (Philadelphia: John Murray, 1848), p. 172; p. 68.

7 Ray Palmer, D.D., An Address on the Education of Woman Delivered at the Anniversary of the Pittsfield Young Ladies' Institute (Albany: Gray, Sprague & Co., 1852), p. 10.

physical structure. "The gay vivacity, and the quickness of imagination, so conspicuous among the qualities in which the superiority of women is acknowledged, have a tendency to lead to unsteadiness of mind; to fondness of novelty; to habits of frivolousness, and to trifling employment; to dislike of sober application; (and) to repugnance to grave studies...".[8]

"Women are by nature weak and defenseless," declared the author of a Boston schoolbook as fragility came to epitomize nineteenth century females. Another children's textbook told of an Aunt complaining to her niece's teacher that the child had been "as pale and delicate...as (she) would wish to see," but now she had "lost that graceful Stoop." The dissatisfied relative asked: "Who wishes to see such a rude state of health as hers?"[9] Girls needed to be taught at an early age that their dainty bodies could not tolerate the rigorous activity of their brother's world. The story of "Miss Sophie," included in the 1837 edition of Rhymes for the Nursery, told of Sophie's fate when she "tried to climb and scramble o'er a gate as high as any door:"

> Now little girls should never climb,
> And Sophie won't another time
> For when upon the highest rail
> Her frock was caught upon a nail,
> She lost her hold, and sad to tell,
> Was hurt and bruis'd - for down she fell.[10]

The frail female form, praised and desired, had to be constantly guarded, for the pale and wan heroines of the antebellum era seemed to be perpetually "drifting off" or "fainting away." In the short story, "The Return," by George

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[8] Butler, p. 27.

[9] Joseph Richardson, The American Reader (2nd ed., Boston: Lincoln and Edmands, 1813), pp. 20-23; Quoted in Ruth Miller Elson, Guardians of Tradition. American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 304.

[10] Rhymes for the Nursery (Boston, 1837), quoted in Notions of the Americans 1820 - 1860, ed. David Grimsted (New York: George Braziller, 1970), p. 235.

Gorden, "(t)he lovely Cordelia...pined away" because her "frame was too fragile to endure (a) long separation" from her lover,[11] and a song commemorating the demise of a precious young lady lamented: "Like a rose we saw thee wither, Poor Mary-Anne!" In Lewis J. Cist's tearful tune, "Death of the Beautiful, " appearing in Godey's Lady Book, a "fair and fragile" woman "faded, drooped and passed away." Melodies of the period abounded with descriptions of "meek" and "gentle" women, "half of earth - the rest of Heaven." The prolific songwriter, Samuel Woodworth, serenaded the female sex as "angels, in limbs, In person and manners, and features."[12] These ethereal beings, celebrated in song and prose and verse, had to avoid all energetic movement. Mr. Lee, in T.S. Arthur's "The Maiden," warns his wife: "(E)ven the slight exertion of pouring out tea may disturb your nervous system."[13]

With minds too weak for serious scholarship, with bodies too delicate for strenuous endeavor, and with emotions too brittle to cope with reality, nineteenth century American women seemed to require constant assistance from men. One of Francis Grund's associates noted that, whereas "our London Women of the middle and even higher classes can walk alone, stand alone, and when taking tea or coffee do not require a gentleman to hold the saucer for them," in the United States the "ladies must be helped...the ladies must be put into the carriage...the ladies must have their shoe strings tied...on every occasion they are treated as poor helpless creatures." The flower-like

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[11] George Gordon, "The Return," The Amethyst (Baltimore: N.C. Brooks, 1831), p. 166.

[12] "Poor Mary-Anne," Boston Musical Miscellany (Boston: J.T. Buckingham, 1811), p. 78; Lewis J. Cist, "Death of the Beautiful, "Godey's Lady's Book (1845), p.222; Boston Musical, p. 78; Samuel Woodworth, "Women are Angels," quoted in Notions, p. 32.

[13] T.S. Arthur, The Maiden ; A Story for My Young Countrywomen (Philadelphia: Henry F. Anners, 1848), p. 32.

creations who languished through the pages of antebellum literature enhanced the male self-image; weakness in women bolstered men's feelings of strength. "Our women in general are...not brought up to work,... our men spurning such a vulgar abuse of their...limbs," remarked a contemporary.[14] Horace Bushnell astutely commented: "The man will be manlier, that he has a true womanly wife..."because"the power we...get on our masculine character is not so much from what women do to us, as from what we do to them." Man's security depended heavily on the conception of woman as fair and feeble: "Destroy (womanhood's) claim to concession and protection and courtesy...and manhood is gone too...," warned George Templeton Strong.[15]

The prevailing image of woman as delicate, impulsive, and irrational provided a further reason to keep her tucked away in the domestic sphere, far from the harsh world of politics and business. "A life of show and publicity is not that in which woman's graces best develope themselves. The scenes of private life...would seem more congenial to her better feelings and more favorable to the cultivation of the highest traits of her character," claimed a report of a maternal association.[16] The Ladies' Garland of 1837 announced that "a...woman never appears so truly amiable as in retirement;her virtues shine there with double lustre;" the Ladies' Magazine echoed these sentiments: "Woman, as she consumes away in her own loveliness, shrinks from the gaze of the world and buries herself on the affections of her friends."[17] "Woman is a gentle being, and exerts her influence mildly," wrote the author of Woman's

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[14] Grund, I, pp. 87; 99; 123.

[15] Horace Bushnell, Women's Suffrage; the Reform Against Nature (New York: C. Scribner & Co., 1869), pp.109,159; Strong, II, 129.

[16] "The Social Position and Culture Due to Woman," Two Addresses Before the Maternal Association of the Amity Street Baptist Church (New York: John Gray, 1846), p. 25.

[17] Ladies Garland (1837) 15; Ladies' Magazine (1829), 561.

Worth, while Reverend Palmer told young women that the "large part of (your) life is likely to be passed quite away from the clatter of the noisy world, the world of fact and sense."[18] The Reader, Abner Alden's widely used schoolbook, tutored children in literary skills with the following passage: "One of the chiefest beauties in a female character is that modest reserve, that retiring delicacy, which avoids the publick eye, and is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration." "Young persons of both sexes" learned "moral and instructive" lessons in "prose and verse" from Miscellanies which described women as:

> Born to dignify retreat
> Unknown to flourish and unseen
> be great [19]

But if feminine nature dictated that woman shun the outside world, theorists assured her: "Your influence is not less because it is obscure...The broad river takes its waters from the little rills that supply it." "No! by no means," exlaimed the author of The World Enlightened, Improved and Harmonized by Woman, "the influence of the female character is not confined to their homes; it is felt through society; felt where they are never seen.... " Woman's impact on society supposedly flowed from the instruction she gave to her children. "The (female) sex has, as its chosen period of influence over these, the young, the earlier portion of the child's life, when it is most impressible. As the earliest teacher, then, woman is answerable for a large share of the child's future character and development," claimed a speaker

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[18] Woman's Worth or, Hints to Raise the Female Character (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1848, p. 26; Palmer, p. 13.

[19] Abner Alden, The Reader (4th ed., Boston: Thomas & Andrews, 1814), p. 51; Miscellanies, Moral and Instructive in Prose and Verse (Philadelphia, 1787), p. 25.

before an 1845 meeting of the New York City Maternal Association, while Rev. Winslow asserted that "upon woman depends the destiny of the nation! for she is rearing up senators and statesmen."[20] Though secluded, weak, dependent, and emotional, women received the persistent guarantee that she, nonetheless, played an important role in society by remaining within the confines of her dwelling.

Charged with the responsibility of adorning the "sacred privacy of home" and with making her household "the school of moral discipline of the heart, the scene of all pure and holy thoughts, the first discoverable source of our greatest glory, the happiness of religion," women had to be pure and pious in every aspect of their lives. [21] Nineteenth century authors agreed that "there is no gem which so much adorns the female character, and which adds so brilliant a lustre to her charm, as unaffected and deep-toned piety," and their writings illuminated different aspects of woman's relationship to religion.[22] Some emphasized an inherent feminine inclination for holiness: "The female is naturally prone to be religious. Hers is a pious mind," wrote Dr. Charles Meigs. Rev. Stearns thought that "religion seems almost to have been entrusted by its author to her particular custody." Children studying from The Reader learned that women had religion within their "special province," because it guarded their "supreme delicacy" and their "modesty."[23]

Other authors stressed the compensatory quality in woman's devoutness.

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[20] Stearns, p.22, The World Enlightened, Improved and Harmonized by Woman (Philadelphia, 1840), p.8. "The Son Unguided his Mother's Shame," Two Addresses Before the Maternal Association, p. 17; Winslow, p.9.

[21] Chittenden, p. 21.

[22] "Piety in Woman," Ladies' Garland (1839), 228

[23] Meigs, pp. 10-15; Stearns, p. 11; Alden Reader, 52.

"Females need the comforts, the hopes, and the prospects of religion, more... than the other sex. Subjected to the...weakness of a feeble constitution, their state, when raised by improvement, and propped with Christian consolations, is still a state of...pain," believed a contributor to the Ladies' Literary Cabinet. "The position and habits of woman are...favorable to piety," wrote another contemporary author. "She needs solace and occupation, and religion affords her both." The article, "Religion in Women," appearing in the Ladies' Garland, also focused on feminine anguish: "Woman, from her very nature, is destined to drink deeper from the cup of sorrow and suffering than the other sex. Her trials are chiefly of the heart...(and) religion alone can disarm these trials and enable her to preserve that equanimity and peace of mind so essential to happiness.[24]

Not only to assuage grief did woman need religion, but her role as the "arbitress of taste and of manners" demanded the cleansing influence of her personal piety. "It is her province to adorn social life, to throw a charm over the intercourse of the world," wrote Rev. Stearns, and his colleague Rev. Spring agreed: "Public taste and manners, public virtues and vices are under the control of woman."[25] Theorists attempted to resolve the blatant contradiction of telling woman, perpetually admonished to shun public exposure, that she could determine the country's morals, by asserting that the effect of the pious female on her individual family would be disseminated

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[24] "Female Piety," Ladies' Literary Cabinet (1820), 156; Sandford, P. 35; "Religion in Women," Ladies' Garland (1837), 225.

[25] Stearns, p.9; Gardiner Spring, The Excellence and Influence of the Female Character (New York: F. & R. Lockwood, 1825), p. 29.

throughout society. "It is a holy influence, which the virtuous and pious sister diffuses over the fraternal circle,...(for) the influence of woman in forming the character of her relatives, gentle and unobserved as it is, is one which can never be adequately appreciated." Rev. Spring, writing for the Ladies' Garland in 1837, expressed the opinion that only "pious mothers" could raise children of a "moral and religious character," who would develope into virtuous citizens capable of governing the nation.[26]

Woman's piety, innate and necessary, formed the "distinguished excellence of the female character," and dreadful indeed was the woman who lacked this precious holiness: "Of all the moral monsters which abound on earth, women without religion are the most disgusting and mischievous."[27] While declaring that woman's special devotion to God made her particularly suited for her role as guardian of family virtue, nineteenth century writers, by their insistance upon feminine piety, wove another thread in the web of myths which entangled and encaged women. And religiousity, like delicacy, submission, and intellectual inferiority, came to be associated with female nature, thus providing males with a clearer image from which to distinguish themselves.

Pious feeling and behavior, though of critical importance, could not suffice to make woman an "image of love and truth." Above all else the antebellum female had to be pure. "There is a natural purity in the heart of woman," wrote a contributor to the 1839 issue of the Ladies' Garland, and the author of "Woman," in the literary annual The Casket, thought females

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[26] Stearns, p. 8; Gardiner Spring "Influence of the Female Character," Ladies' Garland (1837), 122.

[27] Spring, The Excellence, p. 14; Cary, p. 20.

to be "the purest abstract of Deity."[28] A minister from Salem, Massachusetts, preached that "purity, tenderness (and) loveliness" constituted the most important "attributes of female character," while a contemporary author told a group of mothers that the "character of the women of the nation is a criterion, just and unfailing, of its true civilization, of its purity in morals, and of its political well-being."[29]

Perpetually assailed by directives instructing them on the importance of untainted thought and unpolluted conduct, antebellum women became enveloped in a cult of purity. School children learned that women's only strength lay "in their modest charms and chaste deportment," for the female sex had "no shield but unsullied purity." The heroine of a popular song, "Charming Nancy," had many worthy qualities: "Her beauty delights me, her kindness invites me," but most important of all: "Her pleasant behavior is free from all stain."[30] The exhortative and authoritative literary and artistic alembics which permeated nineteenth century society monitored feminine existence as they dictated the inflexible tenets of proper female behavior.

"Frequent not the busy parts of the city, nor sit in the high places of the theater," warned a book on feminine decorum which also cautioned women to "(m)ove not thy foot too often to the sprightly sound of music, lest thy reputation should also dance away." T.S. Arthur, writing on "True Maiden Delicacy," asserted that whenever a woman appeared "at any place of public amusement with a man of notoriously bad character, she becomes, in a degree, tainted," and Thomas Branagan wrote that "the fashionable female,

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[28] "Piety in Women," Ladies' Garland (1839), 203; "Woman" The Casket, or Flowers of Literature, Wit and Sentiment (1824), 20.

[29] Samuel Worcester, A Discourse Delivered in the Tabernacle in Salem Before the Salem Female Charitable Society at their Annual Meeting (Salem, 1809) p. 14; Maternal Association, p. 25.

[30] Richardson, p. 21; "Charming Nancy," Boston Musical Miscellany, p. 119

who exposes publicly what prudence should conceal, not only entices the male of ardent passions to perpetuate, but also commits the crime of sentimental fornication herself."[31] Because the Jacksonians believed "a passionate woman is a disgrace to her sex," all phases of feminine life had to be regulated and moderated. "Surely, profanity in a female, is of all others the most to be deprecated," claimed a contributor to the Ladies' Literary Cabinet after hearing some women utter "improper" language as they walked on Broadway, and John Pintard thought that although men did not have to be too concerned with their speech, "a Female's conversation should be the index of her mind, pure, chaste and unaffected." Conforming to the directives on modest speech, American women even refrained from saying the word "leg." Captain Marryat noted that females referred to the "limb" of a table rather than risk being thought indelicate.[32]

With purity of paramount importance, few argued with the admonition contained in a verse of the ballad "The Pride of the Village:"

> So pretty girls, if they are wise
> As they are fair,
> Will never raise their pretty eyes
> Nor vainly dare
> To look upon a coronet

which might entice them to depart even ever-so slightly from the rigid requirements of impeccable conduct, because "if woman chance to swerve from the strictest rules of virtue"

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[31] Female Monitor, p. 25; Arthur, The Maiden, p. 44; Thomas Branagan, The Excellency of the Female Character Vindicated (Philadelphia: J. Rakestrow, 1808), p. 75.

[32] Cary, p. 62; "A Walk on Broadway," Ladies' Literary Cabinet (1822), 21; Pintard II, 17; Marryat, pp. 244-47. Barbara Welter in "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," American Quarterly (1966) XVIII, 151-174 identifies piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity as the essential traits for antebellum women.

Ruin ensues, reproach and endless shame,
And one false step for ever blasts her name[33]

There could be no half-way point between purity and pollution for nineteenth century American women. "Chastity alone" would make a woman "honoured of God...happy in (herself)...(and) lovely in the view of the world;" without it "the consequences are vain remorse, and certain misery." At the commencement address of Columbia College in 1837, Nathaniel W. Chittenden asserted that "woman's influence is either of the most exalted or of the most debasing tendency. For, in the female character there is no mid-region; it must exist in spotless innocence, or else in hopeless vice."[34] "Truly a woman in her purity is a 'pearl of price,'" asserted an article in the Ladies' Garland, "but in her degradation, to be shunned as to avoid infection."[35]

Numerous paintings illustrated the dire fate awaiting the misguided or defiant woman who challenged the precepts of seraphical behavior. In Richard Redgrave's picture, The Outcast, a stern, unyielding father turns his daughter out into the cold, dark night. A letter crumpled on the floor apparently has exposed the illegitimacy of the babe whom the defiled young woman clasps to her breast as she prepares to face the harsh world alone and unloved. The pleas of a younger sister, who, on her knees, begs the father to relent and the anguish of a brother, burying his face in his hands, cannot deter the strict parent in his determination to banish the offending member of the family, and the morality of the time supported his conduct while it condemned his daughter's.[36] Augustus Egg's Past and Present No.1

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[33] J. Green, "The Pride of the Village," Musical Carcanet: A Choice Collection of the Most Admired Popular Songs (New York: Collens & Hannay, 1832), 52; The Advocate of Moral Reform (1834), 5.

[34] Female Monitor, p. 25, Chittenden, p. 17.

[35] Ladies' Garland (1839), 35.

[36] Helen E. Roberts "Marriage, Redundancy or Sin," ed. Martha Vicinus, Suffer and Be Still (Indiana: Indiana Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 63-64.

also depicts the family misery caused by a woman's fall from morality. As in the Outcast, a letter has revealed the female's sinful actions. Her husband sits with the note clutched in his hand, so stunned by the odious revelation that he simply gazes into space; the wife, ashamed and remorseful beyond words, lies prostrate at his feet, her hands clasped in supplication. The ensuing break-up of the family is symbolically represented by a worm in the half-eaten apple lying on the table, and by the collapse of the house of cards which two little girls had been constructing at the time of their mother's exposure.[37]

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Found could well have been sketched as the logical sequel to the paintings described above, for it portrays the eventual destiny of those women who took one step outside the path of virtue. Once blemished, a woman, no matter what her previous position in life, could never again be accepted by decent society and generally had no choice but to support herself by prostitution. In Found, a young man on his way to market with a calf, meets his former lover slumped against a brick wall. As he tries to raise her up, she pulls away from him, turning her face towards the hard brick, thus demonstrating the depth of her shame. Dressed in the gaudy silks and feathers of a harlot, the woman's clothing forms a dramatic contrast to the simple, practical garments of her one time beloved, while the tension in their hands underlines the incompatibility of their two ways of life. So absorbed is the youth with this woman, that he leaves his calf unattended, but there is nothing to fear. The young white animal, a symbol of innocence, has been carefully bound by a web-like robe and cannot

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[37] Roberts in Vicinus, pp. 70-72.

stray from his master. The artist seems to be communicating the prevalent antebellum belief that female virtue could only be preserved if a woman's activities, thoughts, and behavior are strictly confined.[38]

The decree that women be chaste intensified the image of a passive, porcelain-being whose immaculate delicacy made her willing to submit to the superior wisdom of her worldly, knowledgeable husband or father, while a man who could count among his "possessions" a modest and unseducible wife would surely consider himself the superior to one whose spouse had been unfaithful to him. The cult of purity, demanding ivory innocence, denied that women naturally had sexual drives. Dr. William Acton, author of Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs, one of the most widely quoted books on sexuality in the English speaking world during the mid-nineteenth century, wrote: "The majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feelings of any kind. What men are habitually, women are only exceptionally."[39] Lurid tales and passionate encounters with profligate men could, of course, arouse some sexual yearning, creating social misfits who threatened the harmony of society, for Acton shared the dominant nineteenth century view that "(t)he best mothers, wives and managers of households know little or nothing of sexual indulgence. Love of home, children and domestic duties are the only passions they feel."[40]

This deliberate refutation of ardent feminine sexual feelings had significant implications. Passion connoted an intensity of feeling which defied

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38 For a different interpretation see Roberts in Vicinus pp. 68-69.

39 William Acton, The Function and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Youth, in Adult Age, and in Advanced Life: Considered in their Social and Psychological Relations (Philadelphia, 1865), p. 133 quoted in Carl Degler, "What Ought To Be and What Was: Women's Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century," American Historical Review (December, 1974), p. 1467.

40 Acton, p. 134 quoted in Degler, p. 1478.

control and jeopardized social tranquility. By refusing to recognize that any except the most debased kind of female could have sexual desires, nineteenth century males made certain that their women remained at home, malleable and immobile. Moreover, although doctors, clergy, artists, and theorists, obdurately insisting upon a single norm of behavior, thought, and feeling for all women, carefully supervised feminine deportment, antebellum males enjoyed a wide range of freedom in their social and sexual conduct. Jacksonian Americans believed that a "man may tarnish his name and brighten it again," but woman, once fallen, could never be reclaimed.[41] Underlying the implicit and explicit espousal of a double standard lay the assumption that men and women possessed completely different natures. A man might sin, yet he never lost his basic morality, but for women, an entirely different set of criteria prevailed. As the Jacksonian era increasingly came to define women totally through gender, facilities, actions, character, and worth, all became a function of an undivided feminine nature which either adhered to the tight pattern of perfection or forfeited the name of "Woman."

Pious and pure, fragile and weak, submissive and domestic, passive and unintellectual, this imaginary woman, a composite of myths fettering feminine energy and activity, comprised the nineteenth century conception of the quintessential female; the woman-beau ideal. Careful to exhibit all the requisite qualities, this paragon of excellence had to relinquish willingly her own comforts and interests for the pleasures of others. "A pure true heart, a self-forgetful spirit...a wish and an effort to please," and a

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[41] The Advocate of Moral Reform (1834), 5.

readiness to minister "to the wants of others," characterized the image of feminine faultlessness, as the ethos of the woman-beau ideal expected women to "lay aside all consideration of themselves," and to make their "joys...the results of the gratification of others."[42]

Tocqueville observed that Americans "require much abnegation on the part of woman and a constant sacrifice of her pleasures to her duties, when it is seldom demanded of her in Europe." "If you would live happy -- endeavor to promote the happiness of others," preached the Ladies Companion in 1836, and the following year Washington Irving wrote an essay, "The Wife," for the Ladies' Garland which contained the advice:" Woman, who is the mere dependent and ornament of man in his happier hours, should be his stay and solace when smitten with sudden calamity." In "Confessions of a Platonic Lover," T.S. Arthur asserted that the perfect woman "was by nature good and kind, and generous -- always ready to concede her own pain lest others should suffer."[43]

Throughout the antebellum period, women received rigorous instruction in the paramount importance of self-renunication. Robert Dodsley's The Whole Duty of Woman advised that "the end of thy being...is...to soothe him with thy tenderness," while females who read the popular Woman's Worth or, Hints to Raise the Female Character learned that "(t)he feeling proper for a woman when she enters into society is this: to give no pain to anyone,

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[42] Josiah Gilbert Holland, Letters to the Jones (New York: Charles Scribner, 1863), p. 211; Segur, p. 97; Samuel Patterson, "Female Piety, Ladies' Garland (1849), 36.

[43] Tocqueville, II, 201; "Advice to Unmarried Ladies," Ladies' Companion (1836), 101; Washington Irving, "The Wife," Ladies' Garland (1837), 53; T.S. Arthur, "Confessions of a Platonic Loverm: Baltimore Book (1839), 102

and to contribute as much as possible to others' pleasures." "Do we look for self denial?" asked the author of an article in the Ladies' Garland. One did not have to search far for the answer. The "devoted wife" furnished the pre-eminent example of "a sacrificing spirit."[44]

The theme of feminine abnegation laced itself through antebellum literature, restraining women from consideration and knowledge of their deepest throughts and needs. In the story,"Bear and Forbear," Margaret asks her Aunt Hannah: "Would you have a wife never think of herself?" The older woman replies that "the less she thinks of herself...the better." "Man lives for himself," proclaimed an essay in Christian Wreath, but "woman lives...for all...(s)he cannot be said to live - even for herself. She is forgotten in the unfoldings of her duty." The Ladies' Repository asserted that "woman feels no weariness,...even no recollection of self," and The American Instructor, a school book, taught little girls that their sole aim in life should be "to recompense (man's) care with soft endearments."[45]

In addition to the selfless, "beautiful devotion" and the "angelic ministration" demanded of her, the female striving to fulfill the requirements of the woman-beau ideal also learned that "it is the part of woman to adapt herself to her husband," and to "endeavor to assimilate all...views and customs to (his)."[46] Affection always leads a true woman to merge her separate judgement on anything in the judgement of the beloved object," admitted Mrs. Evelyn of the widely read novel, Queechy, while primary school

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[44] Robert Dodsley, The Whole Duty of Woman (Philadelphia: Edward, Earles, 1817), 1; Woman's Worth, p. 59; "Woman's Enduring Affection," Ladies' Garland (1837), 14; Strong, I, 206.

[45] T.S. Arthur, "Bear and Forbear," American Keepsake (1851), 264; "The Mission of Woman," Christian Wreath (1847) pp. 267-268; Ladies Repository (1843), 168; Rensselaer Bentley, The American Instructor (New York, 1824), p. 162.

[46] Strong, I, 206; Ladies' Repository (1842), 17; Ladies' Companion (1836), 296.

texts preached a derivation of the same lesson to the nation's younger readers: "Girls should be taught to give up their opinions betimes, and not pertinaciously to carry on a dispute, even should they know themselves to be in the right." The Child's Spelling Book taught the ABC's with the following axiom: "She giveth not her opinion unasked, nor stoppeth her ears to that of another," and Caleb Alexander's Instructor warned female youths against expressing themselves in a "boisterous" manner, talking "politics," or ever exhibiting "anger."[47]

Thus, throughout their lives, nineteenth century women imbibed an education from their surroundings which denied them any worth as autonomous beings. Deprived a sense of personal identity by a creed which perpetually admonished them to sacrifice all independent desires, comforts, activities, and interests for the happiness of others, and which consistently urged them to blend all separate opinions, thoughts, and ideas into those of the "superior sex," the female became a mere appendage of her male relations as feminine individuality dissolved within the monolithic ethos of the woman-beau ideal. The word "woman," which during the eighteenth century commanded respect and evoked a serious and important philosophical discussion, practically disappeared in the antebellum era as the fragmenting, identity-negating terms "wife," "mother," "sister," and "daughter," casting women into set molds, furnished the dominant modes of reference to members of the female sex and gave clear expression to the antebellum era's conception of feminine value and role in society.

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[47] Susan Warner, Queechy (New York: George P. Putnam, 1852), II, 134; Charles Pierce, The Portsmouth Miscellany: or, Lady's Library of Improvement (Portsmouth, N.H., 1804), 67; The Child's Spelling Book (Conn.: John Babcock, 1798), p. 100; Caleb Alexander, The Young Gentlemen and Ladies Instructor (Boston: E. Larkin & W.P.L. Blaker, 1797), pp. 25-26.

"The paramount objects of female pursuit," wrote Charles Butler in The American Lady, must "be the attainment of perfection in the characters of a wife (and) a mother...," while writers, seeking "examples of the most amiable tendencies and affections implanted in human nature, of modesty, of delicacy, of sympathizing sensibility," knew they could look "(t)o the sister, to the daughter," for those "endowments" which "form the glory of the...sex.:[48] Each of the rigid roles stipulated for woman dictated specific behavior. "As a daughter, every member of the family with which she is associated acknowledges the ...purity of her character," preached Reverend Spring, and a contemporary author wrote that "a good daughter is the steady light of her parent's house. She is the pride and ornament of his hospitality, and the gentle nurse of his sickness."[49] "Misconduct of daughters is...fatal to family peace," warned Noah Webster in his reader, and The New Pleasing Instructure: or, Young Lady's Guide to Virtue and Happiness taught the school girl that even ill-treatment by her father "(b)y no means releases (her) from...duty to him; had he a thousand errors, he is still... father." A popular song dramatically illustrated the importance of daughters yielding to paternal wishes. When Dinah's father wants her to marry, she replies:

> Oh papa, oh papa, I've not made up my mind
> And to marry just yet, why I don't feel inclined

But Dinah pays for her disobedience, and ultimately poisons herself. The sorrowful ballad concludes with the moral:

> Now all you young maidens take warning by her,
> Never not by no means disobey your governor [50]

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[48] Butler, Preface, p. viii; p. 22.
[49] J.G. Palfred, "A Good Daughter," Boston Book (1836) 191.

[50] Noah Webster, An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking, (Conn: Hudson and Goodwin, 1789), 66; The New Pleasing Instructure: or, Young Lady's Guide to Virtue and Happiness (Boston: Thomas & Andrews, 1799), 125; "Vilikin and His Dinah," in Sigmund Spaeth Read 'em and Weep (New York: Arco Publishing Co., 1959), p. 53.

"The influence of such a female...as a sister...is scarcely less desirable" than that exerted by daughters, wrote Reverend Springs, and William Henry Fry lyrically extolled sisterly affection:

> No love is like a sister's love, unselfish,
> free and pure;
> A flame that lighted from above,
> May guide but ne'er allure
> It knows no frown of jealous fear,
> No blush of conscious guile; its wrongs
> are par-doned through one tear,
> Its hope crown'd by one smile [51]

After vigorous training in discipline, devotion, and denial as sisters and daughters, the young woman could enter "the sphere...which she is so exactly fitted adorn and bless as the wife." Charles Burdette, author of Blonde and Brunette, thought that "woman is made for love, conjugal and maternal, and when the powerful sentiment which seeks this necessary completion of the end for which she was created has...been awakened...Husbands and children... became necessary to her moral organization." The Ladies' Companion praised "The Wife" as "we behold her in her domestic scenes, a mere passive creature of enjoyment...brightening the family circle with her endearments and prized for the extreme joy which that presence and those endearments are calculated to impart." But the "Christian Home,...that appointed shrine for woman... (where) she ministers daily in the holy works of household peace," needed more than a husband and wife, it required children: "the virtuous woman is...happy not only as a wife, but also as a mother," for the "model of womanhood in its ideal excellence" could only be achieved if woman "was wife and

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[51] Spring, The Excellence, p. 26; William Henry Fry, "Romance," A Program of Early and Mid-Nineteenth Century American Songs, ed. John T. Howard (New York: J. Fischer & Bros., 1931), p. 29.

mother both."[52]

"Oh, that sweet word Mother!" effused Dr. Chandler Gilman. "Is there a heart in any bosom...that does not throb thick and fast at the sound?" he asked rhetorically. Even time could not diminish the love for one's mother; a ballad appearing in the 1842 issue of Godey's vocalized the "affection firm and strong" which the writer felt "even now, though years have passed" since hearing "the music of my mother's plaintive song." "Maternal affection is inherent in the nature of women, it is planted within them," wrote "a son" in the Ladies' Literary Cabinet, while a contemporary believed that the "mother has...from the constitution of her sex...gentleness and patience."[53]Increasingly alluded to by her familial relations, vehemently forbidden to view the household as "an invidious and menial sphere of duty," and constantly instructed in the importance of being able "to excel ... in a thorough and practical acquaintance with the arts and duties of domestic life," woman became indistinguishable from "wife," "mother," "sister," "daughter," and feminine essential domesticity emerged as the leitmotif of the womanhood myths.[54]

Simultaneously glorifying matrimony and denigrating singleness with disdainful ridicule, nineteenth century authors urged women into a domestic life shaped by the complex needs of the age. T. S. Arthur thought that women should wed because "marriage is an orderly state," and the happiness of society depended upon "order." Other writers emphasized the assistance woman

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[52] Burnap, p. 64; Charles Burdett, Blonde and Brunette (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1858), pp. 178-79; Ladies' Companion (1836), 230; Harriet Beecher Stowe, The Minister's Wooing (New York: Duby and Jackson, 1859), 567; Joel Hawes, D.D., "A Looking Glass for Ladies" An Address delivered at the Eight Anniversary of the Mount Holyoke Seminary (Boston: Wm. D. Ticknor & Co., 1845), p. 20; Burdette, p. 179.

[53] Gilman, p. 19; Godey's (1842), 152, Ladies' Literary Cabinet (1822), 5; "The Son Unguided", Maternal Association (1846), 6.

[54] Spring, The Excellence, p. 5.

PLATE IV

George Elgar Hicks

WOMAN'S MISSION:
COMPANION OF MANHOOD

could give her husband "by relieving him of every care which she is capable of taking upon herself. His own employments are usually such to require his whole time, and his whole mind," the author continued, and "(a) good wife will never suffer her husband's attention to be distracted by details, to which her own time and talents are adequate."[55]

The married woman had to be prepared to deny herself "all the luxuries, comforts, nay almost necessaries of life to promote (her husband's) pleasure and well-being;" the wife had to be ready to stay "beside his couch in the hour of sickness, enduring fatigue with uncomplaining patience." [56] The painting, Woman's Mission: Companion of Manhood, by George Elgar Hicks shows the loving, submissive wife giving solace to her grief-stricken husband who, as the black-bordered letter he holds in his hand reveals, has just learned of the death of a relative. With her loving upturned face exuding tender compassion, the gentle wife clings to her spouse, trying to comfort him, but the husband, though deeply saddened, stands firm and erect; even in sorrow he remains the strong tree; she, the clinging vine.[57]

"Marriage generally improves the character of woman," wrote one author, "not only because it puts her under the best possible tuition, that of the affections,...but because it gives her higher aims, and a more dignified position in society." Perpetually bombarded with the paramountcy of wedlock, nineteenth century females learned with Florence, the heroine of

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[55] T.S. Arthur, Married and Single; or, Marriage and Celibacy Contrasted, in a Series of Domestic Pictures (New York: Harper and Bros., 1845), p. 12.

[56] Burnap, p. 108; "Wives," Ladies' Companion (1838), 282.

[57] Roberts in Vicinus, p. 48.

T.S. Arthur's tale, The Maiden, "to think of marriage...justly; to esteem it the most important act of a woman's life, and as involving the most important results."[58] Different facets of culture coalesced to force women into matrimony, to convince them that all true women ardently desired to become wives and mothers, and to persuade them that only through marriage could they find personal fullfillment.

The era abounded with popular songs and works of fiction extolling marriage as the primary goal of woman's life. Samuel Woodworth's comic opera, "The Deed of Gift," first performed at the Boston Theater on March 22, 1822, contained the following verse:

> Men may boast the bliss
> Of a free election,
> Women ask but this,
> Uncontrolled affection
> Then we cheerly say
> Tutored by the pastor
> Honour, love, obey,
> To our lord and master [59]

With the wedding deemed the climacteric event in a woman's life, ladies' magazines became medleys of verses and refrains, serenading the bride "in gems and roses beaming." "Bring flowers, fresh flow'rs, for the bride to wear," intoned an air appearing in an 1843 issue of Godey's, for blossoms "were born to blush in her shining hair,...Her place is now at another's side, Bring flowers for the locks of the fair young bride."[60]

The exaltation of marriage and the dogma of its indispensability to feminine existence received further reinforcement from lyrics and stories which scorned and derided those who remained single. In the tune, "The Old Maid's Lament," an unmarried woman expresses remorse at her life. She con-

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58 Burnap, p. 101; Burdette Blonde, p, 179, T.S. Arthur, Maiden, p. 154.

59 Samuel Woodworth, "The Deed of Gift," (comp.) Vernon Greville Yankee Doodle-Do A collection of Songs of the Early American Stage (New York: Payson and Clark-, 1927), p. 10.

60 "The Bride's Farewell," The Ladies' Pearl and Literary Gleaner (1840), 13; Godey's (1843), 140.

fides: "When I was young and fair and gay, I passed my cheerful hours away." But now that it is too late for her to wed, she pleads: "O save me from that dismal stand, Where...old maids do land." In another medody, "My Grandma's Advice," an elderly relative admonishes her grandchild: "You'd better get married than die an old maid."[61] The grandmother's exhortation seemed wise in a social milieu which mocked the concept of "(s)ingle blessedness for woman (as)...a monstrous falsehood."[62]

Mr. Burton, a character in a short story appearing in the Ladies' Magazine, voiced the views of his real-life contemporaries when he declared: "I have an aversion to the whole tribe of antiquated maidens...(I)t seems impossible they can possess the true feminine virtues and graces of character... ." Charles Burdett agreed that all women, regardless of interest or position, should marry. Blonde and Brunette, one of his many novels, contains the following passage: "Old maidhood is a wretched, pitiable condition, to which the most unhappy marriage would be vastly preferable, as life, though wretched, is better than annihilation."[63]

Antebellum females, hurried into marriage by the pernicious dictates of the multitudiness myths comprising the woman beau-ideal, did not always find the blissful happiness promised to them. Tocqueville noted that "(in) America the independence of woman is irrecoverably lost in the bonds of matrimony. If an unmarried woman is less constrained here than elsewhere," he continued, "a wife is subjected to stricter obligation. The

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61 "The Old Maid's Lament," ed Fanny Snow Knowlton, Songs of Other Days (Boston: Oliver Ditson Co., 1922), p. 75; "My Grandma's Advice," Knowlton, p. 92.

62 Burdette, Blonde, p. 179.

63 "An Old Maid," Ladies' Magazine (1830), 290; Burdette, Blonde, p.179.

former makes her father's house an abode of freedom and of pleasure; the latter lives in the home of her husband as if it were a cloister."[64] The musical bachelor of a ballad by the same name declared that he "would not wed the pur-est soul, Unless her heart would bear control," and children studying from Alden's reader found that lesson XLIV contained a quote from Milton in which Eve tells Adam:

> My partner and protector, what
> thou bidd'st
> Unargued I obey; so God ordains;
> God is thy law, thou mine; to
> know no more
> Is woman's happiest knowledge, and
> her praise [65]

The emotional subservience demanded of the wife to her husband dramatically increased as the nation struggled through the tumultuous years from 1820 to 1860; similarly the laws defining the position of the married woman, made flexible by the necessities of the colonial period, became rigorously enforced during the antebellum era as the legal codes reflected the attempt to find a balm for the troubles of an anxious age in a complicated philosophy of womanhood. The severe execution of the laws concerning married women corresponded perfectly to the submissiveness, delicacy, emotionalism, and ineptitude insisted upon by the ethos of the perfect female: married women could not sign contracts; they had no title to their own earnings, or to property even when they received it as inheritance or as dower, and they had no claim to their own children in the event of legal separation. The legislatures and courts repeatedly denied women's requests for divorce,

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64 Tocqueville, II, 201.

65 Anton Philip Heinrich, "The Musical Bachelor," Howard, p.1; quoted in Alden, Reader, p. 184.

although the evidence presented detailed flagrant abuse, while males had far more success in dissolving their marital ties, often for far less substantial reasons.[66] The New York State Assembly Documents record that even in "willful dessertion and abandonment (by the husband) for the term of five years...accompanied by an entire neglect of all duties and obligations ..." women could not secure divorces.[67]

Warned that the status of a single woman equaled annihilation, females were propelled into a married state which deprived them of any sense of independent competence or respect. Depicted as "toys," "ornaments," and "embellishments," nineteenth century women could not escape the message of society: a woman's only worth, her sole importance, indeed her very existence, depended upon her connections to men. Only as daughter, sister, mother, and wife did a woman's life have any meaning or purpose. As an article in the Philadelphia Ledger and Daily Transcript made clear: "A woman is nobody. A wife is everything." The author of this journalistic proclamation urged the "ladies of Philadelphia to maintain their rights as wives, belles, virgins, and mothers, and not as women!"[68]

At once enervating her mind and paralyzing her powers, the myths about feminine character, satisfying America's craving for a common ethos, further eroded woman's ability to believe in herself as a individual person with particular skills, talents, and interests. The postulation of one code of acceptable behavior and attitude for the entire sex gave support

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66 See N.Y.S. Assembly Documents (April 28, 1845)#237, 1; N.Y.S. Assembly Journal 69th Sess., (1846), 135; N.Y.S. Assembly Documents (February 18, 1841), #143, 1 N.Y.S. Senate Documents (March 9, 1836), #68, 1; N.Y.S. Assembly Documents (May 26, 1836), #328, 1.

67 N.Y.S. Assembly Documents (February 13, 1850), #73, 1.

68 Public Ledger and Daily Transcript of Philadelphia, quoted in Calhoun II, 8.

to the theory that "the peculiar characteristics of females, being less distinctly marked, are much more difficult to be delineated than those of the other sex." Whereas theorists believed that "men may hope to obtain happiness and distinction" by "various pursuits,...for women (only) one path" existed.[69] Feminine "success in life depend(ed) entirely on her domestic education." The philosophers of woman's nature confidently predicted that even if "the education of women differ(ed) ever so much in detail, its end (would be) the same, to qualify them to become wives and mothers, (for) in every station the object of female ambition is to marry well. This similarity of purpose produces a similarity of thought, feeling, and action, and consequently character, which no uniformity of training could otherwise bestow, and then the business of married women...is essentially alike:

> To study household good
> And good works in her husband
> to promote." 70

Stipulating a single set of responsibilies and duties for all females regardless of position in life, authors asserted that women do not "exhibit that variety of talent, or those prominent and peculiar qualities of mind, that distinguish men of different professions and dissimilar occupation."[71] The "delicate sex" finds "earthly happiness only by subduing the heart of lordly man...endeavoring to heighten and set off her personal attractions by dress and accomplishments, that she may secure the constant devotion of some gallant knight," wrote a contributor to the Ladies' Magazine in 1828, while another article proclaimed that "a virtuous woman is the same being

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69 Ladies' Magazine (1828), 202.

70 Ladies' Magazine (1828), 203.

71 Ibid.

in all stations, and in all ranks of life, she is called precisely to the same duties...(W)omen have only to learn the common art of being good daughters, sisters, and wives."[72] The reformer, Robert Dale Owen, described the situation of a woman as a being "of one occupation, one passion, one interest," and Francis Grund observed that "an American gentlemen" views "a lady...as the representative of her sex; and it is to her sex, not to her peculiar amiable qualities, that she is indebted for his attentions."[73]

The decree that all females had identical obligations and responsibilities, shared the same interests, goals, and desires, and developed like traits and skills, fostered a conception of women as interchangeable entities, for it denied them the unique personality characteristics and special qualities, the independent areas of competence or taste, which distinguish one person from another. Woman's sense of her individual worth evanesced as the nation, absorbing a dehumanizing philosophy, created an image of the consummate female which insisted upon her inadequacy, frailty, piety, purity, domesticity, passivity and abnegation. Refusing to acknowledge distinction or difference, the ethos of the woman-beau ideal spoke in the singular: to the female, never to females, to the mother, not to mothers, and to the wife rather than to wives. The myths of womanhood strove to demonstrate the oneness of the entire sex whose duties and privileges never changed because they flowed from an inferior and particular feminine nature, which, lacking wholeness and individual autonomy, did not qualify women to share in the natural rights of humanity.

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[72] Ladies' Magazine (1828), 203; Ladies' Magazine (1831), 511.

[73] Robert Dale Owen, Situations (New York: Published at the Office of the Free Enquirer, 1830), 14, Grund, I, 89.

CHAPTER VI

THE BUTTERFLY IN AMBER

She did nothing. She would stay
in bed for hours, or dawdle over
her toilette, sitting idly. . .
and gradually a dumb misery crept
over her like an icy mist. . .
She was neither angel nor brute.
She was just a poor bored woman.

Romain Rolland, Jean-Christophe

Theorists painted nineteenth century women from a single-shaded palette, splashing over the vividly colored canvas of feminine history. The monochromatic portrait of the antebellum female obliterated woman's past with an inaccurate illustration of her present. For the image of a delicate female at home, happily and completely occupied with household and family, did not reflect the lives of a majority of women in Jacksonian America. The disparity between the depiction and reality profoundly disturbed those forced to conform to a picture which bore them no resemblance.

The myths of the woman-beau ideal exercised their constricting canons on all women. They stifled the varying needs, aspriations, and activities of the diversified feminine population and implicitly denyed the existence of the many thousands of urban and rural working women. In certain parts of the nation, women earned a livelihood as field laborers. Lydia Maria Child reported that the daughters of the "Dutch farmers...continue...raking hay, and the girls in Wettersfield, Connecticut may...be seen at early morning weeding the immense beds of onions, for which that town is celebrated." Caroline Dall, traveling through the country, observed that in "Ohio... women went from farm to farm hoeing, ploughing and the like..."[1] Numerous females also did agricultural work in connection with efforts to raise silk. Elizabeth Dexter, in her extensive studies of women workers, reported that

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[1] Dexter Careers, pp. 183-184; Caroline Dall, College, Market and Court or Woman's Relation to Education. (Boston, 1867), pp. 172 - 3

this "now-forgotten undertaking spread like wild-fire over the United States in the 1830's and '40's."[2] Most women, however, did not secure jobs as farmhands. As Miss Dall astutely observed when relating the successes of "two girls named Miller (who) carry on a farm of 300 acres, raising hay and grain, hiring labor but working mostly themselves,...labor attracts them, as it would many women if they were not oppressed by public opinion."[3]

Prejudice against working women grossly limited available positions in the country. Similarly, few opportunities awaited an impoverished urban woman who could not survive without wages. She might take in washing or sewing, do industrial tasks at home, become a household servant, or work in a factory. Arthur M. Schlesinger noted that "women and girls formed from 2/3 to 3/4 of the total number of factory workers in the first half of the nineteenth century..."[4] Victims of male resentment and of a social system which clung to the fiction that a female devoted all her energy to domestic pursuits, women factory operatives, toiling thirteen to fourteen hours a day, received between 54 and 90 cents for seven days of grueling labor. Filling Army orders for uniforms furnished another, but hardly more lucrative, source of feminine employment: "The wages paid by the government for making shirts ...were utterly inadequate to enable the industrious females...to pay rent and to procure a sufficient supply of clothing and other necessaries of life."[5] In the wretched tenements of the nation's cities, women folded and stitched

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[2] Dall, pp. 172-3

[3] Dexter, Careers, p. 184.

[4] Arthur M. Schlesinger, New Viewpoints in American History (New York: Macmillan Co., 1922), p. 134.

[5] Matthew Carey, Appeal to the Wealthy of the Land (Philadelphia, 1833), p. 3.

books, sewed carpet rags, and bound shoes, all for paltry sums. A survey taken in 1831 indicated that "the number of women in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore who were self supporting was from eighteen to twenty thousand."[6] The prevailing precepts of the woman-beau ideal, with its insistence on a fragile feminine nature both shunning and incapable of all arduous labor, refused to recognize the vast numbers of women forced to earn a livelihood and inhibited serious attempts to amerliorate their plight. "It is nothing that they can not get as high wages as men, when they can not do as much, or do it as well," wrote Bushnell. "It is nothing that they can not get the wages of rugged...employments in such (jobs) as are gentle and delicate."[7] Severing the close association between theory and reality that existed during the colonial period, nineteenth century myths of womanhood, distorting and denying the presence of poor females in farms and cities, also failed to reflect accurately the position of the middle - and upper - class urban women . The implications and ramifications or urbanization rendered the image of the ideal woman irrelevant to the lives of the one segment of the population they seemed to describe.

The ethos of feminine perfection, injurious and prejudicial to working women, proved equally deleterious to economically comfortable females as effects of startling urban growth combined with the tenets of the woman-beau ideal to produce an anomalous sector of society: the useless lady.

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[6] Matthew Carey, A Plea for the Poor No. II (Philadelphia, 1831), p.5. The acceptance of only one standard for all women induced poor females, at great personal sacrifice, to emulate the fashionable woman-beau ideal. Anne Royall reported: "I have know young ladies (those who have no dependence but their industry)...sit up till 12 o'clock at night to complete a suit of clothes, the proceeds of which was to purchase a fine cap, or a plume of feathers to deck herself for church . Hundreds of those females thus maintain themselves in a style of splendor..." Anne Royall, Sketches of Life, History and Manners in the United States (New Haven, 1826), 261.

[7] Bushnell, Women's Suffrage,p. 85.

The myths describing the essence of genuine womanhood glorified the home as they importuned woman to devote complete energy and total attention to the domestic sphere. Yet, while the dictates of this static creed prevented the middle - and upper - class woman from following a profession or even a serious intellectual pursuit, the intricate synthesis of life in the nation's cities virtually denied her a fulfilling or satisfying role in the family.

The phenomenal rate of urban expansion, surpassing the city's ability to provide adequate public services, also exceeded the capacity of builders to furnish sufficient housing facilities for the surging population. With homes scarce and rents high, residents took apartments in hotels and in boarding houses. The City Hotel, Mechanics Hall, and Washington Hall, the leading hostelries of the early nineteenth century, had keen competition in the Waverly, Mansion House, American, Carlton, Clarendon and Astor House, which, built during the 1830's, offered luxurious accomodations and ample choice to those unable or unwilling to find private dwellings. Boarding houses, also, became increasingly popular; Walt Whitman, in 1842, described the "Yankee nation" as "a boarding people."[8] A character in a novel set in antebellum New York thought that "signs denoting boarding houses are almost as thick here as lawyers' shingles are in Philadelphia," for "any city family, even the wealthiest might at some time try this style of living."[9]

These public establishments assumed responsibility for all domestic chores. As Harriet Matineau observed, boarding houses rendered women

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[8] Still, p. 90; Walt Whitman, Aurora quoted in Still, p. 91.

[9] Judson, Mysteries III, 98; Calhoun II, 239.

"totally idle...On their husbands' departure to the counting-house after breakfast...the ladies sit for hours, doing nothing..."[10] Francis Grund also noted that New York's upper - and middle - class women did not perform household tasks for "one-half live(d) in boarding houses, and the other half in houses kept by their servants."[11] The influx of immigrants into the nation's cities provided urban residents with a steady supply of nurses, laundresses, cooks, parlor maids, and butlers. By 1855 nearly one quarter of all foreign born persons living in New York City had positions as domestics.[12]

The persistent craving for status in the urban milieu made the number and qualities of one's servants a matter of considerable significance. John Pintard expressed amazement at the "demand for help in this wonderfully progressive city," and advertisements similar to one in the New York Tribune of June 30, 1851 soliciting jobs "for about 70 excellent servants..." appeared frequently.[13] Pintard's daughter apparently had secured "good domestic help" which her father praised as "a comfort that sweetens every trial." But other families did not share this good fortune, and the difficulties of finding household assistance led to the formation of a Society for Encouragement of Faithful Domestic Servants.[14] This Society, organized and supervised by men, demonstrates the importance attached to these laborers; a report of the association stated: "We are dependent upon our Domestic Servants for a large share of our daily family comforts,"[15] and, indeed,

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[10] Harriet Martineu, Society in America (Paris, 1842) II, 169.

[11] Grund, I, 136.

[12] Ernst, p. 66.

[13] Quoted in Miller Jacksonian, p. 178.

[14] Pintard II, 378.

[15] Society for Encouragement of Faithful Domestic Servants Annual Report (1826), 18.

the entourage of workers washing, polishing, cooking, and cleaning provided the middle - and upper - classes of New York City with domestic necessities and luxuries.

As they strove to differentiate themselves from the urban masses, as well as from one another, families of some means relinquished household responsibilities to servants, and child care to nurses and tutors. Lydia Maria Child, visiting New York City in 1845, complained: "It is not genteel for mothers to wash and dress their own children, or make their clothing, or teach them...," and a contributor to the Ladies' Repository noted the frequency with which mothers entrusted their children to hired help.[16] A short story, "Mrs. Chaloner's Visit," described the "nursery (as)...the constant abiding place of ... successive Irish nurses,"[17] while Maria McIntosh's novel, Two Lives, commented on the increasing reliance upon wet nurses among women of the wealthier classes. When one woman asks if Grace had become "more domestic" with "motherhood," the other replies: "Why should she, with excellent nurses and attendants of all sorts?" Originally, Grace had been "quite determined to nurse her own baby, but the fancy was so ridiculed by every one who heard of it that she soon gave it up. Indeed, it would have been quite impossible as she soon found to fulfill the two characters of a lady of fashion and a nursing mother."[18]

Thus prevented from domestic duties and inhibited in the wish to raise and to care for their children, middle - and upper - class urban women became "being(s) formed for no higher purpose than to be decorated... ." The

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[16] Child, Letters pp. 280-81; Ladies' Repository (1841) quoted in Calhoun II, 225.

[17] "Mrs. Chaloner's Visit," The Gift (1839), 297.

[18] Maria McIntosh, Two Lives (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1846), 293.

author, Mrs. A.J. Graves, asked: "Do we not see females in every fashionable circle who fill no loftier station in social life, and who live as idly and as uselessly as the gorgeously attired inmates of the harem...?" Barbara Bodichon, a British visitor and author, revealed that in no other country had she "been so much struck by the utter idleness of the lady class, except perhaps in the East among the Turks...There is in America," she wrote, "a large class of ladies who do absolutely nothing... ."[19] The "groups of ... females who crowd private parties..., who lounge upon the sofa receiving visits, or throng the city promenades to exhibit their decorated persons or to make morning calls," constantly evoked comment.[20]

"There are hundreds of girls in every large city, who parade in the street in feathers, flowers, silks and laces, whose hands are as white as uselessness can make them" noted one writer. Another, pointed out "female characters, who spend their time and talents in as useless a manner and with the same superficial appearance as the painted butterfly." These women seemed prevalent "particularly in cities..."[21] The article, "Young Ladies at Home," in the Golden Keepsake queried its readers: "Who does not see...scores and hundreds of young females, well educated...who are floating along on the current of fashionable life in our cities...without one useful end or aim?" "To embroider and work muslin...and direct servants" comprised the total activities of fashionable women, noted the Ladies' Companion of 1836, while Jesse Peck, without suggesting any change in feminine activities, ridiculed the stubborn decree of idleness: "The tech-

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19 Quoted in Calhoun, II, 277; Quoted in Calhoun II, 231-4.

20 Quoted in Calhoun, II, 237.

21 Jane G. Swisshelm, Letters to Country Girls (New York: J.C. Riker, 1853), p. 130; Branagan, p. 83.

nical lady is now allowed to work provided what she does is perfectly useless! She may embroider, but not make a dress! She may make flowers, but not darn a stocking! She may make music, but not coffee! She may be an exquisite judge of viands on the table, but must carefully avoid the slightest claim to know how they are prepared! She may dismiss her cook, but she must get another or starve!"[22]

Carefully hedged in by custom and public opinion, the typical "New York or Philadelphia ladies (would) rise at eight or nine, breakfast at ten - then...potter three or four hours, - then have a chat with three or four women of their set, - then walk on Broadway or Chestnut Street or go shopping, - then sit down to dinner, then potter again until 6 o'clock - then take tea, and finally dress for a party...." Rose Lee's aunt from Boston in the novel Meadowbrook typified this indolent existence. "She breakfasted in her own room at ten, dined at three, made or received calls until six, went to parties, soirees, or the theatre in the evening, and seldom got back until two o'clock in the morning..."[23] Few dared to estimate the number of women passing their lives so vacuously, but the Ladies' Magazine believed that "in the United States" at least "a hundred thousand young ladies (were) brought up to do nothing except dress, and pursue amusement," while "(a)nother hundred thousand learn music, dancing, and what are called the fashionable accomplishments." The article continued that these women had "(no) use in existence except to be contemplated as a pretty picture."[24]

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[22] "Young Ladies at Home," Golden Keepsake (1851), 184; Ladies' Companion (1836), 241; Peck, P. 47.

[23] Grund I, 146; Mary Holmes, Meadowbrook (New York: Charleton, 1881), p. 24.

[24] Ladies' Magazine (1830), 182-184.

Often making invidious comparisons between women of the antebellum era and those of the colonial period, authors complained: "(Our forefathers' wives) were helpmeets...(T)hey 'looked well to the ways of their household' and ate not the bread of idleness." John Pintard bemoaned the by-gone days when it "would have proved a stigma to a young lady, to have spent hours, as at present unoccupied...." He thought that before 1776 only a dozen or so New York City women would have wasted whole days "fingering a harpsichord."[25] With"lives...consumed in utter frivolity...a little light reading, a little needle-work, a little shopping, visiting, dressing and undressing," women had little choice but to conform to the dictates of status in the urban environment which declared "gentility...in exact proportion to...(feminine) uselessness." The formula for attaining an elevated social rank seemed to be that "those (women) only are entitled to the highest place in society, who have nothing to do."[26] The dreary, monotonous life imposed upon females of the urban middle - and upper - classes rendered them extraneous members of society. It deprived women of making any important contribution to the domestic sphere, the <u>one area</u> of activity granted as the feminine province by the precepts of the woman-beau ideal. Social insecurities, manifesting themselves in ostentatious display of luxurious living complete with servants, nurses, and tutors, prevented those women enjoying a comfortable financial position from managing their households and raising their children. Similarly, economic necessity, compelling perpetual and arduous labor, precluded poor females from devoting

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[25] Calhoun II, 227; Pintard, II, 320.

[26] <u>Ladies' Magazine</u> (1830) 314; "Would-be-Genteel," <u>The Jewel</u> (1837), 24.

attention to home and family.

The prevailing theories denoting the essential attributes of authentic and esteemed womanhood, deeply affected feminine existence, although they contrasted sharply with the interests, desires, and lives of most women living in the antebellum era. Yet these myths of feminine frailty, piety, purity, inferiority, and domesticity, woven into the fabric of American thought, cajoled, coaxed, and actually threatened women into acceptance of a proscribed position which ultimately frustrated feminine creative potential and thwarted efforts at self-realization. Both Alexis deTocqueville and Harriet Martineau, among the most astute observers of life in the United States during the first part of the nineteenth century, commented on the persuasive rigidity of rules governing woman's behavior. Tocqueville observed that an American woman, "upon her entrance into the world finds...notions firmly established;...she is not slow to perceive that she cannot part for an instant from the established usages of her contemporaries without putting in jeopardy her peace of mind, her honor, nay, even her social position. . . ." Martineau noted that the "whole apparatus of opinion is brought to bear offensively upon individuals among women who exercise freedom of mind in deciding upon what duty is, and the methods by which it is to be pursued." [27]

"With the female portion of (the) family there is but little room for fear; for they are so hedged round and guarded by the rules of society that to step over the boundary line is to win shame for life," wrote Dr. Charles

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[27] Tocqueville, II, 201; Martineau, II, 158-159.

Meigs of Philadelphia, as his contemporaries produced a body of literature bludgeoning women into submission by fulminations against unwomanly behavior. "Alas! that women should ever so mistake their natural means to influence and guide...with a sacrifice of womanly conduct and womanly grace," wrote James Fenimore Cooper in The Way of the Hours. "The person who would draw the sex from the quiet scenes that they so much embellish to mingle in the strifes of the world; who would place them in a station that nature has obviously intended men should occupy is not their real friend." "But what can be more disgusting than to see innocent and timid females whose excellence...consists in...silence before superiors encouraged to reverse the order of nature, by playing the orator on a public stage?"[28] asked the author of a children's schoolbook. George Templeton Strong criticized those who "would unsex woman and distroy the Idea of Womanhood on Earth by removing their 'disabilities' and elevating them into a race of disagreeable, effeminate men in petticoats." The diarist also thought that "(s)pecial force of character or intellect are dangerous things in a woman... ." He wrote of his belief that "they are apt to make her unhappy, and to be as scourages and scorpions unto that forlorn and woeful catiff, her husband." Another author added: "I never knew an instance of female supermacy in conjugal life that did not eventuate in misfortune. Woman must abide in her appointed sphere." [29]

If a woman "change(d) her graceful form for one uncouth and gross, by the rough labor of the shop or field," she would not only "unsex and

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[28] Cooper, Ways,p. 43; Caleb Bingham, The Columbian Orator (8th ed. Boston: Manning & Loring, 1807), p. 65.

[29] Strong I, 284; II 184; Cary, p. 23.

uncreate herself," but her actions had far reaching implications: women who dared to leave the domestic domain "wrong(ed) themselves, their families, their sex, and the entire community."[30] A contributor to Ladies' Magazine in 1832 considered "every attempt to induce women to think they have a right to participate in the public duties of government as injurious to their best interests and derogatory to their character," and the Ladies' Literary Cabinet believed that when woman "aspires to ambitious situations, she steps out of the sphere allotted her by nature and assumes a character which is an outrage upon her delicacy and feminine loveliness."[31] With a plentiful stock of pejorative terms in the semantic arsenal, the nineteenth century authors bombarded women with comminations against "unwomanly" and "unnatural" activities.

If woman "forsak(es) the domestic hearth..." she becomes "a sad wreck of female loveliness...(S)he can hardly conceive how ridiculous she appears in the eyes of all sober, discreet, judicious Christian men, or how great the reproach she brings upon her sex... !" No intelligent "man could ...engage his affections to so unnatural and repulsive an object as a woman that has lost the characteristic graces of her sex," wrote a contemporary, for no one "in his right mind would hazard his hand and happiness with one that has already entered upon a course so ominous... !" Exhortations that man viewed "(a)ny approach to his own peculiar characteristics in the opposite sex as odious and disgusting," and assertions that "(t)here cannot be

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[30] Peck, p. 345; Maternal Association, p. 23.

[31] Ladies' Magazine (1832), 86; Ladies' Literary Cabinet (1819), p. 46.

much respect for woman where she is forced out of her sphere and compelled to participate with man in...labors...," combined with other, more portentous warnings to intimidate women into acquiescence.[32]

"Let woman throw off her feminine character, and...her dignity, her own chief protection is lost," cautioned Rev. Stearns. "Beware then," he admonished his female listeners, "how you forfeit your peculiar advantages, beware how you do anything to diminish that delicate and chivalrous respect...,"[33] as he predicted that women would be the primary victims in a chaotic society which placed both sexes on an equal level. "Women never aim so suicidal a blow against their own interest as when they try to do away with or revolt against...(the) doctrinne of their inferiority," declared the Ladies' Garland in 1839. "They throw away their props, reject ...guidance and guardianship and absolve the lords of creation from that protection which they are so willing to afford."[34] Once women waived their claim to masculine guardianship, they could expect the worst, as men frequently and explicitly reminded them: "And be assured ladies," warned one clergyman, "if the hedges and border of the social garden should be broken up, the lovely vine which now twines itself so gracefully upon the trellis, and bears such rich clusters will be the first to fall and be trodden under foot."[35]

Prophecies of certain disaster awaiting recalcitrant females combined with the coercive weight of contemporary opinion to force women into com-

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32 Winslow, pp. 12-13; Burnap, pp. 47, 76.

33 Stearns, pp. 17-23.

34 Ladies' Garland (1839), p. 199

35 Stearns, p. 24.

pliance with the confining, custodial tenets of the nineteenth century conception of womanhood. Yet, this vision of feminine perfection, a patchwork of ideas and theories unevenly sewn together from the unraveling social cloth of the antebellum era, enshrouded but never suited American women. It contained blatant contradictions and inconsistencies which would come to torment those made to wear the constraining and ill-fitting vestments of the woman-beau ideal.

The dictatorial decrees, both describing and defining feminine behavior and nature, authoritatively asserted woman's intellectual inferiority to man, while the same stipulations charged these mentally defective beings with determining "the happiness...of mankind." Women could never hope to understand the intricacies of public affairs, but they could do more "to bind society together than all the laws that legislations ever formed." Assaulted with evidence of their incompetencies while simultaneously burdened with the awesome trust of creating "a bond of union between families" and hence forming the cement of society, women became plagued with self-doubt and a deep sense of inadequacy.[36]

Antebellum females also found themselves pulled in antithetical directions by a creed which insisted upon extreme delicacy yet gave them the responsibility for presiding at sick-beds, dressing wounds, and witnessing the depths of human physical suffering. Dr. J.W. Corson in an article, "Woman in the Chamber of Sickness," which appeared repeatedly in the leading ladies' magazines of the period, wrote: "I love to see her at the couch of sickness, sustaining the fainting head, offering to the parched lips its

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[36] Gift of Friendship (1847), 200; Miller, Society, pp. 20-21; Maternal Association, p. 22.

cordial, to the craving palate its simplest nourishment...and complying with every wish of the invalid... ." Not only was the frail, modest, blushing female who dared not utter the word "leg" supposed to fulfill these physically and emotionally grueling duties without swooning or becoming ill herself, but she had to welcome these difficult tasks. "She is not only the most able to comfort the distressed, but she is happily the most willing. ...Her kindness appears to be the natural prompting of an amiable instinct, without which she would not be woman."[37]

As woman's indefatigable ministrations to ill relatives and friends belied her "fragil constitution," so too did the garments she wore. While women, told that they could never engage in strenuous labor, read "that females are weak without the support of dress," the current styles induced them to wear corsets and fabrics with yards of flouncing which constricted breathing, confined activity, bruised and contorted their bodies, and often weighed as much as fifteen pounds.[38] Feminine fashion, requiring a considerable amount of physical strength to bear and sustain, comprised another area where women had to conform to the incompatible directives of the nineteenth century. The desire for elegant woman's clothing, symbolizing both conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure, constituted an important response to social mobility and status anxiety, particularly in the antebellum cities as men, gaining security and prestige from the indolent luxury they could afford to subsidize, wanted their women to dress in magnificent and costly garments. Wives and daughters complied as they adapted to their husbands' and fathers' wishes. Some women, of course, thoroughly enjoyed

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[37] J.W. Corson, M.D., "Woman in the Chamber of Sickness," Ladies' Repository (1842), 187.

[38] Ladies' Magazine (1830), 31.

their splendid attire, but for others absorption with fashion clearly represented a substitute for all the interests they could not pursue and came to be merely a way of occupying time.

The impetus for fine female apparel arose from many sources; yet, women who, barred from other activity, might find in a day of shopping a chance to talk with another woman away from the servants and children, constantly received ridicule and criticism for their vain concern with dress. A child's schoolbook mocked:

> Fickle fashion! Why this fuss?
> Acting and behaving thus.
> Must the wife thy whims partake,
> And be fools - for fashion's sake?[39]

"Vanity produces contempt and destruction," warned the author of the Female Monitor who likened woman to "the painted butterfly" and "the gaudy tulip." But even if "vanity is one of woman's worst faults," she could hardly help herself because the "propensity to ornament in women is an instinct, it is universal and unvarying."[40] At once urged into displaying fashionable garb, admonished to "carefully avoid ostentation," and told that vanity constituted an innate feminine quality, women experienced perpetual tension as they strove to accommodate to these and numerous other conflicting demands.[41]

In a society which dictated that woman "must make it the business of her life...her pleasure and constant employment to rear up her children," and which insisted that "(e)very married woman in good health should keep her own house...," women found that the differing economic and social realities of their respective classes barred them from dedicating their time and energy to the home and to their children. In an era which glorified

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[39] Abner Alden, The Speaker (Boston: Thomas & Andrews, 1810), II, 230.

[40] Female Monitor, pp. 21, 16; Sandford, p. 91; Burnap, p. 91.

[41] Alden Reader, P. 101.

motherhood and which blandished females with praise of their special attributes for raising children, the courts constantly denied the mother custody of her children in divorce cases.[42] In the kaleidoscopic urban environment, women were deliberately and methodically prevented from important, interesting, and emotionally fulfilling enterprise; yet, in this same social context little girls learned the axiom: 'It is a great sin to be idle." In a culture which glorified marriage and which taught that "(there) are two eventful periods in the life of a woman - one when she wonders who she'll have - the other when she wonders who'll have her," women heard themselves scornfully described as "man catchers " and received reprimands for developing accomplishments which "were merely lures for husbands."[43] In a milieu which obstinately denied that decent women had any sexual drives, professional literature on masturbation, existing in abundance, asserted that the "practice of masturbation is...more common and extensive...with youth of both sexes, than is usually supposed," and catalogued the numerous female "diseases," "both local and general,...induced by masturbation...which have been attributed to other causes."[44]

The irreconcilable mandates encompassed within the ethos of accepted feminine behavior also extended to the area of education. Consistent with

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[42] Ladies' Literary Companion (1836), 81; Sarah J. Hale Keeping House and Housekeeping (New York, 1845), p. 39; For an account of one woman's unsuccessful battle for custody, see: Nancy Shippen: Her Journal Book (London, 1935).

[43] Samuel Putnam, Introduction to the Analytic Reader (2nd ed. Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1830), I, 44; Ladies' Companion (1836), pp. 91, 32, 60.

[44] Samuel Bayard Woodward, Hints for the Young, In Relation to the Health of Body and Mind (Boston, 1856) pp. 7-23. See also: George R. Calhoun Report of the Consulting Surgeon on Spermatorrhoea, or Seminal Weakness, Impotence, the Vice of Onanism, Masturbation or Self-Abuse, and Other Diseases of the Sexual Organs (Philadelphia, 1853); Samuel Gregory, Facts and Important Information for Young Women on the Subject of Masturbation (Boston, 1857); A Treatise on the Diseases Produced by Onanism; Trans. from French with notes and an appendix by an American Physician (New York, 1832).

the nineteenth century refusal to recognize women as autonomous beings, they received an education for the benefit of others, rather than for their own needs. Advocates of a "thorough and systematic education of females" hoped "to make them happy...as the dispensators of happinesses to those around them." Because pedagogues agreed that "women should (mainly) be educated to educate children," they concurred that certain limitations should definitely be imposed on feminine instruction.[45]

"Wish not to know what is improper for thee," cautioned one author, adding that women should learn "what it is fit thou shouldst know... . For those who venture too boldly forth lose themselves in the depth of their own reasonings." Another writer asserted that "a woman's knowledge of chemistry should extend no farther than to the melting of butter; (and) geography to a thorough acquaintance with every hold and corner in the house... ;" while one of James Fenimore Cooper's characters declared: "When it came to the affairs of men, out-of-door concerns, or politics, or law, or anything, indeed that called for a masculine education and understanding, I could not endure a woman who fancied she knew the most." "The education of women should, of course, be strictly feminine," decreed theorists who thought the "chief end to be proposed in cultivating the understanding of women is to qualify them for the practical purposes of life," to "fit her for the family and home... ."[46]

Women who found the smattering of instruction granted them insuffi-

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[45] Ladies' Magazine (1829), 282; G.V.H. Forbes, esq. "Female Education," Ladies' Garland (1837), 75.

[46] The Female Monitor, pp. 10-12; Ladies' Literary Cabinet (1822), 70; Cooper Ways, p. 206; Sandford, p. 139; Butler, p. 156; Maternal Association, p. 22.

PLATE V

THE NOVEL READER

cient to their interests and curiosity and who yearned for more knowledge, quickly evoked society's rebuke. Once "they have been taught a great many things," preached a book on female behavior, "young women sometimes entertain an overwhelming idea of their own talents" and tend to forget the rule that woman "is not the first in the conversation...neither doth she drown the voice of her companions by the strength of her own." Charles Butler warned that "serious subjects should not make up the bulk of conversation; this, as it is impossible, would also...be improper;"[47] women who did not heed this advice became objects of jest. The popular song, "The Clever Woman," advised all to "fly...from a woman dubb'd clever" for:

> She's coarse among females, with men she is funny
> She frightens the timid and tickles the strong;
> Intriguing in public, but cautious in private,
> The ice of her nature then only is known
> Save, save, then O save me from women thus clever
> Who outrage their nature to gain but a name [48]

"The Novel Reader," an engraving appearing in a literary annual, illustrated the alleged incompatibility of a woman's intellectual interests and her domestic responsibilities. The housewife, absorbed in her book, is impervious to the disorder enveloping the home, as husband and children try in vain to get her attention. The room is strewn with litter; a cat is drinking from the family pitcher; a dog is about to devour a large piece of meat obviously intended for dinner; and a baby cries unnoticed in a basket.[49] This scene of disarray left no doubt about the domestic damage which females invited when, violating one of the cardinal principles of the woman-beau

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[47] Sandford, p. 139; Female Monitor pp. 40-41; Butler p. 171.

[48] "The Clever Woman," Sigmund Spaeth, Weep Some More, My Lady (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1927), p. 52.

[49] T.S. Matteson, "The Novel Reader," The Winter Wreath (1853).

ideal, they placed their own interests before the needs of the family and attempted intellectual fulfillment.

A cross-bedded tablet confronted American women who tried to decipher the nineteenth century code of proper feminine instruction. Told that "the leisure of women (could) be employed in storing and strengthening their minds," the true woman knew she should "not (be) anxious for knowledge improper for her state, but...content with the duties of her condition."[50] A female then might receive instruction, should "read the best books," but always had to be careful that she learn only enough to make her happy with her situation. Even if her studying revealed that "she possess(ed) talent," the woman-beau ideal always "remember(ed) that to make a happy home for her husband and child is far more praiseworthy than to make a book." Constantly advised to temper intellectual interests and reproached for attempting to further her education, women received perpetual criticism for "petty" conversation and a "low standard of intellectual excellence."[51]

While berating the entire sex for their inability to participate in engrossing discussions, writers undermined the need for woman's intellectual endeavor by stressing that her knowledge "is not...to be reproduced in some literary composition, nor ever in any learned professions," for underlying the disjointed philosophy of nineteenth century feminine education lay the need to keep women at home.[52] "Female education is of immense importance as connected with domestic life," asserted a contributor to Ladies' Garland

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50 Sandford, p.26; Female Monitor, pp. 40-41.

51 Ladies' Companion (1836), p. 70; Butler, pp. 167, 156-158.

52 Butler, p. 156.

who continued: "It is at home where man generally passes the largest portion of his time; where he seeks a refuge from the vexations and embarrassments of business, an enchanting repose from exertion."[53]

Forced to walk the precarious tightrope of the woman-beau ideal, antebellum females, always in danger of leaning too far one way or another and hence falling from the only path to recognized womanhood, constantly strove to maintain their balance among the era's confusing and contradictory decrees which pulled them in diverse directions. Yet, women might have found some compensation for the emotional labyrinth in which they were encaged if they had the satisfaction of knowing that their presence at home truly enriched their husband's lives. But the imperatives of livelihood and status combined with the variety of urban recreational facilities to keep men away from home for long periods of time, underscoring the hollowness of woman's existence.

For city men, "making money is the principal pursuit to which they are devoted; and which so completely absorbs their time, that between business and politics, they hardly find time for the cultivation of affection," reported one of Francis Grund's New York associates. The German emigré estimated that "(men in) America (were) daily engaged from ten - twelve hours in...business."[54] An English visitor describing the New York merchants' typical day observed their perpetual involvement in activities away from home. "They breakfasted at eight or half past, and by nine were in there counting-houses, laying out the business of the day, at ten they were

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53 Ladies' Garland (1837), 19.

54 Grund, II, 55, I, 88.

on their warves with aprons round their waists, rolling hogshead of rum... at twelve at market...at two back again to the rolling (and) heaving...at four they went home to dress for dinner; at seven, to the play; at eleven, to supper with a crew of lusty Bachanals who would smoke cigars, gulp down brandy, and sing...like so many merry devils, til three in the morning...".[55]

"(Man) is absorbed, especially in our great cities, in the taskwork of the workshop, the warehouse or the office from early morn to dewy eve ...," wrote one author, while another believed the male sex "too much occupied in the pursuit of wealth or fame to lend a willing ear or consoling voice... ."[56] This masculine preoccupation with work gave rise to a slim, questioning body of literature which, emphasizing the need for relaxation, cautiously advised men to create and cultivate their leisure at home, but places for entertainment blossomed within the growing cities and men sought their amusement outside the domestic realm.[57] "Shows, convivialities, (and) plays,...do their part in turning men lose from home...," noted a contemporary magazine, and Mrs. A. J. Graves observed that many wives "burn the midnight oil" waiting for their husbands to return from "societies or clubs."[58] With so little time to spend with his spouse, a man might "marry a woman with tastes, disposition, and character essentially different from his," claimed one writer, but the "points of contact are so few that he might become the father of a large family without discovering his

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55 John Bernard, Retrospections of America,1797-1811, ed. Mrs. Bayle Bernard (New York, 1887), pp. 51-52.

56 Maternal Association, p. 30; Ladies' Magazine (1828), 197.

57 S. Teackel Wallis, Leisure: Its Moral and Political Economy (Baltimore, 1839), pp. 1-50.

58 Arthurs' Home Magazine vii, 123; quoted in Calhoun II, 222.

mistake. He has no time to be unhappy."[59]

Man's varied and engrossing activities may have given him no time for reflection, but with women of the middle - and upper - classes, the reverse proved true. "Women are left all day to themselves: the life is monotonous," wrote an author, while one of Francis Grund's city-dwelling companions commented: "(O)ur women...with the exception of the time consumed at meals, (are) the whole day left to themselves... ." Another of Grund's acquaintances remarked that woman "seldom is...the intimate friend of her husband, the repository of his secrets, his true and faithful counselor."[60] With no choice but to remain at home in accordance with the tenets of a philosophy which glorified feminine importance in the domestic realm, women found themselves acutely isolated as it became increasingly apparent that men, needing the idea of home and the concept of a peaceful, stable abode to ease their accommodation to perplexing social transition, did not choose to spend much time within the walls their theories had constructed. And women's prosaic existences filled the gap between the myths which told them that the well-being of family and, indeed, society depended upon their role in the house and the realities which nagged them into a slow awareness of the uselessness of their lives.

Thus sequestered within the domestic sphere, woman experienced intense loneliness; cut off from participation in the functioning of their communities and deprived of an effective or rewarding role in their homes, women also learned that they did not have the ability to form friendships with

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59 Quoted in Calhoun,II, 133.

60 Quoted in Calhoun, II, 133, Grund, II, 105.

members of their own sex. "The Friendship of Woman," appearing in the Ladies' Magazine of 1829, asserted that the "jealousy of love, the rivalry of beauty, the pride of accomplishments, or fancies of fashion...take possession of the heart" making it difficult for women to become intimates, and a popular novel contained the following indictment of the sex: "A dog will lick away the sores and wounds of another of its own kind; man, tried himself in the crucibles of...suffering and temptation, has still some sympathy for a fallen brother; but woman...yielding to a mean spirit...can find in her heart...no feeling for the fallen and erring of her own... ." "It is seldom indeed that a brother is rival to a brother...," wrote Charles Butler. "They may be of mutual assistance but they cannot clash...Whereas sisters, both while they continue in the paternal mansion, and afterwards when settled in marriage, are frequently drawn into competitions by the showy trifles and follies on which the female mind is apt to dote."[61]

The nineteenth century theories of womanhood, insidiously urging females to view each other with suspicion, attempted to keep women apart from other members of their sex, as the repeated assertions by authoritarian figures that women did not know "what Friendship was, (because) they were hardly capable of anything so cool and rational as friendship"[62] tried to prevent women's efforts to communicate fully with one another. Statements alleging that females naturally saw one another as competitors, perhaps a projection of masculine feelings of rivalry, contrasted with the sermons, pamphlets, and public addresses of the colonial period which helped women to take pride

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61 "The Friendship of Woman," Ladies' Magazine (1829), p. 569 (Edward Zane Carrole Judson), The G'hals of New York; a novel by Ned Buntline (pseud.) (N.Y., n.d.), p. 147; Butler, p. 263.

62 "The Journal of Esther Burr," The New England Quarterly III (1930), 301.

in the achievements of members of their sex and provided important models of feminine creativity and talent for emulation. The antebellum era, however, induced women to consider themselves as antagonists and denigrated those who excelled in areas beyond the stipulated sphere: "With all her reknown, we think of Elizabeth only as the sovereign of England;...she has left no lesson of delicacy, of enduring goodness to her sex, for if woman ever wins our love and insures our respect, it is not in the scenes of courtly power,...but in the sanctuary of home.[63] The critical statements surrounding accomplishments of well-known women and the derogatory remarks about feminine friendship inevitably had a negative impact on the way in which the individual female viewed herself, and the intrusive principles, insulating woman from intimate companionship with other females, also alienated woman from herself.

Not only then did the prevailing concepts of the woman-beau ideal regulate feminine activities, duties, moral behavior and attitudes, but they also governed woman's psychological life. Restraints imposed on the spontaneous expression of sentiment joined with definitive specifications of one acceptable temperament and disposition for the entire sex to make women stifle their deepest emotions and question the validity of their feelings. Cast into the mold of the perfect female, women constantly heard that they "are ever inclined to be gay and cheerful," for "women are naturally buoyant and light-hearted... ."[64] "Perhaps one of the most indispensable and endearing qualifications of the feminine character is an amiable temper,"

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63 Ladies' Magazine (1831), 158.

64 Ladies' Literary Cabinet (1819), 85; Woman's Worth, p. 148.

wrote a contributor to the Ladies'Despository of 1842, while another magazine advised women "to be prepared for...scrutiny by always keeping the temper in perfect equanimity and order... ." The Speaker taught school children that "Married Ladies" should "Be gay and good humored, complying and kind," and "The advice of a Father to his Only Daughter" included the admonition: "Never evince discontent."[65]

"A serene temper is perhaps the first requisite to domestic happiness," wrote George Burnap; The Christian Wreath went even further in its declaration that "woman deserves not a husband's generous love, who will not greet him with smiles as he returns from his labors of the day." In an article appearing in The Sun on August 7, 1845, T.S. Arthur declared that "most women don't appreciate all the trials their husbands go through - wives' troubles are but 'trifles' compared to what a husband endures." Viewing woman's role as compensatory, a writer for the Ladies' Garland of 1837 urged her to be "pleasant" and "cheerful" because a "husband's mind is tossed with storms and tempests...," and another article in the Garland asserted that "a woman may be of great assistance to her husband in business by wearing a cheerful smile continually upon her countenance."[66] The suffocating principles of exemplary womanhood demanded the constant inhibition of emotions. "Be not angry with your boy," scolded a popular song, while a contemporary author wrote: "How sadly is she deficient in natural feeling who thinks her infant troublesome." [67]

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[65] Ladies' Despository,(1842);Ladies' Magazine (1829),51, Alden Speaker III 229; Patrick Henry, "Advice of a Father to his Only Daughter, "Ladies Garland (1839).

[66] George Burnap Ladies' Wreath (1847), 187; "The Wife at Home," Christian Wreath (1847), 100; T.S. Arthur "The Perfect Wife," The Sun (August 7, 1845), 1; Ladies' Garland (1839) 64, 108.

[67] "Be Not Angry," Musical Carcanet, p. 89; Ladies' Companion (1836), p. 209.

Causing women to doubt the authenticity of their impulses while severing them from their most profound feelings, the constraining theories at once postulated a single psyche for all females and affirmed the ethos of the woman-beau ideal as the only road to feminine fulfillment. "You ought...to love home," decreed the writer Josiah Holland, and an article in the Ladies' Literary Cabinet declared that "in the household only can she be happy."[68] (Emphasis added.) Tocqueville believed that women enjoyed being servile: "They attach a sort of pride to the voluntary surrender of their own will," he wrote, and Ralph, in an essay entitled "Domestic Happiness" agreed with the French reformer: "I have often had occasion to observe how easy the yoke of obedience sets...and how perfectly unconscious of its weight females seemed."[69] Disallowing the possibility that any true woman could be discontent in her allotted sphere, authors propagated the view that "America is beyond dispute the Paradise of woman." Indeed they asserted: "Every American woman has reason to thank God every day of her life, that she was born into this happy country ...She is placed...in our own happy America, upon an equality with man..."[70]

Disingenuous proclamations glorifying woman's position assailed antebellum females and combined with the adamant directives on cheerful behavior and blissful demeanor to create a formidable barrier to the unfettered expression of feeling. The unending cavalcade of relentless and irreconcilable demands, forcing women to smother their deepest and most natural emotions,

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68 Holland, p. 265; Ladies' Literary Cabinet (1819), 46.

69 Tocqueville II, 212; Ralph "Domestic Happiness," Ladies'Literary Cabinet (1820), 108.

70 Burnap, pp. 79, 187; The World Enlightened, p. 11.

refused to recognize diversity or individuality as it held up the ever-present yard stick of the woman-beau ideal to measure the degree to which one adequately performed "the duties and responsibilities of woman...which (she) must do."[71] Using threats, flattery, and gross distortions, the myths of womanhood, witholding from females the freedom to respond honestly and creatively to their lives while attempting to dupe them into believing that they did not have the capacity to form friendships, virtually prevented those experiencing profound unhappiness from openly confessing their misery, and compelled women to internalize their suffering.

Not all females, of course, endured deprivation. Many, who lived surrounded by every possible comfort, appeared to accept and indeed to enjoy their situation. Some women liked being idle; others abhorred it. But the rigid stereotype of ideal feminine behavior disavowed the possibility that women, like men, had differing requirements, skills, aspirations and psychological needs. ALL women, including those with leisure, wealth, talent, and ambition were fenced together within narrow limits which controlled their existences and denied their interests and abilities a meaningful outlet. Vigorous women chafed against the confining boundaries of inferiority, piety, purity, docility, and domesticity with their confusing decrees and conflicting dictates. The ethos of the quintessential female, a cornucopia of bitter fruits, stung the palates of those women with the time and energy to digest and absorb its acrid messages. Few dared publicly to protest the unappe-

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71 "She Hath Done What She Could," or, the Duty and Responsibility of Woman A Sermon, preached in the Chapel of St. Mary's School By the Rector, and printed forthe pupils (Raleigh, 1847), p. 1.

tizing fare, but the flagrant contradictions in the nineteenth century views of woman's nature ultimately bred despair, anxiety, and anger. The conflicts in the vision of feminine excellence produced gnawing tension which craved catharsis as middle - and upper - class women, forced to feed on the unsavoring myths of the woman-beau ideal, hungered for a more satisfying form of sustenance.

CHAPTER VII

FOR RELIEF OF THE BODY, RECONSTRUCTION OF THE MIND

I am bombarded yet I stand
I have been standing all my
life in the
direct path of a battery of
signals. . .
... I am an instrument in the
shape
Of a woman trying to translate
pulsations
into images for the relief
of the body
And the reconstruction of the
mind

Planetarium

Adrienne Rich 1968

> The greatest trial. . .is that I have nothing to do. Here I am with abundant leisure, and capable, I believe of accomplishing some good, and yet with no object on which to expend my energies. . . .I cannot be happy without being employed. Alone as I am, my mind seems to prey upon itself until I am weary of life.[1]

With these words, one female of wealth and education related with the sense of stagnation, frustration, and personal misery which scarred the lives of nineteenth century American women. For the decrees of genuine womanhood, tyranically governing feminine existence, thwarted efforts at self-realization. Women could neither control their own destines nor help to free one another from society's binds as long as the myths of the woman-beau ideal remained embedded in the nation's consciousness. Yet, the irreconcilable mandates encompassed within the prevailing dictates generated severe tension. These sought an outlet which impelled women to attempt to alleviate their anxieties and to ameliorate their condition. This search for personal fulfillment assumed different forms and often afforded temporary abatement. The quest, however, did nothing to improve the general plight of women until the roots of feminine anguish at last found strength in the rich soil of urbanization. Nourished by their experiences in the cities females at last broke through the incasements of the nineteenth century decrees of womanhood. Ultimately, they planted the seeds of feminism across the nation.

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[1] The Advocate and Guardian (1858), 28.

Before the dynamics of urban growth would create the environment for women to gain understanding, solace, and support from their shared experiences, nineteenth century females suffered alone. Their numerous ailments became the observable symptoms of inner malaise. Visitors and residents alike expressed astonishment at the extent of ill health among American women. The British actress, Fanny Kemble, remarked that women in the United States "look old and faded" by the time they reach twenty-five years of age. In 1835 the famous performer wrote to a friend that "many women here when they become mothers seem to lose looks, health, and strength and are mere wrecks," while the "pallid and unhealthy complexions of the American ladies" struck her compatriot, Richard Cobden, with amazement.[2] An American journal reported that "foreigners who visit this country (comment) that American ladies have, almost without exception, a delicacy of complexion and appearance, amounting almost to sickness. . . ." Native sons concurred with these European observations.[3]

Both James Fenimore Cooper and Nathaniel Hawthorne expressed dismay at the precarious health of American females. Other, less eminent, writers voiced similar views.

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[2] Quoted in Hone (1835), 145; Quoted in Dexter, Careers, p. 48; The American Diaries of Richard Cobden, ed. Elizabeth H. Cavely (Princeton, 1952), p. 29.

[3] The Water-Cure Journal (1847), 151; James Fenimore Cooper, Gleanings in Europe, ed. Robert E. Spiller (New York, 1930), II, 92-97; Nathaniel Hawthorne,,"Our Old Home" Complete Works, VII, 66-68, 390-391.

Joel Hawes described the "puny forms. . .feeble frames and sickly faces," as well as the "dismal train of ills" which characterized women of the "higher classes." Reverend Anson Smyth thought the "(h)ealth of American women poor compared to what it used to be," and his colleague, Rev. Dr. Hawes of Hartford, bemoaned the fact "that the muscular vigor and strength of our. . .women have, for a long time past been undergoing a melancholy change. . . .But a small proportion of our adult females enjoy complete health."[4] George Burnap also noticed a deterioration in the stamina of American women: "When I see the fragile and diminutive forms of the women of our times, and compare them with the women whom I recollect as the partners of the men of the revolution, it seems to me that if the men of the age had had such mothers, we never should have had any revolution at all." Not only did women lack the robustness of their grandmothers, but they could not compare with their foreign contemporaries. "At that period of life when the European woman is in the meridian of matronly beauty, full of energy, life, and cheerfulness, the American woman has shrunk into the withered proportions of advanced age."[5]

Nineteenth century authors agreed that infirmity characterized "women in our larger towns (rather) than those

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[4] Hawes, p. 8; Rev. Anson Smyth in Dinah Maria Craik, A Woman's Thoughts About Woman (Ohio: Follett, Foster & Co.), 1858, introduction; Quoted in Amy Reed, "Female Delicacy in the Sixties," Century (1915), 855-864.

[5] George Burnap, "Health of American Women," Ladies' Wreath (1849-1850), 185-186.

of rural districts." Mrs. S.W. Benedict noted that the "fashionable often complain of bodily ill," and thought it "difficult to find a woman devoted to ease and fashion, who is not habitually. . .an invalid." George Burnap also commented on the prevalence of poor health among those leading "an idle, useless life."[6] Some attempted casual assessments of the numbers of socially and economically comfortable women suffering from various maladies: "In the whole circle of my acquaintance, I scarcely know a woman who is in the enjoyment of uniform good health, and the number of those who are ordinarily well is small indeed," claimed one middle-class woman. But Catharine Beecher, author and reformer, appears to have been the first to make a systematic survey of the extent of feminine illness in America.[7]

Miss Beecher's "extensive travels" revealed "the deplorable suffering of multitudes of young wives and mothers. . . ." "The number of young women whose health is crushed, ere the first few years of married life are past, seem(ed) incredible," she asserted. When these informal observations convinced her that "there was a terrible decay of female health all over the land," she devoted herself to a thorough exploration of the numerous and diverse ailments which plagued her country-women. Devising a questionnaire designed to elicit relative state of health, Miss Beecher asked her acquaintances in

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[6] S.W. Benedict, Woman, She Was, Is and Should Be (New York, 1849), p. 63; Burnap, p. 186.

[7] Advocate and Guardian (1855), 189.

cities throughout the nation to report on the physical condition of the ten women they knew best. The startling replies confirmed Beecher's earlier desultory investigation and attested to the ubiquity of invalidism among nineteenth century American women.[8]

The poll taken in Milwaukee recorded such complaints as "headaches," "chills," "consumption," "pelvic displacements," "coughs" and "feebleness." The correspondent sadly admitted that she did not know "one healthy woman in the place." New York had a slightly better score with three "healthy," but Wilmington and New Bedford pushed the average down again by relating the existence of only "one perfectly healthy woman in (each) place." Oberlin continued the dismal report: of the ten wives best known to the respondent none enjoyed good health. Catharine Beecher disclosed that of all the married women she had ever met in Boston she knew of just one who could be called "perfectly healthy." In over two hundred towns and cities sampled, only two had a majority of healthy women from the ten questioned. In the remaining cities, the "habitual invalids" and "delicate or diseased" outnumbered the "strong and healthy" from four to one to as much as ten to one. Indeed Catharine Beecher claimed that she could not recall in her "immense circle of friends and acquaintances all over the Union, so many as ten married ladies born in this century and

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[8] Catharine Beecher, Duty of American Women to their Country (New York: Harper & Bros., 1845), p. 158.

country, who are perfectly sound, healthy, and vigorous."[9]

Establishing the extent of feminine illness, however, proved much easier than agreeing upon its cause: contemporaries offered discrepant hypotheses, and their proposed remedies differed as widely as the numerous explanations for female malady filling antebellum literature. Some doctors and health experts, spurned investigation completely. They asserted that women merely feigned poor health as a means of avoiding responsibility. Edward Dixon, in his popular book, Woman and Her Diseases, cautioned physicians and husbands that women often "pretend hysteric attacks in order to excite sympathy and obtain some desired end." But other writers made serious studies into the etiology of women's afflictions. George Burnap attributed female infirmities to the extravagant "mode of living" of "the more affluent classes" with their "tables (filled) with the delicacies of all lands" and their "warm apartments" and "thin dressing." Catharine Beecher blamed both the constricting garments of fashionable attire and the lack of exercise for much of the sickness she observed. "Light, Air, Sleep, Food, and Clothes," seemed to her the essential keys to good health. She urged women to give more attention to these salubrious ingredients, in spite of

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[9] Catharine Beecher, Letters to the People on Health and Happiness, (New York, 1855), 121-133.

the medical profession's contention that the female diseases lay beyond woman's control.[10]

Nineteenth century doctors directed their attention to the womb, holding the reproductive system responsible for most female ills. Her uterus exercises a "paramount power" over her physical and moral system, and its grasp is "no less whimsical than potent," believed William P. Dewes, professor of midwifery at the University of Pennsylvania. Because doctors agreed that woman "is constantly liable to irregularities in her menstrua, and menaced severly by their consequences," they focused medical treatment on uterine and menstrual disorders, and female sexual organs bore the onus for headaches, nervous disorders, indigestion, insomnia, depression, and backaches. For "[t]hese diseases," as one physician explained, "will be found on due investigation, to be in reality, no disease at all, but merely the sympathetic reaction or the symptoms of one disease, namely a disease of the womb."[11] The pages of the Water-Cure Journal, a contemporary periodical heralding the benefits of hydropathy, document the nineteenth century obsession with a multitude of "uterine-related diseases."

Articles on such topics as "chlorsis or green sickness. . . the non-appearance of the menstrual discharge. . .(which)

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[10] Edward Dixon, Woman and Her Diseases from Cradle to Grave, (New York, 1857), pp. 134-140; Burnap, "Health," pp. 185-186; Beecher, Letters, pp. 165-175.

[11] William P. Dewes, A Treatise on the Diseases of Females (Philadelphia, 1843), pp. 17, 14; M.E. Dirix, Woman's Complete Guide to Health (New York, 1869), p. 24.

inevitably results in the serious derangement of the general health," "menstrual cramps" to which the "luxurious and idle are more subject," and "leuccorrhoea and uterine catarrh," dominated the Journal. Offering such novel therapy as "hip baths," "cold injections into the urethra," and "rubbing of the back, loins, and abdomen," the water-cure remedies contrasted sharply with the practices of orthodox medicine which often used "leeching" and "cauterization" to alleviate feminine discomfort.[12]

Much female physical anguish did indeed relate to the reproductive system, particularly as the prevailing codes of delicacy prevented physically sick or diseased women from seeking help. Dr. Charles Meigs "rejoiced" at the difficulty of making a "local examination" as it gave "evidence of a high and worthy grade of moral feeling." Women, conforming to the dictates of modest behavior, suffered in silence rather than endure the mortification of a gynecological examination, as propriety combined with ignorance to make the womb a source of much distress.[13]

The conventional wisdom of the era preached that "conception. . .is much more likely to happen from intercourse a few days before or after the menstrual period"; women who, wishing to practice some form of birth control, intentionally

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12 Water-Cure Journal (1845), pp. 37,44.

13 Quoted in Harvey Graham, Eternal Eve: The History of Gynecology and Obstetrics (New York, 1951), p. 495.

had sexual relations in the middle of the menstrual cycle, might have found their repeated pregnancies not only surprising but physically difficult as well. The numerous ailments attending birth ranged from prolapsus uteri to severe infection to minor irritation, but doctors responded to all uterine disorders with the same antiquated and often painful treatments. Even a normal, uncomplicated birth could prove debilitating. The traditional medical practices insisted upon complete inactivity for long periods of time following delivery. A Mrs. O.C.W. reported to the Water-Cure Journal that she was "kept confined to. . .bed nearly two months" with the birth of her first child, and "it was not until about the middle of the following summer that (she) attained (her) former health and strength."[14]

Clearly, child bearing did have discomforting and dangerous aspects. Scholars seeking to understand the roots of feminine maladies have sympathetically suggested that women used the "pretext of being 'delicate' as a way of. . .closing the bedroom door," "an elaborate strateg(y) for limiting the occasions of sexual intercourse. . .and thus limiting their families."[15] Undoubtedly some women fabricated illness to

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[14] Kathryn Kish Sklar, "All Hail to Pure Cold Water," American Heritage (Dec., 1974), 67.

[15] Ann D. Wood, "The Fashionable Diseases: Woman's Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth Century America," Journal of Interdisciplinary History (1973), 25-52; Page Smith, Daughters of the Promised Land (Little, Brown & Co.: Boston, 1970), p. 132.

shield themselves from unwanted pregnancies, but the prevalence of poor health among women of leisure, the comments of a few sensitive observers, and the strong psychological component of the various afflictions described by nineteenth century females, all combine to invite further investigation into the causes of feminine illness.[16] Alexander Combe, the Scottish phrenologist, believed that "nervous disease of which females of the middle and upper classes were the most frequent victims" could be attributed to "inactivity of intellect and feeling," and Dr. W.A. Alcott, the noted nutritional reformer, urged that ladies be given "some employment. . .to save them from ennui, and disgust, and misery-sometimes from speedy or more protracted suicide." "The vacuity of mind. . .is, I conclude, the cause of a vice which it is painful to allude to; but which cannot honestly be passed over," asserted Harriet Martineau, who attributed "the habit of intemperance, . . . not infrequent among women of station and education in the most enlightened parts of the country," to the unrelieved monotony of feminine existence.[17]

Catharine Beecher, whose "extensive tours in all portions of the Free States" had "brought (her) into most intimate communion" with countless women exclaimed: "And oh! what

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[16] One would expect a prevalence of illness among women of the lower classes who could not afford medical assistance and whose living conditions would increase their susceptibility to disease.

[17] "Insanity: From Combe's Work on Mental Derangement," Ladies' Magazine (1835), 461-463; W.A. Alcott, "Female Attendance on the Sick," Ladies' Magazine (1834), 302; Martineau II, 183.

heartaches were the result of these years of quiet observation of the experience of my sex in domestic life. How many hearts have revealed the fact that what they had been trained to imagine the highest earthly felicity, was but the beginning of care, disappointment, and sorrow, and often led to the extremity of mental and physical suffering." Miss Beecher asked: "Why was it I was so often told that 'little girls little imagined what was before them when they entered married life?'" And, above all, she wondered why she found so many women in comfortable circumstances "expressing the hope that their daughters would never marry." Dinah Maria Craik, author and social critic, wrote of the "dreary mental eclipse -- neither daylight nor darkness" which plagued American women. "A man rarely drags on existence from year to year with 'nerves,' or 'low spirits' and the various maladies of mind and temper that make. . .women a torment to themselves. . . ," Miss Craik observed. The superintendent of an insane asylum, commenting on the high incidence of insanity among women, thought that woman's unhappy life forced her to "see(k) refuge in a lunatic hospital; the poor heartbroken and disappointed wife loses, in turn, her appetite, her rest, and her strength, (until) her nervous system (becomes) prostrated,. . ."[18] Some thoughtful individuals, therefore, stated or implied that most women's ailments had psychological rather than physical origin, and the personal experiences of nineteenth century females seem to support this hypothesis.

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[18] Beecher, Letters, p. 121; Craik, p. 200; Quoted in Calhoun, II, 231.

Detailing the symptoms of hysteria, severe anxiety, and constant depression, the private journals, letters, and case studies of diverse women give expression to the dysphoria torturing antebellum females. "I was quite ill, and my spirits depressed," wrote Sarah Connell Ayer in her diary, as these personal pages reveal the perpetual mental anguish of this middle-class wife and mother. [19] With the phrase "my spirits were unusually depressed," covering the sheets of her journal, Mrs. Ayer frequently confessed having to curtail activities because of her emotional state. "Retired to my chamber (for) solitude soothes each sorrow of the heart and inspires the mind with new fortitude," she wrote on one occasion. On another she recorded: "I did not go to church all day. Was very ill. My spirits were unusually depressed. It was in vain I endeavored to raise them, and I fell into a state of dejection for which I could not account."[20]

Having little understanding of the causes or nature of their afflictions, women described anger and anxiety. On September 18, 1841, Elizabeth Payson Prentiss, who later became an author of children's books, wrote of her constant nervousness which often made life "insupportable." "I. . . think mother would not trust me to carry the dishes to the closet, if she knew how strong an effort I have to make to avoid dashing them all to pieces," she confided. "When I

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[19] Diary of Sarah Connell Ayer (Portland, Maine: Lefavor-Tower Co., 1910), pp. 43, 37.

[20] Ibid., pp. 34-35, 43.

am at the head of the stairs I can hardly help throwing myself down. . . . Tonight, for instance, my head began to feel all at once as if it were enlarging till at last it seemed to fill the room, and I thought it large enough to carry away the house." Mrs. Prentiss' illness persisted: "Three days out of seven I am as sick as I. . .can be -- the rest of the time, languid, feeble, and exhausted by frequent faint turns, so that I can't do the smallest thing in my family."[21]

"My spirits are. . .depressed this forenoon," wrote Anne Warder countless times in her journal. The brilliant student, Nancy Hyde, constantly complained that "(her) spirits have been unusually depressed, and (her) feelings have been those of languor and despondency."[22] The memoirs of the well-known author, Hannah Adams, reveal her "debilitating. . . want of. . .mental firmness." Susan Huntington's diary describes her perpetual battle with "distressing nervous depression," while Laura Clark's journal entries divulge a suffering so great that she states, "I sometimes. . .wonder that I am alive."[23]

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[21] Elizabeth Prentiss, The Life and Letters of Elizabeth Prentiss (New York: Anson D.F. Randolph & Co., 1882), pp. 65-73.

[22] "Extracts from the Diary of Mrs. Anne Warder," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography XVII (1893), p. 452; The Writings of Nancy Maria Hyde (Norwich: R. Hubbard, 1816), p. 65.

[23] Memoir of Miss Hannah Adams -- Written by herself with additional notices by a Friend (Boston: Gray & Bowen, 1832), 5; Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Susan Huntington of Boston, Mass. (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1826) 31; "Diary of Mrs. Laura Clark, June 21 - Oct. 26, 1818" The Firelands Pioneer. N.S. (1920), 2312; Melva (pseud.), Home Whispers to Husbands and and Wives (New York: American Females Guardian Society, 1859), p. 29.

This constant struggle with devastating afflictions that they could neither understand nor alleviate, intensified the difficult plight of American women. In a letter that she did not dare to sign, one woman articulated her despair: "I am so. . .encompassed with infirmities that I long sometimes to flee away." Few women consciously expressed the wish to "flee" or escape from a life they found unbearable, but thousands of nineteenth century females fell victim to a form of psychoneurosis, which manifested itself in disabling symptoms, giving women no choice but to retreat from their daily routines. The Water-Cure Journal disclosed the case histories of numerous women who had suddenly and inexplicably become totally incapacitated. Miss Elizabeth Pott, "an excellent scholar (who) had not been able to read or write for years," and Miss Isabella Thompson who suddenly "could not do anything" furnished but two examples of the multitudes of women invalids who, in desperation, experimented with hydropathy.[24] Thousands of women, seeking cure for various illnesses, flocked to the water-cure centers flourishing throughout the country; Harriet Beecher Stowe was one of these women, and her case study provides an interesting illustration of the nature of feminine malady.

The daughter of Lyman Beecher, a fiery Calvinist minister who infused his children with a passionate desire to reform mankind, Harriet suffered from a tormenting apprehension that

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[24] Melva, p. 29; Water-Cure Journal (1847), 60.

she could not fulfill her father's expectations. She confessed to her sister, Catharine, the fear that she might not be "fit for anything." Fortunately Catharine, ten years her senior, had plans to open a school for girls and very much needed Harriet's help. The two young women worked together until 1836 when Harriet married Calvin Stowe, a classics professor. Demanding, domineering, and irascible, Professor Stowe expected complete obedience from his wife. Within their first ten years of married life, Harriet bore three children and agreed to have Calvin's aged and complaining mother live with them. Then, suddenly, after a decade which Harriet described as filled with "pain, confusion, disappointment and suffering," when all she "proposed was met and crossed and in every way hedged up," her right side became totally paralyzed.[25]

At her sister's insistance, Harriet went to the famous water-cure sanitarium in Brattleboro, Vermont for therapy. There, the "shattered broken invalid, just able to creep along by great care" began to re-examine her life. In the serene atmosphere, removed from the perpetual petty exactions of a domestic martinet, Harriet Beecher Stowe started her slow recovery. "Not for years have I enjoyed life as I have here. . ." she wrote while ignoring her husband's repeated entreaties to return home. After a year away from her life of frustration, of "hasty and irritated censure," Harriet came to realize that she could not make her family "my chief

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[25] Page, p. 137; Sklar, p. 69.

good and portion." Some physical weakness persisted; Harriet believed that for the remainder of her days she would be "at best an amended invalid. . .obliged to walk softly and carefully." Yet during her stay in Brattleboro she gained the emotional strength to insist that her husband make certain concessions as a prerequisite for resuming cohabitation. He agreed to accept a teaching position at Bowdoin College in Maine, and apparently pledged not to inhibit Harriet's fledgling career as an author. She began work on Uncle Tom's Cabin shortly after rejoining her family in Maine; her ailments, not surprisingly, disappeared. Until her death in 1896, at the age of eighty-five, she enjoyed vigorous health, free from all signs of her affliction.[26]

Harriet Beecher Stowe's paralysis emanated from deep emotional distress. Clinically called conversion hysteria, or conversion reaction, this crippling psychoneurosis is characterized by the tendency to represent inner psychological conflicts by means of symbolic somatic disturbances. It joined with severe depression and anxiety to incapacitate Jacksonian women and to authenticate the myriad of observations indicating the omnipresence of invalidism among nineteenth century females.[27] Mrs. Stowe, benefitting from a stable childhood, an indulgent, if somewhat awe-inspiring father, an ambitious

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[26] Page, pp. 135-138; Notable American Women 1607-1950 (ed.) Edward T. James (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), III, 393-402.

[27] O. Spurgeon English, M.D. & Gerald H.J. Pearson, M.D., Emotional Problems of Living (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963), pp. 508-512.

and supportive sister, a comfortable economic situation which enabled her to remain in Brattleboro for over a year, a concilliatory husband and occupying interests, managed to overcome the more obvious, debilitating symptoms of the illness brought on by the tensions, frustrations, and conflicts of her life. But most women did not share this good fortune and languished in their chambers alone and afraid.

Defying the comprehension of those seeking to understand why females, surrounded by every comfort and burdened by no responsibility, became so desperately ill, an abundance of psychoneurotic symptoms plagued American women. They afforded visible evidence of unresolved conflicts, repressed anger, unassuaged guilt, and unfulfilled emotional and physical needs. The overwhelming sense of stagnation, the feeling of uselessness, and the loss of the capacity to experience a sense of worthiness or have faith in herself as a unique being generated intense anguish which manifested itself in profound psychological and related physical distress.[28] Endeavoring to meet the requirements of the woman-beau ideal, the nineteenth century female found herself caught within the irreconcilable but compelling dictates of a complicated and contradictory philosophy of womanhood which fragmented her psyche into a potpourri of emotional disorders. Women suffered unpalliated guilt at their own shortcomings. They anguished over unrecognized conscious and unconscious

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28 For a discussion of anxiety see: Identity and Anxiety; Survival of the Person in Mass Society (ed.) Maurice Stein, Arthur J. Vidich & David Manningwhite (U.S.A.: The Free Press, 1960).

emotional, intellectual, and physical drives, and their inability to find contentment within an ethos that commanded them to be happy while foreclosing every path to self-realization. The avalanche of suppressed anger and hostility, anticipated fear of punishment and loss of love from the realization of repressed drives and wishes, and the unremitting tension of conflicting and forbidden needs came crashing down upon them. Women emerged tormented by the maladies of severe nervousness, anxiety, and depression which crippled both their minds and bodies.

Largely psychogenic, feminine illness represented a symptom of the internal conflicts provoked by woman's collision with a dictatorial, identity-negating social system, rather than a solution to the tensions created by her unfulfilled drives, needs, and wishes. Nevertheless, invalidism did offer some compensations or secondary gains. For the ailing woman of the middle- or upper-classes, sickness generally meant repeated visits to various doctors and specialists, who by evincing concern and interest, gave the female a kind of masculine attention that she missed at home. And, of course, by withdrawing to her room, the sick woman might become the focus of family concern and hence enjoy a fleeting sense of importance that she would otherwise be denied. Severe afflictions usually required prolonged treatment at sanitariums or rest homes. For women who could afford such sanatory luxuries, the relative freedom and equanimity offered at these numerous institutions proved favorable to superficial recovery.

The beneficial side effects concomitant with infirmity, however, neither provided the inducement to become sick, nor supplied a cure for the ills of the antebellum woman. Invalidism, barely understood and poorly treated, did little to alleviate the strains and anxieties of nineteenth century females, but the plethora of afflicted women does much to illuminate the pervasive suffering of females in Jacksonian America. Similarly, women's diaries and letters illustrate inner turmoil, ambivalence, and anger, as women spilled their deepest feelings into cherished and confidential journals and writings.

Woman's confrontation with the crisp contours of true womanhood blighted the leaves of her diary. Fear, frustration, and sorrow, inexorably intertwined upon the trellis of the woman-beau ideal, found an outlet for their runners within the pages of woman's private writings. Forming an inflorescence of doubt, misery, and tension, female diaries of this period reveal both woman's struggle to accept and comply with the era's conception of feminine nature and behavior and the harvest of unhappiness that her efforts inevitably reaped.

The persistent vigil to maintain behavior, thoughts, and emotions in harmony with the precepts of the woman-beau ideal generated severe tension: "How soon one is wearied of the constant exertion to be agreeable, even when conscious of admiration!" complained one woman. Another believed, "(i)t is the struggle to be patient and gentle and cheerful,

when pressed down and worn upon and distracted that costs so much." Taught from childhood that the true woman lived for others and always sacrificed her self interest for the happiness of those around her, women worried incessantly that they did not possess these angelic virtues and constantly berated themselves for their apparent failings. "I think that to give happiness in married life a woman should possess oceans of self sacrificing love and I, for one, haven't half of that self-forgetting spirit which I think essential," confided Elizabeth Prentiss to a friend in 1843. The introspection of one diarist produced her self-confessed "fear that this power of enjoying myself makes my pleasure too independent of others, and consequently renders me too little solicitous about them." "To make all around me happy" seemed to Ellen Bancroft Lowell the motivating purpose for her being, and journal entries record the young woman's pain when she "was impatient with Sara," or committed other mild acts of departure from this guiding "maxim."[29]

Another axiom of feminine nature, woman's innate desire to tend the sick, demanded compliance. Antebellum females constantly ministered to ill friends and family. Their diaries, disclose exasperation with, and irritation at, these tasks. They also demonstrate the perpetual strain women experienced from the need to perform these duties with the

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29 Prentiss, p. 114; Journal and Letters of Hannah C. Backhouse (London, 1858), p. 14; Letter from Elizabeth Prentiss, April 24, 1843; Backhouse, p. 4; Ellen Bancroft Lowell, Private Diary in Ella L. Cabot, Arthur Theodore Lyman and Ella Lyman (1932), I, 242-245.

cheerfulness and composure required of them. Within a period of four years, Sarah Connell Ayer had "been the mother of four children, which now lay side by side in the grave yard." In 1823 she "became the mother of another little girl," but as she related, "(f)or three weeks before the birth of my infant I was dangerously ill, so that my friends did not expect my life."[30] Weary, debilitated and surfeited with death and dying, Mrs. Ayer, nonetheless, agreed to nurse her ailing father. "I have many things to fret, perplex and afflict me," she wrote. "My father is unwell, and so childish and unreasonable that I know not how to act towards him, as it seems as though he was determined not to be pleased with anything I did for him. He often utters sentiments. . .which grieve me to the heart." Although Mrs. Ayer might complain to her journal about being "left (alone) with my Father sick," she did not voice these feelings. The necessity of maintaining her equanimity remained paramount. She always "endeavored to be patient" and searched for the emotional strength which would enable her to "be supported through the trials of. . . life."[31]

Elizabeth Prentiss frequently confessed vexation at having "to drag one's self out of bed to take care of a sick baby." And,the conflict between society's vision of the female happily and indefatigably caring for the sick and woman's resentment and dismay at these chores finds full

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30 Ayer, pp. 209-236.

31 Ibid., pp. 258-265.

eloquence in the diary of Hannah Backhouse. Feeling an overwhelming sense of repugnance at being forced to preside at the bedside of sick relatives, Hannah struggled to cultivate the "appropriate" feelings. When her brother became ill she had an opportunity to test her endurance, and her diary records her mixed success. "I was conscious of doing my duty, at least in part; but I often felt my aversion to the weariness of a sick-room, that constant attention to trifles, and the want of employment and ideas made me feel it a great cross; this sometimes overcame me," she admitted. Yet, the young woman ardently hoped she would develop the requisite qualities: "Beginning to act from duty in such cases, one may end by acting from affection, and then it becomes necessary to one's satisfaction to do so. A woman who cannot suffer the confinement of a sick room, leaves unfulfilled one of her most marked duties and can never be fit for a wife. It is a difficult task when one is not spurred onward by the continual impulse of the heart, or in short, when self is a dearer object than the invalid. . .I could often wish my heart were more susceptible of kindness and compassion than it is."[32]

Silently and secretly protesting the demands made upon them, women also writhed under the decrees of the era which shackled their intellect, fettered their activities, and restrained their existences. "How painfully sensitive am I to not being free to act as I like," asserted one woman. She admitted that as a child she most enjoyed "using the hammer

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32 Prentiss, p. 114; Backhouse, p. 11.

and saw with dexterity, and (found) the greatest pleasure (in) being victorious in a game of trapball." When admonished against the unladylike nature of her amusements, she wrote: "I fell into a sulky mood in my own mind, growling over the misery of. . .restraint. I sometimes feel my want of freedom rather galling."[33]

Other women perceived their bondage differently. Catharine Sedgwick, who later became a noted novelist, ironically came to express her views on women in a letter to a friend requesting fabric for dresses. Absorption with fashion surely would have been considered a fitting topic for a twenty-one year old woman, but Catharine evidently found the subject stifling. "I wish there was some philosophy in vogue that would free us from the slavery of these petty wants. Nothing less than the 'genius of universal emancipation' would effect it, and I am afraid that even this wonder-evoking genius has no microscopic eye to discern the pigmy chains that bind us in this debasing dependence."[34]

Feminine thralldom assumed many forms, but economic deprivation emerged as one of the most visible signs of oppression. With opportunities for employment severely limited, women from impoverished backgrounds along with those whose families had recently suffered financial setbacks found themselves victimized by the prevailing legal and social codes. Nancy Maria Hyde, considered by her contemporaries to have been

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33 Backhouse, pp. 14, 2, 13, 33.

34 Letter from Catharine Sedgwick to Mrs. Watson, April 20, 1810.

an exceptionally gifted student, endured great hardship after her father's death. Creditors pressed upon Nancy and her mother for the payment of debts, and "neither in the family of her father, her mother, or herself, was there a son or a brother, to stand up as their helper." Writing a plea to the Connecticut General Assembly on behalf of her mother, Nancy articulated the plight of the single, widowed or abandoned woman who lack the aid of a male relative; "I find myself not only deprived of support in my declining age, but likely to be left wholly destitute of a home for myself and children."[35]

This appeal evidently did not bring the desired assistance. Nancy left school in an attempt to relieve her family's monetary problems. Teaching remained one of the few occupations open to women, but even entry into this field proved difficult. The young woman wrote of the obstacles confronting her: "Firmness, which is indispensable in every station of life, is particularly so in this; where you have not only to encounter the opposing inclinations of the. . . community. . .but are likewise, . . .distinguished as an object of public criticism." Desperate for an income, and unable to find steady work as a teacher, Nancy, in resignation, took a job painting artificial fruit. But as she explained to her journal: "choice would never have instigated me to this employment."[36]

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35 Hyde, p. 216.

36 Ibid., pp. 7, 78.

Hannah Adams, the gifted author whose scholarly works included History of Religions, fared slightly better than Nancy Hyde. Having been instructed "in the rudiments of Latin, Greek, geography, and logic," by gentlemen who boarded at her father's dwelling, Miss Adams recalled that "few of my sex (had) perused more books at the age of 20 than I had." This thorough and unusual education became invaluable when, as she recorded in her memoirs, "everything appeared gloomy in my situation." "My health was feeble; I was entirely destitute of property; my father's circumstances were very low and I had no other relation or friend from whom I might expect to derive assistance." By courage and fortitude, Hannah Adams barely managed to subsist from her writing. She found that the "penalties and discouragements attending authors in general fall upon woman with double weight. To the curiousity of the idle, and the envy of the malicious, their sex affords a peculiar excitement. Arraigned not merely as writers, but as women, their characters, their conduct, and even their personal endowments become the object of severe inquisition."[37]

Prohibiting woman from most forms of financially remunerative endeavor, the ethos of the woman-beau ideal denied the value of independent feminine achievement and criticized females for developing pride in their accomplishments. The few tasks deemed ladylike by the prevailing codes of womanhood, such as embroidery, painting, playing musical instruments, and perhaps, writing some trivial verses, may not have appealed to

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37 Hannah Adams, pp. 9, 18; Quoted in Adams, pp. 34-35.

most women. Yet even those who demonstrated talent and an eagerness to follow these limited, acceptable pursuits labored under an additional hardship, for the perfect female never exhibited self assurance or even allowed herself to feel confidence. "The love of painting has been upper most in my mind for some weeks past," wrote Hannah Backhouse. After completing a canvas that gave her special satisfaction she admitted: "I did so well that I felt most uncomfortably elated with it, as I was self-conceited beyond measure. . .How I disliked myself. . .I strove much against my feelings."[38]

Hannah Backhouse repeatedly warned "(herself) against conceit and confidence" in the hope that the traits would disappear. She could not have known that identical feelings plagued the lives of countless others of her sex, including Susan Huntington. "Pride has been my constant foe," she wrote in 1818. "Once when I was the mere child of fiction and romance, my ambition was to distinguish myself by poetizing and shining as an authoress. After I was married and was taught some sharp lessons, my great desire was to be. . .a good wife, good mother, good mistress. . . .But pride besets me still."[39] Four years later Mrs. Huntington expressed the forbidden yearning to display her knowledge when "thrown into an intelligent circle, capable of estimating all that was commanding and all that was attractive in (my) character, and whose qualifications would ensure (me) the respect and constant

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38 Backhouse, pp. 5-6.

39 Backhouse, p. 5; Huntington, pp. 182-183.

attentions of that circle." Indeed, she envied the woman of a "humbler and more retired. . .station. . .as it furnished a comparative exemption from. . .(these) temptations. . . ."[40]

Women could expose neither mental ability nor knowledge, but the craving for intellectual stimulation forms a constant litany running through their private journals and letters. "Write me a long letter," Sarah Ayer begged her friend, Maria. "(T)ell me everything. . .what books you have been reading, your opinion of them, and indeed everything that interests you." Before sealing the letter, Mrs. Ayer enclosed a proposed reading list and asked Maria to comment on her selections. Hannah Backhouse records the "delightful hour" she spent "reading Locke," and Catharine Sedgwick's correspondence with her women friends contain frequent references to current authors.[41]

Mary Peacock, a young woman living in Buffalo in the 1830s, wrote of her interest in "Cobbett's life of Andrew Jackson" and also of her companions' plan to broaden their reading experience:

> This morning one of the scholars handed me a note. It was an invitation to join a society that was going to be formed of young ladies for the purpose of reading. We are to meet at each other's houses once a week - one reads to the company while the rest employ themselves in sewing, knitting, etc. We thought of reading the works of Sir Walter Scott, the Waverly novels, beginning them and reading them in their order. We counted up the time it would take us to read them through. Even if we read 50 pages in one evening it would require the term of

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40 Huntington, p. 318.

41 Letter from Sarah Ayer, 1811; Backhouse, p. 4; See for example, Letter from Catharine Sedgwick to Mrs. Channing, Sept. 25, 1821.

> 6 years to go through them. We had a laugh when we summed it up and found it would be so long, but nothing daunted (us).[42]

With feminine craving for knowledge and all invigorating discussions stifled by the ethos of the woman-beau ideal, women wrote of their attempts to assuage intellectual curiosity within the narrow limits allowed them and of their chagrin at the damage being done to the female sex by the prevailing codes of education and behavior. Attending lectures on appropriate subjects comprised an acceptable pastime for young ladies. Mary Peacock's journal contains numerous entries describing these meetings. On January 10, 1838 she "heard a lecture delivered by Mr. Foote on the progress of literature in the 13th and 14th centuries," and on another occasion attended a talk "at the Y (which). . .was to be adapted to the ladies" on the "invention of the art of printing, the utility of the press, and the knowledge and pleasure which is to be derived from the reading of useful books."[43]

It is questionnable whether females found these diluted lectures, especially edited to the assumed level of feminine intellect, informative or interesting. But evidently many women did anguish over insipid conversation which resulted from women's lack of education and activity. "I cannot bear talking about trifles," exclaimed Hannah Backhouse, and other women echoed these feelings. In another letter to her

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42 The Journal of Mary Peacock, Life, a Century Ago as seen in Buffalo and Chautaugua County by a 17 year old girl. . . (Buffalo, New York, 1938), pp. 39-42.

43 Peacock, pp. 42-50.

confidant, Maria, Sarah Ayer wrote: "I hate large parties, such as we have both frequently attended, where sentimental and improving conversation, and all intellectual enjoyments were banished, and trifling amusements fit only to please a child supplied their places." "How much more real pleasure and advantage is to be derived, from solid and refined conversation," she continued "than from that empty, unmeaning chit-chat which I am sorry to say so frequently forms the greater part of female conversation."[44]

Elizabeth Prentiss, raised in the blossoming seaport city of Portland, Maine, disclosed a similar dissatisfaction with the quality of feminine intellectual intercourse to her diary on December 1, 1841: "I went to the sewing circle this afternoon and had such a stupid time! Enough gossip and nonsense was talked to make one sick. . . .Now my mother is a very sensible mother, but when she urges me into company and exhorts me to be more social, she runs the risk of having me as silly as the rest of 'em. She fears I may be harmed by reading and studying and staying with her, but heaven forbid I should find things in books worse than things out of them."[45] She reported that when "the young men rushed in and the girls began looking unutterable things, I rushed out and came home. I can't and won't talk nonsense. . .with those boys!" Apparently concerned about the frivolity of her female companions, she added: "I can't think the girls are the silly creatures they make themselves appear. They want an aim in

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44 Backhouse, p. 13; Ayer, pp. 374-375.

45 Prentiss, p. 70.

life, some worthy object; give them that, and the good and excellent which, I am sure, lies hidden in their nature will develope itself at once." Yet, her sense of separateness plagued her: "Oh, what is it I do want? Somebody who feels as I feel and thinks as I think, ..."[46]

Susan Huntington felt as Elizabeth Prentiss did. Yet, Susan, considerably younger, lived in Boston, and it is doubtful that the two women ever had an opportunity to discuss their shared ideas with one another. Writing to a friend, the youthful Bostonian protested the "extreme sensibility (that) is generally considered an excellence in our sex. . . .I cannot sufficiently deprecate the influence which such a sentiment may have upon the mind. Women are generally brought up to think resolution useless, and led, by false notions of delicacy, to glory in their weakness." Susan conducted a private campaign against the strictures imposed upon feminine intellect. Reacting to a statement that "(t)hought is the characterizing feature of men, and feeling of women," she wrote: "Will not women infer that, if the case be so, it is not necessary for her to cultivate her mental powers; that she may as well confine her views and her thoughts, so far as she thinks at all, to. . .(a) contracted sphere."[47]

Yet women who tried to "cultivate" their "mental powers" in a social milieu which mocked their attempts and undermined their efforts often experienced profound frustration, and,

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46 Prentiss, p. 70.

47 Letter from Susan Huntington, Aug. 30, 1811; Letter from Susan Huntington, May, 1818.

ultimately, resignation. "Don't ask me if I have read anything else," Elizabeth Prentiss wrote shortly after her marriage and subsequent relocation in New Bedford, Massachusetts. "My mind has become a complete mummy, and therefore, incapable of either receiving or originating a new idea." Apparently the recently acquired position of wife curtailed the freedom to indulge her intellectual curiosity which she had previously enjoyed. Indeed, it must have been difficult for this bright young woman to admit: "Just what I expected would befall me has happened. I have got immersed in the whirlpool of petty cares and concerns which swallow up so many other and higher interests, and talk as anxiously about good 'help' and bad, as the rest of 'em do. . . .I sometimes feel really ashamed of myself to see. . .how my time seems to be wasted if I venture to take up a book, . . .wives who have no love and enthusiasm for their husbands are more to be pitied than blamed if they settle down into mere. . .(household) managers."[48]

Substantially barred from satisfying her intellectual needs, the middle- and upper-class woman, her "soul. . . (either buried) under butter and cheese (or) under laces and ruffles," had to endure the agony of relentless boredom. "There is such a sameness in my life. . .that the particulars of it are hardly worth the pains of writing," recorded one young woman, while Ellen Parker of New Hampshire grieved that "(a)nother long day has passed into eternity. How slowly time passes to me." Mary Peacock, in 1838, worried that with

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48 Prentiss, p. 100.

"the Canada war. . .all over I am afraid that I shall make out poorly with my journal for. . .I do not have anything to write about except the weather, and such little trifling things. . . ;" Mary continues her journal, however, and the diary, detailing a life consumed by "calls" and "shopping," reflects the young woman's disgust at having to "sit idle," which Mary describes as "the most tiresome thing a person can do."[49]

"What dull worldly people they seem to be!" exclaimed Hannah Backhouse, describing her friends who came to tea. "Having done nothing all day, and being all assembled in the evening, vacancy pervaded the whole room to such a degree, that I wished I had been obliged to work for my bread, that my duty might not be in the listless inactivity of a parlour." Forced leisure, casting a pall over feminine existence, generated an oppressive sense of uselessness, and caused the nineteenth century woman to "(wonder) why (she) was made, and if anybody on earth will ever be a bit happier for it. . . ."[50]

The antebellum female of the middle- and upper-classes came to be plagued by pervasive feelings of worthlessness, inadequacy, and frustration. But immersed in the ethos of the woman-beau ideal, she lacked the perspective and the awareness to appreciate the intricate social origins of her anguish. Accepting the wisdom of contemporary theorists, she attributed all unhappiness and dissatisfaction to her own individual

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49 Letter from Lydia Maria Child to Mrs. E.C. Pierce, May 27, 1841; Nancy Shippen, p. 149; Ellen Parker, "Diary," New Hampshire Hist. Soc. Colls. XI (1915), 130-162; Peacock, pp. 50-75.

50 Backhouse, p. 8; Prentiss, p. 74.

failings which ultimately intensified her conflicts and sense of isolation. Elizabeth Prentiss confessed to feeling "mentally and spiritually alone in the world." Sarah Ayer, writing in Concord, Massachusetts complained that she had "lived so much in solitude. . .that my mind has become somewhat enervated."[51] Women attempted to meet society's expectations of them. They strove to become more self-sacrificing and patient, endeavored to enjoy their sickbed duties, restrained themselves from exhibiting wit and intellect, and searched to find meaning in a life of futility. Yearning for a compassion and empathy which they did not find within the walls of their homes, women confided their conflicting emotions and troubled thoughts to personal diaries.[52]

This myriad of confidential writings, limited in strength and perception, provided an outlet for stifled feelings. But they did little to enable women to challenge the constricting tenets of the womanhood myths. These hidden pools of thought and emotion, remaining largely isolated, in time became stagnant and then dry. Yet, the insistent urge to find release and understanding could not be absorbed by the scattered, static ponds of private writing. It came streaming forth from the depths of woman's misery, eventually eroding the carefully constructed dam of male authorship. The currents of feminine anguish flowed into forms of fiction, deluging

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51 Prentiss, p. 272; Ayer, pp. 371-372.

52 In those diaries written by married women between the years 1800 and 1860 husbands are rarely mentioned, and in not one of the journals examined did the husband emerge as a supportive companion to his wife.

decades of the nineteenth century with novels and short stories. Woman's creative literature emerged as a confluence of anger and sadness, hope and despair.

The astonishing outpouring of feminine writing at once annoyed and amazed those accustomed to dominating the literary field. Predictably, resentment against women authors rose up to meet their hesitant efforts. Nathaniel Hawthorne damned the entire "mob of scribbling women." Articles, warning women that they could not "be too cautious in assuming the privilege of presenting their thoughts to the world" and cautioning those who devoted "themselves to studies and research" that they would soon "despise their duties and neglect them altogether," appeared frequently.[53]

One author, Mrs. Farrar, endeavored to diminish the prejudice she had encountered. She offered some advice to "those ladies who are deeply interested in their studies, and are pursuing knowledge with an eagerness that leaves them little time or inclination for the duties of their toilet." Farrar reminded aspiring writers that "they are responsible to their sex, for not bringing literary pursuits into disrepute by neglecting their personal appearance." "Let them simplify their appearance as much as they can," she continued, "but at the same time they should be even more careful than others, to

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53 Quoted in Frederick Lewis Pattee, The Feminine Fifties (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1940), p. 110; Ladies' Literary Cabinet (1819) 49; Ladies' Magazine (1828) 33.

be always neatly equipped and sufficiently in the fashion to avoid singularity," for the "connection, in many minds, is still very close between blue stockings and dirty stockings. . . ."[54]

Knowing that contemporary opinion was arrayed against them, women frequently justified, explained or apologized for their literary attempts. Sarah J. Hale, the gifted author, successful editor, and shrewd businesswoman dismissed her unconventional endeavors as being motivated solely by financial necessity. Caroline Warren proclaimed that she "had nothing to ask. . .(from) the ill judging and censorious hypocrite who views with the jaundiced eye of prejudice every production from a female pen," but hoped that "the really learned and virtuous. . .(would) approve the attention. . . ." Catharine Sedgwick explained that she began to write because she "wanted some pursuit, and felt spiritless and sad." "My books have been a pleasant occupation and excitment in my life," she related. "The notice, and friends, or acquaintances they have procured me, have relieved me from the danger of ennui. . . ."[55]

The existence of voluminous printed pages signed by women afforded evidence that middle- and upper-class females did not find their domestic lives engrossing, enriching or fulfilling. The theme of feminine tedium dotted the pages of

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54 Mrs. Farrar, Young Ladies' Friend (Boston,1837), p. 135.

55 Caroline Warren, The Gamesters; or Ruins of Innocence (Boston: J. Shaw, 1828), Introduction iv; Catharine Sedgwick, Life and Letters (ed.) Dewey (New York: Harper & Bros., 1871), pp. 153, 249.

woman's writings. "Oh, the weary days and weeks and months! Oh, the weary years of unused life to which so large a portion of the human race is remorselessly consigned! Oh, the wretched lives, . . ," bemoaned the author of the novel, Three Sisters. Written in the first person, this tale, which traces the maturation of three women, indicted the social system which created and encouraged the useless lady: "I returned home. . .to find my elder sisters leading that living death to which it is the fashion to consign females of the wealthy middle-class. . . ." Her sister was "neither the first nor the last to which an aimless life. . .inevitably doomed her. Quick in her affections, enthusiastic in temperament, restless and vivacious, more than most young men did this girl require a definite object and purpose in life. The education and influences of her class allowed but one aim -- marriage. . . ."[56]

Vesta, the courageous heroine of Charlotte Chesebro's Children of Light, sighed: "I'm tired of reading, and tired to death of embroidery; and one can not be forever praising the work of another;" she asked her companions if they would "acknowledge that idle persons are, of all, most miserable?"[57] Anticipating that Vesta's fate would resemble a "flower that has drooped. . .sheltered away from the sun-heat, the rain of heaven, and the frost of earth, when these elements would

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56 Three Sisters, (London: W. Clowes & Sons,1856), pp. 8-9.

57 Caroline Chesebro, The Children of Light. A Theme for the Time (New York, 1853), pp. 156-210.

have unfolded its glories, and made it to answer for other purposes than that of premature development, unhealthful bloom and sudden death," Chesebro ' infused her character with a yearning for activity, excitment, and fulfillment. "If I were a man, I would very soon discover what there was for me to do. . .I would be clear of dragging out my life in the kitchen, or of putting myself down to the mending of old clothes, or of finding my recreation in walking over the lawn and garden, for all the world like a stupid animal, . . .a well-trained dog! When I feel like rushing out - strong enough to fight all the battles of the world, and with some little disposition that way too.. . ." Yet, Vesta had to face the reality of her existence:

> (B)ut here I am, only a woman -- a housekeeper, the mistress of an hospital as I might say, to be kept in my 'proper sphere' and 'place,' and never to stir an inch out of it in any direction, for fear that all creation would turn against me, and hunt me down, as they would a wild beast! Oh, these laws of propriety -- these ridiculous customs. . . ."[58]

In a short story mildly satirizing the pretensions of wealth, Miss Catharine Sedgwick mocked the so-called "privileges" of "idleness and ennui." She hoped that the "passion for gentility would be confined to the fashionable circles of the city. . . ." Yet her sympathy for urban women of leisure found expression in a longer work. Sedgwick wrote that "a woman of two-twenty, like Grace Herbert, if not occupied by an engrossing affection, is in this fine world. . .much like a locomotive off the track. If she had been absolutely poor

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58 Ibid., p. 31.

and friendless, she would have found a safety-valve in employment. If her destiny had been cast in the country, its unmasked life and healthy simplicity would have tended to a serene existence," but alas, because Grace had money and lived in the city her days would be passed in idle misery.[59]

Like Grace Herbert, Adelaid, of the short story, "Painter's Revealing," had "a dull monotonous life." The author described the youth as one who, "with her warm susceptible heart and brilliant imagination feeding upon themselves, passed those few early years of womanhood which. . .are so often the saddest of existence. Sad they must be when the character and circumstance are at war, and the spirit is bowed by the shackles it has not the power or even the will to rend." A tale appearing in the literary annual, the Dahlia, depicted an adolescent girl who had nothing to do but play with her dog all day. Observing Emily so poorly employed, her uncle remarked: "Poor child, you are really very much to be pitied!" Women similar to Grace, Adelaid, and Emily filled the pages of antebellum gift books. Female authors seemed to agree that society gave their lovely heroines little choice but to be "driven to dress and fashion as a refuge from the ennui of a vacant mind," or to "fall in love (simply) to relieve their mind(s)" from the debilitating effects of boredom.[60]

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59 Catharine Sedgwick, Married or Single? (New York: Harper & Bros., 1858), I, 160.

60 "Painter's Revealing," Amaranth (1848), 88; "Emily's New Pastime," Dahlia (1842), 173; The Jewel (1837), 39; "The Young Devotee," The Coral (184?), 118.

A character in "Truth in Fiction," appearing in the Evergreen, sardonically noted: "I think I may. . .claim to the virtue of usefulness, for no other individual in all the wide world, I believe, has done so much for the encouragement of manufactures as I have." Another fictitious young woman read from a book which called females "flower-crowned victims offered up to the human lords of creation." The text referred to marriage as the "paramount end of her being." Her book continued that, although "men have a thousand objects in life - the professions, glory, ambition, and the arts, authorship, advancement, and money getting in all their ramifications, each sufficient to absorb their minds. . ., if a woman succeed not in the sole hope of her hazardous career, she is utterly lost to all purposes of exertion or happiness, the past has all been thrown away - and the future presents little but cheerless desolation."[61]

Women writers recognized the era's insistence upon matrimony as the only acceptable path to feminine fulfillment, but many attempted to invalidate this important principle of the woman-beau ideal through their literature. Mary Howitt, author of "Single Sisters," printed in the 1845 edition of the Keepsake, objected to "fairy tales which portray 'old maids' as cruel and ugly." Indeed, Ada Lester, in a story bearing her name, did not marry and achieved recognition for her kindness and gentleness. Leopoldine of Julia Delafaye-Brehier's "Two Sisters," claims that she does not regret being

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61 Anna "Truth in Fiction," Evergreen (1850); Chesebro', p.29.

single for "that condition, which appears to you so frightful has its happiness, as well as the other states of life. . .I have called into my aid the arts and letters which it is so difficult for married females to cultivate with constancy." In another tale, Emily, who is married to a lawyer, confesses to her spinster sister: "(Y)ou have had years of happiness while I have never felt a single moment of unalloyed felicity." On her deathbed, Emily pleads: "My sister, teach my children the moral of our story."[62]

Emily's small children might have required an explanation of their mother's dying words, but the countless stories of females, forced into marriage by a deleterious decree, made the message clear to antebellum readers. The Amulet of 1846 relates the sad history of a sixteen year old girl "who abides her parents wishes and marries a man she can't love," while the autobiographical sketch, "A Life Without Love," appearing in the Ladies' Wreath tells of a woman who never loved her husband-to-be and whose wedding day, rather then bringing her joy, filled her with dread. "After the last word (of the marriage vows) was uttered," she reported: "I cast a. . . glance at the face that bent beside me, but instantly turned my eyes away and closed them as a thrill of strange repulsion shot through my frame."[63] Catharine Sedgwick expressed her opinion of the denigrating effect of nineteenth century

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62 Mary Howitt, "Single Sisters," Keepsake (1845), 62; "Ada Lester's Story," Ladies' Wreath (1858), 123-138; Julia Delafaye-Brehier, "Two Sisters," Ladies' Scrap Book (1845), 58; "Some Passages in the Life of An Old Maid," Garland (1830), 85.

63 "Poor Will Newbery," Amulet (1846), 178; "A Life Without Love," Ladies' Wreath (1858), 153.

marriages on women by writing that Grace "will soon be married, and then, like Eleanor, mere wife and mother to the end of her life," while Louisa H. Sheridan, author of "The Jilt," criticized her character, Colonel Wentworth, for asserting that a rather independent young woman would not find a husband and would "draw upon her the dislike of our sex. . . ."[64]

With marriage and the promise of a fashionable life deemed the only appropriate aim for the true woman, females of all classes acutely felt the deprivation of their lives. Those with the inclination and courage to write told of the many forms of poverty pervading antebellum women. The ethos of the woman-beau ideal, insisting upon the oneness of the entire sex, could not acknowledge the existence of many thousands of working women, but female writers, some dependent upon their earnings, understood the realities of economic hardship. They wrote fictionalized accounts of their own difficulties and, sometimes, of the suffering of those far beneath them on the social scale. "Poor Mrs. Stephens," the sewing woman of Harriet Beecher Stowe's "The Tea Rose," had "to live in one coarse room, and wash, iron and cook, . . .(and) had to spend every moment of (her) time in hard toil, with no prospect from (her) window but a brick side-walk, or a dirty lane. . . ." The Ladies' Casket of 1848 carried the tale of "Polly Bush who. . .had not been able to get her scanty earnings out of the clutch of the hard miser Latham." And Blanch, a washerwoman

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64 Sedgwick, Married I, 204; Louisa H. Sheridan, "The Jilt," Amaranth (1848), 202.

who had to support her blind father, saddened readers of the 1845 edition of the Rose.[65]

The suffering of women born into poverty furnished a popular theme for female fiction writers. Similarly, the plight of women from comfortable backgrounds who suddenly had to support themselves, evoked the compassion and attention of those women authors who knew the difficulties of earning a livelihood. For "literature, the only profession open to women (was) the lowest paying." Unless specifically trained at some skill, which could then offer her a meager laborer's sum, the prevailing theories left woman utterly destitute of the means of support. Two schoolgirls in the novel, Live and Let Live noted: "Great pains were taken to make us attractive in a drawing-room and amicable in our domestic relations. But as to the actual business of life, we were as little trained for it as if we had been born in the royal family of Persia. . ."[66]

The nature of feminine education, of course, harmonized perfectly with the era's expectation that all genuine women would lead leisurely existences. Yet the death or disappearance of a male relative or a sudden financial setback often radically altered the contours of woman's life, leaving her penniless and helpless. After the decease of her husband, Alice Montrose, of Maria McIntosh's popular novel, The Lofty and

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65 Harriet Beecher Stowe, "The Tea Rose," Flora's Gems (1846), 44-45; Ladies' Casket (1848), 106; "Blanch Raymond," The Rose (1845), 164-169.

66 Three Sisters, p. 20; Catharine Sedgwick, Live and Let Live (New York, 1837), p. 79.

the Lowly, wrote: "Before I could teach, I should find it necessary to become a learner." Totally devoid of skill and of confidence in herself, Alice concluded: "I cannot go forth into the careless world and enter upon the business of life. . . ." "Men give to their daughters neither trade, profession, nor fortune, and to further their own interests, even take from them what properly they may possess," lamented a young woman of another novel after learning of her father's financial losses. "The son must be educated to a trade - the daughter pillaged for the son's advancement - the weak left weak and defenceless - the strong strengthened." This fear of a life of pauperism drove some women into marriages consummated solely for economic security, and this became the fate of the middle daughter in the novel, Three Sisters. "(W)ith strength, ability and energy beyond the average of either sex, simply for want of training and definite pursuit, a recognized sphere of action, this competent human being, thus rendered incompetent, cast the burthen of mere existence on a husband, and, in exchange for the means to live, gave life itself. . .She married a man she had twice refused during our father's lifetime, never pretending to herself or to him that she loved him. . . ."[67]

The creed of the woman-beau ideal which left females economically destitute, also impoverished them intellectually, and women's writings reflect this pervasive, though subtle,

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67 Maria McIntosh, The Lofty and the Lowly (New York, 1853), II, 24; Three Sisters, pp. 16-17.

shape of poverty. In "Cousin William," Harriet Beecher Stowe related Mary's unhappiness when "she saw a library of books in his room, that made her sigh every day when she dusted them, to think how much there is to be known of which she was ignorant." Mrs. A.J. Graves, in a fictionalized account of her schoolmates, told of "the little girl that steals away to some quiet solitude that she may indulge her fondness for books, or fill her imagination with visions of future intellectual eminence. . . ." Susan, the remarkable young lady of Susan Warner's widely-read novel, Queechy, had a difficult existence, but reading provided her with great pleasure. "If once in a while she could get half an hour before tea, she used to take her book and sit down on the threshold of the front door, or on the big log under the apple tree. . .In those minutes the reading was doubly sweet."[68]

The fictitious females, however, who yearned for intellectual and creative gratification, encountered the same opposition as their real-life contemporaries. "Women have nothing to do with books," declared Mr. Stackpole of Queechy, who continued: "A Woman. . .knows intuitively all that is really worth knowing. Domestic life is the true training for the female mind." Ever cognizant of the barrier of prejudice truncating their mental development, the heroines of antebellum literature spoke of shackled intellect and of its pernicious

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68 Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Cousin William," The Gift (1839), 211; Mrs. A.J. Graves, Girlhood and Womanhood: or, Sketches of My Schoolmates (Boston, 1844), V; Susan Warner (Elizabeth Wetherell pseud.), Queechy (New York, 1852), II, 93.

effect on their sex. Two schoolgirls discussing Madame Eugene's "very 'awakening' and edifying. . .sermon last evening at prayer," thought "it unfortunate and deplorable that she was not a man, so she might spend such burning eloquences on something besides a set of poor little frozen-hearted girls, with nothing on earth but frolic in their heads. . . ." "I am sure," remarked one of the young ladies, that "Madame would shine in the Roman forum. . . ."[69] The narrator of The Three Sisters longed to become a doctor, and as a child performed operations on dolls. "Had I been a boy instead of a girl, these early indications would have been hailed with satisfaction as pointing unerringly to my future vocation. As it was, they procured me only reprimands and punishment for mischief; and as I could not play properly with my dolls, they were taken from me altogether." Eliza Woodson of Eliza Farnham's fictionalized autobiography, recalled being ostracized and labeled a "fool" for her unusual interests. With no books for her own, and desperate for reading material, she "devoured" congressional debates, political newpapers and cabinet reports brought in by the men in her family; by the age of ten, Eliza had formed opinions on such "unwomanly" topics as "tariff, free trade, nullification, (and) internal improvements." Receiving perpetual ridicule and criticism for her "curious" pursuits, she became tormented by self-doubt, and worried that she might, indeed, really be a "fool."[70]

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69 Queechy, II, 73; "Choosing How to Die" Ladies' Casket (1848), 26.

70 Three Sisters, p. 6; Eliza Farnham, Eliza Woodson (New York, 1864), p. 54.

Fear of derision and exclusion forced women to hide their knowledge and skills. "Amelia's frosty reception in the best Philadelphia drawing rooms," led this character of the novel, Ferdinand and Elmira, " to warn her friends to display no learning or sentiment, for the moment it is discovered, your reputation is lost forever." Ruth Hall, the literary creation of the indefatigable writer, Fanny Fern, aroused the curiosity of her friends who "wonder(ed). . .why she took so much pains to bother her head with those stupid books, when she was every day growing prettier" and would not be able to use or exhibit her imagination or learning.[71]

"The Mysterious Picture," appearing in the 1832 edition of Affections Gift, is a sensitive study of one young woman, caught between her own needs and society's dictates. Josephine Vericour had "an ardent ambition to excel" in the painting of miniatures, but, as a true woman of her era, "was the victim of a painful and unconquerable timidity, and entire want of confidence in herself." Josephine could not believe herself capable of producing anything of value, and, indeed, the work she did under the scrutiny of her instructor proved to be quite mediocre. Then one night a miraculous event happens. When Josephine awakens, she finds the unfinished painting she had left on her easel transformed into a magnificent work of art. At first the startled young woman said or did nothing about this extraordinary occurence, but when, after arising

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71 Fanny Fern (Sarah Parton pseud.), Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of The Present Time (New York, 1855), 21; Mrs. S.S.B.K. Wood, Ferdinand and Elmira (Baltimore, 1809), 189.

on several subsequent mornings to discover that more of her own undistinguished miniatures had been changed into truly beautiful paintings, she decides to stay up one night and catch the artistic intruder who furtively worked in her bedroom each night. But when darkness gave way to dawn and no one appeared, the baffled and tired Josephine confided these mysterious incidents to her friend and begged that her schoolmate keep vigil the next night. The friend agreed, and the scene she witnessed astonished her: in the dead of night, Josephine, walking in her sleep, approached an incomplete canvas and worked with a proficiency and talent never displayed in public. With the first rays of morning, the young artist, finishing her work, crept back into bed and slept, having no awareness of the marvelous feat she accomplished. At first Josephine refuses to believe her friend's story, but finally, when convinced of its authenticity, she "made vigorous efforts to conquer her timidity in the presence of her master, and in. . .time she was able to paint as well under his inspection as she had done when alone and asleep in the gloom, of midnight."[72]

The story of Josephine Vericour seems to be no more than a charming tale of a gifted schoolgirl, but Eliza Leslie, author of "The Mysterious Picture," created this work by skillfully weaving together many strands of the separate ropes which bound her countrywomen. Josephine's master symbolized the antebellum male who watched, instructed, and inhibited

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72 Eliza Leslie, "The Mysterious Picture," Affection's Gift (1832), 208-221.

the talents and needs of women, while Josephine, the legitimate child of the woman-beau ideal, felt acute inferiority.

Although wishing to excel in a loved activity, she could not perform well in her teacher's presence, for she knew that when a woman displayed genius, or even real talent, she evoked scorn and contempt. Her artistic impulses, unable to be denied, manifested themselves in such a manner that they neither brought credit to Josephine nor enhanced her self-image. Yet Miss Leslie implies that if woman could somehow be numbed or made impervious to the prohibitions against her intellectual or creative abilities, the talents, long stifled, circumscribed, and lying fallow, would surely burst forth. Ironically then, somnambulism aroused Josephine's dormant skills, allowing her to realize her potential without incurring the animosity of others. Confronted with the reality of her achievement, she was able to develop a sense of self-assurance that would make her immune to society's disapproval. But most of Josephine Vericour's living counterparts did not share this good fortune and passed their lives unfulfilled and unhappy. Predictably, fiction written by women reflected the reality of feminine sorrow.

"Ah! Could we lay bare the secret history of many a wife's heart, what martyrs would be found, over whose uncomplaining lips the grave sets its unbroken seal of silence," wrote Fanny Fern in Ruth Hall, while Isabella of the Lofty and Lowly lamented: "(S)uch is the heroism often demanded

of woman-the heroism of the martyr not the soldier." Jane Harwood, a character in the novel The Intemperate and the Reformed which appeared in 1843, had "woven the tendrils of her soul around many props. Each revolving year renders their support more necessary. They cannot waver or warp or break, but she must tremble and bleed." Eliza of The Gamesters asked her friend Amelia "(w)hy. . .did the God of nature endow us with such exquisite feelings, to have them so constantly wounded?"[73]

An admixture of hope, sadness, and resignation, woman's literary efforts vivify both her struggles for happiness and her ultimate defeat. "Let him be morose and dark, if he will; I will not follow his example. I will not be the slave of his mad caprices," proclaimed the recently married heroine of Ernest Linwood, but she had hardly uttered these determined words before an "angel, (appearing) over (her) right shoulder," whispered: "You will be the forebearing gentle wife who promised to endure all. . . ," thus reminding the misguided bride that women could not be resolute, but had to accomodate to their fate. The insistance upon acquiescence "had cost the woman's heart of Mrs. Marvyn some pangs," wrote Mrs. Stowe in The Minister's Wooing; yet, "after a few tremulous movements, the needle of her soul settled and her life-lot was accepted, (but) not as what she would like or could conceive. . . ." "The youthful bride" of another tale had "commenced her married

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73 Fern, p. 36; McIntosh I, 71; Lydia Sigourney, The Intemperate and the Reformer (Boston, 1843), p. 15; Warren, Gamesters, 287.

life with a determination to please her husband in everything -- her deportment, her apparel, and her housekeeping." But she soon discovered that although "Mr. Howard could blame he never praised." Helen wondered if her husband might be selfish but quickly reminded herself: "Men are used to authority, and are not aware what it oftentimes costs the subject. I suppose. . . they are all much alike."[74]

Mrs. C.E. Robert used her literary skill to ask readers of the Forget-Me-Not whether their "hearts" ever became "wearied with life (and) sigh(ed) for its rest," and apparently most women could easily identify with life's sorrow. Mrs. Montrose of Lofty and Lowly confessed: "My life for many years, has been a life purely of affections. I have read little, thought little, and felt -- oh how much!" In "A Simple Tale of Love," appearing in the 1848 edition of The Amaranth, Amalie Winters summarized the underlying questions of tormented feminine existence: "they ask themselves -- why was I loved, and why am I no longer loved? What availed the beatings of my heart, and my dreams of happiness?"[75]

Unable to answer these questions, women could neither identify the entangled roots of their unhappiness, nor articulate the complex causes of their sorrow. But woman's profound dissatisfaction with her life, blending with an intense craving

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74 Caroline Hentz, Ernest Linwood (Philadelphia, 1869), 327; Harriet Beecher Stowe, The Minister's Wooing (New York, 1859), 106; "The Palsied Heart," Evergreen (1850), 216.

75 Mrs. C.E. Roberts, "Sad Moments," Forget-Me-Not (1850), 79, McIntosh, I, 24; Amalie Winter, "A Simple Tale of Love," Amaranth (1848), 136.

for fulfillment, manifested itself in two distinct although related themes, masculine despotism and feminine potential, at once revealing the depths of her despair and the heights of her hope: "Women are abused all the world over," wrote Harriet Beecher Stowe in one of her novels, as her colleagues poured forth streams of literature depicting males grossly mistreating women.[76] As gamblers, alcoholics, philanderers, and even murderers, men paraded through female fiction: the embodiments of woman's long repressed anger. By consistently presenting men as villains, women writers could find some release for their stifled rage, while their position as authors enabled them to mold and determine masculine life, albeit only a fictitious existence. Symbolizing hostility, resentment, and the desire to control man's being as he controlled woman's, and perhaps also expressing the wish for retaliation, male characterization assumed a singularity that approached the stereotyped portrayal of antebellum woman.

"Oh, it is a terrible thing to be a drunkard's wife! How many thousands of virtuous and noble hearted women have perished in the agony of such a situation," sobbed Flora of Lydia Jane Pierson's tale, "The Wash-Woman's Story." Forced to work as a laundress to support her children, Flora tells her employer's two daughters that once she had been as "pale and delicate" as they, but she had been ruined by her husband's alcoholism. To her startled young listeners, Flora details a marriage of "hopeless and useless. . .pleadings, upbraidings,

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76 Stowe, Minister's, p. 70.

(and) reproofs" for which she received horrible "abuse (and). . . more frequent and prolonged desertion." Like Flora's husband, Edward Grey in a short story by Emma C. Einbury became "reckless alike of wife or children" when alcohol seized possession of his mind. Originally "a poor, but honest farmer," Mr. Grey became a drunkard, lost his farm, and moved his family to the city where "(t)hey were shut up in a close room, in one of those squalid haunts of misery and vice."[77]

Mrs. Phillipa W. Ball's "A Sketch," appearing in the Ladies' Garland in 1839, also told of domestic misery caused by a husband's perpetual intoxication. "The Wife," included in an 1841 edition of the Garland, leaves no doubt that the death of Helen Frankfort, a young and trusting bride, had been provoked by her husband's propensity to drink. Similarly, inebrity ruined a harmonious family in The Gamesters. When Anderson "returned from his midnight orgies, the amicable woman who had chosen him for a guide and protector was treated with scottish brutality. . .His home, his prattling infant, his domestic blessings, were turned into curses; and when insensibility had eradicated feeling, he beheld them with horror."[78]

Alcoholism did not provide the only obstacle to domestic tranquility: the kaleidoscopic antebellum era abounded with

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77 Lydia Jane Pierson, "The Wash-Woman's Story," Ladies' Garland (1849), 75; Emma C. Einbury, "Elsie Grey," American Juvenile Keepsake (1834), 31.

78 Phillipa W. Ball, "A Sketch," Ladies' Garland (1839), 225; "The Wife," Ladies' Garland (1841), 199; Warren, Gamesters, 277-280.

enticements to lure masculine attention and resources away from the family, and women writers frequently focused on speculation and gambling as productive of much feminine suffering. In "Straws of Destiny," contained in the Forget-Me-Not of 1850, Mrs. M.A. Felter related the history of a poor young woman: "(Her) story was a painful, but not uncommon one. Her father, involved in speculation, had lost every farthing of his large fortune, and had died from dejection and sorrow in consequence. Her mother had followed him, and left her an orphan, to struggle as best she might with bitter poverty."[79]

In 1839 the Baltimore Book told of Alice Howard's mother who "had lived to see her fortune dissipated by (her) husband." The tale of "Clara Howard" described how Charles squandered Clara's inheritance, for as soon as "he had again possession of money, his besetting demons tempted him and he resorted once more to his old haunts and his wife's fortune was, before many months had passed, in the hands of more expert gamesters than himself." The lust for money drove men to contemplate and to perpetuate demonic deeds as the story "Julia Nelson" demonstrates. In this tale by Maria Williams, appearing in the gift book, Amethyst, Tremone seduces Julia, but he soon squanders her wealth and "long(s) for the death of his innocent spouse, that by a union with the famous Madame A of immense estate, he might repair his fallen fortunes." As Tremone tries to murder the gentle

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79 Mrs. M.A. Felter, "Straws of Destiny," Forget-Me-Not (1850), 17.

Julia she begs for mercy, "but the monster's heart was steeled against pity."[80]

The villain, Tremone, is thwarted in his dasterdly act; Julia manages to escape destruction, but other heroines of woman's fiction did not have this happy fate. The pages of nineteenth century literature overflow with the sad tales of females forced to endure a destiny worse than physical death: the ruination of their reputation by callous and profligate men. In The Gamesters, "fiendlike Somerton, with hellish industry, plotted the destruction of Eliza." "No penitance, however exemplary and sincere, can meet acceptance at the world's tribunal, the wounds of female reputation admit no unitives and resist all healing application," wrote Caroline Warren in her novel. She urged: "Daughters of innocence! read in the following letter the sad story of Eliza, and steel your hearts to the arrows of love, which like the Parthian wound us as they fly."[81]

In the 1844 edition of the Rose, a woman tells of her "desertion and despair" after a romance with a man of wealth and family background. When, years later, she sees the immoral Mr. Davis again, she cries out: "In beggard and abandonment (I) reared the child (I) bore you." If women fell victim to reckless men, they could not be blamed, according

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80 Mary Hawthorne Reyburn, "Alice Howard," Baltimore Book (1839), 33-34; "Clara Howard," Ladies' Garland (1839), 281; Maria William, "Julia Nelson," Amethyst (1831), 264.

81 Warren, pp. 280-281.

to Mrs. D. Clarke, author of "Grace Brown," as society pardoned males' unscrupulous behavior and made it impossible for women to know a man's true character.[82] Grace of Mrs. Clarke's story refused to believe that a young man whose love she sought "was wild and fickle" because people "were always ready to welcome him to their own homes." But women married to "profligate men" could have no delusions about their husband's conduct and often had positive proof of their infidelity. Louisa H. Sheridan's "The Jilt" asserted that "(w)omen, though painfully convinced that their husbands have long ceased to care for them, experience fresh pain or mortification at each... instance of their wandering. . .attention," while wives in other tales had to contend with an even more base humiliation: Mr. Hayman of the novel Constanta Neville orders his wife to nurse his illegitimate child, and similarly, Amelia Wood's heroine, Lady Stanley, is forced to accept and care for her husband's bastard offspring.[83]

To be sure, not all fictitious females found themselves married to alcoholics, gamblers, murderers, or philanderers. Many wed men free of these vices, but that in no way assured women of blissful lives. Indeed, stories which described unhappy marriages, proliferated. "He had been 'a brute of a

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82 An authoress, The Rose (1844), 42; Mrs. D. Clarke, "Grace Brown-- A Sketch for Mothers and Daughters," Forget-Me-Not (1850), 25.

83 Sheridan, p. 200; Helena Wells, Constanta Neville (London, 1800), I, 172; S.S.B.K. Wood, Amelia; or the Influence of Virtue (Portsmouth, 1802), 14.

husband' to the meekest and gentlest of wives, a harsh master in his household, and a tyrant to his child," wrote Camila Toulmin in "The Painter's Revealing." Chesebro reported that Mrs. Weld had been "mated, nay, united with a man who distrusted her, misunderstood her, and attempted. . .to control her by mere 'brute-blind force'." The mother, in "The Shoemaker's Daughter," had been "like her (daughter) having sacrificed every consideration to that of pleasing her husband who would not be pleased -- of making happy a man who would not be happy," whereas Mr. Callendar of "The Young Devotee," had "no toleration, even of slight imperfections, and he was. . .more apt to blame than to praise, even the praiseworthy."[84]

Mrs. Latham, in a story appearing in the Ladies' Casket of 1848, "had a great many trials. . .she had a multitude of thorns in her flesh, which prickled and tormented her continually, and one was. . .the fact that she was so scrimped for money by her avaricious husband." The American Keepsake carried the woes of a young woman who asked her husband's assistance in a difficult matter, and was all but ignored. "This was about the extent of aid I ever received from my husband in any of my domestic difficulties," she complained.

Catharine Beecher asserted that she had a "tale of very homely grievances to present, but such as they are, many a heart will feel them to be heavy -- the trials of a housekeeper." "Poh! says one of the lords of creation taking a

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84 Camila Toulmin, "The Painter's Revealing," Amaranth (1848), 88; Chesebro', p. 227; "The Shoemaker's Daughter," Amaranth (1854), 128; "The Young Devotee," The Coral (184?), 106.

cigar from his mouth," continued Miss Beecher, imagining male response, "What a fuss these women make of this simple matter of managing a family." Yet, according to female authors, women's complaints were abundantly justified. In Married or Single?, Grace asked her friend: "Tell me, honestly, Eleanor, do you really think that your husband had any right to speak pettishly to you, because his pocket-handkerchiefs were not where his lordship expected to find them? to flout you, because your laundress happened to put too much starch in his shirts? or to make you wait an hour for your dinner, with more discourtesy than he would have used toward the keeper of a lodging-house?"[85]

Women, dominated and maltreated by men, furnished the motif for countless stories. Simultaneously with the theme of masculine villainy, another current of thought arose from the embers of woman's sorrow and circulated through the fiction written by Jacksonian females. Igniting feminine imagination with the glorious potentialities of women, these literary flashes of insight enabled writers to express cherished dreams for their sex, and provided antebellum females with role models from fiction which society had consistently denied them. Stories describing women of courage, creativity, and strength took their place beside the tales of male scoundrels: the one representing woman's despondency; the other symbolizing her hidden hopes.

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85 B.H.S., "The Troubler of his Own House," Ladies' Casket (1848), 99; "My Borrowing Neighbor," American Keepsake (1851), 130; Miss Beecher, "Trials of a Housekeeper," Ladies' Garland (1841), 285; Sedgwick, Married, I, 153.

A single narrative often contained both themes, as male abuse offered women an opportunity to demonstrate fortitude and perseverance; "The Wife's Promise," by Mrs. Lydia Jane Pierson, combined these two subjects. "Did you not promise in the presence of God to obey me? Cried a furious husband to his pale trembling wife." "Dear husband do not strike me. . .," replied the frightened wife to her husband, John Evans. Evans, a tyrant of the domestic realm, attempting to threaten his wife into submission, condescendingly informed her: "Let me tell you, Madam, that a wife is by the laws held in all respects in subjection," and jeeringly asked: "(W)as not woman made for man?" Yet, Mrs. Evans does not demurely accept this treatment. She boldly declares: "I do not contend about the laws that were framed by men, and we know that since the world began, the strong have oppressed the weak and deemed all resistance treason. . .The framers of the marriage act were men also -- fallible men. I know that all our laws bind women down to slavery."[86]

In a "Sketch from Real Life," written by Maria for the 1826 issue of the Forget-Me-Not, unsuspecting Rosalie married Edgar Mandlebert and bears him a son before discovering that he is already married. But Rosalie knew "she did not merit her bitter fate" and refused to think of herself as a social misfit. Determined to manage without a husband, she worked long hours and "was rewarded with health, peace and cheerfulness."

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86 Mrs. Lydia Jane Pierson, "The Wife's Promise," Ladies' Garland (1839), 196.

The "Widow's Daughter," appearing in the Amaranth, also details the achievements of an audacious young woman, Eva Mortan, who manages by "the mighty force of will," to support her family after her father's suicide. Similarly, Elsie Grey shows her resolution and courage when her father's alcoholism leaves the family destitute. For "it was entirely owing to the constant exertions of the little girl, that the whole family were preserved from starvation."[87]

Woman's determination provided the material for numerous stories. Some, with minimal plots, seem to have been written to furnish a background upon which to display feminine achievement. "Nature had bestowed on Josephine industry and capacity," and she yearned to demonstrate her abilities. "Unalterably convinced" that her talents would receive wider recognition in a city, "she precipitately abandoned the country, bending her steps towards Philadelphia. Some months have now elapsed since her arrival," reported the narrator, who called herself "a lady of Philadelphia," "and the history of each day fortifies her resolution to remain, for it is generally admitted that her school for embroidering lace and painting velvet is unrivalled." Some women worked because they wanted to, others because they had to, but in this fantasy world all met with success. In "Straws of Destiny," a poor orphaned girl works for a picture-framer in a large city. The hours are long and the pay scanty, but the tale ends happily for "her proud

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87 Maria, "Sketch from Real Life," Forget-Me-Not (1826), 335; Eliza Walker, "Widow's Daughter," Amaranth (1847), 279; Emma C. Einbury, "Elsie Grey," p. 31.

spirit scorned dependence and she preferred to gain the means of maintenance by her own exertions. She remained true to herself; she. . .had wrought out her true destiny."[88]

Capable, imaginative, and successful, the women of this body of fiction, played an active role in shaping their lives and in deciding upon behavior appropriate to their skills and needs. When Elsie's father is cajoled into commiting a forgery, the remarkable young woman goes with him to trial. Fully convinced that her father acted against his will, Elsie travels to Albany by herself and through her persuasive arguments procures a pardon from the governor. Ellen, the courageous orphan of another tale, becomes determined to locate her lover, a soldier in the Continental Army. "She conceived the design of adopting a disguise and travelling on foot to the Capital. No suggestion of danger could shake the resolution of the heroic girl," who at age seventeen set out from Germantown to Philadelphia through "scattered parties of British troops. . ."[89]

Madame Albert of "The Industrious Daughters," also demonstrates firmness and determination by refusing to yield to her husband's wishes when she believes him to be wrong. Although married to "one of the richest merchants in Paris," Madame Albert thought that the "most precious legacy a mother can bequeath, and one that will, under every circumstance,

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88 A Lady of Philadelphia, "Josephine," Forget-Me-Not (1828), 175; Mrs. M.A. Felter, "Straws," p. 17.

89 Einbury, "Elsie Grey," p. 85; Eliza McNulty, Forget-Me-Not (1846), 245.

contribute to the happiness of her daughters is the inestimable advantage of being able to procure their own maintenance, and thus to bear up against the reverses of fortune. . . ." Accordingly, the wise women asserts that "mere ornamental accomplishments are not sufficient; mothers must have the resolution to have each of their children. . .instructed in some useful trade." Monsieur Albert, unalterably opposed to his wife's plan of education, claims it would be "humiliating" to have his daughters learn to trade. Yet, the immovable Madame Albert persists in her design. Her daughters each gain competence in a useful skill, and as they do not need the money their labors earn, they distribute it to the poor. Hence they win community recognition for their generosity.[90]

In "Cousin Lucy," an imaginative young step-mother dons a disguise to help her stepson overcome his father's objections to his marrying a woman of the "mechanic class." Using her ingenuity and refusing to listen to the husband's intolerance, Margaret follows her own conscience, and resolves the family dispute. Her husband, upon learning of the scheme, remarks: "As my wife was. . .the instigator of this plot against my pride and prejudice, and as it has been so successful and happy in its issue, I must pardon the aiders and abettors as well as the chief conspirator herself - - Ah! My sweet Margaret." While the resourceful stepmother ultimately wins her husband's approval, the heroine of Mrs. Shelley's tale,

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90 "The Industrious Daughters," The Rose (1840), 140-145.

"The Parvenue," does not. In this story, published in the Amaranth of 1848, a poor woman marries Lord Reginald. She is repelled by the extravagance of wealth, and, refusing to spend money on clothing, distributes it to the needy. She knew that these actions would bring her rebuke, for she had been taught that "to please (her) husband and do honor to his rank, was (her) first duty." Nevertheless, she continues to follow her own impulses, and by sharing her riches with her parents, and with other impoverished citizens, she incurs her husband's wrath, but feels secure in the justness of her course.[91]

Women writers believed that females should confidently defend the wisdom of their decisions, even when confronted by male opposition, because the sex possessed both the knowledge and intelligence to determine approrpiate actions. And, woman's intellectual interests and abilities captured frequent literary attention. The hero of "The March of Mind - A Fragment of Fact," has quite a surprise when he visits some women friends in the hope of hearing some "unadulterated feminine nonsense." To his astonishment, he relates: "I peeped over Millicent's shoulder, hoping to find the book in her hand (to be) the last new novel, I found her examining the notes she had taken of a chemical lecture." Eleanor of Married or Single? had an important virtue that "was not merely feminine endurance. She relieved her husband of the drudgery of his researches and often aided him with suggestions of her sound

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91 "Cousin Lucy," Amaranth (1854), 248; Mrs. Shelly, "The Parvenue," Amaranth (1848), 266.

judgment," while Katy, in The Minister's Wooing, "was first to be consulted in all matters relating to the well-being of the church. No woman could more manfully breast a long sermon, or bring a more determined faith to the reception of a difficult doctrine." In "The Murdered Traveller," a woman uses her incisive mind to detect the murderer of her fiance, and the daily governess, a character in a story appearing in The Keepsake, managed to teach a great many subjects although her mother, "an officer's widow," "could not spend a great deal" on her education.[92]

Examples of feminine intellect studded the pages of women's magazines and gift books. But few females of literature enjoyed such glowing accolades as Beulah received when she delivered her school's commencement address. This heroine of a novel by Mrs. Augusta Evans "ascended the platform, and surrounded by men signalized by scholarship and venerable from age,. . .she began her address. The theme was "Female Heroism,' and. . .she sought among the dusty annals of the past for instances in confirmation of her predicate, that female intellect was capable of the most exalted attainments,. . . The reasoning was singularly forcible, the imagery glowing and gorgeous, and occasional passages of exquisite pathos drew tears

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92 Mrs. C. Gilman, "The Marchof Mind," The Gift (1847), 199; Sedgwick, Married,I, 89; Stowe, Minister's, 56; Mrs. Emiline Smith, Forget-Me-Not (1850), 65; Mrs. S.E. Hall, "The Daily Governess," The Keepsake (1845), 57.

from her fascinated audience, while more than once, a beautiful burst of enthusiasm was received with flattering applause."[93]

Woman's intellectual might was equalled by her physical strength: nineteenth century female literary characters demonstrated phenomenal endurance and energy as they accomplished their numerous chores. Fleda, of Susan B. Warner's popular novel Queechy cheerfully did the work of three hired men as well as teach, nurse, and cook. She arose before dawn to do the chores and tend the livestock; yet, found time before breakfact to study the latest agricultural methods. Through her efforts she transformed a run-down farm into a model of agricultural excellence. The produce from her truck garden commanded the highest prices at market, and her new method of haying resulted in the banner crop of the year. Additionally, she cared for numerous guests, revivied the ailing health of her family, and found time to read extensively.[94]

Mrs. Stowe's Katy "could harness a chaise, or row a boat; she could saddle and ride a horse; she could cut any garment that ever was seen or thought of; make jelly, cake, and wine," Ellen, in The Wide Wide World, the first book by an American author to sell over a million copies, had to perform nurmerous errands for her grandmother, then "had to go up to wait upon her Aunt; after which she went into the buttery and skimmed the cream, and got the pans ready for the evening milk. By this time it was five o'clock, and Nancy came in with the

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93 Augusta Evans, Beulah (New York, 1860), 170.

94 Warner, Queechy.

basket of dry clothes, at which Ellen looked with sorrowful consciousness that they must be sprinkled and folded. . .and ironed to-morrow." One might well imagine that such an active schedule left no room for other activities, but apparently Ellen found the time to study, for one of her friends reported: "Mamma, (Ellen) beats me entirely in speaking French, and she knows all about English history and arithmetic." "She spins, she knits, she feeds the poultry, weeds the garden, makes all (the) clothes, helps. . .at. . .lessons, and in the evenings leads her poor blind parents through the green lanes," wrote Mrs. Hale of Mary. Mary's woeful tale became familiar to readers of the 1842 edition of the Rose, and her miraculous endurance placed her among those extraordinary feminine literary creations of woman's imagination.[95]

Fictitious women, infused with energy, vitality, strength, ambition, and intiative, projected a vision of feminine capability quite unlike the prevailing images of womanhood. For these creatures of literature abounded with qualities the male sex allegedly held in monopolistic possession. By endowing their women characters with traditional masculine traits, female writers fashioned heroines from their unfulfilled drives, their unspoken aspirations for themselves and other women, and their beliefs in the unrecognized potential of their sex. By controlling and molding the context in which their protagonists

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95 Stowe, Minister's, p. 4; Susan Warner, Wide, Wide World (New York, 1853), II, 91-92, 152; Mrs. C. Hale, "Mary Grey," The Rose (1842), 12.

lived, authors implicitly expressed their conviction that, in a different, more just social setting, woman would be allowed to demonstrate her abilities. Through their females of fiction, women writers could verbalize thoughts they themselves dared not utter, achieve feats they could never accomplish, and enjoy a freedom which their society had consistently forbidden. Yet simultaneously they avoided the painful consequences that these bold endeavors would have ineluctably brought them in the real world of nineteenth century America. At the same time, their persistent characterization of the male as villain alleviated, to some extent, their feelings of hostility and sense of injustice. And their countless vignettes of woman struggling against the privations of her life enabled authors to articulate and acknowledge the conflicts of their own existence.

The abundance of literature written by nineteenth century women, a complex fusion of fantasy and reality, formed mosaics of anger, sorrow, resignation, and yearning within the tight pattern of feminine oppression. It emerged as yet another reaction to the tensions and contradictions inherent in the womanhood myths. But unlike illness and diary writing, both of which remained as essentially isolated and private manifestations of unhappiness, the incredible outpouring of fiction, occupying the idle hours of multitudes of educated women, undoubtedly affected its readers. The nature and extent of the response, however, among literate women of leisure is problematic. Tales of courageous, accomplished females may have encouraged

some to become more assertive, but most women, vicariously enjoying their heroine's successes, or empathetically weeping over her hardships, found compensations and outlets in fiction for personal sorrow and frustration and did nothing to improve their own lives.

Yet, the intense impulse to share feelings, ideas, and thoughts, the craving to resolve conflicts, the need to find the person, the sense of self, amidst confusion and emptiness which were revealed in illness and in different forms of feminine writing, could not be quelled. These exploded into networks of female voluntary associations in cities across the nation. For in the pulsating dynamicism of the urban milieu, women found a profound form of communication, a potent means of expression, and a compelling purpose for their energies. They eventually gained an awareness of the depth, subtleness, and pervasiveness of their oppression. Through female benevolent societies, women slowly and painfully comprehended the meaning of their collective experiences. They hesitantly began to claim possession of their own lives, began to determine what their duties and responsibilities were to themselves, to other women, and to society. They began to apperceive women as autonomous beings, complex and different from each other, but alike in that they shared an essential humanity so long denied them.

Ironically, then, the intricate urban collage, generating the masculine insecurity, tension, and anxiety which had

coalesced into a stagnant, monolithic philosophy of womanhood, also impelled upper and middle-class women first to identify, but later to challenge and defy the castigating, constricting, and conflicting tenets of the woman-beau ideal.

CHAPTER VIII

ASSOCIATION

Association makes the whole
world kin:
O'er laping time and space, its
magic powers
Can bring the future and the past
within
The scope and feeling of the present
hour

Association
author unknown

Woman will learn the power of association and she will learn the value of herself...

Working Women's Protective
Union 1863

Like waves that surged forth in full flood, female benevolent societies battered the sluice gate of the woman-beau ideal as they covered the cities of antebellum America. Shaped by the complex synthesis of life in the urban milieu, which called forth a multitude of diverse organizations, woman's voluntary associations arose in response to intricate, intermingling personal needs and social demands. Through organization, generations of upper- and middle-class women, confronting and evaluating their lives, created a vibrant feminist ideology which, in turn, sparked the demand for woman's rights in the United States.

Voluntary organizations proliferated throughout the first part of the nineteenth century. Alexis de Tocqueville, noting the immense variety of associations, "political," "commercial," "manufacturing," "religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive," offered an explanation of their origin: "Amongst democratic nations. . . all the citizens are independent and feeble; they can hardly do anything by themselves and none of them can oblige his fellowmen to lend him their assistance. They all, therefore, become powerless, if they do not learn voluntarily to help each other."[1] The French reformer found the impulse to organize within the

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1 Tocqueville, pp. 106-110.

American political system, but twentieth century writers, focusing more narrowly on urban charitable societies, have interpreted the plethora of associations during the Jacksonian era differently.

Some scholars, emphasizing the potential effectiveness of charitable associations in assimilation and acculturation, have viewed organized benevolence largely as a response to an unstable and threatening social context. As the combined impact of rampant immigration, rapid urbanization, and accelerated industrialization radically transformed the texture of urban life, the established institutions no longer served to integrate and regulate the growing community. Voluntary societies became a means by which the "wealthy and respectable old town [could] absorb and digest its chaotic and dangerous environment, to inculcate the entire city population with its attitudes and values."

Raymond Mohl stated in Poverty in New York 1783-1825 that "charity and benevolence [were]. . .important agents of social and moral stewardship." With harmony and docility as their paramount concerns, "middle class men and women consciously promoted moral reformation and religious indoctrination as a method of restoring order and stability to the urban community."[2] Authors accentuating the integrative, socializing, indoctrinating aspects of charitable work have tended to stress the value of evangelicalism in maintaining social control. Clifford Griffin, author of Their Brother's Keeper, believed that "[r]eligion and morality as dispensed by the benevolent societies throughout

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2 Charles Foster, An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front 1790-1837 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960) p. 138; Mohl, pp. 135, 170.

the seemingly chaotic nation became a means of establishing secular order," for "some [nineteenth century Americans] believed the spread of the Protestant gospel and the pervasive influence of Protestant morality would not only save the souls of their fellow citizens, but would restore, to men and to society, stability, and order, sobriety and safety."

Predictably, this concept of "moral stewardship" sparked divergent opinions. In Revivalism and Social Reform, Timothy L. Smith argued that evangelists and perfectionists led the way in both expounding and applying the doctrine of Christian responsibility to the poor, which emanated "from the zeal and compassion which the mid-century revivalists awakened for sinning and suffering men," and did not arise from the need for social control. Similarly, Carroll Smith Rosenberg, author of Religion and the Rise of the American City, The New York City Mission Movement 1812-1870 wrote that social welfare agencies "saw religion as a principal impetus toward respectable self sufficiency for the poor." Urban benevolent societies "did not develop solely or even primarily because of the alarming growth of urban problems. . .[but] such works were the product of an optimistic, truly 'Jacksonian' belief in the perfectability of man."[3]

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3 Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 12, 148-204; Carroll Smith Rosenberg, Religion and the Rise of the American City. The New York City Mission Movement 1812-1870 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971) pp. 8, 178.

Social control and religion afford persuasive arguments for understanding nineteenth century voluntarism. Undoubtedly the desire to maintain a stable, graded society based upon the acceptance of traditional patterns of deference and morality, as well as the sincere conviction that eternal life was the best gift to be given to the poor each provided important sources of inspiration for the formation of benevolent organizations. Yet, an intensive study of more than one hundred fifty female associations in American cities during the period from 1800-1860 reveals that neither of these interpretations is adequate to explain the incredible outpouring and channeling of feminine energy into female societies.

Although Raymond Mohl's study is not directed primarily toward women's groups, he considers them to have been motivated by the same attitudes as men's organizations. To substantiate this interpretation, Mohl notes that several charities conducted by women imposed restrictions on the recipients of their benefaction. The Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, for example, would not aid a woman unless the managers of the organization had evidence of the husband's death or proof of at least twelve months' absence from home. Moreover, a widow could be removed from the pension list for "intemperance" or "immorality."[4] Finding evidence of social control in the insistance upon these and other similar regulations, Raymond Mohl asserts that "the Society of Relief of

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4 Mohl, p. 149; Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children (SRPW) Constitution and By-Laws (1803) 5.

Poor Widows mirrored contemporary currents of urban philosophy." There are, however, other explanations for the deliberate distinctions made among the Society's beneficiaries. The managers repeatedly defend and lament the need to limit the recipients because of a lack of funds. In one report, written in 1816, they note that "at present" they are giving alms to "202 widows and 500 children." "[By] allowing only 3 dollars a month for 6 months the sum is $3,636," and this expenditure did not reflect the Society's policy of providing unlimited assistance during periods of illness. The managers worried that they could not meet their obligations, and the statements of other female associations reflect similar financial shortages which required the members to restrict their charity.[5]

Nevertheless, even acknowledging that women's charities could not afford to aid all the indigent females in their respective cities, one might reasonably question whether the criteria used to deny aid to potential recipients did not imply a condescendingly moral judgment that some women deserved assistance more than others. While it is true that many female voluntary associations in the first few decades of the nineteenth century stipulated that their bounties be bestowed upon "respectable women," or "females of fair character," it is by no means certain that these rules evolved from the wish to

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5 Mohl, pp. 148-150; SRPW Annual Report (1816).

impose order upon potentially unruly segments of the population.[6] The lives of the women who worked as members, and managers, and officers of the early female societies had been molded by the precepts of the woman-beau ideal. Their entire identity and sense of themselves and of other women had been shaped by a philosophy which insisted that only one kind of woman existed. Taught from childhood that a female's only worth came from her purity, piety, docility, domesticity, and willingness to sacrifice for her male relations, the upper- and middle-class women who pioneered in organized benevolence could not easily relate to females who seemed so grossly different from themselves: women alcoholics, prostitutes and criminals, and women born into poverty, all appeared so alien, so beyond the realm of comprehension that they could hardly be considered women. Indeed reports of the early societies often emphasized that the "widows," or "aged, indigent females" had once been comfortable economically, but now, left alone without resources, they required support.

Practical considerations also directed feminine attention to the most acceptable group of females on the fringes of society. Knowing their unprecedented activities would call forth hostility, derision, and scorn, women in early voluntary associations aided the least "socially offensive" members of

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6 SRPW By-Laws (1803); By-laws and Regulations of the SRPW (New York: J. Seymour, 1811); Regulations of the New York Asylum for Lying-in Women, quoted in Henry Cammann and Hugh Camp, The Charities of New York, Brooklyn, and Staten Island (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1868) p. 409.

their sex. This pragmatic decision made it possible for their followers to pursue wider and more audacious schemes of benevolence. Raymond Mohl's analysis ends in 1825, but had he continued his study he would have found that as women, fortified by courage and confidence, absorbed the lessons of urban life and came to recognize and respect the diversity of their sex, they willingly reached out to women so entirely different from themselves that the only bond between them lay in the common denomination of their sexual gender.

If, then, the kind of woman assisted by the early female voluntary societies does not of itself imply that the principles of moral stewardship impelled upper- and middle-class women into charitable work, neither do the activities and attitudes described and reflected in the reports and chronicles of the scores of female societies flourishing in the first part of the nineteenth century. Not only do the extant records of these organizations fail to disclose any significant social control motivation, but examples abound of women risking their person, property, and reputation to assist the less fortunate members of their sex. The documents give ample evidence that theories which postulate that the established classes in American cities consciously used organized benevolence as the vehicle through which to impose their vision of society on the urban masses, although possibly applicable to male organizations, has little relevance to the female voluntary associations which flourished between the years 1800 and 1860.

The impetus for women to form societies dedicated to helping other females flowed from many sources, and religion, though an ingredient in the complex blend of motivation, can scarcely be considered the dominant stimulus. Historians who have viewed religious enthusiasm as the impulse for organized benevolence have emphasized the clerical support given to some urban charities, argued that the language and style of antebellum philanthropic associations reflected deep and sincere piety, and noted the impact of the Second Great Awakening on the nation's cities.[7] The religious argument appears to have a certain cogency. Yet, when one tries to explain the rise of female voluntary societies within the context of pious fervor, flaws in the interpretation become readily apparent. These invite further investigation into the relationship between religion and feminine urban philanthropy, leading one to question whether religiousity and clerical persuasion actually hastened women into benevolent associations.

Numerous clergymen commented on the propriety of feminine societies, and their remarks tell much about the nature of charitable work they considered appropriate for the "fair sex." Some religious leaders, particularly those of the traditional denominations, vehemently opposed woman's involvement in any organization as it meant "laying aside the delicacy. . . and decorum which can never be violated without the most corrupting effects on themselves and public morals."

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7 Smith, pp. 135-178; Rosenberg, pp. 277-280.

Bishop Hobart of New York believed that the "progress of female demoralization amongst that portion of the sex which has fallen prey to Bible Society beguilements could . . .be traced by [any] one who had the daily registers of the period within his reach. . . ." Another minister condemned woman "when impatient of her proper sphere. . . and forsaking the domestic hearth, her delicate voice is heard from house to house. . .expecting to put down every real or supposed evil. . .by the right arm of female power and clamorous for the organization of a female society for this specific object." Reverend Winslow criticized women "when they travel about from place to place as lecturers, teachers and guides to public sentiment; when they assemble in conventions to discuss. . .gravely declaring their own judgment. . . when they attempt the reformation of morals by engaging in free conversation and discussion upon those things of which the apostle says it is a shame even to speak. . . ."[8]

Other clergymen accepted the formation of feminine societies but tempered their approval with large doses of caution. An article appearing in The Panoplist for 1816 advised a secretary of a Female Cent Society on behavior appropriate for women: "It is very important to adhere strictly to the Holy Scriptures," the author wrote as he reminded females of the

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8 Quoted in Foster, p. 94; William Jay, A Letter to the Right Reverend Bishop Hobart Occasioned by the Strictures on Bible Societies Contained in his late Charge to the Convention of N.Y. (New York: John P. Haven, 1823) p. 74; Also see: William Jay, A Letter to the Right Rev. Bishop Hobart in Reply to the Pamphlet Addressed By Him to the Author, under the signature of corrector (New York: John P. Haven, 1823); Winslow, p. 14.

apostolical prohibitions on feminine conduct. Nevertheless, although women could not "set themselves up as public teachers, and [take] the lead in religious exercises, and in other important discussions, and so [usurp] authority over man," the writer thought it acceptable for "a few females assembled in private. . . to meet together for prayer." Rev. J. K. Brownson, addressing the "Young Ladies of Oakland Female Seminary," admonished his audience that "the proper dignity of woman consists not in aspiring to. . .wield the reforms of the day. Ambition for this in the female sex is preposterous." Brownson asserted that women had a role in "promoting the great moral reforms of the day, but not to lead and guide them."[9]

Religious leaders who thought female associations admissible generally agreed that women could enter benevolent work as long as they diligently conformed to the principles of the woman-beau ideal. Reiterating the attributes of the quintessential female, clergymen addressed women's societies, instructing their members on the limitations of both feminine prerogative and behavior. Reverend Moses, speaking before the Salem Female Charitable Society, announced his belief that "the management of funds" lay beyond the proper sphere of women and that "the aid of men who are skilled in these matters [should]. . .be. . . procured." Some clergymen viewed woman's charitable

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9 "Answer to a letter from the Secretary of a Female Cent Society" The Panoplist XII (1816) 256-260; Rev. J. K. Brownson, "Address to the Young Ladies of the Oakland Female Seminary, Ladies' Repository V (1845) 162.

involvement merely as a stage for the display of traditional female attributes. Samuel Miller, in a sermon preached before the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows, asked rhetorically: "What though females cannot stand in the sacred Desk, nor sit on the Bench of Justice? What though they cannot be employed in framing laws, nor in conducting diplomatic missions, nor in organizing or governing nations?. . ." "Here is surely enough to excite all ambition [for] it is in the power of women, by constantly exhibiting the dignity of virtue, and the attractions of piety, to repress. . .impertinence. . .It is in the power of women, by example and by precept to regulate at pleasure the decorums of dress, the purity of manners. . . ."[10]

While speaking before women's voluntary associations, ministers sometimes discoursed upon the female role in spreading the Holy Gospel, and again these clerical directives closely followed the dominant nineteenth century thinking on womanhood. Reverend Samuel Worchester told a group of women in Massachusetts that those "who hold the interesting situation of mothers of families, may shew [sic] their love to Christ, and render him service and assistance, by making it their care that their children should be His." "As a mistress of a family, as a wife, and as a mother, a woman may render essential service to the church of God. Who can do as much as she in regulating

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10 Stuart Moses, Sermon delivered by the Request of the Female Charitable Society in Salem at the Anniversary (1815) 19; Samuel Miller, A Sermon preached March 13, 1808 for the Benefit of the City of New York for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children (New York: 1803) 18-21.

the concerns of her house, so that they shall not interfere with seasons of family worship?" asked Rev. Matthew La Rue Perrine in a sermon delivered at the first annual meeting of the Female Mission Society for the Poor in New York City on May 12, 1817. Insisting that women could make some contribution "however limited the circle in which they moved," and that "[k]nowing that her true dignity and usefulness consist in filling that station marked out for her by the God of nature and of grace," Perrine claimed "she is satisfied in being an assistant of man," for "there is not one among us who feels disposed to indulge the thought that the duties of women in the Church of God are. . .the same as those of men." Yet, women "may. . . form associations among themselves to support men who are spending their time, their talents in evangelizing the poor,. . . [and] it will become the present members of this Society to exhibit a pattern of Christian modesty, meekness, submission. . . [as] that modesty, meekness and submission, which are the ornament of your sex, must be observed, and must shine in all your deliberations, resolutions, and actions."[11]

The ministers who agreed to address female societies were, no doubt, among those most in accord with the aims of feminine benevolent associations, and yet even these relatively sympathetic clergymen imposed rigid boundaries on the nature and

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11 Samuel Worchester, A Discourse Delivered in the Tabernacle in Salem Before the Salem Female Charitable Society at their Annual Meeting September 27, 1809 (1809), 7; Matthew La Rue Perrine, Women Have a Work to do in the House of God (New York, 1817) pp. 4-20.

extent of philanthropic activity a female could pursue. The sermons delivered before numerous women's societies indicate that, although religious leaders might accept, tolerate, or even endorse feminine organizations, in most instances they did not supply the impetus for their formation. As long as women remained docile, subservient, and unthreatening, doing nothing to disrupt the myth of the essential difference between male and female natures, the church, sincerely appreciating the willingness of women to give their time to religious endeavors, might make use of feminine energy. But it would not countenance any activity which caused woman to leave her "limited circle." Indeed, the pulpit refused to support those societies that it believed took her beyond the allocated sphere.

The repeated and specific strictures which the clergy stipulated for women's societies necessitate even further inquiry into the hypothesis that religion exercised the prevailing influence in the development of hundreds of female voluntary associations in American cities. Historians who articulate the religious argument have failed to differentiate between male and female societies, and have thus postulated a causal relationship between all organized urban benevolence and pietistic ardor. In her study of religion in New York City, Carroll Smith Rosenberg discusses the Female Missionary Society for the Poor of New York within the same context as two seemingly similar male associations. All founded in 1816, "these societies were an integral part of the Second Great Awakening's missionary and

millennial enthusiasm," writes Rosenberg; yet, the subsequent history of the Female Missionary Society must raise serious doubts about clerical endorsement of feminine philanthropy. In 1821, Reverend William Gray, addressing the organization's members, told of "the impression which has rested on the minds of many, that you had engaged in an enterprise beyond your appropriate sphere, . . .[for many] questioned the propriety of females managing in the capacity which this society has done." Reverend Gray continued to tell the women of the Female Mission Society that "the active management of [their] Institution has been wholly transferred from the hands of the Ladies into those of the Gentlemen." Although Gray believed that "[t]hese are certainly events of a promising character and appear well adapted to give strength and permanence to the mission," it is by no means certain that the women agreed, but, powerless to protest, they evidently complied with the clerical decision.[12]

Not all female societies, however, demurely accepted the treatment they received by the clergy. For numerous and complex reasons, the American Female Moral Reform Society strenuously resisted clerical objections to their work. Although this society and its programs will be examined in great detail in the following chapters, because Rosenberg includes it in her group of "New York's first three city missions" arising in response to the "phenomenon known as the Second Great Awakening,"

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12 Rosenberg, p. 54; Annual Report of the Female Missionary Society for the Poor of the City of New York and its Vicinity (1821) 5-9.

some preliminary remarks on its origins, aims and activities have relevance to the present discussion. A thorough analysis of the enterprises of the Female Moral Reform Society over a period of fifty years makes it difficult to accept the label of "city mission." To be sure, in the later years of the association, the members organized a directory to help poor women find work, established a Home for the Friendless, and became increasingly responsive to the problems of slum life, but these activities would seem to render the name "settlement house" more appropriate than "mission." Nor is it clear that the genesis for the Moral Reform Society lay in the enthusiasm of revivalism. Dedicated to abolishing the institution of prostitution, and to the ostracism of male profligates, the Society published a journal, the Advocate of Moral Reform, to assist in its campaign.

The early issues of the Advocate explained the association's inception: "This work must be begun with ladies. They are the injured, and they must rise and assert their rights. . .if licentious men are to be admitted into virtuous society we shall ask the same for licentious women. All we ask is equal privileges where there is equal guilt; we think our claim is righteous, and in this day of pleading for equal rights we trust it will be acknowledged." In the second volume of their journal, published in 1835, the women wrote that the "virtuous daughters of America ought to regard the existing state of licentiousness, systematized as it is in our cities. . .as a regular crusade against the sex, and they ought to rise in their own defense."[13]

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13 Rosenberg, pp. 4, 203-204; Advocate of Moral Reform I (Sept. 1, 1835) 72; Advocate (Jan. 1, 1835) 35.

Rather than being impelled to action by religious prodding, the Moral Reform Society repeatedly criticized religious leaders for impeding their cause. In the first volume of their paper they note that they applied to "six editors of religious journals in the city to publish circulars" and all but two refused. In a subsequent issue the Advocate carries the following indictment: "Yes, 'tis true that these heralds of the cross refuse to give publicity to a society of ladies (of course nothing political about it) engaged in saving the country and church from general prostitution. . . ." And, in an open letter to the famous revivalist minister, Lyman Beecher, they ask: "[I]f the cause of Moral Reform should fail, will it not be because the influence of such men. . .[as Rev. Beecher] is withheld?"[14]

Although the countless objections, "advanced either from the pulpit or in articles furnished by clergymen for. . . periodicals," that Moral Reform efforts "tend to debase and corrupt the mind, by the familiarity with vice which they necessarily occasion," make it difficult to accept the theory that this important woman's society, with hundreds of auxilliary branches throughout the nation, flourished because of evangelical enthusiasm, one cannot deny that religion played a part in organized benevolence. Many of the women active in charity work were deeply pious, and the rhetoric used in the publications

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14 Advocate (1835); Reprinted from the New England Spectator Advocate (Jan. 1, 1835) 4; Advocate (Sept. 1, 1835) 66.

of various associations may reflect a profound religious commitment which drove some women into charitable societies; yet, to view urban female philanthropy in the years after 1830 largely as a response to the Second Great Awakening, is to give too little attention to other components in the intricate mixture of motivation and too much prominence to religion.[15]

While a religious dimension did exist to feminine benevolence, the clergy stipulated an essentially limited role for women even in those societies dedicated to spreading the Gospel. The opposition from religious leaders to many significant feminine organizations, the proliferation of female voluntary societies in urban areas some thirty years before the Great Awakening, giving the later societies important models and precedents upon which to base their activities suggest that piety played a small part in organized philanthropy. Moreover, Harriet Martineau's provocative analysis that American women, lacking the requisites to study theology, did not understand religion but pursued it "as an occupation" which could furnish only "small results upon the conduct as well as upon the intellect," combining with the above qualifications, make it necessary to look beyond religious enthusiasm for an explanation of the network of woman's voluntary societies in the years between 1800 and 1860.[16]

The history of feminine charitable organizations in the United States, when studied within the context of the manner

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15 Advocate (1837) 340; See Rosenberg, p. 277.

16 Martineau, II, 157.

in which generations of women experienced and perceived their deteriorating status from the start of the colonial period to the early years of the nineteenth century, strongly suggests that the complicated dynamics of urbanization, responsible for the creation of the ethos of the woman-beau ideal, also became the unwitting midwife of female benevolent societies. Although responding to many of the same problems and pressures which called male associations into being, women's charities had a heritage uniquely their own and developed along lines quite distinct from their masculine counterparts. To a certain extent, both male and female associations reflected the stresses of the urban milieu, the acute sense of individual impotence to effect social change, the pervasive feelings of isolation, the decline of a cohesive community, the erosion of the family unit, and the confrontation with overwhelming poverty and desolation.

But the city, productive of so much insecurity, afforded the antebellum male the means by which he could sublimate his drives, search for identity and gain a sense of purpose and direction. Masculine attempts, however,to ease accommodation to perplexing social transition,diverting man's attention and energy from the home, made him fiercely competitive and intolerant of potential female contenders for his job. Male efforts to adjust to the city gave form to the paralyzing edicts of the woman-beau ideal and her handmaiden, the useless lady, worsening woman's social, economic, intellectual, and psychological condition and causing

the deleterious ramifications of urbanization to fall with a special severity upon the female sex.

The urban collage, then, presenting men with a complicated and confusing social context, also gave them numerous and diverse opportunities through which to find cohesiveness and companionship. Voluntary societies, whether political, occupational, or social, and whether offering mutual assistance, aid to the immigrant or philanthropy, while representing a pragmatic approach to urban problems and an efficient method of organizing opinion and affecting action, nevertheless comprised only one of many paths which the male city dweller could follow in his quest for community, purpose and personal identity. But the urban woman, substantially barred from all emotionally, intellectually or financially rewarding endeavor, had virtually no alternatives. She remained chained to a futile existence, fraught with profound conflicts. This manifested itself illness and in the proliferation of diaries and works of fiction. Finally her anguished search for fulfillment, woven into the variegated tapestry of the nineteenth century city, became fashioned into a design which joined woman creatively to her urban background through the emerging patterns of feminine benevolence.

As boredom, loneliness, and the craving for identity and meaning coalesced into a driving force, women founded networks of societies throughout urban America. The records of these associations reveal much of the motivation behind

their formation. "It is not to listen to beautiful theories or flowery paragraphs on education that these meetings take place.... The experience of one may when imparted be of service to many others; and the peculiar trials of one, will, when shared by a sister hand, be deprived of half their bitterness," proclaimed an article urging the formation of Maternal Associations. An essay appearing in the journal of a prominent women's society wrote of experiencing "Solitude in Cities" when "the sense of [isolation] settled down. . .as the clouds often seem to press the earth, making the air heavy, oppressive and stifling."

An address by the First Directress to the members of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows emphasized that the organization could be "very useful to those ladies who have sufficient health and leisure to engage in it. . . ," while a report of the Association for the Relief of Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females stressed the benefits that women received from their involvement with an association which enabled them to perform works of charity, but cautioned that, "as in the enjoyment of all other privileges, so it happens in this, that to taste the pleasure, . . . we must have a charity of a higher kind than that sickly sentimentalism which sighs in the parlour over pictures of ideal misery. Ours must be an active. . .benevolence. It will not do merely to weep over misfortune that is graced with the poetic embellishments of picturesque cottages and grass fields, the romantic abodes of innocence. We must have a kindness which is of a

sturdier growth; which can descend into the dwellings of misery as they abound in this city. . . ."[17]

Numerous publications of female societies advocated organized benevolence as the antidote for a tedious, useless existence. One paper quoted a woman as saying: " 'I should be thankful to know of some way in which I could employ my time and means for the benefit of some one.' " The author of the article recorded her astonishment at this remark: "And yet, within 3 minutes' walk from this lady's residence there were families suffering for the necessaries of life. Even within the Circle of her acquaintance were widows. . .laboring night and day, with the utmost energies of mind and body, for the support of helpless children, not only without aid, but uncheered by even a word or look of sympathy and encouragement. And this Christian lady. . . is languishing for the want of 'something to do!'" If women will be involved in these benevolent activities, "we shall be forever delivered from the fashionable ennui of 'nothing to do'."

In the short story, "A Cure of Low Spirits," Mary S. Graham described the "cloud upon [her] feelings;" "I could not smile. . . nor speak in a tone of cheerfulness," but when she visits a widow and sick child, "all changed." "Sympathy for others and active efforts to do others good, had expelled the. . .[low] spirits from my heart. . .and I sung cheerfully as I prepared. . .a basket of provisions for the poor widow." At a testimonial for a member of the Orphan Asylum Society, a co-worker asserted that a "well-spent life" of active benevolence should serve as an example to other females of

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17 Advocate (Apr. 1, 1840) 54; In 1847 the Society changed the name of its periodical to: the Advocate and Family Guardian (Advocate and Guardian) Advocate & Guardian (1859) 261; Address by the First Directress to the SRPW (November 19, 1812) ; Annual Report of the Association for the Relief of Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females (1828) 5.

"the various talents of wealth, of influence, and of leisure, [used]. . .for the end for which they were given.

Urging women into organized philanthropies, the printed material emanating from female voluntary associations sometimes callously mocked those women of leisure who shunned involvement in benevolence but just as often the material demonstrated great sensitivity to the difficulties confronting women who wanted to leave their appointed sphere. In one article satirizing "Aimless Lives," the writer queries: "My dear madam, what have you done to-day? You have been busy? Let me hear your work? You did not rise early, you had a headache?" While another essay, appearing in the same publication, claimed that women "would be glad to lift up their hands and do something, but the chains of custom and fashion are upon them. A false social position has made them timid and fearful. . . ." Yet, if feminine diffidence made some females reluctant to join an organization, the unremitting inner tensions drove others to become active in multitudes of associations dedicated to helping members of their sex.[19]

In one sense, then, feminine involvement in voluntary societies represented a multi-faceted quest for identity. In another, it comprised a realistic response to urban problems. The closeness of city living brought upper- and middle-class

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18 Advocate and Guardian (1858) 28; Annual Report of the New York City Orphan Asylum (1820) 109; Ladies' Wreath (1848-1849), III, 168.

19 Advocate and Guardian (1858) 270; Advocate and Guardian (1858) 218.

women into unavoidable contact with lower levels of society. Aged and indigent women, under-paid and sickly laborers, alcoholics, and prostitutes became blatantly visible; their presence disturbing, their needs compelling. An annual report of one society recorded that "in the latter part of the year 1813, a few ladies, moved with compassion, associated themselves for the purpose of relieving the necessities and distresses of aged females." Another organization asserted that the "social duties" of the "women of our city. . .lie among the population of the. . . city," for "New York City. . .is a great world of itself. . . . From year to year its teeming thousands multiply, and whatever may be found human suffering, sorrow and sin; of mental, moral, spiritual and physical necessities, to be considered and relieved almost any where upon the broad earth, may be seen, in some phase, within the precincts of this vast city."

Catherine Sedgwick, the author, who later became active in New York's charities, wrote to her sister of the "confusion and dismay" the economic reverses produced on "those who have been accustomed to live upon the fruit of their labors." Sarah Martyn, a leader in the Female Moral Reform Society, regarded New York as a "great city, . . .though [one] of the extremes which constantly meet and pain the eye, the extremes of princely magnificence and squalid penury, of reckless extravagance and abject want, nothing but actual observation can give even a faint impression."[20]

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20 Annual Report of the Association For Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females (1848) 1; Advocate and Guardian (1866) 317; Advocate and Guardian (1856) 83; Sedgwick, Life and Letters, p. 265; Mrs. Sarah Martyn "New York in the Olden Time" Ladies' Wreath (1847-1848), 285.

The Female Benevolent Society asserted that "[one] of the motives which led to the formation of the Society was the. . . wretched condition of thousands of abandoned females in the city of N-Y," and the reports of organizations from other developing urban areas reflect the same concerns. "Consider a moment some of the causes for such an association," advised a speaker before the Newburyport Orphan Asylum, founded by women in 1803. "It is well known that in populous maritime districts, a greater inequality prevails in the condition of the people, than in those of the same extent whose inhabitants subsist chiefly by agricultural pursuits," and these blatant social and economic disparities necessitated concerted action on the part of the female sex. Noting that "it is not the duty only of large cities to provide for the destitute sufferer," the members of the Newburyport Orphan Asylum agreed that the "HONOR of the TOWN requires it," particularly as the "neighboring towns of Salem and Portsmouth, to the time of their last printed reports have furnished worthy examples" of feminine benevolence.[21]

The women of Newburyport did indeed have strong competition from feminine populations of other large towns and cities; impressed with the responsibilities of urban life, females founded a myriad of benevolent associations. The members of the Female Charitable Society in Salem believed that city dwellers had a responsibility to help one another, for

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21 Annual Report of the New York Female Benevolent Society (1832) 2; Newburyport Orphan Asylum, A Plea for the Orphan, delivered on the anniversary of the Female Charitable Society, May 21, 1822. (Newburyport, 1822) p. 25.

the poor must derive some advantage from where they live or "they would experience the same inconveniences and privations when living in the crowded city as in the depths of the forest." The women who established the Orphan Asylum of New York thought their work had a special urgency because "the subjects of misfortune and misery multiply in large commercial towns." An 1821 report of the Boston Female Refuge recorded that "cities swarm with a mixed population, instances of poverty, [and] distress. . .meet the eye." The volunteers of the Female Benevolent Society of New York perceived their work as necessary because of the "gross dangers" the "friendless and unprotected female" is exposed to in large cities, and they proclaimed: "[W]ho can question the necessity of establishing and supporting institutions for the special and exclusive benefit of the female outcast! Of this class there are hundreds in our opulent and populous cities. . . ." In Troy, New York, a group of women instituted an orphan asylum "to afford assistance to indigent women and children. . . ," while their counterparts in cities across the nation responded similarly to the combination of social and personal pressures.[22]

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22 Newburyport Orphan Asylum, p. 25; Joanna Mathews, A Short History of the Orphan Asylum Society in the City of New York (New York: Anson D. Randolph and Co., 1893), 25; Third Annual Report of the Penitent Female's Refuge of Boston (1821), 15; Eighth Annual Report of the Female Benevolent Society (1840), 6; James W. Thompson, Sermon Delivered by the Request of the Female Charitable Society in Salem 1832; Irving Francher, A History of the Troy Orphan Asylum (New York: Whitehurst Printing and Binding Co., 1933), 33.

In emerging urban areas throughout the country, female benevolent societies blossomed forth, cross-fertilizing one another as they sowed the seeds of American feminism. The history of the activities, aims, aspirations, ideas, ideals, and lives of the women who dedicated themselves to charitable associations devoted to helping others of their sex is the chronicle of the origins of woman's emancipation from the bonds of an imprisoning ethos which thwarted her efforts of self-realization, denied her individual autonomy and refuted her common humanity.

Through their work in voluntary societies, women, becoming blatantly aware of their oppression, began, first for themselves and then for other females, to challenge the applicability of precepts of the woman-beau ideal. In so doing, they slowly came to recognize and articulate a unity of all women, which, based on a profound respect for individuality, stressed that each woman, as an autonomous being, was entitled to human dignity and basic natural rights. The feminist thinking which emerged from female voluntarism, exemplified by writings in annual reports, journals, visitors records, and memoirs, evolved gradually, as generations of urban women learned of and assimilated each others' experiences. Although those societies organized at the inception of the nineteenth century reflect both the members' concern about the propriety of their actions and a wariness of working with women radically different from

themselves, neither of which is found in later associations, numerous trends common to all the female societies existing during the period of this study are evident. An examination of the first three decades of organized benevolence, focusing largely on New York City, but also drawing on other urban centers, discloses the genesis of patterns of thought which, finding full expression in the years after 1830, gave ideological substance to subsequent demands for expanded women's rights. An analysis of the early societies, then, reveals woman's cautious expansion of her emotional, intellectual, and physical sphere beyond the confines of home. It also discloses her camaraderie with other women, the burgeoning sense of confidence in her abilities as she managed funds, made important decisions, implemented plans, worked effectively with municipal officials, carried to conclusion numerous important projects, and began to assume responsibility for her own life as she realized the productive consequences of her activities. Yet, simultaneously the records expose woman's increasing resentment of male domination and her realization of the depth and complexity of the oppression which at once had impelled and inhibited her entrance into charitable work.

In 1800, the fear of social ostracism prevented most women from participating in organized benevolence. Mrs. Isabella Graham, who founded the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, likened a group of "young ladies" about to form a charitable association to the "great general in ancient

times, [who] in search of glory landed his troops on the hostile coast, and then burnt all his ships; thus it became necessary for them to conquer or die." Graham told the assembled women that once they had "embarked in this design, there is no remaining neuter. . . , Your names and undertaking are in every mouth; You must press forward and justify your cause; . . .[I]t cannot be otherwise." She recalled that her own Society, which distributed firewood, shoes, and clothing to widows and provided them with work, "was a new thing in this country. It was feeble in origin; many treated it with ridicule; many raised against it the standard of opposition. The men could not allow the [female] sex the steadiness and perseverance necessary to establish such an undertaking. . . ."[23]

Yet, Isabella Graham, who had been "[b]lessed with a spirit of philanthropy, with an ardent and generous mind, [and] a sound judgement" had the courage and determination to stand firm in the face of opposition and, in 1797, became the founder of the first benevolent association managed by women in the United Stetes. Her daughter, Joanna Bethune, herself an important figure in feminine charities, recalled that, although Mrs. Graham had been "happily qualified to shine in the drawing-room, her time was seldom wasted there; for such a disposition of it would have been comparative waste, contrasted with her usual employments." Appalled at the number of destitute females

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23 Isabella Graham, The Power of Faith exemplified in the Life and Writings of Isabella Graham (New York, 1816), pp. 467-469.

in New York City, Mrs. Graham thought that "none but eye witnesses could have imagined the suffering of [so] many respectable women. . . ." "[T]rained to an active life as well as favored with a superior education," but knowing that by herself she could do little to relieve the misery, she conceived of the audacious scheme of organizing an association of women. Before this plan could be implemented, Mrs. Bethune later recorded, many women "consulted on the propriety of establishing a Female Society. . . .Invitations in the form of circular letters, were sent to the ladies of New York; and a very respectable number assembled at the house of Mrs. Graham" to discuss the new enterprise, which would eventually help tens of thousands of impoverished women.[24]

Three years after the historic meeting at Mrs. Graham's home, in a different city, the aroused sympathies of another courageous woman gave shape to a second pioneer society. Mrs. Stillman, of Boston, the daughter of Dr. John Morgan, "a distinguished surgeon," became interested in the plight of orphaned females when she heard a tale of "a little orphan girl who having no one to protect her had easily become a victim of the designs of an unscrupulous man." Mrs. Stillman wanted to provide an asylum for girls, but the women of Boston had never before combined for a public purpose and the idea's "novelty occasioned objections and delay." The Boston Gazette carried a long anonymous correspondence on the correctitude of the plan.

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24 Joanna Bethune, Life of Mrs. Isabella Graham (New York: John S. Taylor, 1839) Preface; SRPW 1797-1922 (New York,1922); Bethune, p. 51.

"At length, however, by perseverance, one hundred subscribers were obtained. . .[and as] a meeting. . .became necessary [so] that the institution might be organized. . .private notifications were sent out." "With comparatively few friends, and slender resources, its founders. . .struggled against the prejudices and obstacles which an undertaking so novel and so little understood was calculated to excite," a later report of the Society noted. But "this was not a scheme of visionary enthusiasts, fading at the touch of examination, and destroyed by the test of experience." The Boston Female Asylum, established in 1800 by an assemblage of daring women, endured for over one hundred years, and the female populations of other cities found inspiration in the efforts of these early activists.[25]

Within the first decade of the nineteenth century, female asylums appeared in numerous urban areas: Troy, Salem, Newburyport and Portsmouth each boasted of an orphanage founded and managed by women, while in 1806 women of the Empire City associated for the "pleasing task of ministering to the wants [of]. . .parentless children." Developed under the tutelage of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows, the Orphan Asylum in the City of New York, which had its origins in a meeting held at the City Hotel on Broadway, arose because of "the pain which it gave the ladies of the Widows' Society to behold a family of

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25 One Hundred Years of Work with Girls in Boston. Issued by the Boston Society for the Care of Girls, formerly The Boston Female Asylum (Boston, 1919), pp. 1-19; Also see: An Account of the Rise and Progress and Present State of the Boston Female Asylum, together with the Act of Incorporation also, the Bye-laws and Rules and Regulations adopted by the Board of Managers. (Boston, 1810).

orphans driven on the decease of a widow to seek refuge in the Alms House." Originally, members of Mrs. Graham's Society had taken these youngsters into their own homes, but as the operations of the association expanded, the numbers of parentless children exceeded the bounds of individual assistance and the need for another organization became evident. Joanna Bethune, who had gained experience in benevolent work as the Third Directress of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows, agitated for the formation of the new charity and won election to the post of Treasurer, while Mrs. Sarah Ogden Hoffman, one of Mrs. Graham's associates, became the First Directress. Mrs. Sarah Startin, "the widow of a wealthy English merchant, holding a high place in society," also became an officer and, although the "estimation in which she was held. . .enabled her to commend the work" of the organization to the public, the members of the original benevolent associations still had to contend with the many who refused to support an "institution. . . entrusted to females."[26]

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26 Abiel Abbot, A Discourse Delivered Before the Members of the Portsmouth Female Asylum on the Lord's Day, Aug. 9, 1807; Also see: Francher, History; S.P. Williams, Plea for the Orphan Delivered on the Anniversary of the Female Charitable Society of Newburyport, May 21, 1822; Elijah Parish, A Sermon preached before the Members of the Female Charitable Society of Newburyport on the 5th Anniversary 1808 & the Act of Incorporation; Bently William, A Discourse delivered in the East Meeting House in Salem, Sept. 2, 1807 at the Annual Meeting of the Salem Female Charitable Society; Joanna Mathews, A Short History of the Orphan Asylum Society in The City of New York (New York: Anson D.F. Randolph & Co., 1893); Bethune, p. 61; Orphan Asylum in the City of New York -- Origins and History (New York: Bonnell, Silver & Co., 1896) I, 6; Newburyport Orphan Asylum, p. 20.

Ever cognizant of the precarious position they occupied, the women of the early associations exercised extreme caution that their activities provoke no unnecessary castigation. The reports of these first societies reflect the members' misgivings about the propriety of their work and their capability to perform it, as well as attempts to assure an uneasy society that their efforts did not violate the precepts of the woman-beau ideal. The 1814 Constitution of the New York Female Society for the Aid of Foreign Missions hoped to allay apprehension by acknowledging that "it is not the province of Females to go forth in a public capacity and preach the Work of Life. . . ."

The annual report for 1826 of the Brooklyn Female Bible Society gave the following apologetic explanation for the association's origin: "It was in the belief that without neglecting domestic duties which, next to her own salvation, make the first claim upon the attention of a female- without departing from the sphere of usefulness which a candid and cultivated mind assigns to woman- without invading the appropriate province of the stronger sex. . .and finally, without giving any just cause for either. . .sneers or. . .censure. . .we might do something. . .that the Society was formed." The Association for the Relief of Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females called upon "those [men] superior in intellect to come and assist us in our work, for encouraging <u>us</u> in our limited sphere, may lead to. . .[enlarged] plans of benevolence. . . ." The members of the Penitent Female Refuge of Boston, long accustomed to

masculine direction, believed "that the house could not be successfully managed without the presence of a Gentleman as Superintendent."[27]

Woman's self-doubts combined with social pressure and legal restrictions to shape the actions and regulations of many female benevolent organizations in the early years of the century. To enable their associations to hold property, most societies eventually organized in corporate form. The wish to avoid legal complications arising from a husband's right to control his wife's money led numerous organizations to follow the example of the Newburyport Female Charity in decreeing that "the treasurer of the Society should always be a single woman of the age of 21 years upwards." Because the dictates of convention deemed it unladylike for women to solicit funds, some associations, including the Female Missionary Society, depended upon a "committee of gentlemen. . .to obtain subscriptions," and as the antebellum code of feminine decorum also prohibited unchaperoned ladies from walking in their cities' poorer neighborhoods, some of the original associations insisted that members be "accompanied by men" for the purpose of "visiting from house to house."[28]

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27 New York Female Society for the Aid of Foreign Missions. Preamble to Constitution (1814); Fifth Annual Report of the Brooklyn Female Bible Society (1826), 5; Annual Report of the Association for the Relief of Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females (1831), 11; Annual Report of the Penitent Female Refuge of Boston (1825), 24.

28 Act of Incorporation of the Newburyport Female Charitable Society; Penitent Females' Refuge in the City of Boston. Appeal to the Public (Boston,1839); Mathews, p. 17; Female Missionary Society for the Poor of the City of New York and its Vicinity Annual Report (1820-1821), 4.

The necessity of compliance, or at least of giving the appearance of compliance, with the prevailing social mores limited members' activities; yet, even in their hesitant, infant stage, voluntary associations helped women to escape from the bondage of the woman-beau ideal. The determination to initiate an organization or to join an existing society represented, for many females, an important step toward self-assertion, particularly as the decision often provoked the opposition of friends and family. Providing women with a sense of community, purpose, belonging, and involvement, the associations' meetings and activities presented a compelling alternative to the dull, monotonous and often sickly life of the useless lady. And the regulations and functions of the different societies gave women feelings of responsibility and importance denied them in the domestic realm.

Membership in an association provided the upper- and middle-class woman, traditionally isolated at home, an opportunity to relate to other women of similar background in an unprecedented manner, giving acquaintainces and friendships a dimension not found within the stylized tedium of "social calls." Energized by a sense of mission, the women of the respective societies drew together with a special closeness as they shielded one another from ridicule and scorn, exchanged ideas on methods, worked hard and long hours to meet deadlines and avert crises, and assisted each other with emotional support in

the numerous difficulties arising from involvement in organized benevolence.

Sarah Ayer, a member of numerous female voluntary associations in Portland, Maine, including the Educational, Missionary and Maternal Societies, recorded her acute sense of loss when she moved to Eastport. At her last meeting of the Maternal Association on August 7, 1822, she confided to her diary: "I attempted to speak to them, but found it too painful a task to tell them I should meet with them no more." Although continuing to miss her friends, Mrs. Ayer's attendance of prayer meetings apparently helped to assuage her loneliness for she wrote: "[W]e had an interesting female prayer meeting. I do generally enjoy these little social meetings." But these gatherings could not replace the friendships she had formed in the Portland voluntary societies and she writes of the women in the organizations she had been forced to leave: "[W]e shared each others joys and sorrows, and found the one heightened and the other alleviated by sympathy." From the intense and continuous involvement with females similarly situated, urban women, through their societies, began to revere other women and came to rely upon each other for comfort and advice, slowly piercing the isolating myth that "women could not form friendships," as the volunteers began to see each association as "one small link in a chain of female union."[29]

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29 Ayer, IV, 131, 303, 233; Annual Report of the New York Female Union Society for Promotion of Sabbath Schools (1822), 11.

The sense of solidarity with other women, based upon a growing respect for feminine abilities which inevitably heightened woman's self-image, increased as the activities and responsibilities of the societies both illuminated and developed important and hitherto hidden skills. The members of each association drew up their own constitutions and by-laws, elected their own officers, arranged for meetings, assigned duties, managed funds, and wrote and published annual reports on the society's progress. The by-laws of most organizations stipulated that "the direction of the affairs of the society shall be vested in a first and second Directress, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and twelve managers, all of whom shall be chosen by a plurality of ballots at the annual meeting, and shall meet once a fortnight during the winter, and once a month during the summer season." Those societies which distributed alms typically divided their respective cities into districts and assigned a manager to each area with the responsibility to assess the number of destitute women in her division and to determine the kind and amount of relief necessary. Associations required their managers and members to make accurate accounts of the aid given, to keep careful records of their visits with impoverished families and to consult with the Board of Directors "in particular situations of embarrassment or distress."[30]

The membership dues varied with the different societies, but each organization published precise accountings of its funds.

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30 See: By-laws SRPW; Annual Report of the Orphan Asylum in the City of New York (1810)

The Female Bethel Association of New York, established "in the winter of 1832" to aid "the destitute and suffering families of the Seamen, their widows and orphans," decreed that "the treasurer shall receive and have in charge all the moneys belonging to the Society, of which she shall keep a full and correct account, holding the same subject to the Board. She shall make all disbursements and render an account to the Board at its first meeting each month." The third report of the Society for the Relief of Aged, Indigent Females, published in 1816, declared that "a fine of 25¢ shall be imposed on each Manager for neglecting to bring in a statement of spending money" and further warned that each member of the Board would be fined for "not attending [the meetings] at 11 o'clock or sending an adequate excuse."[31] The regularity of the meetings, the significance attached to them, and the promulgation of specific rules and regulations imparted structure and importance to vacuous lives previously passed in promenades down Broadway or Chestnut Street. The multiplicity of available posts as directors, managers, fund raisers, visitors, treasurers, and recording or corresponding secretaries, both allowed women to use specific talents in their respective positions and enabled them to develop new skills and interests.

Similarly, as female voluntarism became more prevalent in the years after 1820, women's options and opportunities for

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31 Constitution of the Female Bethel Association (1836); Annual Report of the Association for the Relief of Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females (1816) By-laws and Regulations, pp.8-9

individual expression increased dramatically. As cities grew in size and complexity the kaleidoscopic milieu presented its ever-changing and challenging needs to a female population desperate for an opportunity to be useful and to find fulfillment. And from this confluence of the imperatives of rapid urbanization and woman's quest for identity and self-realization emerged a proliferation of female benevolent societies. Some associations, like the Brooklyn Orphan Asylum, arose after a specific urban crisis: [T]he ravages of cholera in 1832, by which many children were left orphans, suggested to the minds of a few benevolent ladies the necessity of an Orphan Asylum. Mrs. Elizabeth B. Davidson of Brooklyn was the originator of the plan. . . .She interested other ladies and they formed an association. . ." and, until a permanent home could be found, "Jackson Mansion of the Heights was temporarily used" to house the destitute children. Other organizations originated because of the inordinate poverty concomitant with urban growth.[32]

The Female Association aided numerous "sick poor," while in one year the Female Assistance Society relieved over 1,500 impoverished women. During the same period, the Association for the Relief of Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females distributed alms to 150 women over the age of sixty, and some 254 widows and 667 children under ten years of age received the bounties of

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32 Cammann & Camp, p. 519

the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children.[33] In 1823, a group of women formed the New York Asylum for Lying-in-Women, established "to afford an asylum to women in a state of pregnancy, who are destitute of the means of support, and who are unable to procure the necessary medical assistance and nursing during the periods of their confinement," while the Society for Employing the Poor of Boston, the Ladies' Depository, and the Society for the Promotion of Industry, the latter two of New York City, distributed work to indigent females. The widows and orphans of sailors found helping hands in the Boston Seamen's Aid Society and the Female Bethel Association of New York, both formed in the early 1830s. The Bethel Association, in seeking public support for its agency, queried: "What would New York be without the sailor? Her merchandise is transported over every sea and ocean, and her stately ships visit every port guided by his skill and managed by his hand."[34]

As the variegated texture of life in an urban society, with its glaring contrasts and blatant poverty, crime, and disease, compelled woman's entry into organized philanthropy,

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33 Commercial Advertiser, November 19, December 2, 1814; January 27, 1825; January 19, 1824; New York Evening Post, February 18, 1817, January 26, 1825; SRPW Minute Books 1797-1932, entry for November 15, 1821

34 James Hardie, Description of New York (New York, 1827) 284; Annual Report of the Society for Employing the Poor of Boston (1820); Twenty-second Annual Report of the Ladies' Depository of New York (1855); Annual Report of the Society for the Promotion of Industry (1816); Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Aid Society (1835)

female voluntarism developed a momentum of its own; the women who had founded the pioneer societies urged others to emulate their example. The existing associations needed auxiliaries to enhance their efforts and pressed for their formation. Women, moving with their husbands from city to city, often started societies to replace the ones they left in their previous homes, and in so doing exchanged reports, constitutions and ideas with friends in other urban areas. As the Orphan Asylum of New York had been the child of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows, so the members of both organizations joined together to conceive of a third association: the Society for the Promotion of Industry. Realizing that a large number of desolate females lay beyond the auspices of either of their charities, these active women established a house of industry which, during the winter of 1814-1815, employed more than five hundred women workers at tailoring, sewing, spinning and knitting.

Once women began to find employment, the problem of caring for their offspring became apparent, and the members of the three charities helped to place children in free schools. Mrs. Graham encouraged a group of young women in their plans to establish a school for the instruction of impoverished girls: "[T]his labor of love who could have hoped for it? A Society of <u>young ladies</u> in rank, the first in the city, in the very bloom of life, --coming forward and offering--what? not their purse, that were <u>trash</u>: but, their own personal services to instruct

the ignorant, and becoming the saviors of many of their sex."[35] The New York Dorcas Society, originating as an auxiliary to the Female Assistance Society, supplied the older association with clothing to distribute to the needy, as countless urban women, feeling less uneasy about the propriety of their actions, formed societies to care for a specific, neglected portion of their sex.

Women's benevolent organizations, attempting to satisfy the wants of destitute females, simultaneously fulfilled so many needs of the upper- and middle-class woman that, when a family move forced a woman to leave her associations, she frequently endeavored to initiate another society in her new home. Sarah Ayer recorded in her diary: "[A] number of us met together with a view to the forming of a maternal association, similar to the one in Portland. I had long felt anxious for the formation of such a society and rejoice in the prospect of succeeding so well. We had another meeting at Mrs. Hadens, and then adopted a constitution, and chose officers." Mrs. Ayer added to this entry, somewhat wistfully, "It is now a year since I left Portland, I have found here a few children friends whom I love, but still look back with regret and sigh for the society. . .I have left behind."[36]

Susan Huntington apparently had also found companionship and a sense of purpose in associations and wanted to

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35 Plan of the Society for the Promotion of Industry with the First Annual Report of the Board of Managers (New York, 1816); Isabella Graham, The Power of Faith exemplified in The Life and Writings of Mrs. Isabella Graham of New York (New York, 1816), 469.

36 Ayers, II, 237.

sponsor such organizations in Boston. In 1816 she wrote: "My dear friend, Last summer I received a letter from you, and also a copy of the constitution of your Maternal Association. . .. Since then, a few ladies in Boston. . .have formed a similar association and adopted the same constitution. I trust we have found them useful meetings, I am sure they have been pleasant. As to books for your Maternal Association, I am willing to advise you as far as I am capable. . ." Profoundly interested in benevolent work, Mrs. Huntington wrote to her sister-in-law in 1814: "We have been forming a Female Bible Society here, upon the plan of the one in Philadelphia, and in consequence of letters received from that society. . . .[W]omen. . .ought to embrace such opportunities of usefulness with joy." The following year she reported to a friend: "Our Bible Society (Female) succeeds very well and is doing much good. I suppose you have seen the New Jersey and New York reports for 1815. The latter is very interesting."[37]

Associations frequently helped each other by exchanging proposals and ideas. The Boston Seamen's Society maintained a lively correspondence with other organizations, including such distant associations as the Ladies' Aid and Protection Society for the Benefit of Seamen of the Port of San Francisco. Other societies, similarly sharing their constitutions and reports with one another, gave both encouragement and advice and aided in the formation of innumerable new organizations. Moreover, the ever-increasing number of female voluntary societies induced

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37 Huntington, pp. 113-126

women to become active in more than one organization. At the time of her death in her mid-thirties, Susan Huntington had been a life member of the Female Orphan Asylum, Vice President of the Graham Society, Director of the Corban Society, Corresponding Secretary and one of the visitors and distributors of the Female Bible Society of Boston and Vicinity, an annual subscriber to both the Widow's Society and to the Boston Female Education Society, and a member of the Boston Maternal Association. Joanna Bethune, active in the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows, the Orphan Asylum, and the Society for the Promotion of Industry among the Poor, also organized the New York Female Union Society for the Promotions of Sabbath-Schools, an interdenominational group which brought some 8,000 children of the city into its classes, and in 1827 founded the Infant School Society; her mother, Mrs. Graham, had an equally extensive and diversified record of benevolent work. Of course, not all women devoted every minute to charity, but most females entering the field of public philanthropy committed their time and energies to more than one organization.[38]

The network of female voluntary societies, each with different aims and activities, provided the nineteenth century woman of the middle- and upper-classes with the means through which she could perceive and express her individuality as she slowly began to assert her will. And, perhaps one of the

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38 Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Aid Society (1856), 17; Huntington, p. 123; This observation is based on a comparison of the lists of officers and members of more than one hundred female voluntary societies over a sixty year period.

earliest and most fundamental manifestations of woman's gradual emancipation lay in her very decision as to which organization to join and in what capacity to serve. For the antebellum woman, so long the passive recipient of a narrow, defining creed which imperiously told her what she must and must not do, now found herself with numerous options. For the first time she could actively decide for herself how she wished to spend her time and energy. By giving her a myriad of choices, benevolent associations encouraged the woman of means to express her uniqueness through affiliation with a society that suited her particular interests and aptitudes. Yet this association neither limited nor defined her, as she could be a member of several different associations simultaneously and could exercise different abilities and talents in each. In one she could visit and assist desolate families, in another she could work as a treasurer rssponsible for substantial resources, while in a third she could function as a manager, supervising the members and helping the Board of Directors to determine policy. She might teach young girls, obtain work for poor women, and meet with the city merchants to secure supplies. In each position she had different responsibilities, and her personal contacts varied greatly. Numerous options awaited her. The economically secure urban woman could at last begin to realize the special capacities and concerns which contributed to making her distinct from other women in her social and economic class; at the same time she could develop new skills and interests as she worked intimately

with the members of her society, experiencing a sense of closeness with other females.

In contrast to the stereotype of the woman-beau ideal, which insisted that all women had the same needs, abilities, tastes, aims, and aspirations and which controlled the entire sex through the imposition of a rigid set of myths, the benevolent societies enabled their members to recognize their uniqueness, and afforded them the opportunity to express this newly found individuality in fulfilling and rewarding ways. And, rather than the isolation or alienation which often accompanies the realization of individual differences, this identity was based upon a sense of community with other women and would have important implications for the development of feminist thinking which fully emerged in later women's charities.

The first thirty years of female voluntary associations did, however, contribute much to liberating woman from the ethos which imprisoned her. A multitude of other duties and tasks took women out of their homes and diverted their attention from the domestic realm. In the course of her activities away from the house, the "frail, wan" female who allegedly could not take one step without assistance, or make a decision without male advice, proved her physical strength, emotional fortitude, and sound

judgment. Of her mother, Joanna Bethune wrote: "It was often her custom to leave home after breakfast, to take with her a few rolls of bread and return in the evening about eight o'clock. Her only dinner on such days was her bread, and perhaps some soup at the Soup House established by the Humane Society for the poor, over which one of her widows had been, at her recommendation, appointed." Other women shared Mrs. Graham's determination. During the yellow fever epidemic in 1798, four members of the Board of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows "at the risk of their lives remained in the city, steady in the exercise of their office," and the widows "were received with tenderness, assisted with food, advice, and medicine." Similarly, during a cholera epidemic in 1834, women remained at the Orphan Asylum to care for sick children, and at least one member, contracting the disease, died.[39]

In other ways, also, did women in benevolent societies demonstrate courage, endurance, and wisdom. Although some females succumbed to pressure and sought male protection when

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39 SRPW Report of the Board of Directors, April 1800, p. 14; Cammann & Camp, p. 250.

they walked in their cities' poverty stricken areas, the overwhelming majority of women visited in wretched neighborhoods alone, disregarding the inherent risks as they entered districts conspicious for disease, alcoholism, and crime. Successfully meeting the challenging and often excruciating responsibilities of her organization, the woman in charity work also had to be prepared to "experience much painful banter" and to meet it with "indomitable perseverance," as each novel enterprise called forth new opposition.[40]

The members of the Boston Seamen's Aid Society recalled that their "effort was met with a very ready response by many; some spurned the idea of ladies being associated with such outcasts as seamen or their families, but a few [volunteers] were determined to accomplish their object. This they did." The endless charges of incompetency as well as indelicacy, no doubt demoralizing at times, forced women to prove their abilities and helped to invigorate the members with a crusading zeal. One report recorded that "it has been asserted by a disparager of our sex, that women are unfit for the detail of business which requires method and exactness -- that they always prefer fancies to facts, and detest all figures save those of poetry and dance. But I trust we shall show that, in the prosecution of the benevolent plan, we have not shrunk from the duty of investigating facts, or the labor and care of exact calculation." One of the Directors of a society advised her co-workers to ignore masculine

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40 Graham, p. 469; Origins and History, p. 332.

scorn. "Let it pass -- suffer it quietly. When your scheme begins to ripen and the fruits appear, who shall be able to withhold their praise? Only be steadfast, draw not back. . . ," she urged. Assuredly the constant criticism, endless work and the ever-pressing financial shortages must have been discouraging to many women.[41]

The persistent lack of revenue further extended the realm of feminine activity as it stimulated the imagination and urged women to increased endeavor, for "these enterprising women did not sit. . .waiting for the manna to drop into their outstretched hands, but. . .arranged for ways and means to obtain relief." Fund raising efforts included holding bazaars, selling subscriptions, arranging for speakers to address groups of women, soliciting donations from prominent citizens, and petitioning the government. The requests for governmental assistance, though generally productive of aid, had an importance which transcended the additional capital. Once women breached the mythical barrier and entered the "public arena" by exercising their right of petition, they continued to work with municipal and state officials, learning more about the administration of cities, making valuable suggestions for provisions and programs that they believed would benefit the female populations of their respective communities. They gradually gained confidence that "the weaker

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41 Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Aid Society (1851), 1; Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Aid Society (1838), 4; Graham, p. 469.

sex" had the intelligence to understand the intracacies of government and the potentiality to effect important social change.[42]

Female associations justified their appeals for municipal financial support by arguing that "the assistance afforded by the Society relieves the [City] Corporation from a considerable expense." Persuaded by this logic, the Common Council of New York City frequently remitted property taxes, donated firewood from almshouse supplies, and made cash appropriations. The State also helped ease monetary difficulties, and in 1803 passed legislation which authorized a £15,000 lottery, enabling the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows to establish a permanent fund for its beneficiaries. The records of the Orphan Asylum of New York reveal that "in January, 1808, the Board, justly feeling that they were doing a service not only to the city, but also to the State and the country at large, and relying on the patriotism and benevolence of the State Legislature, passed a resolution to present a petition to that honorable body, begging for a grant of money to enable them to discharge at least a portion of the debt which they had been forced to burden with themselves; and in February the petition was presented, accompanied by a letter from the Honorable De Witt Clinton, the Mayor of the City of New York, who had promised to use his influence at its presentation." In 1816 the Association for the Relief of Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females "received from the Common Council the

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42 Mathews, p. 29; Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Aid Society (1851), 1.

sum of $300, and during the following year $250."[43]

Emboldened by the favorable response of public officials to their financial requests, women began to bring their problems and plans to governmental authorities. They thus further enlarged the feminine sphere, and in so doing, voluntary associations helped woman begin to reclaim the position she had held in colonial America as an integral, valued member of her community. The manner in which voluntarism frequently sparked public and governmental involvement is exemplified in a single episode of Isabella Graham, who, typical of so many females committed to charity work, "visited those parts of the city where the poorer class of sufferers dwelt. . . .Mrs. [Sarah] Hoffman accompanied her in many of her excursions." As a result of one of their visits, the following transpired:

> [T]hey discovered a French family from St. Domingo in such extremity of distress, as made them judge it necessary to report their case to the Honorable Dewitt Clinton. . . .The situation of this family being made public, three hundred dollars were voluntarily contributed for their relief. Roused by this incident, a public meeting was called at the Tontine Coffee-House, and a Committee from the different wards were appointed to aid the Corporation, in ascertaining and supplying the immediate wants of the suffering poor. The zeal of Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Hoffman paved the way for this public-spirited exertion, which probably was the means of saving the lives of some of the destitute and friendless.[44]

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43 SRPW Minute Books 1797-1932, entries for February 1, 1808, November 21, 1822, MCC III 732, IV, VIII, 359-360; Laws of the State of New York 26 Session April 13, 1803; Mathews, p. 23; Cammann & Camp, p. 361.

44 Bethune, p. 60.

The proficient management of the Orphan Asylum won the Association the confidence of the State Legislature. On February 10, 1809, the governing body conferred on the Society the "same power to bind out by indenture as the Commissioner of the Almshouse and Bridewell then had, the approbation of the Mayor of the City being first obtained," thus giving women an authority enjoyed by municipal officials. In other cities, also, women articulated their ideas to magistrates. Members of Boston Seamen's Aid Society indicted the public education system for failing to give the poor female students technical training and agitated for a correction of this situation. The Society's third Annual Report (1836) reported their effective campaign: "[W]e have succeeded in obtaining an order from the City Council of Boston, that plain needlework may be pursued in the Public Schools one hour each afternoon in the week, from April till November."[45]

The women of the Seamen's Aid Society, encouraged by the receptive response their plan had received and appalled at the hideous poverty of the working class females of their city, proposed another scheme to their elected officials for their accounts indicated the belief that "this state of thing [is] to be remedied. . .in the same way in which we think it has been chiefly caused, -- by the influence of the General Government. . . .The Government requires large supplies of clothing for the army and navy precisely of the kind we have been

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45 Cammann & Camp, p. 248; Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Aid Society (1836).

describing -- the slop shop. It contracts with individuals, at or near the different depots, who offer to furnish this clothing at the lowest rate." The account continues:

> [The Contractor] knows that there is a class of females who, having comfortable homes, are not obliged to work for a living, yet they often wish to purchase some superfluity which their means will not quite afford. . . .Large quantities of the clothing for the navy are made in the towns around Boston, by the farmers' wives and daughters. . . [who] do not have their board, house-rent, or fuel to pay for, so they can live. It is not, however, the loss of this work which alone causes the distress of the poor females in the city. . . .The irresistible influence of the Government, by its agents, is brought to operate directly to beat down the price of wages on the only kind of labor which a considerable class of females in every large city can perform, and on which their families, usually the aged and sick, or young children are entirely dependent for a subsistence.[46]

Because the activities of their associates, involving them in the lives of poor women, had revealed that government work, "except [for] domestic service and washing, is the only one open to the sex. . . ," the members of the Society proposed that "it be an indispensable condition that the making of these garments shall be given to females belonging to or connected with the families of sailors and soldiers; or, if more work is wanted then these women can perform, that it shall be given to those females who are most in need of such employment. . . . A benevolent association [of women] to conduct the business of receiving and giving out this slop-work will [then] be required." A report of the Society concluded by asking: "Is there a lady

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46 Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Aid Society (1839), 9-11.

in the city who would not be willing to help in such a plan?" And apparently many women did agree to participate in an interim proposal to improve the plight of working women.[47]

The Seamen's Aid Society, after its initial year, concentrated almost exclusively on the condition of working women, stating that its "object was to correct the evil of insufficient wages to poor females. . . ." Arranging to provide work for needy women, the association's members recalled that the "most delicate part of our duty was to fix the scale of prices for our work. We thought it a righteous principle that the person who labors steadily and faithfully shall receive as wages, sufficient, at least, for. . .her support." Paying their employees substantially more than the average salary given to women, the volunteers joyfully wrote: "Already our example has had an influence for good. Many of the Slop-shops have raised their rate of wages; on some garments 1/3; . . .And all the work is, we believe, better paid. This increase of wages for sewing is benefiting other poor females, therefore, besides those whom we employ. This is the consummation at which we aimed, to secure to our own sex the profits of the needle. . . ."[48]

Heartened by their successes and enlivened by the knowledge that their activities, relieving so much misery, had made them feel needed and useful, the volunteers became infused with a sense of confidence, and the reports of their societies reveal

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47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., (1836), 8.

this growing faith in their enterprises and in themselves. Speaking of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, Mrs. Graham proudly proclaimed that its "fame is spread over the U.S., and celebrated in foreign cities, who have followed the laudable example. This fame is not more brilliant than just. The hungry are fed, the naked are clothed and shelter is provided for the outcasts, and medicine for the sick, and the soothing voice of sympathy cheers the disconsolate." On another occasion she declared: "The ladies of New York rendered themselves truly deserving of applause for their zeal in this benevolent undertaking."[49]

The seventh Annual Report of the Orphan Asylum of New York notes the members' appreciation of the faith their benefactors have in them and reflects that, indeed, "it excites in their minds those most delightful emotions of which the human heart is susceptible -- perfect confidence and tender gratitude." In 1832 they wrote: "Your Managers are increasingly alive to the importance of the station they occupy." The ladies of the Seamen's Aid Society boasted of their administrative competence and sound fiscal management in the third Annual Report in which they detailed the operations of their organization, and concluded that, "without any risk, our capital [remains] in constant circulation. We have not since we began, met with any loss of any kind." The report of another association noted that the "high importance of the object proposed by the society

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49 Graham, p. 467; Bethune, p. 52.

has commanded the attention and regard of the benevolent; its extensive usefulness has been proved by 14 years experience."[50]

Woman's sense of the significance of her actions received reinforcement as benevolent societies won sporadic endorsement from popular magazines and from prominent urban men. In 1829 a contemporary periodical wrote that the "ladies of Boston are active in labors of benevolence. Their societies for charity are well known and appreciated." In 1832 the Ladies' Magazine applauded feminine efforts to establish Infant Schools, noting that the options for working mother were to lock their children up in a large room, pay someone to take care of them, or leave them loose. The article rhetorically asked: "What mother would not feel [any] of these alternatives is a hard one?" Although most men withheld praise, some civic-minded males recognized and commended the efforts of female voluntary societies. Reverend Timothy Alden, addressing the members of the Portsmouth Female Asylum, noted: "[T]he ladies of Portsmouth having been so public spirited in their charitable exertions for female education, the gentlemen of the town have paid a becoming deference to their good example by making provision, this year, for 3 female morning schools, which are handsomely attended."[51]

John Pintard, whose letters to his daughter reflect his intense interest in the Empire City, exuded praise for the labors

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50 Annual Report of the New York Orphan Asylum (1813), 1; Annual Report of the New York Orphan Asylum (1832), 166; Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Aid Society (1836), 3; SRPW Address of the First Directress (1811).

51 Ladies' Magazine (1829), 241; Ladies' Magazine (1832), 179. Timothy Alden, A Discourse Delivered before the Members of the Portsmouth Female Asylum (Portsmouth, 1804), p. 10.

of women's charities. He thoroughly approved of the House of Industry for it "relieve[s] our city from the burthen [sic] of increasing demands on their charitable societies public and private. . . .This laudable Society employs the industrious poor in spinning, making up linen etc., and is conducted with a spirit and attention that does honor to your sex. I never leave the Institution without a more exalted opinion of the merits and virtues of these ladies. . .whose deed deserves every encomium and whose merits transcend my feeble praise." In 1829, Pintard extolled the Female Asylum for Lying-in Women which "has extended great relief;" in the following year he acclaimed the Orphan Asylum and added: "How greatly this city is indebted to Females for the time and support they give to our various charitable. . . associations." Especially impressed with woman's demonstrated skills, he wrote that the Managers of the St. Thomas' ladies' Missionary Society "understand their business, asking good prices wh[sic] none dispute. . ." and that the ladies of other charities "who undertake to solicit benefactions. . .are indefatigable. . . ."[52]

Through association, women began to find respect, purpose, and appreciation from co-workers, beneficiaries, and sometimes the public, all of which reinforcements were generally absent from their personal lives. One society, referring to its work, wrote of the "responsibilities. . .which. . .cling to us. . . ," for the feeling of being essential to others, of

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52 Pintard I, 93, 105, 100; II, 7, 140, 193.

having important duties gave women, so long impressed with their own inadequacy and insignificance, a sense of individual importance and value. As the activities and contributions of women in organizations gradually enabled them to overcome years of denigrating indoctrination, the members cautiously came to believe that perhaps they had accomplished something of monumental merit. The publication, by societies, of memoirs, reminiscences, and eulogies reflected this growing awareness that the achievements of women in voluntary societies should, indeed must, be shared with other females. Exhorting women to participate in benevolent work and providing the sex with important role models, the reality of feminine attainments became diffused throughout the country, awakening women to their long stifled potential. In the widely-read The Life of Mrs. Isabella Graham, published in 1839, her daughter wrote: "She was so happy in the execution of her trust, as to acquire the respect and the confidence of the ladies who acted with her, as well as the affections of the poor." Mrs. Sarah Startin, active in the Orphan Asylum of New York City, earned the following commendation: "From the very start of the Institution, [she] had proved herself one of its most earnest friends, giving not only her time and strength, but also of her substance, and making the most generous and considerate arrangements for its pecuniary benefit."[53]

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53 Seventh Annual Report of the Female Benevolent Society (1841), 13; Bethune, p. 53; Mathews, p. 35.

When Miss Sarah W. Ogden, a member of the Orphan Asylum, died, the association noted her passing in their Annual Report: "To an intellect strong, prompt, and perservering were added a highly cultivated mind and a discriminating judgement rarely to be found in one of her years," and Susan Huntington's death called forth the following exaltation: "In the work of benevolence she has left her sex a noble example. Her exertions in this cause, are known to have been great, and extended to a variety of objects, and productive of a large amount of good...." While frequently emphasizing a particular woman's intelligence and fortitude, most tributes also stressed the member's boundless compassion: "[H]er whole time was occupied in searching out the distresses of the poor and devising measures to comfort and establish them to the extent of her influence and means," lauded a typical encomium. Through her numerous and diversified benevolent activities, the urban woman of means truly came to appreciate the plight of those females below her on the social scale.[54]

Voluntarism exposed the many facets of woman's oppression and brought into sharp focus those glaring abuses which generally did not have as great an impact on the lives of females of the upper- and middle-classes as on poorer women. Whether they distributed firewood to widows, clothing to the aged, shelter to the female orphan, work to the sailor's widow, medicine to the sick, bibles to the unconverted or education to

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54 Annual Report of the New York Orphan Asylum (1819), 104; Huntington, p. 402; Bethune, p. 55.

young girls, the women in philanthropic organizations visited with and listened to hundreds of thousands of destitute females in cities across the country and their collective experiences vivified the depth and extent of feminine suffering. The records of the first thirty years of benevolent work illuminate the volunteers' collision with two distinct but related aspects of woman's maltreatment: the inequity of her economic position and her subjugation to masculine brutality.

The proximity of urban life compelled upper- and middle-clase women to be the perpetual witnesses of poverty in their cities; yet, so long as the desolation remained impersonal, females could accept the many convenient excuses for its existence which told them that the "poor are lazy," that "the poor don't want to work," and that "in America anyone can make money." But as women, through their societies, came to know and share in the daily existences of their beneficiaries, they gained an awareness of the blatant injustices perpetrated upon their sex. The Association for the Relief of Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females early complained of the lack of job opportunities for a woman, while in 1815 the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows published the following comment: "[A]n attentive observation has thoroughly convinced us that it is an impossibility for a widow, with the labor of her own hands, to support her infant family. . .even if work abound, we appeal to those who are mothers, how much time can a widow, with infant children, sometimes 4 and 5 in number. . .have to gather sufficient to provide bread and

clothing to herself and them, and pay the rent of her dwelling?"[55]

Denying the traditional rhetoric of "lazy poor" and ascribing the prevalence of female poverty to the few available jobs and the low wages paid to women, associations asserted that "the only means of earning money for those who cannot go out to labor in families, nor taking in washing, is by needlework. The slop-shops furnish the kind of work which females of this class can best perform; but. . .the price allowed these poor women would 'hardly pay for candle-light'. . . .With the most diligent industry, a poor women could not earn more than from 60¢ to one dollar per week." During the first three decades of organized benevolence, most female charities began to perceive the correlation between feminine poverty and a discriminatory system which kept women at the bottom of the economic scale, but few organizations had the audacity of the Seamen's Aid Society which angrily lashed out at what it considered the sources of oppression: "Combinations of Selfish Men are formed to beat down the price of female labor; and then. . .they call this diminished rate the market price. The slop-shopkeeper grows rich, and adds house to house, while the widow and orphan who toil in his employ, are pining in want and misery. . . .[It is] a shame and disgrace for any one, who writes himself man, to make a fortune out of the handy-work of poor females!"[56]

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55 Annual Report of the Association for Respectible, Aged, Indigent Females (1819); Annual Report of the SRPW (1815),24-25.

56 The volunteers generally refrained from discussing the plight of impoverished males; Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Society (1838), 7; Ibid., (1836), 10.

In a later report the volunteers of the Seamen's Society attacked the "associations of rich men, who are adorning the city with splendid palace-like dwellings for the wealthy," and who expect impoverished females to pay their exhorbitant rents. The Society urged the formation of "an association. . . to build some neat, commodious, comfortable houses, prepared purposely to accomodate" the poor in order to solve the problem of inadequate housing facilities for their beneficiaries. Moreover, their experiences with destitute females had revealed still another inequality which required their attention. In their fourth Annual Report they wrote that "the poor now pay from 20-100% more for groceries and fuel than the rich. The latter can purchase in large quantities, and favorable periods; the former, having not the means to lay by a stock, or take advantage of the market, are obliged to buy tea by the ounce, wood by the foot and coal by the peck." To diminish this inequity, the Society proposed: "Let the benevolent form an association to purchase fuel when it is cheapest, and keep a sufficient stock to sell to. . .poor laboring. . .women, at only such advance as shall be necessary to cover the extra expenses of dealing it out in small quantities."[57]

Upper- and middle-class women entered the dwellings and the lives of poverty-stricken females. Many, for the first time, confronted the gross injustices of a social system which

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57 Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Society (1837), 13-16.

barred women from most forms of employment and then paid only paltry sums for the long and arduous labor she performed on the few jobs open to her. Similarly, as the volunteers listened to the woes of destitute women, they heard of masculine abuse in forms that most of the members had never personally experienced, or, if they had, refused to reveal for the shame and disgrace it would inevitably have brought. But now they were faced with hundreds of women speaking openly of alcoholism, beatings and abandonment. Their accounts evoked pity, their tales engendered anger which built upon and seemed to sanction the repressed hostility that many of the members already felt toward men but dared not express before. Beginning in the second decade of organized feminine philanthropy, women started to publish narratives of masculine mistreatment in their annual reports, indirectly and directly blaming men for feminine suffering while finding a socially acceptable mode to express their own resentment and bitterness.

A publication of the Society for Employing the Poor of Boston wrote of the husbands who desert "mothers of families . . .and leave them the task of maintaining their children and themselves," while the twenty-third Annual Report of the Female Assistance Society described a woman who had been in "comfortable circumstances, but was reduced to a state of dire need by the intemperance of her husband." The associations generally agreed that in "numerous instances [women's]. . .suffering is as great and extreme when the husband and father is living, and even more

so, than when he is dead. Especially is this the case when wives and mothers are abandoned by drunken husbands, under such circumstances of destitution that their health is destroyed by hunger and cold, until they are unable to labor, or even go out to provide for themselves and children." Visitors reports, printed in the societies' literature, detailed countless instances of male abuse. It would not be uncommon for a reader to learn of a woman who, shortly after the birth of her child, had been "cruelly beaten by her husband who took off with. . .the scanty furniture and abandoned her, leaving her only two sticks of wood, a pail of water, and some ship-bread."[58]

As spectators to unending scenes of feminine anguish caused by some form of masculine passive neglect or overt cruelty, the volunteers condemned the "treachery of man" as they criticized the "rich men, . . .the owners of the mean, wretched tenements, in the crowded parts of the city. . .[who should be] ashamed to call themselves Christians," and their sincere compassion for the women they aided streamed into literature of many societies.

With sensitivity and sympathy, the volunteers wrote of the recipients of their aid: "Widow is a word of sorrow, in the best of circumstances, but a widow, left poor, destitute, friendless, surrounded with a number of small children, shivering with cold, pale with want, looking in her face with eyes pleading

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58 Society for Employing the Poor of Boston with the Constitution and by-laws and an extract from the Report of the Managers For the First Three Months (Boston, 1820); Annual Report of the Female Assistance Society (1835/1836), 4-8.

for bread which she has not to give nor any. . .prospect of procuring--her situation is neither to be described nor conceived," asserted a report of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows. Mrs. Graham, in an address to her association, commisserated with women whose husbands had died: "We who have so much to be forgiven, have yet our necessaries, our comforts, and even our luxuries spared. To us, our comfortable dwellings, cheerful fires, and convivial parties, give to winter its charms. Alas, for her!; the new-made widow, to whom all these are lost forever." In 1816 the Society expressed its belief that each family that received their aid had "found a counsellor and friend in the Managers of this institution," while other organizations articulated similar convictions.[59]

The Seamen's Aid Society wrote of the "Committee of Ladies to each of whom is assigned during the year [a group of destitute women]" "[T]hese she visits as a friend, learns their wants, sympathizes in their sorrows. . .advises, consoles and cheers them as best she may;" in another report they described "a committee of ladies who visit our workwomen as friends. . . ." The observations of these volunteers undoubtedly heightened the members' empathy with poor females. "[H]ow can one expect that the worn and wearied woman, whose every moment is passed in hard or hurried work, who scarcely can spend time to eat her scanty meals, lest she should not complete the garment, or

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59 Annual Report of the SRPW (1800), 10; Graham, p. 456; Annual Report of the SRPW (1816).

carry home the washing in season to obtain money for the next day's subsistence, . . .[could] give to her young children that. . .attention which every human being requires in early life?" queried one report, while another addressed itself to the plight of impoverished girls who "frequently have not the clothes decent to attend the city schools; and they stay at home to avoid. . .ridicule. . . ." In 1829 the Association for the Relief of Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females demonstrated their compassion for less fortunate women by writing: "When we see one of our own sex left in the bloom of youth and health to feel the ills of penury, and compelled to relinquish all the comforts, and perhaps luxuries of life she had before enjoyed, how sincerely do we feel for her; but when we see old age, decrepitude, and sickness, added to the trial of friendlessness and want, how strong a call upon our sympathy."[60]

The shared learnings and activities of the upper- and middle-class women who formed the urban benevolent associations had and would continue to enable them to become truly cognizant of their merit and dignity as individuals. So too, did their constant contact with destitute females over a period of three decades, breaking through the anonymous mass of urban

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60 Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Aid Society (1836), 9; Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Aid Society (1837), 7; Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Aid Society (1836), 18; Annual Report of the Association of the Relief of Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females (1829), 4.

poverty and giving names and faces to feminine desolation, impel the volunteers, with genuine compassion for impoverished women, to appreciate the human worth of the females they assisted. "The occurences which come under the observation of the Managers in the discharge of their duties, are not such as are likely to attract the attention of the gay and thoughtless, who regard nothing as precious which had not a glittering exterior. . . .But they possess a real interest in the eyes of those who have learned to judge things according to their real value. . .," proclaimed an annual report for 1826, implicitly rebelling against the artificial criteria traditionally used to appraise women while it explicitly defended the essential humanity of the recipients of aid.[61]

The volunteers' growing concern and identification with the women they aided, flowing from a variety of sources, had significant implications for the development of feminist ideology. The numerous annual reports emphasizing the similarity between the backgrounds of the benefactors and some of the beneficiaries, impressing the socially and financially secure women who formed the societies with the fragility of their position, must surely have made some empathetic toward the plight of those desolate women whose unhappy fate a financial loss or sudden death might lead them to share. Additionally, the members' experiences with the hideous poverty and countless privations

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61 Annual Report of the Association for the Relief of Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females (1826), 10. Emphasis added.

endured by females dramatized for other upper- and middle-class women the pervasiveness of society's cruelty toward their sex and gave them the context in which to understand their own frustrations and oblique feelings of dissatisfaction with their lives. These perceptions, scattered and incipient, subtly suggested a unity of all women emerging from the common bonds of oppression, but after only three decades of organized benevolence, women could have neither the discernment nor the strength to forge these inchoate elements of thought into a penetrating analysis of the theories of feminine inequality. Their belief that woman's plight could be solved through benevolent organizations reflected this yet immature state of awareness, as well as the importance women attached to their voluntary associations.

The frequent suggestion in annual reports that additional benevolent societies be formed to remedy the injustices the women encountered reveals the gratification and fulfillment that members found through charitable organization and their deep conviction that "but for the Society, many. . .would perish, unpitied and forlorn who are now rescued and restored to life, to health, to hope," but further discloses their limited percipiency of the complex roots of woman's condition. Yet, as the opposition and prejudice encountered by upper- and middle-class women in the course of benevolent work mingled with an increasing cognition of their personal abilities and talents and those of other women, the reality of their own oppression became inescapable. No longer could they accept the tormenting and isolating myth that their unhappiness, their anxieties, their "unwomanly interests" emanated from some individual failure

which bred discontentment with the role of the useless lady, for here were tens of thousands of women who, like themselves, were searching for direction, occupation, and an opportunity to be needed through benevolent societies. From this grueling and gradual recognition of their own tyrannized status, the volunteers eventually emerged with a sensitivity, understanding, and compassion for women entirely different from themselves and ultimately even perceived and articulated a kinship with women criminals, prostitutes, and other deviants as they came to see all women as the victims of oppression. "The sympathies of woman should always be awakened by the woes of woman, for the lot of all is, in the main, the same-- Yes, let us pray, not each one for herself but for our sex. . .that we may be sustained in patient well-doing till the oppressions that weigh down. . .are removed. . ."[62] asserted an annual report written after 1830 expressing the growing sense of a community of womanhood which would flourish in the second three decade of the nineteenth century but had roots in the first thirty years of female benevolent activity.

Thus between 1800 and 1830 thousands of urban women embarked on a voyage made hazardous by the crosscurrents of ignorance, prejudice, hostility, and insecurity. They did not reach their destination within the short span of thirty years, but they travelled far, proving the

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62 Twenty-third Annual Report of the New York Female Assistance Society (1835/1836), 4; Annual Report of the Boston Seamen's Aid Society (1837), 19.

durability and flexibility of the voluntary association as a vehicle to transport them on their journey while they charted a course for other females to follow. Enabling women to transcend the limitations of personal experience, benevolent societies impelled urban females of the middle- and upper-classes to identify, question, and finally begin to defy the enslaving ethos of the woman-beau ideal. Their many activities and responsibilities necessitated time and energy away from their dwellings thus expanding woman's physical, emotional, and intellectual sphere beyond the confines of home. The courage, strength, fortitude, and acumen demonstrated by the volunteers contrasted sharply with the pale, wan, irrational creature of antebellum theory who was too weak to stand alone, too delicate to leave her house, and too mentally feeble to understand the intricacies of the "public arena." And woman's competence, so displayed, began to dispel the myth of the total dissimilarity between male and female natures. The multiplicity of societies and positions provided women with the opportunity to recognize and utilize their varied abilities while helping them to discern and express their individuality in a manner which creatively tied them to other women. The members' duties and responsibilities, giving them a sense of important purpose, extended their personal contacts and gave them wide experience in many skills usually associated with occupations in government, business, and the professions.

Those women who displayed special capabilities received recognition through election to office. This enhanced personal

fulfillment, appreciation, and the respect of their co-workers, and symbolized for other females the potential of woman. The necessity of working with municipal officials, strengthening woman's confidence, represented a commitment to urban life and began to integrate women into their communities. The difficulties encountered by the members and the significance they attached to their work inevitably evoked feelings of camaraderie. Women, banding together in novel endeavor, slowly became aware of their personal thraldom. Their intense and close contact with poorer women, arousing profound concern and empathy, dramatized other aspects of feminine ill-treatment which the volunteers would eventually see as intimately related to their own oppression.

CHAPTER IX

THE DEVIANT WOMAN

Women to cards may be compared
we play
A round or two; when used we
throw away
Take a fresh pack; nor is it worth
the grieving
Who cuts or shuffles with our
dirty leaving

Anonymous (1844)

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the newborn Infant's tear
And blights with plagues the marriage hearse

William Blake

Oh! Woman! rouse thee from the sleep
Which all thy faculties would keep
In dormant state! dare to be free
From custom's fond idolatry!
Dare - dare to think! assert the mind,
That is in woman's form enshrined,
Was never meant a toy to be,
A play thing for the mastery
Of greater souls!

The above verse, appearing in an 1848 publication of the American Female Moral Reform Society, is expressive of the confident, assertive, and ultimately emancipating thought which emerged from those feminine voluntary associations dedicated to helping outcasts of their sex. The members' experiences in these organizations at once heightened their awareness of society's oppression of women, deepened their compassion for and communication with other females, and intensified their sense of themselves as moral, accountable beings who shared with men and with women of differing social and economic backgrounds an identical nature and a common humanity. This special synthesis of thought, ideas, and perceptions, which later would form the theoretical basis for woman's rights campaigns, evolved gradually from a complex blend of woman's past role in organized philanthropy, her present learnings from intense involvement in societies concerned with deviant women, and her plans for a future, free from the shackles of the woman-beau ideal.

At their inception, the Female Benevolent Society, Female Moral Reform Society, and Women's Prison Society, the three important voluntary associations formed in New York City

after 1830 to care for aberrant women, which will be discussed in this and in subsequent chapters, followed the patterns of activity established by women's philanthropic organizations in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Yet, feminine attempts to assist erring members of their sex, unprecedented in antebellum America and arousing vitriolic opposition, induced women to confront and re-evaluate both their own lives and woman's position in society. The efforts of upper- and middle-class women to help "fallen females" developed, in part, from the uncertainties and insecurities of urban existence. But woman's assault on prostitution and the double sexual standard, and her criticism of the abusive treatment accorded those females who deviated from the boundaries of social acceptability also grew out of her hostility to man, her wish to control masculine behavior as he dictated hers, and her hesitant claim for equal treatment. This intricate intermingling of motives shaped the activities and ideologies of those associations absorbed with the problems of female outcasts.

"Then could be seen the miserable street-walkers taking their nightly round up and down Broadway;. . .painted, tinseled creatures. . . .There are at the very least 15,000 of these wretched creatures in this city," wrote a popular novelist who asserted that his "book [was] intended to be a <u>mirror</u> of life as it is in this city." It is doubtful if this work of

fiction justified the author's claim of authenticity, but the numerous exaggerated accounts of prostitution appearing after the second decades of the nineteenth century do accurately reflect the city dweller's growing despair about worsening urban conditions. Increasing concern over the atomization of the family, the absence of the male from the home, and the prevalence of crime and vice, all concomitants of urbanization, fused together to produce a proliferation of printed material on brothels, prostitutes, philanderers and adulterers during the Jacksonian period. Novelists, policemen, and municipal officials each contributed to the plethora of literature on the extent of prostitution; yet, the works of few individuals evoked the response aroused by John R. McDowall's published descriptions of harlotry in New York City.[1]

A young divinity student who spent the summer of 1830 in New York City visiting tenements and distributing Bibles and tracts, McDowall became so interested in the problem of prostitution that he decided not to return to school in the Fall, and instead to devote himself to a thorough exploration of the magnitude and nature of licentious conduct among his fellow city residents. McDowall publicized the results of this investigation in his Journal and in two pamphlets: Magdalen Report and Magdalen Facts. Asserting that "not less than 10,000. . .

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1 [Edward Zane Carroll Judson], The Mysteries and Miseries of New York (New York, 1848), p. 106, Appendix. Also see: George Lippard, New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million (Cincinnati, 1853); Sanitary Condition of the City, Report of the Council of Hygiene and Public Health of the Citizen's Association of New York (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1970), pp. 10, 37, 138.

malevolent, cruel and revengeful" harlots preyed upon the population of the Empire City, he claimed: "We have the names, streets, and numbers of the houses of ill-fame in this city. . . and also the houses of assignation. . . .Many of these sinks of iniquity are in respectable neighborhoods, disguised under the mask of boarding houses, dress makers, milliners, stores and shops of various kinds." Predictably, the publication of McDowall's research heightened the city dweller's insecurities and called forth severe opposition to the continued circulation of his study.[2]

Phillip Hone labeled the Magdalen Report "a disgraceful document," and other civic-minded New Yorkers met at Tammany Hall to discuss the insulting accusations. The resolutions adopted by the meeting, reprinted in the Journal of Commerce on August 24, 1831, demonstrate the intense hostility provoked by McDowall's declarations: "Resolved, That we will not rest until these base slanders be punished; Resolved, That a committee be appointed to prepare an address to the inhabitants of this city, stating the propriety of calling a general meeting to appoint proper persons to call on the framers of this report, and demand from them the proofs of what they have asserted." Other sources condemned McDowall's Journal "as a nuisance which calls loudly for the interference of the civil authorities, [for] [u]nder the pretext of cautioning the young of both sexes against the temptations of immoral indulgence, it presents such odious

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2 Memoir and Select Remains of the late Rev. John R.M. M'Dowall (New York: Leavitt Lord & Co., 1838); Magdalen Report reprinted in McDowall's Journal (1834), II, 33-39.

details as are offensive to taste, injurious to morals and degrading to the character of our city. . . ." Most New Yorkers agreed that the former divinity student's findings and estimation of "the extent to which prostitution prevails in our limits, are greatly exaggerated and instead of operating as a dissuasive from vice, they inflame the passions of the young and increase the evil which they profess to discourage."[3]

The combined weight of opposition, ill-health, and shortage of resources eventually forced John McDowall to retreat from his crusade against lewd behavior. And the New York Magdalen Society, an organization managed by men which, for a time, had employed McDowall, also ceased to operate, unable to find sufficient support for its programs. Within the context of limited available revenue and fierce public animosity, one would expect urban residents to eschew campaigning against illicit sexuality, but two societies concerned with the problems of prostitution, founded and administered by women, appeared in New York City during the early 1830s. Their activities and theories illuminate the motivation, the respective successes, and the importance which the women attached to their efforts.[4]

Although some members of both the Female Benevolent Society and the Female Moral Reform Society had previously

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3 Hone, p. 45; Commercial Advertiser Aug. 24, 1881 reprinted in John McDowall, Magdalen Facts (New York, 1832), p. 71; Reprinted in McDowall's Journal (1834), II, 39; Ibid.

4 Memoir and Select Remains; Cammann & Camp, pp. 370-371.

worked with John McDowall, the institution of prostitution and its explicit acceptance of a double standard of sexual behavior had a special significance to upper- and middle-class women. In a very real sense, the prostitute was crucial to the continued existence of myth of the woman-beau ideal. Antebellum theorists, insisting that purity comprised the essential requisite of the true woman, decreed that respectable females, unlike their male counterparts, did not have sexual drives, and used this assertion to support their argument that men and women had totally different natures. As long as the middle- and upper-class man could gratify his sexual needs away from his home, he could cling to the fictitious image of his wife as an ethereal, aphysical being with a uniquely female nature, totally different from that of a male and uncompromising in its immaculateness. As for the prostitute, he considered her a creature so degraded that she did not and could never deserve the glorious name of "woman." Seen as a negative imprint of the quintessential female, the harlot, then, became an unwitting participant in the ethos of the idealized woman. As such she attracted the attention of numerous urban women, impelling them to organization and lending a distinct importance to their ideologies.

The upper- and middle-class woman's yet unidentified and inarticulated anger and discontent with her proscribed position, implicit in her wish to eradicate prostitution, colored the plans, programs, and philosophies which emerged from her organizations. The Female Benevolent Society, evolving from

the combined efforts of women in the Laight, Spring, and Carmine Street Churches "intend[ed] to prevent as well as to remedy the evil of licentiousness. . .by rendering assistance to females who. . .manifest a desire to return to the paths of virtue from which they have swerved." The members of the Society, finding that "[t]hese females were shut out from the common sympathies of the public and compelled by the state of feeling towards them to continue in the practice of iniquity, that they might obtain their daily bread, [and that] [b]y the general consent of the church, and of the world, they were left to perish in their sins, as too debased and abandoned to warrant any attempts to reclaim them. . . ," decided to erect an Asylum "to take [the prostitutes] out of the streets, or away from the abodes of infamy and crime." And, "with the enemy behind and the Red Sea before them they. . .resolved to 'rise and build.'"[5]

Describing their refuge, situated in "Yorkville four miles from the City-Hall," as the "first and only permanent Magdalen institution in the city of New York," members of the Society hoped to show the inmates "by the love of kindness. . . that they may begin to learn, what they now despair of; that it is possible for them to be rescued from their crimes, and that

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5 Cammann & Camp, 369-371; Missionary Labors Through a Series of Years Among Fallen Women by the New York Magdalen Benevolent Society (New York, 1870); First Annual Report of the New York Female Benevolent Society (1834), p. 2; First Report of the Executive Committee of the New York Female Benevolent Society (1830), p. 25; Missionary Labors, p. 70.

there are those who will aid them in their attempts at reformation." The executive committee issued its first report in 1830, two years later published a constitution, and finally in 1834 printed the first annual report of the Female Benevolent Society, detailing the operations of the asylum which could accommodate as many as eighty women. Anticipating the eventual departure of inmates from their refuge, the Society's members instructed the repentant women in various skills. The former prostitute learned the rudiments of spelling and reading as well as cooking, laundry, and sewing, and "everything she earn[ed] over 1 dollar a week [was] deposited for her use in the Greenwich Savings Bank. . .The one dollar per week [was] for board and [was] applied to the support of the asylum."[6]

The Society prospered; by 1838 the women reported that their organization "seeks not only to raise the fallen and reform the guilty; but it extends the hand of mercy to the destitute and friendless female orphan, when no way is left for her to obtain a livelihood but that of prostitution." The annual report for the same year listed over six hundred female subscribers to the organization and the treasurer recorded a donation of four hundred dollars from the "Honorable Corporation of New York." Other sources of income included the "avails of a fair," "work of the inmates," and "subscriptions and donations." Contributions

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6 Seventh Annual Report of the New York Female Benevolent Society (1839); First Report of the Executive Committee of the New York Female Benevolent Society (1830), p. 25; Also see: Missionary Labors.

to the Association flowed in from women living in New England and in upstate New York: the "Ladies of Greenwich" sent 9.00, "Mrs. Arden of Morristown" gave 10.00, "Mrs. Gould from Litchfield" collected 3.00, "Miss Comstock of New Haven" donated 2.00, "Miss Kellogg from Barrington, Mass.," contributed 5.00, and "Mrs. C. Clarke of Utica" sent 1.00. "Mrs. Williams of Springfield, Connecticut" gave the Asylum two pairs of stockings, and among the countless gifts to the organization the records note the receipt of "three bundles of clothing from the ladies of Brooklyn," and "two lbs. of yarn from Mrs. Condict of Morristown."[7]

Assured that feminine support and sympathy for the Association extended beyond the City on the Hudson, the members of the Female Benevolent Society articulated attitudes differing substantially from masculine opinions on prostitution. John McDowall believed it "indeed undeniable" that a prostitute's "suffering [was] self-inflicted. . .that it [was] the necessary result of voluntary vice." Her character, he wrote, "is darker than the worst portrait the ablest pen can draft." Harlots' "imaginations are defiled and their minds filled with the vilest afflictions and the deadliest passions. Their manners, fashions, language and actions are degrading. . .In the arts and habitual practice of deceiving they are skilled to a degree that is almost incredible. For lying they are notorious," and he thought that "hundreds of boys. . .are led as an ox to the slaughter by a ruined woman." Referring to prostitutes as "depraved women,"

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7 Annual Report of the New York Female Benevolent Society (1838), pp. 6-8.

the Reverend Ralph Wardlaw, whose Lectures on Magdalenism received great publicity, asked: "How many of our young men, the inexperienced and the thoughtless, the light hearted and gay, are. . .haplessly led astray" by immoral women? And Charles Christian, in A Brief Treatise on the Police of the City of New York, asserted that "the vast number of loose women that infest the streets of the city. . .are so utterly depraved by all manner of low debaucheries and especially by the use of ardent liquors, so totally bereft of shame, that they are. . .beyond the possibility of reform. . . ."[8]

Contrasting sharply with these sentiments, the Female Benevolent Society published views demonstrating both their acutely felt compassion for women and their hostility to men. Describing "deep-laid schemes of treachery against female innocence," the members boldly declared:

> It cannot be concealed that the treachery of man, betraying the interests of confiding and dependent woman, is one of the principle causes, which furnishes the victims of licentiousness. Few, very few. . .have sought their wretched calling.

As they urged society "to brand the seducer with the infamy that he deserves," the volunteers initiated an attack on the double standard which admitted their anger, their wish to influence masculine behavior and their still undefined protest against the abuse of women. Upon the man, "upon his head should rest the

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8 McDowall's Journal (1834), I, 36; Magdalen Facts, p. 13; Rev. Ralph Wardlaw, Lectures in Magdalenism (New York: J. S. Redfield, Clinton Hall, 1843), pp. 46, 77-78; Charles Christian, A Brief Treatise on the Police of the City of New York (New York, 1812), p. 16.

shame and wretched consequences of his criminal conduct. These. . .have hitherto been heaped upon the defenceless being who has been. . .the victim of base treachery, and who, under a consciousness that she had now no claim to the esteem and the society of the virtuous of her sex, has yielded herself in despair to her fate, reckless of the future. But. . .let every virtuous female utterly refuse to associate with [profligate men], let her feel herself to be polluted by their presence, let them be regarded as enemies to the sex. . . ." Inviting "the cooperation of benevolent females in the city of New York," the members of the Board exhorted: "You are eye-witness to the. . . degradation of thousands of our sex in this city," as they affirmed that women's energies should be directed toward helping other females. Prostitutes also could assist their companions, according to the Association. Once at the Asylum the volunteers urged the inmates "to regard each other as composing a family of sisters, associated together for the purpose of making one another good and happy."[9]

The Female Benevolent Society continued to function for the balance of the century, but it soon became overshadowed by the dynamic Female Moral Reform Society. Assuming control of McDowall's Journal and renaming it the Advocate of Moral Reform, this organization had much in common with the Female Benevolent Society, but differed in a few important respects:

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9 First Annual Report of the New York Female Benevolent Society (1834), pp. 20-24; Seventeenth Annual Report of the New York Female Benevolent Society (1850), p. 10; Advocate of Moral Reform (Aug., 1835), I, 64.

The Moral Reform Society believed "that little good can result from an asylum, unless it is a great working establishment under the arm of law; and that if thousands should be permanently reformed their place, in the present state of things, would be speedily filled with fresh victims. . . ." Criticizing the Benevolent Society for failing to give widespread publicity to either its programs or theories, the Moral Reform Society asserted: "We believe in doing and saying too. . . .[However] the great good must result from saying. . . ." And the upper- and middle-class women who began the Moral Reform Society in 1834 wasted little time in promulgating their activities and philosophies.[10]

The semi-monthly Advocate of Moral Reform, circulating through the nation and lashing out against the accepted distinction between immoral men and women, carried countless articles agitating for an abolition of the double standard. An essay in the first volume explained: "This work must be begun with ladies. They are injured and they must rise and assert their rights. We hold that the guilty of our sex are no more to be despised than the guilty of the other, and if licentious men are to be admitted into virtuous society we shall ask the same for licentious women. All we ask is equal privileges where there is equal guilt. . . ." Another article declared that the "great object of Moral Reform is to shut out. . .the men who are licentious, and oblige them to have no society. . . .The work of exclusion

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10 Advocate (Aug., 1835), I, 64; Advocate (1835), I, 31, (emphasis added).

is done for the women; let Moral Reform do it for the men." "Level your artillery at the head and heart of the debauchee. Fix an eternal stigma upon. . .every man who will sport with female virtue -- upon every man and woman who will throw the whole burden of defense on the timid female and exonerate the vile serpent of man. . . ," commanded a third author. The all-female editorial staff of the Advocate queried: "Why should a female be trodden under foot, and spurned from society, and driven from a parent's roof, if she but fall into sin -- while common consent allows the male to habituate himself to this vice, and treats him as not guilty?" "Has God made a distinction in regard to the two sexes in this respect? Is it any where said that what is sin in one, is not sin in the other? . . . Whence has this perversion of truth arisen?" they asked, and their reply that the "perversion" results "from a corrupt state of society," hints at the conclusions these women would eventually draw from their probing inquiry into the differing criterion society set for men and women.[11]

Continuing to utilize the Advocate, as well as pamphlets, letters, and annual reports in the campaign against the double standard, the women of the Moral Reform Society found a dramatic illustration of the inequitable treatment accorded male and female profligates in the murder case of Helen Jewett. On Saturday night, April 9, 1836, a young prostitute, Helen Jewett, was murdered with an axe at Rosina Towsend's "Palace of the

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11 Advocate (1835),I,72; (1835),I,65; (Nov.,1835),I,84; (Jan.& Feb.,1835),I,7; Also see: Advocate (Jan.& Feb.,1835),I,2; (Nov.,1835),85; XII,18; III,256.

Passions." Attempting to prevent detection, the criminal set fire to the corpse, but Miss Jewett's body remained recognizable. The lurid details of the slaying attracted widespread notice. James Gordon Bennett, reporting the case in his New York Herald, called the killing "one of the most foul and premeditated murders that ever fell to our lot to record," and in the ensuing weeks the members of the Female Moral Reform Society along with New Yorkers of every background followed the trial of the alleged nineteen year old slayer, Richard Robinson.[12]

Robinson eventually won an acquittal, although most city residents agreed with Phillip Hone that the "weight of evidence was against [him.]" Hone's diary entry for June 8, 1836 recorded that Rosina Townsend admitted the accused to Miss Jewett's room the night of the murder, and brought them a bottle of champagne one hour later. A piece of the tassel from the young man's cloak had been found on the murder weapon, and the New York Sun reported that a miniature seen in Helen's room on Friday was in his possession two days later. Everything linked Richard Robinson to the murder; yet, he escaped conviction for the Court viewed Rosina Townsend and the other prostitutes who testified against the youth as so corrupted that it did not accept their accounts of the fateful evening. The New York Sun reported that "His Honor Judge Edwards charged the jury to consider the character of the persons brought forward as witnesses. . . . [W]hen persons are brought forward who lead such profligate lives

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12 Quoted in H. R. Howard, The Lives of Helen Jewett and Richard P. Robinson, by the Editor of the New York National Police Gazette. . . (New York, n.d.), p. 121.

their testimony is not to be credited. . . ," and the Evening Post added: "The result of His Honor's convictions were generally adverse to the credibility of the female witnesses. . . and thoroughly in favor of the probable innocence of the prisoner. . . ."[13]

As the focus of the trial shifted from the heinous act allegedly committed by Robinson to the integrity of the women witnesses, the editors of the Advocate of Moral Reform bristled with outrage and wrote: "The learned counsel for the prisoner, spoke with. . .contempt and abhorence of these prostitutes, but is his moral sense so blinded that he sees no guilt and degradation on the other side? . . .[W]e confess ourselves entirely unable to see any reason why the testimony of Mrs. Townsend and her inmates is not worth as much as that of the young men, who by their own confession are in the habit of visiting her house constantly. . . .The same degree of guilt which sinks a female beyond all hopes of redemption, makes the young libertine a hero, who has manly courage enough to throw off the shackles of virtue and dares to think and act for himself." The facts of the Jewett-Robinson case receded from them, but the women of the Moral Reform Society would not soon forget its lessons: the life of a woman who happened to be a prostitute had no value while that of a man who, engaging in similar activity, had also been the perpetrator of a brutal murder would be preserved at any cost including, even, a sacrifice of justice.[14]

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13 Hone, 213; New York Sun quoted in Advocate (June 15,1836), II,87; Evening Post quoted in Hone, p. 213.

14 Advocate (June 15, 1836), II, 87.

With an increasing cognizance of the inequalities inherent in society's attitude toward females, the volunteers channeled their resentment into a policy which provided their stifled anger with a means of release. Hostility, vengeance, the wish to determine and judge masculine conduct, the unspecified demand for equal treatment, and the desire to exercise control, all coalesced into the decision to publish the names of men engaging in immoral activity. Using the Advocate as a weapon in their battle against a male-dominated society, the editors warned: "Young men in the country! beware what you do when you come into the city; . . .should you be detected. . . coming out of haunts of impurity, our missionaries are not. . . so wonderfully delicate as to keep it still." The ladies visited and kept vigil at numerous brothels and reported their findings in their journal. The immoral occurences in a house on Thomas Street "kept by a man named Taylor. . ." received the attention of the Advocate. The women did not shrink from identifying the patrons of illicit establishments and continually reminded the public of their power by threatening to reveal the names of other customers. Of four businessmen who had been found "engaged in licentious activity," the women wrote: "These names are enrolled on the black list, with a multitude of others of the same class, which are reserved for publication whenever it shall be deemed expedient." One article declared that "[w]here the publication of names seems called for. . .we shall fearlessly expose them, especially in cases where the offence is public and aggravated." Another notice entitled "Licentiousness in

High Places," asserted that it "becomes. . .an imperative, though melancholy duty to expose the malignant movements of the great among us, and to strip them of the false. . .pretences of virtues they do not possess, and to portray in bold and living imagery the disgusting Vices of which they are both the author and the patrons."[15]

Inevitably this unprecedented expression of feminine anger, assertion, and audacity, lending a fiery intensity to efforts to evaluate and regulate masculine behavior, implicit in the attack on the double standard and in the publication of adulterers' names, evoked the wrath of substantial portions of the city and the nation and aroused attempts to stifle these outspoken women. Ironically, the relentless criticism, forcing the members to draw together and infusing them with a fervid spirit, engendered profound introspection. This compelled these upper- and middle-class women to confront the reality of their oppression and to defend their activities and programs within the context of their newly-gained awareness of society's denigration of woman. As the volunteers discussed, reflected upon, and wrote about their involvement in moral reform, their commitments to other women, and their responsibilities to themselves and to society, they began to identify and challenge the theories of woman's inferior and particular nature.And, in so doing, took significant steps toward defying the paralyzing precepts of the woman-beau ideal.

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15 Advocate (1835),I,65; Advocate (April 15,1838),IV,62; Advocate (Mar. 1,1837),III,348; Advocate (Sept.,1835),I,67; (Apr. 15, 1838),IV,62; (Mar. 1, 1837),III,221; (Nov. 1,1837),III,348.

As the forthright conduct of the upper- and middle-class women who formed the Society generated abuse and scorn, the members responded, publishing both the criticisms and their increasingly feminist replies in the Advocate. In the first volume of the journal, the editors reported that postmasters had been instructed to "suppress or destroy" their publication "as incendiary matter." In subsequent issues the women informed readers that numerous groups "did not approve of [women managing] the Advocate of Moral Reform, . . .[and] thought the ladies had better resign it into the hands of the gentlemen, as they are much more capable of conducting a public paper." The members also acknowledged the vehement and widespread opposition to "separate societies of ladies. . . ." Countless articles appeared noting that "[s]ome persons condemn. . .ladies in the work of Moral Reform and declare it utterly unsuitable for them as being destructive of female sensibility." The Commercial Advertiser on August 8, 1836 castigated the members of the Society as "females. . .so blinded by their fanaticism, as to forget the delicacy and reserve of their sex--to overleap the modesty of nature--and enter upon a course. . .from which we are free to proclaim, every pure minded woman. . .would have recoiled."

"In this city the admonitions of their journal have too often but pointed out where 'the haunts of death' were situated and aroused the curiosity of heedless youth," declared the New York Sun. The Commercial Advertiser asserted that "we are indebted for the increase of. . .vice to. . .those who par excellence

have assumed themselves the title of Moral Reformer, and the Evening Post believed "certain individuals of the M[oral] R[eform] S[ociety] [to be] possessed of a diseased activity of mind, such as association frequently developes. . .remarkably in the female sex. . . ."[16]

Initially, the women, still uncertain of the propriety of their work, reacted cautiously to the charges against them. They urged men to join and support them: "How long shall Christian women wait the movement of their pastors in the great work of Moral Reform? . . .And how long shall we wait for their approval?" they asked. In an attack on the clergy for failing to endorse their efforts, they queried: "Where are our religious papers on this subject? Are they not all like dumb dogs that dare not bark?" Apologizing for their involvement in such an "unladylike" enterprise, they wrote: "If ever there was a field from which the timid nature and shrinking delicacy of woman should move her to retire, or one that imperiously demanded the strength and wisdom and courage of man, this is the one: the cause not only demands the aid of men, but men of strength and bravery. . . .[T]he work belongs to men, and when they will come up and take the mighty labour off our hands most gladly will we retire. . . ."[17]

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16 Advocate (Dec.,1835), I, 96; (July 1,1838), IV, 100; (June 16, 1838), IV, 107; Also see: Advocate (Jan.,1836), II, 9; Commercial Advertiser (Aug. 8,1836); New York Sun (Aug. 23, 1845), p. 2; Commercial Advertiser (Aug. 8,1836); Evening Post (Oct. 2,1845).

17 Advocate (Oct. 1,1837),III,326; (Jul. 1,1836),II,100; I, 1-2.

As women slowly began to defend their role in moral reform, they appealed to the precedents established by those females active in organized benevolence between the years 1800 and 1830. In 1837, the editors of the Advocate asked: "What is the duty of females with regard to the benevolent enterprises of the present day?" In their lengthy and cogent reply, they argued: "[I]f our sphere of action is limited to private life exclusively, then we have long since left our province and entered that of the other sex. We have had. . .Missionary and Education Societies, and in prosecuting these objects it has been necessary in repeated instances to step forth from the privacy of that retirement to which we have been. . .so carefully consigned. Women have organized associations, held meetings, published reports, appointed solicitors and resolved themselves into committees without alarming the guardians of the public welfare or outraging public sentiment. They have gone still further, women have ascended the editorial chair, and if may be judged from the favorable reception of their publication, they have filled it with dignity. . . ." Reviewing the antagonism to their work, they continued: "We have been reproached in the cant language of infidelity for leaving the kitchen and nursery to meddle in matters that concerned us not. . . .Why. . . should we be stigmatized as amazons, who have committed an unprecedented breach of decorum, when we appear as advocates of the cause of moral reform? When we wish to unite together to

take measures for the protection of our own sex. . . ?"[18]

Questioning the basis of masculine hostility, the members came to perceive that the scathing objections to their work did not actually relate to their involvement in public philanthropy, but were in some way tied to their commitments to other females and perhaps also to the competence and self-assurance being displayed by women so long dependent upon male opinions and decisions. As women realized the fundamental nature and cause of the opposition, they no longer apologized for or explained their endeavors, but rather wrote with greater conviction and force: "We burned the bridges behind us, and there is no alternative between victory or death," they proclaimed. Instead of appealing to precedent or to men for assistance, they declared: "[W]e are. . .impelled to action by a [just] sense of our duties and responsibilities. . . ." In an article entitled "Clerical Objections Considered," they asserted: "We must claim the privilege of thinking and acting for ourselves," and this argument, structured from woman's right to individual conscience, had important implications for the development of feminist thought and appeared frequently in the Advocate, as the members' successes strengthened their confidence, both in their work and in their theories.[19]

Although they had originally vowed that they would gladly leave the work to men, the women demonstrated their firm resolve to continue their activities when the powerful male

18 "The Province of Woman," Advocate (Oct. 1,1837),III,333.

19 Advocate (1838), IV, 83; (1837),III,333.

Seventh Commandment Society suggested that the women's organization become its auxiliary. "At present," the ladies wrote, "that [Seventh Commandment] Society in fact is auxiliary to us. . .and we have even heard some rumors. . .that that Society is intending to make us the operatives in this great work of Reform. . . .[W]e feel ourselves solemnly bound to wage open war with a vice that is making such sad havoc of our sex. . . ." "Our course is designed. . .for the benefit of females," the women explained in another issue of the Advocate. "We hope to reach them in a variety of ways; and by securing their confidence and freedom of communication, thus to advance the cause in a way which could not be done so well by a society of males." In an essay, appearing in 1837, discussing whether it is "the Province of Woman to take the lead in. . .Moral Reform," the author declared that woman "understands her own sex best. . . ." In another article, published the same year, the editors wrote: "We wish it distinctly understood that we have no idea of relinquishing our paper. . .Never," and the members revealed their growing sense of confidence by claiming that the work they were doing "requires great wisdom, firmness and fearlessness. . . ."[20]

Urging their readers to dedicate time and attention to other women, the volunteers passionately defended themselves against charges of inferiority and inadequacy. "The remark has often been made by some of our brethren that women have

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20 Advocate (1835), I, 59; (Feb. 15, 1837), III, 213; (Dec. 15, 1837), III, 371; Also see: (Jan., 1836), II, 9.

neither education nor intellect sufficient to enable them to manage successfully a public society, and conduct a public journal. We suppose these gentlemen would not be understood as affirming that no woman has, or ever had ability sufficient for these things. . .There is no department of science or literature in which women have not equalled the sterner sex; and though their education. . .has generally been miserably defective, they have in repeated instances, risen to eminence in spite of the obstacles to be encountered." Convinced that great achievements would result from their activities, the women wrote: "If we needed any additional evidence of the fact that our Society is accomplishing something, we have it in the increasing efforts that are made to induce us to relinquish our labors. . . ." The women admitted that once they had "been terrified into silence by the cry of 'indelicacy,'" but now they remained steadfast in the conviction that the "war which we are prosecuting is that of extermination. We have enlisted, and we are determined not to lay down our arms until our bodies lie in the dust; or victory is obtained."[21]

Women from different parts of the country sent countless letters of support, and the members of the New York Moral Reform Society proudly printed many of them. A woman in Ohio praised the efforts to elevate prostitutes: "I tell you that the female is sunk low enough already. Some stories have been published

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21 Advocate (Jul. 1,1838),IV,100; (Apr. 15,1836),II,60; (Apr. 15, 1836),II,64; Also see: (Mar. 1, 1836),II,38; (1835),I,67.

in a manner that gave occasion for opposers to point the finger of scorn at the whole female sex. So long as the slightest deviation from the rules of propriety in females (men being judges) is put in contrast to the most artful deception man can invent to seduce woman, he will never feel his guilt or responsibility. . . ." Another woman wondered why females always "must take a secondary station, and would be censured as usurping authority should they take the lead," and the author of a letter appearing in an 1840 edition of the Advocate, noted a "set of amiable objectors [who] tell you that woman's influence is too precious to be exerted thus publicly. These persons indeed allow her independence of thought and action, but that action must be within the precincts of the domestic or social circle.... This spirit is the same in kind. . .[as] that which incloses her in a harem -- screening her from the eye of the public, making her the companion of man's softer hours, the idol of his fancy, but considering her unfit to share his toils and his cares. . . .I would tear away the artificial restraints which perverted feeling is endeavoring to throw around us."

"A Friend to Equal Rights" stated that, although she wished to buy a copy of the Advocate, her husband, who controlled all the money, had refused to allow her to make the purchase. "I know it will be said that we have food, and clothing, and everything essential to comfort, and even luxury provided for us, and that having this we ought to be content. But I cannot consent to this view of the subject. I am a rational creature,

bound to think and act for myself and I claim the privilege of subscribing for a paper which my conscience and reason both approve, or giving to an object in which I am specially interested."[22]

Underlying woman's justification of her involvement in moral reform work lay the assumption that she had a right to determine her responsibility to herself and to other women regardless of the fierce opposition her novel activities might engender. "We cannot behold in the midst of us a vast whirlpool of vice, annually swallowing up thousands and hold our peace; we must speak out or do violence to our own consciences." Asserting that their "duty" impelled them to correct this evil causing such misery "among our sex," the women urged: "[D]ear sisters, let females maintain their rights, and bring truth and reason to bear on the minds and consciences of men." "With all deference to the opinions of thers," wrote the editors of the Advocate, "our own [opinion] is unalterably fixed, that there is a department of this work in which we, and we alone can labor to advantage."[23]

The increasing awareness which emerged from her defense of woman's role in moral reform that woman's subordinate position in society, neither a manifestation of her inferior abilities nor a function of her defective and uniquely feminine nature, somehow evolved from the intricate montage of nineteenth century

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22 Advocate (1838),IV,19; (Aug. 15,1836),II,116; (1838),IV,145; (1838),IV,170.

23 Advocate (1835),I,2; (Jan.,1836),II,9; (Aug. 15,1836),II,116; (Jul. 1,1838),IV,100.

America also became evident in the various activities of the Society. Drawing upon the examples set by the women who labored during the first thirty years of organized female benevolence, the members of this dynamic Association stimulated a multitude of philanthropic programs for the benefit of other females. The women described some of their many involvements in the Advocate: "The means employed have been the formation of societies among our own sex; the publication of a periodical,... the employment of female missionaries whose whole time is devoted to visiting in the city among the sick, the destitute and the afflicted--in short the devising of all proper methods to assist the unfriended. . . ." As the women devoted themselves to preventing illicit sexual conduct and the abuse of women that resulted from it, while simultaneously agitating for the better treatment of all females, they struck a respondent cord in many feminine hearts and minds throughout America.[24]

In the summer of 1836, a committee of the Board of Managers visited with women "in a portion of 5 of the New England States." This group of economically secure females, breaking all custom by travelling unchaperoned, reported to the Advocate on October 15, that "[s]ince leaving New York, the 12th of July we have met with ladies of 15 different associations and have stopped. . .for a longer or shorter time (as seemed expedient). . ." in approximately forty cities and towns including "Boston, Salem,

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24 Advocate (Jun. 1, 1838), VI, 82; (Feb. 15, 1836), II, 25; (May 15, 1836), II, 65.

Bennington, Heath, Deerfield, Northampton, Stockbridge, Lenox, . . .and Northfield." Their discussions and observations convinced the Managers of the importance women attached to moral reform activities: "Young ladies. . .are coming up to this work with a decision of character that seems to say 'The world will be the better for their having lived in it'," and the members of the New York Society agreed that women throughout the nation should view one another "as a band of sisters, affectionately united. . . ."[25]

The Advocate of Moral Reform, an important means of strengthening the harmonious ties among women, flourished; three years after the formation of the Society, the women reported that they printed 20,000 copies semi-monthly and received approximately 160 new subscribers each week. The women distributed the Advocate in Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Albany, filled requests from Rochester, Pittsburgh and Utica, and sent their periodical to Yale, Amherst and Brown University. The magazine, divided into many sections, stimulated interest in the New York Society, encouraged the formation of auxiliaries, and gave women living in cities and towns across the nation a sense of belonging to an important and cohesive cause. The members of the Parent Society asked females to take an oath that they would shun profligate men, and the Fourth Annual Report asserted: "By the operation of the pledge voluntarily adopted by thousands of females, a line of demarcation is drawn, over which the

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25 Advocate (1836), II, 149; (1845), XI, 87.

libertine. . .cannot pass." The solemn taking of a vow, adding gravity to woman's commitment to the operations of the Society, strengthened her feelings of oneness with other volunteers. Rejoicing that a "union of sentiment and effort [existed] among so many thousands of virtuous females from Maine--Alabama," the Society proclaimed: "The mothers and daughters of our land are coming up to the contest and their motto is 'Extermination or everlasting battle.'. . .Man may quail at persecution, women never. Courage is called a masculine virtue, but. . .virtues like vices know no distinction of sex. . . .[M]ore than 20,000 warm hearts are beating in union on this subject and pledged to each other and to God for the defense of the great principles of virtue."[26]

Although the assault on licentious behavior and its crusading, unifying appeal, remained an important aspect of the Society's work through 1848, the women lent their energies to a variety of other endeavors. To assist poor women, with no alternatives but prostitution or starvation, the Organization established an employment service and urged "[t]eachers, seamstresses, or domestics who. . .wish to enter their names on the Register. . .[to] do so by making application at no. 13 Vandam Street any day during the week. . .as this department is sustained for the special purpose of aiding the homeless. . .by providing them employment. . . ." The Moral Reform Society also

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26 Advocate (1837), III, 228; (Jan., 1836), II, 9; (Jun. 1, 1840), VI, 82; (Aug., 1835), I, 64; Fourth Annual Report of the New York Female Moral Reform Society in Advocate (1838), IV, 80; (1838), IV, 3.

established an evening school "for the gratuitous instruction of domestics," and supervised a group of women who walked throughout the city seeking out destitute females to assist. The reports of this visiting committee, published in the Advocate, indicated that the women performed their task every day of the week and in the course of one year had helped between four and five thousand families: "To those [thus] employed, it has been arduous and self-denying, but not without its reward," wrote a member of the committee, while women engaged in other activities of the Society told of their responsibilities.[27]

A memorandum from the Business Department stated: "This is under the immediate direction and supervision of an Executive Committee. . .composed wholly of ladies, who cannot personally engage in making contracts, purchasing paper, . . .[and] they [therefore] appoint a publishing agent." But the women left no doubt as to who exercised control over the division: "All plans of operation are directed by the committee and entrusted to the publishing agent for execution so far as they come within his sphere of action. As all his power to act emanates from the committee, so he is held directly responsible to them. . . .He is their agent."[28]

The members also wrote stories and articles for children and reviewed and recommended books to women. Charlotte Elizabeth's The Wrongs of Woman received the following notice: "A. . .sketch designed to illustrate the wrongs and oppression

27 Advocate (Nov. 1,1841),VII,618; (Mar. 1,1838),IV,40; (Jun. 15, 1840),VI,93.

28 Advocate (Jun. 15,1840),VI,93.

to which the. . .apprentices of the milliners and dress-makers of England are subjected. . . .One can hardly read it. . .without exclaiming 'O Justice! thou are fled to brutish beasts, And men have lost their reason.'. . .The daughters of America, no less than of England, may well thank God for Charlotte Elizabeth." Another review of the same book claimed that the work "is certainly an example to our sex of what female energy and application may accomplish when directed to a specific end." A critique of Margaret Fuller's controversal feminist treatise, Woman in the Nineteenth Century, declared that "the task of the author has been in the main well executed. . . .[W]e cordially recommend it to the reading or rather thinking public, confident that it contains so much that is truly valuable, that every intelligent reader will be profited by the perusal." Other books discussed in the Advocate included the reminiscences of prominent members as well as selections sent in by the auxiliary societies.[29]

Shortly after formation of the New York Female Moral Reform Society, the members avowed their "intention to operate in every city and village town in the United States where [they] can get an auxiliary society to operate through." The widespread circulation of the Advocate and the attention it attracted sparked the founding of numerous subsidiary organizations. By 1836 the New York Chapter boasted sixty-three associations auxiliary to it consisting of 3,000 members; two years later the

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29 Advocate (Nov. 15, 1842), VIII, 172; (Aug. 15, 1843),IX, 125; (Feb. 15, 1844), X, 29; (Nov. 1, 1844), X, 166; (Apr. 15, 1848), XI, 62.

number of local agencies jumped to three hundred twenty-five, and in 1838 five hundred fifty-five organizations considered themselves linked to the New York Female Moral Reform Society. As the Association became more national in character, the volunteers voted, in 1839, to change the name to the American Female Moral Reform Society, proclaiming that their "grand object was to reach and influence the heart of woman through the length and breadth of the land. . . ." The officers for 1840 reflect this more diversified membership. Although the President, Mrs. Hawkins, lived in New York City, the sixteen vice presidents respectively came from Portland, Maine; Dunbarton, New Hampshire; Shelbourne, Vermont; Springfield, Massachusetts; New Haven, Connecticut; Boston, Massachusetts; Providence, Rhode Island; Utica, New York; Perry, New York; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Fredericksburgh, Virginia; Lexington, Kentucky; Society Hill, South Carolina; Oberlin, Ohio; Chicago, Illinois; and Monroe, Michigan.[30]

The women who joined the auxiliary societies frequently met one another at the quarterly, semi-annual, and annual meetings, but generally they knew of each others activities and shared hopes and disappointments through the exchange of letters. The President of the Utica Society wrote to the New York Chapter that "with you are identified every member and every effort of this great moral association." From the New England Moral Reform Society came the following correspondence: "My dear

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30 Advocate (1836), II, 4, 16; (Jan. 1, 1838), IV, 5; (1841), VII, 555; (1840), 81.

sisters, oh, that I could be with you in person to urge you over and over again to labor more and more for our. . .sisters," and the treasurer of the West Bloomfield Society expressed her support by writing: "I have often had a desire to become acquainted with you and the dear sisters associated with you, in your labors of love. . . .Though not favored with a personal acquaintance, my heart is with you." Another woman declared: "My heart bleeds for you, and that is why I address you by the name of Sister--I love all who are engaged in this cause as Sisters," and the president of one of the chapters wrote: "My dear sisters. . . .Have we not seen crooked things made straight, and darkness light before us? If the cause had been of man, it would long ago have come to naught." A volunteer from Salem in May, 1838, asserted: "Dear Sisters, our cause is one. . . consequently the same reproach that is cast upon you reaches us, the same difficulties oppose and the same ground of consolation are equally applicable. Does one member suffer? All the other members suffer. . . ." A woman living in Rockford, Illinois expressed similar sentiments: "We feel, dear sisters, when writing to you, that we are addressing. . .dear and much loved friends, who will sympathize with us and possess our sympathy in return. We feel that the Moral Reform cause belongs in common to us all. Every woman is, or ought to feel herself identified with it. Yes, dear sisters, when you suffer, we suffer with you, when you rejoice we are made glad."[31]

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31 Advocate (Jun. 1, 1843), IX, 87; (Nov. 15, 1844), X, 175; (1845), XI, 167; (1838), IV, 87; (1840), VI, 99.

The New York Chapter printed most of its mail, and often editorialized with respect to it: "With much pleasure we publish the following letter from the ladies in Salisbury. We can hardly express how much our hands are strengthened and our hearts encouraged by its perusal and especially by the willingness of our friends to come out." The Parent Society, thanking the branches for their support, wrote: "Through your communications, verbal and written, we have learned some of your trials, and through the same medium you have known some of ours," and the Utica Chapter agreed that "correspondence held with sister societies has animated and cheered us on our way, and enlisted our sympathies. . .in their behalf."[32]

Forming a reticulation of feelings and ideas, the letters joined the societies together, forging a sense of community among women and creating a unity of purpose. "Dear Sister--I was deeply affected by the appeal in behalf of the poor of our sex in your city," wrote Maria Synder of Bergen, Genessee County, who signed her letter "Yours, in much love." A mother from Oberlin sent in a donation with the following note: "My two little girls, just beginning to knit (as from the work you will judge) have taken great pleasure in preparing each one pair of yarn stockings in the hope that some little cold feet in the city of New York may be made warm next winter through their industry." Some societies emulated the activities of the New York Chapter. When the Boston auxiliary opened an "Office of Direction for Female

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32 Advocate (1844), X, 87; (Sept., 1835), I, 66; (1845), XI, 125; (1840), VI, 127.

Domestics," the editors of the Advocate wrote: "It is an encouraging fact that sister societies in five of our large cities, are now giving attention to this subject. . . ." But other associations, in smaller cities and towns, did not sponsor any significant programs, and seemed to hold meetings only as a way of reaching and communicating with other women. The society of Gallia County, Ohio did not initiate any reform measures but asserted: "[W]e have ever found it pleasant and profitable to meet. . . ." The ladies of Castelton, Ontario County, in 1839, did not believe the situation in their town called for their "active personal efforts," but nonetheless "have manifested a spirit of friendship towards the society," while the auxiliary in Mansfield Centre, Connecticut "met once in two weeks, . . . and spent the time in. . .reading the Advocate and free conversation on subjects relating to the cause. . . ." The women of Heath asserted: "Although we live in a retired part of Massachusetts--removed from the many temptations which allure and draw aside unwary youth yet. . .feeling a deep sympathy for those in N.Y.C. who are unwearied in their efforts. . .we have formed ourselves into a[n] [auxiliary] society. . . ."[33]

It is doubtful that the women of Rodman, Jefferson County, New York; East Salisbury, Massachusetts; Elgin, Illinois; Webster, Michigan; or Rindge, New Hampshire founded associations

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33 Advocate (1846), XII, 38, 183: (Feb. 15, 1840), VI, 32; (Dec. 1, 1838), IV, 183; (Feb. 1, 1837), III, 207; (Jan. 1, 1842), VIII, 8. For additional letters expressing the sense of community see: (1841), 92; (1836), 25; (1837), 190; (1836), II, 163; (1838), IV, 36; (1841), VII, 5; (1843), IX, 47.

because of the overwhelming threat that illicit behavior posed to their communities. Yet, each of these towns and countless others across the nation formed moral reform societies as a means through which to share feelings and thoughts with other women, as a method both of overcoming the isolation imposed by the woman-beau ideal, of becoming part of an important cause, and as a way of searching for personal identity and gaining pride in themselves as women. A letter written in 1837 to the New York Society from a woman in Greenfield articulates the meaning women attached to their work in moral reform. "I have long felt more and more impressed with the importance of your enterprise and have seen more of the difficulties raised to obstruct your progress. . . .Woman though weak and timid when relying upon her own strength, and supported by her own energies, has a soul invincible when duty calls. She is undaunted by sneers, unsubdued by reproach, and unterrified by alarm. I rejoice my friends that I am a woman; and I never gloried more in my sex than I do now. . . ."[34]

The awareness that woman existed as an independent entity, separate from the incidental relations of her life as wife, mother, sister, daughter, and had the capability to determine and execute her responsibilities to herself and to other women, hesitantly and vaguely perceived by the early female benevolent associations, blossomed forth in the years after 1830. The moral reform societies, sponsoring a myriad of varied

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34 Advocate (1840), VI, 23; (1837), III, 365.

programs, firmly tied together by the many strands of woman's shared sense of oppression, her conscious and unconscious wishes, drives, and needs, her quest for respect and understanding and her search for purpose amidst a life of emptiness, formed strong and enduring fibers of liberating theory. Woman came to insist upon her identity as an autonomous being with the right to individual conscious and judgment. The numerous and intertwined threads of thought which would be woven together into the vibrant fabric of feminism ran throughout the female associations of the first half of the nineteenth century, sometimes dominating the design of the society and sometimes providing the background for a specific program or project.

In the American Female Moral Reform Society, the patterns of thinking which emerged from the need to defend, justify, and explain woman's right to be involved in endeavors related to female deviance, found full expression in later publications of the Organization. For the members consciously used the Advocate of Moral Reform as a forum for female discussion. In 1837, they wrote: "The paper is. . .needed to afford a channel of communication, in which the thoughts and feeling of females throughout the country may more freely mingle than they could do in any other way. It will be obvious to all, that this can only be accomplished. . .in a paper conducted exclusively by ladies, and devoted to their interests." In keeping with the intent to discuss topics relevant to the lives of their readers, the editors published numerous essays questioning and challenging the

traditional role of woman. One of these, entitled "The Condition of Woman," appeared in the third volume of the Advocate. "The first step. . .towards elevating the character and advancing the usefulness of woman, is to show her the station which she at present occupies. . . .Were she but sensible of this, we might hope to see a change--to see her converted from a state of mental bondage to one of honor and usefulness. The world would be saved the trouble of descanting on her weakness, and fondness of trifles; and man, who was designed to be her compeer, not her superior, would be convinced that her talents are in no degree inferior to his own." The author of this explicitly feminist work, who signed her name "A Woman" continued: "Why will not man, instead of daily forging new chains (none the easier broken for being silken) endeavor to assist her in stemming the tide of flattery and prejudice which has been and still is the bane of her life? . . .From infancy to maturity. . .everything conspires to divert her from the path of real greatness and usefulness. She is taught to consider it immodest and entirely out of her sphere, to aspire to any thing beyond the toilette, domestic affairs, and the smiles of man. . . ." The writer ended with the plea:

> Hoping that some far abler and better abilities may be enlisted in a cause, than which none can be juster or nobler, and that woman will awake from the stuper which at present enshrouds her noblest powers of mind and exercise her own energies and talents for her own emancipation. . .[35]

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35 Advocate (Jun. 1, 1837), III, 265; (Oct. 1, 1837), III, 328-331.

Writing on the "Province of Woman," the editors of the Advocate asserted: "We wish our sex to feel that they have a personal responsibility in all that concerns the. . .good of society, and that they can no more transfer this responsibility to their fathers, husbands, sons, or brothers than they can relinquish their own personal identity." The women boldly declared that the "days of chivalry are past, when man might pay an almost idolatrous homage to the weak, vain creature whose only influence over him consisted in her powers of fascination, and whose claim to his protection arose from utter inability to think or act for herself. . . .[Women] are capable. . .of thinking for themselves, judging for themselves, and acting for themselves...," the authors insisted, as they noted that their sex had "given up solid advantages for empty adulation and unmeaning compliments."

"We have substituted external accomplishments for useful knowledge and cultivated the imagination and affection at the expense of the judgement and intellect. Such has been. . . the education of woman. And is it any wonder that the daughter, who is taught that to dress, display herself and secure a good settlement for life as the great end of her existence, should be mentally inferior to the son, who has been prepared to enter on the duties of his station by a systematic and thorough course of instruction? If even under all the disadvantages of the present system, the intellect of woman has in so many instances, shone forth with a brilliancy which has cheered and enlightened

the world, what might not be expected from it were the education of the sexes conducted on the same general principles?"[36]

Urging their readers to use their own judgment, the editors, in 1838, published a letter from their "respected and beloved sister," the noted reformer, Sarah Grimké, to which they added the following: "It is of immense importance to our sex to possess clear and correct ideas of our rights and duties, and we trust every reader will comply with the request so frequently and earnestly preferred by the writer of the article before us, to search the scriptures and decide the question for themselves. . . ." Miss Grimké's essay, devoted to a discussion of "the duties of woman at the present time," challenged the Scriptural decrees that women hold a subservient position in society. The reformer argued that "we [women] do not allow ourselves to investigate any points which have long been settled in the judgement of man. . .[for] [w]e are so little accustomed to think for ourselves, that we submit to the dictum of prejudice, and of usurped authority, almost without an effort to redeem ourselves from the unhallowed shackles which have so long bound us. . . ." Exhorting women to "read all the precepts of the Bible as addressed to woman as well as to man, and [to] lose in [their] moral, intellectual and immortal nature the consciousness of sex," Miss Grimké asserted that "[n]othing has enveloped the mind in more ignorance. . .than the false idea that the mere circumstance of sex. . .is to be the criterion of duty,

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36 Advocate (Oct. 1, 1837), III, 325.

intelligence, responsibility, superiority and inferiority. . . Duties belong to situation, not to sex. . .but the rights and responsibilities of men and women as moral beings are identical and must necessarily be so if their nature is the same. . . ."[37]

Predictably, the Grimké attack on Biblical authority aroused a flurry of responses from male and female readers and, although the editors declared that they stood "as impartial spectators of the combat," their introduction to "Delta's" rebuttal of Miss Grimké's argument suggests where their sympathies lay: "We suffer our correspondent, Delta, to speak for himself and his brethren in the foregoing article, for we would not have it supposed that if the 'weaker sex' seem to have the best of the argument it is because no one has been allowed to take the

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37 Advocate (Jan. 1, 1838), IV, 3-5; Carroll Smith Rosenberg in "Beauty the Beast and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America," American Quarterly, I, (Oct., 1971),XXII,583, in discussing the Grimké letter asserted that after its publication, "the Advocate never again published the work of an overt feminist. . .In rejecting Sarah Grimké's feminist manifesto the Society's members implicitly agreed to accept the role traditionally assigned woman: the self-sacrificing, supportive, determinedly chaste wife and the mother who limited her 'sphere' to domesticity and religion." Professor Rosenberg's analysis is, however, not accurate, for not only did the Advocate, particularly after 1840, repeatedly publish the works of overt feminists, including articles by such noted women as Lydia Maria Child and Jane G. Swisshelm, but as will be demonstrated in Chapters X and XII, the Advocate implicitly and explicitly refuted the traditional role assigned to antebellum women.

field against them. We regret for the sake of those husbands whose endangered rights he is endeavoring to defend, that their champion seems so unskilled in the use of the lance, and we recommend him to the mercy of the powerful antagonist against whom he has entered the lists, should this communication chance to meet her eye."[38]

Their diversified activities, achievements, and arguments, infused them with self-assurance, and females in moral reform societies across the nation began to refer to themselves as women, eschewing the identity-negating terms of wife, mother, sister, and daughter. Multitudes of essays and letters dotted the pages of the Advocate articulating the respect woman felt for other females which at once grew out of and heightened her increasing sense of individual value. A woman from Verona, New York, wrote that "woman has obtained the proud prerogative to act, feel and think for herself," and another urged the members of her sex: "When satisfied you are in the way of duty, do not be moved by the scoffs and sneers of the giddy multitude." An article discussing the importance of holding conventions for the auxiliary societies asked the women to "pledge [them]selves to sustain one annually in some of the large cities of the North," and noted that "[t]he assembling of women in general convention meeting, for the specific purpose of furthering a philanthropic enterprise. . .betokens on the part of woman a

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38 Advocate (Apr. 1, 1838), IV, 55.

clearer discernment of the capabilities of these mental powers. . . which have been for ages. . .lost to the world. It indicates an increasing recognition of those fearful, but ennobling, moral obligations, which grow out of her nature as a moral and accountable being. . . .[and] the glorious, the heroic bursting of these iron limits. . . .When. . .I regard. . .the influence which they will exert in raising woman from the lowly path in which. . . she has hitherto walked. . .I experience sensations of peculiar joy; for I am a woman."[39]

The expression of pride in womanhood, articulated by increasing numbers of upper- and middle-class women who worked in benevolent societies in cities and towns across the nation, evolved from a fundamental view of woman's nature totally at variance with the precepts of the woman-beau ideal. As discussed in previous chapters, the insecurities and uncertainties of the antebellum era, exacerbated in the urban milieu, gave form to an ethos of the perfect woman, which, insisting upon her delicacy, weakness, piety, domesticity, purity, and self abnegation, also decreed that these traits flowed from an inferior and uniquely feminine nature. Because masculine security, indeed entire sense of personal identity, depended so heavily upon the distance he set between himself and woman, he could admit no area of similarity in feelings, interest, or aptitude between the two

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39 Advocate (1845), XI, 40; (1840), VI, 106; (May 3, 1838), IV, 87.

sexes. He thus forcefully and relentlessly propounded the argument that woman, totally defined through her female gender, had duties and responsibilities completely different from those of a man. While the nineteenth century male remained a morally accountable being whose enjoyment of natural rights emanated from his shared humanity, woman became a mere appendage of her masculine relations who lacking autonomy had no title to her own life and no claim to natural rights.

These views of woman's nature, merging into a rigid theory, molded custom and attitude, practice and law, and ineluctably inhibited the development of feminism. For as stated earlier in this study, feminism, embracing all phases of woman's emancipation, including the freedom to decide her own destiny, freedom from sex-linked social roles, freedom from society's oppressive restrictions, freedom to express fully her thoughts and actions, is predicated upon certain basic conceptions of woman's nature. Her complete independence demands the acceptance of woman as an autonomous being with the right to individual conscience and judgment and necessitates the belief that woman's essential dignity and worth do not depend upon the incidental relations of her life, but stem from her common humanity.

Through their involvement in organized benevolence, females implicitly and explicitly began to challenge and defy the theories of feminine inferiority and their pernicious ramifications. However imprecise, hesitant, and scattered were the

perceptions of women who pioneered in feminine public philanthropy, their shared activities, ideas, and experiences, nonetheless, contributed much to woman's emancipation. Within the first thirty years of female voluntarism, women expanded their sphere beyond the confines of home. They demonstrated audacity and perseverance, traditionally considered male qualities, and gained a sense of their individuality, which, contrasting sharply with the monolithic woman-beau ideal, also enabled them to perceive their unity with other females, and gave them the courage to enter unprecedented, even forbidden, fields of endeavor.

The many stars placed in the unfinished galaxy of feminism during the years between 1800 and 1830 remained dim and indistinct until the illuminating theories of women working in societies concerned with the problem of female deviance gave them focus and definition. Forging a bold and unchartered course in delineating proper masculine conduct and establishing the criteria for social acceptability, the women in the Female Benevolent Society and the Female Moral Reform Society formed programs and policies which incurred the wrath of men throughout the nation. As the members defended themselves against vehement objections, they incorporated the experiences of those females active before them in their replies. Cognizant that women in early charities had demonstrated attributes long considered the exclusive property of men, the beleaguered volunteers rejected the argument that women lacked the capability or strength to conduct their projects. They came to suspect that

the opposition originated instead from the concern that women did indeed possess the requisite qualities for success and would in time appreciate their abilities and effectiveness.

As women gained confidence in their own competence, they perceived the antagonism as a form of oppression which, uniting them with other females, forced them to defend their ideas and activities on different grounds. Aware that women had for decades worked with governmental and business officials, initiated policies, executed programs, instituted reforms, written charters, elected officers, conducted meetings, managed finances, balanced books and left records, females could no longer believe that men and women were totally dissimilar with completely different duties and talents. They began to postulate that woman, like man, could determine her responsibilities for herself, for she was a morally accountable, autonomous being with the right to independent judgment and conscience. This theory, set forth with increasing conviction and strength, became the lodestar in the constellation of ideas agitating for woman's emancipation. It gave meaning to and crystallized nebulous and disparate thoughts and actions into a splendid assemblage of feminist thinking which would radiate a vision of female ability and achievement to women everywhere. For the assertion of woman's essential dignity as an autonomous individual, enabling females to feel pride in themselves and in other women, in no way represented a culmination of the discussion and investigation of woman's position in society conducted by the members of female

voluntary associations. Conversely, the knowledge, slowly being absorbed by women across the nation, that they did not possess an inferior, flawed nature, fostered an intensive inquiry, reminiscent of, but going far beyond, both in scope and in ramifications, the discussions which flourished in the eighteenth century, into the causes of woman's subservient status and significantly influenced the programs, policies, and theories which evolved in future years of female benevolence.

CHAPTER X

THE DEVIANT WOMEN

The merciful wife of my poor neighbor, the shoe maker, would make as a legislative woman, a Duchess of Sutherland, were she in her castles with her incomes and I have no doubt their inmost daily experiences would be found very similar, could they be closely and honestly compared.

I rejoice in you, as it is rarely given to one woman to rejoice in another.

Eliza Farnham

The women of moral reform societies across the nation basked in their recently perceived identity as morally accountable beings. Their sense of themselves as autonomous individuals, who shared with men the right to independent conscience and judgment, no longer eclipsed by the myth that they possessed a defective nature, shone forth in a burst of new activity and thought. The awareness that woman's subservient position in society did not evolve from a unique or particular feminine character, enlightened and gave intensity to the members' inquiry into the causes of their subordinate status. If woman's inferior condition did not derive from basic failings in her nature, then its origins lay in society. This understanding of the roots of feminine oppression rendered the volunteers increasingly disaffected from their social milieu. As the century progressed, the manifestations of their estrangement changed and matured.

The first stage of their dissatisfaction appeared in the late 1830s. The women conducted a vigorous campaign against men, customs, laws, and educational and employment systems which thwarted their efforts at self-realization. The volunteers wrote in scathing terms of man, whom they believed to be responsible for their plight. Simultaneously, they sponsored literature exalting the members of their own sex, disseminating the achievements and ideas of the volunteers to women throughout America. As their commitments to other women merged with their increasing estrangement, they agitated for the better treatment of all females, including prostitutes and criminals. They began to view deviant women as sharers in their humanity. And even more remarkably, they came to see themselves as the aberrant female's sisters in alienation.

Energized by a pride in womanhood, the contributors to the Advocate of Moral Reform proclaimed women's capabilities, challenged notions of their inadequacy, and praised the accomplishments of their sex. "We do not admit any but a physical inferiority in our sex," wrote one woman, while another quipped that a "discovery has been made. . .that 'a woman is better than a sheep.'" An article in 1841 heralding The Olive Plant and Ladies' Temperance Advocate, a new magazine conducted by women, declared: "Too long has woman slept over the wants and miseries of a world in ruins. . . .We rejoice that she is waking up at last - and some of the ablest pens are pledged to support of this new periodical." The importance of the press in shaping thought did not elude the editors of the Advocate. Obviously aware that they could wield substantial power through their publication, they asserted: "As the present course of public opinion was directed by men of the last generation, so the public opinion of the coming generation is now in the hands of us who are now acting upon the stage of human life. . . ."[1]

Alive to the potentiality of the magazine in affecting social change, the members wrote and published articles implicitly and explicitly challenging woman's traditional sphere. Nevertheless, essays glorifying the home persisted and appeared alongside expressly feminist tracts, admitting both the staff's ambivalence

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1 Advocate (Jan. 1, 1840), VI, 5; (Mar. 15, 1843), XI, 42; (Jul. 15, 1841), VII, 108; (Jun. 1, 1840), VI, 82.

over their radical stance and the wish to appease the more conservative among their readers. Yet, by the end of the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, treatises urging different aspects of woman's emancipation dominated the periodical and indicated its future direction. One contributor, writing in 1848, declared that woman "[is] not a slave to be trampled under foot; . . .but a companion to man; his equal in every social right," and her work, entitled "Woman's Mission," contrasts sharply to the orthodox view of woman's purpose espoused by most of her countrymen. Although, it would be many years before the editors of the Advocate published an exposition similar to Sarah Grimké's direct attack on the Biblical decree of woman's subjugation, they did search the scriptures for implications of woman's competence: "It appears that Miriam, the prophetess, was associated with her brother as the leader of the tribes of Israel. . . . Deborah, the prophetess, . . .led not the women, but the men to successful combat. . . .In later times, under a clearer and more perfect dispensation, female labor was in high estimation if we may judge by the manner in which it is repeatedly mentioned. How often are holy women commended, and not merely for their domestic virtues, but for labor which directly promoted the interests of the church? Phebe, Priscilla, the beloved Persis and others, have their names honorably recorded as fellow laborers with the saints."[2]

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2 Advocate (1848), XIV, 92; (Oct. 1, 1840), VI, 146.

Through the Advocate the members could circulate articles displaying woman's abilities, while simultaneously the skills that the volunteers demonstrated in conducting their journal and Society attracted attention. The visiting committee reported the story of a young woman who, astonished that females edited and published the Advocate without male assistance, remarked: "If females can accomplish such a work as this, cannot I do something to rescue my father and his property from destruction?" A "gentleman" admirer of the Female Moral Reform Society asserted: "There is so much talent and so much wisdom enlisted as to withstand all the assaults of raillery," while the New York Tribune, in 1843, complimented the Society as being composed of "heroic women."[3]

As the members of the Association came to understand their importance to other women as models of female energy, ability, and courage, they shared their ideas, histories, thoughts, and experiences with their readers. At the semi-annual meeting of 1848, held at Clinton, New York, the volunteers spoke of their involvement in moral reform work and the ways in which it had affected their lives. Margaret Dye, active in the New York Chapter, "owed to [the] Society. . .enlarged views of woman's sphere and destiny;" Mrs. Barnes of Troy, New York had found an outlet for her talents by opening "an evening school for domestics." Mrs. Sarah Ingraham (Bennett), who edited the Advocate for over

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3 Advocate (Oct. 15, 1837), III, 339; (Apr. 1, 1840), VI, 50; New York Tribune quoted in Advocate (Apr. 15, 1843), IX, 60.

a quarter century, had "been interested in Moral Reform before it had a name. . . .She attended a meeting of ladies where this wretched class of persons were remembered. . .but had no thought of laboring publicly in the cause being constitutionally entirely averse to occupying a public sphere." The Society had benefited her personally and had also "[opened] the door of usefulness to do good to the thousands of our sex yearly incarcerated in prisons, and to other thousands without employment or friends to guide them."[4]

The minutes of the meeting also included the account of Mary A. Hawkins who, at the age of twenty-six, became the first president of the Association: "The condition of hundreds of abandoned in [New York City]. . .attracted her attention, and deeply interested her, though she must candidly acknowledge the interest was partly the result of the false light in which romance has taught her to regard such women." She started collecting money to form a society "but soon so much opposition was raised against the cause, her husband objected to her laboring in it." Nonetheless, she persevered and "[t]hough. . .entirely unused to writing for the public, the 3 first numbers of the Advocate were got out by Mrs. Green and herself." Augmenting these casual personal narratives, several books appeared, published by the American Female Moral Reform Society, detailing the lives and accomplishments of its members.

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4 Advocate (Oct. 15, 1846), XII, 154.

Walks of Usefulness recounted the life story of Margaret Prior, the first female missionary of the Society. A member of the board of managers of the New York Orphan Asylum and a founder of a refuge for half-orphans, Mrs. Prior assumed her position in 1836 and held that post until her death six years later. During the period of her employment by the Society, she"stepped fearlessly" through the "Five Points, in the Old Brewery, [and in] Murderers' Alley." "She frequently went. . . on errands of mercy when the weather would have been thought. . . unfit for females to be out." One co-worker recalled that Mrs. Prior "was jealous of the time that the care of superfluous rooms and furniture demanded, and once succeeded in gaining her husband's consent to close her parlors for a year." Another volunteer recollected that she would spend on charities the money that her husband gave her for washing assistance, and then would do the laundry herself and never tell him. Yet, her friends and associates remembered most "Mrs. Prior's benevolence, her active, laborious, untiring, disinterested efforts to do good."[5]

The accolades accorded Margaret Prior found an equal in the praise bestowed upon Mary Hawkins. Sarah Ingraham Bennett, long acquainted with the Society's first president, recalled Mrs. Hawkins as "calm, self-recollected, far seeing. What was done under her supervision was sure to be well-done. . . .The lions in the way were bravely met, and her quiet, lovely examples were ever inspiring to others." Wrought Gold, a biography of

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5 American Female Guardian Society: Our Golden Jubilee: A retrospect 1834-1884 (New York, 1884), p. 14; Walks of Usefulness or Reminiscences of Mrs. Margaret Prior (New York: American Female Moral Reform Society, 1844), PP. 14,20,72,63.

Mary Hawkins prepared by the members of the Society, described "her habit if in her walks of usefulness she met a woman who seemed in trouble to stop and inquire into her situation, and in almost every instance means of relief were found." Her "personal labors were incessant. . . .The widow, the orphan, the fatherless, penniless, and homeless, found in her a friend in need."[6]

Significantly replete with descriptions of "usefulness," or "walks of usefulness," the memoirs and biographies formed a dramatic contrast to the image of idle feminine perfection envisioned by antebellum theorists. And the qualities detailed in the portrayal of Mrs. Hawkins, as well as countless other women, were the antithesis of those female traits insisted upon by an insecure era. "Her keenness of perception, her decision, her maturity of judgement, were traits so manifest that none could be associated with her without feeling her influence. . . .How active and energetic she was! . . .Her influence was magnetic and her enthusiasm contagious, acting as an impetus to urge on her fellow-helpers." Calling Mary Hawkins the "complete embodiment of true Womanhood," her co-workers found in their first president a woman to emulate, as they attempted to repudiate the nineteenth century model for female excellence: the woman-beau ideal.[7]

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6 Sarah Bennett, Woman's Work Among the Lowly. Memorial volume of the first forty years of the American Female Guardian Society and Home for the Friendless, (New York: American Female Guardian Society, 1877), p. 39; Sarah Bennett, Wrought Gold, A Model Life for Christian Workers, (New York: American Female Guardian Society, 1874), pp. 119, 27.

7 Wrought Gold, p. 42.

The identification with gifted and dedicated women imbued members with thoughts of their own unfulfilled potential and heightened their anger and bitter resentment of man whom they saw as woman's oppressor, forcing her to suppress and deny her talents, intellect and ambitions. Lashing out through their periodical which soared to a circulation of over 40,000 copies a year, the women criticized, lectured, and instructed men in a manner unprecedented in American history. Whereas they had once channeled their hostility toward males into the more socially accepted form of an attack on profligate men and other males exhibiting antisocial behavior, the women in moral reform associations, now sufficiently in touch with their own feelings and confident that multitudes of other females shared their views, poured their frustrations and animosity into a scathing body of literature. In "Evils of Despotic Government," appearing in the Advocate on February 15, 1838, they wrote: "We allude to the tyranny exercised in the Home department, where lordly man, 'clothed with little brief authority,' rules his trembling subjects with a rod of iron, conscious of entire impunity, and exulting in his fancied superiority." The authors continued:

> The man we are describing is not a gambler, a drunkard, a libertine, or even a man of the world.... He is kind and affable to those who are not under his immediate control, but the ebullitions of his anger and self-will are reserved for the helpless beings who are dependent on him....[8]

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8 Golden Jubilee, p. 50; Advocate (Feb. 15, 1838), IV, 28.

Most men, the writers asserted, regard their wives "as a useful article of furniture, which is valuable only for the benefit derived from it, but which may be thrown aside at pleasure." If he has an affection for his wife and children "it is [more]. . .because they belong to him and are appendages to his being, than for any reason existing out of himself. . . . Setting aside the question of the equality of the sexes, it is impolitic, ungenerous, unmanly and unchristian for one human being to thus treat another. . . .[And] if [woman's] inferiority is only an official one, the mere inferiority of station, then surely it is the height of arrogance and presumption for him. . . to assume the exercise of despotic government. . . ."[9]

Provoked by the continuous stream of printed material imperiously reminding females of the obligations encumbent upon them, a woman retaliated with her "Counsel for Gentlemen," which had been "suggested by reading J. P. Y.'s 'Counsel for Ladies.'" "Much is. . .made about the duty of wives and much advice is given to make them what is thought by their counsellors they ought to be; but I am of the opinion that they are not such unreasonable beings after all if they do arrogate a little now and then to themselves. . . .Woman is taught to look upon man as a superior being. She believes him so, until experience teaches her better, and that will be soon enough, when such servile subjection is exacted as J. P. Y., in the plentitude of his wisdom and goodness, has marked out as a rule by which a

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9 Advocate (Feb. 15, 1838), IV, 28.

wife shall graduate her deportment toward her husband. . .and that. . .to please a whimsical or implacable man, who is incapable of feeling or appreciating it when done."[10]

Numerous articles appeared in the Advocate, chiding men for their behavior toward women and exhorting them to be more responsive to their wives' needs. In "How to Treat a Wife," the author began by instructing men: "First get a wife, Secondly be patient." Implicitly negating the woman's compensatory role as the balm for all man's troubles, the writer would have all husbands remember that the "wife may have had trials which. . . have been hard to bear." Man, therefore, should not carry "trials" and "perplexities" to the home. Whereas husbands "encounter. . .difficulties in the open air, . . .[the] wife is often shut in from these healthful influences, and her health fails, and her spirits lose their elasticity. . . ." The writer admonished husbands to "yield your wishes to hers. She has preferences as strong as you. . . ." She concluded by asking rhetorically: "Do you find it hard to yield sometimes? Think you it is not difficult for her to give up always?"

"A Chapter to Young Husbands," which appeared in 1842, declared: "We have seen. . .a good many things said in the papers to wives. . .exposing their faults, perhaps magnifying them, and expounding to them, in none of the kindest terms, their duty and the offices pertaining to women's sphere. . . [yet] [s]o far as we have had an opportunity for observation,

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10 Advocate (Apr. 1, 1838), IV, 51.

[women] are far more devoted and faithful than those who style themselves their lords, and who by the customs of society, have other and generally more pleasant and varied duties to perform. . . .It should never be forgotten that the wife has her rights." The essay went on to ask men why they had taken wives: "Was it simply to darn your stockings, mend your clothes, take care of your children, and watch over your sick bed? Was it simply to conduce to your own comfort? Nor is it a sufficient answer that you give her a home. . . .You do this for your help, you would do it for any. . .housekeeper. . . ." And the article concluded: "It is our candid opinion that in a large majority of the instances of domestic misery, the man is the aggressor."[11]

"There are husbands who not only refuse to help their wives in the thousand little ways which their leisure moments would permit, but will even throw obstacles in the way of the mother herself," declared one treatise, while countless other essays, drawing the implications from the abundant illustrations of marital unhappiness, refuted the decree that a woman's only value and happiness came from her married status. Dr. Alexander's "Letters to Single Ladies," published in 1838, asserted that "when it is considered how few happy matches there are and what cares and trials commonly attend the married life, there is in your case more room for self-gratulation than for regret. What a gain would it have proved to hundreds and thousands of married women if they had remained single. . . ," he declared.[12]

11 Advocate (Oct. 15, 1842), X, 152; (Jan. 15, 1842), VIII, 10.

12 Advocate (1847), XIII, 153; (1838), IV, 79.

With the reprint in 1845 of "Love and Courtship," an article postulating the prevailing nineteenth century view of matrimony, the editors of the Advocate had an opportunity to enunciate their thoughts on marriage. The republished essay defined the character of love: "It is woman's all -- her wealth, her power, her very being. Man. . .have ever an existence distinct from that of his affection. He has his worldly interests, his public character, his ambition, his competition with other men -- but woman centres all in that one feeling and 'In that she lives, or else she has no life.'" Protesting both the thesis of the article and its ramifications for women, the journalists wrote: "She who entertains this sentiment. . .lives. . .[not] for herself. . . .[H]er own existence is absorbed by the interests of another. . . .[W]oman as well as man. . .has an existence distinct from her affections. . . .Look where we may in society our sex are found in large numbers having a sterner work to do than simply leaning on a protector and guide."[13]

Another article dissenting from the theories expressed in "Love and Courtship" recounted the history of women in society. They have been "extolled as goddesses" and "looked upon as inferior beings." Yet, woman is "neither an angel nor a fiend, neither too good for censure, nor too bad for confidence and trust, neither above nor below the ordinary duties of humanity, but a rational, immortal being, possessing substantially the same powers and faculties as man," the author proclaimed before

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13 Advocate (Feb. 1, 1845), XI, 19.

addressing herself to the original essay: "By the sentiment alluded to [in "Love and Courtship"] [the] large class of single women are summarily blotted out of existence. They may continue to vegetate but cannot be said to live. . . .Alas for such women as Hannah Moore. . .Harriet Martineau, and. . .our own Catharine Sedgwick, if the propositions of this writer be correct. One thing, however, must I think be conceded, that though dead these ladies have done far more for society, than very many who are living in the full enjoyment of. . .affections." Urging that "daughters. . .be taught to look forward to marriage with rational hopes and expectations," the author appealed: "[L]et them be made to feel that love and marriage are not essential to their respectability, usefulness and comfort."[14]

Although they might rail at theories stipulating the centrality of matrimony to woman's happiness, the all-female staff of the Advocate remained acutely aware of economic realities which often drove women into marriage. Working with prostitutes and with the other impoverished women who registered at the Society's Office of Direction had made it abundantly clear that a life of "single-bliss," where woman, free of domestic responsibilities, could seek fulfillment through a career, became untenable in a social milieu, so prejudiced against women laboring for remuneration that it denied even those completely dependent upon their own wages the means of survival. Woman's freedom to accept or reject the marriage proposal and her ability to

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14 Advocate (Mar. 1, 1845), XI, 33-34; (Jul. 15, 1842), VIII, 108.

determine how she wished to conduct her life unequivocally related to her financial status. And the members of the American Female Moral Reform Society attacked the economic system which kept their sex in a state of dependency while it withheld from them the means for subsistence, fulfillment, and self determination.

"It is a fact universally admitted that the ordinary rate of wages for female labor is unjust and oppressive. In this single fact lies the germs of woman's degradation in unnumbered instances. . . ," proclaimed the Advocate of Moral Reform in 1845. Basing their statements upon the experiences of women in early benevolent societies, the reports of visiting committees of moral reform associations in cities across the nation, which described the countless female "victims of want and neglect," and their own observations of hideous urban poverty, the editors of the Advocate devoted considerable attention to publicizing the plight of working women. An article entitled "Tailoresses and Seamstresses," told of "10,000 females in this city dependent upon their needles for support, . . .[A] valuable, worthy, and indispensable class of the community. . . laboring under a cruel and iron handed oppression. . .[they are] [d]riven by the hand of a merciless oppression into the cellars and garrets of old, worn out, leaky. . .tenements, for which they have to pay an exorbitant rent, and there compelled to toil from 16-20 hours in a day to gain a bare subsistence. . . ." The essay continued: "Nor is the mere pittance which these. . .

females receive for their labor, their only cause of complaint.... Even the trifle promised them. . .is. . .almost impossible to collect. . . .Here is labor without compensation -- labor extorted from our own sisters. . .whom every principle of honor calls us to protect."[15]

"None work harder, or more hours in the day, than our tailoress girls -- and few receive smaller wages for their services," asserted an essay published in 1843, as the American Female Moral Reform Society persisted in its efforts to demonstrate that the working woman "is defrauded of the just recompense for her labor." "Does not such a state of things call for reform? Must our poor and sickly females be compelled to give away so much time for nothing?" queried one writer. Another expressed astonishment that "this oppression [was] carried on. . .in the City of New York, the great commercial metropolis of the nation -- the mistress of the arts -- the seat of science. . .whose proud sons boast of their chivalrous and philanthropic doings. . . .Here it is that woman. . .because she is a widow, or an orphan, is oppressed." "There is a strange and cruel mockery in the conduct of the lords of creation to the weaker sex," proclaimed an author from Philadelphia. "They are fond of speaking in extravagant terms on the excellence of women. . . .[but]. . .[w]hat support or encouragement does the widow. . .or the friendless female receive from man. How is her labor requited? How are her rights maintained? . . . [W]oman

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15 Advocate (1845), XI, 109; (Dec. 1, 1836), II, 171.

[is]. . .the drudge and slave of those who prate about her beauty and their chivalry."[16]

Lavishing opprobrium upon "employers [who] become rich on [female]. . .industry," the volunteers argued that "[t]o grudge or stint the wages of female labor, is false economy. It is to swell the ranks of degredation and vice," and countless "extracts from the visiting committee" detailed the "many and various. . . temptations to which the poor of [the] city are exposed. . . ." After ten years of witnessing, reading about, and involving themselves in the predicament of the impoverished woman, the members of the Society postulated a causal relationship between poverty and prostitution: "In every large community and especially in cities there are multitudes of the young who. . .are thrown on their own resources and obliged to earn a subsistence. . .or become prey to the tempter. . . .Shame on. . .men who, by oppressing the hireling in her wages, . .drive the young and unfriended to dens of shame, while they fill their coffers with the avails of unrequited toil. . . ."[17]

Apparently the members of the Moral Reform Society living throughout the nation, overwhelmingly agreed that "[with] respect [to] the low rate of wages, the customs of society are cruelly oppressive to females," for at the Tenth Annual Meeting, they adopted the following resolution: "Whereas, By the prevailing system of inadequate compensation for female labor, the. . .poor of our sex. . .are cruelly oppressed and by the

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16 Advocate (Feb. 1, 1843), IX, 24; (Dec. 1, 1836), II, 171; II, 136; Also see: (Feb. 15, 1840), VI, 25.

17 Advocate (Feb. 1, 1843), IX, 24; (Feb. 15, 1840), VI, 54; (Nov. 1, 1844), X, 165.

destitution consequent on the low rates of wages are exposed to insult and temptation therefore, Resolved, that. . .it is our duty to feel and in every proper way to act in their behalf till a reform is accomplished, which shall render female industry and skill available to their possessors." Committing themselves to alleviate the suffering of working women, the volunteers filled their publications whth "accounts of the great destitution" due to "the lowness of their wages." Year after year the women protested the "low estimate of female labor," and told of efforts in other cities to remedy the plight of the female worker. From Oregon came the proclaimation the "[f]emales must be better paid for their labor," and the Society's London correspondent reported on the establishment of "societies for the relief of the Governess, the Dressmaker and the Seamstress."[18]

The members of the New York Chapter, endeavoring to assist the "50,000 women in [their] city who sustain themselves and their families," announced that "observation [had] led them to believe that thousands of the sex might be saved [destruction] if some of the avenues of business, now closed to them, such as clerkships in retail dry goods stores. . .and all light-in-door labor, were opened to them, and their training rendered them competent to the work." The Executive Board of the Society related their "experiment. . .to dispense with the services of

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18 Advocate (Oct. 15, 1844), X, 29; (Jun. 1, 1844), X, 86; (Jan. 1, 1844), 7; Annual Report of the American Female Moral Reform Society (1846), 81; For other articles decrying the condition of female laborers see: Advocate (Apr. 15, 1840), VI, 58; (Jun. 15, 1846), XII, 90; (Nov. 15, 1845), XI, 175; Annual Report of the American Female Guardian Society (1848), 85.

men in their office and employ women exclusively --. . .the business of folding, mailing, book-keeping, publishing, book selling, etc., has been done by females, and so far as [the Board] can learn, entire satisfaction has been given."[19]

Disparate facets of woman's oppression coalesced into the campaign for wider employment opportunities. The pleas for the poor female worker continued; yet, the request that she be justly compensated for her labor slowly evolved into the insistence that any capable female be allowed to enter all the traditionally masculine occupations and professions. This demand,was fraught with great significance. It emanated from the upper- and middle-class woman's increasing sense of herself as a capable human being and found expression in the later activities and publications of numerous female benevolent organizations which will be examined in subsequent chapters. But it first appeared in the literature of the American Moral Reform Society in the mid-1840s. An article published in 1846 examined "Female Wages:"

> [M]en have monopolized almost every field of labor. They have taken the learned professions, they have entered every department which commerce opens, and, indeed, almost every place where skill and talent is required, they have excluded women...and have only left to them the unmolested possession of the nursery. Women are thus limited to a few employments, hence these are overstocked with laborers....It will avail little merely to denounce the oppression....The great work to be accomplished is to increase the number of employments which shall be accessible to women and then to encourage the daughters of the land to undertake them. Does anyone ask 'Would you have them plead at the bar, or follow the plough?' I frankly answer 'Yes,' [20]

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19 Advocate (1845), XI, 109; (Jun. 2, 1845), XI, 82.

20 Advocate (Aug. 1, 1846), XII, 119.

Declaring that "it is an honor to have it said that [a woman] can support herself," the members of the Moral Reform Society implored even females of the upper and middle classes to "take in work; do anything but live a lazy and fashionable life." "Make every woman independent," they entreated. "[Q]ualify her to do something whereby she can get her own living. No matter if her father is rich; . . .Let women be educated so that they can compete with men in those branches of business where they can do just as well as men." "Why not female-committee-women, as well as female teachers?" asked Emma Willard, founder of the Troy Female Seminary, in a letter to the Society in which she asserted that "It is a mistake to suppose that if women should go to a school meeting and ever have the privilege of speaking there it would unsex them."[21]

The Advocate frequently published correspondence with professional women and it praised and supported the efforts of those who attempted to enlarge feminine occupational opportunities. Of Mary Lyon, founder of Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary, the editors wrote: "It was truly animating to behold one bearing the name of woman, who had surmounted obstacles of towering magnitude and achieved results making glad many hearts." At a meeting of the Association in 1843, Mrs. Bates of Westfield, Massachusetts, recommended that "females of requisite abilities be encouraged and assisted to qualify themselves to practice obstetrics," and the other members evidently agreed as they agitated to open

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21 Advocate (Jul. 15, 1842), VIII, 106; (Apr. 1, 1846), XII, 50; (Oct. 15, 1847), XIII, 158.

the medical profession to women. Applauding Elizabeth Blackwell's resolve to "take an independent course and act according to her conviction of right," the journalists declared: "We shall expect to see her sustained in her chosen path by the wise and reflecting . . .and that. . .her example will be an agency for good to her sex."[22]

The conviction that "the energies of woman should be fully developed. . .in mental and physical labor of all kinds," urging on the crusade to broaden the scope of feminine employment, implied a dynamic, undefined sphere for women which contrasted sharply with the home domain delineated by the ethos of the woman-beau ideal. Moreover, the realization and assertion that economic deprivation forced women into prostitution pierced another of the myths of nineteenth century womanhood, for it implied that the harlot was not the depraved creature pictured by John McDowall and others but simply a poor woman, victimized, as were middle- and upper-class women, by a discriminatory system. With the demand that more jobs be made available to women, the volunteers hoped to satisfy the needs of females in differing social classes: feminine labor would command a higher wage, and all females, faced with an increasing number of alternatives through which to find both economic security and self-fulfillment, could exercise greater control over their own lives.[23]

Concurrently with their attack on limited employment opportunities which were productive of so much misery, the women

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22 Advocate (Sept. 1, 1846), XII, 133; (Jun. 1, 1843), IX, 86; (Feb. 1, 1848), XIV, 23.

23 Advocate (Jun. 1, 1845), XI, 82.

of moral reform societies argued for a more equitable method of educating females. They identified the inadequate and prejudicial instruction given their sex as an additional barrier to woman's advancement in the various occupations and, indeed, as a principal cause of her degraded status. In an article on "Intellectual Training," the author refuted anticipated criticism to her plan: "But says the objector, you will take from our young men their bread. I am willing to have as many men as women starve. . . .Let us place the woman on the same platform with men in a chance for a living. . . .Does the delicate mother fear that I would make her daughters masculine? What does she mean by masculine? Gross, brawling, reckless. . .thoughtless. . . . For the world I would not do it, and should be just as unwilling to have your sons such. Does she mean by masculine - thoughtful, judicious, wise, learned, independent, self-respecting -- I plead guilty." Continuing with her argument, the writer declared: "I would have the intellect of girls as highly and richly cultivated as boys." Traditionally "the boys have the best education.... [A]t the age of twelve or fourteen [girls] are taken from school permanently. . . .[A] few years are spent in learning the arts of fashion, in dress and manners, and then commence the duties of life without any preparation. . .the poor girl is enfeebled every way, in body and mind."[24]

The essay on intellectual training of women published in the Advocate in 1846 prompted immediate support.

24 Advocate (Apr. 1, 1846), XII, 49-50.

Mrs. Beatty from Ledyard, New York, urged "the writer to use her pen agiin. . . .Let such sentiments become public sentiments, and we should see woman stand in society. . .as. . .an intellectual, intelligent being, not a tool nor a dupe, but. . .a rational being. . . ." Numerous pieces examining and criticizing the education afforded to women appeared. Believing that, "[a]mong the hereditary prejudices which have twined their roots about the essential principle and the strongest passions of our nature, one of the most mischievous is that which originates in the early distinction between the sexes, from which boys acquire ideas of inherent superiority, founded on pride, and supported by selfishness," writers for the Advocate explored the origins of the female station in society and invariably blamed men for their subservient position: "[O]ur brother man has evinced too little generosity towards us:. . .as if fearing our equality with him, has he not done much to perpetuate our inferiority and check the development of intellectual energy? He has not, like a friend, kindly reproved our faults, but he has, by obsequious admiration, stimulated his sister to that pursuit of trifles for which in his heart he condemns her, and having thus debased his own endowments, to assist in degrading hers, he has disingenuously exalted in the superiority of his talents and acquirements."[25]

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25 Advocate (Jun. 15, 1846), XII, 95; (May 1, 1841), VII, 69; (Aug. 1, 1838), IV, 117.

In "The Ladies of the Present Age," a student at Mrs. Atkinson's Seminary shared her views with the readers of the Advocate: "[W]hy the female mind is supposed to be incapable of those lofty pursuits which render that of man so noble, why the possession of a few accomplishments. . .is all of which she is thought worthy, has never been taken into consideration by those wise and learned men who act upon these suppositions. . . . What the ladies of our land are, the influence of our leading men has made them. . . .The gentlemen are supposed to form the standard in everything. Their likes and dislikes are thought to actuate every motive. . . .[T]hey form the standard of female excellence. . . .It [is] a pity indeed that the noble lords of creation whose very being is consistency, should object to a standard of their own formation. . . .The gentlemen think not that the female mind is able to keep pace. . .with theirs -- [but] where the spirit of man has braved its glorious way, there the spirit of woman is capable of soaring. . . ."[26]

Protesting the "assumption of superiority in [their] brethren," women came to perceive and assert that "[it] is the want of a proper education which. . .reduced them as a class to one uniform and inferior standard." As contributors declared that "[i]n the earliest childhood. . .girls are [not] in any measure inferior to boys. . .[and that] in. . .schools. . .where girls and boys are assembled together in classes and instructed in classical literature girls are almost invariably more

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26 Advocate (Mar. 15, 1845), XI, 41.

intelligent. . . ," they proceeded to examine feminine education in all its aspects. "As long as boys and girls run about in the dirt, and trundle hoops together they are both precisely alike," claimed an article reprinted from the Edinburgh Review, which went on to note that "[s]ome persons. . .deem it more becoming that a woman should educate flowers, make friendships with birds and pick up plants than enter into more difficult and fatiguing studies. . . ." "Why," the author asked, "are we necessarily to doom a girl whatever be her taste or her capacity to one unvaried line of petty and frivolous occupation? If she is full of strong sense and elevated curiousity can there be any reason why she should be diluted and enfeebled down to a mere culler of simples and fancier of birds? Why books and history and reasoning are to be torn out of her hands, and why she is to be sent like a butterfly to hover over the idle flowers of the field?"[27]

"The girls are taught to wait on the boys; if a boy wants some bread and butter the girls must go up stairs for it; if one has cut his finger, the girl is dispatched for a cloth. . . while her oldest brother stands by in idleness," complained one writer in 1845. Another, in the same year, ridiculed the "common phrases" that the "true theatre for a woman is the sick chamber" and there is "[n]othing so honorable to a woman as not to be spoken of at all," as "the delight of Noodledom." Still other authors discussed the pernicious ramifications of the prevailing system of education on the female sex: "So

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27 Advocate (Oct. 1, 1837), III, 325; (1838), IV, 121; (Aug. 15, 1845), XI, 121; (Nov. 15, 1845), XI, 169.

completely have the talents of women been kept down that there is scarcely a single work, either of reason or imagination, written by a woman which is in general circulation. . . ." Not only did women fail to achieve recognition in the world of arts and scholarship, but "[f]ew women [were even] capable of transacting the most ordinary business. They [were] consequently obliged to entrust all their affairs to their relations or to hire agents, by both of whom they [were] constantly defrauded and plundered. . . ."[28]

The women who wrote for the Advocate generally agreed that "[f]eebleness of mind is the result of improper education, . . [for] where the present system of mental culture is fully carried out, nervous, irritable, unhappy females are the result -- a temperament utterly inconsistent with a life of rational enjoyment. . . ." "How can girls be otherwise than delicate when they are not allowed to do anything that can possibly strengthen their physical powers -- how can they be learned when they have not the time and how can they have judgement and decision when others always think for them?" the essayists queried, as they cautiously proposed changing the methods of instructing women. "There are colleges and academies founded and sustained by permanent funds and legislative appropriations for the education of young men," reasoned one writer arguing for publicly supported female education, and she asked: "but where are there similar institutions for young ladies? And

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28 Advocate (Aug. 15, 1845), XI, 121; (Sept. 1, 1845), XI, 130; (1838), IV, 121.

are they not needed? Are females so much more wealthy - are their means and opportunities for self support so much more abundant, that they can educate themselves, while the widow's mite, the abundance of the rich and the resources of the state must all be put in the requisition to educate young men?"[29]

The increasing number of theorists proposing alterations in the traditional manner of educating women's minds, also addressed themselves to the prevailing ideas of feminine physical instruction. Denying that woman's inherent nature made her weak and infirm, articles appeared attributing female fragility to tight corseting, "breathing. . .impure air," and lack of exercise. Asserting that it is "just as healthy for the girl" as for the boy to "run out of doors," one woman declared: "I would have your daughters play out of doors just as many hours as your sons, and no one should call them girl-boys."

In a piece entitled "Doctors vs. Ladies," an author criticized the medical profession for their indifference toward women and claimed that too little attention had been given to the "frequent fainting in females fashionably attired," which the writer declared had roots in customs that disregarded the health of women. Hoping to counterattack the deleterious effects of social more on feminine health, the Advocate printed Dr. William Alcott's "Thoughts on Physiology -- Addressed to Mothers and Daughters" intermittently throughout the 1840s, as well as numerous other essays on the same general theme. Discussing such topics as "Tight Lacing" and the "Consequences

of Compression," these articles tried to overcome the years of indoctrination in feminine idleness and delicacy, while they reminded women of the convention and practices keeping their sex dependent and subservient.[30]

At once attacking custom, men, and the educational and employment systems as damaging to women and responsible for their degradation, the members of moral reform societies also unleashed an assault upon the legal codes which they found to be prejudicial against women. Their experiences with betrayed and abandoned women, forced to support themselves by prostitution, and with other impoverished females, impressed the volunteers with the callousness of antebellum laws and they wrote articles remonstrating the discriminatory ordinances. "Women have so long been called 'angels' that men seem to have come to the conclusion that they have no persons to protect; and as for property, they say women do not know enough to take care of it, and therefore the laws and customs of society virtually say they shall have none to protect." protested one writer. "If a man dies and leaves a snug little property, which judiciously managed would support the family and educate the children, the law kindly steps in and appoints a guardian for the children -- and a surrogate to settle the estate -- as if she were an idiot. . . .The law in its kind care for woman. . . takes every cent from her. This is not exactly burning a woman

30 Advocate (Nov. 15, 1845), XI, 169; (Jul. 15, 1842), VIII, 108; (Mar. 1, 1841), VII, 40; (May 1, 1841), VII, 71.

on the funeral pile of her husband, but is rather a refinement on the Asiatic cruelty."[31]

Although the American Female Guardian Society opposed all edicts biased against women, the history of their activities and policies predisposed them to agitate for a particular kind of reform. After years of effort to end the double standard and male profligacy by changing public opinion, the women came to realize fully the inadequacy and insensitivity of the laws allegedly protecting women from masculine (sexual) abuse, and their drive for the passage of enactments favorable to females grew out of their perceptions of the unjust decrees governing them. When Joseph Farryal, a notorious procurer, abducted and assaulted a young woman, the editors of the Advocate expressed their indignation at the "prostration of the majesty of law, by the form under which the action [against Farryal] was brought -- an action to recover damages for loss of services! A young and innocent girl insulted under aggravated circumstances, her health injured -- her life endangered -- and the offender can be brought to justice only by the contemptible plea of loss of services! . . .The man who steals a horse is sentenced to confinement in the State Prison for a term of years, but he who [steals] from an immortal creature all that makes life desirable, . .escapes with the payment of a sum of money. . .for gold in the eye of the law is a sovereign remedy for loss of virtue, character, body, and soul."[32]

31 Advocate (Apr. 1, 1846), XII, 49.

32 Advocate (Jun. 15, 1838), IV, 93.

The stabbing of a licentious male by one of his victims, elicited a response in the Advocate from many women, including reformer Lydia Maria Child. Defending the actions of Amelia, the wronged youth, Miss Child criticized the laws which considered "woman a chattel or a plaything." She expressed her outrage that "the woman must acknowledge herself the servant of somebody, who may claim wages for her lost time!" "With indignation and scorn," she continued, "I appeal to common sense and common justice against this miserable legal fiction -- this independent assumption that I am a chattel person. It is a standing insult to womankind; and had we not become the slaves we are deemed in law, we should rise en masse. . .and sweep that contemptible insult from the statute-book." The inequities in the legal system incensed the periodical's subscribers as well as it contributors; one reader wrote: "There are many who look with wonder and deep indignation on the anomalous fact that while the man who steals comparative 'trash' in the form of gold and silver is branded and punished with. . .severity. . . the thief of female innocence and virtue. . .stands upright among his fellows and laughs at the misery and ruin he has wrought. . . .One deep and strong impression of opinion should be heard through the ballot box on this subject to which our lawmakers should be compelled to listen, to which their action should be made to respond. . . ."[33]

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33 Advocate (Mar. 15, 1844), X, 41; (Aug. 1, 1844), X, 115; (Mar. 15, 1840), VI, 46; (Jun. 1, 1840), VI, 83; Also see: (1846), XII, 36, 13.

The despair of affecting a substantial change in the lawmakers' attitude through articles in the Advocate mingled with a heightened awareness of woman's oppression on the one hand and her capabilities on the other to stimulate an audacious enterprise. "O that we women had the handling of such matters!" lamented one female as she contemplated the American legal system, while thousands of others responded to the appeals of the Moral Reform Society and sent petitions to their state capitols demanding laws to punish seduction and adultery as crimes. Among other things, intercourse under force or false premises violated a female's physical integrity as well as her freedom and self determination and the general indifference to it at once admitted society's denigration of woman and her powerlessness to control her own life. Beginning in 1838 and continuing with increasing strength and intensity for the next ten years, the women affiliated with the Society urged their "sisters [to] pour in petitions to the Several State Legislaturss. . .praying that this foul stain on honor and justice may be washed away by enactments making the crime. . .an offence punishable with imprisonment," and advised them that "Printed petitions [would] be prepared. . .and forwarded on order to any part of the country. The matter should be immediately and thoroughly attended to." Month after month the Advocate carried a copy of the Association's petition:

> [Whereas] Seduction and Adultery, which are most degrading to moral and accountable beings and destructive of the best interests of individuals,

> families, and society at large; and whereas houses of infamy are tolerated to an alarming extent, and are the known cause of ruin to multitudes of the rising generation....We, therefore, the undersigned, residents of this State and of the County of -- respectfully and earnestly pray your honorable body at this Session of the Legislature, to pass an act, whereby the perpetrators of the crimes referred to viz. Seduction and Adultery, including also the keepers and tenants of houses of ill-fame shall be punished with imprisonment for such term of time as shall be sufficient to make the penalty 'a terror to evil doers.' [34]

The petition campaign, emphasizing the common interests of women, infused females with a sense of important mission as it awakened them to the feminine potential of affecting social change through organization. Inviting "Boston, Philadelphia, Albany, Troy, Utica, Rochester [and] Buffalo" to join them, the New York Chapter published the reports and progress of petition gatherers in the Advocate: "Have visited more than 150 families the last month," wrote one woman. "They were presented with the petition and requested to sign it. The usual objections such as 'women have nothing to do with the subject' -- 'it is out of her sphere' -- 'it is a necessary evil' [proliferated]. . . .They were told that when women suffer wrong, it was 'lady-like,' it was 'her appropriate sphere' to petition for a redress of those wrongs." In 1840 the New York branch noted that "auxiliary societies in this state and Ohio forwarded several thousand petitions to the state legislatures, praying our law makers to suppress licentiousness by legal enactments. These petitions have gained a respectable hearing, and a bill has been reported

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34 Advocate (1838), IV, 93-94; (Nov. 15, 1841), VII, 176.

in both legislatures. In New York State there were between 15,000 and 20,000 petitions -- 5,000 of which came from New York City. . . .Let the attempt be made to obtain 50,000 names the present year, and let it be distinctly understood, that the cry will annually come up from an increasing number, till our voices are hushed in death, or our prayer is answered."[35]

Bringing women into close contact with one another, petitioning also served to attract attention both to the project and to the feminine resolution responsible for it. The Honorable Frederick Starr, former member of the New York Legislature, addressed a Semi-Annual meeting held in Rochester, New York, during 1844 and assured the assembled women that their "course is right." In the same year the New York Observer expressed "strong convictions of the necessity of further action to punish seduction and adultery" and the Journal of Commerce asserted that "[p]ublic policy demands that the seducer should be severely punished. . . ." The New York Tribune "endorsed the petition of many thousands of the virtuous mothers and daughters of our State [which was] presented at Albany." A lengthy piece carried by the Philadelphia Public Ledger supported the petition campaign with the following remarks: "Moral Reform societies, consisting... of women, have been founded in most of our cities; and their principal object has been the saving of their own sex from the infernal vortex in which thousands are annually engulfed. . . ." Commenting on "the sneers and scandalous imputations" which greeted those soliciting signatures, the author asked: "And in

35 Advocate (Apr. 1, 1840), VI, 53; (Jun. 1, 1840), VI, 83.

presenting such petitions to legislators, do women travel out of their proper province. . . ?" The definitive reply that "[t]he protection of their own rights and dignity, . .if nothing more, is a. . .very important part of their business," encouraged the volunteers and reinforced their self-confidence that they could function effectively in the "public sphere."[36]

Woman's crescive perception of her own capabilities enabled her to persist in the face of opposition and to devise new campaign methods. Noting that the legislators treated "with civil contempt or indecent humor the applications of honest and honorable women for legislative attention to their own rights and to the crimes especially affecting the sex," and that "men whose views of women's rights [were] not very nice. . .[stood] by each other," the editors urged their readers to persevere in their efforts and to experiement with new strategies. "Would it not be well for every society. . .to appoint a committee of the most intelligent women belonging to it to wait upon the. . . [legislative] members for that county to endeavor to interest them personally in the subject before they come together. . . . Remember, dear sisters, that personal influence is a very important talent. . . ." In the Spring of 1845 a delegation of women

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36 Advocate (Oct. 1, 1844), X, 149; New York Observer reprinted Advocate (1844), X, 35; Journal of Commerce reprinted Advocate (1844), X, 110; Tribune reprinted Advocate (1844), X, 28; Philadelphia Public Ledger reprinted Advocate (1844), IX, 58. For other expressions of support see: Extracts from the Report of the Select Committee of the Ohio Legislature in Advocate (1842), VIII, 15; N.Y.S. Senate Documents (March 3, 1847), #68, pp. 1-12.

from New York City joined with a group from Albany to attend the legislative debates on a bill, "making seduction a State Prison Offence," which had been introduced in response to their appeal, and during the next three years, the women exerted relentless pressure on the law makers.[37]

"Let our legislators know that the female portion of their constituents have some claims upon them," wrote the volunteers as they exhorted "every Auxiliary [to] appoint a special committee -- select those who have both tact and talent -- whose duty it shall be to see the individual members of the Legislature. . .and obtain. . .a promise from each of them that. . . they will. . .give their vote in favor of an act to suppress vice." Those legislators who had failed to support the cause had their names published in the Advocate with denigrating comments: "[I]t is but reasonable to suppose [that these men] if re-elected. . . owe their success. . .in favor of the libertine and his associates," the editors wrote in 1848 just before the crucial vote resulting in the passage of their bill.[38]

The Act to Punish Seduction as a Crime, stipulating among its provisions that "any man who shall under promise of marriage seduce and have illicit connection with any unmarried

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37 Advocate (Mar. 1, 1840), VI, 34-35; (Dec. 15, 1841), VII, 189; (Apr. 1, 1845), XI, 53; For legislative debate on the Bill to Make Seduction a Crime see: N.Y.S. Assembly Documents (March 23, 1842), #134, pp. 1-13; (Feb. 9, 1844), #363, pp. 1-5; (March 10, 1842), #159, pp. 1-18; (Apr. 23, 1840), #333, pp. 1-5; (Jan. 23, 1845), #23, pp. 1-5; N.Y.S. Senate Documents (Mar. 13, 1847), #68, pp. 1-17.

38 Advocate (Dec. 15, 1841), VII, 189; (1847), XIII, 100; (1848), XIV, 45.

female of previous chaste character shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction shall be punished by imprisonment. . . ," called forth praise and congratulations for the women. It represented both the successful completion of a long and arduous campaign and the culmination of the American Female Moral Reform Society's intense involvement with licentious conduct and moral reform. After 1848, the Association, re-named the American Female Guardian Society, directed its attention to the care of friendless women and children in the nation's cities, but it continued to fight for the liberation of women from society's binds.[39]

In the period between 1834 and 1848, the first fourteen years of the organization's existence, important steps had been taken toward female emancipation. Joining with the Female Benevolent Society in an attack on the profligate male and on the double standard, the Female Moral Reform Society had been forced to defend its programs by asserting the right to independent conscience and judgement as morally accountable autonomous beings with natures identical to males. The awareness that woman had value as an individual, growing as it did out of the combined sense of oppression and realization of her capabilities, impelled her to question and ultimately to condemn the synthesis of thought, custom, and decree which she saw as responsible for her degraded state. It incited efforts to transform her social milieu into an environment where woman, free from sex-linked

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39 Advocate (1848), XIV, 79; (1848), XIV, 67.

roles, could control her destiny. Yet, while the members of moral reform societies continued to expand woman's sphere by circulating petitions, working with law makers, judging masculine conduct, and forcing public policy to be more responsive to the needs of their sex, they did not forget the deviant woman whose plight had been indirectly responsible for so many of their ideas and actions.

Concern with the fate of prostitutes after they had been arrested led members of the Society to visit regularly the City Prison and the Penitentiary on Blackwell's Island. The women, appalled at the conditions that existed in these institutions, reported their findings in the Advocate: The female prisoners were "composed of the very dregs of society, unable to read or write, and herded together like wild beasts with nothing to interest or employ them. What wonder if new lessons are taken in iniquity, and sentiments of hatred and revenge against all whom they consider more fortunate, are nourished, until they become part of the very being?" On another occasion the visiting committee recalled that the sight of female prisoners "led [them] involuntarily to exclaim, 'O that we could speak in the ear of every sister in our land, we would beseech them to cultivate. . .sympathy and benevolence' for these women." "In the Female Department [of the Tombs] young and slight offenders are exposed to the degrading contact of those who have grown old in the most abandoned vice." noted the women, and they

continued: "It was a matter of surprise and astonishment. . . that not a single matron or nurse is provided for the female department; . .this department being under the sole charge of the male keepers, and at night watched by male guards."[40]

Writing from the courtrooms where they witnessed countless unfortunate females being tried and convicted they documented: "There seemed to be no more sympathy with these wretched beings, in officers, accusers, or judge than in the gigantic columns which supported the vaulted dome above them," and women of moral reform societies became impressed with the importance of assisting these outcasts of their sex. In 1840 a committee visited the Mayor and Common Council "in behalf of the female convicts at Bellevue and the Halls of Justice, praying that a Matron, instead of gentlemen keepers, may be placed over them." Mrs. Hawkins visited the State Prison at Sing Sing "to observe what the appointment of a Matron had done for the women there." She reported her impressions in the journal: "The Matron who has charge of the female convicts appears to be a woman well qualified for her station. She appeared uniformly kind and affectionate to those under her care; and thus affection and kindness has led them to respect and confide in her...."[41]

In the early 1840s, simultaneously with the petition campaign, the Society agitated for improved conditions for

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40 Advocate (1841), VII, 105; (Apr. 15, 1840), VI, 63; (Apr. 15, 1845), XI, 62.

41 Margaret Dye, Wrecks and Rescues (New York: American Female Guardian Society, 1859), p. 208; Flora Northrup, The Record of a Century (New York: American Female Guardian Society, 1934), 208; Northrup, p. 24; Advocate (Jul. 1, 1840), VI, 103.

female prisoners, the majority of whom generally were prostitutes and many of whom were diseased. Drawing on the experiences of Elizabeth Fry, the famous British prison reformer, her American counterpart, Dorothea Dix, and Eliza Farnham, the first female matron appointed to a state prison, the members urged the formation of an Association specifically devoted to helping female convicts. Describing the "cruelty, injustice and woe experienced by the miserable inmates of [the] prisons," the volunteers hoped to "enlist all in favor of giving [the] direction [of women prisoners] to a portion of female energy and benevolence. . . ." In answer to their pleas, the New York Prison Assoc ation, formed in 1844, created a Female Department which enabled women to supervise and regulate the care given to imprisoned members of their sex, but like so many new women's associations, the Female Department had first to contend with male opposition before it could commence its activities.

Miss Catharine Sedgwick, author, who served as the First Directress of the Organization from 1848-1863 wrote to her friend on March 2, 1845: "I went to a meeting of the Ladies' Prison. . .Society, where a committee from the men's society appeared to remind the women that they were but a department, that a report they had printed and which was just ready for publication would knock up all the magnificent plans of the House of Lords [the men]. . . .Some of [the ladies] were disposed to stand upon their reserved rights; some modestly hinted they had privileges as well as responsibilities, and

it finally ended in an agreement for a meeting. . . ."[42]

Apparently the women's unit won a full measure of autonomy; it functioned effectively and energetically, relentless in its efforts for better treatment of female convicts. Building upon the precedents established by the Female Benevolent Society and the Female Moral Reform Society in their programs to help prostitutes, the youthful organization stated in its first report: "It is only a few years that those who have been cut off from society for their misdeeds, have been deemed worthy of attention." The publication continued to detail the abhorrent situation of women "found in the City Prison without any employment whatever. . .at liberty to pass from cell to cell -- under the sole care of men, and daily coming in contact with those of all principles and no principle, . .[without] the counsel, care, and protection of one who would speak to them as a mother. . . ." To substantiate their argument for instituting matrons in the municipal prisons, they printed Mrs. Farnham's reports on her successes as Principal Matron at the Mount Pleasant State Prison for Females. Yet, when municipal officials finally acceded in the demand, the victory proved to be ephemeral since "before the experiment could be fairly tried, an alteration was made, and the matrons were mostly withdrawn. . . ."[43]

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42 Advocate (Apr. 15, 1845), XI, 62; (1841), VII, 106; (Oct. 15, 1845), XI, 156; (Oct. 15, 1846), XII, 158; Dye, p. 119; Sedgwick, Life and Letters, p. 292.

43 First Annual Report of the Female Department of the New York Prison Association (1845), Intro., 17, 40, (1846), 58.

"To carry out the objects of our Society in reference to this class of prisoners will require of us, as a duty, to counterattack and remedy the ills which our city authorities inflict upon them with so unsparing a hand," wrote the women in their second annual report (1846) as they proclaimed that there "are a thousand avenues to the female heart, which females alone can find; and they must be found and travelled. . . ." While the members endeavored to compensate for the lack of female supervisors in the prisons by visiting with, reading to, and counseling inmates of their own sex, they also became drawn to the plight of the former convict: "[W]hen a woman is discharged, penniless, or with a few shillings in her pocket, her almost inevitable fate is a return to vice." Asserting that "a discharged female convict is necessarily an outcast from society," the volunteers rhetorically asked: "Who will employ such a one?" "She may starve -- she may beg -- she may return to vice, or she may put an end to her hateful life."[44]

As the members of the Female Department of the New York Prison Association became convinced that "nobody feels the blame" for the fate of the discharged female convict, they resolved to work in her behalf. Many of the members took former convicts into their homes for months at a time, "but the number proved too great for this," and "it became evident to all that

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44 Second Annual Report of the Female Department of the N.Y. Prison Association (1846), pp. 58-59, 127; C. M. Kirkland, The Helping Hand: Comprising an Account of The Home for The Discharged Female Convict and an Appeal in Behalf of that Institution (New York: Charles Scribner, 1853), p. 37.

the Female Department could do nothing materially to benefit this almost hopeless class of unfortunates without a house in which to receive and keep them. . . ." After much publicity and strenuous fund raising drives, the asylum, eventually called the Isaac T. Hopper Home, located at 191 Tenth Avenue, opened in the late 1840s. Numerous women lent their skill and energy to making the enterprise thrive. Abby Hopper Gibbons, a participant in temperance reform, aid to the poor, and abolition, became active in the new project, along with Sarah Platt Doremus, who later achieved recognition for her roles in the establishment of the Nursery and Child's Hospital and especially in the founding of the Woman's Hospital in 1855. Sarah Martyn, long associated with the American Female Guardian Society, and Caroline Matilda Kirkland, noted author of stories realistically depicting life on the American frontier, served as officers for the Association which housed over one hundred women a year.[45]

The members' collective experiences and observations convinced them that the high rate of female recidivism had been created by the combined effects of the lack of self esteem, the contemptuous treatment by society, and the inability to find employment. The attitudes, programs, and policies fostered at the Home attempted to remedy these deleterious influences. In The Helping Hand, a book publicizing the Home, Mrs. Kirkland wrote that the "inmates share the household labor among them, being alternatively called in to aid in the kitchen, while on

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45 Kirkland, Helping, p. 31; Third Annual Report of the Female Department of the New York Prison Association (1846), 126; (1848-1849), 12, 2.

the second floor two large rooms are always devoted to needle-work and instruction in reading, writing and arithmatic." Some of the women earned money working as nurses or as domestics or by taking in sewing and washing. The volunteers wanted to instruct the inmates in "certain trades, [such] as tailoring. . . ," for they believed that the "possession of a good business of that kind would have saved some of our poor patients from degradation," and hoped that knowledge of a skill would obviate the necessity of returning to a life of crime upon leaving the Asylum.[46]

Discharged prisoners entered the Home voluntarily and generally stayed at least three months, after which the members of the Association either tried to place them with a private family or recommended them for employment. The women who ran the Hopper Residence attempted to give the inmates more than proficiency in a trade; they hoped the Refuge would be a "place that shall offer the. . .kindness. . .of home." "She remains at the Asylum," wrote Kirkland, "treated not with a supercilious, a cold, a spurious kindness, but as a woman and a sister." Guided by the conviction that "there is no heart so callous or obdurate that the voice of kindness and sympathy may not reach it, or so utterly debased as to give no response to the tones of Christian love and benevolence," the members of the Female Department extended compassion to females both in and out of prison. Their belief that "women could work best independently for the redemption of their own sex" led them to sever connections

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46 Kirkland, Helping, p. 59; Fifth Annual Report of the Female Department of The New York Prison Association (1850), 8-11.

with the male Prison Association in 1854 and operate as a separate society: The Women's Prison Association and Home.[47]

Convinced that they must "approach the most unhappy of her sex in the character of a. . .sister," the members filled publications with their progress, attitudes and impressions. "Not infrequently is the kind word met with an irrepressible tear, the encouraging smile with a quick blush of animated hope," they wrote in the Fifth Annual Report (1850). In the next year, the members responded to the query: "Did the women criminals choose freely to err?" in the following manner: "Our experience, which we have now a title to urge, has shown us conclusively that in nine cases out of ten, no choice was ever made, for none was offered." The women then catalogued some of the pressures which had driven their inmates to commit misdemeanors: "Temptations subtly planned by the old in crime; lack of any kindly aid after the first offence. . . ;the cruel desertion of those who should protect; the hard trials of poverty, harder for woman than for. . .[man]. . . ." Year after year the middle- and upper-class women who formed the Women's Prison Association interlaced sympathy and sensitivity through their reports: "In the case of very many female convicts, the heart has been crushed, the affections chilled and the sensibilities destroyed, by a long course of neglect, unkindness or oppression which might drive a wise man mad," they wrote in one account, and in another they described those "innocent" women who had "fallen into misfortune

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47 Fourth Annual Report of the Female Department of The New York Prison Association (1849), 4-6; Kirkland, Helping, p. 39; Letter from Mary Ann Johnson, Assistant Matron - Mount Pleasant Female Prison (July 10, 1844), in Second Annual Report of the Female Department of the N.Y. Prison Association (1846), 59-60; (1854), 5-10.

by no fault of their own," while in a third they told of females whose "misfortunes are to be traced. . .to their ignorance and helplessness. . . ."[48]

The empathy and understanding expressed in the Women's Prison Association's pamphlets, reports, and articles, similarly articulated by the members of the moral reform societies, maintained a harmonious relationship with the attitudes and sentiments shared by women during the first three decades of organized benevolence. Yet, while the concern and compassion of the volunteers for the poor women they aided during the thirty years following 1800 was noteworthy indeed, the identification of the socially and economically secure women, after 1830, with deviant females may be considered truly remarkable. And it had important implications evolving dually from the function of deviance in social conformity and cohesion and from woman's recognition of the essential oneness of her sex. By its very definition, deviant behavior implies a departure from some established norm, a violation of acceptable action and conduct, and, as such, enables a society to acknowledge and reaffirm its unifying values and ideas by stating implicitly and explicitly what it will and will not permit. Ironically, the deviant person and the punishment or ostracism that his or her actions call forth has an integrative rather than a disruptive effect on the society, for it allows a community to erect a symbolic boundary around itself,

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48 Fifth Annual Report of the Female Department of The New York Prison Association (1850), p. 7; (1851), p. 52; (1845), Intro.; (1854), p. 4; (1853), p. 4.

to define itself and its members through those acts and ideas that it cannot tolerate.

The prostitute and criminal, unanimously treated as social outcasts, therefore, had an importance in solidifying thought and giving a glimmer of stability to antebellum cities. By treating the erring female as a misfit, by heaping abuse upon her as a degraded, tainted creature who had none of the attributes of the true woman, society found still another means of delimiting those feminine qualities worthy of womanhood, while the traditional position of the non-deviant female population presumably would be strengthened and secured through the indignation and outrage that it was expected to feel and to express toward the aberrant women.[49]

Nevertheless, as members of the Female Benevolent Society, the American Female Moral Reform Society, and the Women's Prison Association gained a knowledge of deviant females "from the most intimate acquaintance of year after year," they came to perceive and articulate a likeness between themselves and the social outcasts with whom they worked. Rather than emphasizing differences between the prostitutes, the criminals and themselves and thereby using their experiences to bolster and affirm their place in society, the volunteers stressed the similitude of all women. And, as they labored to restore their beneficiaries to social acceptability, they simultaneously implied their dissatisfaction with the conventional feminine role. "We call them

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49 The discussion of deviance is based on Emile Durkheim, The Division of Labor in Society, trans. George Simpson (New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 70-110.

outcasts, but when we call them so, do we think of the fearful import of the word? To be an outcast, is to have lost that which is every human being's birthright," declared the eighth Annual Report of the Women's Prison Association. The members of the organization attempted to prove that a criminal act did not stem from a debased, defective nature and should not be treated as such. "It is the habit of the careless world to award praise or blame too much according to circumstances; giving disproportioned credit for virtues which cost no effort or sacrifice, and condemning, with a no less unjust severity, transgressions which have all the apology of ignorance, evil nature and temptation," wrote the women in 1850 and called upon all to "soften. . . indignation" for "under certain imaginable circumstances we might have been no better than the wretch we despise."[50]

"[T]hese poor. . .[inmates] of ours," noted Caroline M. Kirkland, "compare not unfavorably with more fortunate sisters of the human family. . . .In short, we are obliged to own that the faults of these degraded ones are our own, carried out to their legitimate consequences, and that of what we consider our superior virtues, they are often found to retain. . .[in] a number and amount which could hardly be expected under the circumstances. Lydia Maria Child, who during her long stay in New York spent considerable time with both the benefactors and beneficiaries of the Women's Prison Association, wrote: "It is common to treat the inmates of penitentiaries and prisons as if they were altogether unlike ourselves -- as if they belonged to another race,

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50 Annual Report of the Female Department of the New York Prison Association (1853), p. 4; (1850), p. 6.

but. . .if you look inward. . .you will. . .[find] that there have been periods in your own life when a hair's breadth further in the wrong would have rendered you amendable to human laws; and that you were prevented from moving over that hair's breadth boundary by outward circumstances for which you deserve no credit."[51]

As the volunteers urged that women who had committed misdeeds be accepted by society, they blurred the distinction between themselves and deviant females and in doing so postulated a mutual interest, intent, and need among all women. The Female Benevolent Society fought "to bring back the [feminine] wanderer to the path of virtue" and wanted "assurances given that she [could] be. . .restored to the confidence and esteem of her sex. Until females will thus arise and assert the rights of their sex, . .nothing can be done," the women declared, for they viewed the hideous treatment of prostitutes as related to the general oppression of women. The American Female Moral Reform Society dedicated itself to assisting the "many -- sisters in the common tie of humanity, who are. . .fallen -- treated as outcasts," and declared: "In seeking to promote. . .the elevation of our own sex. . .we recognized no distinction of station, or clime or color. . . ."[52]

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51 Kirkland, Helping, pp. 83-87; Child, Letters, p. 207

52 First Annual Report of the New York Female Benevolent Society (1834), pp. 20-23; Advocate (Aug. 1, 1844), X, 115; (May 1, 1845), XI, 65; Annual Report of the Female Department of the New York Prison Association (1851), p. 6; The women of the moral reform societies, similarly expressed their sense of unity with the "poor squaw" Advocate (1838), IV, 164, and with the "slave woman [for] she is a woman" Advocate (1843), IX, 127.

The members of societies which helped aberrant females believed that the "strong cords of friendship as well as of consanguity" bound women together; no matter how vast the social, economic, or intellectual chasm appeared, separating the virtuous from the erring women, the volunteers forcefully asserted that "our own nature is. . .distinguishable in the criminal. . . ." Harlots, female vagrants, inebriates, theives -- "the fallen and the falling --. . .are our sisters by the ties of a common humanity," proclaimed the Female Moral Reform Society. As particippants in a humanity which they shared with the middle- and upper-class women who formed the societies, the deviant females had claim to natural rights, including "the natural right of women to the sympathy, counsel, and care of. . .their own sex...." "Woman is the natural. . .aid of woman in her needs; the woman that feels this not has yet to learn her mission aright," asserted the Women's Prison Association. "Among the most precious of woman's rights, is the right to do good to her own sex; . . . Every woman in misfortune or disgrace is the proper object of care to the happier and safer part of her sex. Not to stretch forth her helping hand, . .not to defend her against wrong. . . is to consent to her degradation and to become in some sense party to her ruin. Because from the very nature of the case, if women deny her cause, she has no natural friend. . . ."[53]

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53 Fifth Annual Report of the Female Department of the New York Prison Association (1850), p. 6; Advocate (May 1, 1843), IX, 69; Second Annual Report of the Female Department of the New York Prison Association (1846), p. 129; Seventh Annual Report of the Female Department of the New York Prison Association (1852), p. 4.

Defying a society which demanded that they regard prostitutes and criminals as outcasts who had forever forfeited all claim to humanity, the volunteers reached out to deviant females from the sense that all human beings had the same moral nature as well as from the awareness, painfully gained through years of benevolent enterprise, of the subtle and blatant oppression which united the entire sex:

> It is time that women...should consider themselves as a community, having special needs and common obligations.[54]

As they came to believe that women comprised a distinct group, they transcended the boundary separating the aberrant female from the virtuous lady and implicitly rejected the stability, conformity, and adherence to the norms of the woman-beau ideal which that boundary was supposed to insure. For those who formed and joined philanthropic associations recognized the ties which bound them to the unfortunate women they called their sisters.

The volunteers had long experienced the agonies created by the imposition of boundaries, and they knew all too well the anguish of being barricaded in and viewed as an inferior and flawed class which could never compensate for a damaged nature. The women who extended a "helping hand" to deviant females had known isolation and understood the pain of being denied participation in society. When they asserted a oneness of all females they did so with a full realization of the injustices and inequalities which assumed different forms but affected every woman.

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54 Kirkland, Helping, p. 51; Seventh Annual Report of the Female Department of the New York Prison Association (1852), p. 4.

Moreover, having gained a sense of themselves as morally accountable autonomous beings with the right to independent judgment and conscience, tens of thousands of women across the nation who participated in or endorsed the ideas of these societies devoted to "fallen females" now believed that a female, like a male, could step outside the rules of society and still retain her essential humanity. Yet the identification of the volunteers with the deviant female implied more than the realization and acknowledgement of a common nature and a shared oppression. As discussed earlier in this chapter, before the philanthropers came to empathize with the female outcasts, they themselves had felt disaffected from society. And their estrangement from the social milieu which had degraded and suppressed them found expression in their attack on the customs, laws, men and educational and economic systems which had shaped and limited their lives. As women developed a cognizance of the origins of their inferior position, they became increasingly alienated from the male-dominated society. As they measured their attitudes, abilities, activities, needs, and drives against those insisted upon by the yardstick of antebellum feminine normalcy, the woman-beau ideal, they understood that, in a very real sense, they too were deviant women.

CHAPTER XI

TOWARD THE SPLENDID CITY

> There is no insurmountable solitude. All paths lead to the same goal: to convey to others what we are. And we must pass through solitude and difficulty, isolation and silence, in order to reach forth to the enchanted place where we can dance and sing our sorrowful song--but in this dance or in this song there are fulfilled the most ancient rites of our conscience in the awareness of being human and of believing in a common destiny.
>
> Pablo Neruda
> Toward the Splendid City
> Nobel Lecture

Women in female voluntary societies slowly recognized their anomalous position in American society. As their shared activities and observations convinced them that they would find neither fulfillment nor emancipation by trying to fit their attitudes and behavior into the rigid puzzle of nineteenth century womanhood, they shaped new thoughts and policies out of their collective experiences. The volunteers cautiously contoured interacting thoughts and programs. These they pieced together in an attempt to create the environment where woman, as an autonomous being with the right to independent conscience and judgment, by assuming responsibility for her own life, could begin to control her destiny.

The realization that all efforts at self-determination would inevitably fail unless woman could effect significant changes in customs, institutions and laws developed gradually. The first thirty years of female charitable associations substantially expanded woman's sphere. She gained a sense of importance, individuality, and empathy with poorer women while infused with the confidence and courage to persist in her efforts and to enter the highly controversial field of moral reform. Nevertheless, the strenuous opposition to woman's organizations concerned with helping prostitutes and criminals forced her to insist upon her right to individual conscience. She came, therefore, to focus on her own oppressed state. Hence she recognized and articulated that each woman, no matter what her class or background, possessed a nature

identical to man's which entitled her to participate fully in the natural rights of humanity.

As women began to claim the prerogatives of their legitimate identity, they felt increasingly disaffected from a society that had consistently relegated them to an inferior status. Consequently, they endeavored, first through their associations and later through a variety of other endeavors, to transform the social milieu into one in which woman, liberated from the chains of tradition, poverty and ignorance, could fulfill her individual potential. Out of woman's alienation, then, came her attempts to re-structure her environment. Her imaginative efforts blended with a malleable urban setting to produce a wealth of valuable institutions which seemed to obviate the need for countless municipal agencies.

Woman's charitable associations multiplied dramatically in the years after 1830. Most of the pioneer societies continued, even enlarging their scope of operations. Many new ones, however, also appeared to perform those functions once considered a form of feminine heresy but now, in the second thirty years of benevolence, generally accepted as traditional. Yet, in addition to the "conventional" associations and to the moral reform and prison societies, two other types of organizations emerged after 1830. These reflected the increasingly feminist concerns of their members. With the proliferation of societies dedicated to helping women become economically self sufficient and with the appearance of associations devoted

to treating women's diseases and to enabling females to be cared for by physicians and nurses of their own sex, upper- and middle-class urban women worked to free themselves and other women from the child-like dependency upon men decreed by the ethos of the woman-beau ideal. As they struggled to help their sex claim possession of their own lives, they added new dimensions to their sixty years of progress.

Urban female voluntary associations flourished in the years following 1830. Their records and reports demonstrate the continuation and augmentation of the ideas, programs, and activities initiated by the early benevolent organizations. The literature of those societies founded between 1830 and 1860 reveals woman's increasing confidence as she worked with prominent men, her growing perseverance as she sponsored unpopular projects and saw them to successful completion and community acceptance. The material further discloses her heightened belief in the unity of all women, overarching her sense of the individuality and diversity of her sex.

The history of the Association for the Benefit of the Colored Orphan, the first of the "traditional" associations to be discussed in this chapter discloses many of the trends inaugurated by the earlier societies. According to a report of the Association, the society originated in 1836 through the

efforts of "two Quaker ladies, Miss Anna M. Shotwell and her niece Miss May Murray," when they "found two wistful little Negro children sitting on the steps of an old house in lower New York. They learned that the children were orphans and that they were soon to go to the Almshouse. It seemed too cruel a fate for the poor children, so the ladies emptied their purses to a kindly woman, who promised to care for the children until some more hopeful solution could be found." The account continued: "[W]hen Miss Shotwell and Miss Murray returned a few days later, 4 more little waifs were waiting for them." After much investigation, "[the] two ladies discovered that neither the Long Island Farms, the public nursery for white orphans nor the 3 existing orphanages in New York would accept Negro children. So the indomitable. . . women began what would prove for Miss Shotwell, at least, a life's work."[1]

The women who joined Anna Shotwell in her enterprise required unending determination. As the Eighteenth Annual Report of the Association recounted, "[the] feeble band who first went forth as pioneers [entered] into the haunts of the outcasts and of victims of cruel prejudice. . .among the diseased and degraded." The twenty-two managers elected in the final weeks of 1836, appointed a committee to look for a house to use as an asylum, "but after a search of three months

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1 Riverdale Children's Association 1836-1956 (formerly Associations for the Benefit of Colored Orphans) 120th Anniversary (New York, 1956), pp. 1-2.

. . . the pursuit had to be relinquished [because of] the existing prejudice against color; owners resolutely refusing the use of their property on any consideration the Managers could offer; preferring their buildings should remain unoccupied, rather than to be applied to shelter the helpless. . .ones. . . ."

Undaunted in their plan, the women selected an old double frame cottage on West 12th Street near 6th Avenue for their home. But they immediately petitioned the Common Council for a grant of land on which to erect a new building. Although the city government repeatedly refused the Association's requests, the women persisted. Finally the Fifth Annual Report (1842) acknowledged the "appropriation by the Corporation of the City of twenty lots of ground on 5th Avenue between 43rd and 44th Streets." The Asylum, "the first. . .institution of its kind in the country," prospered under the indefatigable tutelage of its managers. Beginning with twelve pensioners, the average number cared for by the institution reached eight hundred within a few years. The women managed a school and established a nursery for female "children over three years of age, who [could] not be admitted to the Colored Orphan Asylum." Inevitably drawn to the plight of the Black woman, the members created a Lying-in Department and attempted to find employment for other women in the area. The work of the Association attracted notice. The volunteers reported in 1844 that the Asylum "had been visited and inspected by the Mayor and Common Council who have since signified their approbation by a grant

to the Institution of 20 additional lots of ground adjoining their premises." The progress of their organization, especially when contrasted with its inauspicious beginnings, supported the members' confident proclamation that "their toil and skill and patient perserverance" had assured the "success and permanence" of their "benevolent effort."[2]

Heartened by the attainments of the Colored Orphan Asylum, other orphanages dedicated to helping specific groups of children appeared and prospered. Located on Prince Street, the Female Orphan Asylum of the Roman Catholic Benevolent Society sheltered hundreds of girls raised in the Catholic faith. The Orphan's Home and Asylum of the Protestant Church, situated on the southwest corner of 49th Street and Lexington Avenue and governed "by a Board of Lady Managers," housed Protestant children when their parents either died or could no longer care for them. St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum, organized in 1858 for "the maintenance of orphan, half orphan, homeless and neglected children, especially those of German origin," added to the increasing number of refuges for children founded in the Empire City after 1830. These institutions, established in New York through the efforts of benevolent

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2 Eighteenth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans (1854),11; Cammann and Camp, pp. 395-391; Fifth Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans (1841), 6.

women, had counterparts in cities and towns across the nation.[3]

In addition to assisting orphans, the "helping hand" of woman's charity reached out to other segments of the urban female population. The Ladies' Christian Union of the City of New York began an association in 1858 to promote the "welfare of women, particularly the young and unprotected employed in stores and manufactories." The volunteers believed that "in all large cities, there exists a class peculiarly needing sympathy and care [who,] drawn by the superior advantages for education, or seeking a livelihood for themselves or their families. . , flock to the crowded city where they stand dismayed amid the perplexities, temptations and wrongs. . . ." Similar organizations founded in Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Chicago found young women homes with private families and obtained employment for them.

The House of Mercy, emulating the programs of the Female Benevolent Society and the Women's Prison Association provided a refuge for "fallen females." Started by Mrs. S. A. Richmond in 1854, this institution housed "women and girls fresh from scenes of dissipation and vice." The determination and courage of

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3 William P. Letchworth, Homes of Homeless Children. A Report on Orphan Asylums and Other Institutions for the Care of Children. Transmitted to the Legislature with the Annual Report of the Board of the New York State Board of Charity, January 14, 1876 (New York, 1903), pp. 328; 325; Cammann and Camp, p. 273; First Annual Report of the Orphan's Home and Asylum of the Protestant Episcopal Church (1852),1; Third Annual Report of the Orphan's Home and Asylum of the Protestant Episcopal Church (1854),6; See for example orphanages listed in Letchworth.

the founder received the recognition of a contemporary: "Her exertions were not confined to the care and training of the inmates when she had gathered them into her home, but she went about for years soliciting by personal appeals the means to enable her to sustain her charity. She shrunk from no toil; she held back from no self-denial or danger in the way of unpleasant duty or contagious disease, in meeting the responsibilities which she felt rested upon her. . . ."[4]

Other urban women, charged with a sense of duty towards the less fortunate of their sex, formed associations to relieve the needs of impoverished and sick elderly women. The Ladies' Union Aid Society, established in 1850, succeeded "through the perservering energy of Mrs. E. A. Farr, Mrs. M. W. Mason, Mrs. B. F. Howe, and the other ladies associated with them." The Church Charity Foundation "[owed] its origin to a private enterprise which had been undertaken by a few noble-minded and generous ladies, Mrs. Richard Pierrepont, Mrs. Hastings and others, who had in 1850, rented a small building in Love Lane and gathered there. . .aged women, supplying their wants from day to day and watching over them with affectionate care." The Brooklyn Home for Aged Indigent Women began to function in 1851, while the St. Luke's Home, situated at 543 Hudson Street dedicated to assisting "indigent

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4 Cammann and Camp, pp. 504-508; Letchworth, p. 251; Cammann and Camp, pp. 241-243.

Christian females," opened the following year. The ninth annual report of the St. Luke's shelter stated that the "[p]rosperity of the Home was due. . .to the untiring and devoted attention of the Association of Lady Managers to its internal affairs, to their daily visits, their personal intercourse with its inmates and the warm sympathy and interest which they manifest towards them, and. . .the permanence which has characterized their connection."[5]

Numerous female voluntary societies which appeared after 1830 directed their attention to a specific portion of the urban population; other associations devoted their energies to a particular geographic area. Few received more disparagement for their plans and ultimately more publicity for their accomplishments than the Ladies' Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Society embarked upon the audacious scheme of bringing philanthropy to the Five Points and eventually of purchasing the Old Brewery and converting it into a clean, safe dwelling for the residents of the notorious area. As discussed in Chapter II the region which lay to the south of Canal Street had become a mecca for the poor, the desparate, and the derelict of the city. Residents viewed it as a "great moral ulcer located in the very heart of

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5 Cammann and Camp, pp. 377, 525; Second Annual Report of the Brooklyn Home for Aged, Indigent Women (1852), 1-10; First Annual Report of the St. Luke's Home for Indigent Christian Females (1852), 1-8; Cammann and Camp, p. 197.

the city, being only a few hundred yards from the City Hall and Park, and within 3 minutes walk, and in plain view of Broadway." Fredricka Bremer who accompanied Abby Hopper Gibbons, the prison reformer, through the area found "every grade of moral corruption, festering and fermenting [there]," and Lydia Maria Child, who visited the Five Points in 1841, wrote: "Morally and physically the breathing air was like an open tomb." Squalid, dank, and dark, this crime-ridden section made respectable New Yorkers cringe when they neared it, but the Ladies' Home Missionary Society chose precisely this site for their work.[6]

The Society stated its objectives "to provide food, clothing, and other necessaries for. . .[the] poor, to educate poor children and provide for their comfort and welfare, and. . .to perform kindred acts of charity and benevolence." It already sponsored seven missions in the city's destitute neighborhoods, but when the Organization first considered extending its field of operations to the Five Points area in 1848, the plan evoked adamant opposition. One contemporary reported that the "proposition met with hearty laughter, so chimerical did the idea appear. . . ." And, indeed, as the members of the organization later recalled, "they were told by gentlemen who they requested to survey the ground that no suitable room could be procured." Nevertheless the women

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6 Cammann and Camp, p. 303; Lydia Maria Child, Letters, p. 26; Bremer, II, 601.

"expressed their determination to send a missionary there [and]. . .they did in 1850." In the narrative of their efforts in one of the nation's most desolate settings, The Old Brewery and New Mission House at the Five Points (1854), the women recounted that at first "it was thought extremely hazardous for the ladies to visit families in that neighborhood and to gather in children for the schools. Two of the ladies of the Board, however, years before associated with the New York Clothing Society, were the committee of visitation to the Sixth Ward, which included the Five Points, and they thought there was no ground for these apprehensions. The first years proved their views correct as nearly every house and family were visited by some lady of the Board, and nowhere did they meet with rudeness or incivility. Even the Old Brewery with its numerous cellars, dark passages and attics became familiar to a few who had moral and physical courage enough to bear the sight, inhale the air and hear the sounds."[7]

Renting a room which had formerly been a liquor store, the volunteers, including Phoebe Palmer, revivalist, author of The Way of Holiness (1845), and dedicated worker in New York City charities, reached out to the "infatuated cast-off girl," the "desolate widow," and all other hopeless residents of the

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7 An Act to Incorporate the New York Ladies' Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York, 1856) The Old Brewery and New Mission House at the Five Points (New York, 1854).

neighborhood. The members initially established a Sabbath School in the area, but soon realized "the necessity of a day-school." They hoped to "educate the hearts of children who have no homes in which their young affections are expanded, or their childish desires sympathized with and gratified." The "children with short ragged garments--old shawls tied round their waists--bare feet bespattered with. . .mud" received the compassion and assistance of the volunteers, but their main concern lay with the women of the region. The accounts of their labors in the Five Points, filled with stories of destitute females, implicitly urged greater employment opportunities. Of one widow they wrote: "Alone, unaided, she began the struggle of life, with three helpless children dependent on her exertions. Early and late she toiled, supporting her family. . . ." In their walks throughout the area, they encountered endless instances of feminine suffering. "A poor woman. . .almost frozen to death" and one "on a wretched pallet in the corner. . .[who was] dying with consumption [and had] no hand to smooth the tangled hair or wipe. . .her brow," were but two of many women whose anguished histories darkened the pages of the Society's book. These experiences induced the members to organiz a house where they could employ the beneficiaries of their aid and begin an informal employment agency.[8]

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8 Letchworth, p. 302; Twenty-third Annual Report of the Ladies' Home Missionary Society (1867), 7-8; Old Brewery, pp. 38, 290-291; 161; 192; 170-172.

As the women's struggles in the Five Points met with success, they aroused the attention of substantial portions of the community who endorsed the Society's aim of establishing a permanent settlement house in the vicinity. Meeting with New York's most affluent men, including Anson G. Phelps, William B. Skidmore and Daniel Drew, the women divulged their plan to purchase and renovate the Old Brewery. The gathering, held in 1853, only five years after the members first announced their design to work in the Five Points, demonstrated the magnitude of their triumph. Now instead of being met with ridicule, their proposal received strong support. The gentlemen resolved that "in view of the benefits that have resulted from the experiment of the Ladies' Home Missionary Society in the establishment of a mission at the Five Points and also in view of the prospects of its increasing usefulness, we deem it of the utmost importance that a permanent location be purchased. . . ." The Common Council agreed to appropriate $1,000, and within a short period of time the women obtained pledges for an additional $5,000.[9]

After purchasing the dilapidated building, the Society decided to tear it down and erect in its place a structure containing a chapel, schoolrooms, baths, and twenty apartments designed to be furnished without charge to families residing in the area. The project quickly caught the public imagination,

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9 Old Brewery, pp. 50; 300.

especially after the Society arranged to provide free Thanksgiving dinners for five hundred inhabitants of the neighborhood. Prominent citizens bestowed exuberant praise on the women. Mr. R. A. West, a New York attorney proclaimed: "What no legal enactment could accomplish--what no machinery of municipal government could effect. . .women have brought about, quietly but thoroughly and triumphantly. . . . The great problem of how to renovate the Five Points had engaged the attention of both the legislative and executive branches of the city government, and both had abandoned the task in despair. . . .[I]t will be an imperishable honor to the Ladies' Home Missionary Society . . .that with them the idea originated, and by them has so successfully been carried out."[10]

The splendid achievements in the Five Points area, paved the way for continued and expanded settlement work in cities across the nation. The triumph reaffirmed woman's awareness of her ability to make significant contributions in her community and perform essential social services. Many of the early societies, withstanding the vicissitudes of time, operated successfully throughout the century. Their records disclose the increasing sense of their integral importance to the welfare of the city. In 1836, the New York Female Assistance Society thanked those who had contributed to their organization: "Through the exertions of these gentlemen, and the liberality

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10 Smith, Revival, p. 170; Quoted in Old Brewery, p. 64.

of the merchants and others, we have been enabled to lay in store for the coming winter, a quality of wood and coal, with which we shall be able to relieve the suffering of hundreds of sick poor who might else suffer extreme distress or perish as too many have done in the abodes of poverty and want in this great city." The women continued: "Encouraged by these tokens of public confidence, and the evidences of usefulness of the past, the Managers are ready to enter again upon their arduous duties. . . ." The Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children in 1844, "reviewing the field of its operations," noted "the vast amount of suffering it. . .relieved," the "fears which it. . .quieted," and the "joys which it. . .inspired." The managers, "in contemplating the sister charities which have flowed as healing streams from this fountain source," felt "constrained to say. . .that the institutions in this city under [woman's] direction" have been the most successful.

The annual report of the Association for the Relief of Respectable Aged, Indigent, Females published in 1848 looked back over the society's thirty-five year history: "[The women were] united in sweetest friendship [as] they struggled on through difficulties, traveling together many a weary mile to accomplish the objects for which they were associated, never relaxing their efforts to secure the sympathy and confidence of the community and the permanency of that institution which

they loved."[11]

As they received the acclaim of other city dwellers, the members of the female voluntary societies founded before 1830 felt more secure in the value of their achievements. This heightened confidence at once led them to confide some of their difficulties to the public, to enlarge the scope of their acitivities, and to defend more forcefully the recipients of their aid as victims of society's oppression of women.

Forty years after the New York Orphan Asylum had been founded, the women told of "struggling--often amid discouragements, perplexities and embarrassments: but we have no reason to be disheartened. . .when we remember the feeble band. . .who first established this society. Their own sorrow had taught them to love, 'to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction'. . . ." The members of the Female Bethel Union, describing the encouraging effects of their meetings, related: "Often when the Managers of this Society have been ready to faint under their responsibility, toil and perplexity, these precious meetings have been like the oasis of the desert--and they have come up again to the work with renewed strength and energy." Urged on by the shared sense of importance, the women

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11 Twenty-third Annual Report of the New York Female Assistance Society (1836/1837), 9; Annual Report of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children (1844), 6; Thirty-fifth Annual Report of the Association for the Relief of Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females (1848), 4.

continually extended the operations of their societies: the Orphan Asylum established schools for their beneficiaries and eventually employed young women raised in the refuge as teachers. The Association for the Relief of Aged, Indigent Females gathered its "aged pensioners. . .into one Home" which it established and administered. This enabled the members to "make themselves acquainted with the situation of the inmates and report their observations in the Visiting Book."[12]

Predictably, as volunteers more strongly believed in the stability and merit of their organizations, they voiced their ideas with greater fervor. In 1854 the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children asserted that the "increasing rate of rent, the increasing price of articles of food, the insufficient pay, and limited sphere of labor. . . falls. . .crushingly upon the objects of this charity--women . . . ." A speaker before the Society for the Relief of Aged Females in Newburyport reflected the views of the members in declaring: "[B]y a singular injustice of society. . .woman labours more hours and labours harder than a man. . .and still earns scarcely half, in most advocations not more than a third of man's daily or weekly wages. . . ." The Seamen's Aid Society of Boston, dedicated to assisting poor women, criticized the

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12 Fortieth Annual Report of the New York Orphan Asylum (1846), 4; Annual Report of the Female Bethel Union (1838), 17; Cammann and Camp, p. 256; Forty-fourth Annual Report of the Association for the Relief of Respectable, Aged, Indigent Females (1857), 6.

opinion "not infrequently urged, by the benevolent, that in our favored country all persons who enjoy health and will work and be prudent can support themselves and families comfortably," and they called "this position" "not correct."[13]

As in its earlier years, the Seamen's Aid Society assumed an explicitly feminist stance. Yet, whereas formerly it urged the creation of additional benevolent societies to alleviate the feminine poverty and deprivation its members encountered, now, cognizant of the social origins of woman's oppression, the volunteers agitated for legal remedies. And, along with the women of moral reform societies, they became the first organization of females in America to argue for legislative enactments favorable to their sex. In 1837, the women attacked "the law which gives to the husband uncontrollable power over the personal property of his wife."

They called the decree "legalized plunder," and wrote: "It would be easy to show the flagrant injustice of this law in its operation on the rich; how, not infrequently, the property of the wife, inherited from her father, is squandered by her extravagant husband, or lost in some wild speculations; or by her death lavished on the children of another wife, . . .[and] [t]hough she possessed a million dollars before she marries, she cannot,

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13 Annual Report of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children (1854), 4; Andrew Peabody, A Sermon Preached Before the Society for the Relief of Aged Females at Newburyport, Mass., 1840. (Newburyport, 1840), p. 13; Fourth Annual Report of the Seamen's Aid Society (1837), 5.

after she is a wife, dispose of a dollar in her own right, she must go to her husband to beg money for her charities. . . ."[14]

Although the law threatened and affected their own lives, the women insisted: "We are pleading the cause of the poor [female] to whom this law, which subjects the property earned by the wife, even when separated from her husband, supporting herself, and it may be a family of young children, by the labor of her own hands, to seizure for his debts, is as cruel as those of Draco! Though it be not written in blood, it has wrung seas of bitter tears from the broken-hearted wife." In their efforts on behalf of the impoverished females of Boston, the members had met many a woman whose "husband, after spending all his living, is gone for months, or years, contributing nothing to his family; the wife. . .labors and saves . . .[but if] the [h]usband returns. . .he can take all her furniture, even her clothing and that of her children, and sell them, legally for rum. . .[T]here is no remedy while the law gives to the husband the uncontrolled right over his wife's earnings," the women continued. "And although the. . .ladies, who constitute the Seamen's Aid Society, may not one of them suffer in consequence of the statute; yet, they should feel none the less for those who are subjected to its demoralizing and soul-withering influences," and in this context they proclaimed:

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14 Fourth Annual Report of the Seamen's Aid Society (1837), 17-18.

> The sympathies of woman should always be awakened by the woes of woman for the lot of all is, in the main, the same--Yes, let us pray not each one for herself, but for our sex. . .till the oppressions. . . are removed. . . .[15]

As the members of the Seamen's Aid Society worked to extricate females from their legal bondage, the women of other associations strove to emancipate their sex from another form of slavery. The years after 1830 saw the development of numerous institutions, founded and administered by urban women, dedicated to helping those they called "their toiling sisters 'who rise early and late take rest'" earn enough to subsist and ultimately to become economically self sufficient. The establishment of homes for the friendless, houses of industry, and industrial schools in cities throughout America which sheltered, trained, and employed needy females evolved directly from the past experiences of women in benevolent societies.

The American Female Moral Reform Society, now renamed the American Female Guardian Society and Home for the Friendless, stated its reasons for initiating this enterprise: "The first idea of a House of Industry originated in the Publication Office where poor women flocked for aid and comfort." The Society's "Register of Direction for. . .females needing employment. . .[gave the members] abundant opportunity. . . to become personally acquainted with the. . .wants and exposures

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15 Fourth Annual Report of the Seamen's Aid Society (1837), 19.

of the destitute and friendless. . . ."[16]

Having petitioned for and received approval from the Common Council to erect their proposed home for friendless, destitute females, the members of the organization appealed to the public: "The facts strongly indicating the existing necessity for the establishment of this institution are these: First--It has been ascertained by careful inquiry, that there are usually within the limits of the city, an average of not less than one thousand. . .females out of employment, and in most cases. . .they are homeless and friendless,--that in consequence of the emergences that want brings, they are frequently subjected to fraud, imposition and wrong treatment, and. . .to. . .an early grave. Second--That while charitable institutions have made provision for almost every other class of the needy, the alms-house, watch-house or Tombs, are the only shelter afforded the friendless, unprotected female whose only crime is poverty and the need of employment." Hoping to achieve the "self-preservation and self-elevation" of their sex, the volunteers, rented a small house on First Avenue on the corner of Second Street as a temporary lodging for their new project. They provided homeless women and children with a safe place to stay. The records state that "the first industry proposed was the. . .mixing of soda and Siedlitz powders," but

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16 Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Ladies' Despository (1856), 6; Golden Jubilee, p. 22; Report of the House of Industry and Home for the Friendless, presented May, 1848 (New York, 1848), p. 1.

the institution quickly offered training in a wide range of trades.[17]

The members reported that "the building was overcrowded and there was considerable illness among the inmates and those in charge". As the Board had adopted the policy of accepting all women who wished to enter the home, receiving over six hundred females in less than a year, the need to build a larger accomodation became inescapable. Enlisting the support of several clergymen and "also a number of practical businessmen, well known to the public," to serve as a "Committee of Reference," the women began their fund raising efforts. "Two ladies--Mrs. N. K. and Miss M. M. Everts were employed as collectors, and addressed themselves to the work with prudence and efficiency." So well did the women present their case to the public and so earnestly did they plead for the impoverished female, that contributions to the Home Building Fund poured in from such outstanding New Yorkers as Horace Greely, Anson G. Philps, Lewis Tappan, James Lenox and Abraham Schermerhorn, enabling the corner stone to be laid on May 5, 1849, just two years after the women had commenced their venture.[18]

The completion of the Home for the Friendless, which included a House of Industry, symbolizing woman's efforts on

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17 Advocate XII (1846), 70; Northrup, p. 30.

18 Report of the House of Industry, p. 1; Northrup, p. 30.

behalf of the less fortunate of her sex, elicited enthusiastic applause. One speaker at the dedication declared:

> Little do many of you know the toil and anxiety of mind and spirit through which this great work has been carried on! We have seen. . .ladies willing to encounter every difficulty, and even contumely, in pursuit of the means where with to erect an institution for the reception of the poor and friendless, and with a spirit that nothing could discourage or repress. They have endured their burdens and toils with an inextinguishable ardor, . . .Too much praise cannot be accorded to those who in the midst of every discouragement were determined to prosecute with every energy. . . .

Mr. E. W. Chester, a New York attorney, asserted that the building would "stand as a monument to. . .[women's] charity, their perseverance, and their warm-hearted philanthropy," while the noted reformer, Lewis Tappan, stated that "no public building for precisely such a purpose has ever been erected in this country or any other. . . ." The women gloried in these tributes and proclaimed: "Not only. . .[is] ours the first Home for the Friendless, but one of the first enterprises of any magnitude in our city and country exclusively under the guidance of women."[19]

To be sure, the members enjoyed the profuse exaltations their work called forth; yet, the women found a more compelling purpose in their efforts. Sarah Bennett, editor of the Advocate wrote: "This association has bridged the amazing chasm which separates the extremes of society. . . .Those who have crossed the bridge have learned lessons in the abode of penury, . . . and at the pauper's death-bed, that cannot be forgotten amid

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19 Bennett, pp. 77; 153; Golden Jubilee, pp. 27; 68.

the comforts and enjoyments of home. The same is emphastically true of each and. . .[every] sister association." The poem, "A City Street," which appeared in the Advocate expressed similar sentiments. Finding that "life's severest contrasts meet, Forever in the city street," the author, Mary Howitt, rhymed:

> Hence it is that a city street
> Can deepest thought impart
> For all its people, high and low
> Are kindred to my heart,
> And with a yearning love I share-
> In all their joy, their pain, their care.

Catharine Sedgwick, first Directress of the Women's Prison Association and intimate friend of members of the Female Guardian Society, also believed female organizations could help to transcend social and economic differences. "I have just come from the House of Industry," recorded Miss Sedgwick, "from the infinite complicity of paying committee, purchases committee, examining do, reference do, receiving do, cutting do, etc. etc. [sic] I received about 200 registered names, etc. poor women eagerly seeking work. . . .The best of it all is to see the ladies. . .in close contact with these exuberant daughters of Erin, earnestly devoting themselves to the relief of their wants. It will be a noble institution. . . ."[20]

Attempting to offer poor women an alternative to a life in the haunts of poverty and crime or a marriage based solely on economic considerations, the Home for the Friendless

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20 Bennett, p. 204; Sedgwick, Life and Letters, p. 322.

and House of Industry gave destitute females emotional and financial support while helping them to earn a livelihood. News of this successful enterprise, carried by newspapers and, of course, through the Advocate of Moral Reform, now called the Advocate and Guardian, spread quickly. Philadelphia, Poughkeepsie, Rochester, and Syracuse soon established similar institutions, which ultimately appeared in most American cities. Within the Empire City numerous other organizations arose concerned with assisting impoverished females to support themselves.

The Mariner's Family Industrial Society of the Port of New York, located on Staten Island, stated its "two fold object" in the constitution: "to provide work at a fair remuneration for the female members of the families of the same as are incapable of labor, including their widows and orphans." The Managers hoped their charity would "[leave] its recipients in possession of [the] independence of spirit and self-reliance" which they themselves were enjoying through the imperatives of administering their association. The volunteers' continued assurance and assertion is demonstrated in the organization's efforts to build a home for their beneficiaries. The women circulated petitions, gathering support for their project, and then selected a group headed by one of their members, Mrs. R. H. Lambert, to take the memorials to the legislature in session at Albany. As one contemporary recorded, the women "obtained an interview with the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor and

the Senate and Assembly to whom. . .[they] presented the claims of the petition and of their influence in its favor."[21]

Other urban societies shared the aims of the Mariner's Family Industrial Society and devoted their attention to female laborers. The woman's Benevolent Society of the Calvary Church gave work to poor women, "encouraging feelings of self respect [and] inspiring a spirit of independence," and the New York House of Industry and School, situated at 120 West 16th Street, "afford[ed] to infirm and destitute females employment in needlework at such a rate of remuneration as [would] enable them to exist." The latter organization, giving "employment according to circumstances, either at the residences of the applicants, or at the House, where also instruction in sewing [was] given to such as need it," stated that its beneficiaries "[were] old, feeble and infirm, nearly all [were] miserably poor and. . .[were] ignorant of all branches of industrial pursuit." The Ladies' Helping Hand Association taught women sewing and needlework, while the Working Woman's Protective Union, established in 1863, dedicated itself to ameliorating the condition of the factory worker.[22]

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21 Bennett, p. 204; Fourteenth Annual Report of the Mariner's Family Industrial Society of the Port of New York (1858), 4; Cammann and Camp, p. 572.

22 Annual Report of the New York Woman's Benevolent Society of the Calvary Church (1850-51), pp. 10-15; Thirteenth Annual Report of the New York House of Industry and School (1864), 6; Fourth Annual Report Ladies' Helping Hand Association (1869), 8; Fifth Annual Report of the Working Women's Protective Union (1868), 16.

Efforts to alleviate the plight of the female dependent upon her own wages for existence, assumed many forms, and the industrial schools which proliferated in the middle of the century represented one of the most popular. The American Female Guardian Society established many such schools One member explained their need: "These children are too poor to avail themselves of the. . .generous provision of the public." Citing "lack of suitable clothing" and "the necessity which often require[d] their assistance at home [and forced them to work at the most menial labor]" as reasons why their pupils could not attend the public schools, upper- and middle-class women in urban centers founded institutions where girls could receive an education comparable to that given in the city schools, while simultaneously learning to support themselves. The industrial schools taught sewing and other skills, provided lunch which the children helped to make, and willingly "waived" certain regulations "for the good of the children."

The women who taught at and administered the schools evidently viewed each institution as a base for social service work in the desolate neighborhood in which it was situated. As Sarah Bennett stated: "The ladies engaged in this work devote much time to visiting in the vicinity of the school, both to gather in new scholars and to become acquainted with the condition and circumstances of those already members. In this way they meet with cases of extreme destitution which it

becomes their privilege to assist."[23]

The women of the Guardian Society sponsored more than twenty schools in New York's poorer regions, while other females throughout the City and State founded similar institutions. The German Industrial School in Manhattan reported that most of the girls who attended had formerly spent their time trying to earn a few pennies on the city streets. The Wilson Industrial School for Girls, located at 125 St. Mark's Place, similarly recorded that before opening the institution in 1853, its students had "passed their time in the street as beggars [and] rag pickers." The Wilson School, taking the name of its founder, Mrs. James Wilson, advised the public of the "possibility of establishing self-sustaining trade-classes [which] has been fully demonstrated by the success of those of the Wilson School, where. . .instruction has been given to classes of girls in tailoring and dressmaking by 2 competent teachers, employed at salaries of $300 each, the whole amount having been paid by the proceeds of the work done in the two departments. . . ." The older girls received, "in addition to a knowledge of the trade," payment for their services, "and thus the feeling of independence is cultivated." "Girls have left the Tailoring Department, and now maintain themselves by that trade," stated one report. Another noted that some of

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23 Golden Jubilee, p. 42. Eventually industrial schools were founded also for boys; Bennett, p. 203.

their graduates could command from "five to seven dollars for their dressmaking skills," while other students had become qualified to work as private tutors. "Corporal punishment, the use of scholding and of loud and angry tones in speaking on the part of the teachers is entirely dispensed with," wrote the women, who viewed the success of their institution largely as a result of their sincere interest in the welfare of their students.[24]

The Brooklyn Industrial School Association, organized in 1854 by "two philanthropic women, Mrs. Sharp and Mrs. King," established several schools in different parts of Brooklyn which, partaking in the general features of industrial schools, also instituted two novel programs. "Mothers' Meetings," held periodically at each school "to assist and encourage the burden bearing, often disheartened, mothers," gave poor women an opportunity to share their problems and thoughts with one another. Each school also had a Nursery, the precursor of the modern day care center, which accepted the children of working women and placed them under the care of nurses: "This is a great relief to indigent women, who are thus enabled to go out to service." This imaginative plan filled an important need, for working mothers could not afford to pay someone to

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24 See Letchworth for description of industrial schools throughout New York State, pp. 350-425; Annual Report of the German Industrial School (1855), 22; Letchworth, p. 379; Fourth Annual Report of the Wilson Industrial School (1857), 4-5; (1860), 2.

watch their children and usually had no alternative but to leave them alone and unattended. The Advocate reported that "papers continually mention accidents by fire in consequence of mothers being obliged to lock up their little ones while they go out to obtain the mere necessaries of life." Those mothers, who resisted locking their youngsters in an unsafe dwelling, unwittingly created the phenomenon of "street children." These youths passed long days and nights on the city's avenues and boulevards, forming a visible sign of urban poverty and suffering.[25]

Women devised the scheme of establishing child care facilities on a daily basis in the 1850s. But their creative program had roots in another organization, founded earlier in the century, which sheltered children of working mothers for months at a time. The Society for the Relief of Half-Orphans and Destitute Children originated in 1835 through the efforts of Mrs. William A. Tomlinson, after she heard the dilemma of a widow who, working as a domestic, had no placed to leave her children. One of the early reports of the Society proclaimed that "their first and most appropriate duty. . .[was] to pity and relieve woman in her weakness and desolation, . . In accordance with this aim they provided lodgings and education for the children of female workers, while using their annual reports to publicize the hardships of the females they assisted:

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25 Brooklyn Industrial School Association and Home for Destitute Children. An Outline History (New York, 1898), 1-10; Cammann and Camp, p. 562; Advocate (Apr. 1, 1854), XX, 40.

"Regard for a moment the condition of some widowed mother with an infant family! Shut out from many ways of earning her livelihood which are open to the hardier sex, receiving a mere pittance for her labor, with her children a continual clog upon her exertions, how can she ever realize anything beyond that required by the necessities of the moment?. . .If anything occur to hinder the prosecution of her employment for a single day, her means are proportionally diminished; and should it continue longer, the little comforts, which it may have taken years to accumulate, must be sacrificed. . . to keep them from starvation. . . ."[26]

Almost twenty years later, the special needs of another group of working women awakened the sympathies of Mrs. Thomas Addis Emmet, a manager of the Marion Street Lying-in Asylum, and of Mrs. Cornelius Du Bois. Upon hearing "of the miseries of infants. . .and the suffering of mothers whose poverty forced them to give the nourishment intended for their own infants to the children of the rich," they decided to organize an asylum" for the maintenance and care of the children of wet nurses, and the daily charge of infants whose parents labor away from home." They thus established the first institution in the city and perhaps in the nation primarily devoted to day care. Originally called the Nursery for the Children of Poor Women,

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26 Seventh Annual Report of the Society for the Relief of Half Orphan and Destitute Children (1842), 4-5; Letchworth, p. 354.

the establishment, formed in 1854 and located on the corner of Lexington Avenue and 51st Street, included among its Managers Sarah Doremus, who had seceded Catharine Sedgwick as First Directress of the Women's Prison Association. The organization, dedicated to relieving the "sorrows and wants of destitute mothers" sheltered their young children and provided infants with wet nurses. The widespread illness among the youngsters forced the volunteers to expand their operation, and in 1856 they organized a Child's Hospital. The facilities, which ultimately included a Lying-in Hospital, also admitted illegitimate children to prevent "suicides of erring mothers." The Nursery and Child's Hospital in the City of New York as the establishment came to be called attempted to meet the needs of poverty-stricken women and became a tangible expression of women's efforts to help one another.[27]

Similarly, the upper- and middle-class women who struggled to found the Woman's Hospital called their institution "the work of woman for the benefit of woman." Declaring their "object and business. . .[to be the provision of] a hospital intended for the treatment of diseases peculiar to woman," the members of the Woman's Hospital Association asserted that "they knew that many women were passing weary days and nights of agony, debarred by poverty from seeking medical aid, and for whom no

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27 Act of Incorporation--Nursery for the Children of Poor Women (New York; Billon Bros, 1854), Nursery and Children's Hospital Twenty-second Annual Report (1876), 8; Fourth Annual Report (1858).

shelter was provided, for the crowded wards of our established hospital, even if numerous enough to receive them, were no fit places for the class of cases they wished to succor." The efforts and enthusiasm of numerous women joined in this attempt to relieve "suffering that no mere man [could]. . .possibly understand." Yet, Mrs. Sarah Doremus, who ultimately became the president of the board of the new hospital had taken the lead in "all the early struggles made from day to day to establish the Woman's Hospital. . . ." From her cumulative experiences with women prisoners, many of whom suffered from venereal disease and other gynecological disorders, and with destitute females in her capacity as founder of the New York House and School of Industry, Mrs. Doremus became plagued by the physical anguish endured by women whose poverty and ignorance combined with custom and modesty to deter them from seeking even the limited medical attention available to antebellum females.[28]

Urging "every woman. . .to aid in healing her suffering sisters," Mrs. Doremus, along with the other members of the organization, campaigned vigorously to raise money for the health center, fully aware that the nineteenth century code of feminine conduct deemed it most unladylike for them even to mention the so-called "female diseases." When Dr. J. Marion

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28 First Anniversary Meeting of the Woman's Hospital Association (1856), 15; Annual Report of the Woman's Hospital Association (1854), 20; Thomas Addis Emmet, M.D. Reminiscences of the Founders of the Woman's Hospital Association (New YorK, n.d.), p. 6.

Sims, a male gynecological surgeon from the South who had developed a procedure for closing vesico-vaginal fistulae, an ailment widespread among antebellum women, decided to practice in New York, the volunteers of the Woman's Hospital Association invited him to join in their project. Together they launched their unprecedented enterprise. The forty bed hospital, located in what had formerly been a private home on Madison Avenue, opened in 1855. Its constitution stipulated that the "surgeon's assistant must be a woman," and its report declared that, "[to] the poor, its wards and all that it can offer are free." Under the auspices of women managers and visiting committees who administered the facility and met with, interviewed, and comforted patients, the hospital quickly won the enthusiastic support of the citizens of New York.[29]

At the first anniversary celebration of the establishment of the Woman's Hospital, civic-minded doctors as well as other men of note heralded the "formidable. . .task" achieved by the founders. Dr. John W. Francis credited the women with making the city aware of the "claims" of the "particular class of diseases to which the. . .Woman's Hospital is devoted." "To the brave and intelligent labors of a society of New York ladies. . .[the Hospital] owes its existence." The women,

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29 Annual Report of the Woman's Hospital Association (1854), 21; Elizabeth Blackwell, Pioneer Work in Opening the Medical Profession to Women (New York, 1895), p. 162; Emmet, p. 3; Annual Report of the Woman's Hospital Association (1854), 21; Emmet, p. 10.

"their union strong. . . , put all on trial. . .they coalesced as one power in the promotion of their design," and their courageous and determined actions, like those of Mrs. [Joanna] Bethune, . . .Miss Dix. . . and Florence Nightingale, vindicates the true character of their sex beyond dispute. . . ." The Woman's Hospital represented an extraordinary attainment for the members of the Association. Deeply touched by the physical agonies of their sisters and boldly ignoring the prevailing prohibitions upon their sex discussing the reproductive organs,they publicized the anguish of female illnesses until they received sufficient support for the establishment of an institution where women of all classes could seek help.[30]

The Woman's Hospital, which grew in size and importance, greatly expanded the medical facilities available to New York women. Yet, it never achieved the fame of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children, organized in 1853 under the direction of Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, which gained distinction throughout the nation as the "first medical charity established by female physicians and as the first hospital organized for the instruction of women in practical medicine." The Infirmary had its origins in a special blend of circumstances: Blackwell's decision to begin her medical career in New York City where she believed "popular feeling had sanctioned the effort," the refusal of existing hospitals to admit her to practice, and

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30 First Anniversary of the Woman's Hospital Association (1856), 15.

the presence of countless women who, conforming to the nineteenth century dictates of delicacy, would not disclose their ailments to male doctors merged to give impetus to the founding of the Infirmary. In her autobiography, Blackwell recorded the isolation she felt at being "excluded from medical companionship," which made her "determined to try and form an independent dispensary"; yet, the difficulties attendant upon this project seemed almost insurmountable. She recalled that the "trials encountered at this early period were severe. Ill-natured gossip, as well as anonymous letters came to me. . . . These malicious stones [were] painful to me, for I am a woman as well as physician, and both natures [were] wounded by these falsehoods. . . ."[31] Nevertheless Elizabeth Blackwell persisted in her goal, believing that "with common sense, self reliance, and attention to the work in hand, any woman can pursue the medical calling without risk."

In 1853, with the aid of sympathetic women," a small room was engaged in a poor quarter of the town near Tompkins Square, with one of her quaker friends, Mrs. Cornelia Hussey, actively assist[ing] in arranging drugs. . . ." The Act of Incorporation clearly stated that the purpose of the institution was "[t]o afford poor women the opportunity of consulting physicians of their own sex." Blackwell recalled that the Infirmary was met with vehement hostility by many males who told her that a

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31 Cammann and Camp, p. 80; Blackwell, Pioneer, pp. 158-60.

"[woman] doctor would be looked upon with so much suspicion that the police would interfere [and] that if deaths occurred their death certificates would not be recognized." The female population, however, long accustomed to receiving support and assistance from members of their own sex and sufficiently familiar with competent women to believe that woman could indeed practice medicine with skill and intelligence, flocked to the new Infirmary.[32]

An early report of the clinic recorded that "over 200 poor women have received medical aid. All these women have gratefully acknowledged the help afforded them." A later publication noted: "[The] rapid increase of the patients of the Infirmary, the number treated this year being more than double that of [the last], shows how highly poor women appreciate the advantage of being able to consult physicians of their own sex. The same thing is proved by the fact that the patients of the Institution have come from all parts of the city, from Brooklyn, Williamsburgh, Long Island and occasionally from New Jersey and New England. Many instances might be mentioned in which patients have sought relief after suffering for years without being willing to apply to any other public charity."[33]

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32 Blackwell, Pioneer, p. 158; Act of Incorporation of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children reprinted in Cammann and Camp, p. 79; Sixty-fifth Annual Report of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children (1920), 5; First Annual Report of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children (1855) in Blackwell, Pioneer, p. 234; Fifth Annual Report of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children (1858), 6.

33 Fifth Annual Report of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children (1860), 6.

"The medical service is conducted entirely by women," proclaimed a memorandum of the Infirmary, which detailed one of the special services supplied by the institution: "Poor women are attended at their own homes, by the junior physicians. . . . The degree of wretchedness, of filth, of utter degradation in the abodes of many of the poor. . .[is] inconceivable. . . . Night after night is spent by the young physician in these dens of misery, ministering to the wants of the sick, when the only bed is a heap of rags on the floor, and that heap is shared perhaps by a drunken husband." Other functions of the Infirmary included a free out-door Dispensary open every morning to all women, as well as limited in-door hospital facilities. In addition to the "usual departments," Dr. Blackwell reported establishing the position of "sanitary visitor. . . , filled by one of [the] assistant physicians, whose special duty it was to give simple, practical instruction to poor mothers on the management of infants and the preservation of the health of the families." "A word of counsel or information, too, has often been given to the destitute widow or friendless girl who was seeking work as well as health; the best methods of seeking employment have been pointed out, suitable charities. . .recommended, and pecuniary aid sometimes rendered," wrote the physicians, who viewed their organization as a means through which women could learn to become self-reliant.[34]

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34 Blackwell, Pioneer, p. 183; First Annual Report New York Infirmary (1855), 234.

"The essential feature of this Institution is that it is an effort of women to help themselves by the steady and earnest cultivation of a valuable field of industry. . . ," declared an annual report of the Infirmary, while its founder, concerned with woman's ignorance of her own body, urged her sister, Dr. Emily Blackwell who would soon join the staff, "to collect all [available] information. . .about maternity, the rational of the sexes, and kindred subjects." She added: "[W]e have a vast field to work in this direction. . .I feel as if it were peculiarly our duty to meet this want."

With Emily's arrival in New York, and with the assistance of Dr. Marie E. Zackrzewska, a young woman who had been sent to Elizabeth for encouragement by the New York House of Industry, the doctors rented a house on Bleecker Street in 1857 and expanded the scope of their endeavor. With Dr. Zackrzewska working as the resident physician and Dr. Emily Blackwell responsible for surgical procedures, the women attempted to establish a separate, complete hospital. As Elizabeth Blackwell later recalled, "at that date, although college instruction was being given to women students in some places, no hospital was anywhere available either for practical instruction or the exercise of the woman-physician's skill. To supply the need had become a matter of great urgency. A report of the Infirmary reiterated Blackwell's sentiments: "[U]nless women themselves take up these branches of usefulness with zeal and shape the institution to meet their own needs,

they will neither succeed as nurses, as instructors in health, nor as physicians."[35]

The establishment of a Hospital by women physicians excited strong resistance, but the doctors persevered in their determination to "provide treatment for poor women and [female] children by physicians of their own sex, to form a center for the work of women physicians and to give practical instruction to women medical students [and nurses]." The hospital had a multiple significance. It would alleviate "a vast amount of suffering--often the cause of death could. . .[be] averted--[now] that woman's heart has been moved to claim as her rightful prerogative the privileges of an education that will qualify her to administer to the relief of the suffering of her sex."

Moreover, it would "gain the attention and respect of the community, and win that confidence from the profession which would induce them to receive its students to their wider opportunities." Eventually gaining the support of Horace Greely, who publicized the enterprise in his New York Tribune, and the endorsement of Henry J. Raymond, founder of the New York Times, as well as the backing of innumerable male physicians, the venture made steady progress. In 1868 Elizabeth Blackwell's plans for adding a woman's medical college to the New York Infirmary came to fruition, and the institution which admitted women from all over the nation, stood as a monument

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35 Blackwell, Pioneer, pp. 162, 168; Sixth Annual Report of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children (1859), p. 9.

to woman's initiative, courage, and dedication to the advancement of her sex.[36]

Assuring that "women. . .receive the blessings of a medical attendance from skillful physicians of their own sex," the New York Infirmary for Women and Children and the Women's Medical College were the natural offspring of feminist thinking, born out of woman's labors in hundreds of female voluntary societies over a period of fifty years. The woman doctor received the support and encouragement of numerous women's benevolent associations. She insisted upon her right as a fully equal individual to enter a male bastion of privilege and authority and extended free medical treatment and advice to other women. This help, coming as it did from a female physician, had a significance even beyond the undeniable importance of making such assistance so readily available to those imprisoned by poverty, ignorance, and convention. By giving instruction in the principles of hygiene and health care, by treating the whole person rather than only the specific symptom, by recognizing the social context of illness, and by demonstrating

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36 A Brief History of the Woman's Medical College of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children (n.p.,n.d.), 1; Second Annual Announcement and Constitution of the New York Medical College and Hospital for Women (New York, 1864), p. 9; Seventh Annual Report of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children (1860), 6; Notable American Women, ed. Edward T. James (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), I, 164; See list of graduates Annual Catalogue and Announcement of the Woman's Medical College of the New York Infirmary (New York: S. Angel, 1872), p. 12; Fourth Annual Report of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children (1857), pp. 8-9.

sympathy and sensitivity to feminine diseases, particularly those involving the reproductive organs, the woman doctor helped her patients to overcome years of embarrassment, fear and alientation from their bodies. Thus, as she broke through the barrier which prohibited women from pursuing a professional life and challenged the concept of sex-linked roles, she symbolized the competence and skill associated with men and simultaneously helped other females to feel more comfortable with, and to exercise greater control over, their bodies, and consequently over their lives.

Woman's benevolent involvement in the years after 1830 admitted both her estrangement from nineteenth century society and the beginning of her attempt to transform the social milieu into one responsive to the exigencies of her sex. The female sense of herself as a capable individual intensified her awareness of the abusive treatment accorded females by a society, consistently stifling feminine potential, creativity, and happiness. Thus urban women across the nation created organizations out of their search for personal fulfillment, their commitment to other females, and their recognition and respect for the diversity of their sex. In contrast to the ethos of the woman-beau ideal which spoke in the singular, dictating a monolithic code for the entire sex and blithely ignoring the reality of hundreds of thousands of working women, the vivid experiences of the members of female voluntary societies had taught them that all women did not have the same

needs.

Although the social and economic backgrounds of the members necessarily limited their perceptions, they formed societies which they earnestly believed would ameliorate the conditions of impoverished females and help them toward self-discovery and self fulfillment. The associations of the first three decades of organized philanthropy, although agitating for numerous reforms and having crucial significance for the development of feminism, generally did not establish permanent institutions devoted to helping present and future generations become independent. But the organizations developed during the years from 1830 to 1860 founded day care centers, schools, employment facilities, and hospitals. These varied establishments, at once expressed women's sense of themselves as individuals with differing wants, yet bound together as a distinct community by special interests and obligations as well as by the burden of oppression. They also revealed woman's refusal to continue to allow men, the traditional authority figures, to dictate and define their needs. The societies further disclosed the conviction that women must be freed from the tyrannies of poverty, ignorance, prejudice, inhibition, and sex-related roles and be educated and trained to claim possession of their own lives.

Ironically, the myriad of institutions formed by women in the antebellum period, shaped out of her alienation, dissatisfaction, and disillusionment, greatly enriched the

quality of urban life, bringing humanity to the frantic, impersonal nineteenth century cities, and providing a wealth of vital social services. Anticipating the creation of municipal agencies, these organizations demonstrated great flexibility and sensitivity to the needs of women in urban America. The activities of the nineteenth century woman, coming from within the still narrow confines of her existence, may be seen as not only helping to advance the interests of her sex, but also as working towards a better and, perhaps one day, "Splendid City."

Yet, predictably, as governmental officials and other prominent citizens praised woman's protean talents and acknowledged the importance and value of her accomplishments, her frustration and anger at being denied full participation in her community increased dramatically. She became enraged at being allowed to contribute her time, energy, and skills on a voluntary basis only, while continuing to be barred from most forms of remunerative and rewarding employment. And as women active in voluntary associations absorbed the meanings of their cumulative experiences this hostility came bursting forth in a plethora of literature. As part of their on-going quest for woman's emancipation, they demanded, throughout the 1850s, expanded opportunities and rights for their sex.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN LIONS ARE PAINTERS

A painter once exhibited to a lion, a splendid picture in which Hercules was represented conquering the Nemean lion, who lay prostrate and bleeding at his feet. After examining it steadfastly for some time, the king of beasts exclaimed haughtily--"This is all very well, but if lions were painters, we should see the other side of the picture."

From an Aesop Fable

The history of woman's involvement in female benevolent societies constitutes a flagrant denial of the prevailing nineteenth century conception of female nature. Yet, while woman, clearly demonstrating individuality and competence, donated her time, resources, energy, and talents to a community made better by these varied contributions, her basic economic, educational, legal, and social position remained unaltered. This created a vast chasm between woman's awareness of the worth and human dignity of her sex and society's denigrating treatment of its female population. The dichotomy between experience and behavior on the one hand, and the habits of mind and belief on the other, generated an unremitting tension as woman became increasingly frustrated over the nation's reluctance to alter its theories and attitudes.

As woman absorbed the lessons of almost a half century of organized charitable activity, her discordant relationship with society became intensified. But, at the same time it became understood in a new way. No longer would she express her yearning for fulfillment furtively in locked diaries, or her faith in feminine potential disguised through fictitious heroines. The shared experiences of members in voluntary associations throughout America impelled women forcefully and directly to demand increased rights for their sex.

At once gaining a sense of self and the courage to articulate it, females whose thinking had been shaped by organized benevolence produced countless articles urging the

emancipation of woman. Some wrote in their capacity as managers or members of particular societies; others did not. But all expressed ideas nurtured by philanthropic involvement. Confident that their past activities at least guaranteed them society's attention, women agitated for all phases of independence including expanded employment and educational opportunities, increased legal rights, and the end of sex-related roles. Of course feminine voluntary associations had, from the beginning, implicitly and explicitly argued for greater freedom, and the member's dim perceptions of their autonomous identity coaxed emergent pleas for fairer treatment. But as the century approached its middle years and women came to appreciate and assimilate the many meanings of their cumulative experiences, they more thoroughly recognized and accepted that they possessed the same human nature as man. They consequently had the same abilities, duties, and responsibilities, and, therefore, deserved identical rights.

Generally refraining from polemical refutations of woman's alleged inferiority, the volunteers believed that the rich history of female organized philanthropy had demonstrated their equality beyond question. They now claimed the prerogatives which the years of charitable endeavor assured them all women deserved. Urging woman's complete liberation from society's binds, the members articulated a wide variety of political and social beliefs and interests; yet, the profound conviction that woman had value as an independent being whose essential

dignity emanated from her humanity, joined the disparate writings together and gave them unity. Autonomy became the elixir in the potent brew of nineteenth century feminism. It flavored the many theories and demands which had been fermenting during almost fifty years of benevolent activity.

The assertion of woman's individual worth apart from the incidental relations of her life as mother, wife, sister and daughter formed a continuous thread running through the blanket of literature admonishing society to treat her as man's equal. This precept gave strength to the numerous essays beseeching that woman be trained and educated for independence so that she could assume responsibility for her own life. The Advocate and Family Guardian which, by the late 1840s, had become an expressly feminist publication, concentrating its energies on the various phases of woman's emancipation rather than on the specific activities of the American Female Guardian Society, asserted that woman is "possessed of. . .common humanity, having personal responsibilities for which she alone is responsible. . . . It is manifest that whatever increase her power, whatever will command the respect of others, in brief whatever will en able her more successfully to accomplish life's greatest purposes is rightfully hers on the plainest principles of common justice. . . ." In an article entitled

"The Wrongs of Woman," appearing in an 1854 issue of the Advocate, the writer stated that there is "no feeling more universal among. . .human beings than the desire to be independent, to take care of themselves, and it's lamentable that there should be so large a portion of the human race so educated that they must depend on others. 'Oh you deprive woman of all her charms, if you make her self-reliant and give her independence,' exclaim very many who are so fearful of the encroachments of females upon their privileges and prerogatives, but when from want of knowledge and proper training they are thrown helpless upon charity, these are not the persons. . .willing to aid them."[1]

Entreating mothers to "educate their daughters to far greater self-reliance," the Advocate promulgated the view that "[n]o woman of health and sound mind should allow herself to feel dependent on any body. . . ." An author, who signed her name "A New England Mother," believed it "necessary" for "young women in this country. . .to acquire a knowledge of several trades," and thought that the wages should be sufficient "not only [to] enable [young women] to contribute liberally to the support of benevolent institutions, but to be. . .independent. . . ." Mrs. C. F. Fonda from Wheaton, Illinois looked forward to the day "when woman comes to occupy her true position. . . and is allowed to qualify herself for self-support."[2]

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1 Advocate (1857) XXIII, 4; Advocate (Mar. 1, 1854), XX, 33.

2 Advocate (1855), XXI, 166; Advocate (1858), XXIV, 207; Advocate (1856), XXII, 124.

To dramatize their demand that women be allowed to control their own lives, the Advocate printed the "true" story of a young mother whose husband dies after squandering all their money. "Week after week the needle was plied by M-L- from early morning till the midnight hour, through blinding tears with failing health, with the consciousness that wrongs had been inflicted in the despotism of her affairs, the result of which none but herself could duly estimate. She was told that redress, to some extent, was possible, yet she shrank with. . . timidity from the extention found to be necessary to this end."

As a woman of the antebellum era, she had been "educated to regard it as 'unladylike for a female to journey without an attendant, . .not appropriate for her sphere to appear in the marts of business or to seem to know right from wrong in what might pertain to legal transactions.' In the parlance of the circle where she had been wont to move 'woman should ever shrink from observation, lean upon others, dress-a-la mode, play to a charm, be admired, and of course supported'." M-L- decided that "she must brave a false public sentiment and adopt the true idea that woman can do with propriety whatever. . . she may have the strength and wisdom to perform." "[H]er course . . .[was] beset. . . with difficulties," but she entered "upon it with a determination to be moved by no obstacles. She felt that she must help herself, or none would help her. She sought advice, made herself familiar with the laws of her state [and]. . .employed counsel in whose hands she placed the

data necessary. . . ." As the editors related the happy ending of their tale, they declared that the "struggles of the past few years have made M-L- a truly energetic, self-reliant woman. . .[who] has become conscious of her own powers."[3]

Similarly exhorting women to independence and self-determination, Sarah Martyn, formerly a manager of the Female Guardian Society, wrote in the Ladies' Wreath, a feminist periodical which she organized and edited, that "[e]very healthy young woman ought to be so trained as to be able to make her own way through the world, without the necessity of dependence on any other. No matter what her rank or station may be, she ought, in the common language of the community, to be able to support herself through life." Eliza Farnham, first female matron of a state prison and co-worker with the members of both the Female Guardian Society and the Woman's Prison Association, also condemned woman's dependency upon men and boldly proclaimed: "All women sacrifice more or less to man for what their. . .necessities imperiously demand, and this sacrifice has only to be continued by imperceptible degrees to make all women in the course of time prostitutes."[4]

Although few women in the nineteenth century would have dared publicly to articulate Farnham's views, countless females urged their sex to assert woman's autonomy by refusing to wed for any reason but deep and sincere love. Denouncing

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3 Advocate (1857), XXIII, 180.

4 Ladies' Wreath (1846), I, 186; Eliza Farnham, Woman and her Era (New York: A. J. Davis Co., 1864), II, 288.

the prevailing decree that "[t]o get married is absolutely necessary to. . .[women's] respectability and support," Melva, whose Home Whispers appeared serialized in the Advocate and also as a separate book published by the Female Guardian Society, indicted husbands "not infrequently to be met with who practically ignore woman's equality with man--who have been educated to believe that she was created a necessary and convenient auxiliary to him, and that she best fulfills the primary ends of her being, when she unquestioningly does the bidding, and in all possible ways, promotes the wishes and comforts of the 'lords of creation.'" "Oh dear! What did I ever marry for?" Melva recorded one young woman as asking, and the desolate wife's lament painted a grim picture of "Holy Matrimony." "It's nothing but care, trouble, disappointment and vexation. . .overtaxed energies, feeble health and more than all a cross selfish exacting husband."[5]

"O it's not the worst thing in the world. . .to be an 'old maid.' Not half so bad as to be the disappointed, wretched wife of something that would disgrace a brute. . . ," declared an article printed by the Advocate. Sarah Martyn believed that among the "false sentiments" of the era "there are none more pernicious than those which represent love and marriage not only as essential to the happiness of our sex, but in reality the only end and aim of our existence." Catharine Sedgwick, a founder and first directress of the Prison Association for almost twenty years, hoped to "persuade. . .

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5 Advocate (1854), XX, 34; Melva [pseud.], Home Whispers to Husbands and Wives (New York: American Female Guardian Society, 1859), pp. 189, 214.

[her] young countrywomen so to reverence herself. . .that she will not give her hand without her heart, nor her heart till she is quite sure of his good desert who seeks it." In the Preface to Married or Single? written in the late 1850s, Sedgwick enunciated her wish that all women would "raise. . . [their] voice with all. . .[their] might against the miserable cant that matrimony is essential to the [female] sex--that a woman's single life must be useless or undignified--that she is but an adjunct of man--in her best estate a helm merely to guide the nobler vessel. . . . [W]e believe she has an independent power to shape her own course, and to force her separate sovereign way."[6]

The demand that marriage be viewed as one of many alternatives open to women, emerging from the experiences of females in benevolent socicties who truly understood the numerous and varied ways in which women could find fulfillment, inevitably related to the insistance that woman's "sphere is unquestionable as extended as human interests, and her appropriate labor whatever she has ability to do well." "To be married, is too frequently the great aim," stated an article which continued by urging that women must be "taught that to be happy they must be useful in whatever sphere they might move. . .[and] impressed that life had many missions of which marriage was

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6 Advocate (1854), XX, 130; Ladies' Wreath (1847), II, 105; Catharine Sedgwick, The Linwoods (New York: Harper & Bros., 1835), II, 285; Sedgwick, Married, Preface.

but one. . . ." "Woman's Rights, and her sphere of duty and employment are properly attracting public notice and exciting discussion," applauded the Advocate in 1858. The editors emphasized that "[d]ifferent individuals have different taste and capacities, adapted to perform. . .various acts. . . ." Sedgwick wrote of the "discovery. . .made that a woman is capable of something besides praying, loving, sewing and spinning," while Martyn satirized those who decreed "that WOMAN'S appropriate sphere is limited to her own family circle." An article appearing in the Golden Keepsake (1851), a gift book dedicated to woman's emancipation, also edited by Sarah Martyn, expressed similar sentiments and inquired if the "denunciation" of women who left "her appointed bounds. . . brought into disrepute the names of Miriam, Deborah, and Hannah. . . ."[7]

The staff of the Advocate wrote that they "must beg to dissent" from the "position" that "the duties of the family should be performed by [woman]. . .and [that] this is her 'appropriate sphere.'" "Look at the voluntary benevolent associations and institutions under our country whose origin and continuance may be traced to woman's agency," they directed. "[T]he thousands and tens of thousands of the ignorant destitute and helpless, now being. . .[helped] who, had woman's mission begun and ended at home, had met a dark destiny. . . .[T]he

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7 Advocate (1858), XXXIV, 155; Advocate (1854), XX, 186; Advocate (1858), XXXIV, 207; Catharine Sedgwick, Live and Let Live or Domestic Service Illustrated (New York: Harper & Bros., 1837), 182; Ladies' Wreath (1846), I, 232. Golden Keepsake (1851), I, 230.

magnitude of woman's mission enlarges, the longer we contemplate the picture." "Many a woman is lost to society after she becomes [a mother]. . .[b]ut this should not be," declared the Advocate in 1852. Endorsing philanthropic organizations as a way to expand woman's sphere, a member of the Female Guardian Society empathized: "I know it often requires a great effort to. . . go out in uncomfortable weather. . . and when your head aches, or you are tired--to attend the Sewing Circle, and that Board meeting, or carry round a subscription paper--but still, if you are not sure that your duty lies at home, you will be a gainer by the sacrifice; . . .a worthy example set to others."[8]

"To every woman, whatever occupation she may occupy, life is a fact, stubborn, earnest, real, to be shaped and moulded by her own efforts, or to be borne and endured by her own fortitude," wrote those women who had withstood fierce opposition in personal attempts to control their own lives and determine their own destines. And, after the experience of almost five decades, they espoused a dynamic, undefined sphere for their sex. This contrasted sharply with obdurate decree of the antebellum era that woman's domain, the home, an automatic function of her particular female nature, was the same for the entire sex. The members of female voluntary societies, having substantially expanded their own spheres, understood and revealed the fallaciousness of a theory which allegedly spoke

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8 Advocate (1854), XX, 33; Advocate (1855), XXI, 93; Advocate (1852), XVIII, 3.

for all women, but which disregarded the tens of thousands of working women forced to labor outside their dwellings and the tens of thousands of others barred from domestic pursuits by custom. Encouraging woman, so long the passive recipient of a narrow, defining creed which set rigid boundaries around her existence and denied her individuality, the volunteers urged their sex to break out of society's binds and actively and energetically to form their lives by determining their own orbit of activity. As this idea caught woman's imagination, authors began to express its full implications.

If woman could select her own realm according to individual interests and needs, then woman could enter any trade or profession and compete with man in all phases of his life. There would in fact be no woman's sphere and no man's sphere either. Shaped out of women's belief in themselves as autonomous individuals with the right to independent conscious and judgment, this concept admitted no difference between male and female natures, duties, responsibilities, and rights; it undoubtedly proved as threatening to nineteenth century males as it proved alluring to antebellum famales, and many women did not hesitate to elucidate the ramifications of their refusal to accept a "woman's sphere."[9]

"I would not live in a house that had to be scrubbed. It is senseless, useless drudgery. . .invented to kill [women]

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9 Advocate (1851), XVII, 23; Also see: Advocate (1854), XX, 33.

and Old Time," declared Jane Grey Swisshelm, a leader in the movement to reform the legal status of women, in her Letters to Country Girls, which the editors of the Advocate excerpted for their periodical and repeatedly recommended to their readers. "What I object to in housekeeping, is keeping houses and making them the centre around which things celestial and terrestrial must revolve. I do not believe. . .the chief end of woman [is] to keep them." Analyzing the reasons why man, indifferent to woman's needs, had relegated her to the domestic domain, Swisshelm explained: "[Males] see no paper but a religious or political one. The former never speaks about woman, except to lecture her about her duties, her obligation to obey her husband--her vocation to forget herself and live only for the welfare of her liege lord and some particular church. The latter never speaks about woman or her interests a bit more than if such a creature never existed. The laws and policy they are discussing set her down midway between men and monkeys. She has no vote to solicit, no offices to confer but is a kind of appendage to her master. Of course the ignorant boor gets a vast opinion of his own importance, as it is continually held up to view by church and state; and it cannot be wondered at that he practices what our divines, statesmen, philosophers, and poets teach."[10]

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10 Jane G. Swisshelm, Letters to Country Girls (New York: J. C. Riker, 1853), pp. 47, 54, 73-75; also see Crusader and Feminist. Letters of Jane Grey Swisshelm 1858-1865, ed. Arthur J. Larsen (Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul, 1834).

Drawing the implications from the male attitudes enunciated by Swisshelm, Eliza Farnham addressed herself to woman's feelings at being restricted to the home. "To patter over the floors or carpets; to keep well cleansed, clothed and fed the bodies of her household; to mix and bake the bread of a family; to churn its butter. . .make its deserts and its beds, is certainly not an expanded circuit of action for any human soul. . . .Prison is prison despite. . .meek deportment therein. . . . Measured by man's stage, hers is a prison--. . . I wonder not that Woman protested against that imprisonment and solemnly affirmed that it could not, should not endure." Asserting that "woman sighs for. . .liberty," Farnham quoted a grieving female: "I pine and grow feeble here--let me go. I am a prisoner and must escape to strengthen and enlarge myself in freedom."[11]

If woman wished, both in fact and in theory, to be free from the domestic realm, man must be so educated to share in the household. Women from benevolent societies, already experienced in lecturing to men, now exhorted them to participate in the functions of home. The Advocate in 1854 declared the need "to educate boys to by sympathizing, active, home-helping husbands. . . . [For] boys who are taught that 'girls work' or woman's work is degrading will not when men consider it honorable to ease a wife's burdens. . . ." Articles refuting the notion that affection in a man towards his family was "a sign of

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11 Farnham Woman II, 350-351 (emphasis added).

weakness" appeared frequently in the literary organ of the Female Guardian Society. Similarly the Ladies' Wreath urged men to take a greater interest in the home. Melva asserted that "[m]an as well as woman needs to be educated for domestic life; [most men] look upon domestic life as a theater for the exercise of man's petty tyrannies, as an institution whose highest and almost only use is to promote the convenience, comfort, honor, and aggradizement of themselves--the 'lords of creation.' . . .[M]en don't care. . .about their wives, I believe, only to get as much benefit from them as possible. . . [Men] can sell goods, make bargains, and attend to business. . . they don't care how things fare in the house, provided they are made comfortable, and too many demands are not made on their purses."[12]

The insistence that every woman be allowed to decide upon her individual sphere of interest and activity, manifesting itself in a critique of the traditional nineteenth century home, also found expression in an assault on society's treatment of the female laborer. With few available jobs, each paying a paltry wage, the working woman had an even smaller chance for self determination than the woman chained to her household. Decades of involvement with destitute women, dependent upon their own income for subsistence, had overwhelmed the members of benevolent associations with the desperate condition of

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12 Advocate (1854), XX, 127; Advocate (1851), XVII, 77; Advocate (1856) XXII, 57; Ladies' Wreath I, 233; Melva, pp. 14, 216; 167.

hundreds of thousands of their sex. Although contemporary scholars have claimed that "feminist propaganda rarely mentioned women's wages and conditions in industrial enterprises until about the turn of the century. . ," in reality the first body of feminist literature in America, that produced by the women of urban female voluntary societies, devoted more time and energy to the plight of the woman laborer than to any other single issue. "Are the [seamstresses]. . .to be left to starvation under the assurance that it is the natural consequence of trade?" asked the Ladies' Wreath in 1846, as it continued: "and while political economists are solving this difficult problem, society may go on taxing them for its luxuries; capitalists may double their gains from [women's] overwrought strength." In another article also printed in 1846 the author pleaded for the "oppressed operative. . .who produce[s] property which thousands others of [her] sex only live to consume."[13]

The circumstances of their "suffering sisters" engaged the perpetual attention of the editors and members of the staff of the Ladies' Wreath. An essay, "Home Philanthropy," written by Ann Stephens who left the Female Guardian Society along with Sarah Martyn, appeared in both Ladies' Wreath and the Golden Keepsake, expressing concern not only for the female, but also

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13 Aileen S. Kraditor, Up from the Pedestal. Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 14; Ladies' Wreath (1846), I, 106; 108.

for the male laborer. Urging that more employments be opened to women, Stephens warned that if they "are to enter upon any of the trades now pursued by men, let it not be to reduce the wages of mechanics, which are already sufficiently low. . . and [consequently] enrich the capitalist." Generally, however, the early feminists ignored the condition of the male worker and made the "unequal. . .rate of compensation for the labor of the two sexes" the focus of their polemics. "A plea for Female Operatives" criticized "those calling themselves gentlemen" who prefer to have "a garment made by a woman because she will do it for half price, and it will be quite as well done." "It seems to us," wrote the staff of the Ladies' Wreath, "that while there are so many paths of profitable industry open to man and comparatively so few to woman, every principle of honor and justice demands that where the labor of the latter is equally productive it should be to herself equally available. Monopolies are always odious, and always more or less oppressive, and the fact that man has enjoyed a monopoly of profit so long, does not change the nature of the case or furnish a reason for its continuance."[14]

Predictably, the realization of the blatant inequalities bearing down on the female worker aggravated the frustration at woman's inability to effect significant change. "[W]hen the manufacturing interests of a country suffer, when the commercial

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14 Ladies' Wreath (1846), I, 105; also see: Golden Keepsake (1851), I, 73; Ladies' Wreath (1846), I, 19.

interests are threatened. . .[i]t becomes a subject of general interest, often serious legislation, because men have the power and will to clamor at the halls of legislation, and make their wants felt at the strongholds of power. We can only plead, where they demand--expostulate where they threaten and expose, and oppose female helplessness, shackled down by a thousand restraining influences, where they stand forward in their own behalf and wrestle for their own rights." Supporting those "female operatives. . .who came together as sisters. . .to claim the acknowledged human right of receiving food, shelter, and raiment for the labor of their hands," both the Ladies' Wreath and the Golden Keepsake asserted that "those of our own sex who are suffering under this grinding system of [economic] oppression and injustice, have a right to expect from us whose lot is differently cast both feeling and action in their behalf."[15]

Agreeing with the author of "Help for the Needle-Women" who wrote that the "gratulations of both sexes over the condition of American women have disgusted me," the Advocate published countless essays arguing that women should enjoy higher wages and greater employment opportunities. In the course of their discussions, the editors could not resist noting their own contributions to the cause. Their "Home Printing Office"

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15 Golden Keepsake (1851), I, 73;24; Ladies' Wreath (1846), I, 22.

had opened "a new field of remunerative labor for women," and the "training received. . [there] may fit woman as well as man to use that mighty power--the press." Moreover, they believed "the Advocate may be cited as a noble instance of widely-extended influence of more desirable character, exerted by a periodical wholly conducted by women--a paper that, by its own merits, has attained a circulation only reached by few of its contemporaries." As in its earlier years, the Advocate printed the members' account of their visits to bolster the organization's campaigns. Deploring the few available jobs, the women of the Female Guardian Society's Home Visiting Committee reported: "A. wants to get work to do, house cleaning, washing, sewing--anything she can do. Has an aged mother. B. has a babe of 14 months in her arms, has three older children, needs clothing and everything. Her husband went away last September to seek for work, since which has not heard from him. . . ." And so the long list continued, as the editors used every opportunity to detail the misery and poverty of their "struggling sisters."[16]

Along with frequent catalogues of feminine woe, the Advocate diligently publicized any effort to help the destitute of their sex. The editors had exuberant praise for "Mr. Stimson, the proprietor of the Day Book, in his experiment of teaching girls to set type" and heartily endorsed the "opening of Clerkship positions in Philadelphia to women." They urged

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16 Advocate (1852), XVIII, 166; Advocate (1857), XXIII, 53; Advocate (1855), XXI, 57.

"New York and other. . .cities [to] follow the excellent example of the 'City of brotherly love'" and asked: "Is it not time to remember that women cannot live on air, or even on compliments; and that both justice and policy demand their admission into walks of usefulness suited to their powers and yielding the means of decent livelihood?"[17]

Eliza Farnham protested the "'low wages to women'. . . [as] the warning set everywhere over the gates of man's dominion, Productive Labor, to discourage Woman from entering there." She further added that "the question of work and wages, of self-support by Woman, is one of immense importance to her and to society. Not alone because of her necessity to live, but because of what I had almost named her greater necessity to escape dependence on man. . . ." The Advocate similarly urging woman's economic self-sufficiency as a prerequisite to her personal fulfillment and independence, perpetually expounded the opinions "that it is lawful and proper for woman to do whatever she is fit for. . . ," and that each woman must be free to decide how she wished to be occupied.

Jane Swisshelm satirized the masculine response to women's entering the traditional male fields of endeavor: "[L]et her aspire to turn editor, public speaker, doctor, lawyer--take up any profession or avocation which is deemed honorable and requires talent and O! bring the Cologne, get a Cambric Kerchief

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17 Advocate (1854), XX, 45; Advocate (1852), XVIII, 77.

and a feather fan. . . . What a fainting fit Mr. Propriety has taken! Just to think that 'one of the dear creatures,' the heavenly angels, should forsake the. . .woman's sphere to mix with the wicked strife of this wicked world! What rhapsodies we have. . .about soiled plumage on angels' wings; while stern matter-of-fact tyrants crack their whips and shout 'Back to thy punishment false slave!'"[18]

Caroline Kirkland, who as a member of the Women's Prison Association had eloquently defended the essential humanity of female convicts, blended wit with anger to produce a delightful essay on women writers. Because "lordship [is] so much an object of desire among the stronger part of the creation. . .we shall take care to deal with the subject after the desultory, unsystematic and feminine manner," she began. "We repudiate learning, we disclaim accuracy, we abjure logic. We shall aim only at the pretty prattle which is conceded to our sex as a right and admired as a charm."

Bemoaning that "literary women" had "no distinguishing marks--inky fingers--corrugated brows--unkempt locks. . ," Kirkland declared "that some gentlemen would award a palm. . .to her who writes a Cook's Oracle, where a rod or a fool's cap would be the doom of a lady who should presume to touch political economy. The novel of fashionable life, provided it have no

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18 Farnhan, Woman, II, 340-344; Advocate (1860), XXVI, 220; Advocate (1852), XVIII, 77; Swisshelm, Letters, p. 75.

suspicion of a moral, and make no pretension to teach anything whatever, may pass as feminine, . .but a novel with the least bit of bone in it is 'mannish.'"[19]

In accordance with her interest in woman's professional rights, Kirkland attended a male lecture and debate on pursuits considered "fitted to women." "[W]hat made the most distinct impression on our memory," reported Kirkland, "was the question repeated in various forms as different branches of knowledge were examined with reference to their fitness for female use--'Will it render her more alluring? Here lay the key. . .to the whole popular philosophy of female claims on the score of intellect. This hint as to the object of woman's being solved a world of doubt. Here was a touchstone by which to try any pursuit--a test to determine the value of any talent. Whatever does not conduce to the grand aim must be. . . noxious. . . ."[20]

Obviously departing from the male views effectively presented and derided by Caroline Kirkland, the Advocate strenuously campaigned for admitting women to all professions and occupations. The members' widely diversified experiences informed their arguments and lent a special force to their writings. In the course of organized benevolence, females had demonstrated the requisite versatile qualities and abilities to pursue every career. Proclaiming it woman's "natural right" to become a physician, the Advocate relentlessly agitated for

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19 Caroline M. Kirkland, A Book for the Home Circle (New York: Charles Scribner, 1853), pp. 79-81.

20 Kirkland, Book, p. 84.

an end to the male monopoly of the medical profession. "We think it can require no labored argument to reform public sentiment in this direction. The argument is found in NATURE. . . . The friends of moral reform far and wide will be expected to take right ground on this subject, and thus doing they may exert a strong influence for the right."[21]

Underlying the demand that women be allowed to select their own calling lay the profound belief that females must be permitted to fulfill their nature by eschewing dependence. "Every daughter, as well as every son, should have a profession--a sufficient knowledge of some art or science to make it the means of independence, so that she may not have to resort to a degrading marriage. . . ." In issue after issue the same argument appeared: "Every girl should have a trade, a business, a profession, or some honorbable and useful way of gaining a livelihood--some employment in which her powers of body and mind may be amply developed. If she has not, she will be dependent upon somebody, and her dependence will degrade her. . . ."[22]

The members to the Female Guardian Society, always sensitive to the importance of their periodical in circulating information and ideas, devoted considerable space to a series

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21 See: Advocate (1851), XVII, 31; Advocate (1852), XXIII, 125; 155; 183; Advocate (1851), XVII, 31.

22 Advocate (1854), XX, 34; Advocate (1858), XXIV, 218.

of feminist lectures held in New York City in 1858. Woman had been "cramped in her action and forbidden to use the faculties which God had given her, to gain an honorable position in society or even to earn bread for herself and children," complained one speaker who urged enlarging "immensely the sphere of woman's activity, opening to her a hundred employments now closed. . . .Let the thing regulate itself! Let every human being man or woman find out his or her proper sphere and do what God hath given the faculty to do best." Whereas [m]en may be reconciled to women being printers and engravers," the lecturer continued, "when they aspire to enter one of the learned professions, then the whole masculine world bursts out into a fit of inextinguishable laughter." The editors reprinted most of the address and endorsed the closing remarks that the "principle which many of the advocates of women's right contend for is simply this. . .that a woman is always in her sphere when she is doing what God has given her that faculty to do. . . ."[23]

The assumption that woman should define her own realm inevitably gave impetus to the insistence that she receive an education equal to man's. As with the pressure for greater employment opportunities, the drive for expanded education, combining the need for woman's economic self-sufficiency with her right to self-determination, derived from the conviction that woman was an autonomous being. In 1855 the Advocate quoted

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23 Advocate (1858), XXIV, 218.

from an article, "The Education of Females," appearing in a Buffalo paper. "[T]here are certain of woman's rights which we are prompted to own and defend. . . .It is right that women as well as men should be furnished with the means of acquiring such knowledge as will be profitable to them in many ways. . . ." A different essay published the same year articulated the opinion that "a good education is, to a woman. . .an independence."[24]

One writer for the Advocate asserted that "[daughters'] physical powers must be developed and matured, if we would have them enjoy a happy womanhood. Their intellectual abilities must be cultivated and their minds richly stored with treasures of knowledge and wisdom." Another author declared: "She obtains her enjoyments from the same sources. The world without was equally intended for her benefit. Earth with its ten thousand voices is whispering to her in the same manner words of precious instruction, and presenting its wonders for her to explore. And there is no argument from experience or from the word of God why the road to these rich and pure enjoyments should be laid open with so much care to the one. . .[sex] and so. . . shut to the other."[25]

Critical of all obstacles to woman's full physical and mental education, the Advocate condemned custom which taught that "it is unladylike to run and romp and climb trees

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24 Advocate (1855), XXI, 59; 186.

25 Advocate (1855), XXI, 169; Advocate (1857), XXIII, 4.

and skate. . . .[Girls] must never laugh aloud, nor give a full joyous halloo, because 'a low sweet voice is an excellent thing in a woman.'" The prevailing codes "so educate [woman] that none of her powers, physical or mental, can ever attain a full and healthy action," protested an article in the Commercial Advertiser, reprinted by the Advocate. "She never. . . throws the ball, never slides down the hill, never roams through the woods, because. . .these are deemed unfeminine. . . . It matters not whether she is to live in the midst of fashion, or move more quietly in country life. . .or to struggle against unforeseen adversity," women deserved the same instruction as man. The members of the Female Guardian Society, accustomed to criticizing all forms of authority, did not hesitate to denounce the clergy's failure to promote the education of their sex. "They have not done it, nor do they intend to do it. . . . This state of things ill becomes a people that boast enlightened views on the subject of mental culture. It ill becomes the professors of. . .religion. . . ."[26]

Women argued for greater instruction from a variety of perspectives; the theory that education would enable females to realize their complete identity as persons in their own right found full eloquence in an essay by Jane Swisshelm. Entreating parents to give boys and girls "an equal education,"

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26 Advocate (1855), XXI, 169; Advocate (1851), XVII, 23; Advocate (1857), XXIII, 4.

Swisshelm wrote: "If [they] would give their daughters the same mental training they do their sons, they could not be converted into slaves so handily. Everywhere there is a distinction between the education of boys and girls--if the boys get little, the girls get less; as they get more the proportion is kept up." If woman wished to command respect, Swisshelm admonished: "[You must] know. . .your own duties and do them. You should try to understand everything you see and hear; to act and judge for yourselves; to remember that you each have a soul of your own to account for;--a mind of your own. . . . When you once get these ideas fixed, and learn to act upon them, no man or set of men, no laws, customs, or combination of them can seriously oppress you. Ignorance, folly, and levity, are. . . essential to the character of a slave. If women knew their rights. . .we would never hear of men [dominationg them]."[27]

Antebellum women suffered under many varieties of slavery, and fashion, although a subtle manifestation of restraint, nonetheless comprised an important form of bondage. The contemporary mode of dress, with yard upon yard of material, tight lacing, and wide hoops, severely constricted mobility as it presented a tangible symbol of woman's utter usefulness as well as her submission to authoritarian custom. In their discussion of clothing, the contributors to the Advocate first criticized the current styles as injurious to female health,

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27 Swisshelm, Letters, p. 81.

but by the 1850s they viewed the prevailing manner of dress as another shape of subjugation. Blaming men for their role in fostering uncomfortable and cumbersome feminine attire, the periodical urged "the women of America. . .to arouse to a consciousness of the responsibility resting upon THEM and firmly discountenence any [damaging] demand of fashion. . . !" "Woman's apparel," wrote the editors, "may lose a few inches in length and breadth, and thus an immense saving. . .[will] be effected in the score of. . .convenience." In another article they declared that "improvements [in fashion] should be the fore-runner of thorough revolution--our sex should rise above subserviency to fashion's despotic rule. . . ."[28]

Whether they agitated for freedom from fashion's dictates, or greater employment or educational opportunities, members of benevolent societies truly appreciated the importance of association in effecting change, and as in earlier years the volunteers emphasized unity of womanhood. "The duty of women to women has been deeply impressed upon my mind," wrote one female active in organized philanthropy, and others referred to the "bond of union" and the "cementing link" which joined them together. A writer who signed her letter "AN OBSCURE COUNTRYWOMAN" articulated sentiments felt and expressed by volunteers throughout the nation: "We WOMEN whether in thronged cities or quiet country spots should feel that we are one

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28 Advocate (1857), XXIII, 63; Advocate (1856), XXII, 131; 130; Advocate (1851), XVII, 186.

united sisterhood, bound together by one common interest. . . ."[29]

The "one common interest," the advancement of the female sex, assumed numerous forms; and deliberate display of woman's abilities formed one of these. The Ladies' Wreath detailed in great length the achievements of those in voluntary organizations who "fought and nobly conquered many of the great moral evils of the day." The Advocate, never missing an opportunity to praise the accomplishment of either individual members or the Society in general, printed a letter in 1857 by a woman who "found it difficult to believe a work [of administration] so great was undertaken by females alone. I certainly never had a low conception of the energy or self-devotion of woman," she confided, "but nothing has raised my ideas of her abilities so high as an acquaintance with the workings of the Home for the Friendless. The publication of a paper is in itself considered an undertaking demanding considerable time and talent, yet the editing and publication of the Advocate . . .is but a 'department' in the labor constantly demanded from. . .the Society."[30]

The attainments of members of benevolent societies obviously furnished the volunteers with the most accessible role models through which to demonstrate feminine ability. Yet, towards the middle of the century, these original

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29 Advocate (1859), XXV, 264; Advocate (1850), 2.

30 Ladies' Wreath (1858), XXIV, 81; Advocate (1857), XXIII, 217.

femininists initiated an important method of demonstrating woman's competence, constituting a significant path to female self-awareness and determination. Substituting individual interpretation for the prestigious weight of historical writings, the members searched the past for evidence of woman's important involvement and demanded that the writing of history be revised to reflect woman's vital participation in bygone days. Eliza Farnham asserted that "[H]istory has been neglectful and cold towards women," while other females tried to compensate for this indifference. The Ladies' Wreath had a regular feature on eminent historical women, and their story of "Isabella of Castile" exemplified much of the purpose behind these sketches. "[N]ot as the wife of Ferdinand. . .is Isabella the dearest historic name royalty ever gave. . . .[But] when the kings heard with cold incredulity, and learned prelates condemned with bitter sarcasm, the noble plans of Columbus, Isabella studied them with. . .patience, and believed. . .and resolved to prove that belief, though she might meet the sneers of rival royalties, and the urbent remonstrances of her own nobles at every step of the enterprise. Worst and hardest of all, she had to meet the disapproval of her. . .husband."[31]

One did not, however, have to look abroad to find examples of female courage; the "Pilgrim Mothers" provided writers with an important source of material. Martyn, in the

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31 This demand that history be revised to reflect woman's attainments has only recently been revived by contemporary feminists; Farnham, Woman II, 320; Ladies' Wreath (1846), I, 8.

Golden Keepsake, criticized those who consider "the graves of the pilgrim fathers as the proudest and most enduring monuments of national glory. . . ." She continued: "[T]he voyagers of the Mayflower on the. . .errand of freedom came not alone. Standing by their side on the trackless ocean, or in the howling wilderness were. . .women who had freely given up all the elegancies and comforts of home, and all the endearments of kindred, to share their perils, their privations and sufferings." In an article in the Ladies' Wreath, also concerning the early colonists, the author stated: "We present the Pilgrim mothers to our. . .readers. . .as lofty models of excellence intended for their imitation. . . ."[32]

"We hear enough about our forefathers. They were nice old fellows, no doubt. Perfect bricks in their way. Good to work, eat or fight," wrote the editors of the Advocate with uncharacteristic levity. "But where are their companions? Our foremothers. Who landed at James River and came over on the Mayflower and established the other early settlements? Were there any women among them? One would think not. . . . All hail to noble old boys, our forefathers say we. May the glory of their deeds never be less, but the good book tells us to 'render unto Caesar,' etc, [sic] and we wish to speak a word in season for women generally and especially for our noble. . .foremothers lest time and the one-sided page of

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32 Golden Keepsake (1851), I, 83; Ladies' Wreath (1846), I, 83.

history shall blot them forever from our memories." The assertion that history must be made responsive to women predictably led to the demand that they be allowed to expand their role in society. The members of the American Female Guardian Society agreed that the "history of every country should have as much to record of woman as of man; but this can never be until woman's field. . .is extended."[33]

In the course of their many campaigns to extend woman's sphere and expand her rights, members of benevolent societies across the nation had challenged authority in its numerous and varied embodiments of custom, law and philosophy. They had not shrunk from forays with the clerical, medical, educational, or historical professions, but, with the exception of a few brief encounters with the Scriptures, had generally avoided direct confrontation with Biblical authority. Yet, by the 1850s, the women felt sufficient confidence and conviction to use the Holy Book to support their claim of equality, thereby refuting the most persistent and esteemed theories of woman's inferiority. The essay, "What Rights Have Women?" published in an 1852 issue of the Advocate, set forth its intention to give "a connected view of Bible teaching in relation to. . . the question of 'Woman's Rights.'" Examining the contention that God assigned different spheres to men and women, the author asked: "What was the practice of those who knew and did God's will?" and replied in great detail: "In a feast prepared

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33 Advocate (1860), XXVI, 6; Advocate (1858), XXIV, 218.

for invited guests, Sarah cooked the meal while Abraham served it up, and waited upon the table. Gen. XVIII 6,8, Rebecca drew water for the camels of a passing stranger as an act of common courtesy. Gen. XXIV 14, Rachel kept her father's sheep, though it was one of the most arduous of out-door services. Gen XXIV 9, 31, 40."[34]

After providing many examples of women who, departing from the traditional feminine realm, "were an honor to their families and an ornament to the age in which they lived," the writer of "What Rights Have Women" leveled an attack at the accepted Biblical doctrine of woman's subjugation to man. "Deborah was the wife of Lepedoth. How did she understand the law 'Thy husband shall rule over thee?'" asked the author of the article, and the answer impugned the Scriptural decree of woman's subservience. "As a prophetess she was governed wholly by the spirit of prophecy. As the Judge of Israel 'she ruled justly in the fear of God.' . . . She led her armed men into battle, and God gave her the victory. . . .No account of her husband is made in the history. . . .He did not prevent her from 'ruling over men.'"[35]

The exposition continued with lengthy quotes from the "portraiture of a virtuous woman" including the following descriptions: "She maketh fine linen and selleth it and

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34 Advocate (1852), XXIII, 26.

35 Advocate (1852), XXIII, 24-27.

delivereth girdles to the merchants. She girdith her loins with strength and strengthened her arms." Drawing significant implications from the foregoing characterization, the essayist wrote: "Though a business woman, she was well educated, and kindness ruled her tongue like a law and what renders her course more remarkable is the fact that she had a husband well qualified to take charge of his own business, and able to support her in idleness. . . .Her virtue is represented as invulnerable, not merely in spite of her occupations, but as the fruit of them." "I would that all homes were as happy as hers," added the writer, before the concluding remarks of the long and well-documented piece.[36]

The summary listed the six main points arrived at "[f]rom these teachings of God's book":

1. That the Creator has not assigned to the different sexes different spheres of action. But left to each individual. . .the choice of position and pursuit. So far as God is concerned, a man may be a cook and a woman an artist.

2. That. . .the interests of society are [not] to suffer the least injury by thus allowing each to choose for themselves from all the pursuits honorable to men.

3. That if either sex should be confined to the inner temple, lest they outrage propriety by running at large, man should be confined. . . .

4. [That] [n]o right now exercised [by females] is to be given up when coming into possession of all that God has given to woman. . . .

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36 Advocate (1852), XXIII, 24-27.

5. [That] [w]e urge on all women to select a sphere which they are competent to adorn. Any sphere is hers which she chooses for herself--God gave it to her.

6. That we are not merely to tolerate, but actively and heartily encourage conformity to these Bible teachings and glorious example. Were I required to gather up into a single sentence the purport of these teaching and examples, I would do it thus. The rights and privileges of the sexes are equal--are the same.

The author of the treatise ended by urging those engaged in benevolent activity to continue their work to [grant] to all their birthrights," and the women who had pioneered in fights to gain greater security under the law for their sex complied by endorsing and aggressively promoting the potpourri of legal reform campaigns of the middle nineteenth century. Believing that women's "talents and virtues [should] place them on a footing of perfect equality with the other sex," the volunteers condemned "lawmakers. . .who have forogtten to legislate in behalf of the female sex and then have adduced the very disabilities they themselves have imposed as proof of. . .inferiority."[37]

Those involved in eleemosynary endeavors agitated for Temperance Laws, and in 1855 applauded the passage of a Prohibitory Law" in New York State by asserting: "Woman has suffered long enough to suffer no longer; endured enough to command the sympathy and united efforts of her sex, to free her

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37 Advocate (1852), 24-27 (emphasis added # 6); Ladies' Wreath (1846), I, 28; Golden Keepsake (1851), I, 2.

and her helpless babes at once and for ever, from the galling yoke [of intemperance]." As in their earlier years, benevolent societies fought for the passage of laws "for the better protection of the property and earnings of married women." Their experiences had taught them that "[there are. . .hard-working wives in [New York] State, more especially in the large cities, whose unceasing efforts to support themselves in respectability and to provide decently for their children are perpetually thwarted by lazy, profligate and drunken husbands, who, in many cases, seize by force upon the hard-earned pittance of the wife. . . .Surely, it is time that this wanton abuse should cease. . . .We do not think this or any legislature could do a more popular, certainly not a more just, thing than to extend their protection over neglected and abused. . .[women]."[38]

The argument for changing legal codes to reflect woman's equality with man flowed from the belief that woman's true identity entitled her to full participation in the natural rights of humanity. "[T]here can never be a question of Natural Rights in any living being, after we have learned to read correctly its whole natural constitution," wrote Farnham, and she asserted: "[Woman] is the natural possessor of every right which is his." Commending the views of a speaker who "demand[ed] everything espoused by the most ardent advocates of Woman's

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38 Advocate (1854), XX, 45; Advocate (1855), XXI, 69; also see: Advocate (1852), XVIII, 62-63; 117; Advocate (1859), XXV, 143; also see: Advocate (1860), XXVI, 126.

Rights," the Female Guardian Society quoted a lecture on the "Subject of the Legal, Social and Industrial Position of Woman." The address focused on the "strange inconsistency that a woman, whatever her rank, position, or estate, or however large a revenue she might pay for the support of government, could not have the slightest voice or vote by which to influence its action. . ." and these strictures, like every other restraint against which the volunteers had implicitly and explicitly rebelled for more than a half century, violated woman's "natural rights."

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39 Farnham Woman, II, 322; Advocate (1858), XXIV, 102.

CONCLUSION

Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;

T.S. Eliot
Little Gidding

Nineteenth century woman's claim to natural rights was an integral part of her quest for complete freedom from the rigid theories of the woman-beau ideal, a stringent code which decreed her inferiority, denied her individuality, and persistently thwarted efforts at self-realization and determination. The process by which generations of women came first to perceive their subordinate position and later to demand the emancipation of their sex, as subtle as it is complex, is deeply rooted in the tumultuous transformations of the antebellum era. The decades after 1820 reverberated with cataclysmic change: profound alterations in politics, religion, transportation, communication, immigration, technology, and social structure sent repeated shock waves through an increasingly insecure people. But the advent of furious urbanization, which threatened to impose its rampancy upon the entire nation, exercised the most potent and unsettling influence of those turbulent years.

The relentless velocity of city growth, defying all expectations and understanding, challenged inveterate and cherished beliefs about the future form of the nation and man's position in it. This threat to enshrined principles had important ramifications for the female population, at once heightening woman's oppression and setting the stage for her future efforts at emancipation. It is, therefore, to the complicated and confused transfigurations in the nineteenth century social milieu and to the responses they called forth that one must look for an explanation of the origins of

American feminism. For, indeed, the movement for woman's independence had a heritage uniquely its own and did not naturally develop out of the liberating tendencies of the Age of Enlightenment.

America's early years seemed rich in potential for the continuing acceptance of woman as a valuable, autonomous being. A lively debate, pursued in earnest on both sides of the Atlantic, inquired into the female nature and ability. Theories propounding woman's aptitude, importance, and human dignity, flowing from the pens of both clerical and secular leaders, slowly gained acceptance and found natural allies in the ideas of the eighteenth century political and religious revolutions with their emphasis upon the substitution of individual conscience for authority. Moreover, the philosophies of woman's competence and importance maintained an intimate and genuine association with the reality of her life in the New World. With restrictions upon the activities of the allegedly inferior sex abated by necessity, women enjoyed access to most occupations. Lending skill and energy to the development of their communities, they commanded respect as effective participants in society. In frontier settlements and nascent cities, women labored alongside men, sharing in the hardships, responsibilities, and advantages of life in America. Of course, colonial women rarely received treatment comparable to that accorded the other sex. Nonetheless, benefiting from the liberal theories of the age and the exigencies of life in the virgin land, their position in

American society appeared to be markedly and tenaciously advancing and might well have continued to approach equality with men had it not been for disintegrating effects of urbanization.

As the raging and persistent rate of urban growth made a mockery of man's plans and hopes, he experienced a profound sense of loss of identity, of control, and perhaps even more important, of a coherent set of values around which to understand and organize his life. For the ethos of agrarian America, with its promises of a harmonious, stable, democratic society, unruptured by social strife and competition, and its munificent images of abundant harvests and tranquil, lush verdancy could no longer serve to inspire and give meaning to the lives of growing numbers of Americans. Indeed, rather than assuaging fears and mitigating anxieties, the pastoral legend intensified the insecurities of city dwellers throughout the nation. They suffered unpalliable guilt at the realization that the rest of the nation viewed their way of life as an anathema to its most beloved traditions.

Yet urban residents could not, any more than the United States itself, return to the simple agrarian Republic of aspirations and fantasies. As the old beliefs became less relevant to an ever-growing part of the population, Americans, particularly those living in cities, desperately searched for a way to cling to the values of a precious and idealized yesteryear while accommodating to the realities of the present. By the creation of a complicated philosophy, an urban-agrarianism,

Americans admitted their yearning, their desperation, for stability, identity, security and shared ideals. And through their troubled search for order and understanding, they eventually realized that they could embrace the future with enthusiasm and optimism without relinquishing the best of an illusory bucolic past. By transforming their conceptions of an agricultural paradise into a set of prevailing images and perceptions of womanhood, Americans could preserve the qualities they valued most, while enjoying the advantages and opportunities of a new era. The woman, quietly tucked away at home, making her dwelling a haven of peacefulness and order, provided a salubrious contrast to the screeching, shrill urban milieu. As the repository of all virtue and morality, woman became the substitute for a bountiful nature who nourished and nurtured, purified and sustained. Blissfully noncompetitive, she remained unsullied by a corrupt world and emulated the serene garden, free from the rampant vying for money, power, and position so characteristic of antebellum cities.

As man made woman the ballast on his unsteady journey into the future, he reached out for a sense of personal identity which he found by insisting that woman's nature, totally unlike his own, was comprised of certain specific inferior, unchanging qualities. In proscribing set characteristics to the "weaker sex," man, no matter what his social position, could feel superior to someone over whom he could exercise a substantial degree of control. And, the rigid differences he postulated

between male and female recompensed for the fluidity of class lines which defied his domination. The composite traits of nineteenth century womanhood, merging into the implacable theory of the woman-beau ideal, gave man a foil for his ambiguous identity, but forced the pernicious effects of urbanization to fall with a particular harshness upon the female population.

Whether she languished idly in her luxurious chamber or struggled to earn a pittance on the city streets, the urban woman collided with the tenets of the nineteenth century codes of womanhood which distorted her nature and damaged her life. American women suffered under the harsh dictates of a monolithic creed: the prevalence of feminine invalidism, the content of private diaries, and the characterizations and plots of their fiction arose as visible signs of feminine distress. But lacking the context in which to understand their unhappiness, women berated themselves for their own "inadequacies" and remained alienated from themselves and isolated from others of their sex.

Substantially barred from every emotionally and financially rewarding endeavor, urban women of the upper- and middle-classes responded to the unremitting pressures by founding myriads of voluntary societies in the nation's burgeoning cities. The rich variety of urban life with its blatant extremes and devastating poverty shaped woman's anguished search for meaning and importance, communication and companionship, into hundreds

of associations dedicated to helping the aged, infirm, impoverished, and deviant female. As woman's vaguely perceived needs, drives, and wishes found definition in the compact collage of the city, forcing her to confront and re-evaluate her own life against the backdrop of her growing awareness of society's actions and attitudes towards the female sex, the reality of her oppression became inescapable. She slowly began to challenge and defy the theories of woman's inferiority. For the vivid realities and complex interactions of the city impelled generations of women to appreciate and respect the diversity of their sex, while simultaneously recognizing both the burden of oppression and the gift of humanity which bound them together. And from the subtle synthesis of urbanization and woman's quest for self-realization emerged the origins of American feminism.

Female benevolent societies in the years between 1800 and 1860 transformed the hesitant, imprecise perceptions and feelings of women throughout America into the compelling feminist ideology. Woman, as an autonomous being with a nature identical to man's, had an equal claim to the natural rights of humanity. Woman's assertion of her independent status evolved gradually from the shared experiences of urban women. Continually enlarging their sphere beyond the home, the volunteers raised revenue, maintained records, managed funds, organized meetings, worked with government and business leaders, and initiated, conducted, and completed difficult programs. Through

their varied activities, they demonstrated qualities and abilities traditionally associated with men, thereby blatantly denying myths of feminine inadequacy and inferiority. They inaugurated networks of social service agencies in cities across the nation and eventually recognized the value of their contributions to urban life. They criticized male conduct and challenged the prestigious weight of authority in its many guises.

While learning to trust and have faith in their own capabilities, ideas, and achievements, the members, understanding and appreciating individual differences, found outlets for their varied personalities within the diversified structure of urban organizations. Their many involvements, creating a cognizance of woman's autonomous nature, also brought them closer to other women and forged a web of interdependency. For this was an individuality that grew out of the sense of a community of women, and throughout the sixty year period discussed in this study, woman's growing awareness of herself as a person in her own right inevitably heightened her commitments and obligations to the rest of her sex. Not only did the volunteers rely upon the support, encouragement, and ideas of their colleagues in their continuing efforts for self-determination, but in a special and crucial way were acutely dependent upon the recipients of their aid for their own individual emancipation. The uncompromising pattern of nineteenth century female perfection, the woman-beau ideal, foreclosed virtually

all paths to feminine gratification. But the malleable urban milieu unwittingly provided antebellum women with one vehicle sufficiently broad, flexible, and durable to transport them on their arduous journey to freedom. By fostering the development of the female voluntary society, the American city determined the direction of women's quest for liberation.

In a very real sense, the extent to which women of the upper- and middle-classes could disengage themselves from society's bonds related to the scope and nature of their activities on behalf of the poor and downtrodden of their sex. The wider and more audacious the schemes of benevolence, the greater would be the acceptance of woman's constantly enlarging sphere. The more daring the plans, the more splendid and significant the ultimate achievements which could and would be used to demonstrate woman's versatile abilities to a watching community. And, the more abundant their experiences with the differing forms of woman's oppression, the easier it would be for the members to understand the meaning of their own existences and to clarify and refine their thinking about woman's position in society.

Yet, the attempts of economically secure women to achieve fulfillment through voluntary societies were neither consciously nor even largely self-serving. Although the era's rigid impositions on feminine behavior may have originally forced wealthier women to seek their liberation through work for impoverished females, the deeply felt sympathy and concern

soon developed a momentum and a rational of its own. Moreover, while the majority of volunteers appeared to accept much of the traditional social structure, they did, nonetheless, tend to view society as divided along the lines of sex.

The members postulated a community of women. They continually emphasized the similarities between themselves and Black, Indian, and immigrant women. Theirs, then, was a vertical rather than a horizontal dichotomy. This image of society, shaped by the precepts of the woman-beau ideal which had implicitly used the myths of fixed differences between the male and female to compensate for the instability and insecurity of the antebellum class structure, had important implications. While making the members generally insensitive to the plight of the impoverished males, the perception of a community separated and stratified by sex, rather than class, intensified their belief in the unity of all women and impelled and reinforced the many efforts to help their "struggling sisters" control their own lives. And as the volunteers' relationships with poorer women became more intimate, the more eloquently they would plead for their beneficiaries' liberation, which in so many ways was inexorably tied to their own.

By a unique blend of circumstances, the development of feminism bound the lives of different classes of urban women together, making the freedom of the one a function of the emancipation of the other. Yet, it is also true that the proximity of urban life, necessitating the intense interactions of widely disparate female existences, forced woman to argue for her independence from the most inclusive of all principles: woman's common humanity. In this way, the antebellum city

dictated the development of nineteenth century American feminism as a broadly based movement for human liberty.

Originating as it did in the experiences and observations, the frustrations and angers, the hopes and convictions, and the thoughts and ideas of the members of female voluntary associations, nineteenth century American feminism did not limit its perspective to any one specific right but embraced all aspects of woman's emancipation. In 1860, the volunteers articulated their understanding of woman's freedom and the meaning they attached to their efforts:

> Agitation and discussion are the instruments of tillage of truth. Society must reap the fruits--it already does, however loath to acknowledge its indebtedness--fruits that are relieving it of its old stagnation. . .and emancipating woman. . .not solely or chiefly from the trammels of legal disabilities, but from subtler chains. . .from many fetters and. . .oppressive servitude. . . .[1]

The ideology represented by these sentiments was as expansive as it was vibrant: woman, a complete and independent person whose value and dignity emanated from her shared humanity, possessed a nature identical to man's. She had the same abilities, duties, and responsibilities as the other sex and hence deserved complete and equal rights. This profound belief in the individual integrity of each woman stimulated a wide variety of subsequent demands. The volunteers insisted that woman be given greater employment and educational opportunities and urged that she be permitted to select her own

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1 Advocate (1860), p. 70.

field of endeavor without reference to a traditionally defined "woman's sphere." They further importuned that woman, free from the restrictions society placed upon her sex, be allowed to determine her own destiny, fully participating in all the prerogatives and privileges that were the natural birthright of each and every human being.

With autonomy the leitmotif of the many varied demands, the feminism that evolved from antebellum cities encompassed all phases of woman's freedom, but by the end of the nineteenth century, the suffrage campaign, one of the numerous facets of woman's quest for full emancipation, dominated all other issues and concerns. Based upon the philosophies of woman's nature and the conceptions of her rights which originated from the experiences of generations of women in American cities, the drive for the vote attenuated and distorted the feminist thinking and vision which had infused it with ideological substance. As women came to see the vote as the panacea for every problem, they invested all their energies and activities into the crusade. The ballot took on an almost mystical importance. Enfranchisement became wrongly equated with the end of oppression, and suffragists would unknowingly sacrifice much to achieve it.

In their fight for the vote, women both ignored and compromised the principles of feminism. The realities and complexities of American society at the turn of the century caused the suffragists to change the basis of their demand for

the franchise. Originally arguing that it was the natural right of every woman as well as every man to participate in the legal system that would govern them, the suffragists moderated their platform as massive immigration once again transformed the texture of life in the United States. Seeking wide support among other white middle-class Americans, the campaigners urged that women be given the vote to balance the impact of the foreign born. Thus the suffrage rationale of the early twentieth century used the persuasion that native born women outnumbered foreign born men and women combined, and advocated an educational qualification for voting which could prevent the "less desirable" members of the population from taking part in the electoral process. These two tenets of the later suffrage movement, denying the basic human rights of lower class women, implied a distinction in the essential worth and dignity of women not found in antebellum feminism.

As the drive for the vote ruptured the idea of a community of women dedicated to helping one another, so too did it obscure and vitiate the philosophy that had produced the suffrage agitation. The ideology emerging from the cities had urged woman's complete liberation: her right to fulfill her autonomous identity, her freedom from sex-related roles, her privilege to control her own life. But in their efforts to secure the ballot, women dismissed and discounted these vital theories. It has, indeed, been the misfortune of the twentieth century to have remembered only the suffrage campaign

while forgetting the origins of American feminism. For the woman's movement that developed between the years 1800 and 1860 was a full and compelling search for human liberty. But sharing the tragic fate of so many antebellum women from whose lives it evolved, nineteenth century feminism never fulfilled its ultimate destiny.

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