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An introduction to the Victorian woman : a comparative study dealing with poetical and historical sources

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE VICTORIAN WOMAN:

A COMPARATIVE STUDY DEALING WITH POETICAL AND HISTORICAL SOURCES

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PREFACE

The purpose of studying the Victorian women in poetry has been to find some relation between the historical woman and the literary woman. Louise E. Rorabacher in a similar thesis considered only the novels of the day (Victorian Women in Life and Fiction, University of Illinois, 1942). Her purpose was to determine the validity of the concept of the woman in the novel in terms of historical fact. She concluded that the fictional woman was real, in a narrow, myopic sense, but that she did not reflect the social change. The picture of her social and conservative home life was accurate, but she was without intellectual or political tendencies. She was stereotyped. In fact, the popular novel maintained the status quo to the detriment of reform, for it retarded rather than promoted change. The working girl was encouraged to be patient and quiet, since this was how her fictional counterpart met the rich young man and lived happily ever after.

A parallel study of the woman in poetry would be worthless and impractical because it is necessary to become acquainted with her to determine her validity. For the most part, the Victorian poetry dealing with women is strictly objective. It, too, is limited in scope regarding the phases of life it deals with. In some instances, it has been necessary to construct composite women from various poems. The very nature of poetry restricts the picture, also, because even the narrative poem is not required to have transitions or causatives. It

can begin in the middle of a situation without ever explaining the causes or describing the results. The poet may never reveal the motives of the woman in poetry, nor her destiny as a result of the action in the poem. So the picture of her is, in fact, incomplete and thereby objective.

But it is not a useless picture; it is important for another purpose of this study, which is to discover what influences poetry has had on the modern conception of Victorianism. This conception seems to be synonomous with prim perfection. From the furniture to the tea party, the Victorian society was surrounded by precision and detail. By today's standards, the life in 19th century England seems regimented and lifeless. But was it? Certainly an orderly society is nothing to condemn; but if the order vaunts itself to the point of denying humanity, then the system is faulty. A close look at some of the forms of Victorian society as well as at some of its members is included here.

This study is limited, however, to Victorian women because, more often than not, women are the focal points of each standard of living. They set the pace and are in turn are the ones who are forced to keep up with that same pace. That is, they not only locate the mark, but also must toe it. The Victorian Age was not an exception; the women were indeed the center of society.

The poet's attitude toward women and their society is an important factor in the consideration of the basis of the Victorian reputation. A comparison or contrast of the Victorian society, the Victorian woman, and the Victorian poetic heroine should be sufficient to find some relationship that would honor or dishonor Victorianism

as it is thought of today. It will be noted that several major poets are excluded. Most of these are the pre-Raphaelites. They have been omitted because their very purpose was to break away from the Victorian society and devote themselves to the simple, direct medieval themes that preceded Raphael.

For organization purposes, the women included in this study have been separated into three classes: the fashionable nobility, the mercantile commoners, and the poor laboring class. Within each class the study deals with the society and the real and fictional women. When practical, biographies of the historical women are used. These women were not selected for their conformity to any pattern, but rather because they were important women and thereby influential within their spheres of society. Of course, it was not practical to deal with all the women, nor in fact with all the poems of the period. It has seemed to the author, however, that the selection is adequate and that additional research would not change the results of the study.

It is impossible to talk about the Victorian Age without considering the Industrial Revolution. Its effects touched nearly all phases of life, from the economic to the spiritual. Specifically, it influenced the position of the woman, for the period witnessed a great change in attitude toward her. This change is not as evident in the poetry of the time as it is in the lives of the contemporaries. The cultural lag, which is generally accepted as being in effect at all times, may be responsible, then, for the discrepancies between the historical woman and the fictional one. It is not the purpose

here, however, to explain discrepancies, rather merely to point them out. Nor is the study concerned with tracing the reform, because this has been done several times. The Revolution and reform affected the women of the lower class more than any other group. The women of the middle class also changed their ways of living and thinking, but the aristocrats took little notice. The varying reactions to the contemporary conditions will be reflected in the study that is to follow.

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CHAPTER I

THE ARISTOCRATIC LADY

A study of history will show that, regardless of century or country, each society is usually divided into three social levels. The requirements for membership in the various strata accordingly differ in diverse eras and lands. Sometimes the main qualification for belonging to the upper class is money; at other times it is family and social position; in still another time it may be favor of the rulers and political position; often it is a combination of all of these.

To define the upper class, then, is first to specify an historical time and place. The time is the second half of the 19th century; the place is England. Next, what were the different standards of living in Victorian England? The Industrial Revolution which greatly affected this period was a main factor in ranking English people in society. Only those who were connected with the court or were otherwise financially independent were in the upper class. These were the only people who could afford to be virtually unaware of the Revolution. These people shall be called the aristocrats.

The aristocracy, it would seem, should include the majority of the people responsible for the Victorian reputation. Certainly, the first thought of Victorian England would include an image of a pompous society living in oversized mansions overflowing with overstuffed

furniture. This picture can refer only to the aristocracy. This characterization is reasonably reliable. The aristocratic class, the lords and ladies of the Queen's Court and of Parliament, was educated in the external graces and the most ostentatious of the internal virtues. Theirs was a life dictated by established order. They fit very nicely in their highly decorated surroundings.

But the concern here is with the aristocratic lady. It was she who was most important for establishing the manners of her class and time. Queen Victoria, indoubtedly, should be considered the prime example of Victorian aristocracy. For the purpose of this study, however, she is not included in this chapter. The interest here is in the way of life of the feminine aristocrat. What were her daily activities? What were her relations with her social peers and inferiors? How did she affect the modern conception of Victorianism? As will be seen, Queen Victoria rejected the life of her social class. Here were the ways of the middle class; her standards determined those of the middle class. It has seemed best, therefore, to postpone the study of the queen until a later chapter.

Of relevance at this point is the life of a typical young aristocratic lady of Victorian England. Such a one was the daughter of Prime Minister William E. Gladstone, Mary Gladstone, who recorded her life in a diary and in letters. Included in the study of Mary's mature life will be references and incidents which might not be true in Mary's case but which were generally typical of her contemporaries and peers.

Mary Gladstone was one of seven children, all of whom grew up

with their twelve cousins, the Lyttletons. The girls were taught at home by governesses or visiting tutors until they were about seventeen. They received little or no attention or sympathy from their parents during this time, being kept out of the way by the various servants who often treated the girls harshly. When the girls were not at their studies, they were talking, drawing, painting, copying music, doing needlework, or practicing the art of letterwriting.

After these years of preparation, near the age of seventeen, Mary and her friends "came out." This was an occasion for the girl to be introduced by her mother, whose social obligation was to find a husband for her daughter. What distress and embarrassment she endured if she had not a son-in-law within two years! For it was actually the young married women who got the attention then, not the young unmarrieds, as it is today. The social life of the young debutante then began. Of course the ladies all had chaperons until they were twenty-one, and so the ballrooms were complete with two tiers of red sofas around the room, placed so that the debutantes sat demurely at the feet of their respective, protective chaperons. Mary, commenting on her first ball, said that she was not permitted to waltz, and that there were only five quadrilles the whole evening. She and her friends also enjoyed dancing the polka.

The ball itself was governed by very strict protocol. Most balls, always big events on the social calendar, were given either by the Whigs or the Tories for their own group. Invitations were sent out, sometimes preceded by announcements. The hostess was immediately swamped with applications for cards of invitation for friends and friends' friends

ad infinitum. Even strangers applied, for there was no shame associated with seeking cards. Not only was there a struggle to obtain an invitation; there was just as much fuss on the part of the hostess to assure a successful party. If the demand for invitations to her party was not great, she hired a social mentor whose job it was to secure guests for the party. He, or she, had a list of young men who could dance and who also would rescue the wall flowers and keep the proper proportions on the dance floor and in the dining room. These youths were, however, at an advantage, since they had the choice of approving the hostess; her dinner must be sufficiently succulent to warrant their subjecting themselves to a full night of dancing.

These were the private balls. But those that were semi-public were actually more exclusive, hence more desirable, the ones given at Almack's being the biggest and most important. A ticket of admission for a Wednesday night ball at Almack's was a cherished acquisition, and parts of a poem by Henry Luttrell[11], "Advice to Julia, a Letter in Rhyme," published in 1830, and quoted by Matthew Whiting Rosa in The Silver-Fork School, explain best its social significance.

> For oft I've marked how one rejection
> Has spoiled a blooming nymph's complexion.
> A second has been known to leave her
> In strong convulsions or a fever.
> I waive the stories I have heard
> Of what has happened from a third.
> Nor marvel that a prize which, won,
> Is capital, and yields to none
> In this world's lottery--when lost,
> Not health alone, but life should cost.
> All on that magic LIST depends;
> Fame, fortune, fashion, lovers, friends:
> 'Tis that which gratifies or vexes
> All ranks, all ages, and both sexes.

If once to Almack's you belong,
Like monarchs, you can do no wrong;
But banished thence on Wednesday night,
By Jove, you can do nothing right.

* * * * * * * * *

Hence the petitions and addresses
So humble to the Patronesses;
The messages and notes, by dozens,
From their Welsh aunts and twentieth cousins,
Who hope to get their daughters in
By proving they are <u>founder's kin</u>.
Hence the smart miniatures enclosed
Of unknown candidates proposed;
Hence is the fair divan at Willis's
Beset with Corydons and Phillises,
Trying, with perseverence steady,
First one, and then another Lady,
Who oft, 'tis rumored, don't agree,
But clash like law and equity;
Some for the Rules in all their vigor,
Others to mitigate their rigor.

* * * * * * * * *

The vainest Beauty will renounce
Her last imported blonde or flounce;
The gamester leave a raw beginner;
The diner-out forego his dinner;
The storm reformer change his notions,
And waive his notices of motions;
The bold become an abject croucher,
And the Grave—giggle for a <u>Voucher</u>;
Too happy those who fail to nick it,
In stumbling on a <u>single ticket</u>.

Such were the pressures that Mary and her friends were subject to. But their social life was not restricted to formal balls. There were breakfasts and teas and lawn parties and many other forms of social life, each with its rules of procedure. Breakfasts were held at ten o'clock, in the drawing room, and were formal-dress affairs. After eating, the women retired to the sitting rooms with their sewing or their chatting, while the men engaged in some sport, usually hunting.

Girls were not taken out to dinner as a rule, but men friends were invited to tea. Teas seem to have been the most prevalent form of

entertaining, from evidences in Mary's account, and they were apparently about the most enjoyable form, too, for they were stimulating for all partakers. Conversation was one of the social arts taught to a young girl who thereby became the epitome, example, and leader of all conversing. She not only could keep up a brilliant flow herself, but she also could tactfully encourage others less clever to contribute. At other times, the teas became verbal contests, a sort of "can you top this?" intercourse, filled with flattery and false modesty. The male visitor had to be alert constantly to prevent himself from being ungallant to any of the ladies present. The compliments that were uttered in most gracious and polite tones were not taken seriously, but were passed off as part of the game they were all playing.

Mary Gladstone had a large circle of close friends and always noted their good talks. Even while she was aware only of the form and glamor of government and not its difficulties, she was an excellent companion to her father's friends. Perhaps one reason for this is that no restrictions were placed on her reading matter; her father was in favor of an organized, directed education for girls, similar to the university program for the boys. This liberal attitude toward reading matter was most apparent in the upper classes, although the reading of novels was considered by many to be harmful, to be a waste of time, and to lead to daydreaming. Reading, it was thought, should be limited to studies and to the Ladies' Magazine, which proposed the popular ideas and standards. Some of the important information it published was the opinion that a girl's education was not complete until she completed a picture that was

good enough to be framed and glazed. It also warned young ladies against being seen running in public and against riding in omnibuses, the former because it was not ladylike, the latter because of the danger from rude male riders.[1] Mary, no doubt, read her magazines devoted to females with a great deal of care. And although she also read much of the contemporary controversial matters, her mind was without an intellectual aim, as she picked up insignificant bits of literature without analysis or impression. Nevertheless, her speaking acquaintance with many subjects must have been increased by this reading which led ultimately to her becoming involved in issues, political and social. Mary had many men friends, but she was proper and did not go into detail about their conversations in her diary.

[1] George M. Young, Early Victorian England, vol. 2, p. 61. The information on the Ladies' Magazine was cited by E. E. Kellett in his chapter on "The Press" in Mr. Young's book from an article by W. F. Gray appearing in the centenary number of the Journal, February, 1932.

Mary did not write about attending many house parties, but the contemporary etiquette books describe rather precisely their procedure. The lady of the house always wrote the notes of invitation, being careful to include among the guests the indispensable witty man and a bachelor or widower who could converse, pun, or write society verses. The hostess included precise times for arriving and leaving, which were always observed by the guests. The purpose of the house party seemed to be to give the city guest a chance to relax in the country, to enjoy at his leisure the property and the sports of his hosts. The influence of the hostess was always felt although her presence was not always apparent.

She came without fail to eight o'clock dinner and usually to the one o'clock luncheon and afternoon tea. This latter occasion was strictly a social gathering and was very important to the hostess. The success or failure of the house party depended on the afternoon teas.

Dinner was always full dress at these or other parties, and was semi-formal even when there was no company. There were rules on entering the dining room according to social rank, and a corresponding seating arrangement. Rules also prescribed the method of serving, drinking, and talking, as well as eating. The bringing out of a certain port was the sign that dinner was over and that the women should retire to the drawing room, where they amused themselves by singing and playing the pianoforte, even if they did both badly. The men might stay in the dining room for more talk and drink and then join the women in the next room. There were never complaints or chastisements directed toward the servants; all mishaps were smoothed over or ignored. This at least was a worthwhile manner to cultivate.

An additional duty of the aristocratic set was sometimes called "carriage exercise," but more often the protocol of "calling." It was a system of visiting and exchanging cards. A newcomer in town was always eager to belong to the social set, but she must not assert herself by sending out or delivering too many cards too soon. In fact, it was always better for the oldest residents to make the first delivery. The etiquette books, specifically Manners and Social Usages, told the women that they should deliver the cards in person, sending them only in extreme situations, since the purpose of "calling" was to visit. Each of the ladies

had a reception day, a day on which she was "at home" to her callers. If callers came on other days, it was perfectly acceptable for the servants to say that the lady of the house was "not at home." When delivering cards on a lady's reception day, however, the caller was to ask for the hostess, enter, and visit. On some occasions, especially if the weather was bad, it was permissible to leave after delivering the card. After a first call had been made, it was to be returned within two weeks. If the card contained an invitation to an entertainment, it was to answered immediately. If the invitation was regretted or accepted, the addressee was to visit within a week after the entertainment. A letter of introduction sent by a mutual friend always meant an invitation to dinner; however, the acquaintance need not be continued unless the hostess was so inclined.

The cards themselves were small, thin, and unadorned. A young woman did not have cards of her own, but her name was added to her mother's card, or to her father's if she was motherless, in which case it was always accompanied by her chaperon's card.

In retrospect, calling seems overdone, although well intended. Gertrude Aretz, who studied the elegant woman through the ages, included the following poem in her perceptive book.

A Social Reception

Flowers and candles,
Feathers and laces,
Names with handles,
And snobbish faces,
Hearts behind corsets,
And shoulders in shawl,
Each female bore cits
"Paying a call"!

Duly presented
Sons and spouses
Who've long frequented
Similar houses,
With meaningless stutter,
Or tones affected,
Painfully mutter—
What seems expected.
The hostess's daughter
Dispenses a stream
Of tea like water,
With sugar and cream,
Pastries and tarts,
And suchlike things,
Till the rumour starts
That So-and-so sings!

The virtuosi
Blunder and stumble
From high C to low C
While waiters mumble.
Teacups clatter,
And, undiminished,
The women's chatter—
Thank God!—that's finished!

The room grows hotter,
The air grows stronger,
And Time gets longer and longer and longer![2]

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[2] Gertrude Arets, The Elegant Woman, pp. 191-192.

The balls, the teas, the week ends in the country, and all the other social events took much of the time of the Victorian élite. There were plans to be made and customs to be followed. Surprisingly enough, there were also rules of serving humanity. It would seem from the busy schedule of the socialites that there would be little time for reform even though a great deal was needed. It would also seem, as a result, that the aristocrats were thoughtless and completely self-centered, permitting cruelties and injustices to exist. Actually they were generally

ignorant of the situation, taking part only gradually in any type of reform until it became of national note. For instance, it was much against the protests of her social set and the clergy that Mary Gladstone agitated against the kidnapping and prostitution of children. Her particular generation was prone to be aware only of certain situations, not all, for there was a prescribed method of condescension set by "maiden aunts," patronizing women who determined the social policy regarding the ideal of service. The women visited the village school and people (such a trip was called "poor peopling" by Florence Nightingale), taught service and needlework at the orphanages, took flowers to the old women in the work houses or hospitals, and even visited the fallen or convicted women in the reformatories. Mary Gladstone, according to references throughout her diary, was one who made a point of doing all of these things.

Little of the expected romantic life of a young lady of nobility can be learned from Mary Gladstone; she did not marry until she was thirty-eight. From her observations and descriptions, however, as well as from etiquette books and other commentary, it can be assumed that there was much tradition involved in weddings, as there is today. The proposal itself required an eloquent introduction followed by a subtle lead and then a ring. This is quite in contrast with the practice of the contemporary youth who would not risk the chance of an expensive ring being refused by offering it at the same time he offered himself. The Victorian lady would take the proper amount of time to deliberate, although she had known the precise day and moment the young gentleman would bend his knee, and the marriage plans would proceed swiftly. Plans differed

according to status.

> In England there are four ways of getting married. The first is by special license, which enables two people to be married at any time and at any place; but this is very expensive, costing fifty pounds, and is only obtainable through an archbishop. Then there is the ordinary license, which can be procured either at Doctor's Commons or through a clergyman, who must also be a surrogate, and resident in the diocese where the marriage is to take place; both parties must swear that they are of age, or, if minors, that they have the consent of their parents. But to be married by banns is considered the most orthodox as well as the most economical way of proceeding. The banns must be published in the church of the parish in which the lady lives for three consecutive Sundays prior to the marriage, also the same law holds good for the gentleman, and the parents must have resided fifteen days in the parish. Or the knot may be tied at a licensed chapel, or at the office of a registrar, notice being given three weeks previously.[3]

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[3] Manners and Social Usages, pp. 76-77.

June was the favorite month for marriage, a tradition still popular, and the time for the wedding was in the morning, between eight o'clock and noon. The ceremony itself was well attended, for the pair was usually well known because of their social prominence, and they were cheered by friends and admirers at the church. After the service, the couple would leave the church in the groom's carriage and proceed to the wedding breakfast, where many speeches were made. After about an hour and a half, the pair would change into their traveling clothes and leave in the groom's carriage for their honeymoon spot. The carriage was pulled by four bedecked horses and driven by flowered coachman and footman. The bride and groom were showered with rice and satin slippers.

A slipper landing on the top of the carriage meant good luck.[4] A quiet

[4] Ibid., p. 59.

country home of a friend was the usual destination of the couple. Since the bride was honored for three weeks after her marriage, many parties were planned for the return home of the newlyweds.

Nothing has been said thus far about the home life of the Victorian woman and her position within the family. A good place to begin this story is with her marriage. Marriage, held as a sacred and honored institution in which both members took their proper positions, was believed to be happy and blessed. The position accepted by the young bride was one of submission. It was her duty to produce, in spite of Malthus, and surrender herself to her home and family. No defaulting was permitted; even the Queen bore nine children. And when anesthesia was introduced to ease the pains of childbirth, many hands went up in horror at the very idea of defying God's Will as prescribed in the Garden of Eden.

The picture of the Victorian man is often that of a tyrant, a Reverend Mr. Bronte or an Edward Barrett. This extreme was probably the exception; there were no doubt an equal number of domineering women. Nevertheless, the father was the center of the family, its head and its law. The mother was next in authority, followed by the governess or tutor.[5] Theoretically the children were last, but in practice they got

[5] Marjorie Quennell and C. H. B. Quennell, A History of Everyday Things in England, vol. 4, p. 103.

their way more often than not. The home was the center of life, of

learning, of religion. The first and most important lessons that the children learned were duty and religion. There were to be no arguments, no back-talk, no tardiness. The father was to be addressed as "Sir," and company meant that curtsies and bows were in order. The Victorian Sunday was almost unendurable for the children, for it was austere and drab. The family attended two long church services and spent the rest of the day reading the Bible or Paradise Lost, memorizing from these books, or singing hymns.

The position of the wife and mother in this family circle was a complex one, for she had to be one thing while seeming to be another.

> The Victorian matron lived a secure and untroubled life as a rule, protected by her menfolk from all the hard shocks of life, and expected in return to leave all business and public affairs to them. The "ideal woman" of the day was a modest, retiring creature who reigned supreme in her own household but took very little interest in anything outside it. She never meddled in politics or legal matters, and she never dreamt of claiming equality with men in anything. She was quite content to be a good housewife, and a charming hostess, a devoted mother, and, of course, a loving and obedient wife. Moreover, in spite of the fact that she led an extremely busy life and often had a large family of children, she was always supposed to be a "delicate female" who could not be expected to bear much hardship, and would almost certainly faint at once in any shock or emergency.[6]

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[6] Ibid., pp. 91-92.

Actually the life of the wife and mother was very hard, since she was in charge of the children, the servants, and the guests; and she had to take care of the catering, the house accounts, and the nursing, besides her social duties with her class and with the poor. Sometimes

she was not only interested in affairs outside of the home but was also involved as a writer, teacher, or a reformer. The woman was supposed to create the illusion that money was limitless. She was to appear leisured and secure, and these duties must have been her favorites.

The cause for all of the acting, emphasis on social propriety, and etiquette books was that the people were moving up socially and did not know how to act in their new positions. Therefore, rules and standards were set up, usually by the women, for what seemed to be appropriate action for the entire day. The aristocratic woman arose in the morning in time to retire to her separate dressing room to prepare for the formal ten o'clock breakfast. Afterwards, if it was not a wet day, she could get her exercise by walking or riding. Otherwise, she stayed indoors with her needle and books until the lunch bell rang. She had a large room strictly for sewing, knitting, and spinning where she would go if she had nothing else to do.

After lunch, which was from one o'clock to two o'clock, she made her social calls to visit or perhaps play croquet or lawn tennis. At afternoon tea she served cake and wine, if the occasion was formal. Dinner was usually at eight o'clock, followed by any of her indoor activities, including playing musical instruments or games. If she had guests, they might dance or play charades until tea time again at nine o'clock. About ten o'clock she would retire. This day, as prescribed by the etiquette books, was certainly one of leisure; it has been learned, however, that even the aristocratic woman had many responsibilities and duties, so that her life was not nearly as dull as it would seem

to be. But since the 19th century man liked his woman ignorant, subservient, and charitable, there was a certain attitude that she did not mind assuming because, for the most part, she was very willing to be all three, at least part of the time.

Now with a relatively complete and accurate conception of the life of the model Victorian woman of the aristocratic class, it should be possible to discern the differences between and the variations of the fable connected with this social set and the actual practice. For instance, it is relatively certain that not all of the women had all of the qualities desired, but that the majority tried to develop all of the traits; the majority did not want any type of equality with men; they did not think that they deserved it. There must have been some women of the aristocracy, however, who did want to shed the cloak of Victorian propriety and exist on a different level, with different standards, social and personal. One of the prime examples of these women was Florence Nightingale.

Miss Nightingale was from a well-to-do family who owned country homes in Derbyshire and New Forest besides their rooms in London.[7]

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[7] Lytton Strachey, Eminent Victorians, p. 135.

Florence's social life was like that of Mary Gladstone; she attended parties and dances with her sisters and cousins not only in England but also in other countries where the family toured. It would seem that Florence would have followed the social pattern, as her kin did, and continued her socializing with a marriage at the appropriate age. But Florence did not. Even as a child she felt that God had a purpose for

her, and this conviction never subsided. Her youth was filled with dissatisfaction, restlessness, and unhappiness, all noted by her parents. She was not happy to sit with her needlework or to indulge in idle leisure; she required constant activity and often sought occasions to read to her father.

At twenty-five, well past the usual marrying age, she announced her desire to go to Salisbury Hospital as a nurse, with the ultimate goal of setting up a house near her home as a "Protestant Sisterhood," as she called it. Her parents were shocked at the idea and refused to consider it or even talk about it. It was not considered proper for young women to be independent, and nurses had the well-earned reputation for being immoral, ignorant, dirty, and drunk.

After this first attempt and failure, Florence knew that her determination was still strong enough to warrant another approach toward her calling. For the next eight years, then, she was outwardly engaged in a busy social life but spent her spare time visiting hospitals, slums, and workhouses, and reading medical and sanitation reports. While traveling with her family she still managed to keep up with both her private and public affairs. In fact, while the family was in Rome, she spent a few days as a Sister of Charity in a convent school, and she spent over three months as a nurse in Kaiserwerth, this latter experience being the basis of the future of the "Lady with the lamp."

At thirty-three, Florence became the superintendent of a charity nursing home. Her parents had not given up their Victorian ideals, but they realized that she was old enough and strong enough to do as she pleased.

The following year marked the beginning of the Crimean War. The War Office requested Miss Nightingale's services at the same time that she offered them. Within a week she and thirty-eight other nurses left for Constantinople, at Scutari, across the Black Sea from the Crimea. The nurses arrived there on November 4, 1854, to find terrible conditions; there were no provisions, equipment, drugs, clothes, or good doctors. Florence had brought supplies and money from private sources, and she began to use them immediately. But she soon found that she had more to fight than disease. She met opposition from government officials who said that accepting charity in the form of private funds was admitting that a public service could not take care of itself. Both the officials and the doctors resented her presence, for she was a woman and an amateur invading the medical and military professions and procedures. She and her nurses were subordinate to the doctors and could not help until requested to. The doctors ignored Florence at first but soon recognized her competence, tact, and gentle, friendly nature. She instituted new methods of supply, of sanitation, of building new wards, of laundry, and of cooking. She quickly assumed a position of authority, being well aware of the extent of her power. Her will was strong and her methods commanding but quiet. She never hesitated, however, to denounce or turn her bitter sarcasm on anyone. Her wrath often fell on innocent people whose actions, although conflicting with her ideas, were perfectly justifiable.

Dedicated to the health of the soldier, Miss Nightingale visited many of the hospitals in the Crimea. The terrible travel conditions

and hardships suffered on this occasion led to a serious fever which almost caused her death. She refused to return to England until all of the soldiers were out of Scutari; so she stayed during her sickness and wrote, even when she was delirious.

Her personal problems did not cease as she gained recognition and respect, however, for she had continual feuds with doctors, nurses, and clergymen. Despite her troubles in the Crimea, when she returned to England four months after the Declaration of Peace, she received a brooch from the Queen with the inscription "Blessed are the Merciful," an ironic twist, for she was merciful to the underdog and merciless to those who stood in her way.

Miss Nightingale never completely regained her health after her experiences in the Crimea. Her heart and nerves were spent and she needed rest badly, but she insisted on working with frenzy, reading and writing, although she did consent to stay in bed for a few months. Hers was never an idle life. Her doctors told her that if she did not die prematurely she was sure to be an invalid permanently.

Even though her life was restricted from this point on, her influence was never stronger. She publicized the Army conditions to the court. Since she was of the upper class, her social set included the Cabinet Ministers, the War Office members, and other important persons, all of whom quickly became aware of her opinions. Florence used the poet Arthur Hugh Clough, her brother-in-law, as her political mouthpiece in parliamentary affairs. The first action that she caused to be accomplished in Parliament was the appointment of a Royal Commission,

which was to report on the health of the Army. Following this, the Army Medical Department was reorganized, and then a Sanitary Commission was appointed. Miss Nightingale's suggestions were also followed in the revision of hospital construction and management policies.

Her last years were spent in her room, but she was still the powerful, dominating invalid, and she knew it. Her reputation soared. Her illness was an effective barrier and she used it to her best advantage; guests who begged for audience were subject to her whim. Within the confines of her room, she turned her efforts toward revitalizing Christianity, pointing out its faults and correcting them in three big volumes. The conception of God she presented was not orthodox, because she seemed to control Him, too, and call on Him whenever she could use Him. However, she lost her dominating, vindictive, sarcastic nature with old age and became sentimental, kindly, and gentle. Humbled upon being awarded the Order of Merit, she was thereafter grateful for each small compliment and favor. She died at ninety-one after retiring to her room for that very purpose twenty years previously.

Florence Nightingale was an effective social and political force within her day, but she was also an aristocratic Victorian woman. Yet her life was far different from the accepted way of life, such as that led by Mary Gladstone. Miss Nightingale never showed ignorance or submission, but did exhibit a great deal of charity. Her conversation was probably rarely playful or clever; to her, conversation was not a game, but a means toward action. As a result she was often cruel and sarcastic in her frankness in upholding her point. While the rest

of her set became noted for their use of the art of conversing, Miss Nightingale became noted for her misuse of it. While her sisters were home raising families, she was looking out for the interests of their sons and husbands. While her cousins were taking flowers to the old women in the charity hospitals, Florence was nursing these same unfortunates. While her mother was fulfilling her social duty by making calls, Florence was busy with her self-imposed duty of social reforming. Nevertheless, Florence Nightingale was a credit to her class; her contributions were of merit. It is appropriate that the conception of her today is as the "Lady with the lamp," the strong, quiet friend of the sick soldier.

This is a generalized picture of her but true enough as far as it goes. The constructed picture of the typical Victorian woman of the aristocracy is just as generalized, for it has already been determined that the "typical lady" never existed but was rather a synthesis of many women. Both generalizations appeal to the universal concern for human interest even though they may not typify the real characteristics or the most important contributions of their models. Nevertheless, for the present interest in the validity of the Victorian reputation, both generalizations and both models are important for an honest picture of the aristocrats of the period.

From the available diaries of the Victorian period, it would seem that a great many of the people, including the aristocrats, traveled. However, a more accurate supposition would be that it was the travelers who wrote diaries. One particular traveler of the aristocracy was Lady

Nugent. She wrote of the time she spent in Jamaica when her husband, Sir George Nugent was appointed Lieutenant-Governor and Commander-in-Chief (1801-1806). Her personality and her analysis of her position are evident throughout the excerpts from her diary.

Shortly after their transfer to Jamaica, she wrote:

> I would greatly have preferred remaining /at Hampstead/ instead of playing the Governor's lady to the blackies; but we are soldiers and must have no will of our own.[8]

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[8] Arthur Ponsonby, English Diaries, p. 328.

As the Governor's wife, she was the hostess at many dances and parties. All the officials of the island attended and Lady Nugent, unfortunately, had to dance with all the members of the Council. Usually the affairs were quite conventional and boring. Lady Nugent's comments on various formal occasions are very interesting.

> But after supper I forgot all my dignity and with all my heart joined in a Skotch reel—Many followed my example and the ball concluded merrily.
>
> A very large party in the evening and the candidates for the Chief Justices situation particularly smiling and attentive. Some of them danced merrily on the occasion and particularly when they were my partners.
>
> I would give anything for a little rest and quiet but must exert myself at dinner to make the /sic/ agreeable to the big wigs.[9]

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[9] Ibid., p. 329.

Lady Nugent's insight into her situation and into the ways

and means of her associates was extremely keen. It is somewhat comforting to know that "apple polishing," such as it was, was recognized as such by at least some of the aristocrats in an age filled with flattery and propriety. Yet it is possible to conjecture that Lady Nugent did not recognize the same sham when it surrounded her in Hampstead. Nevertheless, it is with a credible and creditable person that a portion of this study, that of the historical Victorian aristocratic lady, is completed.

The poetical portrayal of the Victorian aristocracy is limited. The best example is Tennyson's Idylls of the King. To be sure, his legend is Arthur's, but his characters are Victorians, and Victorians of the upper class. How close Tennyson's courtiers were to their historical counterparts is yet to be determined. The first look should be at Queen Guinevere's activities and development through the Idylls as an example of Tennyson's treatment of women. It is necessary to ignore some of her inconsistencies, since she appears to be married to different types of men in the various poems. However, it is generally considered that she was the queen of tragedy, the tragic flaw in the nobility of the court. King Arthur had continual confidence in her honesty while she was just as persistent in her unfaithfulness to him. She considered herself worthy of loving only the best although she herself commented, "But who can gaze upon the sun in heaven?" So she did, on occasion, show some signs of humility. But Arthur was still not what she wanted and needed; she insisted on more that the conventional love; she demanded a lover. It seems that here was a woman who was not satisfied

with the passive, subservient role of the Victorian female. However, being a woman of Tennyson's design, she was subject to chance, for "She did not choose Arthur; she was chosen in spite of herself; and the result was disaster."[10] Guinevere, referring to the king,

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[10] Morton Luce, A Handbook to the Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, p. 341.

> thought him cold,
> High, self-contain'd, and passionless, not like him,
> "Not like my Lancelot"
> ("Guinevere")

But Tennyson was determined to uphold the Victorian principle, as stated so succinctly in The Princess, "Man to command, and woman to obey."

Since she has been called the tragic flaw of the court, it is logical that Queen Guinevere's main concern, as she put it, was her responsibility in

> The sombre close of that voluptuous day
> Which wrought the ruin of my lord the king.
> ("Guinevere")

King Arthur fell, and with him fell the entire court and thence the nation, for it is not unusual for the commoners to emulate the crimes as well as the virtues of their leaders and models. The corruption resulting from the revelation of the love between Guinevere and Lancelot, then, led to the downfall of the land as well as the court. Tennyson had no pity for Guinevere, and in this he was a typical moralistic Victorian, since he changed her guilt from political treason, as Malory recorded it, to moral unfaithfulness, writing

> That she is woman, whose disloyal life
> Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round.
> ("Guinevere")

She was not forgiven, nor offered a new life as was Lancelot, but was left to her shame at the feet of King Arthur. Tennyson was of the old school which allowed choice to the man but only chance to the woman. Sir Alfred Lyall, of the Victorian Age himself, thought that the treatment of the queen was appropriate for the contemporary society.

> Thus in Tennyson's poem we have the faithless wife and injured husband of our own society, a woman's agonized repentance and a man's stern justice that is neither hard nor forgiving; we have the costumes, the scenery and the dramatis personae of the old romance with a change of feelings and manners.[11]

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[11] Sir Alfred Lyall, Tennyson, p. 107.

Tennyson, then, reflected rather accurately the Victorian attitude toward women of Guinevere's character. There is more, however, that can be said about Guinevere; she was real. She was not a very strong character, nor was she particularly intelligent. She was a good queen, a credit to the king, because she was a good hostess. She was stately, courteous, and pleasant to be with. But she was also quite natural in her reactions, and this, in a sense, tends to make her credible. That is, she could play the role of the Victorian model in public, but in her personal life she was average. She was vain and passionate; she showed poor judgment as a result; she became jealous at the appropriate time. She repented, but not until she stopped loving Lancelot and recognized her real love for the king. If she had been truly a queen, she

would have been strong enough to acknowledge her sin without the aid of an emotional involvement. But Guinevere is only one of the many women that Tennyson treated in the Idylls of the King.

The first woman Tennyson dealt with in this poem was Lynette. She was a fresh, frank young lady, often thoughtless and usually outspoken. But her bad manners were not intentional, for she meant well. Who would dare to be bold and rude to Lancelot and the king? No one would on purpose, especially if he were as society-conscious as Lynette was. Lynette thought that the most important thing about knighthood was the name and that in comparison the deed was insignificant. As a result she rebuffed Gareth's advances until his patience and love lifted her from her narrowmindedness and false pride and into love. Her shift of character is so complete that some critics, such as Stopford Brooke, think of her as two different people, since otherwise it is difficult to know when she was serious and when not. They argue that, for example, the following two passages do not sound as if they were spoken by the same young lady.

> O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain,
> O rainbow with three colours after rain,
> Shine sweetly: thrice my love has smiled on me,
>
> Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon!—to me
> Thou smellest all of kitchen as before.

It is not unreasonable, however, to grant the girl a variety of passions. In fact these reversals of mood make her human and believable. Lynette seems to be a Victorian young lady who remembered the importance of social status, was reminded of the principle of submission, but completely forgot

her lessons on the art of clever talk.

Enid, in "The Marriage of Geraint" and in "Geraint and Enid," grew consistently from a girl to a woman. A patient Griselda, she seemed to be Tennyson's favorite, because he was very careful and affectionate in his delineation. However, her qualities really do more harm than good to men. She thought that she was behaving properly and graciously as a devoted wife when she remained silent, but this same silence encouraged her husband to become tyrannical, selfish, jealous, and suspicious, little more than a brute. Enid was ruled by love, which was soon supplemented by fear. Her love and silence were constant; she knew that his actions were the result of his loving her. What she failed to realize was that it was her fault that she had not taught him how to express his love in a more acceptable manner. Geraint encouraged drinking and telling lewd stories in the presence of his wife. He even invited Limouis to tell Enid of his love for her. Enid was trying, it would seem, to be the submissive, obedient wife, but she was certainly not getting the protection from her husband that she read about in the etiquette books. The constancy of Enid's love is an improbable phenomenon, for even in ordinary marriages the degrees and types of love vary from day to day. Just as people often question the depth of love of couples who "never argue," so do they tend to doubt the validity of a love which is inflexible, especially under the conditions placed on Enid. Tennyson liked her constancy, however, regardless of its defects; he admired the Victorian ideal of feminine subordination.

In fact, Enid had all of the female qualities that a Victorian

man could want, and she did not have to pretend to have them nor to develop them much further. She was not exactly ignorant but was without depth and insight, for she showed no understanding of the situation. She never realized that she was in control. She was certainly subservient; she rarely exhibited any sign of initiative or aggression. She was patient and obedient. And it can be said that she was charitable, too, since she sacrificed herself and her humanity to her husband. Enid is an accurate picture of the Victorian man's ideal of womanhood, but she was also a failure as a woman and a wife. It has been shown that the Victorian woman assumed the ideal when in public, to the great pleasure of her husband, but she was quite competent in her control over the house; this, too, it can be assumed, pleased her husband. Life would have been dull and frustrating if all Victorian wives were like Enid, and the Victorians knew it. Yet Tennyson liked Enid, and this is understandable; he was a Victorian man.

Enid was not stripped of all her humanity. It is true that she was meant to be a symbol for patience, just as Guinevere represented the human heart; but she also was meant to be a vital, living person. Many of the things that she did are very realistic. For instance, what young girl does not lie awake at night in her excitement after being told she is loved by a desirable youth? And what wife does not dress to please her husband and to make him proud of her in public? With the protective, motherly instinct, she warned her husband of his enemies, guarded him while he slept, nursed him when he was wounded. And when he was away and she alone in the bandit hall, she thought the worst, that

he was dead. Because of these attitudes, it can be seen that she loved; her strength and persistence in her love is admirable; she was always gentle and sweet. Her faithfulness was finally recognized and there is hope for an improvement in her position. Her husband repented and offered to share his experiences, his fate, and even his horse with her. She still rode behind him, however.

> And never yet, since high in Paradise
> O'er the four rivers the first roses blew,
> Case purer pleasure unto mortal kind
> Than lived thro' her, who in that perilous hour
> Put hand to hand beneath her husband's heart,
> And felt him hers again; she did not weep,
> But o'er her meek eyes came a happy mist
> Like that which kept the heart of Eden green
> Before the useful trouble of the rain:
>
> ("Geraint and Enid")

So Tennyson rewarded her not only by giving her happiness again but also by having her personality help other people, too.

An altogether different type of woman is Vivien. For Tennyson, she was a symbol of the sin of pride resulting in death, physical and spiritual. She represented hate of the most despicable sort, for she was false and evil without cause. The only thing she believed was that there was goodness in no one; her actions were perfectly consistent with this creed. She was sincere and honest in terms of her belief. Her only god was sensuality and she was brave and daring in her worship. At court, she quietly and artfully lowered people to their basest natures by planting gossip and breeding suspicion, managing to destroy all she approached. She ruined Merlin by charming him into telling her his secrets and then used his own craft to entomb him alive in the hollow oak, so that he

was "lost to life and use and name and fame." Perhaps Tennyson did not have any of his contemporaries in mind for the historical counterpart of Vivien; she was either insane or inhuman; her speech was no more rational than her actions. Perhaps she is a warning against domineering women, including those who meddle in things outside the home. Certainly Tennyson knew some women who fit this description.

In contrast to the contrived cruelty of Vivien was the unconscious innocence of Elaine. The center of her world of fantasy was love, and she was bold in love because she was pure in love. With her first glimpse of Lancelot she fell in love with him, and as a young girl she took the precious moment into her imagination to build on, to protect, and to enjoy. The evolved emotion was her only experience with life and was all she lived and died for. Tennyson presented a true picture of a girl becoming a woman; her love brought maturity to her and meaning to her existence. Every action, every thought, every moment, even the one bringing death was passionate and full. She told of her love unashamedly and it was never cheapened or taken advantage of by Lancelot. He was always noble, kind, and gentle to the girl, offering sincerely his strong friendship. Her passion consumed her, for she died in utter devotion. But her life was not wasted, because she had her great moment of love, a moment greater than any experienced by the other courtiers because hers was pure. She died innocent and happy. And it is important to note that she loved a worthy man. Tennyson treated Elaine tenderly and joyously; he wanted to evoke no pity for her. It was, rather, Lancelot who lost the opportunity to live.

Somewhat like Elaine was Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott." She, too, lived in a fanciful world supported by dreams and imagination. The world she saw was reflected in a mirror. She reinterpreted the images by weaving them into her tapestry. Her life was in direct contrast to that of the market girls and damsels outside her window. Like Elaine, the Lady created her own life; like Elaine, when reality forced itself upon her, she died. To both, the death of the imagination meant death to the whole self.

In "The Holy Grail" Tennyson introduced another woman, Percivale's sister. She was a nun, and a mystic saint to all who knew her, even though she was very passionate. Sir Percivale, describing her, said:

> and if ever holy maid
> With knees of adoration wore the stone,
> A holy maid; tho' never maiden glow'd,
> But that was in her earlier maidenhood,
> With such a fervent flame of human love,
> Which being rudely blunted, glanced and shot
> Only to holy things; to prayer and praise
> She gave herself, to fast and alms.

She was the first to see the Holy Grail and she turned to Christ. She and Sir Galahad were the only ones who were able to lose themselves in their search and thereby attain the Christian ideal of perfect love which they believed was separated from the flesh. Others tried and failed to succeed in their search for the vision and resorted to sensuality. Their leaving the Round Table for this apparently religious motive was the first cause for the crumbling of King Arthur's court, because the country was left unprotected. The second cause was the failure of their mission which brought on recklessness and sensuality.

Percivale's sister was a force behind the movement, but she cannot be held responsible for either its outcome or the degree of devotion, or lack of devotion, of the knights. Tennyson made her human, nevertheless, for there are suggestions of her love of men before she turned to Christ. To relate her to Victorian standards of womanhood would involve pointing out particulars to prove generalities, for there is really no alliance. Any age, however, would respect and admire such a woman.

The last type of womanhood treated by Tennyson in the Idylls of the King was Ettarre, whom the poet included as a warning to the Victorian society which was becoming decadent. Ettarre was worldly and cruel. She used Pelleas for her own vanity and belittled him whenever possible. She never loved him but recognized his devotion to her, realizing that he could introduce her into the courtly circles. When she became bored with his love offerings, she became cynical. Her victim, Pelleas, refused to lose the ideal he had built around her. Tennyson feared the reforms taking place in England, it would seem. When women left the boundary of their homes and took interest in things other than their families, he feared trouble.

Tennyson's attitude toward women can be summed up in the words of Merlin:

> For men at most differ as Heaven and earth,
> But women, worst and best, as Heaven and Hell.
> ("Merlin and Vivien")

Tennyson's women of the Idylls of the King ranged within these limits, whereas his men rarely fell beneath human dignity. When the men did fall, it was the fault of the beguiling and treacherous women whom

Tennyson never forgave. The physical attractiveness of Guinevere and Vivien in particular led men first to jealousy and greed and then to their ruin. Vivien, the femme fatale, was one extreme of the women of the Idylls, and Enid the True was the other. The wickedness done by Vivien is just as shocking as the unjustices done to Enid. Nevertheless, Tennyson tended to admire the strength of Geraint and his masterful treatment of his wife. From the general outline of Tennyson's aristocratic women, it can be seen that he did not group them into one type but rather pictured them, as in reality, with varying personalities. His tendency, however, was to impose his own attitude on women regarding their worth and position in society. His attitude would appear to represent that of the typical Victorian.

William Morris planned an entire Arthurian cycle, too, but he did not finish it. He did complete his poem about the queen, however, and it is interesting to note the differences between his treatment of her and Tennyson's. In "The Defense of Guenevere" Morris dealt only with her attitude and explanation after being accused of unfaithfulness by Gauwaine. She was perspiring and flushed and a little panicked because she knew that she had to speak in her own defense. And she was ashamed that the only feelings she had were shame and guilt and not shock at the insult. She started her defense with an insincere apology, for she planned to justify her actions. She appealed to the sympathies of the listening knights and lords by comparing her position to a tense, dramatic scene in which she placed her audience rather than herself. What would they do if they were offered two cloths, one red and the

other blue, one leading to heaven and the other to hell, but they were not told which was which? This analogy would seem to indicate that Guenevere did not know the difference between faithfulness and unfaithfulness.

She did admit, as Tennyson's Guinevere exhibited, that she did not learn of her mistaken choice until after Lancelot had left. She described her whole situation, following her progressions of rationalizations, wondering why she must remain cold the rest of her life because Arthur had bought her with his "great name and his little love." She, like Tennyson's queen, did not choose her husband but, unlike Tennyson's queen, she never learned to love him. It would appear that her decision was between faithfulness and unfaithfulness to herself and her femininity, not to Arthur. During her speech Guenevere watched her audience, dramatically holding them and winning them with her theatrical delivery. She did not restrict her defense to words.

> And her great eyes began to fill,
> . . . . . .
> With passionate twisting of her body there:
>
> Turn'd sideways; listening, . . . [and] stood lean'd eagerly,
> And gave a slight spring sometimes,

Her extreme vanity showed when she spoke of her obvious perfection and honesty by saying:

> Being such a lady could I weep these tears
> If this were true: A great queen such as I
> Having sinned this way, straight her conscience sears;

Guenevere did not repent. In fact she wore a smile of smugness and victory as Launcelot rode up at the end of her dramatic monologue. Morris's

Guenevere did not conform to any of the Victorian standards. In fact, Morris's whole attitude toward Guenevere was different. His conception was neither Malory's nor Tennyson's; his interest was in the thoughts and resulting actions of the characters rather than in the romance and adventure of the Arthurian court. He was not telling a story as much as he was creating effects. The beginning of the first version of "The Defense of Guenevere" was colorful and interesting, but Morris rejected it in favor of the dramatic and abrupt scene he published.

Another example of Morris's treatment of his characters is included in "The Maying of Queen Guenevere":

> The end of spring was drawing near
> And all the leaves were grown full long;
> The apple twigs were stiff and strong,
> And one by one fell off from song
> This thrush and that thrush by daylight,
> Through lustily they sing near night.
> This time a-maying went the Queen,
> But Mellyagruance across the green
> Fresh meadows where the blue dykes were
> Stared out and thought of Guenevere.
> "If I could get her once," he said,
> "Whatever men say, by God's head
> But I would hold her." Here he glanced
> Across his strong courts, for he chanced
> To be on a tower-roof that tide,
> And his banner-staff up beside
> His bended knee. "St. Mary, though,
> When I think well, I do not know
> Why I should give myself this pain
> About the Queen, and be so fain
> To have her by me; God to aid,
> I have seen many a comely maid—
> Ah! and well-born too—if I said:
> 'Fair lady, may I bear your glove?'
> Would turn round quick and look all love:
> While she laughs at me—laughs aloud"[12]

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[12] William Morris, The Collected Works of William Morris, vol. 1, p. xix. Poem quoted by May Morris in the Introduction of her edition of her father's works.

Although many Victorians of the aristocratic class may have experienced such thoughts as Hallyagranne did, not many would admit it. Most of them preferred to limit their speech to the safely conventional, as Tennyson did.

In "Lady Clara Vere de Vere" Tennyson came very close to chiding a type of aristocratic lady. Tennyson was not a reformer, merely an observer; so he did not lecture. Lady Clara, the daughter of centuries of earls, was filled with pride over her material possessions, her name, and her coat of arms. But none of these things could compare with the value of the peasant's kindly heart. The yeoman rejected her passes; he had seen too many of his kind hurt and even killed as a result of her flirtations. He realized that she was extremely bored, despite her wealth and health, but thought she could find better things to do than to play tricks with the hearts of men. He suggested that she give aid to the beggar at her door or teach the orphan to read and sew. His primary request was, however, that she leave him alone; he knew what she was doing and why.

The yeoman's comment of the heartless actions of Lady Clara differ greatly from the Duke's attitude toward his late wife, as expressed in Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess." The yeoman wanted Lady Clara to spend her spare time and talents usefully by benefiting rather than tormenting the unfortunates; the Duke wanted the Duchess to spend all her time honoring him and his nine-hundred-year-old name rather than bestowing kindnesses on the servants. Her gentle, friendly nature made her a very happy person, easily pleased and flattered. However, she

smiled equally on all; she did not reserve special attentions for the Duke. The Duke was highly insulted that she did not treat him as the superior he thought he was. She got as much pleasure from her white mule and from the sunset as she did from his favors. Browning's Duke wanted the Duchess to act like a refined, snobbish aristocrat; Tennyson's yeoman wanted Lady Clara to act like the Duchess. Here is an idea of how the two different classes viewed the aristocratic lady of the Victorian period.

Tennyson included several contemporary attitudes toward women in The Princess. King Gama represented the "indifferent, half-contemptuous treatment of the earnestness of women by the man, mingled with an irritating profession of love for them."[13] The father of the Prince said,

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[13] Stopford A. Brooke, Tennyson, His Art and Relation to Modern Life, p. 182.

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typically, that "Man is the hunter; woman is his game." Cyril represented the romantic lover "who, when he loves, idealizes the woman into the teacher of things which no knowledge can give him, but who always thinks that his man's strength is the natural victor over the woman."[14]

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[14] Ibid., pp. 182-183.

The Prince represented Tennyson's views in his belief that the man ought to be master. He did not strip the woman of her individuality; both work apart for completion. The position of the woman, according to the 19th century man, including Tennyson and the Prince, was as a wife, mother, and nurse, devoted to her loved ones. The Prince corrected his

father's opinion that women were all alike by saying that he thought they had as many differences of character as men did. He agreed with his father to some degree, however; he did believe that men were morally superior.

The women had a still different conception of themselves. Lilia had an answer ready for her brother Walter when he tauntingly asked the whereabouts of contemporary counterparts of the brave feminine warriors in their family history. She retorted:

> "There are thousands now
> Such women, but convention beats them down:
> It is but bringing up; no more than that:
> You men have done it: how I hate you all!
> Ah, were I something great! I wish I were
> Some mighty poetess, I would shame you then,
> That love to keep us children! O I wish
> That I were some great princess, I would build
> Far off from men a college like a man's,
> And I would teach them all that men are taught;
> We are twice as quick!"

Walter, very skeptical, answered:

> "Pretty were the sight
> If our old halls could change their sex, and flaunt
> With prudes for proctors, dowagers for deans,
> And sweet girl-graduates in their golden hair.
> I think they should not wear our rusty gowns."

Such a princess as Lilia dreamed of was Ida. She had dedicated her life to freeing women from

> The sins of emptiness, gossip and spite
> And slander,

because she wanted women to be able to develop other talents. As long as women were considered incapable of more than emptiness and gossip, they would not be respected as individuals. Princess Ida remarked:

"Would this same mock-love, and this
Mock-Hymen were laid up like winter bats,
Till all men grew to rate us at our worth,
Not vassals to be beat, nor pretty babes
To be dandled, no, but living wills, and sphered
Whole in ourselves and owed to none."

Princess Ida felt strongly that if women had the chance to see what it was like to be independent and self-sufficient, they would not choose subservience. She did not have time, however, to indoctrinate them thoroughly before they had a chance to revert to their old, comfortable ways. Some contended that these ways were a result of natural inclination. Ida firmly held that they were a result of training.

After her experiment had failed, Princess Ida still felt that she could not marry one who had scorned her cause of equality with men. She asked the Prince not to judge her theory by her failure. He assured her that he was not a skeptic, that he would like to work with her to achieve similar ends but by less radical means, because "The woman's cause is man's." Both rise or fall together, he told her; a man cannot grow without a strong woman with him. He wanted to work to free woman from forms and customs which were meant to honor her but which enslave her. He felt that woman should be free to choose her own ways. The Prince agreed that woman should develop herself fully not only for her own sake but also for man's sake. Recognizing that woman was diverse from man, he believed that the two would grow strong together because of this diversity. There would be two minds but one purpose, two hearts but one beat.

In spite of its many pleas for women's rights, The Princess, published in 1847, was used as a banner by the antifeminists.

> Ironically enough, Tennyson had intended the poem to advance the cause of women's education and, indeed, had his treatment of the university theme been serious and sympathetic no better propaganda for organised education could have been devised. A residential college with violet-hooded doctors, gowned students, complicated courses in every subject (anatomy excepted) and a sorority motto "Power through knowledge," was [an ambitious project]. But Tennyson, firmly convinced that "if women ever were to play freaks the burlesque and the tragic might go hand-in-hand," (letter from Tennyson, Nov. 21, 1852), merely raised his elaborate mediaeval structure so high the better to enjoy the crash when the moment came for him to expose its faulty foundations and to send the edifice toppling to the ground. As a result, the Victorian reading public felt at full liberty to enjoy the beauties of the poem, the gentle ridicule, "Prudes for proctors, dowagers for deans," the patronising approbation, the generous admiration—secure in the certainty of an ultimate éclaircissement. Nor were they disappointed when it came. The couplet with which Tennyson summed up his doctrines was admirably suited to Victorian taste and helped to place masculine education for women in an unfavorable light for many years. . . .
>
> For woman is not undevelop't man,
> But diverse . . .
>
> . . . And so the gospel of The Princess was absorbed into the nation's consciousness—a gospel with much in it that was progressive and tolerant but one admirably calculated to discourage any real attempt at levelling-up women's education with that of men. As long as the basic likeness between men and women was denied there could be no common educational standard.[15]

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[15] Patricia Thomson, The Victorian Heroine, A Changing Ideal, pp. 59-60.

Another question in Victorian England was that of marriage between the classes. Tennyson's treatment was typical, and he offered

no solution. He observed society without giving approval or disapproval, for in some marriages, Lady Clare's for instance, the parties were happy; but in others, such as the one described in "Walking to the Mail," they were not. Tennyson apparently thought that the problem had no sure solution. He did take a stand, however, on the motives for marrying between classes. "Ring out false pride in place and blood," he sang in In Memoriam. If a marriage took place because one of the parties wanted to raise his social standing or if a marriage was prohibited because one of the parties was considered socially inferior, Tennyson indicated his disapproval.

Such a marriage was disallowed by Sir Aylmer Aylmer in "Aylmer's Field." Edith, his daughter and last descendent of the family, grew up and fell in love with Leolin Averill, who came from a family of rectors who had served the Aylmers for generations. Sir Aylmer was determined to preserve the purity of the family. As a result, the dismissed Leolin, was equally determined to make a name and fortune for himself. While he was away, Edith was beseiged by suitors, whom she turned down. To make his daughter more submissive, Sir Aylmer began denying her the pleasures she got from life such as "poor peopling," gardening, and finally the secret letters from Leolin. Slowly she wasted to death; Leolin stabbed himself with a dagger she had given him, a gift from another suitor. Tennyson was rather strong in his criticism of Sir Aylmer.

Tennyson recognized, nevertheless, that the adjustments that had to be made as the result of a change in environment and way of life

were difficult for most people. "The Lord of Burleigh" posed as a landscape painter, wed a village maid, and took her to his manor house. Although she learned her duties and won the love and respect of the people, she could never reconcile herself to her new position. She bore her husband three handsome children, but continued to grow weak. When she died, still young, her understanding husband buried her in her village wedding dress to give her soul rest. Tennyson understood the problems involved in marriages between classes.

Tennyson's attitude toward marriage, however, is consistent throughout his poetry; the ideal expressed by King Arthur in "The Coming of Arthur" is similar to that proposed by the Prince in The Princess. Arthur said that without Guinevere

> I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
> And cannot will my will, nor work my work
> Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm
> Victor and lord. But were I join'd with her,
> Then might we live together as one life,
> And reigning with one will in everything
> Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
> And power on this dead world to make it live.

Arthur needed someone to love to make his work worth while, and he needed work to glorify his love.

What comparisons can be made now between the historical and poetical woman of the Victorian aristocracy? A typical lady of the class was Mary Gladstone. Of course, not all the women followed the conventions as Mary did; Florence Nightingale did not. As a rule, both men and women admired the established standard of living. Tennyson, a Victorian man as well as a poet, also honored it. His only poem that suggested anything other than the conventional was The Princess. He

was not convinced, however, that his arguments were valid; so he dismissed the idea of equal rights for women. He really preferred the women to stay at home and fulfill the duties of wife, mother, and nurse. Tennyson's aristocratic women, for the most part, were submissive and feminine. The ones he liked best, such as Enid and Elaine, were optimists and romantics. Nothing could discourage them; they were in the best of all possible situations and were most fortunate. Tennyson admired women who were grateful for what they had. He did not like those, like Lady Clara Vere de Vere, who used their station in life to harm others.

The poetic picture of the contemporary woman as being subjected to the will of her husband is an accurate one. The amount of rebellion from this position is also recorded in the poetry; for every historical Florence Nightingale there was a poetical Princess Ida. The proportion of nonconformists in real life was observed in the poetry; the poets observed the changes but did not suggest them. The aristocratic man, including the poet, was happy with the situation and did not promote alterations. The poet consented to reflect the attitudes as they arose, but tended to support the conventional opinion. The poetry supported the contemporary attitude toward the aristocratic woman, but it did not prescribe her way of life.

CHAPTER II

THE LADY OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

The definition of "middle class" must depend a great deal on the specifications for the aristocracy. That is, where the aristocracy stops, the middle class begins. It has been determined that members of the Victorian aristocracy were left virtually unscathed by the Industrial Revolution. It would follow, then, that those Victorians who depended on weekly salaries for their living, and were thereby affected by the Industrial Revolution, belonged to the middle class. Another distinction must be made to distinguish the lower class from the middle class. There is no clear line between any of the classes, of course; the difference between the lower middle class and the upper lower class is an arbitrary one. Nevertheless, a general distinction between the two classes would be based on the way of life. The people of the middle class, with their incomes, managed to set respectable standards for living and acting. Those in the lower class could not afford to establish standards, for theirs was a daily hand-to-mouth existence.

The Industrial Revolution, which affected most of the Victorians, caused a great number of changes in the middle-class society. The middle class, usually the most populous in any society, sets the standard for the entire country in most instances; its voice is the one that is heard and remembered. And the Victorian Era was no different from others

in this respect, for the growth of the period was greatly affected by and had its greatest effect on the middle class. Victorian England underwent development and change involving the majority of its institutions. In politics, industry, science, religion, and transportation there were many movements for change, some of which were beneficial, others of which were not.

The position of women changed correspondingly within this society. It had to change. It was a time when the rule of thumb for a woman was to suppress at all costs any signs of health, wit, or learning and to develop a strong relationship with God, because religion was her only consolation for an unfaithful or otherwise unworthy husband. But this attitude was not practical for a great majority of the middle class. There were many bachelors in Victorian England (the law did not tax bachelors). There were also many supposedly weak and helpless girls without the protection of homes and families. They were forced to support themselves for many reasons. Those left with fortunes had no problems. When Queen Victoria ascended the throne, the Whig party had depleted the treasury. She found that the country was without a budget. Economic and industrial distress was widespread. Many persons were affected by the period of bankruptcy and other failings and were without money. They were forced to work for a living and the Industrial Revolution made it possible for some and impossible for others. Industrialization creatednew jobs while it destroyed others.

The feminist movement was particularly concerned with the position of the woman of the middle class. It recognized the need for

a change in her status as her responsibilities and interests grew outside the home. George M. Trevelyan wrote, in his History of England:

> The advance in humanity, democracy, and education, and the changes in industrial method bringing large crowds of wage-earners of both sexes together in offices and factories, led to a new conception of the place of women in society. The education of women, from being almost totally neglected, became in a couple of generations comparable to that of men. The position of women in the family was altered in law, and was yet more altered in practice and opinion. Finally the movement for their political enfranchisement ceased to seem absurd.[1]

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[1] George Macaulay Trevelyan, History of England, p. 618.

The law referred to is the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, reinforced in 1893, giving a woman control of her own property. Her husband could no longer dispose of it as he would. Previously, if a woman married, she owned nothing; neither her property nor her savings were hers any longer. She could not write a will, obviously enough, since she had nothing to will; she had no legal control of the children; she could not sue for divorce. In fact, legally she did not really exist; but she was usually ignorant of this fact because she did not worry about it. If she was not married, she had legal status which included rights of ownership, but this did her little good because it was a constant struggle for the middle-class single girl to keep out of debt.

The action for the voting power for women, mentioned by Trevelyan, was largely stirred up by John Stuart Mill, a political philosopher whose theme was "complete democracy." He felt that all

men and women should be active in local as well as national elections.

> His advocacy of women's rights, in The Subjection of Women, (1869), though in his own day it was not allowed to affect the political franchise, helped to increase the respect for women's personal liberty, and the belief in the importance of their proper education which characterized the later Victorian age. Mill and Florence Nightingale were the two principal pioneers of the position that women hold in society today.[2]

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[2] Ibid., p. 678.

Other legal changes which benefited the Victorian wife and mother included The Infants Custody Act, passed in 1839. This gave to a mother the right to keep her children under seven years of age and the right of access to children over seven if adultery could not be proved against her. Another legal revision was The Marriage and Divorce Art of 1857.

> Up till this time there had been no method of obtaining a divorce except by Act of Parliament, granted only on the application of the husband and founded on the adultery of the wife. By the 1857 Act, divorce was rendered less costly, by being made available through the law courts. But the wife could apply for divorce only if her husband were somewhat of a specialist in infidelity. Adultery, without variations on the theme, was not enough. If, however, he carried his sexual delinquencies to the point of committing incest, rendering himself liable to criminal prosecution, or coupled his adultery with legal cruelty or criminal desertion for two years and upwards, then the law had consolation for the injured wife.[3]

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[3] Patricia Thomson, The Victorian Heroine, A Changing Ideal, p. 87.

Thus it is seen that the causes for the improvement in the

status of women was the result of several concurrent activities, one of which has been neglected thus far. The very fact that England was under the rule of a queen who was loved and admired seems to be significant. Her reign was of such length that her persistent character and code of conduct could hardly help permeating her kingdom. The mannerisms of a respected person are often aped by people of lower degree, especially those seeking the recognition and approval of the revered individual.

> Victoria was possessed in a high degree of queenly instincts and dignity, but they were softened and popularized by a mind and an emotional nature of great simplicity. In herself she was not very different from her female subjects in humble stations of life—except that she was also a great Queen. She was not at all an aristocrat; the amusements and life of the aristocracy and their dependents and imitators meant little to her. She was above the aristocracy, not of it. With the other side of her nature she was a simple wife and widow-woman /sic/, who would have been at home in any cottage parlour. So, too, the intellectual and artistic currents of the age flowed by her unnoticed—except when Prince Albert was there to instruct her. The common people understood her in her joys and sorrows better than they understood those who stood between themselves and her, raised on the platforms of aristocracy or of intellect.[4]

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[4] Trevelyan, p. 692.

The Queen was an ideal to her people, for although she was not their peer and was not, of course, forced to support herself, she was nevertheless not beyond their reach, nor were they below hers. The qualities that she combined with their own were admirable, and so she set a desirable if not attainable goal for them.

From the Queen's own diary can be learned much about her character. She wrote as a custom and a duty, and to help her own memory. Because her diary is sincere, unsophisticated, and without pretense, it can be assumed that she was not trying to create a false picture of herself for future generations. She was genuine, intensely active, and passionate; she treated nothing as unimportant or passé. She was not moody, but she did experience periods of woe, woe which was justifiable. Victoria regarded mourning for her husband as a sacred duty, and she could not be convinced that it was an excessive self-indulgence.

An interesting selection from her diary describes her moment of engagement to Albert.

> At about ½ p. 12 I sent for Albert: he came to the Closet where I was alone and after a few minutes I said to him that I thought he must be aware <u>why</u> I wished him to come here—and that it would make me <u>too happy</u> if he would consent to what I wished (to marry me). We embraced each other and he was <u>so</u> kind and <u>so</u> affectionate. I told him I was quite unworthy of him—he said he would be very happy . . . and was so kind and seemed so happy that I really felt it was the happiest moment in my life.[5]

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[5] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 294.

She was an excellent wife and mother. Her children came first with her; she had nine in seventeen years and loved them all very deeply. The court ideals became the values and standards of the middle class, not the aristocracy, for the Queen and the Prince Consort set the example for the simple, respectable, happy family life.

Of course, the women of the middle class had neither the means

nor the opportunity to enjoy the diversions of the Queen. Actually, their suburban home life was lonely and monotonous. Usually they had one servant, but a great deal of the work was done by the daughters who were trained in all of the household duties while their rich sisters were learning needlepoint and carving. Whatever their status, the young ladies were expected to run their homes efficiently after their wedding day. Marriages in this class were made on the basis of economics and convenience. In fact, most of the things done were for reasons of expediency or escape with little thought of rationality or practicality for the future. The workingmen got a bare minimum of education so that they could get jobs. Because they were without ambition and creativity, however, they rarely advanced. If the girls who had to work did not find employment in the cities, there was another occupation waiting for their service. As Clara Middleton said to Laetitia Dale in George Meredith's The Egoist, coquettes were forced by their families, by society, and by their own femininity, into positions of insecurity. They had to capture men because there was nothing else for them to do; and once the girls had laid the trap, they could not avoid their own prey.

At least two different types of middle-class existence were satirized in Punch. Charles Keene treated the middle class immortalized by Dickens and scorned by Matthew Arnold, that of the self-sufficient, pompous codger who accepted his place in life. George Du Maurier pictured, on the other hand, the class-conscious middle class, dependent rather than sufficient, ashamed if they were not successful in appearance

since they were always trying to convince each other that they were successfully playing the parts that they were inadequate for. And Punch had many characterizations of henpecked husbands like those in the contemporary novels: Bishop Proudie in Trollope's Barchester Towers and Joe Gargery of Dickens' Great Expectations. Because of the routine of the middle-class life, it is understandable why the people took Queen Victoria for their model; she added a sense of glamour to their own dull lives. Her life was probably the publicized and remembered standard, for surely there were many divergences of character in the middle class in 19th century England. Since the middle class consisted of such a great number and variety of people, it is difficult to say that one is typical and another is not. If a norm were determined, there would be a greater degree of divergence from it than there was from the norm of the aristocracy.

One extreme of the middle-class standards was Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot). Mary Ann had two qualities that drove her all of life: ambition and intellect. These led her to determine a specific philosophy and then to follow it. She was also very passionate, and this characteristic implemented itself throughout her life. She longed for approval and affection from her mother, who preferred the other two children. She tried to please her in many ways, but all failed; she was too clever to be understood. Her family held the social position of the country working people, and it was their customs and speech habits that Mary Ann took to school with her in Coventry when she was thirteen. She became aware of her inferior dialect and manners and tried to improve, because all she desired at this point was acceptance. The result

of her efforts and failures, however, was lifelong stiffness in company.

In her maturity, Miss Evans was tolerant, generous, and polite, even to those who dealt harshly with her. But her passion was still without an outlet. Her appearance thwarted her attempts to be seductive; so she could not be the coquette of her generation. Her emotions led her to drift from one project to another in search of satisfaction. This type of life was not considered respectable. When she was twenty-four, she had her first love affair, with a man who was sixty-two. Her second affair, at thirty, was more serious, but it was with a younger family man.

She was very dependent on men, and she realized it. She had been a staunch Christian, but she found that the abstractions at the basis of the faith were not solid enough to satisfy her. She therefore placed her faith in man. In her stories, she wrote about her first loves and always pictured the girl as being young. She felt that any love engaging older people had to be successful and must, consequently, be entertained with caution by the people involved. This was her attitude toward herself and George Lewes. In her books she preached what she felt the two of them must adhere to; failure meant ruin for her. The union of the two, however, was very harmonious. They were drawn together by similar intellectual sympathies, by masculine firmness, and by a sensitivity to external influences that they both felt. Both had experienced unsuccessful love. Lewes wife was insane. Both were poor, talented, and generous, and their union was one of understanding and sympathy. Mary Ann's pen name is indicative of the large degree of respect

and gratitude she had for George Lewes. The first name was an obvious adoption, and the second was a kind of acrostic for "to L. I owe it." Everyone knew that the two lived together.

> George Eliot was the faithful wife of one man who was not her husband. Had she been a nobody or a mediocrity, the world . . . would have frowned . . . . Respect for her was strong; regret that there should be any blemish in her life was keen; there was possibly some pity for her, which she would have rejected . . . .[5]

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[5] George W. Smalley, London Letters, vol. 1, p. 244.

Miss Evans did not care for society and thus was rarely seen in it. She was shy in public because she was awkward, especially in feminine etiquette, and she knew it. To engage her in talk was more like listening to a sermon than it was taking part in a conversation. Her passions and her ambitions were at last satisfied, however, and she no longer sought approval. She needed no justification of her life other than her own, and so she was happy living outside the bounds of the society she had so long strived to please. And ironically enough, it was this same society that came to her and asked for her membership.

Harriet Martineau was another nonconformist to the Victorian middle-class standard. She, like Mary Ann Evans, had an unhappy childhood. She recorded only two occasions when sympathy was extended to her, only one of these from her parents, when she had an earache. Rather than resorting to tricks to gain approval, Harriet rebelled by running away several times, by telling preposterous lies, and by building up an extreme hate for her mother. She became deaf in her early teens

and thereby had to give up her chance of becoming a great musician. The mental anguish she suffered at first changed to acceptance, then courage, and then self-confidence. She would engage in nothing that made her dependent on others. Since she could not develop her emotions and affections, she developed her mind. She studied French, music, Latin, the classics, history, poetry, and politics. Her studies in religion and philosophy were tainted by her own egotism, because she discarded what she could not understand.

She carried an ear trumpet most of her life. When she had become famous, she carried two to dinner parties, throwing one at the speaker for him to talk into until he bored her or she had something better to say. When these many occasions arose, she retrieved her horn. She asked for no sympathy, for she rather enjoyed her troubles and her quarrels. She was conceited and even absurd at times, but always courageous and persistent. Convinced of her importance, she expected, and received, respect.

Even though she was born of the middle class, Miss Martineau was recognized and accepted by the upper class. Convention required her to take her mother with her when she moved to London; however, she always resented this imposition on her will. Having an approved guardian with her seemed to be the only convention she followed; she always refused to live by the accepted standards. It was a deliberate attempt to flout society and boost her ego. She turned down many invitations and made it known that a person working for the public good had not the time for such Victorian social habits as making calls and accepting dull invitations.

Harriet's separation from her mother was accomplished in three steps. First, she took an American tour, leaving her mother in London. She and her family were Unitarians, and while in America, she met with Unitarian abolitionists, considering herself in danger of being hanged because of these associations. Upon her return to London, she was hospitalized with an abdominal tumor and was again without the companionship of her mother. The final step of separation was taken five years later when she declared herself cured by mesmerism. To take up mesmerism, of course, she had to denounce her former religious beliefs. Her mother found it impossible to live with an infidel; so Harriet was at last rid of the mother who did not deserve her daughter's wrath. Harriet, however, also sacrificed the strong friendship with her beloved brother James, a Unitarian minister, a philosopher, and an author.

While loudly professing and spreading mesmerism ten years later, Harriet had a recurrence of her stomach trouble. She was told by the doctors that it was the same illness, that its previous apparent cessation had been only a shift to a less bothersome area. She had not been cured by mesmerism, but she could not admit her own fallibility, nor could she disown Atkinson, the mesmerist with whom she had collaborated in writing Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development. She therefore announced that she was dying from heart trouble, and she set out to do so, but it took her twenty-one years.

> [Harriet Martineau] advocated philanthropy by her pen, and proceeded to organize her own village of Ambleside. There, as its charitable dictator, she forcibly improved the minds of her maids; placed her library at the disposal of deserving villagers;

> provided the sick with nourishing invalid foods; formed a building society; and delivered lectures on domestic economy, ethics of communal house-building, politics, hygiene, emigration, history and above all, temperance.
>
> Miss Martineau achieved her greatest success with her lectures on drink, at which she showed coloured prints of the stomach, demonstrating the progress of disease in a drunkard's interior. It is recorded that for 80 minutes she held a "closely packed audience breathlessly attentive—the only interruption coming from a young man who staggered out and fainted at the door . . . ."[7]

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[7] Thomson, pp. 23-24.

Harriet was obstinate and proud, but also busy and cheerful, for she knew that no one dared to interfere with her activities or question her methods. She was powerful and she loved it. For political reasons she refused a crown pension three different times; however, she accepted 1,400 pounds from private subscription. She did not believe in women's rights, but thought that they would come when women were educated enough to deserve them. She declared herself a mesmerist, an abolitionist, and an infidel; and in each case she was a deviator from the middle-class norm, or from any Victorian norm. Her life was anything but dull and routine. But she was respected, not because she was popular but because she was powerful. Both she and George Eliot were accepted by society not because of the lives they led, but because of their literary contributions to that society.

A third rebellious woman of the Victorian middle class was Frances Trollope, mother of Anthony. Her beginnings were very conventional, but her mature years were not. She was the daughter of a vicar

of Heckfield and Mattingly. As a properly educated young girl of her class, she was taught how to perform all the household duties and how to spend her leisure time. She was always a wit and a mimic.

After she married Thomas Trollope, her independence became more obvious. She was a devoted mother, but not truly a loyal wife. Her love for her husband was not complete because he did not approve of her and she did not respect him. In fact, she ridiculed his quirks to the children, making him and his plans very laughable. She seemed to encourage some of his projects so that she could make fun of him before the children. She took it upon herself to save the family financially, and more than once she kept them out of debtor's prison. She had integrity and courage and was a hard worker. She took to writing to make money for the family, and as a result wrote satirical poems and travel books, besides thirty-four novels. She seemed to work best under pressure, and she had many such occasions when she was working to keep the family solvent. She would desert her husband and Anthony to go off and do her work. She thought that these separations would ultimately bring her and her husband closer together.

Many of her schemes to make money failed, but her industry and ambition kept her cheerful and undaunted. She always had new ideas to try. She went to America determined to sell art objects to the backwoodsmen in Cincinnati. Often her projects were aimed toward social reform, just as some of her novels were. She joined others in founding a colony in the United States for emancipated slaves. She also planned a communistic colony for white people of the cultured class. Each was

to contribute $200 a year for community expenses. Her success in America was slight, however, because, while she was away from her colony, her male deputies tried to promote free love.

Although her exploits were fantastic and amusing, her persistence and energy are admirable. Her husband could not control her; for even when she was punished, she had too much vitality to be repentant long. Her relationship with her husband was unusual.

> Ill-matched as they were, neither could have found a better mate. Her restless brilliance would have polished to nothingness a weak man; his ferocious irritability have crushed or driven to fury a lesser woman. They had not been happy, but they had achieved more than either of them imagined.[8]

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[8] Lucy Poate Stebbins and Richard Poate Stebbins, The Trollopes, p.76.

Frances Milton Trollope was not a typical Victorian woman, for despite her charm and deep motherly instincts, she was a nonconformist. She traveled all over Europe and to the United States without her husband. She agitated for liberalism until she experienced American democracy, and then she became a Tory. Her family certainly did not lead the simple, happy home life experienced by the Queen and her Prince.

Another unusual middle-class family in Victorian England was found on Wimpole Street, for this is where Edward Barrett and his twelve children lived. His wife Mary, who had submitted to her obstinate husband, died when Elizabeth was twenty-two. Shortly after her death, slavery was abolished in England, except in the Barrett household;

Mr. Barrett completely dominated the children. All of the sons did the work that their father had planned for them. When his wife died, he dismissed sex from his own life and from the lives of his offspring. He refused even to exhibit any signs of love or tenderness or approval within the family, though he did show pride in Elizabeth's early attempts at poetry.

Elizabeth always hoped that her father loved her; she could not stop loving him, or perhaps pitying him. But he did not love her, she found; he said that he preferred her dead to disobedient. He refused his children's requests and denied them their due for no other reason than to prove his authority. During weeks of silence he would not answer their simplest questions but required their utmost subservience and attention. He was an extremely proud man and his actions were a direct rebellion against his own childhood. His father had driven his mother into refuge with her father.

Edward, whose standards had always been exacting, was repelled by his father's conduct. He even dropped his father's name, which was Moulton. Since he lived by the faulty logic of "I only want what is right, so what I want is the only right," he had no doubts that what he was doing was proper and just. His children did doubt, however, but were afraid of open rebellion; so they hid their feelings from their father and confided in each other.

Elizabeth did not divulge her plans of eloping with Robert Browning to her sisters and brothers; she knew that they would not lie to their father and she did not want them to suffer afterwards for

having known and not told. Elizabeth did not want to leave her father in that way; but she had no other choice, for he would not listen to her. After she had left, she wrote persistently, hoping he would give in and show some sign of emotion, even if it was not affection; but he sent back all of her letters, unopened. This procedure went on continually the last eleven years of his life and Elizabeth never received any satisfaction. Edward Barrett was an unusually hard and stubborn man, unique in any society. It is amazing how he could have lived so long with so much youth and life around him and not show any signs of humanity. The Barrett household was an example of the masterful father dominating to an extreme.

A quick look at two other types of women of the Victorian middle class will help complete the view of English life. Most of the diaries written in the period were, as has been noted, written by travelers. A large percentage of the remaining diaries were kept by Quakers and were, therefore, mainly introspective. One such diary was kept by Elizabeth Fry from the age of sixteen until her death.

In 1797, at sixteen, Elizabeth wrote:

> I feel by experience how much entering into the world hurts me; worldly company I think materially injures; it excites a false stimulus, such a love of pomp, pride, vanity, jealousy and ambition; it leads to think about dress and such trifles and when out of it we fly to novels and scandal or something of that kind for entertainment.[9]

At seventeen,

> I have known my faults and not corrected them and now I am determined I will once more try with redoubled ardour to overcome my wicked

> inclinations; I must not flirt; I must not ever be out of temper with the children; I must not contradict without a cause; I must not mump when my sisters are liked and I am not; I must not allow myself to be angry; I must not exaggerate which I am inclined to do. I must not give way to luxury, I must not be idle in mind, I must try to give way to every good feeling and overcome every bad.
>
> I find it easier to acknowledge my vices than my follies.
>
> I feel I am a contemptible fine lady. May I be preserved from continuing so.[9]

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[9] Arthur Ponsonby, English Diaries, p. 322.

Elizabeth was one of twelve children. At twenty, after measuring the spiritual values of marriage, she married and subsequently became the mother of eleven. She raised her children with a degree of hardness, feeling that too much care and tenderness given to a child led to weakness of character.

Elizabeth carried on a great correspondence all over the world regarding prison reforms and prison schools. As a result, she received much publicity, which she deplored, and met the Queen, which meant dinners and other functions; she even had to have her portrait painted. All the fame and success which came her way, however, did not change her devotion or her purposes. She used all opportunities, even if they in themselves were distasteful to her, to their greatest advantages in fulfilling her admirable goals. Many middle-class Victorians lived as Elizabeth Fry did; it is too bad that these people are not associated with the contemporary impression of Victorianism.

Another lady worthy of consideration is Fanny Kemble (Mrs. Butler), an actress. Her father, also an actor, was Charles Kemble. Fanny was very well educated for her time and station; she had a distinct appreciation of art and literature and could discuss them at length. After she left her husband, a Southern planter, she became a Shakespearean reader. When she was not rehearsing, she, like any respectable young Victorian, was riding, reading, singing, embroidering, sketching, or learning German. She wrote in her diary one evening: "Came home at nine, tea'd and sat embroidering till twelve o'clock, industrious little me."[10]

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[10] Ibid., p. 373.

Very religious, she was a regular church-goer.

> I heard about as thorough a cock and bull sermon as ever I hope to be edified withal. What shameful nonsense the man talked! and all the time pretending to tell us what God had done, what He was doing, and what He intended to do next, as if he went up into heaven and saw what was going on there every five minutes.[11]

It had not been very long before Fanny's generation that the actress was considered a woman of disrepute. If any such feelings existed in Fanny's surroundings, she did not seem aware of them, nor did she have any ideas coinciding with the feminist reform. She was a proper Victorian, greatly amused at the American idea of equality.

> I promised him never to waltz again except with a woman or my brother. . . . After all t'is not fitting that a man should put his arm around one's waist whether one belongs to anyone but one's self or not. 'Tis much against

> what I have always thought most sacred—the dignity of a woman in her own eyes and those of others.[11]

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[11] Ibid., p. 374.

To Fanny, her profession was a great art, often lost on the audience. She was her own most demanding critic. Because she was such a perfectionist in her standards for her work and her life, she was very influential in raising the status of the actress. She became a working woman acceptable to the strict Victorians, just as acceptable as the many who wrote to supplement the family income.

Many girls of the Victorian middle class took positions in the homes of others. One such was Alison Cunningham, the nurse of young Robert Lewis Stevenson. While the family was traveling on the continent in 1863, Cummy wrote a journal to Cashie, the nurse in the home of Mr. David Stevenson, whose daughter Bessie Stevenson was on the trip. Cummy was employed by Mr. Thomas Stevenson, a lighthouse engineer, when Robert Lewis, called Lewis, was eighteen months old. Cummy and the boy became very close during the years. Lewis was physically handicapped but extremely intelligent.

One entry in Cummy's diary, written in Dover, noted that

> I had my dinner downstairs with people I never saw before. I'd rather not take anything than go among them tonight again. I do not know a great deal of what they say, which makes me more backward. Miss Stevenson /Bessie/ and I slept in the same bedroom in London, and we have the same here.[12]

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[12] Alison Cunningham, Cummy's Diary, p. 4.

Cummy's position, then, was as the devoted and much loved family help who knew her place and was satisfied with it. We can tell more about the type of person she was and the things she was used to from other selections in her journal. She mentioned the cleanliness of the rooms in Amiens, and especially noted, for Cashie, that a man entered the bedrooms to empty the slops and thought nothing of it. She described a dinner in Paris, making a special point of the fact that she got a table napkin. At no place did she eat with the family. She knew her Bible very well and continually quoted from it; however, she was put to shame by the earnestness of the worshippers in a Parisian church. The first thing she noticed wherever she was was the clothes; her descriptions are delightful. She knew that Cashie would be interested, too.

She was a very sincere and simple person, well-suited for her position. In Marseilles she wrote:

> I thought if you had only been beside me to enjoy it with me. I make all kinds of funny mistakes with the French people. We generally end in taking a hearty laugh at each other. Mrs. Stevenson has been coughing a good deal; O, I wish it would leave her! O Cashie, woman I think I love her more than ever now when I am with her in a foreign land. Bessie is very kind and thoughtful about me. She is a nice girl, I shall not soon forget her kindness to me. Both Mr. S. and my dear bit Low are keeping very well.
>
> I am often beside you and Aggie, I mean in thought. I hope Aggie is keeping better, poor lady! It is awful to think that people in this beautiful country, and very nice people, too, are under the reign of the man of sin; the Roman Catholics seem to have the sway. O Cashie, the Lord's praying people have need to be pleading with a loving faith for the downfall of the man of sin in this country as well as in others.[13]

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[13] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

Cummy did not enjoy the meals in Marseilles; there were too many people, too many waiters; it was too grand. She finally became friendly with a housemaid who brought her tea so that she did not have to mingle with the others. But the maid was not permitted to do this for long; so Cummy had to go with the others or do without. The first Sunday they were in Marseilles, a tray was passed for the waiters. Cummy had to ask what it was for and then had nothing for them. She was most unhappy until the family found a house where she, with the help of a fifteen-year-old French girl did all but the cooking.

Cummy's diary does not tell as much of her duties as it does of her position in the family and in society. As a nurse she was probably typical. But not many nurses of her time became immortalized in verse by their wards. In 1885, when he was thirty-five, Stevenson wrote a poem to her.

To Alison Cunningham

From Her Boy

For the long nights you lay awake
And watched for my unworthy sake;
For your most comfortable hand
That led me through the uneven land;
For all the story-books you read;
For all the pains you comforted;
For all you pitied, all you bore,
In sad and happy days of yore;
My second Mother, my first Wife,
The angel of my infant life—
From the sick child, now well and old,
Take, nurse, the little book you hold!

And grant it, Heaven, that all who read
May find as dear a nurse at need,

And every child who lists my rime,
In the bright, fireside, nursery clime,
May hear it in as kind a voice
As made my childish days rejoice!

Another diary of interest was written by a maid that was not typical. Auguste Schlüter was a German girl who, at nineteen, became a servant of the Gladstone family in 1867 and waited on Mary. Auguste was intelligent, emotional, sensitive, and devoted; she was also a good judge of character. She was allowed, with chaperones, to attend the concerts, where she heard Joachim and Norman Neruda and Clara Schumann. Very well educated, she took over for the male secretaries when German letters needed translating. She met many famous people, including Tennyson, Parnell, Ruskin, Rosebery, Balfour, and Lord Cavendish, but took it all in her stride, appraising them as she saw them.

The Gladstones were understandably very fond of her. They all laughed together at family jokes because she was often treated as a member of the family. When she went with Mrs. Gladstone to the photographers, Mrs. Gladstone told the man to take a picture of "her young friend."

Auguste knew very little English when she came to the family, and it is interesting to note the progression of familiarity with the language in her diary. The slang she acquired from the two boys who visited from Eton on vacations becomes more prominent as the diary proceeds. Auguste seemed to have a reasonable amount of time to herself, much of which she spent in reading and studying.

Auguste was both upset and outspoken when Mary expressed

love for Mr. Drew, a curate; she hoped that Mary was not serious. When she found that Mary was indeed serious about Mr. Drew, the young maid spoke cruelly, reproachfully, and tearfully to him, but finally wrote and apologised, saying that she would learn to love him as Mary did. But it took a long time for Auguste to get over it. One would think that Auguste was taking liberties beyond her station, but the family did not take offense. Auguste was a respected and accepted member of the family.

Those girls in the Victorian middle class who were not fortunate enough to find positions as nurses or maids were forced to serve families as governesses. Most of the working girls from this class were governesses. Many of them were daughters of the clergy, trained for the job from youth by raising the younger siblings and teaching Sunday school. They were well-bred and humble and knew the sins of the people, because they knew all the parishioners. Other governesses came from wealthy families suddenly impoverished; others were from Army families.

By 1845 the governess was stereotyped. She had a pale and depressed look. Her employers prefered her plain to avoid involvement with the guests and members of the family. It was to her own advantage, however, if she were attractive to the children. The typical governess wore a cottage bonnet, a drape merino shawl, and threadbare gloves. She carried a neat umbrella and carpetbag.

Many parents did not care what their children were taught, just so they appeared prettily with their governess when summoned and

spoke without a provincial accent. Governesses who were qualified to teach, however, advertised for positions. Their specialties might include English, French, German, Italian, singing, music, thoroughbass, oil and water color painting, pencil and chalk drawing, needlework, dancing, and drilling. Usually, the governess was not so gifted; so she advertised merely that she had a solid English education. The least-qualified girls advertised for small children only.[14]

[14] Bea Howe, A Galaxy of Governesses, p. 115.

The situation of the governess was pathetic because she lived on the outskirts of a family, seeing all the advantages of the life, more than she had seen when she herself was a child, and yet she was denied the opportunity of having a family of her own. There was little chance of her finding a mate before her bearing days were over; so she rarely had her own home. The governess was considered above marrying the gardener or coachman, as the cook and housemaid could do; and her employers carefully guarded their sons and guests from her. Her acceptable mates were limited to the painter, the house-steward, and the curate. It must have been the source of much unhappiness for the governess to realize that her prospects for a home and family were slim, especially as she became fonder of her charges. Perhaps this is why Charlotte Brontë advised governesses not to develop affections for the children, a self-protective device.

The things heard most often about the hardships of the governess are horrid children, crude employers, impudent footmen, bad hours, and

very little pay. The pay was low because the supply of governesses was great. By 1850, there were 21,000 registered members of the despised occupation. The governess was treated like scum by the servants, like an automaton by the employers. Her salary, which she usually received only semi-annually, was often a source of money supply for her lazy male relatives, who spent it for cigars, liquor, or to pay gambling debts. Her employers felt equally guilt-free when they failed to pay her.[15]

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[15] Ibid., p. 117.

The best way to appreciate the life of the governess is to learn of the character, training, and experiences of the period's most noted governess, Charlotte Brontë.

The parsonage home life of the Reverend Mr. Brontë and family was very bleak in comparison with the usual Victorian gaudiness, however, it was typical of the middle class. The Reverend Mr. Brontë's wife died young, leaving her husband with six children. They were raised haphazardly by their Aunt Branwell, whom the children strongly disliked. The girls were taught the usual homemaking chores and lessons and became proficient in them. After their preliminary training, the girls were sent to a boarding school at Cowan Bridge. The two oldest girls went first and died there. Then Charlotte and Emily went, but they stayed only a year, leaving because of the dampness which had led to the deaths of their sisters. It was during this short time that Charlotte got much of her material for her novel Jane Eyre. She wrote from experience

of a bad school with its brutal director whom she always held responsible for her sisters' deaths, of the attitudes and conduct of various students, and of sadistic and kindly, inferior and superior teachers.

When Charlotte was nine, she became the head of the family. This resulted immediately in her arrogance and ultimately in her failure as a governess, for she could never reconcile herself to that social position. At the parsonage, Charlotte was the game mistress, too. A favorite pastime of the four children was making up stories about their brother Branwell's wooden soldiers. All of the children, Charlotte, Emily, Anne, and Branwell, began writing at an early age. For Charlotte the parsonage at Haworth was an escape from life; she was free to believe the stories they made up, and she usually chose to do so. Her dreams and imagination relieved the monotony of her life.

Charlotte was almost fifteen when she was sent to school at Roe Head to prepare herself to be a governess. For the first time she had the opportunity to live a normal life, but she was reluctant to talk about or relinquish her dream world of Haworth. She always kept it as a place of escape. She resorted to it in continual efforts to avoid the thought of the death surrounding her. After her training, Charlotte went home to write. Then she went back to Roe Head, but this time as a teacher, taking Emily with her as one of her pupils. She hated teaching because her students interfered with her reveries. When she was twenty-three, Charlotte spent three long months as a governess. She was extremely nervous and disliked both the children and the social position.

A new phase of her life started when Charlotte went to Brussels to teach in a girls' school, where she became infatuated with M. Heger, who, with his wife, directed the school. This love, which was not returned, destroyed her dream world. It was the first real thing in her life and she could not find the old security she had always clung to; everything was new and cold. She could not understand; she had always managed to work things out before. But it was too late for her ever to comprehend human relationships. Later she was courted by Mr. Nicholls, a poor curate, in a manner quite in accord with the Victorian rules. She was the picture of a lady content with the ways of her father's house who must sacrifice pleasures to marry; he was the lover who had to prove himself before he could hope for her consent. Charlotte consented with the appropriate attitude of condescension, which was, in her case, benign. Her marriage was the end of her dream world, but at least she was happier in the kitchen and sewing rooms with implements she could handle than in the nursery and school rooms with children she could not.

As an author, Charlotte felt that she must draw her serious characterization from personal experience and observation. She based all of her work on what she had seen and known. She was conscientious and humble in her work, taking all praise or censure as instruction and nothing else. From Charlotte's own letters can be learned her first experiences as a governess. She wrote to Emily:

> I have striven hard to be pleased with my new situation. The country, the house, and the grounds are, as I have said, divine; but, alack-a-day!

there is such a thing as seeing all beautiful around you—pleasant woods, white paths, green lawns, and blue sunshiny sky—and not having a free moment or a free thought left to enjoy them. The children are constantly with me. As for correcting them, I quickly found that was out of the question; they are to do as they like. A complaint to the mother only brings black looks on myself, and unjust, partial excuses to screen the children. I have tried that plan once, and succeeded so notably, I shall try no more. I said in my last letter that Mrs. —— did not know me. I now begin to find she does not intend to know me; that she cares nothing about me, except to contrive how the greatest quantity of labour may be got out of me; and to that end she overwhelms me with oceans of needlework; yards of chambric to hem, muslin nightcaps to make, and, above all things, dolls to dress. I do not think she likes me at all, because I can't help being shy in such an entirely novel scene, surrounded, as I have hitherto been, by strange and constantly changing faces. . . . I used to think I should like to be in the stir of grand folks' society; but I have had enough of it—it is dreary work to look on and listen. I see more clearly than I have ever done before that a private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living rational being, except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil. . . .[16]

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[16] Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, pp. 131-132.

To a friend Charlotte wrote:

As it is, I will only ask you to imagine the miseries of a reserved wretch like me, thrown at once into the midst of a large family, at a time when they were particularly gay—when the house was filled with company—all strangers—people whose faces I had never seen before. In this state I had charge given me of a set of pampered, spoilt, turbulent children, whom I was expected constantly to amuse, as well as to instruct. I soon found that the constant demand on my stock of animal spirits reduced them to the lowest state of exhaustion; at times I felt—and, I suppose, seemed—

> depressed. To my astonishment, I was taken to task on the subject by Mrs. —— with a sternness of manner and a harshness of language scarcely credible; like a fool, I cried most bitterly. I could not help it; my spirits quite failed me at first. I thought I had done my best—strained every nerve to please her, and to be treated in that way, merely because I was shy and sometimes melancholy, was too bad. At first I was for giving up all and going home. But, after a little reflection, I determined to summon what energy I had, and to weather the storm. I said to myself, "I have never yet quitted a place without gaining a friend; adversity is a good school; the poor are born to labour, and the dependent to endure." I resolved to be patient, to command my feelings, and to take what came; the ordeal, I reflected, would not last many weeks, and I trusted it would do me good. I recollected the fable of the willow and the oak; I bent quietly, and now, I trust, the storm is blowing over me. Mrs. —— is generally considered an agreeable woman; so she is, I doubt not, in general society. She behaves somewhat more civilly to me now than she did at first, and the children are a little more manageable; but she does not know my character, and she does not wish to know it. I have never had five minutes' conversation with her since I came, except while she was scolding me.[17]

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[17] Ibid., pp. 132-133.

Charlotte admitted, however, that even though the life of a governess was hard, nearly impossible, past endurance at times, she knew none who really regretted the experience or who had not profited by it. She herself was badly suited for the job because she was extremely sensitive. She was not qualified to teach well-bred children, because she did not know French or music, nor had she had the social training herself, having been reared in a North Country parsonage. She could teach only young children, those of the rich manufacturing families

in the North where her profession was especially scorned, since most of the girls there worked in the factories.

About eight months after Jane Eyre had been published, and successfully received, she got a letter from a Mr. William Smith Williams asking if Charlotte thought that he should send his two daughters out as governesses. Her reply was mature and honest, much different from her younger appraisals of the job. She told of one essential quality that she herself lacked, having an innate fondness and sympathy for children that enables a person to stimulate and influence young minds. Without this, she said, teaching is a constant struggle and is a waste of that same struggle. She did not believe in higher education for governesses, because she thought that they were paid too little as it was for what they knew, most of which never reached their charges anyway. She warned girls not to forego health for more studies for more money. A governess should, no, must be healthy, strong, cheerful, with fortitude and high, strong standards. Generally, she thought it better to be overworked and underpaid as a teacher than to sit at home and do nothing.

Emily's experiences as a governess were much different from Charlotte's. She endured greater hardships and duties and hours and appeared the stronger and healthier for it. It was easier for her to undergo the rigorous treatment of a stern superior than the ridiculous orders of a silly mother. She was not a meek and shy governess, but demanded, and got, constant obedience. A popular and attractive teacher, she did not care what people thought of her. All of her qualities

made her a good governess for impressionable children.

Anne Brontë was the best governess of the three sisters. She was the prettiest, the most tolerant, and the most successful. She made permanent friends of two of the girls she taught. Neither Anne nor Emily were sensitive as Charlotte was.

The three sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë, published poems and novels under the pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Perhaps they wanted to keep sacred their world at Haworth; maybe they were afraid of failure; it could have been that they knew that works by women were not as likely to sell as those by men; or else they realized the importance of the unknown. Whatever their reason or reasons, their identity was not kept secret long.

To a large degree, it was the writings of girls such as the Brontës, who had been governesses, that did the most to raise the role of the governess to a respectable position. Such authors usually depicted their heroines as being intelligent, clever, and independent. The reform measures started with the formation of the Governesses' Benevolent Association, 1841, which began to raise money and give the cause publicity in magazines such as Punch and the Quarterly.

> For the temporary relief of governesses a fund was raised to help women out of work. A home opened in 1846 at 66 Harley Street, in London, with accommodation for twenty-five women during their unemployment, was sufficiently spacious for the ground floor to be used as a registry office without expense to those enrolled. The same building held a bank, where they could invest their money in Government securities in their own names, the society taking all the responsibility, and with another department reserved for small savings.

> Assistance was also planned for women too old to work; annuities were to be raised, and an asylum built for those helpless, aged workers.[18]

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[18] Wanda Neff, Victorian Working Women, p. 176.

The organization instituted other reforms, too.

> The most remarkable and enduring project, however, was that of a college which should make it practicable, in time, for all governesses to be required to have a certificate guaranteeing the proper qualifications for their work. A house was taken in Harley Street adjacent to the governesses' home, with the permission of Queen Victoria called Queen's College, and formally opened in 1847. With the humour which relieves so much of the barrenness of historical fact, the date of the opening of this humble school for governesses is now given as the beginning of college education for women. Although Queen's and Bedford College, founded in 1848, in their beginnings were only secondary schools with a cumbersome and ineffectual lecture system, they manifested an altogether new consciousness of the importance of intellectual training for women.[19]

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[19] Ibid., p. 177.

The College, however, did not meet with success in its first venture.

> The criticism of the College as a training school for governesses was very intelligent. In the first place, girls were admitted too young. . . . Then, the professors did not examine the pupils on the lectures, so that the results were superficial. Much of the teaching was not suited to governesses. The College itself, with its connection with the Governesses' Benevolent Association, had a dual purpose, which in its early stages was considered difficult to execute. The professors, self-constituted and self-elected, under no superior authority, were not amenable to any definite policy.[20]

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[20] Ibid., p. 178.

The school, however, was a step for other organizations to follow, and schools did grow up which offered useful courses for governesses, including practice teaching. The opposition still felt that moral education for governesses was more important than literary; to them an examination and certification in literature seemed more than useless in determining the worth of a governess. But the problems of the governess were never solved as long as she and the mother lived in such close contact, as long as the child was subject to and torn between the authority and love of both at the same time. Yet the lot of the Victorian governess was improving.

Most of the women of the Victorian middle class that have been mentioned lived by the standards of their model, Queen Victoria. Mrs. Martineau and Mrs. Trollope did not. These two worked as hard as the others of their class, but they were not doing their work within their homes. Queen Victoria devoted herself to loving and caring for her family. The middle-class women did, too. It is difficult to compare the unmarried women to Queen Victoria, however. Most of those studied can be called typical because they were adjusted to their position in society. They were not the cause of scandal or any other form of excitement. Of the women from the middle class, those whose lives did not conform to the standard, those whose lives did create interest and wonder, were the artistically talented and sensitive people. They are important, however, for an understanding of Victorian middle-class life, because they are an aspect of it which cannot be ignored. It is of relevance here to look at the feminine lives depicted by some of

the poets of the period to see if the fictional women resemble the typical or untypical Victorian middle-class woman.

Tennyson, it has been said, expressed the contemporary view of society and its problems. Sir Alfred Lyall wrote in his biography of Tennyson:

> [Tennyson's] finest poetry may undoubtedly be treated as an illustrative record of the prevailing spirit, of the temperament, and to some degree of the national character of his period.[21]

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[21] Sir Alfred Lyall, Tennyson, p. 2.

Of particular concern here is Tennyson's treatment of women and their position within society. The most admirable women of his poems are those whom he knew personally rather than those he created in his mind.

One such woman was the Queen herself. The most obvious poem about her is his dedication "To the Queen," published in the seventh edition of Poems, 1851, the year that he was presented to Queen Victoria as Poet Laureate. Tennyson and the Queen were friends and admirers, keeping up a relatively active correspondence the last twenty years of the poet's life. She made him a peer in 1883 in recognition of his services to literature and to the world. He wrote many poems for her, as requested or on impulse, for public events or as gifts for personal occasions. The poem in question is one of grace and dignity, a combination of advice and respect. It honored her as "Mother, Wife, and Queen," the order being significant of Tennyson's idea of the purpose of women. The poem is not cheap flattery, but sincere commendation, clearly indicating the Queen's ability to combine her duties efficiently.

Tennyson told of her pure and serene life at court, indicating her lack of concern for the aristocracy and her love of simplicity as opposed to display. The tone of Tennyson's poem is reminiscent of his letters to the Queen which close, for the most part, with "Your most affectionate and loyal servant," polite, dutiful, but still sincere. This poem is one of Tennyson's finest tributes to women.

Tennyson also permitted the influence of his mother to enter his poetry. One poem, "Isabel," was exclusively drawn from her image. Mrs. Tennyson was a beautiful and beloved woman who bore her twelve children in a home filled with gentle care and simple piety. Tennyson has kept such a memory of her in "Isabel," because the poem describes her as being the perfect wife, forever calm and assured, wise and strong, faithful and devoted. The critics agree that Tennyson was referring to his mother again as the model the Princess Ida unconsciously was trying to emulate, for in defining herself before the Prince who desired to marry her, she described a woman she loved and considered a perfect wife.

> Yet was there one thro' whom I loved her, one
> Not learned, save in gracious household ways,
> Not perfect, nay, but full of tender wants,
> No Angel, but a dearer being, all dipt
> In Angel instincts, breathing Paradise,
> Interpreter between the Gods and men,
> Who look'd all native to her place, and yet
> On tiptoe seem'd to touch upon a sphere
> Too gross to tread, and all male minds perforce
> Sway'd to her from their orbits as they moved,
> And girdled her with music. Happy he
> With such a mother!

Tennyson was obviously extremely satisfied with his mother. The passage above is consistent with the presentation of the previous poem, the resulting picture of Tennyson's mother being a combination of the human and the divine.

There has been much controversy as to the type and amount of influence Lady Tennyson had on her husband's poetry. We cannot tell from firsthand sources because most of their correspondence was destroyed before it was recorded. It is known that he met Emily Sellwood through Arthur Hallam when Tennyson was twenty-one. It is also known that their second meeting was at the wedding of her younger sister, Louisa, to the brother of Tennyson's clergyman. On this occasion Tennyson wrote:

> O bridesmaid, ere the happy knot was tied,
> Thine eyes so wept that they could hardly see;
> Thy sister smiled and said, "No tears for me!
> A happy bridesmaid makes a happy bride."
> And then, the couple standing side by side,
> Love lighted down between them full of glee,
> And over his left shoulder laugh'd at thee,
> "O happy bridesmaid, make a happy bride."
> And all at once a pleasant truth I learn'd,
> For while the tender service made thee weep,
> I loved thee for the tear thou couldst not hide,
> And prest thy hand, and knew the press return'd,
> And thought, "My life is sick of single sleep:
> O happy bridesmaid, make a happy bride!"
>
> ("The Bridesmaid")

At this time, Tennyson was twenty-seven; Emily, Twenty-four.

According to the standard of the day, marriage was not considered until the groom was financially settled, but it is known in practice that many young men married for the purpose of becoming financially settled. Tennyson, however, approved of the Victorian standards and insisted on living by them. As soon as Tennyson was promised a year's royalty on In Memoriam and some of his other poems, he renewed his love vows with Emily and they were married immediately, before the cake and wedding dresses came, twenty years after they first met.

Tennyson was apparently devoted to his illness-prone wife,

both in private and public life, for his friends noticed that his happiness increased after his marriage as did the intensity of his love poems. When Elizabeth Barrett Browning met her, she doubted that Mrs. Tennyson could be the critical but encouraging companion the poet needed, and considered her merely another of his admirers. Tennyson himself, however, showed evidence of complete devotion and trust, seeming to find spiritual inspiration from their marriage. The day following the wedding, he sent to the vicar of Shiplake, who had performed the ceremony, the following lines:

> Vicar of this pleasant spot
> Where it was my chance to marry,
> Happy, happy be your lot
> In the Vicarage by the quarry.
> You were he that knit the knot!
> Sweetly, smoothly flow your life.
> Never tithe unpaid perplex you,
> Parish feud, or party strife,
> All things please you, nothing vex you,
> You have given me such a wife.[22]

[22] Raymond Macdonald Alden, Alfred Tennyson, How to Know Him, p. 20.

In later years, one of his poems to her was:

> Dear, near and true—no truer Time himself
> Can prove you, tho' he make you evermore
> Dearer and nearer, as the rapid of life
> Shoots to the fall—take this and pray that he
> Who wrote it, honouring your sweet faith in him[23]

[23] Philip Guedalla, Bonnet and Shawl, p. 140.

The theme of the poem was devotion, the remaining eight lines referring to himself as the object of her devotion. He was an absorbing person

and she was willing to be absorbed. Although he did not sacrifice as she did, he remained faithful and appreciative. At eighty, he dedicated his last volume

> to you,
> This and my love together,
> To you that are seventy-seven,
> With a faith as clear as the heights of the June-blue heaven,
> As the green of the bracken amid the gloom of the heather.[24]

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[24] Ibid., p. 140.

When he became laureate, she helped him correct proofs; he valued her judgment and intellect. She was always in the background, never asserting herself, always the perfect Victorian lady. She collaborated on some of his poems, adding verses to some, setting others to music. Always his private secretary, Emily answered letters from friends, admirers, and hopeful and hopeless poets. She also kept accurate records of visitors, poems written, poems planned, stray ideas of the poet, and the poet's very words. As his charming hostess, adored by all the servants, she entertained the vast range of visitors from all ranks and all countries. Emily, in an age of goodness, shone as perfection. Very religious, she told Tennyson that she could see God's smiling face when she prayed. All in all, it seems that Mrs. Browning was mistaken when she called Emily an inadequate partner for Tennyson. Tennyson's marriage was a happy one, approaching, if not achieving, the ideal state that he described in several of his poems.

This leads to Tennyson's depiction of the family unit and its place in Victorian England.

> Perhaps no writer has ever given to the world pictures of English home and country life more original and beautiful in form than those given by Tennyson in such poems as "The Gardener's Daughter," "Dora," "Audley Court," "The Talking Oak," "Locksley Hall," "Godiva," "Lady Clare," "The Lord of Burleigh," and several others. He believed and taught that the stability and greatness of a nation depend largely upon the home life of the people. He had true joy in the family duties and affections. It is only the simple truth to say, as his son has said, that this was one of the secrets of his power over mankind.[25]

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[25] William Clark Gordon, The Social Ideals of Alfred Tennyson, as Related to His Time, pp. 98-99.

The home life of the people depended largely on the mother; her love ruled the family. Of all the spiritual forces influencing Tennyson, love was the greatest. The role of the mother, then, was as he described in The Princess, the loving and gentle matron. But Tennyson was more specific in other poems. He felt that she belonged at home with her children. The woman was to be a partner in marriage, for each member's purpose was to draw out the best qualities of the other, resulting in an endless growth of interest and love. The partnership was never to become a proprietorship; each was to keep his individuality while continuing to improve the relationship. "The Miller's Daughter" is an example of Tennyson's attitude toward marriage as the binding of souls. And, as he wrote in "Aylmer's Field," "marriages are made in Heaven," and this must be done before a true earthly marriage can be consummated.

> When that has been wrought, the husband, understanding the sacredness and full significance of the relationship upon which he has entered, can say to his chosen:

In the name of wife,
And in the rights that name may give,
Are clasped the moral of the life,
And that for which I care to live
("The Day Dream, L'Envoi")

This does not mean the subjection of one to the other. There is no slavery, but the complete life for each. The lover declares to the Princess:

my hopes and thine are one;
Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself.

Even to the Lotus-Eaters, the memory of wedded life was dear. Love increased in purity and strength with the years. In later life the husband thought of the one whom he had known most intimately in the sacred relation of the family as

the idol of my youth,
The darling of my manhood, and alas!
Now the most blessed memory of mine age.
("The Gardener's Daughter")[26]

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[26] Ibid., pp. 88-90.

Tennyson referred to his wife in a letter to the Queen as the dearest and closest part of himself; so apparently he did achieve to some degree the completion of self that he felt to be essential in a perfect marriage and family.

In some of his poems, Tennyson treated the middle-class life. "The Miller's Daughter" is a picture of a happy, complete marriage. As an old man, the husband reminisces over his courtship of and many happy years with his Alice. Because they are life to each other, he hopes that they can die together. This poem is another example of the consciousness of class distinction, because the boy's mother, whose deceased husband was a squire, wished that the boy would aim higher

for a wife, but she accepted and loved his choice. Again Tennyson proposed the ideals of Victorian England, that it was quite noble for a youth to stoop from his class for a wife, and, correspondingly, it was a great accomplishment for a girl to marry into society.

Another picture of middle-class life is found in "Enoch Arden." Tennyson's handling of the situation is very tender and sympathetic. It is a situation that could have happened again and again in middle-class life. The three fishing village children were good, honest people who had to make the best of their positions. Annie Lee grew up to marry the stronger and bolder boy, Enoch Arden. Philip Ray, who had always loved Annie too, understood. Annie was a good, loving wife who bore Enoch three children. Enoch was an equally good husband and father who worked especially hard to provide for his family. But they were the victims of fate. Tennyson made it quite clear that none of them was responsible for the tragedy. Philip was not improper when he proposed to Annie after Enoch had been lost at sea for ten years, especially since he, as a friend of Enoch's, had been helping Annie educate her children. Annie was not wrong in marrying him; her children deserved a father. And it certainly was not unnatural for Enoch to feel that he had to take the job on the ship for China. He saw that his baby was dying and he could not afford to take care of him unless he took the job. He was extraordinarily considerate of Annie when he did get home. He did not want her to know that he had found his way home to her, but he did understand that she needed to know when and if he had died. Tennyson's story is tragic, but it is typical of the fortunes

of those who must depend on their own industry for a living.

A third example of the course of middle-class life is seen in "Sea Dreams." The role of the wife is pictured here. She was the orphaned child of an unknown artist; her husband was an office clerk. They forfeited a month's meager wages to take their three-year-old daughter to the shore to restore her health. Her husband was tricked into giving his money to a man for shares in a Peruvian mine. She tried to comfort him, then get him to tell her about it, and finally convince him that he should forgive and love as a Christian. She knew that the swindler had died of a heart attack, but she wanted her husband to exhibit compassion before he found out that the man was dead. She was concerned more about her husband's mental and spiritual well-being than she was about the money. She was an ideal helpmate for any class and any time.

Tennyson was a staunch believer in the necessity of the combination of love with marriage. He saw no real happiness with either one if it was without the other. In this instance, he did not agree with the middle-class practice of marriage for convenience and economics. An interesting human interest angle in the middle-class standards and motives is expressed in Tennyson's shorter poem "The Sisters." The older, fairer sister was seduced by a handsome earl and died in shame. The younger, plainer sister tempted him, loved him, and then killed him in his sleep the same night. She said that her motive was revenge, but actually it was jealousy over the initial love between the handsome couple. No doubt there were many instances similar to this in the

reality of middle-class life, many instances of jealousy among sisters, just as there are today. As usual, Tennyson did not preach or even comment; he merely narrated.

In "Dora," "Locksley Hall," and "Northern Farmer—New Style," there are three different aspects of the results of a domineering father who made the wedding plans for his children. In "Dora" the father suggested to his son William that he marry his cousin Dora whom he had grown up with. Expecting no argument, the father was shocked when William refused. He said that no one would dare defy the father when he was a boy and he did not intend to have that tradition altered. His word was law in the house and if the boy would not marry Dora, he would have to leave. William did leave, and soon after, he married a laborer's daughter to prove his rights. The stubborn old man forbade Dora to speak to the son and his new family under punishment of being forced out of the house, too. Dora was a milktoast character, a Pollyanna without emotions or personality. She loved William, she thought, but did not mind his refusing her. In fact, she helped him and his family because she blamed the whole situation on herself, on her very presence in her uncle's house. She is totally unbelievable. She took insult from all sides and smiled and apologized. It is almost too painful to tell more of the sorrows of the family and the pathos of their reunion. The importance of the poem here is its representation of the law-giving father. For sentimental reasons, he wanted his son to marry his first cousin.

In "Locksley Hall," Amy's father chose her husband for social

reasons, and the girl obeyed. She rejected her love and deserted her lover. The bitter young man resented her decision but did not really blame her; rather he cursed the society which thwarted the reality of youth. Like a true martyr, he told his love, rhetorically, to remember her duties as a faithful wife, to live the farce she could not believe in, and to warn her daughters against the dangers from which she herself had not been exempt. Tennyson was not sympathetic with tyrannical fathers who denied their children the natural love and marriage that should have been their due. At the same time, however, he could not help admiring the masterful fathers and husbands such as Geraint.

"Proputty" was the cry of the "Northern Farmer—New Style." That is what he told his son to marry for. Social position was worthless without property, and a gentleman's daughter only had a name and good manners to offer. "Doänt thou marry for munny, but goä whoer munny is!" he told Sammy.

> Luvv? what's luvv? thou can luvv thy lass an' 'er munny too,
> Maakin' 'em goä together as they've good right to do.
> Couldn I luvv thy muther by cause o' 'er munny laäid by?
> Nafty—fur I luvv'd 'er a vast sight moor fur it: reäson why.

The farmer placed property over society, a real practical choice that could come only from a man who had to work for a living. Tennyson knew and appreciated all of the attitudes of contemporary English society regarding the father's right and wisdom in selecting his children's mates.

It would seem that Tennyson deserved to be called a poet who represented life in Victorian England, since he remained true to the conventions. His picture of each aspect of society seems balanced

with the proper amounts of the ideal and the exception. He tended to prefer the ideal, for he did not advocate many changes. To be fair, he presented the various diversions from the norm, but only in limited quantities. It seems that it was from Tennyson that the best contemporary picture of 19th century life is derived, since Tennyson was the typical Victorian man of the typical Victorian household and he immortalized the life through his poetry.

Coventry Patmore was another poet of the Victorian Age who wrote of the middle-class lives and loves. Like Tennyson's, his personal acquaintances affected his style and subject matter. Patmore's priggishness is said to be a reaction against his mother's sternness; she had little concern for her son's and husband's literary pursuits. Her impatience and coldness with the children may have caused Coventry's craving for love (he married three times), and his religious attitude. By his nature, however, he probably would still have exploited all the happiness and holiness of marriage. Nevertheless, his mother's attitude probably prompted the development of his philosophy of love and his opinions as to the abilities and duties of husband and wife.

One of the first emotional influences to cause a lasting effect happened when Coventry was sixteen. He fell in love with the eighteen-year-old daughter of Mrs. Charles Gore, a novelist and friend of his father's. The girl did not think that the boy was serious and married soon after. Patmore regarded the impression as "the most precious of the intuitions into truth"[27] that he experienced as a youth.

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[27] J. C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p. 19.

It resulted in his first two long poems, "The River," and "The Woodman's Daughter," both involving rejection, frustration, and disillusioned love, the very subjects and treatment that caused the young pre-Raphaelites to choose him as their representative poet. The year after Patmore wrote these poems, he completed his 1844 volume by adding "Lilian," "Sir Hubert," and some sonnets to prove that he was not going to brood over lost love, but was prepared to love again. This was the first evidence of his philolophy of love and marriage.

His first marriage influenced his philosophy more than any other experience. Before this time, he had not specialized in any particular subject matter, but he became the poet of nuptial love after his marriage to Emily Augusta Andrews in 1847. Their life was filled with harmony and tenderness. His wife had a deep religious faith, a strong personality, and the priceless ability to show her love for her husband and children. She was the direct inspiration for Patmore's The Angel in the House, although the story was not autobiographical. She combined beauty with good sense. She could draw out the good qualities in her husband, confirming his former belief in marriage as a sacrament, since she encouraged his art as well as his love.

In several places within Patmore's poetry there is evidence of Emily's direct influence. In only one instance, however, was she described:

> her Norman face:
> Her large sweet eyes, clear lakes of love.
> (The Angel in the House, I,4)

After Emily's death, Patmore wrote two poems in her memory. One was "Departure," in which he described her last moments rather bluntly.

It was not like your great and gracious ways
. . . . . .
with huddled unintelligible phrase
and frightened eye,
and go your journey of all days
with not one kiss or a goodbye,
and the only loveless look the look with which you passed.

The second poem was "The Azalea," in which his treatment was more delicate than it was in "Departure." In this poem he dreamed for a while that his wife was alive; however, he proceded to describe the scene in which the hero, a poet, took his betrothed to the grave of his former wife.

Emily's influence is more obvious in "Amelia," written fifteen years after her death, not only from the title, but also from the lines:

How changed, in shape no slender Grace,
But Venus, milder than the dove;

Emily almost died in 1860 and wrote a will at that time which Patmore found to included these bequests:

> "I leave my wedding-ring to your second wife with my love and blessing . . . also, I leave you my grateful acknowledgment of your goodness and love to me, my last prayer that God may bless and console you, my first, last, and only love. If in a year or two, you are able to marry again, do so happily, feeling that if my spirit can watch you, it will love her who makes you happy, and not envy her the reward of a part of your love, the best years of which I had."[28]

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[28] Basil Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore, vol. 1, p. 133, as quoted by J. C. Reid, p. 23.

Patmore used his wife's sentiments, if not her exact words, in Victories of Love, the sections of Jane's letters to Frederick.

> The only bond I hold you to
> Is that which nothing can undo.
> A man is not a young man twice;
> And if, of his young years, he lies
> A faithful score in one wife's breast,
> She need not mind who has the rest.
> In this do what you will, dear Love,
> And feel quite sure that I approve.
> And should it chance as it may be,
> Give her my wedding-ring from me;
> And never dream that you can err
> T'wards me by being good to her;

Coventry did marry again—two times. He married Marianne Caroline Byles in 1864, and Harriet Robson in 1881. He loved them both; each fulfilled a different role for him, but Emily was always the standard of womanliness and wifehood.

Patmore's philosophy of love was an attempt to reconcile physical love with religion. He found a clash between desire and the ideal which he eventually resolved, at least for his own satisfaction; he received much adverse criticism concerning his subject matter. He wanted to define the purpose and significance of the right kind of love for a woman, but he felt the pressure of the unending battle to control and synthesize.

> From this point of view The Unknown Eros is one result of Patmore's attempt to fuse his sensuality with his religion, or rather to pass beyond the sensual impulse to the transfiguration of that impulse, to reconcile the natural with the supernatural.[29]

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[29] Reid, p. 33.

During his later life, when his philosophy was fully developed, he was influenced by another member of his family, this time by his

eldest daughter, Emily Honoria, who entered a convent of a teaching order and became a Sister. Patmore relied on her advice, sending his verses to her for her opinions and reactions; she thoroughly understood his poetry. While Patmore was trying to unite with God as woman does to man, he found a new meaning for dedicated virginity, such as that of his daughter. He decided that it was equal to, if not higher than and more virtuous than, married love. Married love he described as the fulfillment of passion, for he distinguished between love and passion. Love had forms and laws to be obeyed; passion was formless, boundless, restless. To join God, as his daughter did, without the experience of physical love Patmore considered a great achievement.

Patmore strongly believed that complete fulfillment and perfection were impossible with one, but could be achieved only through the union of two. He thought, as Thomas Aquinas did, that both man and woman are a potentially complete humanity within themselves, but a distinction was made between them by God so that each would realize his incompleteness. God alone could bring this realization to fruition; it could be achieved only through Him since He made them both. The desire for and realization of completeness was, therefore, an act of self-love as well as unselfish love. The act of completion of self was, in Patmore's philosophy, the union of man with God. Patmore believed that God desires the soul of man as man desires woman.

This analogy involves a relationship between unequals. This was part of the distinction that God created so that man might realize his incompleteness; and therefore it was important for Patmore that each

maintain his proper place, be it the manly or womanly, in their relations. As a result, he felt that emancipated women had forfeited their Christian heritage and faith. A woman true to her nature is the only mirror for man to see his reflected, fulfilled nature. A woman untrue to her nature is a trap, Patmore maintained. He was often criticized for subjecting the woman to the man, saying that her only salvation was through her husband. And yet Patmore's portrayals of women are realistic. His treatment of them was as an understanding husband who demanded no rights. In fact, his poetry shows an attitude of respect for and subordination to women, honoring them in the sincere Victorian fashion. Both the male and the female, he felt, realized the true situation, for in his prose essays, he proposed the real subservience of women.

> In them he never tires of scoffing at the view of woman as man's equal, though similar. She is the "weaker vessel," "the last and lowest of all spiritual creatures," made to be ruled and strictly ruled: "No right-minded woman would care a straw for her lover's adoration if she did not know that he knew that after all he was the true divinity"—with much more to the same effect.[30]

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[30] Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Studies in Literature, Third Series, p. 134.

Some of Patmore's poems, such as "King Cophetua the First," indicate a consistency with this attitude. Jove, bored with "Juno's almost equal mind," descends

> On low and little earth to seek
> That vessel infinitely weak
> (The abler for the infinite honour
> He hugely long'd to put upon her).

The distinction between the sexes Patmore carried even further;

he felt that women had a greater capacity for affection than men did and that men were correspondingly more endowed with understanding than were their mates.

> Because of this richness of affections, and because of her greater sensitivity to the value of human feeling, woman is a constant reminder to man of those mysteries of love and being which lie beyond the scope of reason . . . which man is otherwise likely to ignore since they are not discoverable by the reason alone. She reveals to man new depths within himself, and enables him to complete himself as his understanding enables her to complete herself. As his spiritual witness and conscience, woman conveys to him an awareness of divinity which he realizes in this life in love, the love of marriage in particular.[31]

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[31] Reid, p. 141.

Corresponding to this attitude toward women is Patmore's description of her purpose.

> Her face
> Is the summ'd sweetness of the earth,
> Her soul the glass of heaven's grace,
> To which she leads me by the hand;
> Or, briefly all the truth to say
> So you, who briefly understand,
> She is both heaven and the way.
> (The Angel in the House, II, ix)

Marriage, then, was the only way to achieve happiness, Patmore thought. His idea of true marriage was that it was the precursor of divine union between God and the soul; therefore the earthly union could not be complete perfection because this was reserved for the heavenly conjunction rehearsed for. Separation he approved of if the imperfection was too pronounced, but he would not condone divorce. Patmore's marriage ideal was not based on Victorian sentimentality, but was an art involving

mutual respect and admiration for the spiritual and emotional capabilities of both partners. There was no place for either to take the other for granted; rather both were to cultivate tenderness. He saw marriage in the realities of family life common to all ages, not in the socially established Victorian standards of domesticity. It was not until The Unknown Eros, however, in which he clearly indicated his attitude toward sex and its importance in the relation to marriage, that the middle class whom he was describing transferred its loyalty to Tennyson.

His subject of wedded sex life was considered a ridiculous subject by many, but was thought of as divine by Patmore. He felt that pure sex was the best manifestation of God's love that both God and the creative poet were able to recognize. As a result, man's attitude toward love was to be the golden mean of awe and respect, never reaching the excesses of abstinence or familiarity. "Abstinence" must be qualified, because Patmore had no use for purity which resulted from fear, but honored that which resulted from love. The exercising of self-control over passion and will in marriage would result in the happiest, most peaceful state that man could reach, thought Patmore. When his philosophy was questioned, Patmore said that love between man and woman was either representative of the animals or symbolic of God; and since it received the blessing of a religious sacrament, he preferred to conceive of man as Godlike.

Patmore's method of presentation varied, appearing in its lightest and most popular form in The Angel in the House, the Angel being not a woman, but love. He was laughed at for bringing love to Salisbury

Cathedral, but at the same time he was gaining popularity; because the passions he described were associated with the daughters of an Anglican dean, they became respectable and proper. He pictured the young man and woman both as pursuers before and after the wedding, both trying to fulfill their spiritual and physical selves. By the books, it was the man alone who was supposed to pursue, but more often than not, in Victorian England and in 20th century America,:

> Without his knowledge he was won;
> Against his nature kept devout;
> She'll never tell him how 'twas done,
> And he will never find it out,
> If, sudden, he suspects her wiles,
> And hears her forging chain and trap,
> And looks, she sits in simple smiles,
> Her two hands lying in her lap.
> (The Angel in the House, II, viii)

As to Patmore's opinion of the social position of women, he would not condone divorce, nor did he think that social independence was according to their nature. He definitely put a damper on the feminist movement by glorifying the importance of wife and motherhood. He valued education for women, both married and unmarried, however. He understood that educated wives would be better friends and companions to their husbands as well as better mothers. He found purity in all who repented; to him the only sin was the unrepented one. Therefore, he had a place in his philosophy for the fallen and betrayed women so sentimentalized by the Victorian writers.

Patmore did not exhibit the sentimental and romantic qualities abounding in his contemporaries, such as Tennyson. Yet it seems hardly fair to compare the two poets. Tennyson was strictly a poet; Patmore

was a philosopher. Patmore's ideas might have been further crystalized through his rebellion against the sweetness and banality of Victorian middle-class life depicted by Tennyson. Patmore never thought of love as common, but treated each individual experience as a unique and complete event, regardless of its partakers. He had no good words for a father who prescribed his children's marriages on the basis of social position, economics, or just plain dogmatism. It would be hard to define the line between the perfect marriages proposed by the two poets. Both believed in a partnership in which each party took care of his own responsibilities and no more, and in which the husband was superior. From what has been learned, Tennyson's mother was probably very similar to Emily Patmore, and so the conceptions the two men had for the maternal position were not unlike. Neither poet considered any form of human activity too insignificant to write about. In actual form it would seem that the men differed very little in their attitudes toward women; both desired to keep them in the homes. It is, however, their reasons which separate them; Tennyson's were traditional and Patmore's were religious. That is, Tennyson had no reason other than his own partiality, which does not discredit it, for treating women as he did; but Patmore arrived at his treatment through a systematic philosophy. Both men supported the same way of life, the life led by the majority of middle-class people like the Tennysons before they received social distinction, and the Patmores.

Some of the individual poems of the period define more specifically the problems and situations of middle-class life for the young Victorian girl. The time for a change had come and some of the poets

recognized it. The idle women of the middle class needed to do something. For this reason, and others, education was promoted; teaching was an occupation that was becoming respectable. Many thought that women should take any employment that would require their energy as well as their time. One of the poets who expressed the new point of view was Arthur Hugh Clough.

> But ye, ye spurious ware, who
> Might be plain women, and can be by no possibility better!
> Ye unhappy statuettes and miserable trinkets,
> Poor alabaster chimney-piece ornaments under glass cases,
> Come, in God's name, come down! the very French clock by you
> Puts you to shame with ticking; the fire-irons deride you.
> You, young girl, who have had such advantages, learnt so quickly,
> Can you not teach? O yes, and she likes Sunday school extremely,
> Only it's soon in the morning. Away! if to teach be your calling,
> It is no play, but a business: off! go teach and be paid for it.
> Lady Sophia's so good to the sick, so firm and so gentle.
> Is there a nobler sphere than of hospital nurse and matron?
> Hast thou for cooking a turn, little Lady Clarissa? in with them,
> In with your fingers! their beauty it spoils, but your own it enhances,
> For it is beautiful only to do the thing we are meant for.
> ("The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich")

In the same poem Clough wrote, "Labour, and labour alone can add to the beauty of women." Clough and his school, although less remembered than Tennyson and those who advocated the Victorian standard of early days, were the contemporary modern poets, the angry young men, because they did not observe the cultural lag. They recognized the changes of the surrounding situation and tried to mature with it.

A second poem important for this study is Aurora Leigh, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Mrs. Browning's story, in nine books, is of contemporary Victorian life.

> Aurora Leigh (1857) was regarded by many of its day as at once the very apotheosis of woman's love and a tract establishing forever woman's equality and true partnership with man in marriage. It

> is a tedious and long-drawn-out and portentously sentimental tale. There is characterization in it, it is true, that of Miss Leigh, Aurora's aunt, a type of Englishwoman . . . And an unsufferably arrogant man, Romney Leigh, Aurora's cousin, is finally brought to heel by a nobly suffering woman. It is all of it the very essence of sentimental Mid-Victorianism. Mrs. Browning is, indeed, responsible for a good deal of the feeling aroused among the impatient of today against the unoffending time, fast growing into picturesqueness now that the twentieth century is well into its second quarter. The quality of Aurora Leigh is of a sort that can exist only among those that are protected from the realities of life by the strong souls who are not afraid to accept things as they are.[31]

[31] Cornelius Weygandt, The Time of Tennyson, pp. 155-156.

Weygandt holds Mrs. Browning responsible to some degree for the contemporary impression of Victorianism. It would seem that she shares the blame with a few other poets and countless novelists of the period who wrote with similar themes and characters. The characters are the stereotypes, hardly credible, that can be found in many of the contemporary novels. Romney was the self-styled martyr who was going to sacrifice himself by marrying the girl from the streets. Marian was the girl from the streets who was untouched by the filth that surrounded her. Lady Waldemar was a scheming aristocrat who did not know that people below her own station had the right to feelings. As for Aurora Leigh herself,

> Elizabeth Barrett Browning . . . wrapped her . . . in a
>
> large
> Man's doublet, careless did it fit or no.
>
> calling down scorn upon the liberal education of womanhood--the classical French, the German, the

> polka, the stuffed birds, the waxed flowers—let her acquire "the trick of Latin and Greek." But no more than the trick. It was upon poetry that Aurora satisfied her appetite when she found the poets, her "soul sprang up surprised." The preliminary training with the classics may, of course, have imparted elasticity to her soul, but the stress throughout the poem is laid rather on Aurora's insight into life, as an artist, than upon her intellectual expansion . . .[32]

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[32] Thomson, p. 62.

Besides the conventional liberal education established for young Victorian girls, Aurora studied to learn the position of women in society.

> I read a score of books on womanhood
> To prove, if women do not think at all,
> They may teach thinking, . . .
> —books demonstrating
> Their right of comprehending husband's talk
> When not too deep, and even of answering
> With pretty "may it please you," or "so it is,"—
> Their rapid insight and fine aptitude,
> Particular worth and general missionariness,
> As long as they keep quiet by the fire
> And never say "no" when the world says "ay,"
> For that is fatal,—their angelic reach
> Of virtue, chiefly used to sit and darn,
> And fatten household sinners,—their, in brief,
> Potential faculty in everything
> Of abdicating power in it:

She scorned this position. She was not willing to accept it for herself. To men, Aurora said about the feminine duties:

> By the way,
> The works of women are symbolical.
> We sew, sew, prick our fingers, dull our sight,
> Producing what? A pair of slippers, sir,
> To put on when you're weary—or a stool
> To stumble over and vex you . . .
> Or else at best, a cushion, where you lean
> And sleep, and dream of something we are not,
> But would be for your sake.

Aurora was speaking here, as she did in many cases, for womanhood in general, and not for herself. She rejected the life of the typical Victorian woman, choosing a career as an authoress, a professional worker, who wrote

> with one hand for the booksellers,
> While working with the other for myself,

> And yet, Mrs. Browning's heroine cannot, in justice to the species, be considered a career woman at heart. It is true that she has "clipt the curls before her eyes", but not for one moment does she cease to be self-conscious about her shorn state. She may scribble till midnight in her attic, review books, write a masterpiece and become famous, but all that makes her none the less ready to admit to Romney, whenever she is given a second chance, that
>
> Art is much, but Love is more.
> O Art, my Art, thou'rt much, but Love is more!
>
> It is difficult to feel that, by her defection, the structure of woman's employment lost one of its sturdier props.[33]

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[33] Ibid., p. 78.

Nevertheless, Aurora did her part to define Victorianism. Her attitudes about the worth of women were capitalized on by the feminists, too. She was a successful artist in competition with men; she had the proper attitude toward her critics and her public.

She was a woman, however; and as such, her opinions of others of her sex are interesting. Most of her observations were on women in general; some were studies of individual women. One such woman was her aunt, a Victorian old maid, a proper, narrow-minded madam who protected herself from life.

> The poor club exercised her Christian gifts
> Of knitting stockings, stitching petticoats,
> Because we are of one flesh after all
> And need one flannel, (with proper sense
> Of difference in the quality)—and still
> The book-club, guarded from your modern trick
> Of shaking dangerous questions from the crease,
> Preserved her intellectual. She had lived
> A sort of cage-bird life, born in a cage,
> Accounting that to leap from perch to perch
> Was act and joy enough for any bird.

Aurora's aunt is definitely stereotyped. She never came to life; she never leaped out of her cage. She conformed to the modern conception of a Victorian woman. And because she conformed, the conception is partly Mrs. Browning's responsibility.

Of the aristocratic woman, Lady Waldemar, Aurora wrote:

> She had the low voice of your English dames,
> Unused, it seems, to need rise half a note
> To catch attention,—and their quiet mood,
> As if they lived too high above the earth
> For that to put them out in anything:
> So gentle, because verily so proud;
> So wary and afeared of hurting you,
> By no means that you are not really vile,
> But that they would not touch you with their foot
> To push you to your place; so self-possessed
> Yet gracious and conciliating, it takes
> An effort in their presence to speak truth:
> You know the sort of woman,—brilliant stuff,
> And out of nature. "Lady Waldemar."

This is a picture of the aristocrat from the vantage point of the middle class. Aurora wrote that Lady Waldemar presented an attitude of complete superiority. But she admitted that the Lady knew no better, for as Marian said:

> Ladies who
> Sit high, however willing to look down,
> Will scarce see lower than their dainty feet:

But Lady Waldemar thought that she was as human as anybody else. She tried to convince Aurora that her emotions were as close to the surface as the working girls were. She said:

> We fair ladies, . . .
> have hearts within,
> Warm, live, improvident, indecent hearts,
> As ready for distracted ends and acts
> As any distressed sempstress of them all
> That Romney groans and toils for. We catch love
> And other fevers, in the vulgar way.
> Love will not be outwitted by our wit,
> Nor outrun by our equipages:—mine
> Persisted, spite of efforts.

Lady Waldemar, however, did not really consider the fact that the sempstress and her kind had emotions. As a typical aristocratic lady, she indulged in more "poor peopling" than most, but she did it for personal gains, not through any humanitarian dedication.

Aurora also discussed women as a class. Some of her arguments or observations were no doubt used by the feminists because they pointed out women's right to themselves as individuals. For instance, when Romney asked her to marry him, she answered:

> What you love,
> Is not a woman, Romney, but a cause:
> You want a helpmate, not a mistress, sir,—
> A wife to help your ends . . in her no end!
> Your cause is noble, your ends excellent,
> But I, being most unworthy of these and that,
> Do otherwise conceive of love.

And later she said:

> You forget too much
> That every creature, female as the male,
> Stands single in responsible act and thought,
> As also in birth and death. Whoever says
> To a loyal woman, "Love and work with me,"
> Will get fair answers, if the work and love
> Being good in themselves, are good for her—the best
> She was born for.

Such answers shocked Romney. It never occurred to him that Aurora would refuse his proposal, much less that the reason would be because what he was offering did not suit her. A rebuff like Aurora's was unheard of in Victorian England. But Aurora felt that she had as much right to be happy and satisfied as Romney did. So she set love aside to develop her best self, her poetic self, but she found that she could no longer do anything alone. Society required that everything be done on a big scale. If Aurora wanted to prove something, she had to start a movement to show that the thing was plausible and possible before the thing was done. Organization had replaced individual progress. Aurora wrote:

> A woman cannot do the thing she ought,
> Which means whatever perfect thing she can,
> In life, in art, in science, but she fears
> To let the perfect action take her part
> And rest there: she must prove what she can do
> Before she does it,—prate of woman's rights,
> Of woman's mission, woman's function, till
> The men (who are prating, too, on their side) cry,
> "A woman's function plainly is . . to talk."

This is the situation that the Victorian feminists faced. Society and convention forbade them to prove their rights by action. They had to talk about them. Aurora tried to act, tried to put herself in the man's world, forgetting that she was a woman. She was successful to all outward appearances; she became the idol of many weaker women. But Aurora was not really successful.

Most of Aurora's analyses of women proved that they think in terms of their own surroundings, their own family, their own experiences, and ought not, therefore, to try to understand the world without. Aurora discovered that she was one of these women. Romney's opinion of women,

which Aurora finally had to agree with, was that women make their generalizations from their own experiences, which reach from a child's sickness to an old man standing in the cold. Each separate experience they expand into a world of woe. And yet they cannot comprehend a real world tragedy, race problems, plagues, or ignorance on a wide scale. And so he said:

> Therefore, this same world
> Uncomprehended by you, must remain
> Uninfluenced by you.—Women as you are,
> Mere women, personal and passionate,
> You give us doating mothers, and chaste wives,
> Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints!
> We get no Christ from you,—and verily
> We shall not get a poet, in my mind.

Aurora agreed that women are tied down to the immediate time and surroundings. She also understood, in the same sense, that women are concerned with how they are judged at any particular moment by one particular person, not with how their actions will influence society as a whole. They are not interested in society in general, but are dedicated to one man, usually, to one love.

> We women . . .
> strain our natures at doing something great,
> Far less because it's something great to do,
> Than, haply, that we, so, commend ourselves
> As being not small, and more appreciable
> To some one friend. We must have mediators
> Betwixt our highest conscience and the judge;
> Some sweet saint's blood must quicken in our palms,
> Or all the life in heaven seems slow and cold:
> Good only, being perceived as the end of good,
> And God alone please,—that's too poor, we think,
> And not enough for us, by any means.

Aurora agreed, then, that it is man's place to serve God, woman's to serve man. And the woman wants it that way. And how does she serve man? One

thing she does is try to protect him, to take upon herself all his troubles.

> To see a wrong or suffering moves us all
> To undo it, . . .
> —'tis our woman's trade
> To suffer torment for another's ease.
> The world's male chivalry has perished out,
> But women are knights-errant to the last,
> And, if Cervantes had been greater still,
> He had made his Don a Donna.

Another thing a woman does is soothe a dejected man. Her way of comforting him is similar to the way she comforts a child. She can reason with neither of them when their emotions are involved. After Romney realized that he had lost Marian, he automatically pulled his chair up to Aurora's and she, just as automatically, soothed him as she would a child.

> And I, instinctively, as women use
> Before a sweet friend's grief,—when, in his ear
> They hum the tune of comfort, though themselves
> Most ignorant of the special words of such,
> And quiet so and fortify his brain
> And give it time and strength for feeling out
> To reach the availing sense beyond the sound,—
> Went murmuring to him, what, if written here,
> Would seem not much, yet fetched him better help
> Than, peradventure, if it had been more.

With the tone of her voice, a woman can calm a man, or a child, and thereby help him to regain his peace of mind and his ability to reason out the situation. Her own reasoning alone would be inadequate.

Children are also left to a woman's care.

> Women know
> The way to rear up children, (to be just,)
> They know a simple, merry, tender knack
> Of tying sashes, fitting baby-shoes,
> And stringing pretty words that make no sense,
> And kissing full sense into empty words;
> . . . . . .
> Such good do mothers. Fathers love as well

—but still with heavier brains,
And wills more consciously responsible,
And not as wisely, since less foolishly;

Aurora felt that the woman's natural occupation was serving her husband and her children. Even if she had considered herself a success in the masculine world, her observations of womankind in general would still prove her an exception. Although Mrs. Browning treated women of the Victorian age specifically, she also treated them as they are universally, hence, making herself an exception to the rule that women do not know how to generalize.

Some Victorian poets described accurately the life of the middle-class woman; others merely presented their attitudes toward her. Both points of view are essential for an evaluation of the contemporary impression of the Victorian middle-class woman. Of the poets who preferred to study and thereby to comment on the woman as an individual divorced from society, Browning is the best known. Instead of dealing with the society, he dealt with women's problems that arose because of the society. His imaginative analysis saved his women from the flatness of some of Tennyson's. Browning could look beneath the superficiality of one event and imagine the effect this event would have on the entire woman. When Browning's women speak, they often betray an intellectual superiority unexpected of a Victorian woman. When his men speak, they usually suffer because they are aware of their comparative mental weakness.

In "Any Wife to Any Husband," the wife is about to die. In this state, she has a keen understanding of the love that exists between them. She realizes that a man loves for a different reason than a woman, and she

wishes it were not so. Her greatest fear is that her husband will forget her love after she dies. She imagines the argument he would put up when he began to love again. She would understand and consent, but would still wish it would not be. She knows that he would not consider loving another while she was alive; he needed love and she fulfilled his needs. But after she was dead, her love, remembered, could no longer satisfy him. For a woman, love is her whole life. If he were to die first, she would continue to subsist on his love. To a man, however, love is only a part of life, but a necessary part that he needs continually. He cannot store it. She knows that her husband could not understand her distress, because he thinks of her love for him in his own terms. He does not understand the depth and complexity of her love. She reconciles herself as well as she can to the fact that he will love again, so she will consider these loves trifling affairs that will not discredit the love he had for her. One last attempt at rationalization, she hopes that his pride will prevent him from loving again.

> What did I fear? Thy love shall hold me fast
> Until the little minute's sleep is past
> And I wake saved.—And yet it will not be!

In another of Browning's poems, "A Woman's Last Word," the wife was unfaithful. She shows no signs of maturity or superiority; she acts like a child; her logic is twisted. After they have gone to bed her husband begins to question her. The result is angry words and tears. She cannot understand why he wants to pry for the truth when it will only prove her false to him. She tells him to ignore suspicions; she already has. She wants to forget the whole situation and have everything as it

was before. She cannot face reality. All she wants is to curl up in the warmth and protection of his arms and go to sleep. She will be all his; she will do or be anything he wants, but not this night. One night is needed to forget the arguing and weeping; besides, she is tired. The wife tries to forget a situation she does not like. When she does not know what to do, she wants protection; she demands protection. Is it not her husband's duty as a Victorian man to defend her? Browning's conception of women is valid today.

A third situation is described in Browning's "In a Year." In this poem, Browning showed what can happen if a marriage is typically Victorian, if the man is the aggressor and dominator, and the woman is taken for granted. Browning showed why the man really does not want it that way, but only wants it to seem that way. The Victorian middle-class marriage, as has been stated, was often based on convenience. Love was rarely a requirement. In this case, the couple was not married yet for the very reason that the woman did notllove the man. He gave her a year to learn, but she never tried. He adored her, however, and she thrived on being loved. She knew that he longed to hear her speak, but she thought it was her voice alone that thrilled him. Actually he was pleading with her to express love for him.

"Speak, I love thee best!"
He exclaimed.
"Let thy love my own foretell,"
I confessed:

Now that she has lost the flattery of a lover, she is confused. She thought that she did what was expected of a Victorian girl, if not more. It never occurred to her that she should return his love. She was

a woman and that meant that she was to be passive and obedient. Actually she had thought that she had been quite considerate in allowing him to indulge in her possessions.

Was it wrong to own,
Being truth?
Why should all the giving prove
His alone?
I had wealth and ease,
Beauty, youth—
Since my lover gave love,
I gave these.

It puzzled her that he had left her. It had been his choice to love her. She had never been emotionally involved, but had tried to be fair, she thought, and to give him what she had.

That was all I meant
—To be just,
And the passion I had raised,
To content.
Since he chose to change
Gold for dust,
I gave him what he praised.
Was it strange?

She seems to suspect here what was wrong. She realized that her possessions were dust in comparison to his love. But she could not make herself accept any blame. Browning was very critical of the shallow Victorian woman.

George Meredith saw in married life some of the things that Browning did. "Modern Love," by Meredith, consists of a marriage where the original, exciting love is gone. In company, the pair put up a pretense of clever talk, each admiring the other in the game of wits. Perhaps, however, each is longing for the other, but it is only in company that they can be honest. Married people can be very proud. An embarrassing situation arises when an old bachelor friend comes to tell of his forthcoming

marriage. He, of course, expects them to rejoice with him in the prospects of his married life. They have succeeded in fooling society.

There are hints of unfaithfulness on the wife's part, as there was in Browning's "A Woman's Last Word." And, as in Browning's poem, the wife cannot talk about it. He still loves her, he wants to forgive her, but she will not ask him to. He finds himself seeing her through the eyes of other men, especially when she is dressed up; he forgets that he is married to her. He longs for signs that she is willing to yield; but he will not ask, because he wants to be wanted, to be loved for himself. He does not want to be the dominant, demanding Victorian husband who uses his wife. He knows that he could be the envy of other men because his wife is so beautiful. If she would only adore him! Wondering why she does not, what he did wrong, he decides that his whole conception of love has been wrong. He did not expect it to change. He was going to be the undisputed master and she was going to be a worshiping and obedient wife, he thought, one who did what she was told without questioning.

> I dreamt of loyal Life:
> . . . . . .
> My crime is that, . . .
> I plotted to be worthy of the world.
> Oh, had I with my darling help'd to mince
> The facts of life, you still had seen me go
> . . . . . .
> Her much-adored delightful Fairy Prince!

Tensions build, seasons pass. Finally she calls him to her and they drink of the river of forgetfulness.

> Then each applied that fatal knife,
> Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.
> Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
> When hot for certainties in this our life!

Meredith acknowledged the wife's need for recognition as an individual. Browning saw the same need. Both were aware of the deception in the contemporary ideal pattern for love and marriage. These poets were influential in the movement for women's rights.

How did the poetry of the period affect women? Was there any alliance between the two? Most of the poets captured the way of life in the middle-class society although they did not describe all of the aspects of the life. Several poets were acutely aware of the "woman problem" that was arising. Perhaps they wanted to be fair and give the movement every encouragement, but they, including Mrs. Browning, could not deny their poetic instincts to preserve the sentimental. For the most part, the poets who treated the middle-class life were accurate; but they were not completely honest. They made the life seem very attractive and appealing because they omitted the aspects that the Industrial Revolution promoted. There were not enough Cloughs who could approach the problems and the people practically and realistically. There were too many nostalgic, romantic Tennysons. As a result, the romantic picture was kept because it was prettier, and the inevitable change was ignored as long as possible, until the transition could no longer be made gradually.

How were unsubmissive women presented in poetry? Domineering and possessive women like Mrs. Martineau and Mrs. Trollope were studied by Browning, who felt that such women were the rule rather than the exception. He would agree, however, that the number of women who let their possessiveness extend outside the household affairs was few. He knew that most of them had no desire to leave the safety of their homes. His wife

know that most women were incapable of survival outside their homes; they could not compete in the world. Victorian women, like Mary Ann Evans, who lived outside convention but who were admired by the conventional, were suggested by Mrs. Browning in her characterization of Aurora Leigh. The artistic mind, in life and in poetry, was independent.

But Aurora Leigh did not want to remain independent. Although she scorned the conventional way of life, she wanted to be part of it. Mrs. Browning, like Coventry Patmore, believed that women were meant to serve man's needs. Both felt, however, that this was a noble task because men could not serve God, which was their part, without the particular and special aid of women. The self-giving Christian wife in Tennyson's "Sea Dreams" corresponds to the devoted Quaker mother, Elizabeth Fry. The poetry described an ideal pattern for middle-class life. The Victorian women did their best to live up to this poetic representation.

CHAPTER III

THE WOMAN OF THE LABORING PEOPLE

A further consideration of the Industrial Revolution, after noting the changes in middle-class life, is its effect on the lower class. The first thought is of the terrible conditions in the mines and factories, especially for the women. A study of these women is a different type of project from those already undertaken. Previously, the purpose has been to compare the historical woman with the poetical one, and in so doing, to determine which more accurately conforms to the modern conception of Victorianism. It is impossible to study the woman of the working class in this way because, first, there are no helpful personal diaries to authenticate historical description, and second, because there are very few narrative poems that treat the laboring woman as an individual. Poems dealing with these people treat them as a class; also, most writers who considered writing about the lower class did so because they were interested in social reform. Usually protests against deplorable conditions in any situation are more powerful and far-reaching if they are in prose. Another reason why the women of the lower class cannot be studied as the women in the other classes were is that they were not considered Victorians. Their only association with Victorianism was as the objects of the "poor peopling" indulged in by the aristocrats on occasion. They were associated with the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution drove the poor women into factories. The textile workers were usually the wives and daughters of men in the same factory; they filled the demand as the revolution increased. It was not unusual for a woman to work from thirteen to eighteen hours a day; she was paid less than half what her male counterpart got for the same job. The uninformed aristocrats thought that these conditions were proper because it made factory working so unappealing that the woman would stay home where she belonged. It was poverty, not interest, that drove the woman to work.

The employers liked to have women working for them. The women worked for less money, they worked at night, they were not unionized, and they obeyed orders docilely. The male employees disliked them for the very same reasons. The men, who were organized, used their strength to thwart the women as much as possible by breaking their machines and harming them physically. They managed to have laws passed restricting the percentage that worked in a factory and forbidding them to work while their husbands were alive.

Even though the woman were not members of unions, they were affected by the actions of the organizations, especially by the strikes which they usually enjoyed.

> Their apathy toward the unions had one colourful incident in its history. Dickens, in his account of the Preston strike of 1854, in which the women not only failed to attend the mass meetings but refused to pay their part of the expenses, printed in Household Words the ditty inscribed to the Preston women by the strikers:
>
> Within these walls the lasses fair
> Refuse to contribute their share

Careless of duty—blind to fame,
For shame, ye lasses, oh! for shame!
Come, pay up, lasses, think what's right,
Defend your trade with all your might;
For if you don't the world will blame,
And cry, ye lasses, oh, for shame!
Let's hope in future all will pay,
That Preston folks may shortly say:
That by your aid they have obtain'd
The greatest victory ever gained.
(Household Words, VIII, p. 555)[1]

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[1] Wanda Neff, Victorian Working Women, p. 34.

The situation began to arouse the upper-class Victorians who became concerned about the future generations. If all parents were factory workers, what would be the moral and spiritual growth of the children? Or what about just growth? Would there be any? Health problems were the first to be considered. So teams of inspectors went to the various factories. Their reports of conditions varied according to the purposes of the reporter and the mill involved. Some rooms were as hot as 140°, at the same time being filled with dust or cotton fluff stirred up in production. The older buildings had very few windows, and the newer ones rarely had opened windows; so the fumes from the machines added to the bad air. The wheels of the machines were not covered and often caught the aprons and hair of the women working by them, resulting in permanent injuries. Some factories employed no pregnant women and few married women. It was generally accepted by all reporters that factory life was not a fit preparation for motherhood because the long hours of standing, especially if practiced from youth, tended to decrease the size of the pelvis. When mothers worked, their babies were neglected; the mortality rate was high.

The living conditions of these people were just as bad. Their basement apartments were below the level of the streets so that sewage flowed in freely. Rags stuffed the windows of the dark, dank, dirty, and overcrowded rooms.

The factories led to the destruction of the family system. There was no similarity between the family life of the lower class and that of the aristocracy. With each member of the family bringing in money, the father was not necessarily the head, especially if the children were supporting him. In Aurora Leigh, Marian mentioned that the children were expected to support their parents.

> (Your children work for you, not you for them,
> Or else they better had been choked with air
> The first breath drawn;)

It was not at all unusual for everyone in the family to find work but the father, who remained home and tried to manage the younger children and the house. He usually failed. The love and respect within the family was nonexistent.

When the girls found that they could earn enough money to support themselves, they foolishly moved away from supporting the family, bought fancy dresses and jewelry, and often ended up walking the streets. It is hard to condemn the girls, considering the atmosphere in which they grew up. The factories were filled with indecent language, liquor, smoking, theft. There were no dressing rooms; none of the workers wore many clothes because of the heat. These conditions, combined with long, boring hours, led to the need for excitement. Moral and spiritual standards were bound to break.

A point to remember, although it is not necessarily a pleasant one, is that immorality was widespread among the lower classes. It was only the factory girls who got the attention, because the Industrial Revolution had created the deplorable conditions for women. Much was published and exaggerated about them because they were independent and not protected by their employers as were their equals who had worked for years as servants or farmhands or sempstresses. What the factory girls did on their own time was public business; what the other laboring girls did was not generally known because their masters, who divulged only what they pleased, would not expose their own employees.

In 1850 a law was passed limiting the hours of work for women and children from six o'clock in the morning to six at night, or from seven to seven, with one and a half hours for meals, and no work after two o'clock on Saturday. These reforms came after years of debate; the ultimate result was very good. At first, there was a great reduction in pay; but soon the factories were turning out more in the ten hours than they previously had in twelve. The law also resulted in putting more people in business, although it was expected to close up some mills. One company could no longer monopolize the bids and require overtime to complete the orders. The women, with the extra time at home each day, regained their interest in their homes and families, taking good care of both. They learned to sew and knit and some had the opportunity to attend night school to learn to read and write.

It was not long before the mills provided benefits for their employees. They had lending libraries, medical attendants, saving banks,

and dining rooms. In progressive mills, these extras were initiated and managed and partially paid for by the employees. It was good for them to be somewhat independent. After 1850, factory women became respectable and efficient, and they had the earning power of men.

In literature, the factory girl, textile and non-textile, was virtually ignored by the novelist. She was not pretty, and in no way was she romantic. She was brought up in filth and never got out of it. She swore, drank, lived wildly, and gladly scraped to support her illegitimate children. She had none of the qualifications of the Victorian heroine.

The girl who was employed by a neighbor who had frames for making stockings or gloves was forgotten by any legislation or attempt at reform as well as by novelists. Her conditions were similar to those of the early factory girl. Her working area was crowded, dark, and cramped. The situation of the dressmaker was the same. Her condition was blamed directly on the English lady who ordered clothes at the last minute to keep in fashion. Lady Waldemar, in Aurora Leigh, was one such woman who had her dresses made in the shop where Marian worked. The shop owners agitated to keep the upper-class ladies from doing their own sewing; it meant competition with the shops. Thomas Hood's "The Song of the Shirt" is pointed directly at these shops where

> With fingers weary and worn
> With eyelids heavy and red,
> A woman sat in unwomanly rags,
> Plying her needle and thread—

He described her plight very accurately in the sixth stanza.

> Work—work—work!
> My labor never flags;

And what are its wages? A bed of straw,
A crust of bread—and rags.
That shatter'd roof—and this naked floor—
A table—a broken chair—
And a wall so blank, my shadow I thank
For sometimes falling there.

Many times, work was given to the sempstress too late to be finished on time. Her employer would do this intentionally so that he could dock her pay. More often than not, the girl was then driven to prostitution.

Most prostitutes were occasional rather than habitual. They partook only when they were driven to it, and then felt no responsibility or blame. William Bell Scott and Thomas Hood commiserated with them in their poems. Scott wrote "Rosabell" after meeting a prostitute. This poem is a prime example of the things too crude for a Victorian lady's ear. It is a relatively mild story, however, about a sempstress. She was

> led astray by the bad company of the other girls in the workroom. From neglect, at first, of her mother's advice
>
> . . . to rise betimes,
> To dress quite plain, to lace her boots
> As she had always done . . .
>
> she went from bad to worse. Bell Scott, in tracing her downward path, asked, with stern, Scottish pity, the question that so touched Rossetti's heart:
>
> Can the outcast retrace her steps?
> Would any mourn with her although
> She watered the earth with tears? . . .
> And hearts as innocent as hers,
> As blindly shall succeed, shall take
> Leap after leap into the dark,
> Blaspheming soul and sense at once
> And every lamp on every street
> Shall light their wet feet down to death . . .
>
> In The Bridge of Sighs (1846), Hood, with some skill, evades naming the profession of his One More Unfortunate, Weary of Breath—although a slanting

> rebuke to Dissolute Man leaves it in little doubt. Pity is once again the predominant note. Pity from the standpoint of virtuous detachment. As a test piece for Victorian lungs and hearts, the poem soon attained deserved popularity for after-dinner elocution.
>
> Take her up tenderly,
> Lift her with care;
> Fashioned so slenderly,
> Young, and so fair![2]

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[2] Patricia Thomson, The Victorian Heroine: a Changing Ideal, pp. 123-124.

Another stanza seems to leave no doubt as to what kind of trouble had caused the unfortunate to plunge from the bridge.

> Still, for all slips of hers,
> One of Eve's family—
> Wipe those poor lips of hers
> Oozing so clammily.

Fortunately, this study is not concerned with the poetic qualities, good or bad, of Hood's work. Hood was blaming English society for the crime done to her. There was not one home of Christian charity that would take her in. The deed was done now, he said; it was too late for her, but not for others. Do not judge her, he said in effect, but leave her to God.

Other poets had different views on the problem of prostitution.

> Mrs. Browning saw no reason to explain it. She was perfectly clear in her own mind that the chastity of the body was unimportant in comparison with chastity of the soul, and with some élan stated her viewpoint in Aurora Leigh (1856). Marian, after her violation, seemed as pure to Aurora as ever before. Purer, if possible. And although, in that case, there was no need to think of her child as a means of redemption, Marian chose to consider it her claim to happiness. Mrs. Browning, it could be seen, was

devotee of the "Marriage makes an honest woman of her" cult. Marian, with a shake of her "impassioned, spaniel head", gratefully refused Romney's offer of marriage:

> . . . Here's a hand shall keep
> For ever clean without a marriage ring,
> To tend my boy . . .

Mrs. Browning did not seem up-to-date in her treatment of Marian's ability to observe and deduct, as shown through this conversation between Marian and her mistress.

> "I think thou mock'st me and my house," she said;
> Confess, thou'lt be a mother in a month,
> Thou mask of saintship."
> "Could I answer her?
> The light broke in so; it meant that then, that?
> I had not thought of that, in all my thoughts,—
> Through all the cold, numb, aching of my brow,
> Through all the heaving of impatient life
> Which threw me on death at intervals—through all
> The upbreak of the fountains of my heart
> The rains had swelled too large; it could mean that?"[3]

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[3] Ibid., p. 138.

The prostitute's position was treated rather completely by the other Victorian poets. As Hood suggested, many of the girls jumped from the bridge of sighs. Marian considered jumping. It is doubtful, however, that any of them were as naive as Marian.

A few descriptions of Marian Erle's life will suffice to show that Mrs. Browning represented accurately the girl's surroundings even though she did not know the girl. Marian was born in a hut made of mud and turf, built on a ledge of a hill to look like an anthill so that the landlord would not see it.

> Her father earned his life by random jobs
> Despised by steadier workmen—keeping swine

On commons, picking hops, or hurrying on
The harvest at wet seasons, . . .
In between the gaps
Of such irregular work, he drank and slept,
And cursed his wife because, the pence being out,
She could not buy more drink. At which she turned,
(The worm) and beat her baby in revenge
For her own broken heart.

Most parents put their girls to work in factories, but Marian's family never stayed anywhere long enough for her to get a job. So she darned hose, petticoats, and other clothes for thrifty housewives. When the family was completely destitute, Marian's mother sold her to a brute of a man. It was not unusual for a family to use the children as marketable items rather than human beings.

At one time, Marian was a sempstress in a hot, crowded room. During this time she nursed one of her fellow workers who was dying as a result of the working conditions. No one but Marian was concerned about the girl. The employers were just as glad to get rid of her and replace her with a better, healthier worker.

Marian found a room for herself and her son in a dirty, unsafe row house.

'Twas a room
Scarce larger than a grave, and near as bare;
Two stools, a pallet-bed; I saw the room:
A mouse could find no sort of shelter in't,
Much less a secret; curtainless,—
The window fixed you with its torturing eye,
Defying you to take a step apart,
If peradventure you would hide a thing.

Again, in "The Song of the Shirt," Hood expressed further the anguish of the sempstress. She sings her song in hopes that the rich might hear. She wants men to know that they are not wearing out linen

shirts, but human lives, lives that might have belonged to their mothers or wives or sisters. She feels herself close to death, sewing with a double thread a shroud for herself as well as a shirt for the rich.

> Oh, God! that bread should be so dear,
> And flesh and blood so cheap!

Another condition of the poor is condemned by William James Linton in his poem "Eviction." Linton damns the landlord who evicted the widow and orphans from a cabin which is worthless, half destroyed by time and the weather, but which has kept the family together through storms and plagues. Famine has finally killed the father and is not far from the rest of the family. The landlord evicted them because they could not pay the rent after the death of the father. Linton was one of several poets who urged social reform by protesting against the wealthy class, the ones who owned the laborers.

Some of the poets appealed to the workers themselves rather than to their tormentors, urging them to be strong and patient, that they might be useful in the struggle that was to come for their rights. William Morris, in "The Voice of Toil," told the workers that the men who gave up hope and praying are long dead. He realized that it was inhuman to work so hard to provide pleasure for others and to have to return each night

> Where home is hovel and dull we grovel
> Forgetting that the world is fair;
> Where no babe we cherish, lest its very soul perish;
> Where mirth is crime, and love a snare.

He took half of his poem to urge the laborer to join shoulder to shoulder with his fellows for their cause. Although this poem does not refer to

women directly, it describes the conditions of their lives.

This poem and the other poems treated, although they are generally not well-known, were accurate descriptions of the position of the working woman of the Victorian lower class. The Revolution and reform that followed affected these people more than any other. The changes the conditions forced upon them were permanent because they were passed down through generations. It is hard to compare the woman of this class with her sisters above her in station because we do not know her personally; and even if we did, we probably could not understand her since her life was so different from anything we are familiar with.

We can say that we sympathize, but really it is pity. We do not care to become that closely acquainted with her that we can sympathize; we want to remain objective and aloof so that we can only pity. Even if we could get close to her, we could probably do her little good because she could not understand our ways and our reasoning any more than we could hers. Our concern, however, has not been with reform. And we have studied only a small portion of the poetry dealing with the lower classes to confirm the idea that it might conform to the true picture of the contemporary situation. It conforms more closely than does the poetry describing the women of the other classes. It is too accurate; it is too pointed; it is too didactic. It deals with a particular time; so it does not have a universal appeal.

We have been able to compare more completely the lives of the Victorian women of the aristocracy and middle class, using historical, personal, and poetical references, than we could the lives of the lower-class

women. Again, the women of the lower class were not considered Victorians.

Our conclusion must be that the Victorian woman was not the absolute model of perfect deportment as she is often pictured, but she honestly tried to live up to her reputation. It is fair to assume that if the standards of the day had been less stringent so that they actually coincided with the way of life, that same live would have lowered correspondingly. England during the reign of Queen Victoria saw many changes, all of which created the need for adjustment of the rising society and the protection of the old. Change came rapidly, despite the efforts of Tennyson and his followers to recapture the charm and simplicity of early Victorian days. One of the most important changes was the rise of the status of women, a recognition of her worth outside the home. By 1929, according to Virginia Woolf, there must have been over two thousand women capable of making a sum corresponding to $500 a year! Such is the picture of progress. How can we summarize the qualities of the Victorian woman? She had so many sides and existed in so many forms. George Young has written the conclusion.

> The outstanding Victorian woman is a blend of the great lady and the intellectual woman, not yet professional, and we can graduate the proportions until, at the opposite ends of the scale, we encounter the limiting instances of the Queen herself and Harriet Martineau.[4]

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[4] George M. Young, Victorian England, Portrait of an Age, p. 2.

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VITA

Lois Iffert Rudge was born in Washington, D. C., on April 1, 1937. She lived two years in Takoma Park, Maryland, before her family moved to Bethesda, Maryland, where they still reside. She attended Bethesda Elementary School, Leland Junior High School, and Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School, graduating in June, 1955.

In September, 1955, she enrolled in Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. She attended the summer session of The American University in 1958. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree, with a major in English, from Bucknell University in February, 1959.

On February 2, 1959, she began her graduate work in English at the University of Richmond.

She married Howard James Rudge on January 31, 1959. Mr. Rudge, also a graduate of Bucknell University, was employed by E. I. duPont de Nemours, Inc., in Richmond, Virginia, as a chemical engineer. In August, 1960, Mr. Rudge was transferred to duPont's patent law office in Washington, D.C., so that he might enter the George Washington School of Law.

Mrs. Rudge plans to teach in the Washington area at the college level if possible.