

VALUES IN THE POPULAR VICTORIAN LOVE STORY
FROM THE RISE OF THE SUBJECTIVE NOVEL
TO THE RISE OF THE SENSATION NOVEL
(CIRCA 1840-1860)

by

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Abstract



2

This thesis is an attempt to chart changing ideas and attitudes for part of the nineteenth century, chiefly between 1840 and 1860, from their reflection in popular fiction of the time. The works consulted are not necessarily enduring literature, but the novels that were read by the literate in the shape of "books from Mudie's."

Values during the period under consideration shift from a fixed faith in a universe of universal principles to a subjective relativity in which good and evil are a matter of individual preference and interpretation. During the same time the rights of the individual assume increasing importance over the best interests of society; and in literature, fiction becomes increasingly subjective in its approach.

I have limited my material to love stories, and have treated it under three heads: I. Courtship as a search for values; II. Marriage as a test of values; III. Love as value. Courtship first appears largely as a search for principle, since principle was the only quality which offered security for a happy marriage; later it becomes a quest for happiness through the pursuit of inexplicable whim. The principal ingredient in a successful marriage is first held to be duty--which is not always a matter of coercion--though gradually the right of the individual to happiness assumes increasing importance. Love wears the two appearances of affection and passion, immoveable object and irresistible force.

The change in taste therefore opposes reason, principle, duty, and quiet, unselfish affection to the overwhelming energy of passion and the

irrational impulse that sees the world well lost as long as it gains its object. Since the ideals that literature makes attractive to readers tend to influence behavior, the change in ideals would appear to be significant.

I am indebted to Dr. J.M.S. Tompkins, my academic advisor, and to Dr. Edith Batbo, the principal of Royal Holloway College, for their sympathetic encouragement, without which no thesis could ever have been attempted. I am grateful beyond measure to them and to the scholars I have had the privilege of meeting at Crosby Hall, for their example of what I've scholarship is like and grateful beyond that to my personal friends, who bullied me, put up with me, and gave me reason to believe in some of my own conclusions.

In more than subject matter this thesis has been written on gratitude, esteem, and affection. The full score is as much too long for inclusion as it is too great for computation; but my affection and otherwise felt notes should be debited to those who assisted me with the proofreading: Mrs. Marjorie Rose, Miss Lisa Rauschenbusch, Miss Janet Pons, and Dr. Margaret Boddy. The errors and stupidities that remain are my own.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	2-3
Acknowledgements	4
Table of Contents	5
Introduction	6-43
I. Courtship as a search for values	44-99
II. Marriage as a test of values	100-147
III. Love as value	148-196
Chronological list of novels	197-199
Author and title index to list of novels	200-204
Selected bibliography	205-210

Introduction

Because at first glance the proposal to examine values in the Victorian love story may sound dangerously like a project for reclaiming gold from sea-water, a few preliminary specifications are perhaps in order. In part, the design for this thesis is an attempt to test the theory that "books from Mudie's" afford a valuable index to taste in reading during the nineteenth century, and the concomitant theory that taste in reading reflects the system of values to which the readers subscribe. I do not argue complete agreement or absolute uniformity on the part of the reading public, but I do believe that the general average of popular taste may help to reveal a good bit of the philosophy that is taken for granted at any particular time.

On so hopelessly huge a subject as nineteenth century popular taste, I have limited my field topically to love stories, and chronologically to a period roughly between 1840 and 1860. It is a period which accidentally coincides with Prince Albert, and the accident may well be significant, but in the development of the novel the same dates mark off a period which is bounded on one side by an increasing subjectivity and on the other by the advent of the sensation novel, which in one form or another is still with us. Since I am particularly interested in the distinctive pattern of values which prevailed during the period in between, I have further limited my material to popular fiction, novels which flourished and were eagerly read at the time, but which for the most part have not continued to be regarded as major literary achievements. Their popularity is evidence that at one time they were accepted as

an accurate reflection of life, motivation, and value; their archaic flavor is evidence that the reflection captured more of contemporary fashions than perennial tastes. Fashion is perhaps a frivolous word and a transient thing, but insofar as it supplies the evanescent color which its contemporaries took for granted and which is the very thing that makes their view differ from ours, I believe some permanent value may attach to a record of fashions in values. At the very least, it fills in some of the minor details of a chapter of literary history.

My point of departure has been my previous work on Mudie's Select Circulating Library and its relation to the nineteenth century literary scene, work which I began on a Fulbright grant for graduate study in 1953-54 and have carried as far as two bibliographies of fiction in circulation at Mudie's between 1848 and 1884. Together the two lists include nearly 7,000 separate titles. The examples for the present study have been drawn almost entirely from the first of the bibliographies, which consists of the Mudie fiction lists for 1848, 1858, and 1869. In reading through a selection of titles taken chiefly from the 1848-1858 lists I found what looked like a decided shift in taste beginning about 1860, when the sensation novel apparently acquired an enormous public in approximately five years' time. The sensation novel did not entirely replace the kind of novel that was written before 1860, but it did displace it. I have chosen to deal with the values embodied in the novel before the sensation novel altered the picture.

My process of selection has in all probability been very much like that of Mudie's original subscribers. With a pertinacity which would

surely have been held light-minded in the forties, and probably in the fifties as well, I have chosen titles that sounded like love stories from the list of offerings, favoring particularly those I had seen cited in reviews or advertised in the Athenaeum. Some titles, such as The Heir of Redclyffe, John Halifax, Gentleman, and Guy Livingstone, were of course obvious and inevitable. Some attracted me by what might be called their literary recommendation, among them Amelia Opie's Adeline Mowbray, Susan Ferrier's Marriage, Disraeli's Henrietta Temple, a love story, and selections from Mrs. Gore and Mrs. Trollope--titles for the most part published before 1840, but, on the evidence of Mudie's 1848 list, still being read at the end of that decade. Mrs. Hubback interested me because she was Jane Austen's niece; the two anonymous titles Agnes Waring and Kate Vernon I included because they were the first works of the author who was subsequently voluminously published under the pseudonym of "Mrs. Alexander." Similarly, The Rich Husband and The Ruling Passion were early works by the prolific Mrs. J.H. Riddell, subsequently author of the highly successful George Geith of Fen Court.

Other authors to whom my attention was directed largely by the length of the list of their published works were Mrs. Oliphant (who is credited in D.N.B. with more than a hundred and twenty novels), "Holme Lee," John Gordy Jeaffreson, and Frederick William Robinson. The recurrence of

¹
Marriage and Henrietta Temple appeared in all catalogues to 1884; Mrs. Brunton's Self Control in all catalogues to 1876; Mrs. Gore's Mothers and Daughters to 1869, and Adeline Mowbray (published 1805) to 1858.

²
 A fictionalized account of her struggles with authorship and the success of George Geith forms part of the plot of The Rich Husband.

titles in advertising and in attributions made me aware of the authors of Anne Dysart, Margaret and her Bridesmaids, Dorothy, Rita, and Violet Bank and its Inmates. Advertising and allusion suggested Emilia Wyndham,¹ Amy Herbert, and Margaret Percival. Alarmed and indignant reviews of the sudden crop of sensation novels in the early sixties almost always cited Lady Audley's Secret, Aurora Floyd, and Caroline Norton's Lost and Saved. All of these titles occur in Mudie's lists, and most of them in more lists than one, arguing a circulation of something more than a decade, and in some cases a circulation of some sort for thirty years or more. The fact that they were circulated I take to be more significant than the fact that they were advertised. As it was pointed out in the censorship controversy of 1860, books were often advertised as "out" some time before they were actually available to the public; sometimes titles figure more prominently as figments of the publisher's imagination than they ever do as physical volumes. Lists of books offered for circulation would appear to be a better guide, though other publicity undeniably influenced my choice in many instances, as it probably influenced Mudie's original subscribers.

The principal use of Mudie's lists, however, has been in establishing the level of the works dealt with. Mudie's was quite explicitly a select library, and the element of selection appears to have been of some significance, at least until the ill-natured correspondence in the Literary Gazette for 1860. The fact that Mudie enlarged his premises on December, 1860, might be cited as fair evidence that large numbers

1

All circulated 1848-1884.

of paying subscribers did not at that time regard selection as synonymous with censorship, whatever unsuccessful authors might mutter about prejudice. "Select" implies discrimination in a good rather than in a bad sense, while the scale on which Mudie conducted his business insures that the taste served was popular rather than esoteric.

Popular taste is so frequently mentioned with a sneer that a corrective is both useful and necessary, otherwise popularity is in danger of being regarded as the inexplicable preferences of the undifferentiated masses less intelligent than the speaker. I have therefore taken particular pleasure in noting that Thackeray's condescending characterization of popular novels in Vanity Fair and Rebecca and Rowena is largely caricature. The love stories I have been at some pains to sift out by no means all end with weddings or slavishly conform to Thackeray's "happily ever after" pattern. Quite a number take life seriously, and even tragically. The authors, of course, are nowhere near being Thackeray's equals or rivals, but it is possible that in his disparagement of popular fiction he has underestimated them.

The determination of popularity is a relative matter, something like the definition of the horizon. If Thackeray caricatured popular fiction as foolishly sentimental romance, one of the authors he may have been caricaturing envisioned a yet lower deep. In the future "Mrs. Alexander"'s Kate Vernon (which concludes with the characters visiting the Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851), Kate is employed as companion to a Mrs. Jorrocks who compels her to read aloud from the police reports in the newspapers, and rejoices in the "dungeon and subterranean passage,

1
 revengeful, mysterious stranger class of literature." Kate's contempt, then, would appear to be directed at the Gothic novel, and it can be proved that Catherine Cuthbertson's Romance of the Pyrenees (originally published in 1803, and absolutely honeycombed with secret passages) was reprinted in 1840 and 1844, and that the same author's Santo Sebastiano (1806) was reprinted in 1847. Someone must have read them--but on the evidence of the 1848 catalogue, Mudie's subscribers were not offered these or other items of the Mrs. Radcliffe school, though they might choose from the complete works of Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Scott, and Fenimore Cooper, and might have read Beckford's Vathek any time up to 1884. Susan Ferrier and her correspondent Charlotte Clavering read and made fun of Gothic novels at about the same time that Jane Austen's amusement was being re-
 2
 flected in Northanger Abbey, but it seems probable that their vogue as popular fiction was over before Mudie began lending books in 1841.

3
 Nor was the penny fiction public Mudie's. G.M.W. Reynolds was not
 4
 a Mudie author; James Malcolm Rymer probably was not; and William Stephens

1
Kate Vernon, 1854, III, 321.

2
 "I shall write a book to which yours shall bear the same proportion as Joe Miller to Mrs. Radcliffe. You have but one serpent, I shall have nine. Yours can only speak (which they could do in the days of Adam). Mine shall sing and play on the Harp, and Waltz; you measure out blood (like Laudanum) in drops, but I shall dispense it like the shower bath!"
 --Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier (1898) p.100 (ca. 1810)

3
 See Margaret Dalziel, Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago (1957). This extremely interesting study deals with cheap fiction, the penny journal and the shilling series, and discusses the serial story which never appeared in any other form and the reprint novel which was originally published in three volumes as if they were indistinguishable. I am here trying to distinguish.

4
 Author of Varney the Vampire, 1845-47. The anonymous 1848 Mudie entry for The White Slave was probably not his, though he is the author of a work with that title (1844).

1
 Hayward did not appear until the 1884 catalogue. The difference between the kind of popularity they represent and the kind in which I am interested can perhaps best be illustrated from two articles by Wilkie Collins, both published in Household Words and subsequently reprinted in My Miscellanies (1863). "A Petition to Novel Writers" deals with popular fiction as Thackeray dealt with it in Rebecca and Rowena, somewhat condescendingly, but from a constant reader's point of view; "The Unknown Public" deals with the penny fictions analytically, from the outside. Collins claims that the Disreputable Society of which he is a member

got a box-full of novels for ourselves, once a month, from London ...and we say it boldly, in the teeth of dull people, that there are few higher, better, or more profitable enjoyments in this world than reading a good novel. ["A Petition to Novel Writers," p.482, 485]

He protests the clichés of the authors he reads, but he reads them; penny fiction he finds abysmally unreadable. He can only conjecture about an audience of three million somewhere invisibly below the circulating library and the railway bookstall.

The penny journals which distributed this stuff to an enormous and in one sense popular audience appear to have sprung up in the forties and to have maintained the dead level of their contents with remarkable

1
 Whose titles include Anonyma, or Fair but frail, a tale of West End life (1864); Incognita, a tale of love and passion (1864); and The Soiled Dove, a biography of a fast young lady, familiarly known as "The Kitten" (1865), titles which understandably never appeared in Mudie's selection, But ex pede Herculem.

2
 "A Petition to Novel Writers," Household Words, XIV (6 Dec. 1856) 481-5.

3
 "The Unknown Public," Household Words, XVIII (21 Aug. 1858) 217-222.

4
Family Herald, 1842; Lloyd's Penny Weekly Miscellany, 1845; London Journal, 1845; Reynolds' Miscellany, 1846.

uniformity ever since.¹ Fashions in the type of popular literature I am trying to define change; about 1860 they changed radically--but at the lowest level of literacy, alteration is almost geologically slow. In 1863 Collins reprinted his observations on the Unknown Public with the note: "Five years have passed since this article was first published, and no signs of progress in the Unknown Public have made their appearance as yet,"² and in 1881 James Payn concluded that no progress had been made in twenty-five years.³ Actually, he might have said thirty, for Mayhew's description of the literature of costermongers appeared in 1851--again a sociological survey, not a reader's report.⁴

But costermongers--and Payn suggests female domestic servants--were not Mudie subscribers, and "books from Mudie's" were well above the penny fiction level, in spite of the occasional undeniable incompetence of some of the authors. The works of Wilkie Collins and James Payn themselves might reasonably be taken as generally characteristic of the New Oxford Street circulation. Popular taste--in the sense in which I am using the term--may have degenerated by the 80's,⁵ but until 1860, at least, the

¹
London Journal ceased 1906; Family Herald 1940.

²
"Curiosities of Literature," My Miscellanies (1863) p.191.

³
J. Payn, "Penny Fiction," Nineteenth Century, IX (Jan. 1881) 153.

⁴
Henry Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor (1851). See also "Weekly Romance," Saturday Review, I (Mar. 1856) 364-6; and "Penny Novels," Spectator, XXXVI (28 Mar. 1863) 1806-8.

⁵
This is the extremely interesting suggestion made by Malcolm Elwin in Victorian Wallflowers (1934), when he says of Ouida, "Her worthlessness and artificiality are her qualifications, for they typify the taste and mentality of the new reading public, created by industrial development [Continued on next page]"

popular taste upon which Mudie's business was built was still select, by its own choice. The selection included an astonishing number of what the present century might consider set books--not because any schoolmaster insisted on it, or because the contemporaries of Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontes, Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot knew those works were going to be set books for their great-grandchildren, but because the literate public found them enjoyable reading. The fact says a good deal for popular taste at a literate level, though, with the superiority of hindsight, a later reader tends to smile at characters who apologize for reading anything so popular as Dickens:

"I frightened away a very studious young lady, whom I found deep in the perusal of some trash--Dickens, I believe," taking up the number Kate had been reading.

"My cousin, Miss Vernon--poor Kate is not in the mood for any profound literature; she has had great sorrows." [Kate Vernon, 1854, III, 50]

In strict justice to Annie French, however, it should be pointed out that the tone of this passage is more of a comment on the society characters whom the author weighs and finds wanting than on her heroine. But what else was popular, and what was passé? From the less familiar authors read or rejected, one begins to form a shadowy picture of literate popular taste. In the second volume of Kate Vernon, Kate visits a circulating library and newsagent's, where she asks for Charles Lever's The Knight of Gwynne, and anything by the authoress of The Cup and the Lip (Laura Jewry). She rejects Zarifa, a tale of the passions, and Trials AND Trifles, by one who has experienced both, titles which, if read generically, would appear to indicate that by 1854 the turn-of-the-century

[continued] and cheap education."--p.311. Similar deductions about the level of literate popular taste might be drawn from George Moore's attack on Mudie in 1884-5, though Moore condemned Mudie and not the public for it.

fictions of Rose Matilda and the slightly later fashionable novels of the silver fork school were no longer popular in the sense which I am trying to establish. Because Kate is represented as being selectively fastidious in her reading rather than omnivorous, her preferences are significant, as is the attitude of selectiveness in itself. There is at this point no hint of restrictive library censorship. Mudie's success was founded on his offering the public the quality resources of a select library, and Kate is slightly condescending to the newsagent because her taste is better than his. To those who tend to be equally patronizing toward Victorian taste, it may be instructive to note that Kate condemns Trials and Trifles for being sentimental.¹

Similarly, Arthur Martindale, in Charlotte Yonge's Heartsease (1854) entertains a vague recollection of Emilia Wyndham (1846), a best seller of nearly ten years before: "It was a green railway book. Theodora made me read it, and I should know it again if I saw it. I'll look out for it, and you'll find I was right about her head."² Emilia Wyndham appeared in all the Mudie catalogues from 1848 to 1884, so it is possible that a good many readers were equally and similarly entertained, though Mrs. Marsh-Caldwell's name would no longer mean anything to library patrons. It is popular authors and popular fiction of this type that I have been most interested in discovering and investigating.

Besides availing myself of Mudie's lists as an indication of taste, I have also made considerable use of the conduct books of Mrs. Ellis as

¹
Kate Vernon, 1854, II, 144-5.

²
Heartsease, 1854, I, 142.

an indication of temper. Mudie's select and selective subscribers of the forties and fifties were in all probability the same group to whom her works were addressed:

Those who belong to that great mass of the population of England which is connected with trade and manufactures, as well as to the wives and daughters of professional men of limited incomes ... that portion of it who are restricted to the services of from one to four domestics,--who, on the one hand, enjoy the advantages of a liberal education, and, on the other, have no pretension to family rank. [The Women of England, 1839, p.19]

The group "restricted to the services of from one to four domestics" (J) was no doubt numerically smaller than the collection of domestics and others who constituted the readers of penny fiction, but surely considered literarily rather than sociologically it embraced a more significant section of the population. I have assumed that Mrs. Ellis's admonitions to the Women of England (1838), the Daughters of England (1842), the Wives of England (1843), and the Mothers of England (1843) can be taken as a fairly accurate index to the general attitude and outlook during the larger part of the period under consideration. If anyone wants proof that standards and manners were anything but uniform throughout Victoria's reign, let him compare the works of Mrs. Ellis with the biting essays of Eliza Lynn Linton, published in the Saturday Review between 1868 and 1874, and reprinted in 1883 under the title The Girl of the Period. Mrs. Linton's diverse caricatures are recognizable--perennial types in period costume, as it were--but Mrs. Ellis's uniform copperplate engraving seems dimly, mediievally remote. She advocates "living for others, rather than

The possibility of doing so was in part suggested in an article by William S. Knickerbocker, "Victorian Education and the Idea of Culture," in The Reinterpretation of Victorian Literature, ed. by Joseph E. Baker for the Victorian Literature Group of the Modern Language Association of America (1950), p.105.

for themselves---... living for eternity, rather than for time,"¹ and she preaches to the Daughters of England, "As women, then, the first thing of importance is to be content to be inferior to men--inferior in mental power, in the same proportion that you are inferior in bodily strength,"² with the precept doubly underscored for the wives of England:

... the superiority of your husband, simply as a man. It is quite possible you may have more talent, with higher attainments, and you may also have been generally more admired; but this has nothing whatever to do with your position as a woman, which is, and must be, inferior to his as a man. [Wives of England, 1843, p.17]

The extent to which one finds Mrs. Ellis incomprehensible is a partial measure of the difference between her generation and our own, and for that reason I have found her particularly useful in assessing the manners --"the minor morals of domestic life"³--in the novels of her contemporaries that I have read.

Protests against her Quaker discipline began to be audible by about the mid-fifties,⁴ but this does not mean that throughout the forties she

¹
Daughters of England, 1842, p.17.

²
Daughters of England, 1842, p.11-12.

³
Women of England, 1839, p.2.

⁴
She was brought up in the Society of Friends, but left it for the Congregational Church.

⁵
At least one sourly specific protest was registered against Mrs. Ellis even before her series of conduct books was complete: a character in Catherine Sinclair's Modern Flirtations (1841) complains:

I can fancy nothing more intolerable than a young lady turned out on the model of those horrid sententious books, filled with advice to young ladies. Mrs. Ellis writes to the "Women of England," but she luckily leaves the "Women of Scotland" to their own devices, without troubling us to be exorbitantly amiable. [Modern Flirtations, 1841, I, 352-3]
But, for at least another decade, she was the acknowledged arbiter of manners. A review of the anonymous novel [Continued on next page]

was sweetly twittering rose-colored nonsense, or that when her somewhat austere code is found embodied in the heroine of a minor novel, the character is necessarily woodenly theoretical and psychologically impossible. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in any one age's psychology. Mrs. Trollope's observations on family pride have a much wider application than the novel in which they are found and the situation for which they were intended:

Those who would declare that such a state of mind, in such a woman, would be unnatural, blunder as much as a born-and-bred citizen does in doubting the fact, that a thorough-bred sporting dog would fast, almost, if not quite, to death, rather than feed on game. It is idle to call it unnatural.

If it be an art, it is "an art that Nature makes," as she does that by which the culture of the gardener can metamorphose a flower.

[Gertrude, or Family Pride, 1855, I, 221]

[Continued] Pique runs:

It is totally impossible to believe that Mildred Effingham and Lord Alresford can have been married in the manner described at the opening of the tale. We will appeal to any jury of English matrons, with Mrs. Ellis for forewoman. [Athenaeum (14 Dec. 1850) p.1309]

From this it would appear that the author was more probably "Francis Derrick," Eliza Frances Millett Notley, than Mrs. Ellis herself, to whom the British Museum attributes the authorship.

The mid-fifties made mouths at her authority, however. It is possible that Aurora Leigh's gibe (1856) at "a score of books on womanhood" was directed at Mrs. Ellis; certainly her books do uniformly advocate woman's abdication of power. It is also possible that this satiric exchange between husband and wife in Emily Jolly's Caste (1857) is similarly incited:

"It is a wife's duty to amuse her husband."

"Mrs. Mellish! Always give your authority when you make quotations."...

"Mrs. Mellish says a wife should know no will but her husband's," Isabel replied demurely, speaking at the dictation of her evil spirit.

"Confound Mrs. Mellish! I suppose I shall never hear the last of her!"

[Caste, 1857, III, 5, 41-2]

Even if another arbiter of manners is intended, the tone is a protest against Mrs. Ellis's precepts, and Whyte-Melville's Kate Coventry (1856) and Hamilton Aide's Rita (1858) are the antithesis of Mrs. Ellis and all her works.

Mrs. Ellis's code of conduct is severe, but it is not impractical, and it is not hypocritical. It represents, as the novels which reflect it do, a different ideal and a different philosophical attitude from the one which by this time we unconsciously take for granted. Not what was normal or average, but what was superior was genuinely admired; a severe virtue was fashionable, and, being fashionable, it was not thought unattainable. All of this makes a great deal of difference, but what makes even more difference is the shift in orientation from objective to subjective that marks the beginning of the period I propose to treat. In this instance it was the novels, and the way in which they were written, that helped me to understand Mrs. Ellis.

1

Her idealism is certainly not saccharine. As an example of her cold-water common sense, she finds superabundant leisure (before the age of labor-saving devices) productive of more evils than repression. Not all languishing upon sofas was tolerated. It is a little startling to find psychosomatic delicacy of health so acidly diagnosed:

Far be it from me to speak with unkindness or want of sympathy of those maladies of mind and body, which, under the general head of nervous disorders, I believe constitute some of the greatest miseries which "flesh is heir to." But [I have] never found them to exist to any serious extent where constant occupation of head and hand, and healthful bodily exercise, were kept up with vigorous and unremitting effort. [Wives of England, 1843, p.225]

Her attitude toward work is recognizably like Carlyle's in Past and Present—"Smite, smite, in the name of God!" Mrs. Ellis is less flamboyant, but both books were published in the same year.

2

For the growth of "Victorian" morality before the accession of Victoria, see Maurice Quinlan's Victorian Prelude (1941), Muriel Jaeger's Before Victoria (1956), and Gordon Rattray Taylor's The Angel Makers (1958). Almost the only useful observation which can be drawn from "L.E.L.'s" Romance and Reality (1831) is confirmation of the conclusion that by that date morality had become fashionable:

We must first make ... due allowance for climate and constitution--we must make another for fashion; we live in an age of reaction; the style of loud talking, laughing, or what was termed dashing, lies in the tomb of the Duchess of Gordon. We are in the other extreme. [Romance and Reality, 1831, I, 214]

This type of observation on contemporary manners carries the conviction of reality where the equally contemporary Byronic romance of banditti and convents does not.

In general, many eighteenth and early nineteenth century novels seem designed, like Aesop's fables, to illustrate the operation of universal principles in terms of narrative adventure. Events automatically happen to characters, and individual exceptions are not as significant as general rules, or are chiefly significant as proving the rules in extreme cases. The universe is designed like a formal garden, orderly as Paley's watch, reasoned and rational, though Clarissa Harlowe suffers and Tom Jones enjoys. Moral and intellectual superiority is admired, but even the superior individual is subordinated to the general rule. Minor characters have an unfortunate tendency to resemble the walking abstractions in morality plays or the paper puppets in a toy theater, and by 1856 a writer in Fraser's Magazine was complaining,

There is no development of the inner life to compensate for the meagerness and transparency of the external incidents ... The motive power throughout is in the events, and not in the causes of the events. ["On the Treatment of Love in Novels," Fraser's, LIII (Apr. 1856) 415]

He demanded personal and particular details, the inner life of the individuals, not the picaresque adventures of Anyman, the juvenile lead, or reiterated tribute to universal mechanics. In more ways than one the reaction to Mrs. Ellis had set in, as much against her method as against her ideas. She regards universal good as more significant than partial evil; her advice is in terms of what generally ought to be rather than in a detailed résumé of specific exceptions.

She--and the novels of her contemporaries--are not therefore vacuously and romantically twaddling about Man in the Rousseauistic abstract. Her advice to wives on the characteristics of men (Wives of England, Chap. III) is thoroughly practical, though it approaches the subject from

what the twentieth century might consider a theoretical point of view:

Were all men excellent, without inconsistencies, and without defects, there would be no need for words of caution or advice addressed to the weaker sex, but especially to wives, for each would have perpetually before her, a perfect model of true excellence, from which she would be ashamed to differ. ... If all men were of this description, these pages might be given to the winds. We must suppose, however, for the sake of meeting every case, and especially the most difficult, that there are men occasionally found who are not, strictly speaking, noble, nor highly enlightened, nor altogether good. That such men are as much disposed as their superiors to enter into the married state, is also a fact of public notoriety, and it is to the women who venture upon uniting themselves to such men for life, that I would be understood chiefly to address myself. [Wives of England, 1843, p.64-6]

Man ought to be better than he is; the fact that he is not does not invalidate the fact that he ought to be. This steady concentration upon the ideal does not ignore real individual instances, but it does alter the perspective in which individual instances are regarded.

In this scheme of things, the particular is dwarfed by the universal; action acquires depth chiefly through casting an allegorical shadow; and to eyes accustomed to heavily specific shading, the method looks flat, as a Flaxman drawing looks pale and shallow beside the emotional chiaroscuro of a genre painting. During the forties and fifties the particular emerges with ever-increasing distinctness, and the universal recedes; the exceptions become more significant than the rule, and the indistinguishable Keepsake beauties are gradually replaced by minutely specific Pre-Raphaelite portraits whose backgrounds are filled with photographic detail. And if there is something somehow springlike about the leafy proliferation of detail, there is something even more springlike about the distinct rise in the emotional temperature. The particular is much warmer and more immediate than the universal. By 1865 a writer in

Cornhill Magazine was complaining:

It has been often said that novels might be divided into two great divisions--the objective and the subjective; almost all men's novels belong to the former; almost all women's, now-a-days, to the latter definition. Analysis of emotion instead of analysis of character, the history of feelings instead of the history of events, seems to be the method of the majority of penwomen. ["Heroines and their Grandmothers," Cornhill, XI (May 1865) 632]

By 1865 the sensation novel was firmly established, and with it the technique here described: "analysis of emotion ... the history of feeling instead of the history of events." Ten years had not elapsed since the 1856 article in Fraser's, but the orientation of popular novel-writers--popular enough to be complained about in reviews--had completely altered, and with it the system of values and codes of conduct. On the basis of the novels that I have read, I should be inclined to believe that the tide had already turned before the Fraser's writer registered his complaint about motiveless events; that the real beginning of subjectivity and the history of feelings in the popular novel was nearer 1840.

In this respect Mrs. Sherwood's notorious History of the Fairchild Family offers a particularly interesting example of technique and ideas in transition. The first volume was published in 1818, the second in 1842, and the third in 1847, though nominally much less time intervenes between the parts. Nevertheless even the physical appearances of the first two volumes seem more than a generation apart, and the difference in attitude is almost schizophrenic. In the 1818 volume, the frontispiece is a line drawing of children in Kate Greenaway costume in a Regency room; the occasion is the quarrel which led to Mr. Fairchild's taking the children to see the gibbeted corpse of a murderer as a warning against the ultimate

consequences of anger and bad passions. The morality is as uncomplicated in its black and white as a line drawing: evil passions lead to crime, and crime inexorably ends in punishment. If there is any horror, it is for the immaterial essence of evil; not for the physical shape of the consequences. One is the material embodiment of the other.

By 1842, however, Mrs. Sherwood herself saw the world in less ultimate and unsparing terms. The second frontispiece is much more naturalistically shaded, and shows the children outdoors, in pinafores a generation later than Kate Greenaway frocks, scrambling over a stile in the mischievous pursuit of a magpie--naughtiness, not potential wickedness. The Last Judgment does not so obviously overshadow every action. Somehow it is extremely hard to believe in Miss Augusta Noble, the haughty child in the first volume, who disobediently played with candles until her dress caught fire and she burned to death; but one has no difficulty at all in recognizing and somewhat ruefully sympathizing with scatterbrained Bessy in the second volume, who thoughtlessly gets into even more trouble than the young Fairchilds, not through natural depravity but out of human fallibility. Miss Augusta is merely a name bestowed upon a quality; Bessy is a type, but a type with the shading and personality of an individual. It is impossible

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In 1856, Frank Smedley's Harry Coverdale still entertains the same opinion:

If a brat steals sugar, its mother slaps it; if a schoolboy prigs apples, the master flogs him; if an apprentice bolts with the till, the law transports him; if Jack murders Tom, the hangman stretches his neck for him--and serve 'em all right, say I; it would be a precious deal worse world to live in if it were not so, to my thinking. ... Not ... as an act of revenge upon the individual, but in order to benefit society by deterring others from committing a like crime. [Harry Coverdale's Courtship, p.192]

But Harry Coverdale was a sporting hero whose "English common-sense" was one of his consciously old-fashioned qualities. In 1856 a sporting heroine like Kate Coventry was brightly up to the minute, but a sporting hero was not.

to feel any sympathy for Miss Augusta; she is mere Disobedience in a child's frock; but Bessy's qualities are mixed as they are in a human being. One loses sight of the abstract because of the immediate palpability of the concrete.

Unmistakably, public opinion on moral questions had altered between 1818 and 1842. In the later volume, Mr. Fairchild and Henry pass the murderer's gibbet a second time.

"O papa!" said Henry, "there is that terrible place--does the man hang there now?"

"No, my boy," answered Mr. Fairchild, "the gibbet is taken down. ... When we are all conformed to the will of God, and have laid down our naughty sinful earthly nature, we shall need nothing to keep us in order, but, till that happy time is come, we should understand that it is the greatest of all present blessings to be kept from following our own will." [History of the Fairchild Family, II (1842) 77-9]

The stark shape of the gibbet has been removed, and the moral has now become "Our misfortunes are sent to curb our bad passions; let us therefore accept misfortune cheerfully." In 1818 it was "Bad passions entail terrible consequences; let us then avoid bad passions." The shifted point of view shades and considerably tones down the original black and white of basic morality.

The difference in descriptive technique between 1818 and 1847 is equally marked and equally indicative of an altered system of values. Besides the gibbet, the children in 1818 are also taken to see a corpse, which could not have been described more objectively in an invoice.

They perceived a kind of disagreeable smell, such as they never had smelt before: this was the smell of the corpse, which, having been dead now nearly two days, had begun to corrupt; and as the children

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It became illegal to expose corpses on gibbets in 1834.--D.C. Peel, The Stream of Time (1931) p.44.

went higher up the stairs, they perceived this smell more disagreeably. ... The face of the corpse was quite yellow, there was no colour in the lips, the nose looked sharp and long, and the eyes were closed and sunk under the brow. ... The whole appearance of the body was more ghastly and horrible than the children expected. [History of the Fairchild Family, I (1818) 150]

There is not the faintest tinge of emotion in the whole thing; it is not intended to make the flesh creep, but to impress accurate fact and a kind of philosophical diagram on the mind. The early nineteenth century moralized, but it called things by their right names, and it dodged nothing.

You now see what death is. ... This shows the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and its horrible nature, that the soul, which has sinned, must be born again, and the sinful body be dissolved and fall to dust in the grave. [History of the Fairchild Family, I (1818) 151]

In the third part, 1847, death is realized very differently, by indirection and the nervous system, and the implications are no longer abstract principles.

The only object which stood out distinct and clear above the portico was the hatchment, or escutcheon, for the dead, bearing the family arms, dimly gleaming in the moonbeams, and telling the little girls of the death of one, not many years older than themselves. They knew the signification of the huge lozenge standing on one of its points, with its wide black border, and they turned from it with a shudder to look round at the woods which seemed to encompass the house, though at a considerable distance, rising above it--looking black or silvery, as lighted up by the moon or not affected by its beams. [History of the Fairchild Family, III (1847) 105]

The stark shape has been taken down. One sees the hatchment in the fitful moonlight far more vividly than one does the itemized corpse or the moralized gibbet, but the picture is somehow shallower. It is a single incident, not part of the structure of the universe.

The change during the forties and fifties from the objective, impersonal, universal point of view to the subjective and personal was not limited to a matter of literary technique. One finds evidence of the

same shift of outlook in the passionately-held opinions of Caroline Norton. She campaigned for the alteration of the child custody laws and the divorce laws, not because she was any militant precursor of the woman's rights movement, but because she unfortunately found herself in an absolutely intolerable situation.

Many hundreds, infinitely better than I,--more pious, more patient, and less rash under injury,--have watered their bread with tears. ... Not that my sufferings or my deserts are greater than theirs; but that I combine, with the fact of having suffered wrong, the power to comment on and explain the cause of that wrong; which few women are able to do. For this, I believe, God gave me the power of writing.
[Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill, 1855, p.153]

Even Mrs. Ellis's provisions for meeting every case, and especially the most difficult, fell short of the facts in this one, which outran Mrs. Ellis in both directions. Sheridan's granddaughter was a brilliantly superior woman, unhappily married to one who was not "strictly speaking, noble ... nor altogether good." He was spitefully petty and mean; contemporary law gave him a giant's power, and he used it tyrannously like a giant. She was driven to protest, not for the redress of her own wrongs, but for the remedying of injustice. Her interest was in Justice, abstract, universal, and philosophical; but two sets of pamphlets, two on the Infant Custody Bill in 1838-9 and two on the Marriage and Divorce Bill in 1854-5, illustrate the difference in approach. In 1838 the point is simply theoretical justice, based on universal and natural law; in 1854 it is the remedy of specific abuses--the difference between allegory and Pre-Raphaelite portraiture. The Infant Custody pamphlets, with their impersonal argument, were issued anonymously and pseudonymously; the Marriage Law

¹
The Separation of Mother and Child by the Law of "Custody of Infants" Considered. 1838.

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pamphlets carried Mrs. Norton's name on the title page and incorporated a wealth of specific detail and particular reference.

She cites cases in the Infant Custody pamphlets, but the reasoning about them is abstract. Law and law-givers appear as Flaxman-like abstractions:

The law-giver has a sacred duty to perform towards the community, and if a law be just and necessary, he has no choice but to establish it; his office is merely to provide such security for its enforcement as the imperfection of human means will permit. [Plain letter, 1839, p.23]

Natural justice has as much concrete existence as ratified statutes:

On what principle of natural justice the law is founded, which in cases of separation between husband and wife, throws the whole power of limiting the access of a woman to her children into the hands of her husband, it is difficult to say. A man should hardly be allowed to be accuser and judge in his own case, and yet such is the anomalous position created by the law. [Custody of Infants, 1838, p.8]

--and society, not the individual, is principally to be protected:

This brings us to the consideration of another point; namely, whether there is not something in this law calculated to injure the female character, and thereby to militate against the best interests of general society. [Custody of Infants, 1838, p.18]

She cites the Greenhill case of 1835, in which Mrs. Greenhill, a woman of unimpeachable character, refused to surrender custody of her three little girls to their dissolute father, until she was eventually forced to flee the country with them to escape a sentence of imprisonment for contempt of court:

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A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Infant Custody Bill
... by Pearce Stevenson, esq. 1839.

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English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century, 1854, and A Letter to the Queen on the Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill, 1855.

From it may be drawn a deduction injurious to the best interests of society, since it teaches women rather to depend, as they are already prone to do, on wild and romantic expedients, than on the protection afforded them by the laws and rules which govern the community at large. [Custody of Infants, 1838, p.71]

Fifteen years later, in arguing for the reform of the marriage laws, she cites principally her own experience, with circumstantial detail.

My history is real. ... In the last act of this weary life of defamation, I went down in a hack-cab--to take part in an ignoble struggle --in a dingy little court of justice--where I was insulted by a vulgar lawyer--with questions framed to imply every species of degradation. ... I really wept and suffered in my early youth--for wrong done, not by me, but to me--and the ghost of whose scandal is raised against me this day. I really suffered the extremity of earthly shame without deserving it (whatever chastisement my other faults may have deserved from heaven). I really lost my young children--craved for them, struggled for them, and was barred from them--and came too late to see one who had died a painful and convulsive death, except in his coffin. I really have gone through much that, if it were invented, would move you, --but being of your every-day world, you are willing it should sweep past like a heap of dead leaves on the stream of time. [English Laws for Women, 1854, p.168]

She disclaims an exclusively personal grievance, but there is much more highly-colored pathos and specific individual hardship reflected in her words about her own children than in her citation of the Greenhill case and the general deductions to be drawn from it. Abstraction becomes genre-painting, with hack-cabs, dingy courts, and vulgar lawyers. If the question is entirely abstract justice, the physical appearance of the court and the personal graces of the lawyer are irrelevant except as concrete embodiments of intangible qualities. If the picture she paints really reveals the essential nature of the protection afforded by the laws and rules which govern the community at large, alas for justice secured by the imperfection of human means! Mrs. Norton's insistence on the reality of her suffering is less an appeal to universal reason than it is an emotional appeal for sympathy in a good cause.

Precisely because the suffering was real, Mrs. Norton's pamphlets are an excellent illustration of the change in point of view that manifested itself between 1838 and 1855. At the same time, fiction too tended to become more and more emotionally persuasive and more and more minutely specific. But the result was that the exceptional individuals who demanded attention in the sixties tended to be those who disproved rather than those who demonstrated universal laws. In 1805, Mrs. Opie's highly exceptional Adeline Mowbray (based on the character of Mary Wollstonecraft) served to demonstrate that outstanding purity of life and integrity of purpose are still not enough to enable a woman to flout social convention. Mrs. Opie was an admirer of Mary Wollstonecraft, but she saw the claims of society as more important. In 1863, Mrs. Norton's Beatrice Brooke in Lost and Saved is used to demonstrate that social conventions are erroneously unjust, since Beatrice, through a melodramatic and incredible series of accidents, manages quite innocently not to be married to the father of her child. The relative importance of the individual and of society has been exactly reversed. Since society of necessity is made up of individuals, it is difficult to know how justly to balance the claims. If Adeline Mowbray's author condemned her, virtuous as her life was, because she was a dangerous example, what kind of example was Beatrice Brooke? The question is by no means a dead issue, as long as literature, as an embodiment of values, still has an influence on life.

But what of the other side of the proposition, the influence of life

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The determinative influence of the ideal one habitually contemplates is admirably delineated in Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "The Great Stone Face," published in The Snow Image and Other Twice Told Tales, 1851.

upon literature? Did the increasing flood of specific details that accompanied the rise of the subjective novel increase the novel's truthfulness? Paradoxically, it would appear that literary truth and documented fact cannot be measured on the same scale, and approximately at the point at which the difference became most significant, specifically literary judgment suffered an unfortunate eclipse. Perhaps the reading public had altered, and were already potential devotees of Guida. Perhaps values had shifted beyond recall. Or perhaps the circumstances of the 1860 censorship controversy still have some kind of significance.

Until 1860, public restiveness under library censorship was negligible. The situation resembled that described in connection with Kate Vernon: strict views were fashionable, and subscribers prided themselves¹ patronizingly on being more discriminating than newsagents. Private views probably were more strict than those of public distributors, for though Lady Bulwer-Lytton's Very Successful! (1856) complains of the "coarseness" of Jane Eyre, Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell appeared in Mudie's select 1848 catalogue, and Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights in every catalogue thereafter. Guy Livingstone, a much more daringly dubious piece of work, was published in 1857 and appears in the 1858 list and all that follow.

The censorship question, when it did arise in 1860, was not a matter of moral suppression, but a charge of religious prejudice and commercial rivalry. A reviewer in the Athenaeum for 1874 characterizes the nineteenth century as

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Wilkie Collins' Disreputable Society of 1856 was in revolt against a private book club's rigid preference for voyages and travels. There is no evidence in "A Petition to Novel-Writers" that the same dealer who supplied the voyages and travels did not also supply the novels, on request.

... commonplace enough, moderately good and moderately bad, interested chiefly in money-making and theology; very unromantic, both in their virtues and their vices; coveting their neighbour's house, even his ox and his ass, oftener than his wife. [Review of Hagarene, by the Author of Guy Livingstone, Athenaeum, 21 Nov. 1874, p.674]

--and the curious combination "money-making and theology" appears to be at the heart of the 1860 controversy, which was begun by the Literary Gazette and carried acrimoniously on by the Guardian. Most of the name-calling centered around the anonymous novel Miriam May, by one Arthur Robins. When he died in 1899, Robins was the rector of Holy Trinity, Windsor, chaplain to the Queen, to the Household Brigade, to Lord Boston, Lord Rossmore, the Earl of Caledon, and the Prince of Wales. He was also author of three novels, one of which, Black Moss, a tale by a tarn, was published in 1864 and appears in Mudie's catalogues for 1868 and 1876. That it should do so argues extraordinary tolerance on Mudie's part, for Robins' resplendent associations did not commence until 1873, with the appointment to Holy Trinity.

In 1860 Robins was a bumptious young man of 26, with an enormous grudge against practically everyone. Some of his spite escaped, steam-like, in the writing of Miriam May, but when Mudie, as one of the principal purveyors of fiction to the public, refused to stock it, pressure began to build up for a long and piercing blast. The Literary Gazette for 29 September 1860 had already begun an attack on Mudie with the charge that he was profiteering in the wholesale trade discount allowed on his phenomenally large purchases, and furthermore that he exercised "personal antipathy" in rejecting the books that he did not stock. Then on 10 October, a letter to the Guardian, the stiffly high church publica-

tion of that name, triumphantly advanced the fact that Mudie was a Dissenter as the discreditable explanation for the absence of Miriam May from the New Oxford Street circulation.

Mudie, charged with "covert attacks" on Church literature, "libellous" judgment, "despotism," "pushing his principles with his trade," and "establishing a virtual Index Expurgatorius by means of which every book that maintains the doctrines of the Church of England shall be smuggled into oblivion," replied with reference to Miriam May,

I will not knowingly circulate any work of fiction which egregiously misrepresents the views of any religious party as this book Miriam May unquestionably does. It is in your correspondent's opinion a High Church fiction; it can only be so described because it vilifies and caricatures a Low Church rector, who, by base influences, obtains a mitre. It is true that one of the secondary personages in the story is a tutor preaching in a Baptist chapel, who turns out a rogue, and whom I leave in the limbo to which the writer consigns him without a pang. The whole thing is grossly overdone, and is therefore comparatively harmless. [Guardian, 17 Oct. 1860, p.899]

Mudie's judgment is sanely and soundly literary; the book does not embody any of the principles with which the author wishes himself to be identified; it merely calls the opposition names. Mudie says, temperately enough, "The whole thing is grossly overdone, and is therefore comparatively harmless." At which "the Author of 'Miriam May'" immediately leapt into indignant print:

Sir,—As Mr. Mudie has thought it well to publish his reasons for the suppression of 'Miriam May,' and his measures to accomplish it, I must in justice to myself beg you to allow me as publicly to assert that his letter, so far as it affects my book, is from end to end untrue. ...

Mr. Mudie says ... 'I will not knowingly circulate a work of fiction which egregiously misrepresents the views of any religious party,' and further on, 'The whole thing is grossly overdone.' Much nonsense in many hard words. I really cannot help this, even to oblige the keeper of a public library. 'Miriam May' is true. That it should seem 'exaggerated' or 'overdone,' or what not, to Mr. Mudie, only

shows the folly and evil of such an unqualified person intruding himself as a critic. Mr. Mudie says I 'egregiously misrepresent.' You will permit me to assert that I have simply stated facts--the possibility or probability of which I shall not stop to explain to Mr. Mudie. [Guardian, 24 Oct. 1860, p.924; reprinted in the Literary Gazette, 27 Oct. 1860, p.355-6]

"It is grossly overdone"--"Miriam May is true ... I have simply stated facts." Robins and Mudie are not speaking the same language, and whatever facts Robins learned during his seven-year apprenticeship to a proctor in Doctors Commons, they had very little to do with literature. Miriam May is grossly overdone, in spite of the fact that reviews quoted in publishers' advertisements imply that the political parts of the story can be read as a roman à clef. The Literary Gazette review (2 June 1860) runs in part:

The Hon. and Rev. Calvin Slie is a Low-churchman, and a courtly hypocrite; he is eventually made Bishop of St. Ambrose, nominally by Viscount Fripon, really by Lord Kantwell, both of whom are easily recognised. [Literary Gazette, 2 June 1860, p.656]

So much for Robins' simple statement of facts. One wonders why the factual original of Slie did not bring a charge of libel, since Robins' High-churchmanship expresses itself in these terms:

It is hard to say what an "Evangelical" may be; the better may it be told what he is not. He has not any business with the name. It is to him the means of feeding upon, with a great greed, the bread of the Church, whilst he does but do the work of the conventicle, the while repudiating every form, ceremony, and doctrine of the Establishment. ... We should take nothing by burning by the street such as Mr. Slie. It would be a thing bad to see and worse to hear; but when, in the end, he became melted down, we should be none the father [sic] off from Rome and none the nearer to Geneva. [Miriam May, 3d ed., 1860, p.284-5]

Whatever the color of Robins' ecclesiastical politics, whatever his interpretation of Christian charity, the powers of composition he displays

in this passage scarcely give him the right to be contemptuous of Mudie's critical judgment. Moreover, sectarian rancour apart, Robins' envenomed bitterness against everybody and everything has a tendency to sound slightly unhinged to a generation somewhat more clinically accustomed to pathological examples. It is not simply a matter of clumsily opprobrious names like Mrs. Stoolman and Mrs. Dubbelfaise; there is precedent for that in Mr. Hate-light, Mr. Love-lust, Mr. Live-loose, Mr. Facing-both-ways. But even the generally favorable Literary Gazette comments: "All the friends of Arthur Trevor's parents seem to be selfish and scheming. ... Perhaps occasionally a little too bitter in its tone..."¹ and only the original itself can really demonstrate what the bitterness is like:

"I was so fond," she said, in a manner which was believed to partake of pity, "of saying what I thought of people. This might be honest," she admitted, "but society must be protected. Young men" she continued "oftener went wrong--that is after the manner indicated by Mrs. Stoolman--between eighteen and twenty-five, than any other age;" what she said "was for the best," when she advised my mother, that, such property as might come to me, should remain with trustees, until I was twenty-five. ...

There are a very few dying women who would not do as my mother did. All the unnumbered perils of temptation summoned by Mrs. Stoolman in a great procession came upon the scene, and it is strange how such things overtake and move us when the physicians have even ceased to take their fees, not because their consciences will not permit them to consult, but by reason that the attorney has come to draw the will. It was not--I believed it then, I know it now--that my mother's faith in me grew less, but that the evidence of everything was plainer, and she saw temptation as it had never risen up before. [Miriam May, 3d ed., 1860, p.215-6]

Mudie tolerantly said, "It is grossly overdone;" Robins insisted "Miriam May is true." Resisting the temptation to wonder what kind of will Mrs. George Henry Robins left, and why, one can generalize thus far about Miriam May: However closely Robins followed fact, however recog-

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Literary Gazette, 2 June 1860, p.656.

nizable his circumstantial detail, fact alone will not constitute a fiction that gives even an illusion of truth. The inclusion of more and more specific detail as a means for embodying permanent truth has its limitations. Like Adeline Mowbray, truth must not only be true, but must appear true by the code of social conventions currently in force. "Miriam May is true" has nothing to do with Miriam May's quality as a novel.

As a novel, unfortunately, it has nothing to recommend it. Clearly it is a work of less than average ability, and when Mudie declined it, he demonstrated sound common sense and good literary judgment. But the public, which is willing to find lenient excuses for almost every violation of the Decalogue, including "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour," seems to hold the bare idea of censorship or restraint in peculiar horror, and to regard it as something wrong per se. Anyone who says "No" appears as a narrow-minded perpetrator of injustice. The public which had formerly prided itself on the superiority of its discrimination resented the implied censure of a judgment superior to its own. The exalted hysteria of the charges against Mudie--"Index Expurgatorius" and the like--obscure the fact that Mudie's rejection of a book did not make it impossible to get; it only made it inconvenient. The situation by no means called for surreptitious purchases under the counter or smuggling volumes past the Customs. The publishers Saunders, Otley, and Co., as well as the retail booksellers, were quite willing to sell to anyone on net terms. Even the usual objection to the size and price of novels did not operate in this instance, for Miriam May was published in one volume at 10/6, not three volumes at a guinea and a half, and the following year Routledge

published a reprint edition at 1/6. Furthermore, Hookham's of Old Bond Street and George Bubb of New Bond Street both wrote letters to the Literary Gazette gently intimating that if the public was dissatisfied with the service at Mudie's there were a number of other subscription libraries in London.

At bottom, the situation reduces to the fact that the book is not worth 10/6, even with a trade discount, and besides that, Mudie's was convenient. It was convenient not only for its low subscription rate, its wide selection of titles, and its extensive book stock, but also for the very element of selection of which the Literary Gazette and the Guardian complained. One of Mudie's advertisements in the Saturday Review for 27 October 1860 runs:

C.E. MUDIE is again under the necessity of reminding the Subscribers to his Library, that while he desires to give the widest possible circulation to every work of acknowledged merit or general interest in HISTORY, BIOGRAPHY, RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY, TRAVEL, and the higher classes of FICTION, he reserves the right of selection. The present rate of increase exceeds ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY THOUSAND VOLUMES per annum, consisting chiefly of works of permanent interest and value. Works of merely professional or local interest, novels of less than average ability, ephemeral pamphlets, quartos, costly books of plates, serials, and cheap reprints, are almost invariably excluded.

And Mudie's judgment of "less than average ability" was shrewdly good, and was recognized as such. In spite of the Literary Gazette's sneers

that it is detrimental to the interests of the public on the one hand to have their tastes directed by a person who, by education and position, is singularly unfit for so august an office; and it is detrimental to the interests of authors on the other hand to be forced to pander to the narrow-minded prejudices of the Oxford Street sectarian [Literary Gazette, 10 November 1860, p.398]

the situation in itself is a powerful argument that the public's estimate of Mudie's taste was much less disparaging than the Literary Gazette's.

Mr. C.E. Mudie, unqualified alike by habits and by education, actually has more power to damn a book than was ever possessed by any body of literary men. [Literary Gazette, 10 November 1860, p.398]

If his disapproval was effective, it could only be because it was widely felt to be justified. The world of Mrs. Ellis, in which wives would be ashamed to differ from a pattern of perfect excellence, the world of Carlyle, in which true liberty consists in finding out or being forced to find out the right path,¹ the world of Caroline Norton in which law-givers have no alternative but to establish justice, was willing to be advised on excellence; but the laissez-faire of the world of John Stuart Mill (s concept of liberty (1859) could be taken to insist on the overriding im-² portance of the individual's right to his own stupidity. Both attitudes are reflected in the 1860 controversy:

I know lots of people, with whom the announcement that Mudie would not have a book in his library because it was improper, would have the most telling effect, and probably damn the book. ... I do not care what qualifications he may have, but I deny most emphatically that any man has the qualifications for this post of judging for me what books I ought or ought not to read. ["Z," in Literary Gazette, 6 October 1860, p.285]

The dissidence of this dissent makes much of what is generally accepted as criticism impossible. Even as it was, the sequel was bitter. In 1860, Mudie maintained the validity of his critical judgment ("He reserves the right of selection") even in the face of a public demand that threw verbal bricks if it did not get what it wanted. He was temperately within his rights, and his literary judgment was soundly good, but the public

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"Democracy," Past and Present, 1843.

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"His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because in the opinion of others, to do so would be wise or even right."--"Introductory," On Liberty, 1859.

was less interested in right judgment than in its own judgment. And apparently Gresham's Law operates in matters of taste as well as in economics: give good opinions and bad opinions equal currency, and the bad will drive out the good. Mudie expanded his premises in December, 1860; but in 1864 he was forced to retrench to the extent of making the business a limited liability company. Meanwhile, the sensation novel flourished sensationally, and in 1884 the censorship question arose again.

This time the indignant author was not Arthur Robins, but George Moore; and the issue was not religious prejudice, alleged or actual, but the morality of art. That Moore at 32 was a great deal more literate than Robins at 26 goes without saying. But he was fully as indignant as Robins when Mudie took fifty copies of A Modern Lover and would not circulate them.

"Two ladies from the country wrote to me objecting. ... I saw the review in the Spectator, but I must consult the wishes of my clients." ... "I quite admit that such is your duty, but ... concerning my next book, what are you going to do? Will you agree to be guided as regards my literary morals by the verdict of the Spectator, the Athenaeum, or would you prefer the Academy?" "I can accept no opinion except that of my customers." "But I don't know who your customers are, and you only define them as two ladies in the country. I want something more definite; will you set up your own moral standard, and then I shall know up to what point I shall have to live?" "I have no standard to set up; I shall take the advice of my customers." ["A New Censorship of Literature," Pall Mall Gazette, XL (10 Dec. 1884) 2]

Moore, in a cold fury, stormed off and wrote an attack on the circulating libraries entitled Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals (Vizetelly, 1885), in which he was as condescending toward "the censorship which a mere tradesman assumes to exercise over the literature of the nineteenth century" as the Literary Gazette had been some twenty years earlier.

"I hate you," he chanted, "because you are the great purveyor of the worthless, the false and the commonplace. ... I hate you because you pander to the intellectual sloth of to-day." In 1860 Mudie was criticized for rejecting the worthless and false; in 1884 he was condemned for circulating it. In damning support of his disparagement, Moore outlined the plots of several novels then in circulation at Mudie's, claiming that his work was no worse than they were. He gives quotations, on the basis of which it is possible to say that the authors concerned are more fluent, and grammatically more competent, than the author of Miriam May, and somewhat more ingenious in the concoction of plot, but--one wonders about the two ladies in the country. Did they ask for this kind of thing, or were they unaware of its existence? All trace of Mrs. Ellis's system of values has completely vanished. In 1860 Mudie specifically reserved the right of selection; in 1884 he had no standard beyond the advice of his subscribers. Both ways he was bitterly criticized, but only in the latter case was the criticism really justified. Give the public what it wants, and eventually you will be beaten for that too.

It is obvious that the public is never entirely unanimous in its tastes. In 1860, besides those who fled before the slightest intimation of immorality, there were those to whom even justified censure merely presented a challenge, and in 1884 besides those who championed a sociological

[continued] or a librarian should automatically be less intelligent than a publisher, no one fuming about "mere tradesmen" has ever attempted to explain. Mudie's native taste and judgment on books was certainly as good as that of most reviewers, and in 1884 he was assisted in the business by his second son, Arthur Oliver Mudie, who took a B.A. at Oxford in 1879, M.A. 1881. The deadly factor would appear to be the sovereign power vested in the two ladies in the country. "Popular taste" is never quite as good as one's own.

approach to morals ("Whatever is, is right") there were the two ladies¹ in the country. The advent of the sensation novel seems to me to mark a shift in the balance of power, and I have therefore taken the censorship question of 1860 as a convenient terminus to a period when popular fiction dealt with emotional human beings, not moralized abstractions, and yet still subscribed to a moral rather than a sociological system of values.

When the divergence of values first appeared in the mid-fifties, there was little evidence of the celebrated Victorian intolerance. Guy Livingstone (1857), as I hope subsequently to demonstrate, was infinitely more revolutionary than Jane Eyre; Kate Coventry (1856) and Rita (1858) were infinitely more destructive of the feminine ideal--and yet all of these books were popular. It was not entirely the introduction of new subject matter. Mrs. Gore and Lady Charlotte Bury had previously castigated the follies of society, but in the fifties apologists began to make the same thing fashionable. Seducers have figured in novels ever since Pamela recognized the designs of Mr. B--, but the import of Noell Radcliffe's Alice Wentworth (1854) is an extended apology for "Beautiful Darrell," who is much less acute than Mr. B--, and entirely incapable

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For an excellent treatment of the characteristics of the sensation novel, see Gordon H. Fleming's George Alfred Lawrence and the Victorian Sensation Novel (University of Arizona, 1952); also the unpubl. diss. (London, 1961) by Peter David Edwards, "Anthony Trollope and the Victorian Novel of Sensation." Contemporary articles include "Our Female Sensation Novelists," Christian Remembrancer, XLVI (July 1863) 209-236; "Sensation Novels," Quarterly Review, CXIII (Apr. 1863) 481-514; "Novels with a Purpose," Westminster Review, LXXXII (nls. XXVI) (July 1864) 24-49; "Youth as Depicted in Modern Fiction," Christian Remembrancer, LII (July 1866) 184-211; "Our Novels: The Fast School; The Sensational School," Temple Bar, XXIX (May-June 1870) 177-194; 410-424.

of reformation. Unhappy marriages have inspired a good many spectacular methods of escape, in life and in literature, but the future "Mrs. Alexander"'s Agnes Waring (1856), without actually advocating elopement, argues that wives are entitled to a breaking point. The burden of Adeline Mowbray (1805) is that it is necessary not only to be virtuous but also to appear so; but Rita (1858) goes out of her way to appear in the worst possible light and then protests her spotless innocence. Religious hypocrites have been recognizable since the days of Tartuffe--Burns was by no means taken in by the unco' guid--but the odiousness of the race of Holy Willies did not become an argu^ment against all religion until churchgoers as a whole began to pay more attention to the lice on their neighbors' bonnets than to the sincerity of their own devotions. If L.E.L. observed in 1831, "The style of loud talking, laughing, or what was termed dashing, lies in the tomb of the Duchess of Gordon. We are in the other extreme,"¹ and for a time severe morality was genuinely fashionable, by 1861 the public was ready to bury the age of reaction in the grave of the Prince Consort.

My concern is with the values that prevailed during the lifetime of the Prince Consort and the twenty years that morality was fashionable. I have already attempted to indicate some of them: an increasing emphasis on the immediate and the emotional at the expense of the ultimate and the rational; historical rather than poetic truth; an increasing emphasis on individual rights at the expense of general obligations and duties; glorification of the exception rather than the rule. As a workable whole,

¹
Romance and Reality, 1831, I, 214.

the system is perhaps best seen in Coventry Patmore's Angel in the House (1854-1856), where many of the ideas that novelists expounded in three volumes are found raised to a higher power in concentrated form. Patmore's poet Vaughan, for example, deliberately rejects heroic themes in favor of the commonplace and the domestic, which was exactly what the contemporary novel was doing. Yet for all his exaltation of wife and children, his subject is love, not lovers, and his point of view is intrinsically, not superficially, religious. He prefers the contemplation of virtue to the study of vice, and the achievement of happiness to the anatomy of misery. In The Victories of Love (1860-1862) Patmore does deal with a character who failed to get what he wanted, but, with Christian persistence, he still brings good out of evil.

One can scarcely condemn as theoretical and visionary a point of view which prefers the pleasure of what one already possesses to the charm of pursuing what is beyond one's reach:

He discommended girlhood. 'What
 'For sweetness like the ten-years' wife,
 'Whose customary love is not
 'Her passion or her play, but life?
 'With beauties so maturely fair,
 'Affecting, mild, and manifold,
 'May girlish charms no more compare
 'Than apples green with apples gold.' ¹

Happiness built on this foundation is not gratuitously bestowed, like a legacy of £5000 from the forgotten uncle who went to India. Victorian love stories are in some respects far more realistic than many people believe or realize. Their system of values highlights a different area of experience from that featured in the sensation novel and its successors,

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Angel in the House, Epilogue.

and in consequence operates on a different set of assumptions. Attitudes like this of C. Willett Cunningham in Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century (1935) are distinctly beside the point:

The 19th century novel tells us very little of psychological value, except by some chance slip of the pen, and we have to apply modern psychoanalytical methods in order to understand the 19th century woman. The novelist may have been an artist, but he was entirely under the influence of the Gothic tradition, which aims at graceful concealment rather than precise truth. [p.300]

--for reasons which I hope I have already at least partially clarified.

It might be possible to reverse a good many of the charges of concealment, hypocrisy, and misrepresentation leveled against the Victorians with a "Tu quoque," and the resolute reaffirmation that happiness is as real as misery, that goodness is infinitely more attractive than evil, and that love is better worth study than anger and hatred; but current literary conventions would scarcely permit it. Such an attitude would sound as superficial and shallow at the present time as the young man who confessed he had no intentions sounded to Paterfamilias a hundred years ago. Therefore I have attempted to deal with the values in the popular love stories of the period 1840-1860 as if they were historical rather than poetic facts, and have dealt with them under three heads: I. Courtship as a search for values; II. Marriage as a test of values; III. Love as value. I have concentrated upon the dominant pattern, but have endeavored to indicate divergent views where they are apparent, not unmindful that Mudie, after all, did not cease to be a power in the literary world until after he abjured the right of selection, and allowed himself to be governed by public demand.

I

Courtship as a Search for Values

I, in my pleached garden, watched the pomp,
 Forgot my morning wishes, hastily
 Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day
 Turned and departed silent. I, too late,
 Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Days"
 (pub. in Atlantic Monthly, 1857)

One of the principal protests against Victorian love stories is the charge that they inevitably ended jubilantly with a wedding, as if that ended all problems instead of creating new ones. I shall take up the chief refutation of that idea in my next chapter, in dealing with the novels concerned with marriage rather than with courtship, but for the present I should like to explore the idea that in some senses, and to a very large extent, marriage did conclusively end one volume and begin another. Whatever effect it had or failed to have on men, it radically reoriented women's lives and permanently fixed their places in society. It had a finality like death, concluded only with death, and was very nearly as inevitable as death. Of course the expected termination to any girl's story was marriage. But since her husband in all earnestness did represent her fate, as inexorably as the Day of Judgment, the unsettled, uncertain period of courtship could be regarded as a quest for values that would last for life, and that is the way I have chosen to deal with it.

I should first of all like to dispose of the tabula rasa innocence of ignorance cliché that surrounds Victorian courtship like a cloud of

tulle and a wreath of artificial flowers. This exotic hothouse bloom was principally cultivated after the advent of the sensation novel, when authors did their best to render vice amiable and attractive, rather than before. One does sometimes encounter finicky foolishness and a hint that some things are better not inquired into,¹ but there is a curious suggestion in The Egoist (1879) that the demand for ignorant innocence came not from Mrs. Grundy and the omnipotent two ladies in the country, but from Sir Willoughby Patterne: "Innocence is as poor a guarantee as a babe's caul against shipwreck. Women of the world never think of attacking the sensual stipulation for perfect bloom, silver purity, which is redolent of the Oriental origin of the love-passion of their lords."² And until one encounters a passage like this from Percy Greg's Ivy, Cousin and Bride (1881), he does not fully realize that its equivalent is almost entirely lacking in the silly fictions of scribbling women earlier in the century:

All the world might have known it, if he could have kept Ivy innocent of a knowledge so fatal to her stainless purity of soul. His rever-

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"I studiously avoid lowering their moral tone as women, and vulgarising them as gentlewomen, by ever talking to them of lovers, flirtations, and 'getting married,' as the servant-maids phrase it; and as for a real and deep love, I think it too sacred and serious--not to say often too fatal and inevitable a crisis in a woman's existence--to touch upon the solemn mystery till nature and fate have taken the initiative in it."--Lady Bulwer Lytton, Very Successful, 1856, I, 312. But Lady Bulwer Lytton was an egregiously silly woman, as the rest of the book is abundant witness. Lady Charlotte Bury was a great deal more intelligent, and she does not approve of the character who expresses these sentiments: "People told me, General Monteith was very honourable, as far as men go in these times; and my father expressed his decided opinion that it was highly improper and unfeminine to ask about men's private actions."--The Wilfulness of Woman, 1844, I, 205.

2

The Egoist (1879), Ch. V.

ence for maidenhood in general might be extravagantly credulous, but there was no exaggeration in his poetic apprehension of Ivy's maiden innocence; and he simply could not endure that any glimpse of the truth, any vague shadow of shame or sin, should darken that snowy chastity of thought, or startle that perfect ignorance of evil which was for him the deepest charm of her exquisite nature. [Ivy, Cousin and Bride, 1881, I, 233]

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Into such quagmires did the sensation novel and its successors flounder. But it is a man's idea, not a woman's, and it is late rather than early Victorian.

"Ignorance of evil, and consequently of temptation" is no recommendation to Mrs. Ellis; the virtue she prefers is a durable integrity:

Integrity we may find in every circumstance of life, because integrity is founded on principle; and consequently while not a stranger to temptation, its nature is to withstand it. Integrity is shown in a straightforward and upright line of conduct, on trifling, as well as on great occasions; in private as well as in public; beneath the eye of God alone, as well as before the observation of men. [Daughters of England, 1842, p.426-7]²

"It becomes the first act of integrity to endeavour to see, hear, and

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Ethert Glynne marries his cousin Ivy at his aunt's urgent request, because Ivy's father had bigamously married her mother while he still had a mad wife confined in a private asylum; Ivy is therefore not her father's heir, and sundry property believed to be hers is actually his as his uncle's heir-at-law. The chivalrous unconsummated marriage conceals from the world in general how the property came into his possession. But of course mad wives in private asylums are always found out. The end result of Ethert's nauseating ideal of ignorant innocence is that Ivy learns the whole truth about her father and mother anyway and grovellingly adores Ethert for his magnanimity in marrying her, while on his part, he feels no affection for her until she, maiden innocence and all, begs him to consummate the marriage.

2

In the decade after Mrs. Ellis, something very like what she is advocating here became the hall-mark of the fictions of Charlotte Yonge and Elizabeth Sewell; in the decade after that, the principle was weighed and found wanting. An article in the Spectator comments:

It is to these very qualities [the constant reference of petty acts to high principles] that the popularity of nursery novels is to be attributed. ... The view of life which delights to regulate every thought and deed by the influence of religion ... has, we believe, two defects. It is only partially true. Many actions are morally indifferent; many more ought to be ruled, not by the highest but by the secondary moral laws. ...

It inculcates a waste of moral force.--["Nursery Novelists," Spectator, XXXVI (25 April 1863) 1926-7. Unused, moral force has tended to disappear.

believe the truth, and then to speak it," which is a long way removed from the conventional myopia which "consists in pretending not to see, or not to understand vice, where it is not convenient to believe in its existence," or the false delicacy "which is perpetually in quest of something to be ashamed of, which makes a merit of a blush, and simpers at the false construction its own ingenuity has put upon an innocent remark."²

True delicacy

maintains its pure and undeviating walk alike amongst women, as in the society of men; ... shrinks from no necessary duty, and can speak, when required, with seriousness and kindness of things, at which it would be ashamed indeed to smile or to blush. [Daughters of England, 1842, p.178]³

Mrs. Ellis never counselled the daughters of England who were to become the wives of England and the mothers of England to be ignorant. "No human being can learn too much, so that their sphere of intelligence does

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Daughters of England, 1842, p.433.

2

Daughters of England, 1842, p.177.

3

Victorian earnestness is well demonstrated in the contemporary reception of Holman Hunt's The Awakening Conscience. The high neck of the woman's dress and the curious way she has gathered her skirt suggest the bustles of the 1870's, when the two ladies from the country would indubitably have protested. But the picture was originally exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1854, as a companion piece to The Light of the World. Hunt's subject was then recognized as conscience, not sin. The Spectator comments upon it:

We rest the nobility of the picture upon the fact that the thought which dictated it is to be honoured, and the feeling with which this is expressed admirable. We rejoice to find the earnestness and unflinching thoroughness of the Pre-raphaelite school applied to subjects of our own day. [Spectator, XXVII (27 May 1854) 566]

Furthermore, the same seriousness and kindness, without any attempt to glamorize, is the essence of Hood's "Bridge of Sighs" (1846), and is back of Dickens' rendition of Nancy in Oliver Twist (1838) and of Little Emily and Martha Endell in David Copperfield (1850).

not extend to what is evil." ¹ It is true that she does say that "The atmosphere of the kitchen is [never] an element in which a refined and intellectual woman ought to live," ² but she does not therefore advocate discreet avoidance of all that goes on there. She assumes that an intelligent woman can understand without necessarily participating, and she advises "maintaining a general oversight and management of such affairs" without plunging "head, heart, and hand, into the vortex of culinary operations, thinking, feeling, and doing what would be more appropriately left to ... servants." ³ Her administrative attitude is not dictated by a finicky belief that the mistress of a household restricted to the services of one to four domestics should never roughen her hands with anything coarser than embroidery silk. The truest delicacy "shrinks from no necessary duty," and she strongly advocates that all girls should learn to make themselves useful in a sickroom--genuinely useful, not conventionally graceful with a bowl of gruel. The care of the sick might more conveniently, but not more appropriately be left to servants, because the service rendered in this case gains from the spirit in which it is performed, and Mrs. Ellis advocates educating the head and heart worthily ⁴ even more than the hands.

¹ Women of England, 1839, p.334.

² Wives of England, 1843, p.261.

³ Ibid.

⁴ A decade later, one finds the protest in Anne Dysart: "She concluded by hoping that Anne was not an admirer of the 'old-fashioned silly cant, that the less a woman is heard of the better; and that a woman's proper sphere is in the sick-room, &c. &c.'" [Anne Dysart, 1850, II, 6] Some indubitably did consider it old-fashioned, but in 1850 Anne and her author were essentially in agreement with Mrs. Ellis.

Her principal emphasis therefore, and that of her contemporaries, is on what contributes most to one's highest development, and without ignoring other aspects of development, she does not think it necessary to dot all the i's and cross all the t's. She advises the Daughters of England;

I would rather suppose them already acquainted with the fact, that those passions, and emotions, to the exercise of which they believe themselves especially called, are many of them such as are common to the inferior orders of animals, while the possession of an understanding capable of unlimited extension, is an attribute of the Divine nature, and one which raises them to a level with the angels. [Daughters of England, 1842, p.39]

If this sounds theoretical, a cursory glance at the conditions of Victorian life nevertheless reveals a good many sources of practical information which could then be taken for granted, though the same information now constitutes a special educational problem. If one had seven or eight brothers and sisters, not to mention families of cousins, getting along with people was a practical matter, not the theoretical bugaboo it is for an only child. However restricted a Victorian girl's education and activities, if she had brothers and cousins, she probably had less difficulty meeting and understanding young men than her modern counterpart, for all of women's subsequent emancipation. The enormous families in Charlotte Yonge's stories demonstrate how richly sane an education life in a large family could be. Ethel May is perhaps socially awkward in her encounter with her cousin Norman Ogilvie in The Daisy Chain (1856), but the awkwardness does not extend to her dealings with her brother Norman, and though scholarly rather than domestic, she makes an admirable head of her father's household. In The Trial (1864), nominally twelve years later, she inspires a kind of adolescent enthusiasm in Leonard Ward,

which she is perceptive enough to render beneficial to him, while at the same time she also offers her mother's old admirer, Dr. Spencer, genuine sympathy and understanding. There is very little that psychoanalytical methods and greater freedom of manners could have taught her.

Of course the amount that could be learned from the premature household management of brothers and sisters was necessarily limited by the intelligence of the individual. Ninian Graeme, the elder brother who becomes the head of the family in Miss Mulock's story of that title, appears to have learned very little from it. Perhaps brothers learned less from association with their sisters than the sisters learned, or perhaps girls were naturally more practical in their observations. Lotty Beauvilliers in Margaret and her Bridesmaids illustrates the system at its best. Lotty has twelve brothers, sharp eyes, and excellent judgment:

"Little Lotty, tell me how you know all these things that you seem to know?"

"Nobody told me, but I guessed. I am fifteen, and Miss Elton says, quite learned enough to leave school next year. However, I love Margaret, and I love Basil; I think he is a man, in the true sense of the word, fit to take upon himself the care of such a creature as Margaret. He is loving, yet manly; gentle, yet firm; good, yet forbearing. I like Basil very much, and if he had married Margaret, I would have been bridesmaid; that is, I think I would, for I do not approve of marrying."

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He fails even to reprove his flirtatious sister Tinie, and he is so besotted with Hope Ansted, a wide-eyed innocent and near-imbecile in the worst Dora Spenslow tradition, that she very nearly has to propose to him. One feels that any children born of such a marriage would inevitably be fools. The worst of it is not that the characters behave foolishly, but that the author does not appear to be aware that they are foolish. Charlotte Yonge permits Theodora Martindale in Heartsease to be jealously possessive of her brother Arthur, but without preaching about it, she makes it perfectly clear that Theodora is at fault in this instance. Miss Mulock is apparently serenely imperceptive of Tinie's colossal selfishness in wheedling, "You will never think of marrying when we love you so much? ... You will never go and love some stranger and leave your sisters alone in the wide world?" and of Ninian's colossal stupidity in solemnly promising "God is my witness, I never will!" [The Head of the Family, 1852, I, 291]

"And why, little one, did you deem it necessary to have any ideas on the subject?"

"Why should I not? Did Flory and Carry think of aught else? to say nothing of Augusta. They believed me to be a safe listener, ignorant and innocent, so I heard all, and drew my conclusions." ...

"You are certainly very quick-witted, my Lotty," said Millicent.

"About men I am," said Lotty; "because I live with them so much. But all my brothers, and uncles, and cousins are true Beauvillians-- they all make good husbands." [Margaret and her Bridesmaids, 1856, I, 97-99]

In a day when children, especially girls, were to be seen and not heard, the ability to listen could provide the key to a liberal education not found in books. Two jeunes filles in Violet Bank and its Inmates (1858):

"From the mysterious whispering going on no doubt they are deep in Natural History."

"Are they indeed?" said Grace.

"Don't take me literally. I mean they are talking medically, Miss Lloyd; didn't you ever listen to old married ladies' conversations? it's very instructive, I assure you, only I can't tolerate it; so let us go away from them as far as we can." [Violet Bank and its Inmates, 1858, II, 288-9]

Besides the whispered conversations of mothers, aunts, and married sisters, there was also, especially for the very young, the uninhibited chatter of the one to four domestics. Faithful old retainers were unlikely to be imbued with exaggerated notions of theoretical delicacy. The lady of the house, if she was a conscientious cottage visitor, saw a great deal that is now apparent only to trained social workers. Moreover, in the days of home nursing, almost all levels of society lived closer to the major issues of life--birth, death, and illness--than a more specialized age can, however outspoken. The numerous deathbeds which the twentieth century tends to dismiss as a lugubrious convention of Victorian fiction were unfortunately a fact which can be supported by absolutely objective nineteenth century statistics on infant mortality and on typhus, typhoid, T.B., and other medically certified causes of death. Ruskin's

comment was as late as 1880:

The temptation, to weak writers of this order of subject [deathbed pathos] is especially great, because the study of it from the living --or dying--model is so easy, and to many has been the most impressive part of their own personal experience; while, if the description be given even with mediocre accuracy, a very large section of readers will admire its truth, and cherish its melancholy. . . . The easily rendered, and too surely recognized, image of familiar suffering is felt at once to be real where all else had been false; and the historian of the gestures of fever and words of delirium can count on the applause of a gratified audience as surely as the dramatist who introduces on the stage of his flagging action a carriage that can be driven or a fountain that will flow. [John Ruskin, "Fiction--Fair and Foul," Nineteenth Century, VII (June 1880) 947]

It scarcely supports the idea that the Victorians were living in a fools' paradise populated entirely by ostriches.

Among the more dubious sources of information on life and its meaning were the chatter of schoolmates ("Did Flory and Carry think of aught else?") and French novels. Fortunate those who had some reasonable corrective like Lotty Beauvilliers' twelve brothers. Hamilton Aide's Rita (1858) unhappily measured French novels against a Micawberish father who gambled and kept even worse company than gamblers.

It was deeply, terribly exciting, beyond anything I had yet perused--no matter that I did not understand two-thirds of its insidious immorality. The heroine was a married lady, a giddy sort of person, but tossed upon such a perfect sea of troubles, poor thing, that I felt very much interested in her fate. I had a dim apprehension that she had better not meet her husband's friend quite so often, at uncertain hours of the night. There were long passages, too, about "l'âme pure," and "l'union sympathique des coeurs," that I skipped, because I found them dull; but the story itself, ah! that was cunningly and thrillingly told! incidents threaded on close and thick, like beads--a murder, a mystery, a disclosure, a false marriage, another murder--all so wrought up that my blood ran hot and cold by turns. [Rita, 1858, I, 46-7]

Under her aunt's catechizing she sounds oddly like a devotee of X films and television:

"What sort of books do you like best?" ...

"Real things--and horrible--I like the most horrible ones best."

[Rita, 1858, I, 48]

It is quite possible that the daughters of England who read Mrs. Ellis, Charlotte Yonge, and Elizabeth Sewell understood no more of what those authors said about "pure souls" than Rita comprehended of "l'âme pure," but they were infinitely less likely to get into trouble patterning their daydreams on pure-souled models. If marrying and giving in marriage constituted the principal subject of female meditation, there was certainly no need for Thackeray to sneer. Men might make their fortunes, but women who were not born heiresses were forced to marry theirs. Until the 1850's there was virtually no alternative to domesticity for women who were not domestic servants, and even then, alternatives to matrimony were grim indeed. Earlier in the century it was almost impossible for women to appear in public unchaperoned--not for any finicky theoretical delicacy, but because alone they were genuinely likely to be subject to serious annoyance. City streets in Ireland were as dangerous a jungle for Sarah the exemplary wife (1813) as London was for Clarissa Harlowe. Adeline Mowbray (1805) is several times unpleasantly jostled. Laura Montreville, in Mrs. Brunton's Self Control (1811) is rescued from an awkward situation by De Courcy, as Lucilla Temple, in Mrs. Gordon Smythies' The Breach of Promise (1845), is similarly but much more improbably rescued by Lord Trelawney.

Somewhere in the 1850's, life became a little less hazardous. Miss Mulock's Agatha, of Agatha's Husband (1853), was apparently able to walk home unattended before her marriage: "The idea of anybody's taking care

of me! We never thought of such a thing three months ago. I used to come and go everywhere at my own sweet will." ¹ Kate Vernon (1854), who taught music, Lotty Beauvilliers, Margaret's unwilling bridesmaid (1854), and Isabel Wold, who eventually supported herself by keeping a music shop in Emily Jolly's Caste (1857), all enlisted large dogs as chaperones. It argues a greater degree of independence than was possible to poor Sarah. Gertrude Morley, in Geraldine Jewsbury's The Sorrows of Gentility (1856) finds needlework preferable to the husband she married to keep from being employed as a barmaid in her father's inn, though according to most accounts from Hood's "Song of the Shirt" onwards, needlework was a hazardous last resort between indigence and starvation. It represents the lowest ebb in the fortunes of Anne Dysart (1850), Anne Sherwood (1857), and Miriam May (1860). Similarly, Beatrice Brooke, in Lost and Saved (1863) touches bottom in cleaning and repairing lace. Jessie Jefferson, a minor character in "Holme Lee"'s Maude Talbot (1854) rejoices in her independence as a milliner's assistant in a factory town, but she comes to grief because she fails to realize that mill owners have no intentions of marrying milliners' assistants.

The most astonishing excursion into independence is Elizabeth Worme-

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Agatha's Husband, 1853, I, 299. Her experience is like May's in Mrs. Hubback's May and December (1854):

"You do not know the danger to which a beautiful young woman exposes herself, when she ventures about without a protector. But take my word for it, and do not repeat these expeditions."

"Your imaginary dangers to unprotected females, however beautiful, do not alarm me in the least; first, because I did not meet with anything of the sort, and secondly, because I was not wholly unprotected, having not only my own presence of mind and courage, but one of my most devoted lovers to take care of me." [May and December, 1854, I, 112]

The devoted lover is the adolescent brother of the friend whom she had been visiting.

ley Letimer's Amabel, whose story is subtitled The Victory of Love (1853): unjustly turned out of house and home by her husband's unfounded suspicions, she goes to London and becomes a hospital nurse:

I am surprised that decayed gentlewomen of the better class, who sigh after conventual life, and crowd the daily papers with advertisements, so seldom make choice of this occupation: it is safe, independent, respectable, and responsible; it may be dignified by a religious self-consecration. [Amabel, 1853, III, 185]

This was in 1853, the year before the Crimean War.

Of course there were always governesses; it was probably the primary refuge par excellence of the decayed gentlewoman; but the first volume and a half of "Berkeley Aikin"'s Anne Sherwood (1857) is devoted to a fictionalized sociological survey of governessing that makes Jane Eyre's life sound like a bed of roses, and Mr. Rochester appear like Prince Charming. Adelaide Lindsay (1850) was fortunate in securing an appointment with someone who is subsequently discovered to be a relation, and Agnes Waring (1856) equally fortunate in accompanying a military family to Canada. Both of them were interested in vanishing from circulation, and apparently taking a post as governess was an entirely effective way of doing it.

But education was sufficiently a woman's province to offer a number of opportunities. A distinctly new departure in the same field is introduced by Honor Sky in Christiana Jane Douglas's Onwards! (1859), almost ten years after the same author's Anne Dysart. Honor is not a decayed gentlewoman, but a village orphan who ultimately becomes an independent schoolmistress, seriously entering into teaching as a full-time career,

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and concluding the third volume unmarried and undaunted. But this was in 1859, when a new order was genuinely afoot. Mrs. Riddell's The Rich Husband (1858), being partly autobiographical, depicts a woman author's struggle to support herself in much darker hues than Laura Montreville's genteel attempt in 1811 to supply her father with little luxuries by disposing of her water-color paintings. It was possible for a woman to make a living without being married; but that is a little like saying that it was possible to survive shipwreck. Certainly the most normal form of life, and the one that offered the greatest prospect of happiness, was marriage.

In general, the generalization is probably still true, but how different are the details! There is a delightful episode in Margaret and her Bridesmaids (1856) which reads almost like a deliberate parody of Victorian romance, in which Mr. Frank, one of Lotty Beauvilliers' cousins ("They all make good husbands") proposes to one of the two sisters known as Prudence and Propriety, though their real names are Charlotte and

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Onwards! documents the contemporary school situation almost as well as Anne Sherwood does the life and prospects of the governess. Another of its revolutionary originalities is that it depicts Honor as offering serious intellectual competition to her male counterpart, James Carver, who wants an education in order to get ahead in life. A number of sisters, like Maggie Tulliver, were more acute than the brothers to whom they were subordinated, but the brothers seldom took their sisters seriously, or considered them as competition. James Carver is a very early instance of male jealousy of female ability.

2

In Mrs. Brunton's Self Control. It is doubtful whether Laura would have disposed of any paintings if De Courcy had not discovered the artist's identity.

3

Some account of occupations for women is to be found in Patricia Thomson's The Victorian Heroine, a Changing Ideal, 1837-1873 (1956), though the principal emphasis of the book is the emancipation of women.

Georgina, in compliment to the highly moral queen of George III. He first approaches her mother, who insists that a decent interval should be observed. Finally, "the time deemed fit by propriety, decorum, and courtly example being fulfilled," she orders her unsuspecting daughter, "Get your parasol and take a turn under the walnut trees."

Certainly, this was rather a public place for such a circumstance, inasmuch as the avenue was commanded from every window in her house, as well as those of Court Leigh.

Pro. never dreamt of disobeying, and Mr. Frank, fortified with various powerful shakes of the hand from his kinsmen, and many good wishes for his success, departed with the amiable object of his affections at a decorous distance from his side.

Most men would have been nervous had they supposed themselves to be under the surveillance of many curious eyes (though no words could be heard) in such delicate circumstances; but it was a peculiarity of the Beauvillians that they could do nothing in secret or alone. Therefore Mr. Frank thought with pleasure and satisfaction, of the eager and anxious Beauvillian eyes that would be scanning his every action, as he took this eventful walk.

Lady Katherine also took her station at her window, that she might be able to judge with her own eyes, that the proposal was made and accepted according to the strictest rules of etiquette. Pro. herself was the only unconscious person in all these base plots, and went, perhaps a little fluttered, but quite an innocent victim to her destiny. They walk about a yard apart.

Mr. Frank bows.

"He is beginning," say the eager Beauvillians, from their windows.

"Very respectful," thinks Lady Katherine, from her window.

Pro. starts, and Mr. Frank bows lower.

"He is in full cry," exclaim his sympathetic kinsmen. "Poor child! how fluttered she will be," murmurs Lady Katherine.

Pro. stops short, then starts again, as if about to run away. Mr. Frank places himself before her, and bows lower than ever.

"He is well on the scent," cry the Beauvillian windows.

"I almost think he is at this moment proposing," says the other window.

Pro. drops her parasol, and attempts to grasp at it. Mr. Frank takes the extended hand in his.

"Bravo, Frank! that's the way; you have her now!" cry the Beauvillians.

"Oh!" gasps Lady Katherine; she half thought she must shut her eyes, but her anxiety to see that all was conducted with the strictest propriety, made her look more vigilantly than ever.

Pro. puts her handkerchief to her eyes; Mr. Frank bows lower than ever, so low indeed that surely he is kissing her hands.

"Tis done! she's won!" shout the Beauvillians.

"Oh! oh! oh dear!" cries Lady Katherine, and vanishes from the window, for fear he should do it again, or something worse.

[Margaret and her Bridesmaids, 1856, I, 210-213]

Admittedly the author handles all her material as if she were writing exuberant fairy tales, but the walk under the walnut trees mixes some of the fun of the early volumes of Punch with the innocent pleasure of innumerable fictional picnics, without the faintest suggestion of stuffy hair-cloth sofas, suppression, repression, or concealment. The figures are unhindered by the stylized pattern in which they move, and the uncomplicated happiness of genuine innocence has the radiance of a golden age.

If Mr. Frank and his enthusiastic audience is slightly comic, Amy Edmonstone's refusal to listen to the heir of Redclyffe's proposal except in the presence of her mother is not. Mr. Frank was admittedly somewhat exceptional in the extent to which his name embodies his nature, but the importance of being frank as well as the importance of being earnest was fairly general. It was observed of the mother of the fair Carew (1851), when she connived at a secret but legally binding marriage for her daughter by having the banns read in a very obscure church in London;

She ought to have felt that this very shyness to court observation was a tacit avowal of error, and a proof that her strategy was unsound; but it would seem that her moral and religious perceptions were on that occasion equally obtuse. [The Fair Carew, 1851, I, 155]¹

Integrity, founded on principle and maintaining a straightforward and upright line of conduct on trifling as well as on great occasions, made courtship a moral and religious matter, beneath the eye of God alone as well as before the observation of men.

1

There is not much graceful concealment here, nor in the observation in Violet Bank and its Inmates (1858): "Everything that cannot bear the light must be wrong, and ought, without reference to the wrong doer, to be exposed. No, no, we have a right to be thankful that in our day secrecy is impossible." [Violet Bank and its Inmates, 1858, II, 281]

Charlotte Yonge makes Amy's ingenuousness more exciting and more attractive than her sister Laura's duplicity, but ingenuousness is not entirely synonymous with childish simplicity. In Coventry Patmore's poet Vaughan, it reaches a kind of mystic exaltation:

And forth I went, in peace, and proud
To take my passion into Church. ¹

The harmless doves were wise as serpents, for in the picture that emerges from the novels, Victorian courtship would appear to be a matter calling for the exercise of reason, and Victorian marriage a matter calling for the exercise of will. This does not mean that in fact and in fiction there were not to be found matches so founded on caprice or on a rather unpleasant sort of calculation, but fiction writers tended to regard such choices as immature or ill-advised. Marriage was a serious business, demanding a woman's full attention and all her wits:

You speak as if you considered a ball matter of pleasure, not business! Do you imagine a girl goes through her first season in London with the view of amusing herself? Heavens! she has no time to waste in any such folly. The first campaign is conquest and hope--the second, conquest and fear--the third, conquest and despair. A ball-room is merely--"Arithmetic and the use of figures taught here." A young lady in a quadrille might answer, like a merchant in his counting house, "I am too busy to laugh--I am making my calculations."
[Romance and Reality, 1831, I, 215]

It was not only the problem of getting a husband, but of getting one who would not subsequently make life a living misery. Mrs. Norton's bitter experience in the thirties, forties, and fifties was accurately summarized by Meredith as "Men may have rounded Seraglio Point; they have not yet
²
doubled Cape Turk." Tennyson's "Something better than his dog, a little

¹
Angel in the House, Bk. I, Canto X, 4.

²
Diana of the Crossways (1885), Ch. I.

dearer than his horse" (1842) was scarcely even the exaggeration of bitterness. A husband's power was very nearly absolute,¹ and therefore it was well to choose one's tyrant carefully while choice was still possible.

There is no evidence in the Mudie novels I have examined of the eighteenth century idea associated with Pamela, that a reformed rake makes a good husband. In fact, the principal argument of Mrs. Brunton's Self Control (1811) is that rakes do not reform, and are therefore poor matrimonial risks. But two early nineteenth century titles taken from other sources than Mudie's lists faintly suggest that a woman had so little option that a reformed rake might in some instances be preferable to an unreformed brute and bully. Sarah, the exemplary wife (1813), was talking about marriage, not courtship, but she insists on "decency of manner,

1

See Mrs. Norton's English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century (1854). Mrs. Gordon Smythies makes fictional capital out of the situation in Married for Love (1857), which probably owes a good deal to Mrs. Norton besides the Infant Custody laws:

The very clothes she wore, the ornaments that adorned her, any work of brain or hands that she might do--all were his. . . . He could ill-use her with impunity; and a few years ago (if not at the present time), he could have subjected this noble, delicate, and trusting woman, to the discipline of "whips and sticks." He could still, by a little management, starve, confine, and coerce her; and if she fled, he could drag her back, and compel any one who harboured her to give her up to his vengeance. [Married for Love, 1857, I, 234-5]

Mrs. Norton's pamphlet is a good deal more moving than Mrs. Smythies' novel.

2

Susanna Rowson's Sarah, or The exemplary wife (1813) is an American publication which first appeared in the Boston Weekly Magazine for 1802 under the title Sincerity, but it has an English and Irish setting, and is almost a perfect archetype of a situation--Emilia Wyndham a generation earlier. The exemplary wife was not nearly as popular as the same author's erring Charlotte Temple (Charlotte, a Tale of Truth, 1791), which was the first best-seller novel.

Henrietta Rouviere's A Bride and No Wife (1817) I happened upon by accident, and included here as an example of a Minerva Press novel, partly by way of contrast to the "books from Mudie's." Henrietta Rouviere, subsequently Mrs. Mosse, is credited in one source or another with ten titles, published between 1804 and 1829, all apparently ephemeral.

purity of language, and cleanliness of person" as necessary to love.

The picture she sketches is principally negative, but none the less horrible:

Where all those circumstances are entirely neglected, or the direct contrary practised, it [love] could never be expected to arise in a heart where it had never the smallest previous admission. ... She who is by turns the slave of capricious passion, or the object of contempt or neglect, if she is possessed of the least degree of delicacy and feeling, must suffer a bondage more severe than the slave who is chained to the oar. [Sarah, or The exemplary wife, 1813, p.259]

In A Bride and No Wife (1817) Anna Woodville is cautioned about qualities¹ to beware of in a husband:

"Has he run away with his friend's wife? Does he keep a mistress? allow her his name, liveries, and arms? Does he dine at night and sup in the morning? go to bed joyous, rise sottish, and run his bills longer than his rent roll?"

"Dear Lady Emily, how should I know all this?"

"But this is life, child, with many more things of equal celebrity, to all of which you'll become familiar in proper time."

[A Bride and No Wife, 1817, III, 6]

The caution is by no means exaggerated. The groom and no husband to whom Anna binds herself by an anomalous sort of Scots marriage in vol. 1, whose real identity she does not discover until vol.4, is apparently entitled

¹

Mrs. Mosse (late Henrietta Rouviere) was not writing a temperance tract, or anything like it, but her digression on drunkenness suggests another caveat for the unwary:

Is it any matter whether a man gets drunk with whiskey, a few shillings a gallon, or with wine, three times as many pounds a dozen? He is still, in moderation, a good fellow; beyond that, a sot; and further on, a brute. If one of the better class could only see himself in that state! We'll just suppose an elegant, well-educated, high-bred, exalted man of fashion--one whom all the world observes--from whom every thing the term gentleman could imply might be looked for, and not looked for in vain; see him surrounded by flatterers and followers, dressed at all points to captivate--his nod command--his smile approbation; obeyed with pleasure--acknowledged with pride. But see him--not what he should be, but perhaps what he is--a drivelling drunken profligate, for a drunkard has no control over himself, a debauchee, an infringer of human laws, a profaner of divine ones, a bad father, a wicked husband, a detestable master. [A Bride and No Wife, 1817, II, 18-19]

to desert her, suspect her grossly, rage, storm, knock her down, and generally behave outrageously before he and the reader finally discover that the mysterious Charles was her half-brother all the time. Contrition after all this then clears the slate:

"Must not my Anna's chaste and virtuous mind," said he, "have thought me but a scoundrel—a base, infamous, perjured villain, meriting only her scorn and contempt?"

"Never, never, Aubery!" exclaimed Anna, with fervour—"No, Aubery, I believed you inconstant, but I supposed it the natural frailty of man, and forgave what I possessed not the power of preventing."

[A Bride and No Wife, 1817, III, 179]

"The natural frailty of man!" A really reformed rake might indeed make
1
a good husband, if the alternative was an unreformed one.

But one of the most striking features of nineteenth-century love stories before the sensation novel is the increasingly high moral standard for heroes and the decreasingly low intellectual standard for heroines. In view of the life-and-death importance of the situation for women, something like a sense of fair play may have dictated the idea that a male flirt was more reprehensible than a female coquette:

What greater pestilence can there be than the secret sense of having wronged a helpless, defenseless, devoted woman! ... He ought never to have allowed an appearance of attachment on his part to lead her into an illusion so fatal to her peace: that which was play to him was death to her. [Flirtation, 1828, III, 88]

1

Lord Mowbray, the "good" hero in Lady Charlotte Bury's Flirtation (1828) confesses to "one Flirtation only" with the beautiful Italian Rosalinda. The second-hand account of this episode runs to fifty pages, and Rosalinda follows him to England, where she eventually succumbs to disappointed affections and the rigors of the English climate, whereupon Lord Mowbray reforms.

He mourned unfeignedly the fate of Rosalind; he lamented his own self-indulgence, which betrayed her to her ruin; but the image of Lady Emily stole like a sunbeam through the shade, and brought back peace to his heart. He secretly vowed to make amends, in as far as he could do so, for his past conduct, and determined to redeem his errors. [Flirtation, 1828, III, 90]

In 1828, one Flirtation only was moderate enough for virtue.

Hence, in Mrs. Brunton's Self Control (1811), when Hargrave reveals in the first chapter that his intentions are dishonorable, Laura Montreville conceals her indignation from her father, lest he, in spite of age and infirmity, should challenge Hargrave to a duel. Forty years later, when Kate Coventry, hidden in a shower bath, overhears Frank Lovell coolly confess, "I really cannot undertake to marry every lively young lady that condescends to flirt with me, merely pour passer le temps," her cousin John resents the implied insult in these terms: "Captain Lovell, I claim a brother's right to protect Miss Coventry's reputation, and as a brother I demand reparation for the wrong you have done her; need I say more?"¹ And this was aimless flirtation, not seduction; not dishonorable intentions, but no intentions at all. "Attentions without intentions" had come to be regarded as almost as great an insult as a dishonorable proposal:

"He had never for one moment thought of it."

Thought of what? Thought of her in the sacred character of wife! Could then her conduct be accused of such levity, as to deserve that she should be subjected to treatment, which she could now only regard as insulting? ...

It was her poverty--her unprotected situation!--No father--no brother! --Oh, if the earth would open and swallow her up as she stood!

[Adelaide Lindsay, 1850, II, 50]

Love was not a word to be used lightly, and the feeling of betrayal and degradation on the part of those whose sense of honor felt a stain like a wound could be as intense in a case of this kind as if they had actually been seduced.

"I suppose some times, however, it is the result of thoughtlessness,"^h said Mrs. Newton, "not deliberate cruelty. Gentlemen follow their own inclinations in seeking the society of a pleasant woman, and do not think of anything but amusement, until roused by reports of what the neighbourhood expect. Then they start back suddenly. I have often seen it."

¹

Kate Coventry, 1856, p.300.

"The expectations of the neighbourhood, Mrs. Newton, are much more often founded on a sense of moral justice, than the conduct of men is." [Malvern, or The three marriages, 1855, III, 71]

But "a sense of moral justice" should not be translated exclusively to mean that propriety demanded that seducers should marry their victims. Over and above the somewhat impersonal idea of justice and fair play, there was, at least to begin with, a genuine admiration for goodness which went beyond justice. Admittedly, virtue and morality had become fashionable, and experienced a vogue like any other fad, but some of their very real and radiant attractiveness may be found reflected in Elizabeth Sewell's little girls. Rachel Lester in Cleve Hall is an entirely credible twelve-year-old, and emphatically not a prig.

"I would bear any thing, yes, any thing in all the world, to be very, wonderfully good. Wouldn't you? ... Wonderfully good ... not a little good, but, oh!" and she drew a long breath, "so very, very,-- beyond all thought. Will God make us so, if we wish it?"

Bertha hesitated. "We may hope He will, if we can bear the means." There was a pause; and then Bertha heard, almost in a whisper, the words, "I would try. ... Is there any harm in thinking about it a great deal, and liking it, in a way?"

"What do you mean, Rachel?"

"I can't exactly explain; but don't you know how Ella likes to read about knights, and tournaments, and persons being brave and generous, --what one reads in Froissart, and those books? ... Then, when Ella reads about such things, and gets into a way about them, I never feel as she does; but I do feel it when I read about martyrs, and people who have been so good; and it makes my heart beat fast, and my head seem almost dizzy, as if I could do any thing to be like them. Is it wrong?"

"Of course not, dear Rachel; you can't help it."

"But do you ever feel it? ... I don't think all people do, ... and it puzzles me." [Cleve Hall, 1855, I, 88-9]

Girls who grew up with ideas like these were most unlikely to be attracted to rakes and libertines, however dashing. Given enough of them, bold bad men would be out of the running. Watered down, the impulse may have contributed considerably to the popularity of curates, and indubitably was at least partly responsible for John Halifax, gentleman.

The characteristic Victorian hero therefore was a Man of Principle, which is not quite the same thing as a Hero of Romance. The latter is gently rallied in Mrs. Brunton's Self Control (1811) in a reference to Jane Porter's Thaddeus of Warsaw: "Your favourite has the same resemblance to a human character which the Belvidere Apollo has to a human form. It is so like man that one cannot absolutely call it divine, yet so perfect, that it is difficult to believe it human." ¹ The man of principle was to be seen in De Courcy, the hero of Self Control:

He was a Christian from the heart, without being either forward to claim, or ashamed to own, the distinction. ... In the tranquil pleasures of a country gentleman, a man of taste, a classical scholar, and a chemist, he found means to occupy himself without injury to his health, his morals, or his fortune. [Self Control, 1832, p.98]

As one of the first love stories to introduce a hero who is deliberately moral in cold blood, the novel reads like a fascinating hybrid. Laura Montreville entertains a strong initial predilection for the libertine Hargrave, though it is severely shaken when he makes her a dishonorable proposal. Laura nevertheless is willing to consider his honest proposals if he will submit to a two years' probation, and give evidence therein of sincere reformation. (A reformed rake for whom one had a decided preference might, considering the state of the matrimonial market in 1811, make a passable husband.) But Hargrave spends the first six months in seducing a friend's wife, and is consequently involved in a crim. con. action and a duel. This is really more than Laura bargained for, and she resolutely undertakes to overcome her mistaken preference, gradually becoming sensible of De Courcy's superior qualities. It is

¹

Self Control, 1832, p.74.

Mrs. Brunton's thesis that rakes do not reform; but it is an interesting comment on prevailing manners and morals that Laura's father, not knowing of Hargrave's first proposal, urges "Your simplicity and ignorance of the world make you attach too great importance to Hargrave's little irregularities,"¹ and that the strength of Laura's preference is undisturbed by Hargrave's jealous rages at the possibility of De Courcy's rivalry:² "Still fondly attached, Laura took pleasure in persuading herself that a mere defect of temper was not such a fault as entitled her to withdraw her promise."³ De Courcy's character, however, offered a much better prospect for married happiness.

A somewhat similar contrast of passion and principle also confronts Ellen Middleton (1844) and Adelaide Lindsay (1850). Ellen's choice is immediately and unambiguously in favor of principle:

The language of passion was new to my ears; his words made my heart throb and my cheeks burn; but even while he spoke, and while under the influence of a bewildering excitement, which made me feel, for the time, as if I shared his sentiments, I once thought of the crusader. [Ellen Middleton, 1844, I, 213]

Adelaide learns the value of principle through the humiliation of discovering that Captain Mostyn had never once thought of her as a wife. It was some time after that before she began to think of the scholarly Charles Latimer as a husband. In retrospect she compares Latimer and Mostyn:

¹

Self Control, 1832, p.179.

²

One of these jealous fits supplies the frontispiece in the Bentley's Standard Novels editions of the story: Hargrave, finding a book with De Courcy's name in it, flings it on the floor. The caption, in a demure copperplate script, reads: "'Touch not the vile thing!' cried Hargrave, in a voice of thunder."

³

Self Control, 1832, p.193.

The latter so brilliant--so fascinating--so talented--yet so superficial!--The former so little gifted with external advantages, yet endowed with such powers of intellect--such depth of feeling--such exalted goodness! She acknowledged that her love for the one had been kindled by the ignis fatuus of imagination, her devotion for the other at the steady lamp of reason. Happy those with whom both are at once satisfied!--but that is a bliss reserved for few.
 [Adelaide Lindsay, 1850, III, 137]

Possibly no one has ever so fervently insisted on the combination of reason and romance in courtship as the Victorians, in spite of the difficulty of reconciling the two and satisfying both. And in the Victorian system of values, if one had to be sacrificed, imagination, the ignis fatuus, was the more expendable. "The steady lamp of reason" illuminates most early Victorian courtships, unless they are intended as solemn warnings. And the chief object of reason was to recognize principle. In the game of love and chance, principle was one of the few qualities upon which an inexperienced heroine might rely for a hope of decent treatment once she had irrevocably promised to honor and obey.

There were inevitably those who muttered "methodist," and sighed about dullness, of course; it is the point which divides Sydney Harrington and her cousin Harriet Erskine, in Lady Charlotte Bury's The Wilfulness of Woman (1844). Sydney marries Edward Monteith, who, according to Harriet, lectured upon charity and the use of time in the same letter in which he proposed, a method of courtship which Harriet finds incomprehensible. She prefers the more dashing John Trelawney, whom, to please her aunt, she attempts to persuade to accompany her to church:

"I never was in church in my life, my sweet creature," answered the lover slowly. "I don't know how I should find my way."
 "Oh, I will guide you into our pew, Trelawney."

"But people stand, or kneel, or something, don't they? I never attended parade there."

"Oh, I will tell you what to do."

"But I have no prayer-book. ... I must get you to report me 'absent.' I only kneel to you."

"Fie, you wicked animal!--but ... I shall be with you. You must do exactly what you see us all doing."

"Well, you will bring me out before the sermon begins, won't you?"

"No, Trelawney--positively no! You must remain to the close."

[The Wilfulness of Woman, 1844, I, 12-13]

He continues to wriggle, like a fish on a hook, objecting that he has letters to write, that "The damp of a church makes one cough, does it not?" --to which Harriet replies, "Don't be silly now, Trelawney! One visit in your life cannot injure you; and my aunt's pew is so warmly lined and stoved, it is impossible to take cold"¹--protesting that "I shall go there to receive the treasure of your hand alone," though he eventually capitulates. Harriet has reason to regret it, however, for his behavior in church is so provokingly like a heathen that he is more of a witness against himself than his worst enemy could be. Harriet nevertheless attempts to defend him, incidentally documenting the antiquity of one line of argument: "Trelawney is no methodist, I know ... he possesses neither their gloom or their cant; but it does not follow that he is to prove heartless because he will not condescend to become a hypocrite."² It is scarcely anticipating the next chapter to add that Sydney's marriage is happy and Harriet's is not.

During the forties, even those who objected to Methodism might eventually be won over. One of Lady Charlotte Bury's earlier heroines, Louisa Vansittart, the flirt in The History of a Flirt (1840), begins with what

¹
The Wilfulness of Woman, 1844, I, 14.

²
The Wilfulness of Woman, 1844, I, 26.

virtually amounts to a sniff of contempt for the excessively upright Lord Elford: "Lord Elford, whose eyes rarely lifted themselves from his prayer-book, in church, walked in ... and looked as dignified as dullness would allow, but my eye rested not on him." ¹ In time, however, she revises her estimate of the quality she had first assessed as dullness:

I felt I liked Lord Elford better every day, in spite of his strict principles. I could always depend upon him. ... I had no suspicion of a snare spread for my sentiments, or a mystery practiced to alarm me. ... Such a mind must in the end attract veneration and esteem even from my uneven spirit. ... It must be the influence of a manly, unbending, high principle. [The History of a Flirt, 1840, II, 287-8]

Principle--by which was meant Christian principle--was the important thing. Sydney's mother had told her in 1844 "that no man deserted his principles who feared his God;" ² and apparently mothers continued to repeat it. It is doubtful how long Harriet's Trelawney could have held out against becoming a hypocrite; a little later in the century it might have been highly inexpedient to confess "I never was in church in my life." But if hypocrisy and a profession of principles that exceeded practice was adopted as protective coloration, the game for young ladies then became the endeavor to detect the reality. There is an interesting instance in Catherine Sinclair's Modern Flirtations (1841), in which the virtuous Clara Granville rejects the impassioned and persistent suit of Sir Patrick Dunbar, whom she sincerely loves, with the objection, "I must only con-

1

The History of a Flirt, 1840, II, 147.

2

The Wilfulness of Woman, 1844, II, 178. Cf. also Newman: "Quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then you may hope with such delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and the pride of man."--"Philosophical Knowledge its Own End," Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education (1852).

sent to pass my life with a confirmed and consistent Christian, completely master of himself and of his actions." ¹ Sir Patrick cannot understand the nature of her demur:

She thought my religious principles not sufficiently serious! That her brother disapproved of my morals and conduct! I offered her any terms! To attend chapel with her once every Sunday; to refrain from Sunday dinners and Sunday travelling! Not even to ride out on horseback that day; and, in short, to pass Sir Andrew's whole Sunday bill in my house; but it did not satisfy her! ... I gave her carte blanche to put my name down as a subscriber to as many tract, missionary, and slave-abolition societies, as she pleased, and asked her how many distressed families she wished me to maintain. [Modern Flirtations, 1841, I, 274-5]

Obviously by this time a reformed rake could not hope to pass muster.

Through the forties, manly, unbending high principle remains a gilt-edged security, more to be prized than fine gold, and in fiction at least, difficult to counterfeit successfully. But in the fifties a number of curious things happen: (1) the domestic hero as a man of principle reaches the top of his form in the heir of Redclyffe (1853) and John Halifax, gentleman (1856); (2) a much higher moral standard is expected of men than the one that prevailed at the beginning of the century; (3) a curious crop of bogus men of high principle appear; and (4) capricious heroines decide they want something else.

There is absolutely nothing specious about the enormously popular Guy Morville, the heir of Redclyffe (1853). He is infinitely more attractive than the perfectly good but rather terrifying Edward Middleton of Lady Georgiana Fullerton's Ellen Middleton (1844). It is Edward whom Ellen likens, not without reason, to a marble crusader.

¹

Modern Flirtations, 1841, I, 295.

Like all perfectly true characters, [he] could not even understand those that were not so, and judged them too severely, or too leniently, from the impossibility of putting himself in their place. ... When others were angry, he was stern. ... From a child I had been afraid of Edward. ... I dreaded ... the severity of his judgment. [Ellen Middleton, 1844, II, 6-7]

Guy is just as good, but a great deal more charitable--more winning in every way. He perfectly embodies Clara Granville's ideal of "a confirmed and consistent Christian, completely master of himself and of his actions." He is naturally endowed with a violent temper, so that he bites his lip until it bleeds to keep back angry words, but he is not satisfied with the achievement of a soft answer alone: "The victory will be if the inward feeling as well as the outward token is ever subdued." Mrs. Ellis had been preaching a similar sort of self-control to the wives of England some ten years earlier:

The mistress of a house should always appear calm and perfectly self-possessed, whether she feels so or not. ... Nor ought we to class this species of self-discipline with those artificial manners which are assumed merely for the sake of effect. ... The self-control I would gladly recommend, is of a widely different order, extending to a mastery over the feelings, as well as the expressions. ... By ... habits of reflection, and by the mastery of judgment over impulse, she will be able in time, not only to appear calm, but really to feel so. [Wives of England, 1843, p.264-5]

The interesting feature is that the heir of Redclyffe finds self-mastery applicable to men as well as to women; and Elizabeth Sewell's Cleve Hall (1855) is certainly not advocating a double standard:

"He's a good sort of fellow enough," was Clement's off-hand reply; "only not very pretty company for girls."
"Then I shouldn't think he could be good for boys," observed Rachel, with a quick glance at Clement, which made him a little angry.
[Cleve Hall, 1855, II, 23]

1

The Heir of Redclyffe, I, 53

2

The Heir of Redclyffe, I, 163.

It may be significant in this respect that both Charlotte Yonge and Elizabeth Sewell are rather High Church in their point of view.

Beside Guy Morville, John Halifax, gentleman, appears somewhat vulgarized, a Man of Principle in large primer type, who ventures farther and farther into the minor branches of applied virtue until he succeeds in illustrating almost every one of the Scout laws in a series of vignettes. One cannot question his principles, nor, without descending to the theological asperities of 1860, impugn his Christianity; but confronting him, one feels a vague sort of discontent. One would be perfectly safe married to John Halifax, but--wouldn't it be dull? By 1856, like the condition of the streets, marriage was a much less hazardous thing than it had been in the twenties. Principles could be expected; therefore one hoped for a little bit more, to satisfy the imagination.

Perhaps one of the best proofs of the Prince Albert as opposed to the Prince Regent standard expected of men in the 1850's is to be found in the behavior of Guy Livingstone (1857). Guy is with some justice regarded as having initiated the sensation novel, and he is admittedly mad, bad, and dangerous to know. In some improbable fashion--for cant and hypocrisy are completely foreign to his blunderbuss nature--and for some inscrutable reason, he is engaged to the beautiful and entirely virtuous Constance Brandon. Somewhere midway in the action of the story, she comes upon him kissing the scheming siren Flora Bellasys in the conservatory--The discovery instantaneously breaks the engagement; Guy has not one word

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"As to what doctrinal creed we held, or what sect we belonged to, I can give but the plain answer which John gave to all such inquiries--that we were Christians."--John Halifax, Gentleman, 1856, II, 237.

to say for himself. Presumably the natural frailty of man was as operative in 1857 as it was in 1817, and certainly Constance had much less to forgive than Anna Woodville, the bride and no wife--but more was expected, even of a bad man, in 1857, than society required of good ones forty years earlier.

Nevertheless, not all of the good men of the 1850's impress one as being matrimonial prizes. Miss Mulock's heroes in general are all obviously good, but their native nobility has an embarrassing similarity to that of Landseer's horses and dogs: an honest man's a good domesticated animal. One somehow feels that virtue, to be worthy of the name in a human being, should be something more. Furthermore, a number of good men appear whose goodness is asserted but never demonstrated; one rather suspects that they are essentially frustrated Guy Livingstones, hindered by society from expressing their natural frailty, and therefore deluded into believing themselves good. Among them is Rita's Hubert Rochford (1858), whose exceeding and immaculate virtue is apparently measured by his censure of Parisian society: "He is stern and uncompromising. I know that he does not approve of me very often"¹--and his domesticated approbation ~~for~~ Shakespeare: "He takes a lively interest in his sister's mental development, and of an evening often reads aloud Shakespeare (a family Shakespeare, of course, with all objectionable passages omitted.)"² Yet while he is still lovelessly engaged to his cousin Maud according to his mother's wish, he avows in a letter: "I felt all the old love within me unextinguished. And that love

¹
Rita, 1858, I, 243.

²
Rita, 1858, II, 56.

was now crime. I tried to harden my heart against you--in vain! ... To think of what might have been!"¹ The moment he begins mooning in that fashion, his principles cease to be genuine.

2

Similarly with Talbot Bulstrode, in M.E. Braddon's Aurora Floyd (1863). He is another of the company of Angel Clares whose strict views of feminine conduct break off what would otherwise be a match. He is fascinated by Aurora--against his will and principles, for "she is like everything that is beautiful, and strange, and wicked and unwomanly, and bewitching"³--but he resolutely terminates the engagement because she refuses to explain a mysterious hiatus in her school days. With good reason: during the period in question she absented herself from boarding school in order to elope with a stable boy who subsequently reappears to levy blackmail. So far Bulstrode was well out of the situation. But when he finds in Aurora's cousin Lucy

... exactly the sort of woman to make a good wife. She had been educated to that end by a careful mother. Purity and goodness had watched over her ... She was lady-like, accomplished, well-informed; and if there were a great many others of precisely the same type of graceful womanhood, it was certainly the highest type, and the holiest, and the best. [Aurora Floyd, 1863, I, 89]

--and begins on "what might have been"--"but oh, how tame, how cold, how weak, beside that Egyptian goddess, that Assyrian queen with the flashing eyes and the serpentine coils of purple-black hair!"⁴--it is obvious that

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Rita, 1858, II, 276.

2

When Aurora Floyd was published, Middlemarch was almost ten years in the future, but Talbot Bulstrode is most inappropriately christened, whenever he was published.

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Aurora Floyd, 1863, I, 87.

4

Aurora Floyd, 1863, II, 132.

his passion for principle is scarcely even an affection. And when the excess of his great virtue makes him fear that because of it, no one will ever be able to love him, one can only say that he is as wide of the mark as Sir Patrick Dunbar in his Sunday observances.

He wished that some good and pure creature would fall in love with him, in order that he might marry her. ... He felt little capacity for loving, on his own side; but he thought that he would be grateful to any good woman who would regard him with disinterested affection. [Aurora Floyd, 1863, I, 72]

One is tempted to write him off as "lady-like, accomplished, well-informed." Genuine virtue in men of principle is not like that at all.

But by this time it is doubtful whether heroines would be as quick to detect the fraud as Clara Granville in 1841. At best they tended to be like Lucy Floyd, "lady-like, accomplished, well-informed," Galateas without the breath of life. "Be good, sweet maid, and let who can be clever" (1856) did virtue no service, for it conveyed Mrs. Ellis's "understanding capable of unlimited extension" from being an attribute of the Divine nature into the hands of the fallen angels. Becky Sharp is already headed in that direction; and the passion for the commonplace accelerated the trend--the moral equivalent of "the eternal brown cows in ditches and white sails in squalls, and sliced lemons in saucers, and foolish faces in simpers,"¹ that Ruskin complained about at the Royal Academy. It was perhaps a mistake for the High Church party to insist overmuch that "It is not talent which we respect, but goodness,"² and perhaps an even greater

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John Ruskin, Pre-Raphaelitism, 1851, p.19.

²

Margaret Percival, 1847, II, 410. And with modification, in Charlotte Yonge also: "I don't care for mere talent--people are generally more sensible without it; but, one way or other, there ought to be superiority on the man's side. ... Cleverness is not the point. ... It is not the real one. It is honest goodness that one honours."--The Daisy Chain, 1856, p.392-3.

mistake for intellectuals to decry the fictitious unreality of the paragon. At least the kind of heroine George Eliot was castigating associated intelligence with beauty and goodness:

Her eyes and her wit are both dazzling, her nose and her morals are alike free from any tendency to irregularity; she has a superb contralto and a superb intellect; she is perfectly well-dressed and perfectly religious; she dances like a sylph, and reads the Bible in the original tongues. [George Eliot, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," Westminster Review, LXVI (n.s. v.X) (Oct. 1856) 442]

Good heroines thereupon retired into sackcloth, beauty became prettiness or wickedness, and wit and fascination were appropriated as the exclusive property of the somewhat dubious "fast" set. In opposition to the virtuous
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sweet nothings like Lucy Floyd, one had the impudent Kate Coventry:

I had rather be a hoyden, Aunt Horsingham, and go on in my own way. I have much more enjoyment; and upon my word, I don't think I'm one bit a worse member of society than if I was the most delicate fine lady that ever fainted away at the overpowering smell of a rose-leaf, or the merry peal of a noisy child's laugh. [Kate Coventry, 1856, 131-2]

One is attracted by Kate's bouncing health as opposed to the sickly affection of the morally inert, but it does not follow that because she is physically robust, she is in all ways superior. She meditates matrimony:

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Kate was a man's creation, but she did not immediately enlist universal manhood suffrage; Wilkie Collins, though he made gentle fun of the conventional heroine, was presumably protesting against Kate Coventry or something very like her in his "Petition to Novel Writers," commencing with a round of clichés:

I love her blushing cheek, her gracefully-rounded form, her chiselled nose, her slender waist, her luxuriant tresses which always escape from the fillet that binds them. ... We now protest positively, and even indignantly, against a new kind of heroine--a bouncing, ill-conditioned, impudent young woman, who has been introduced among us of late years. I venture to call this wretched and futile substitute for our dear, tender, gentle, loving old Heroine, the Man-Hater, because, in every book in which she appears, it is her mission from first to last to behave as badly as possible to every man with whom she comes in contact. ["A Petition to Novel Writers," Household Words, XIV (6 Dec. 1856) 484]

I fear I must now choose between Frank and my cousin. The latter has behaved honourably, considerately, and kindly, and like a thorough gentleman. The former seems to think I am to be at his beck and call, indeed, whenever he chooses. ... I will say for him that he is afraid of nothing; but I cannot conceal from myself which has behaved best towards me. And yet ... I would rather have Frank for a lover than Cousin John for a husband. [Kate Coventry, 1856, p.208-9] ¹

This is a complete reversal of Self Control. There is no more principle in this than there is in "might have been;" obviously something else is more admired, and the admiration itself takes a different shape.

Miss Mulock marks the difference in the remarkably mindless Head of the Family (1852): "What a difference there was between the heart-flood 'I love,' and the clear ice-drops 'I esteem'." ² Rita debates much the same point to much the same end (1858):

"I always considered that a permanent affection must be founded on esteem." ...

"I'm not at all sure of that. One hears of very bad people inspiring very strong love. I believe on the contrary that no one ever made a great sacrifice for esteem. It is a sort of sentiment to lend money on, not to give up a life to." [Rita, 1858, II, 246]

But the distinction would not have occurred to a thinking character, one who, like Louisa's Lord Elford, could say "My mind loves; and it loves in that intensity which demands--which will demand an equal return ... a full confiding affection." ³ Esteem requires mind, but it is an emotion, not a calculation. There is nothing icy about the sentiment described by Mary Douglas in Susan Ferrier's Marriage (1818):

¹

It is interesting to observe that Cousin John's principles are entirely unimpeachable, but they are more nearly those of a gentleman than those specifically of a Christian (Newman's distinction in The Idea of a University, 1852: "Philosophical Knowledge its Own End." Cf. also the discussion of a gentleman in "Philosophy and Religion."

²

The Head of the Family, 1852, III, 159.

³

The History of a Flirt, 1840, II, 267-8.

"Can you suppose I would so far forfeit my honour and truth, as that I would swear to love, honour, and obey, where I could feel neither love nor respect; and where cold constrained obedience would be all of my duty I could hope to fulfill?"

"Love!" exclaimed Lady Emily; "can I credit my ears? Love! did you say? I thought that had only been for naughty ones, such as me; and that saints like you would have married for any thing and every thing but love! Prudence, I thought, had been the word with you proper ladies--a prudent marriage. Come, confess, is not that the climax of virtue in the creed of your school?"

"I never learnt the creed of any school," said Mary, "nor ever heard any one's sentiments on the subject, except my dear Mrs. Douglas. ... She told me ... that there was a love which even the wisest and most virtuous need not blush to entertain--the love of a virtuous object, founded upon esteem, and heightened by similarity of tastes, and sympathy of feelings into a pure and devoted attachment; unless I feel all this, I shall never fancy myself in love." [Marriage, 1818, III, 27-30]

"The love of a virtuous object, founded upon esteem," whether cold or not, was much less subject to fluctuation than Miss Mulock's "heart-floods," which owed nothing to reason. Esteem was even proof against the vicissitudes of a long engagement, complicated by opposition:

She knew that the stamp of Christian excellence was on his whole character, engrained in his very being, and only to decay with life itself; therefore her opinion was not at the mercy of any idle representations; but the blast which might have uprooted a superficial attachment, only deepened the root of her own. [Modern Flirtations, 1841, III, 199]

The features of his character, like the features of his countenance, are unalterable; and I could not believe in his identity, if he were deficient in honour and truth. [Modern Flirtations, 1841, III, 343]

It is more than a sentiment to lend money on, but it calls for more character than Miss Mulock's simple loving hearts possess, or are capable of possessing. Nevertheless, it is what one naturally expects of the paragons that George Eliot was making fun of. Current convention tends to regard paragons as tedious, but even cheapened and mass-produced like Lucy Floyd, they are surely no more tedious than similarly mass-produced Kate Coventrys. Drabness and an inclination to be a spoil-sport were

never intrinsic features of a paragon's character; the idea is a relatively late interpolation. Real paragons not only appear amiable and sweet-tempered; they actually are so. Mary Douglas, who would honor and obey only a virtuous man whom she could esteem, is surely as attractive as Kate Coventry scandalizing her aunt and hesitating between Frank Lovell and Cousin John:

Her object is to be, not to seem, religious; and there is neither hypocrisy nor austerity necessary for that. She is forbearing, without meanness--gentle, without insipidity--sincere, without rudeness. She practices all the virtues herself, and seems quite unconscious that others don't do the same. She is, if I may trust the expression of her eye, almost as much alive to the ridiculous as I am, but she is only diverted where I am provoked. [Marriage, 1818, II, 279-80]

Some of Charlotte Yonge's characters are capable of detecting the ridiculous, which is a rarer intellectual gift than Ethel May's natural capacity

I

Authors are sometimes given to calling their heroines paragons when obviously they are nothing of the kind. The result supplies critics like George Eliot with ample ammunition. One of the most vicious examples is Cecil Clare, in Ellen Pickering's The Quiet Husband (1840). Cecil is a superciliously haughty young lady who is most unfairly permitted to marry a viscount in the third volume, after a long series of nervous headaches which one is sorely tempted to ascribe to temper. Likewise Lucilla Temple, in Mrs. Gordon Smythies' The Breach of Promise (1845); one is willing to accept seventeen-year-old Lucilla's beauty on trust, but her genius takes the form of poetry modeled on L.E.L.'s, and her excessive virtue expresses itself in contracting a secret engagement to the portrait painter Francesco di Moricini, because he has melancholy dark eyes and beautiful mustaches. Of course Di Moricini turns out not to be a poor foreigner at all, but a wealthy young Englishman in disguise, which is much better fortune than Lucilla deserves.

Mrs. Gordon Smythies is a remarkably silly author, but even an intelligent one could be fooled. Amelia B. Edwards' The Ladder of Life (1857) offers additional proof that transcribed fact will not necessarily make believable fiction. In real life, Miss Edwards made a notable name for herself in Egyptology; according to D.N.B., her talent was such that she might have made her living in art, music, or literature. But when she attempts to transfer some of her own genuine genius to her character Natalie Metz, she fails completely. Natalie is not as abundantly silly as Lucilla, but the spectacle of a nineteen-year-old girl, previously unacquainted with music, who is taught singing so effectively that she becomes a famous operatic star, alternating roles with Malibran, places a severe strain on the reader's credulity.

for Greek; but most of the latter-day righteous suffer a myopic confusion¹ of serious-mindedness and deadly seriousness. The Meredithian rejoicing of the pure in heart--the sparkle in Mary Douglas' eye--is an excellence which is never in any danger of being mass-produced, because so many more people are capable of being good than are capable of being intelligent. The conjunction of the two qualities is particularly rare, and it is a thousand pities that the virtuous ideal ever repudiated the moral obligation to be intelligent and allowed wit to be appropriated as the exclusive property of the naughty ones.

Even when paragons were most in demand--which would have been chiefly before 1850--it is a little doubtful how far their intellectual gifts were really appreciated. Elegant gentlemen, not always paragons themselves, commended rational conversation, but except in the rather doubtful case of Henry Harley, in Mrs. Trollope's Second Love, or Beauty and Intellect (1851), it would not appear that their demands were very high. One rather suspects that Mrs. Trollope, a vigorously intelligent woman herself, was engaged in a piece of special pleading, and possibly even the rational conversation requirement was a piece of wishful thinking on the part of women authors. The general average was probably very much like Mr. Cameron's specifications, the December of Mrs. Hubback's May and December (1854):

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It is distinctly startling to come across a statement like this on "Didactic Fiction" in the Christian Remembrancer for 1842: "We may say that a sense of propriety involves a sense of the absurd, and vice versa: that such a sense is the tact by which we instinctively see our way in the minor moralities; that the subdued expression of it is often the gentlest way of announcing disapproval which we must announce."--"Didactic Fiction" Christian Remembrancer, III (Feb. 1842) 154. The first numbers of Punch and a host of Comic Histories, Comic Grammars, Comic Arithmetics, and the like, testify to the lively sense of absurdity abroad in the forties.

I do not care how poor she might be; but good temper, Wildey, mildness, gentleness, and some intelligence, neither a very great genius, nor quite a dunce, and good principles, steadiness, and prudence, youth and health, and as much beauty as I could get. [May and December, 1854, I, 59]

The peculiarly Victorian part of this picture is the insistence on principles. "As much beauty as I could get" has been constant since the days of Helen of Troy, but the Victorians were notably asking for something more. In part the impulse was prudent self-interest:

The great majority who act upon no principles ... are selfish, and will admire all which conduces to their vanity. Though in the choice of a wife they appear to hesitate, that hesitation is selfish alarm--they fear to trust one of their own order, because they are aware of the consequences--they do not admire virtue, but it is necessary in a wife, whose honour must preserve them from the world's ridicule. [The History of a Flirt, 1840, II, 242]

But it was not entirely bounded by selfish calculation. Mr. Bolton's proposal to Anne Dysart sounds rather cold-blooded--

You possess the grand desideratum--Principle; and you have not hitherto imbibed that dangerous taste for social dissipation and vain display which is its destruction. ... Your temper also seems good, and

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Sometimes mixed with a measure of arrogance. Dolores Nevil and the villain Robert Cecil in Laura Jewry's The Cup and the Lip (1851):

"You would not marry a woman who could not even profess affection for you!"

"You are mistaken, Miss Nevil, I could be satisfied with a less romantic sentiment than love. I require in a wife, principally an intelligent companion, and a person in whose truth and integrity I could trust. You are that person. No one else can so well entertain me. I never knew one of your sex before whom I would trust. Moreover, it is my will, and I, like others do not choose to have it thwarted." [The Cup and the Lip, 1851, III, 230]

2

Compare with Monteith's Methodist proposal to Sydney Harrington (1844): I believe I understand your principles--your religious principles, Sydney, and your heart. I know you will consider fortune only as a means of effecting great good; and I know you will consider time too valuable a loan to waste in frivolous dissipation:--I know you will be my companion, my counsellor [sic] and my guide, in the charities of Glen Aram and in the schools we have so often advocated together. It was for those sentiments, for your views so consonant to my own, that I loved you and now woo you, Sydney. [The Wilfulness of Woman, 1844, I, 4]

free from the love of opposition, childish uncertainty, and petty spitefulness I have so often seen exhibited. In short, though having some faults and many weaknesses, you appear to me to be upon the whole a sensible, amiable, and well-principled woman. As such I wish to marry you. ...

I have not spoken of love, because I neither feel nor wish to feel that mad and evanescent passion. Love, Miss Dysart, is a brief intoxication, beginning in delusion and folly, and ending in disappointment and wretchedness. Much soberer and more lasting are the sentiments I offer to your acceptance. [Anne Dysart, 1850, II, 90-1; 93]

--but advantageous as the match appeared, he was not accepted until he betrayed considerably warmer sentiments:

When I spoke of love as I once did, it was because I had utterly mistaken its nature. I regarded it then as a selfish passion, seeking but its own gratification. Real love I now know to be a true and sincere affection for what is in itself good, and pure, and high-minded--the most purifying and exalting of all the human affections--one of God's great means for the improvement and discipline of our whole character. [Anne Dysart, III, 277]

An appreciation of "the grand desideratum--Principle" was not emotionless, but depended on emotions engendered in a discriminating mind, and on what Ellen Middleton called "instinctive homage to what is pure, intense admiration for what is good." Perhaps it could not be better defined than "a true and sincere affection for what is in itself good, and pure, and high-minded."

Then as now, however, there were those to whom character and principles seemed fine-spun theory when weighed against solid material advantages. Mary Douglas's mother, for example, found them quite superfluous:

"You know (or, at any rate, I do,) all that is necessary to know. I know that he is a man of family and fortune, heir to a title, uncommonly handsome, and remarkably sensible and well-informed. I can't conceive what more you would wish to know!"

"I would wish to know something of his character--his principles--his habits--temper--talents--in short, all those things on which my happiness would depend."

"Character and principles!--one would suppose you were talking of your footman!" [Marriage, 1818, III, 85]

¹Ellen Middleton, 1844, II, 159.

The Duchess of Gordon, in whose tomb all that was considered dashing was buried before the demand for principles really began, was particularly noted for the brilliant marriages she achieved for her daughters, the brilliance consisting preeminently in birth, wealth, and position--all that made up the ton in the Silver Fork novels. But where fairy tales had once rained handsome princes and the Minerva Press had bestowed noble lords, the general tendency of the nineteenth century was to exalt personal worth at the expense of the more obvious and tangible advantages, till "love in a cottage" became as much a romantic cliché as "Prince Charming." Admittedly at times this Arcadian simplicity has a touch of Miniver Cheevy--"Miniver scorned the gold he sought, but sore annoyed was he without it"--and authors and characters are often remarkably adept at managing to eat their cake and have it too--but in general the accepted attitude is that material advantage in a match is a suspicious circumstance unless it somehow represents a reward of merit. In 1828 Lady Charlotte Bury's Flirtation neatly diagrammed the situation:

The characters of Lady Frances and Lady Emily were direct illustrations of the power of an early initiation into the frivolities of ton, and of the better tendency of an education uncontrolled by its ascendancy. Lady Emily had hitherto never shared in these frivolities, and the time which, happily for her, had left her free from their contagious influence, was a profitable period in

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Jane Maxwell (1749?-1812), wife of Alexander Gordon, 4th Duke of Gordon, "married three of her daughters to dukes and another to a marquis." --D.N.B. Lady Charlotte and Lady Georgiana, the eldest and youngest, were respectively intended for Pitt and Eugène de Beauharnais, but failing that destiny, they became duchesses of Richmond and Bedford.

2

Captain Aubery, in A Bride and No Wife (1817), eventually makes the chaste and virtuous Anna, Countess of Dunbevan, which it is to be hoped was ample compensation for his behavior in the first three volumes--his pyrotechnic display of the natural frailty of man.

her existence, wherein were garnered up many a virtuous and rational principle, many an active and useful habit of employment, which made her in after-life the comfort and delight of others, and bestowed upon her the inestimable possession of self-approbation. [Flirtation, 1828, II, 47]

Finally, "In the different fate of the two sisters, may be traced the fate of all who like them shall choose either the pure path which leads to lasting happiness, or follow the downward road to misery and shame, through the PERILOUS MAZES OF FLIRTATION."¹

Among frivolities, noble birth in particular is subject to serious discount. Kind hearts are more than coronets, and simple faith than Norman blood. In all probability the passion for respectability has something to do with it,² the sentiment expressed by Lucilla Temple that "the legitimate son of a legitimate tinker was better than this base-born son of a base-born son of a Duke"³--though the individual in question had already been completely condemned for lacking "an aristocratic air and an intellectual expression."⁴ Except on this point, Mrs. Gordon Smythiès is apparently convinced that blood will tell, though the examples she uses are singularly unconvincing, and have a distinct tendency to prove the exact opposite. She weighs the aristocratic past and the utilitarian present in the shape of two teapots, one of which had once served tea to Charles the Martyr:

¹
Flirtation, 1828, III, 324.

²
Perhaps also the reaction of fear to the French Revolution, which was back of the passion for respectability. See Maurice Quinlan's Victorian Prelude (1941).

³
The Breach of Promise, 1845, II, 257.

⁴
"Without which no beauty in a man can interest me."--The Breach of Promise, 1845, II, 253.

It was quaint, worn, small, and originally inconvenient, and had besides every vice to which tea-pots are addicted; for though a wretched pourer of tea, it was lavish of the tea-leaves; closed very imperfectly at top, had even a propensity to leak, and the handle being of thin, sharp silver, was very hot and painful to the hand. However, the choice lay between this old aristocrat, with its poverty and its pride, around which gathered the imperfections and the hallowed memories of the Past, and a coarse, large, black plebeian tea-pot of the true kitchen breed, warranted as a drawer and a pourer, and a capital drawer and pourer it was--a tea-pot of the modern Utilitarian school. [The Breach of Promise, 1845, II, 49-50]

Lucilla "was a Temple, and the aristocratic offspring of the Past triumphed over the vulgar utility of the Present"--a very different moral from the one Carlyle read into the Past and Present two years previously.

It was not part of Mrs. Smythies' purpose to portray the legitimate aristocracy as addicted to every vice, but in the cliché that succeeded the generation of reformed rakes, the aristocracy was commonly either feeble or vicious, or both, and of course the French aristocracy was¹ diabolic. There is more than a touch of the old tea-pot about the Marquis D'Ofort, to whom Rita's father attempts to marry her in 1858:

"He is a most liberal old fellow, and quite the vieille cour--one of the oldest families in France--what more do you want?"

"Why, even for a mere acquaintance a little more might be desirable; for a husband, a good deal." ... I looked my father full in the face, though my voice quivered, and I said, "If by settling respectably you mean marrying an old man of the worst character (for whom I feel the most profound disgust and contempt) because he is wealthy and highly born, I do not understand the term as you do." [Rita, 1858, II, 86-7]

¹

Lotty Beauvilliers' husband in Margaret and her Bridesmaids (1856) is not French, but he behaves as if he were. A prize example is the Count D'Alembert in Annie ("the Author of the Morals of May Fair") Edwardes' Creeds (1859): "A man whose whole nature was so steeped in vice, that to breathe the same air with him was to be contaminated"--and when the French were no longer wicked enough, there were the Russians. Prince Zouroff, in Quida's Moths (1880), "had all the vices, and had them all in excess."

Mrs. Trollope proclaimed with crusading fervor that the true aristocracy was one of intellect, and that education would level social distinctions in spite of the Almanach de Gotha.¹ W.L. Alden, writing in The Galaxy for 1866, expressed the republican conviction that inequalities in wealth and social distinction could no longer be invoked as obstacles in the course of fictitious true love.² Certainly when Holme Lee's Maude Talbot makes an issue of family pride in 1854, it sounds rhetorically ridiculous: "Is it fitting that you should mate with one who, in the days of Hastings, had ranked us serf? Is it fitting, I say? A man of yesterday--a mere man of yesterday!"³ It seems fairly certain that Holme Lee intended to portray her heroine as tragically mistaken rather than wilfully idiotic when she refuses Philip Warburton, whom she loves, and who has been made a peer and a prime minister by his own worth and ability, solely because his grandfather was a cotton lord.

Occasionally family pride appears in reverse, as in the complicated case of John Halifax, gentleman (1856), whose father was a gentleman, and who marries a lady, but who wears his homespun rise from tanner's assistant to mill owner almost arrogantly in refusing to stand for Parliament. Even more obnoxiously class-conscious is Emily Jolly's Isabel Wold, in Caste (1857), who entertains a grudge against the universe because her father is a hosier. She refuses Reginald Long, whom she loves, because

1

Gertrude, or Family Pride, 1855.

2

W.L. Alden, "The Seventh Commandment in Modern Fiction," Galaxy, II (15 Oct. 1866) 375.

3

Maude Talbot, 1854, II, 67.

he is a gentleman, and she consciously wishes to humiliate him. When he decently takes her refusal as final and marries someone else, she undertakes to marry Percy Blanchard for the sake of his family and position, simply to prove that she can. It is of course a mistake, because Percy is one of the degenerates that one might expect to find among the fictional aristocracy--he embodies passion without principle, the natural frailty of man.

But if men of birth but no principles were no better than anyone else ("Is it any matter whether a man gets drunk with whiskey, a few shillings a gallon, or with wine, three times as many pounds a dozen?"), and if the Irish gentry was proverbially penniless,¹ mere wealth was usually vulgar. Apparently American title-hunters came a bit later; the wealthy vulgarians of the fifties were chiefly cotton-spinners from no farther afield than Manchester. Yet one can understand the vulgarity of wealth--the ponderousness of the Podsnap plate--better than its frequent stupidity. There is undeniably something stupid about enormously wealthy young men who dumbly persist in wanting to marry certain indifferent heroines, but what is really incomprehensible is how the zanies acquired these enormous fortunes in the first place. Major Simpson is an extreme case:

"It depends on what that beau ideal is. He would be that of many a young lady, I can tell you, he has a magnificent place and 10,000*l* a-year."

"But he is quite silly--a perfect Master Slender!"

Mrs. Howard laughed.

"He has sense enough to admire you excessively; he sits and stares at you like any Laird of Dumbiedikes." ...

1

See Geraldine Jewsbury's The Sorrows of Gentility, 1856.

"Do you believe, Mrs. Howard, that any woman would marry a man as deficient in sense as Major Simpson?"

"Any! say rather many! You have no notion what a thick veil--a great deal thicker than charity--10,000^l a-year is." [The Cup and the Lip, 1851, II, 134, 172]

Slightly less fantastic are the Tony Lumpkins or the village idiots with the comfortable property. One of them proposes for Anne Dysart in 1850: "All that he said, even of the most trifling import, was uttered with the solemnity of an oracle, and the importance of a fool. ... Being trustworthy, though tedious, in business, he was rather a rising young man in his profession,"¹ and another for Adelaide Lindsay in the same year:

He looked very much like a rushlight, moved about gently, and always spoke, when he did speak, in a low and indistinct tone, as if he was afraid of putting himself out. ... It did not escape her that his dull and vapid eyes were constantly glancing at Adelaide's face as she conversed with his sisters; while his fingers were busy fidgetting with his gloves, or smoothing the nap of his hat which he held between his knees. Now and then he would blunder forth some remark about the weather, and then suddenly stop in the middle of his sentence, and stare at Adelaide who would good-naturedly endeavour to disentangle his ideas for him. [Adelaide Lindsay, 1850, II, 108-9]

Obviously it would be a mistake to marry something like this, however uncomfortable it might be to marry without a competence.

Part of the shading of the same picture was the romanticism which surrounded the idea of love in a cottage. The soulful Lucilla Temple in 1845,

Were he the poorest of curates I should be proud to share and cheer a little cottage home, to do my utmost to be in all respects a help meet for him--with him to visit the sick and the sorrowful, to teach in his Sunday School, to do all the good the poor can do the poor; but a foreigner and an artist, good as he is, noble and pious as I feel him to be, how all my parents' prejudices will rise against him; they cannot see him with my eyes, or know him with my heart! Oh, that he were but a poor English curate! [The Breach of Promise, 1845, III, 130]

¹ Anne Dysart, 1850, I, 176-7.

Rita's wrathful father in 1858, while urging the suit of the Marquis, insists: "It doesn't suit my plans that you should go to England and marry a country curate with forty pounds a year, which is just what you would do, with your romantic ideas."¹ Actually Rita's romanticism took the form of pining for a somewhat more elaborate estate in the country, "with Handel and the herbarium for recreations," and "the pervading principle in such an existence, for ever sweetening and elevating it above a life of mere social pleasures, however refined and intellectual"²--though one suspects that the principle too is part of the romanticism, since it is nowhere save verbally in evidence.

The nineteenth century, hard-headedly interested in money-making and theology, was well aware that love in a cottage was mostly moonshine,³ but a certain romanticism colored even the denunciations of it:

Your romantic notions would probably drape beggary in a tinsel petticoat and nourish it upon chickens' wings; but I beg to assure you that it is fed and clad far otherwise; and that I owe the privilege of having exchanged its rags and black bread for the comforts of existence, to a resolute will and an indomitable energy. [The Jealous Wife, 1855, I, 188]

1

Rita, 1858, II, 86.

2

Rita, 1858, II, 60.

3

It would be a mistake to suppose that the Victorians could not recognize their own clichés. An absurd nosegay of them can be collected from Wilkie Collins' "Petition to Novel Writers," Household Words, XIV (6 Dec. 1856) 481-5, and from "Stock Incidents of Fiction," Once a Week, V (10 Aug. 1861) 182-6. And Catherine Sinclair's Modern Flirtations (1841), in spite of its Gothic madmen and missing heir, antiromantically points out

Poetry is all written to mislead our unsuspecting youth into an effervescent empty enthusiasm about rural felicity on an income of nothing per annum. . . . There were within the walls three noisy dogs, four ditto children, a roasting-jack, and a mangle, all screeching at once! [Modern Flirtations, 1841, III, 132] And yet the conclusion is "Money is only the raw material of enjoyment."

Then as now there were realists whose standard of living was measured by material advantages--

White muslin and roses, and a dear little white cottage, all over woodbines and earwigs, makes me shudder. ... I thought the matter over long ago, when I was eight years old, I believe. ... I like lots of everything,--carriages, horses, servants; I couldn't bear the least worry about money; and I hope, when I marry, I shall be able to have two lady's maids ... and I'll bargain beforehand for a large allowance, and every one of my petticoats shall be trimmed half a yard deep. [Violet Bank and its Inmates, 1858, II, 293-4]

--but then it was intellectually respectable to revise the estimate, and in fact it argued maturer perception to do so: "I here, from this moment, give up my two ladies' maids and the worked petticoats, now and for ever. I'll be tender and true," she sung, but there was more of bashful softness¹ about her than merriment." It was all very well to want two ladies' maids at the age of eight, but at eighteen one should be able to see more than the obvious:

"Isn't he a handsome man, Anne?--so much handsomer than that Mr. Mackdougall, that married Miss Wood; and Miss Wood was three years older than I am; very few people are married so young as I am. And then, he is so rich! I shouldn't wonder if he gave me a diamond bracelet, or something of that sort and I am determined to have a house in Edinburgh in the winter, and I shall give very stylish parties, and have lots of polkas and waltzes. Won't it be charming?"... "Do reflect, dear Julia, what a very serious step you are now about to take; consider the responsibilities of a married woman--the grave and difficult duties which may devolve upon you. You may have a family--" [Anne Dysart, 1850, III, 205-6]

In a way, it was plebeian to be taken in by glitter; certainly it was a mistake:

Jessie set store by fine clothes, rings, pins, studs, &c, decorations which Frederick displayed, in addition to his personal attractions; but unfortunately for the foolish girl, he had not under his fine vest that priceless gem of an honest, upright heart, which beat beneath Geoffrey's fustian jacket. [Maude Talbot, 1854, II, 193]

1

Violet Bank and its Inmates, 1858, III, 111-2.

None of this altered the fact that from the Silver Forks to Ouida, a rich match was ardently desired by all mammas with any pretensions whatever to recognition in society, and by a good many out of it as well. Margaret Percival's sister Agatha had heard all the right maxims, but she judged by practical demonstration, not precept.

No one said to her that wealth was "the one thing needful;" but many said it before her, and, as must almost invariably happen, Agatha turned from the instructions immediately addressed to herself, and largely gathered in passing observations. ... She heard Colonel Glive envied, and she saw that his riches gave him, in the opinion of her family, a position which he could never have gained by his virtues or his intellect. ... Of what use could it be to be told that the goods of this world are of secondary consequence, when every thing about her contradicted the assertion? Agatha heard every one wishing for money, and of course she learned to think that it was the perfection of human desires. [Margaret Percival, 1847, I, 107]

This kind of calculation usually went by the name of not being romantic: 1

"I don't know any thing about love," she said, after a short pause; "such love at least as people talk of, and if it were to come, it might be no good to me; I might not be able to marry."

"But esteem--have you esteem, Agatha?--it must be dreadful to marry without it."

"Of course there is nothing to object to, nothing to find fault with; and you can't imagine how fond he is of me. ... I am not romantic." [Margaret Percival, 1847, I, 148-9]

It was a mistake not to be rational enough to esteem or romantic enough to love, though in all probability the great majority of matches were muddled into without much of either. Fictional ballrooms are per- 2

1
With a little less rationalization, the May of May and December says, "It is not every woman who can love, that meets with a suitable husband. ... It would be a hopeless speculation to wait until I met with any one better worth marrying than Mr. Cameron."--May and December, 1854, I, 103-4.

2
See also the assembly-rooms at Bath (The History of a Flirt, 1840), Cheltenham (Temptation, 1839), Malvern (The History of a Flirt, and Malvern, or The three marriages, 1855), and Harrogate ("Harrowgate is the greatest marriage manufactory in Britain"--Modern Flirtations, or A Month at Harrogate, 1841, II, 277-8) and the seaside at Ryde (History of a Flirt, and Flirts and Flirts, or A Season at Ryde, 1868) and Ramsgate (One and Twenty, 1858).

petually crowded with a tapestry-like background of docile Miss Podsnaps who are there to be married off. They usually come in sets, like encyclopedias. One group is nicknamed Envy, Hatred, and Malice, with Mamma accompanying them as All Uncharitableness; but for the most part they are rather palely pathetic. In the early part of the century they exhibited a sort of dim variation:

1

Poetic justice with variations:

Adelaide neither lost her life by eating ice when warm with dancing, nor her features by the small-pox, the usual destiny of vain creatures in the days of moral essays: she went on ... till the rose and the ringlet became alike artificial; and she was left to that "winter of discontent," which shared its reproaches between the maid who could no longer make, and the mirror that could no longer reflect, a beauty. [Romance and Reality, 1831, III, 326-7]

But those who had no choice in the matter inspired a kind of rough sympathy even in the heavy-handed author of Guy Livingstone:

The chief fault, at all events, lies with the trainers; the jockeys (poor little things!) only ride to orders. ... In the name of Matuta, and of commonsense, is there an imperative necessity that all our maids should become matrons? ... If you are to lead apes, is it not better to defer the evil day as long as possible, instead of parading the animals about by your sides, here on this upper earth?" [Guy Livingstone, 1857, p.237, 239-40]

2

L.E.L. supplies a useful summary of successive styles during her lifetime:

Her first daughter had come out during the reign of useful employments; and Lady Susan plaited straw and constructed silk shoes, till Mr. Amundeville, possessor of some thirty thousand a-year, thought he could not form a more prudent choice, and made her mistress of his saving-bank and himself,--and mistress indeed was she of both. A day of dash and daring came next; and Anastasia rode the most spirited hunter, drove her curri- cle, told amusing stories, drew caricatures, and laughed even louder than she talked. Lord Shafton married her; he was so delicate, he said, or it was said for him, that he needed protection. Sentiment succeeded; and Laura leant over the harp, and sat by moonlight in a window-seat, sighed when her flowers faded, and talked of Byron and Italy. Sir Eustace St. Clair made her an offer while her dark blue eyes were filled with tears at some exquisite lines he had written in her album.

Lady Adelaide only remained, and an undeniable beauty; her mother did indeed expect this match to crown all the others. Her style was, however, to be wholly different, like that of a French tragedy, classical, cold, and correct,--indifference, languor, and quietude now united to form a beau idéal of elegance. [Romance and Reality, 1831, I, 107-8] For the fate of Lady Adelaide, see the note above.

The Misses Fergussons ... were still the fair but unappropriated adjectives of the noun-matrimonial husband; still it was something to be "ready, aye ready,"--the family motto. Of them nothing more can be said, than that Laura was pretty and enacted the beauty; Elizabeth was plain, and therefore was to be sensible: the one sat at her harp, the other at her workbox. [Romance and Reality, 1831, I, 38]

but with the steady progress of mass-production, they became indistinguishable:

Highly educated, strictly proper girls they were. Not beauties any of them; rather the contrary. Straight, lathy, angular figures, with pale complexions, light hair, eyebrows, and eyes, and undecided features: but they dressed well and talked well; only rather too precisely. They were all ambitious of settling well in life, but left any overt acts in the art of conquest to be performed by their respected mama. [Maude Talbot, 1854, I, 187]

Emotion was largely beside the point.

"Is it possible you can think of marrying a man you plainly despise?"
 "Assuredly--if he give me the chance. It is our vocation: we must either marry, or sink down into old maidism and obscurity, for which I at least have no taste. ... I myself am of an independent spirit, but I shall have no objection to be turned into Lady Linnet or Lady Anything-else very speedily. We are none of us so young as we have been, you know." [Maude Talbot, 1854, I, 216]

And in hundreds of cases there was not even the weary hint of desperation.

An incalculable number of romances were like that of Harry Coverdale's friend Knighton, "as dull a tale of true love as ever ran smooth: true love of the very mildest quality, which from the beginning, was certain to end simply and naturally in a stupid marriage, about the whole of which affair there could not by possibility be two opinions." Miss Mulock's more homespun characters in particular tend to give this impression of foregone conclusion:

Esther and Ruth, being of those quiet sort of girls who never weary their friends with getting into love-troubles--whose wooings and marryings nobody ever seems to contemplate, but who bide their time,

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Harry Coverdale's Courtship, 1856, p.80.

and then astonish everybody by a wedding, after which they turn out the best wives and mothers imaginable--... all was done in the most commonplace and straightforward way imaginable. Three months' coming to tea once a week--a walk or two around the Calton Hill--an interview with the elder brother--Esther and Ruth called into the study, and coming out with dim eyes, but smiling--a three months' engagement, and a wedding! [The Head of the Family, 1852, II, 110-1]

In fact, Miss Mulock's characters in general tend to give the impression of mating through a sort of domestic instinct rather than any passionate impulse or rational affection. John Halifax might have been born married; the utmost reach of Ninian Graeme's desires is children: "A longing for some tie closer than that of kindred ... making him acknowledge, as some man says: 'That to be the husband of a wife and the father of a child, is to rise to a higher place as citizen of God's universe.'" Agatha marries partly out of passive emotional inertia and partly out of an active desire for a house to manage:

To one whose heart is altogether free, the knowledge of being deeply loved, and by a man whose attachment would do honour to any woman, is a thought so soothing, so alluring, that from it spring half the marriages--not strictly love-marriages--which take place in the world, sometimes, though not always, ending in real happiness. [Agatha's Husband, 1853, I, 91]

"A house of one's own." Many ordinary girls marry for nothing but this; and in the nobler half of their sex even amidst the strongest and most romantic personal attachment there is a something--a vague, dear hope, that, flying beyond the lover and the bridegroom, nestles itself in the husband and the future home. [Agatha's Husband, 1853, I, 297]

The sweeping generality of Miss Mulock's phraseology obscures the poverty of her reasoning and the thinness of her emotions. Her characters think they think, and believe they experience whatever emotions are appropriate, and since a large portion of the general public is in the same insensitive case, the synthetic substitute is never detected.

There are natures so dull, selfish, and insensible, that, providing they eat and sleep, nothing moves them. Their passions are like stagnant water, their vices and virtues all negatives. They are born, and they die--that is the sum of them. Their happiness never rises above a lethargic content, and their unhappiness never exceeds a vague sense of disturbance in their torpor. Let them be: we have nothing to do with them. I like the fine clay through which the vivid soul shines like a star, not the dense earthen pipkins that the rushlight cannot penetrate. You and I think and feel more in one month than the rudely fashioned vessels do in a whole lifetime. [Kathie Brande, 1856, I, 182]

Miss Mulock's "half the marriages" and "many ordinary girls marry" may be quite literally true, but she does not appear to realize that she is describing the average in her main characters. Her earthen pipkins believe themselves finer clay.

By comparison, Elizabeth Sewell's Ursula, who is not a paragon, nor is intended for one, is a good deal more intelligent than Agatha, and even the frivolous Jessie in the same volume is capable of more genuine emotion:

"You don't know anything about Lieutenant Macdonald that is good, and what is more, you don't care for him. ... Jessie," I said gravely, "what is the love of a bad man worth?"

"Nothing, nothing; only, Ursie, it is very pleasant to be loved."
[Ursula, 1858, I, 369-371]

Miss Sewell also generalizes, but it cannot so comfortably be shifted to the rest of the population: "Care for him she did not; but she might be flattered by his admiration, and touched by his expressions of affection, and how many women marry, and make themselves miserable for life under no greater inducement!"¹

In the catalogue of devious reasons, there are a number of miscellaneous entries. Geraldine Jewsbury's Gertrude marries to get away from

¹
Ursula, 1858, I, 377.

home--it is scarcely Miss Mulock's passion for domesticity:

Gertrude was not the least in the world in love with him; he was too noisy and too full of spirits. Her taste inclined towards sentimental officers and interesting young clergymen. . . . It is probable that she would have rejected him--if the post that morning, which had brought her a sudden recall home to assist her mother in the preparations for an election dinner had not made Mr. Dennelly seem the better alternative. [The Sorrows of Gentility, 1856, I, 45]

She has had many successors with similar motivation, equally imbued with the notion that marriage is a universal panacea. Some of Mrs. Gore's mothers and daughters, almost a generation earlier, had likewise preferred anything to the ills with which they were already too well acquainted. But in 1831 the grievance was genuine, and value for value was promised in return:

"I do not like to hear you talk thus of a man you seriously intend to marry; whom you will swear, in the sight of Heaven to love and honour!"

"And so I shall love and honour him. I have a mighty respect for fools, as forming the antipodes to my own knavery. As to Sir William, I shall do more than love--I shall positively adore him for furnishing a peaceful refuge to my sister and myself from an unhappy and discreditable home." [Mothers and Daughters, 1831, II, 120-1]

This is the situation that the Author of Guy Livingstone compassionated. As it happens, Eleanor Willingham does not escape; but this is the spirit in which Emilia Wyndham is married in 1846, with results which are more properly part of the next chapter; and something like it also colors the drab match between an anonymous governess and an equally anonymous bookseller (quite probably true) in Berkeley Aikin's exposé of governessing, Anne Sherwood (1857):

Happy governess! happy bookseller! She had acquired more than she had ever dared to hope for--a home! He had obtained a superior woman for his wife, and could look up and down his street with the satisfied air of a man who had done something which raised him far above his ambitious neighbours. [Anne Sherwood, 1857, II, 301-2]

The desire for a home, after a weary round of agencies, insults, and dependence is something very different from what it is for Miss Mulock's Agatha, and heart-felt gratitude might go far to supply the place of the ideal esteem.

During the fifties, however, the notion was growing up that esteem was not enough, that a vow of love and honor ought to be accompanied by something more immediate and impulsive than esteem, a sentiment gratuitously bestowed rather than earned. Love was to play the philosophers' stone and perform miracles, and the stage was set in this fashion:

"There's no shame in loving a person, though you are not sure he's going to ask you to marry him, but it is a shame and a sin to marry only because you are asked, and because it's what is called a good match."

"Ah! my dear," replied Mrs. Birch, strangling a sigh. "it's much the same after a few years which you do--that sort of grandissimo happiness you dream about, where do you see it?" and the excellent lady looked through her spectacles inquiringly at every one in the room.

"No where," burst out Sylvia, "and for a good reason, because everybody is so prudent and modest."

"Happiness, Sylvia, is never to be found but in the discharge of one's duty," said Mrs. Birch at a loss.

"Not for me, mamma; I hate and loathe the idea of duty to one's husband. If I love him I shall do every thing right, so you had better let me marry a man I can love. I would rather die or do anything than live the life some of your prudent people do, only comfortable when they can get rid of their husbands--no, no, that won't do for me." [Violet Bank and its Inmates, 1858, I, 168-9]

In this case, even-handed justice permitted her to marry the man she loved according to her own imprudent fashion, and then allowed her no peace or comfort until she did get rid of him, by a legal separation.

But the idea of a love owing nothing to reason is there, and variations on it make one of the interesting aspects of Annie French's second novel, Agnes Waring (1856). Expediency forces Agnes Waring into an un-

happy marriage--no worse than Emilia Wyndham's, or a dozen other sad circumstances related by various minor characters for the edification of the principals in sundry early nineteenth century fictions--but the attitude toward it is different.

My mother talked a great deal of sound unanswerable sense, and proved to demonstration that a marriage without love is the best for happiness and moral improvement. Only she omitted to reflect that however advisable such maxims may be when applied to mere reasoning machines, they are most imperfect when they pretend to guide human hearts, whose weaknesses, passions, and errors, must chafe and wear the mystic closeness of the marriage bond, unless love, divine and all sufficing, like its giver, enfolds them, as air compasses earth, upholding weakness with its inexhaustible buoyancy, supplying the waste of passion, and gathering a gracious curtain of mist, over the errors it will not see! [Agnes Waring, 1856, I, 80-1]

Something very like this was back of Anne Dysart's refusal of Mr. Bolton in 1850, and something like it had been under discussion when Mary Douglas insisted that only love could persuade her to exchange a submission to parental authority for "chains still heavier, and even more binding."¹ But that was love of a virtuous object, founded upon esteem. Annie French appears to be arguing for something else. One of the minor characters in Agnes Waring relates the story of her unhappy marriage and moralizes upon it:

Because I despaired of my own happiness, I thought I would at least please my father, and I added perjury to faithlessness, and vowed at the altar to love Monsieur Duchenois, as my husband; and my father was pleased, and thought how wisely he had secured his daughter's welfare, as if the solemn task of choosing a helpmate can ever be taken out of God's hands, and that of his delegate in every heart--nature's instinct. [Agnes Waring, 1856, II, 155]

This is a very long way from Mrs. Ellis's notion that man shares his natural instincts with the lower animals and his intellect with the angels.

1

Marriage, 1818, III, 27.

In the hands of the sensation novelists, the result was something like the *Call of the Wild*. Rita babbles about "heart perjury;" Aurora Floyd "in the sovereign vitality of her nature, had rebelled against sorrow as a strange and unnatural part of her life. She had demanded happiness almost as a right; she had wondered at her afflictions, and been unable to understand why she should be thus afflicted." Arthur Vincent, the Nonconformist minister of Salem Chapel (1863), daydreams about Alice, Lady Western, who represents all the things that are out of his reach, and without helping himself or anyone else, he allows disappointed ambition to drive him out of the ministry. Henry Stondon, who at 56 meets the completely characterless sixteen-year-old Phemie Keller, is inexplicably bewitched by her:

Anything rather than give her up--anything sooner than lose auburn hair and blue eyes for ever--any trouble--any sorrow--any pain--if trouble, sorrow, and pain could hinder his going out again into the wide world without Phemie Keller by his side. [Phemie Keller, 1866, I, 189]

By this time it would appear that Mr. Bolton's proposal to Anne Dysart in 1850, "You possess the grand desideratum--Principle" was unlikely ever to be repeated. Whether that state of affairs was well or ill is matter for the next chapter.

1

Aurora Floyd, 1863, II, 127.

II

Marriage as a Test of Values

I love thee to the level of everyday's
 Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
 ... I love thee with the breath,
 Smiles, tears, of all my life!--and, if God choose,
 I shall but love thee better after death.

--Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Sonnets
from the Portuguese (1850)

It would be curious indeed if so thoroughly domesticated an era as the Victorian period, with its family Shakespeares and its family prayers, its home firesides and home education, should not deal with marriage, but stop perpetually short of it, or should regard married life as having no problems worth mentioning. Any illusions of this kind must be founded on the fact that the Victorians defined the problems differently and offered a very different set of solutions to them from the current brand of universal solvent, which at times would appear to be passion plain and tuppence colored. It might, for example, be pointed out that the Victorian love story is essentially a subdivision of the domestic novel rather than of the romance, which gives it a different complexion altogether. Furthermore, an astonishing number of heroines are married, not on the last page, but in the first volume, and suffer for it through the rest of the book. No problems, indeed! It is heroes who go adventuring for 500 reprint pages and then drop anchor and are married at last--but their adventures are not love stories. Marriage was for women their Cape of Good Hope, their Golconda, their still vex'd Bermoothes, and sometimes their Botany Bay, the stuff and substance of the larger part of the adventure that was open to them.

Beyond the orange flowers, however, the territory had an astonishing resemblance to what had gone before. It was observed of Laura Montreville in 1811, "The same qualities which made her youth respectable, endear her to the happy partner of her maturer life,"¹ and of Lady Emily and Lady Frances in 1828, that while one was absorbed in the frivolities of the ton, the other was collecting principles and habits "which made her in after-life the comfort and delight of others and bestowed upon her the inestimable possession of self-approbation."² Life was all of a piece; as one sows, so one reaps; and where courtship was a search for values, marriage was the test of the values chosen. It was an adventure, but it was an adventure in the commonplace, calling for endurance rather than struggle.

Women writers may have been largely responsible. While their brothers learned dead languages, girls were sketching from nature; it was a genteel accomplishment and better suited to feminine capacities than the heroic. The accurate eye that sketching develops is exactly suited to a certain type of realism, the faithful rendition of the trivial and familiar, a very different thing from the documentation of notebooks and newspaper clippings. It tends to be a subjective reality, colored by individual thought and feeling, but at the same time it is the reality of the commonplace rather than of the lower depths. Both elements--the subjective and the commonplace--are important in nineteenth century fiction, and it is possible that George Eliot's silly lady novelists were at least partially responsible for their introduction.

1

Self Control, 1832, p.499-500.

2

Flirtation, 1828, II, 47.

Subjectivity has always been a feminine characteristic--or a characteristic feminine weakness--a tendency to make emotions into events and to evaluate events in terms of emotions. It may on the one hand invalidate judgment; it may on the other contribute vividness of detail. Mrs. Ellis, speaking of the circumstances of actual life, laments, "He knows not half the foolish fears that agitate her breast. He could not be made to know, still less to understand, the intensity of her capability of suffering from slight, and what to him would appear inadequate causes."¹ But productive of trouble as the tendency may be in personal relations, the same ability to make something out of nothing has its uses at one aesthetic remove in fiction. A male character in Laura Jewry's The Cup and the Lip (1851) comments: "I doubt whether I have ever been able to describe my feelings in all their intensity; you would give me a vivid picture of yours, but because I want your feminine gift of expression do not the less believe me in all sincerity."² If intensity and vividness of expression are the measure, then women do have an advantage; but that is a little like teaching Eliza Doolittle to speak without paying any attention to what she has to say. Certain types of narrative, notably picaresque adventures, are not adapted either to women's experience or their technique. The gambling hell episodes in Disraeli's Henrietta Temple (1837) and the sequence in Robert Mackenzie Daniel's The Young Widow (1844) in which Gerald Maccoir loses his horse crossing Falconridge and Ravenspur in a snowstorm on his way to fight a duel could scarcely

1

The Women of England, 1839, p.224.

2

The Cup and the Lip, 1851, III, 27.

1

be rendered convincingly from a woman's point of view. There are melancholy histories which are wooden attempts on the part of women writers to handle straight adventure in the personified-quality manner ("The picture of virtue and vice, under these forms, has been attempted"--Lady Charlotte Bury's Flirtation, 1828), but the ladies are considerably more readable when their feelings are involved. Mrs. Humphrey Ward says of Jane Eyre (1847): "It is one of the signs, no doubt, that mark the transition from the old novel to the new, from the old novel of plot and coincidence to the new novel of psychology and character."² Furthermore, she says of Charlotte Bronte:

You cannot think of her apart from what she has written, and everything that she wrote has the challenging quality of personal emotion or of passion, moving in a narrow range among very concrete things, and intimately fused throughout with the incidents and feelings of one small, intense experience.³

With due allowance for the difference between a vivid soul and a rushlight, the method here described is that of most women writers.

The narrow range illuminated by the rushlights was the commonplace,

1

These two men's novels stand out sharply in the list of titles taken from Mudie's 1848 catalogue. Since I excluded military and sporting novels, boys' adventure stories and the consciously historical romance, almost all of my popular authors were women, until second-rate men entered the popular novel field toward the mid-fifties. By that time the vivid emotional technique for emotional subject matter was well established.

2

Mrs. Humphrey Ward, Introduction to Jane Eyre, in Haworth ed. of The Life and Works of Charlotte Bronte and her Sisters, in 7 vols. (1899) I, xviii-xix.

3

Ibid., p.x.

1

the deliberately anti-heroic. Dolores Nevil, the heroine of The Cup and the Lip, who presumably possessed the feminine gift of expression, complained, "Alas! I am a mere spinster, and must keep to my distaff, and be satisfied with 'chronicling small beer,' as William Shakespeare hath it;"² but the small beer of which innumerable chronicles were made is perhaps best characterized in a passage from Holme Lee's Kathie Brande, a Fireside History of a Quiet Life (1856). The title is entirely characteristic, and the author's pseudonym is a pun.

It is a life-history, not a romance, that I have undertaken to tell. ... To those whose lines have fallen to them in quiet lowly places, who endure rather than struggle, who patiently take their daily labour as it is laid out for them, inch by inch, and piece by piece, my story may go home like an echo of their own pale lives. [Kathie Brande, 1856, I, 32]

Kathie, who spends three volumes inventing duties to keep her from marrying her incredibly patient clergyman until he is left a widower with a family, leads a very pale life indeed. But the distinction "a life-history, not a romance" is significant, because it manages to dye so many of the romances the same utilitarian color as everyday life. Mrs. Ellis had warned the women of England in her first volume,

It is for circumstances such as these, that a large proportion of the young women of England, now undergoing the process of education, have to prepare. Not to imitate the heroines they read of; but to plunge into the actual cares, and duties, and responsibilities of every-day existence. [Women of England, 1839, p.212]

1

Mario Praz, in The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction (1956), deals with the resemblance to Dutch genre painting of the work of various major Victorian writers; but what he calls Biedermeier, "a naïve observance of the simplest relationships of life ... the small joys of a restricted life with an eye to their utilitarian aspects ... roughly 1815-1870," (p.117-8) appeared in the works of minor writers as well.

2

The Cup and the Lip, 1851, II, 62.

Heroines thereupon obligingly went and did likewise, and fiction for a time became almost indistinguishable from contemporary life.

As a result the commonplace tended to become slightly idealized. It was not, as the modern commonplace sometimes appears, the reduction of everybody to an earthen pipkin, but the illumination of clay with a star-like soul. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Victorian marriage problems may not be recognized as such: they are problems of character and principles, of temper, disposition, duty, and self-discipline; not, until after the middle of the century, the ignis fatuus of imagination, the pursuit of happiness.

The trivial round, the common task,
Would furnish all we ought to ask,--
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God.

So Keble, in The Christian Year, in 1827; and as long as the clay was illuminated with a star, "the trivial round, the common task" was an adventure. There is nothing drab about Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "level of everyday's most quiet need," nor about Coventry Patmore's "customary love" which is not the wife's "passion or her play, but life." It is the depth and not the tumult of the soul, not tinsel petticoats and chicken's wings, but resolute will and indomitable energy. A genuine Victorian happy ending is earned, not bestowed.

The Victorian cult of the commonplace really antedated Keble, for apart from its Romantic Wordsworthian origins, it may be found in Laura Montreville's childhood in 1811. She has the same romantic devotion to "goodness beyond all thought" that characterizes Rachel Lester in Cleve Hall, the same responsiveness to stories of martyrdom.

Full of the emulation which the tale of heroic virtue inspires, [she] exclaimed, her eyes flashing through their tears, her little form erect with noble daring,--"Let them persecute me, and I will be a martyr."--"You may be so now, to-day, every day," returned Mrs. Douglas. "It was not at the stake that those holy men began their self-denial. They had before taken up their cross daily; and whenever, from a regard to duty, you resign any thing that is pleasing or valuable to you, you are for the time a little martyr." [Self Control, 1832, p.5]

In all probability, children were dosed with the idea as regularly as with Foxe's Martyrs and Froissart, for it also colors the early pages of Emilia Wyndham (1846)¹ and the whole of that archetypal Victorian child, Margaret Cecil, whose story is subtitled with the nineteenth century motto, I can Because I Ought (1851). Margaret Cecil remained in print until something like 1876, encouraging children in perseverance.

The simple domestic trials and annoyances which our heroine encounters, may be really more irksome, more difficult to bear, to a girl of her high spirit and enthusiastic temper, than those of a more romantic, spirit-stirring kind. [Margaret Cecil, 1866, p.218]

Margaret, volunteering to sweep the floor, is taunted with not even knowing how to hold the broom, but her answer is like Rachel Lester's "I would try": "If I found that was not the right way, I would try another, and

¹

Emilia's mother gave her romantic tendencies a Victorian direction: "Heroism! To those who consider it rightly, it is a far nobler thing now; when it is no longer a sound to mark the glowing excitement, the lofty enthusiasm, which fights and struggles in the brilliant midday, ... but the slow, silent, death-struggle of the soul in solitude, darkness, and obscurity, against the heavy, wearying, every-day evils of every-day actual life; sacrifices of the hourly and the small ... given, as it were, by inches; the heroic devotion to others, and those others, not even worthy! ... Patience, perseverance, endurance, gentleness, and disinterestedness--that is the heroism of our day, my dear poet!" [Emilia Wyndham, 1846, I, 6]

Amy Edmonstone, in The Heir of Redclyffe (1853), reduces the idea to shorthand without the appeal to heroics: "Little things, on little wings, bear little souls to heaven." Theodora Martindale to Lord St. Erme, in Heartsease (1854): "Devoir is always poetry in real life. ... What is it but the work ready to hand? Shrinking from it is shrinking from the battle." --Heartsease, 1854, II, 65.

another, and every way till I found the right one." ¹ I can because I ought; duty because it is there.

You may sometimes, perhaps often, be called upon to deny yourself for the sake of those whom you can neither love nor respect, and to sacrifice your inclinations and wishes at the call of mere duty, in cases where affection has no place. [Margaret Cecil, 1866, p.33]

The ideal therefore is "to do every duty because it is duty, and not merely from love to those towards whom you do it." ²

There was good reason for the intense concern over what was suitable reading for young girls. Ideas like these have obvious applications in later life, particularly for wives, who were in all seriousness expected to obey, even where the demand was unreasonable and love as a motive for obedience impossible. The importance of principle is obvious, and the desirability of superiority on the man's side. Mrs. Ellis was very long on male superiority and wifely duty, as obvious postulates to be deduced from the nature of the universe: "It is impossible but that woman should feel her own inferiority; and it is but right that it should be so. ... Her part is to make sacrifices, in order that his enjoyment may be enhanced." ³ "Her husband cannot have married her without her consent; and therefore the engagement she has voluntarily entered into, must be to fulfil the duties of a wife to him as he is, not as she would have wished or imagined him to be." ⁴ And if she has made a mistake, let her, as a rational though inferior creature, abide by the consequences.

¹ Margaret Cecil, 1866, p.75.

² Margaret Cecil, 1866, p.144.

³ The Women of England, 1839, p.223.

⁴ The Women of England, 1839, p.263.

As no man becomes a fool or loses his senses by marriage, the woman who has selected such a companion must abide by the consequences; and even he, whatever may be his degree of folly, is entitled to respect from her, because she has voluntarily placed herself in such a position that she must necessarily be his inferior. [Wives of England, 1843, p.78-9]

The time for regrets and misgivings was before and not after the ceremony. "Can you suppose I would so far forfeit my honour and truth, as that I would swear to love, honour, and obey ... where cold constrained obedience would be all of my duty I could hope to fulfill?"¹ It was a promise to be made seriously and taken literally:²

To me the service of matrimony has more of solemnity in it than that of burial: the responsibility incurred by those who pledge themselves, in the presence of their Maker, to the fulfilment of duties, and the performance of obligations, against which the fallibility of our nature, and the perverseness of our passions, may afterwards rise in conflict and opposition through a lengthened life, is tremendously serious. Remember what the contracting parties swear to. [Love and Pride, 1833, II, 200]

But once the promise was made, it was to be fulfilled faithfully:

¹

Marriage, 1818, III, 27.

²

There is some evidence in Rita (1858) that at that date approved opinion still took the words of the marriage service literally, though Rita's own seriousness of purpose is difficult to assess:

We had read over the marriage-service together at my earnest request, very early that morning. I sought to impress on her the solemn nature of the compact she was about to enter into, and my own view of a woman's obligations in matrimony. I ended by saying, "And therefore, dear Rose, I would sooner beg my bread than be married to a man I could not 'love, honour, and obey.' Not all the rank and the riches--not all the persuasion in the world, shall tempt me to do this." [Rita, 1858, II, 19]

By the time of Ivy, Cousin and Bride (1881; see ante, p.46) it would appear that the marriage vow as a promise was entirely form without content:

"Why proclaim your distrust by exacting formally what should be matter of course--what she promises and must expect to render by the very terms of her marriage vow?"

"You know how much that vow is generally worth! If a wife obeys, it is either because she loves or because she fears--not because she has promised. In our case, the whole marriage vow is a solemn fiction--a hollow form." [Ivy, Cousin and Bride, 1881, I, 181-2]

Before the marriage, she would thankfully have made the sacrifice of her dearest personal interests to save her sister from a life of wretchedness; now, she would as thankfully have made an equal sacrifice to induce her to submit to the fate which was the result of her own deliberate act. ...

"You are not a wife, Margaret; and it is very well for you to tell me that I must submit. Could you do it yourself?"

Margaret left the question unanswered, but in her own mind, trusted that she should never have put herself in a position to make submission difficult. [Margaret Percival, 1847, II, 173, 143]

Intelligent forethought and merited esteem is what keeps the Victorian wife's docile obedience from being spineless submission. Too much weight on one side unbalances the picture. Miss Mulock, for example, has a grovelling deal to say about male superiority and female obedience, "the mystery that causes ¹ man to rule and woman to obey," but very little to indicate that obedience may be rational as well as emotional.

We women ... the very best and wisest of us, cannot enter thoroughly into the nature of the man we love. We can only love him. That is, when we once believe him worthy of affection. Firmly knowing that, we must bear with all the rest; and where we do not quite understand, we must, as I said, have faith in him. [Agatha's Husband, 1853, I, 63]

This kind of rebuke is administered to Agatha when she not unreasonably expresses a suspicion that the husband she married on three weeks' acquaintance might have married her for her money. Actually, her fortune has been misappropriated by her guardian, her husband's elder brother, whose peculations he is shielding by nobly refusing to explain anything to anyone; but Agatha has no means of knowing which of the two is the defaulter, or even that the money is not there. Her suspicion is the only evidence Agatha gives of being a reasonably intelligent woman, and Miss

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Agatha's Husband, 1853, II, 252. At times Miss Mulock's luxurious wallowing in the idea of male superiority produces something curiously like a reverse impression of The Sheik, the significant difference being that Miss Mulock prefers good men and E.M. Hull bad ones.

Mulock rebukes her for it without suggesting any other basis for blind faith than self-hypnosis. She leaps intuitively from believing him worthy of affection to firm knowledge and absolute faith. It may be a copy from life, but it makes a very bad precedent.

It is unfortunate that this is too often the impression one has of Victorian wives (Miss Mulock herself was not married until 1864, when it is to be hoped that she was wiser), but they were not necessarily built to this pattern. It is dimly possible to see how a distortion in this direction may have come about through a misrepresentation of Mrs. Ellis, but a far better transcript of her intentions is to be found in Christiana Jand Douglas's Onwards (1859), in which Honor Sky has reason to suspect that her fiancé supplements his business acumen with fraudulent practices.

"A woman ought never for a moment to allow herself to question her husband's conduct."

"And if I marry," said Honor, "I trust it will be so with me. But James Carver is not my husband, and it is that I may have this full confidence in him that I now come." [Onwards, 1859, III, 54]

Finding that her apprehension is justified, Honor breaks the engagement. But in 1859 there were alternatives to marriage. Earlier in the century the peculiar dilemma was that there were no alternatives, and good faith

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L.E.L. is in many ways a very foolish author, but her perceptions on this point are much more acute than Miss Mulock's. She says of her heroine in Romance and Reality:

Our being attached to a hero almost makes a heroine; and excellence is an excellent excuse for admiration. Yes, he was worthy of devotion, such as the heart pays, and once only, to the idol it has itself set up; but it was to be deep, silent, and unsuspected. ... What a pity it is that our most pure and most beautiful feelings should spring from false impressions! What generous self-sacrifice--what a world of gentle affection, were now called forth in Emily by a moment's phantasy!

[Romance and Reality, 1831, I, 318-9]

Miss Mulock begs the question; L.E.L. makes allowance for the possibility of error.

was exacted in very difficult circumstances.

Sarah, the exemplary wife (1813), marries as a last-ditch resort a man it is impossible to love or to esteem. He is crude beyond redemption, and the unreformed rakes of the period gather like vultures. But though she has been forced into a desperate bargain, the drama of the situation hinges on her desperate endeavor to maintain her end of it honorably:

"Has he not broken through every moral obligation to you?"

"That does not release me from the vows I made to him."

"Do you love him?"

"No."

"Do you esteem or respect him?"

"It is impossible I can in so high a degree, as the relationship that exists between us challenges."

"What then is to prevent your accepting the protection of another?"

"My duty to God, and the respect I owe to myself." [Sarah, 1813, p.128]

This is indeed virtue of a strenuous and heroic order. How often it may have been called for is matter for conjecture; but a good many characters were buried in paragraphs with the epitaph "She was a good wife to a bad husband." Characters are held responsible for their own mistakes, and when milk had been spilled, there was nothing to be done but to wipe it up. A cheerful acceptance of a disappointing second-best was the nearest thing to happiness, as in the case of Mrs. Douglas in Susan Ferrier's

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Probably late eighteenth century, since the story was first published in 1802, and Mrs. Rowson's recollections are probably based on her experiences before 1793, when she finally settled in America.

2

One of the minor background characters in Lady Charlotte Bury's Flirtation (1828):

Living her whole life in, or about the court, a reigning beauty at one time, Mrs. Neville has always, nevertheless, kept the straightforward path. She was a good wife to a bad husband, and having done her duty by him, declared that she would in future live a life of single blessedness, and she has kept her word, not for want of offers to do otherwise. [Flirtation, 1828, II, 271]

1

Marriage (1818):

Alicia ... diligently strove, not only to make up her mind to the lot which had devolved to her, but to bring it to such a frame of cheerfulness, as should enable her to contribute to her husband's happiness.

When the soul is no longer buffeted by the storms of hope or fear, when all is fixed unchangeably for life, sorrow for the past will never long prey on a pious and well regulated mind. If Alicia lost the buoyant spirit of youth, the bright and quick play of fancy, yet a placid contentment crowned her days; and, at the end of two years, she would have been astonished had any one marked her as an object of compassion. [Marriage, 1818, I, 184-5]

Emilia Wyndham's mother was not quite so fortunate, but "She had soon obtained sufficient mastery over her own temper and feelings, not to suffer them to be outwardly, in the least degree discomposed by these perpetual annoyances." ² And it was against a background of this kind that Emilia's mother delivered her lecture on the heroism of sacrifice by inches.

She was very young when she committed the folly of marrying him; that is all we can say in her behalf. She found herself the idol of a day, and, when the short-lived passion was over, there was neither friendship, nor affection, nor confidence to replace it. Of friendship, such a man as Mr. Wyndham is evidently incapable. ... Of affection not many men are capable; they have usually a sort of attachment to the things they live among, the people who fill their house and family; that is, they do not very well like to do without them when they have been accustomed to their presence; but that is all. ... As for confidence, that is not the attribute of a little mind, especially if tinged with jealousy of a mind more enlarged and noble than itself. ... Folly hates wisdom, even the gentlest wisdom. ... She was so much too good for him, that even her fine and generous qualities were actually in her way. Had she but possessed some portion of his own littleness, undoubtedly she would have managed him better. [Emilia Wyndham, 1846, I, 78-9]

3

Since until the revised Marriage and Divorce Act of 1857, women's

¹ The History of Mrs. Douglas has been identified as Charlotte Clavering's contribution to her friend's novel.

² Emilia Wyndham, 1846, I, 57.

³ Prior to 1857, a man might obtain a divorce only by a private act of Parliament, after a successful suit for damages in the ecclesiastical courts. The Act of 1857 abolished the prerequisite crim. con. action, transferred the whole proceeding to a special civil court, and in certain aggravated cases permitted women to sue for a divorce.

fates were fixed unchangeably for life on men's terms, unfortunate wives whose own principles were good were sometimes driven to eccentric expedients. One such is Lady Tattersall Trottemout in Harry Coverdale's Courtship (1856):

His lady-wife went through the usual agreeable process of awaking from "Love's young dream," and discovering that, after the manner of Caliban, she had, in her simplicity,--

"Made a wonder of a poor drunkard,"

she, like a sensible woman, resolved to put up with her bad bargain, keep her husband in respectable order, and create or discover some fresh interest in life for herself. In accordance with this determination, she restricted the marital cigars and brandy and water to certain definite limits; tested several phases of London society; and then took her line, and chose her associates accordingly. Being an intellectual woman, and having literary taste up to a certain point, she affected the society of artists of all classes, and in every department of art. [Harry Coverdale's Courtship, 1856, p.267]

It was a laudable endeavor; but it would appear that by this time "my duty to God and the respect I owe myself" had become separated. Duty had in many cases lost its reason for being, and had become merely duty, while self-respect, judicially separated from religious motive, tended to become pride. The result was not at all the same thing. Religious motive was not lacking, but in its excessive humility and overanxious zeal for the commonplace, it wilfully forfeited some of the grandeur it might have claimed. The star-like qualities of the soul may sometimes unhappily be obscured by the density of the earthen pipkin in which it resides.

Elizabeth Sewell's Ursula (1858) succeeds in beating the idea of duty to a shapeless grey pulp. Duty for duty's sake may sometimes be invested with a kind of grim grandeur, but not in the limp person of Mrs. Weir.

"I shall see a way by and by. I hope you will never know so much trouble as I have; but I must go to my husband."

Those were the saddest words of all to me. There was no love in them, only a despairing sense of duty. [Ursula, 1858, I, 149]

Religious motive should have more backbone than this. Before it could reach such a sniveling state it had to be absolutely divorced, a vinculo,¹ from any shadow of eighteenth century self-approbation or self-respect.

The unfortunate separation of the two may be seen in Geraldine Jewsbury's The Sorrows of Gentility (1856), which embraces all the stoic endurance of an age without anaesthetics. There is remarkably little hypocrisy,² concealment, rosy optimism, or refusal to face problems in Lady

¹

Margaret Cecil (1851), speaking to a sister who wishes to be reconciled to her brother after a quarrel in which the brother was in the wrong, says, "You must forget even that there is any self to deny. ... If you get this spirit of self-forgetting love, it will teach you the wisdom necessary for guiding your conduct aright."--Margaret Cecil, 1866, p.383-4. But she does not advocate surrendering right perceptions to wrong ones.

²

Those who are obsessed with the idea of Victorian euphemism might be hard put to explain passages like these:

Call every crime by its proper and disgusting title, Sydney. The world has such varied and softened terms for guilt, that we are perplexed and baffled in discovering the narrow path of right. ... If our English females consider foreign manners and foreign vices amiable, then raise those vices into notice by their own names--but let them not be dignified by the sophistry which virtuous minds even, do not always detect. [The Wilfulness of Woman, 1844, I, 235-6]

It is a grievous pity that we do not all learn to call our faults by their right names. Ella acknowledged herself to be indolent,--that she did not object to; it was rather a refined fault. She would have been deeply mortified if it had been suggested to her that she was selfish, for she was always dreaming of heroism, and heroines are never selfish. [Cleve Hall, 1855, I, 180]

"Papa won't let me say I can't help a thing," replied Rachel, "unless I really can't. He says that people teach themselves self-deceit by their words. And you know, Clement, nothing can be wrong which we really can't help."

"Then I am quite sure I am the most virtuous being in existence," exclaimed Clement; "for I can't help half--no, not three quarters--of the wrong things I do."

"But if we ought to say, I don't try to help it," persisted Rachel, "that would be a great mistake." [Cleve Hall, 1855, II, 24]

Southend's advice to Gertrude:

Lay hold of the fact of things, even though it should be sharper than a sword. Accept your lot as it actually is--do not weakly try to make a compromise if it is miserable; say to yourself, it is miserable--and bear it. You will have strength enough to bear whatever trials may come, and to do whatever duty is laid upon you--but your strength will fail if you waste it in struggling to be happy into the bargain. [The Sorrows of Gentility, 1856, II, 198]

Lady Southend had assuredly bought and paid for the right to give advice.

She says of her husband:

He was what you would have called 'a fine gentleman,' but I tell you that I have worn my diamond bracelets to hide black flesh where he had pinched me. I had a Brussels lace tippet which was the envy of all the women who saw it. ... I wore it morning, noon, and night; ... they never guessed it was to hide the marks of his brutality on my shoulders. One day, whilst my maid was dressing my hair, he came in like a madman, and seizing the hot irons, scored them across both shoulders; the scars were ineffaceable. I had that morning refused to sign away an estate to pay a gambling debt. ... He kept another of his mistresses in a fine house exactly opposite to my back drawing-room windows. I was a great beauty, and had brought him an immense fortune, and I had been desperately in love with him, but I never complained--I never took the world into my confidence. ... Perhaps you will ask me what I gained by putting so good a countenance on the matter. The world could not gossip about me or pity me, and my husband feared me when I looked at him and held my tongue. I believe he thought it was a spell by which I could work him evil--his conscience told him what he deserved. I did not gain that strength at once. I began by being eloquent, which only ended in my own discomfiture--and you may be sure that I nearly broke my woman's heart before I could cease to hope that, amid all the wealth of fine qualities with which I had endowed him out of my own beautiful imagination some would at least hold good; but they were all charming illusions, for which I learned to despise myself; and when I once was able to lay hold upon the truth, I was calm--and at last ceased to wear myself out with vain hopes. [The Sorrows of Gentility, 1856, II, 195-8]

Sheer courage of this kind compels admiration. Yet her former maid says of her:

I used to wonder where she found all her strength, but I have thought since that she did not take her trouble just in the right way. She set her face like a flint, and hardened herself like iron, and nobody ever saw her give way, but I have often found her beautiful cambric handkerchiefs gnawed into holes;--she always covered her mouth when

my lord angered her. ... When my own troubles came I did not find that being proud helped me one bit; it only drove the hurt deeper I was obliged to bear. [The Sorrows of Gentility, 1856, II, 211-212]

Mrs. Hutchins, the former maid, had likewise endured her share of hardship.

"My husband was not a good man,--he was a very bad one in every way. We had one child, and God forgive me if I wrong him, but I surely believe he made away with it for the sake of the club-money. That was a sore grief, and it drove me out of my mind for some months. When I came to myself, I prayed very hard that I might not be let to hate him, and I was not; thank God, I was kept quiet. He fell very ill soon after my judgment had come back to me, and I was able to nurse him, and have a good heart towards him. It was not against me he had sinned, though he had made me suffer. ... He went on in bad ways. He left me to go and live with another woman, and I went to service under my maiden name; my husband joined a gang of burglars, and got shot one night in attempting to enter a gentleman's house. I went to him in the prison. ...

"I prayed to God for him, ma'am--that was all I could do, and I was kept to feel quiet myself--through everything."

"But you could not love such a husband, surely?"

"No, ma'am, perhaps not; he had wore that out. But I didnot hate him; I wished him well." [The Sorrows of Gentility, 1856, II, 213-5]

Whatever the motive for it, women did condone--it was one of the stumbling-stones of the divorce law, and one of the forms of courage that extorted admiration from the Author of Guy Livingstone.

The acts of some of these--how they warred with their husbands and were worsted; how they provoked the presiding Draco, and stultified the attesting policeman, by obstinately ignoring their injuries written legibly in red, and black, and blue; how they interceded with many sobs for the aggressor--are they not written in the book of the chronicles of Bow-street and Clerkenwell? [Guy Livingstone, 1857, p.233]

The real effect of duty, however, was on those who practiced it.

The conscientious concentration on one's debts rather than on one's debtors might, by Carlylean arithmetic--"Make thy claim of wages a zero, then; thou hast the world under thy feet!"--produce content, and even a form of happiness. Lady Southend was perhaps unable to reach resignation

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"The Everlasting Yea," Sartor Resartus, 1836.

until she relinquished hope, but there were other instances in which hope eventually created the object of its contemplation. Duty was undeniably easier to perform when assisted by love--"If I love him, I shall do every thing right"--and in some instances it was even possible for duty to create love.

This is the basic argument of Emilia Wyndham (1846). Emilia marries Mr. Danby, a drably unromantic lawyer whom she does not love, in order to provide a home for her helpless and improvident father. When her former sweetheart reappears married to her best friend, she does everything in her power to bolster the marriage, and to keep her flighty friend from the perilous mazes of flirtation. And as her ultimate reward:

She has fought the good fight, and she has vanquished--and it is given her, the high reward is given, to love. Yes, she loves him; not with the tumultuous, vain passion of her youth, but with the deep, sincere, and heartfelt affection which moral worth inspires. [Emilia Wyndham, 1846, III, 68]

--Not her dashing first love, who reenters her life with the plea, "Oh, Emilia, it should have been you. With you, I was another man--with this idle and thoughtless being I am only an irritated, ill-tempered, heartless fool!"--but her own husband, as he is.

"He has my hand--he has my duty--he has my esteem--and he has my everlasting gratitude," said she warmly. "He has loved me indifferent--he has sheltered me thankless--he has saved me when I was about to perish--and I am not going to forget him. I should be the very basest, meanest, most despicable creature on earth," she cried, the generous tears rising to her eyes, "if I could suffer any one in the universe, in my hearing, to wrong or disparage Mr. Danby." [Emilia Wyndham, 1846, III, 116-17]

The author soliloquizes tidily:

Emilia Wyndham, 1846, III, 113.

Now, was it not better, dear reader, think you, that all these pairs, once united, should have remained united, done their duties by, and learned to love one another, than that they should have changed partners, according to the fashion of some of our continental neighbours, and found mutual failings, and mutual discontent, and fresh reason for changing again, in every new form of the marriage life they might have tried? [Emilia Wyndham, 1846, III, 359-60]

--But Coventry Patmore hints at the means which bring it about:

We love, Fool, for the good we do,¹
Not that which unto us is done!

Resignation, contentment, happiness, love, on these terms, are honestly earned.

The extent to which domestic love might arise from a sense of duty or from Mrs. Ellis's self control which not only appeared calm, but really felt so may be at least partially gauged by the achievement of Isabel Wold in Emily Jolly's Caste (1857). Isabel marries Percy Blanchard for a collection of bad motives, among them hurt pride, social ambition, and something resembling revenge, and he makes her as abundantly miserable as the severest moralist could desire. There is nothing excellent or admirable about him, though she was certainly married with her own consent and contrivance. Yet in spite of the fact that affection had nothing to do with her marriage, and under the circumstances was not likely to arise in a heart where it had never the smallest previous admission, Isabel does in the end manage to love her husband.

Isabel's heart was drawn unto her husband's in wifely love. Love that owes nothing to the merits of the creature loved, but is poured forth freely from the abundance of the lover, is purest Love. ... A proud woman cannot love thus; she will love "worthily" and comprehendingly, adding honour to herself from the honourableness of the

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"A Riddle Solved," Angel in the House, Bk. I, Canto VI.

2

See quotation from The Wives of England, ante, p.71.

one loved; yet, perhaps, it was thus that one woman loved long ago, who was forgiven much, because she had loved much. It was thus that Isabel, proud no more, loved Percy now and long after. ... She loved her husband! she had one grand aim in life. She loved the father of her children, and there was a hitherto unknown unity in her life. [Caste, 1857, III, 271-2]

"Now, was it not better, dear reader--?" Assuredly better in this instance that she should make a success instead of a failure of it; but trouble of all kinds is inherent in the idea that love worthily bestowed is of a lower order than love lavished without regard to the quality of the object. It makes the prudent heroine's man of principle less beloved than the betrayed maiden's deceiver. It removes the justest reason for pride and offers instead a selfish one. It substitutes a quantitative for a qualitative best. When in addition the idea arose that duty had limits and that individuals had a kind of birth-right title to happiness,¹ the stage was set for the sensation novel.

The shift in values had radical and far-reaching consequences. It makes a great deal of difference whether duty or happiness comes first, the best interests of society or the rights of the individual. Mrs. Opie in Adeline Mowbray (1804) and Mrs. Marsh-Caldwell in Emilia Wyndham (1846) agree "that there is a great deal of individual suffering in the marriage state, from contrariety of temper and other causes,"² but they also agree that "It must be for the general good, that people should be called upon to perform their duty, and not be taught to seek so much after their happiness; and that marriage should be the most holy, sacred, indissoluble of ties."³ Mrs. Opie even adds:

¹

The U.S. Declaration of Independence says "the pursuit of happiness."

²

Adeline Mowbray, 1805, III, 148-9

³

Emilia Wyndham, 1846, II, 264.

To BEAR AND FORBEAR I believe to be the grand secret of happiness, and that it ought to be the great study of life: therefore, whatever would enable married persons to separate on the slightest quarrel or disgust, would make it so much the less necessary for us to learn this important lesson; a lesson so needful in order to perfect the human character, that I believe the difficulty of divorce to be one of the greatest blessings of society. [Adeline Mowbray, 1805, III, 149-50]

But in 1856, in Mrs. Alexander's Agnes Waring, appears a different kind of argument, not that human beings in bearing and forbearing may reach the breaking point, but that they are entitled to a breaking point. Earlier, the marriage vows, however productive of individual misery, were regarded seriously. Agnes Waring, unhappily married, argues: "My youth and its promises--my marriage and the earnest spirit with which I took upon me its vows--all rose before me, and the long course of misery which absolved me from those vows." ¹ Absolved? The whole story is wrapped up ² in the justification of "nature's instinct;" whence then this absolution? Against nature's instinct, Agnes marries Mr. Millar, who is nothing better nor worse than a clod, with plenty of money and daughters almost as old as Agnes herself. He does not maltreat her in the style of my lord Southend, but his "impervious husk of selfishness ... first chilled me into ³ indifference, and then--" presumably roused a natural instinct which

¹ Agnes Waring, 1856, I, 193. Sarah, the exemplary wife, says, "That does not release me from the vows I made to him." (1813).

² See quotations ante, p.98, and also the author's preface, which in the British Museum's copy of the book is bound in vol.II, in which she inveighs against "the fatal errors into which women, through weakness, tenderness, mistaken self-devotion, and virtues grown beyond rational bounds, have been led to commit on the all-momentous question of marriage--the long domestic martyrdoms--the obscure tragedies, that have arisen from stifling nature's instinct."--Agnes Waring, 1856, II, ii.

³ Agnes Waring, 1856, I, 119.

whispered absolution and prompted her to disappear by feigning accidental death down a crevasse in Switzerland. Presumed dead, she smuggles herself back to London under an assumed name and then goes as a governess with a military family to Canada. Natural instinct does not appear to make her any happier than Emilia Wyndham's sense of duty, persevered in to the end.

But the ignis fatuus of imagination and instinct is infinitely rosier than the dry light of reason, and the mischief is that in its glow instinct is not always distinguished from impulse, and rational happiness is somehow much less exciting than irrational misery. The two opposed temperaments were not an original discovery of the fifties, but earlier than that the balance of power lay in the other direction. In Modern Flirtations (1841) the excitable Agnes Dunbar unfortunately appears about twenty years too soon:

"Give me the happiness that will, as my milliner says, 'wash and wear well!'--good fire-side domestic comfort."

"Comfort! I hate comfort!" said Agnes indignantly, "a stupid, detestable word, as opposite to real happiness as night is to day! I shall be satisfied with nothing short of felicity."

"But felicity can last only a day, while peace and comfort may be enjoyed for life," replied Clara. "In talking of marriage you seem to think of nothing beyond the honeymoon, and to forget the hours, days, and years of actual life that must follow!" [Modern Flirtations, 1841, I, 206]

Clara's attitude is certainly not visionary, and it is the hours, days, and years of actual life that she has in mind when she insists on a confirmed and consistent Christian, completely master of himself and of his actions.

1

See ante, p.70.

Nevertheless marriage as a trial of principle rather than as the
 1
 fruition of hope was a two-sided affair. Not all wives were dutifully
 obedient. As the Egoist was uncomfortably aware, they sometimes ran--.
 The outspoken Dr. Meadows in The Wilfulness of Woman (1844) pronounces
 as his opinion:

My practice has shown me the dreadful effects of domestic misery,
 and I tell you that the inevitable consequence of such misery is
 the perpetration of crime, if they do not carry their burden to their
 Maker. It ends in elopement or intoxication. Mrs. Trelawney loves
 her husband, therefore she drowns recollection by drinking. [The
 Wilfulness of Woman, 1844, II, 212]

2
 Alcoholism was apparently the less frequent alternative, since his diag-
 nosis was received with incredulity.

The theory about elopements was adamant:

"But should I see one I may like better?"--Her look petrified me.--
 "Impossible," said she, "impossible, a woman whose passions are kept
 under the dominion of reason, will never let a thought wander to
 another, when once she is married, though she may not love her hus-
 band, she will not love another." [Sarah, or The exemplary wife,
 1813, p.5]

Not all passions come consistently under the dominion of reason, however,
 and the strain upon reason is particularly severe when esteem plays no
 part in the original bargain.

My brother wished for a young and stylish wife, and his wish was
 granted in Lady Sarah Carnegie. Her anxiety was to procure a wealthy
 establishment, which she achieved by becoming my brother's wife. Each
 was well aware of the ground upon which they stood, and each firmly
 believed the path before them was strait and secure from temptation.
 [The Wilfulness of Woman, 1844, II, 120-21]

1

The Wives of England, 1843, p.135.

2

A more socially acceptable alternative was for the wife to become
 obliviously absorbed in her children. Gertrude, in The Sorrows of Gentil-
 ity, finds a motive for her life in her daughter, and Isabel Wold in Caste
 makes her love for her children the means to her love for their father.

But it was a mistake to rely too confidently on the continued absence of temptation. Mrs. Ellis is perhaps too consistently and complacently inclined to congratulate the Wives of England on their singular good fortune in this respect.

It is an unspeakable privilege enjoyed by the women of England, that in the middle ranks of life, a married woman, however youthful or attractive, if her own manners are unexceptionable, is seldom, or never, exposed to the attentions of men, so as to lead her affections out of their proper channel. [The Wives of England, 1843, p.146]

And if, in spite of this Utopian state of affairs, "ignorant or unprincipled men" should attempt to corrupt good custom, "the slightest approach to undue familiarity is easily repelled, by such a look and manner, as all women know how to make use of in discountenancing what is not acceptable." The Daughters of England were likewise fortunate in finding themselves surrounded by so many restrictions that it was actually "more difficult to do what is positively wrong, than what is generally approved as right."

It ought ... to be the pride of every English woman, that such are the conditions of society in her native land, that ... she cannot become a member of good society, or at least retain her place there, without submitting to restrictions, which, while they deprive her of no real gratification, are at once the safeguard of her peace, the support of her moral dignity, and the protection of her influence as a sister, a wife, a mother, and a friend. [Daughters of England, 1842, p.270-1]

And yet for all that, wives sometimes ran.

They were not ordinarily the victims of brutality, like Lady Southend. Far more frequently they endlessly repeated the sin of Eve, in rationalizing about good and evil.

She began to parley with principles, which, however vague and unsettled upon points of the minor morals, had, till then, stood firm with

1

Wives of England, 1843, p.146.

2

Daughters of England, 1842, p.459.

her against what was obviously wrong--she began to ask herself those dangerous and casuistical questions which have upset so many in their life's career.

She began to question her duties--to talk to herself of nature, and the rights of the heart, and all those vain sophistications which have, alas! so often betrayed. [Emilia Wyndham, 1846, III, 141]

But in 1846 rationalization was quickly identified. Emilia Wyndham is uncompromising with her friend:

You are perfectly right to please yourself in every thing you do, and to disregard the wishes of your husband and the counsels of your friends; for what concern has anything so perfectly enchanting and beautiful as you are with right and wrong--duty, propriety, or any such antiquated stuff?

You are perfectly justified--you, the wedded wife of another man--perfectly justified, because that man is peevish, careless, and I own it, unkind to you, in seeking revenge by casting aside every consideration of prudence and honour, and ... trusting yourself with one, notorious as a flatterer, a liar, and a betrayer-- ... you are quite justified--you, the mother of infant children, in blemishing, by your careless indifference, your own reputation and your husband's name--that name which must descend to those children. Yes, Lisa. You would not listen to my unpleasant truths--listen to my pleasant falsehoods. [Emilia Wyndham, 1846, III, 171-2]

In 1866 Phemie Keller is married at sixteen to a man forty years her senior. Except for his extraordinary foolishness in marrying her for no better reason than that she has auburn hair and blue eyes, he is an honorable man and a kind and indulgent husband. He makes an accomplished lady out of a farmer's niece, and she then falls in love with his heir-at-law. The heir is a worthless young man who has never done anything but live extravagantly on his expectations; he would never have glanced at the farmer's niece. But confronting the lady she has become, he begs for the love she has never given anyone else:

"It belongs to me, Phemie," he said; "though you are another man's wife, though you may never be my wife, yet I own the love of your heart, and whether you try to keep that love from me or not, you cannot prevent my having it."

He was right; Phemie could not prevent his having all the love of which her nature was capable. She could not help the tears with which she watered her pillow; she could not help her thoughts, her regrets, her misery. [Phemie Keller, 1866, II, 154]

In the end, neither Lisa nor Phemie is actually unfaithful in deed to her husband; but the point of view in regard to metaphysical adultery is completely altered in the twenty years between them. In ten years; for in 1855 Rachel Lester insisted, "If we ought to say, I don't try to help it, it would be a great mistake." During the ten years that followed, "I can because I ought" became "I will because I want to." Mrs. Riddell displays a great deal of muddle-headed sympathy for Phemie, compassionating her at the time of her marriage for misfortunes more visionary than real:

That was it--for better, for worse--she was resigning all hope, all chance of happy love; love with its bliss and agony, love with its doubts and distractions, love without which no life, be it otherwise ever so symmetrical, can be perfect. Attachment--affection--a calm, even, unruffled existence is better, some tell you, than the hot and the cold, the fever and the collapse, the mad pulse and the shivering agony. It may be so. [Phemie Keller, 1866, I, 230]

The deep, sincere, and heartfelt affection which moral worth inspires would not appear to enter into the author's calculations at all. In part, this circumstance reflects a change in ideas about the nature of love; in part a change in ideas about good and evil.

Till she had eaten of that tree, however, how was she to distinguish between good and evil? Till she had felt danger, how was she to arm herself against harm? Are the blind to be blamed for walking straight towards a precipice? Was Phemie a sinner, then, because she rejoiced in the sunlight on the waters, because she delighted to hear the birds sing, because she thought the country had never before looked so beautiful, because she looked with dreamy eyes at the pure blue summer sky, because the floating clouds were lovely to her imagination, because there was a glory on the sea, on the lands, on the fields, on the woods, because she was happy, unknowing why? [Phemie Keller, 1866, II, 79-80]

The earlier view held that reason and principle forbid; the later that ignorance excuses. Mrs. Riddell contrives to make it sound as if reason

and principle would condemn Phemie for spontaneous joy in simple existence, chill as a dull face frowning on a song; but this is seriously to mistake the object of the condemnation.

There was an earlier attitude which held

When once a woman loves, and acknowledges to herself that she loves one who is not her husband, and does not strive, by every effort, every means in her power to overcome, and root out the passion, but rather cherishes and makes it her idol,--even though her error extend no further, she inflicts on her husband an injury. . . . She has already been unfaithful to him in heart, and broken the spirit of her marriage-vow. Of what value can she be to him after that? [Temptation, 1839, I, 207-8]

Its severity was not dictated by a domineering spirit of tyranny. In the same novel, Lady Montgomery's daughter Susan feverishly protests against her medicine:

"Oh, no, no, mamma; not no more medicine."

"Yes, my precious child; a little more to please mamma. I think my Susan will take it to please poor mamma, who is so anxious about her." The little girl took the draught and swallowed it hastily; then, exhausted by the effort she had made to rise, she sank back on her pillow with a little moan of weakness and disgust. "My own precious child," said her mother, bending over her, and kissing her hot little cheek, with a pang of unutterable anguish and tenderness; "mamma loves Susan dearly." [Temptation, 1839, I, 183]

The author thereupon contrives to place Lady Montgomery in a situation morally analogous to Susan's. Married to an immovable lump of a husband, she nevertheless makes him an excellent wife until she falls a victim to the intellectual fascination of her husband's house guest, Vernon Clavering. Clavering stimulates her intellectual and aesthetic interests, and his gentlemanly qualities command respect it would be impossible to give her husband.

Never, perhaps, had she been conscious of so strong a feeling of disgust--almost of aversion, to Lord Montgomery as at this time! His indifference about herself, as well as his children, his carelessness whether she staid [sic] or went, and his utter coldness,

chilled her to the very heart.--"This is the man with whom I am to pass my life--to drag out the weary chain of existence!" thought she, and her very soul died within her at the idea. [Temptation, 1839, I, 262-3]

In the moral fever that ensues, Lady Montgomery's clerical friend Morton demands with thunder and lightning that she give up Clavering, though apparently nothing, absolutely nothing, has taken place that could possibly be recognized in a court of law. "Indeed, I am not vicious! My heart, I know, has been unfaithful to the vow it made, but in all else, I am still pure, still true." She pleads in effect "No, no, not no more medicine," but in his concern for her welfare, he can be adamant as well as she.

"Surely, if we still love on in absence, our crime is as great as though we still continued to meet, as we do now."

"No! Helen; we can but struggle against involuntary sin, and with humble shame deplore it; but for that which is voluntary, who shall be excused? Meet your lover no more; and, though at first I know you cannot forget, and your heart will still cherish his memory, even in spite of yourself, constant prayer and repentance will in time obliterate his image from your mind." ...

"Never--never can I cease to worship him whilst this pulse beats with life!"

"These are ever the words of passion!" said Morton calmly. "Every one who loves, thinks such love must be eternal, whilst it is a certain truth, that no feeling which animates the human heart is more liable to change." [Temptation, 1839, III, 106-7]

The blue sky and bird-song kind of happiness is fearfully unstable when it borders on guilt; the very instincts which call it into being are against its continuance, and Morton's nauseous draught of moral febrifuge is essentially practical rather than theoretical.

1

Temptation, 1839, I, 207.

Though it is not so in this instance, metaphysical adultery is frequently the shadow of the event to come, and even the extraordinary novel Alice Wentworth (1854), which is a prolonged and elaborate apology for the natural frailty of man, acknowledges that it is extremely difficult to set bounds to indulged caprice: "But having, elsewhere, given the reins to my senses, I became so far the plaything of my own passing caprices and those of others, that I was led there, whither I never meant to steer."²

1

Frances, Lady Bellamont, first makes fun of the idea--"the venial trespass of preferring some one else to one's husband!" [Flirtation, 1828, III, 139]--then "taking advantage of a virtue to which, in fact, she had no right, (for she forgot that there is an adultery of the heart,) defied him to any proof of her actual guilt," [Flirtation, 1828, III, 298]--and finally finishes the career that began with the frivolities of the ton with an elopement, is abandoned by her seducer, and dies, a victim of THE PERILOUS MAZES OF FLIRTATION.

Adelaide Douglas is in much the same position as Helen, Lady Montgomery, but with more opportunity and less principle to restrain her, she does end in an elopement:

At this point Lord Lindore arrived on a visit, and the daily, hourly, contrast that occurred, betwixt the elegant, impassioned lover, and the dull, phlegmatic husband, could not fail of producing the usual effects on an unprincipled mind. ... Criminal passion was exalted into the purest of all earthly emotions. [Marriage, 1818, III, 267]

2

Alice Wentworth, 1854, III, 146-7. Lady Charlotte Bury had commented on the fall of Rose Delvin, "Nine times out of ten, sensual indulgence closes the heart to all natural affections; particularly when it acts upon persons in a low sphere of life." [Flirtation, 1828, II, 297] She therefore regards sensual indulgence as something that enlightened people will have the intelligence to avoid. Noell Radecliffe and his character Philip Bramstone appear to believe that because the consequences of Darrell's indulgence make him unhappy, he is the exceptional tenth, and his sensitivity excuses him. One question, however, the sensitivity that expresses itself like this: it seems influenced by sensual indulgence:

Though I twice lost you by my own fault--though I kept not the vow I made--yet I feel, I know in my soul, that it was the only truly binding one that ever passed my lips. ... Why should I be held bound by the legal, but unblest tie, with which, urged by mere worldly honour, and weak pity, I chained myself to an adulteress? [Alice Wentworth, 1854, III, 174]

Alice's reply is "Leave me at least to sinless sorrow!" which seems a curiously mild rebuke, even at a time when the public pitied rather than censured The Awakening Conscience. Apparently at the time it provoked no protest from the ladies in the country.

Arthur Darrell, "Beautiful Darrell," the speaker in this passage, enlists the author's compassion because his caprices eventually condemn him through a point of honor to a marriage with the woman he has seduced, but from whom he fastidiously recoils:

Nor had it once occurred to him, till his lot was inextricably bound up with that of one so different to those friends of other days, that he could ever have in his own household, and as his own permanent companion, a person whom the slightest fear of blame tempted to falsehood, and whom the lack of any accustomed luxury led into unscrupulous conduct in money matters. [Alice Wentworth, 1854, II, 39-40]¹

It scarcely seems logical to expect a woman who would deceive her husband to be truthful and honorable in money matters; but in retrospect elopements generally turn out to have been rashly ill-considered. In fact there is a curious tendency for them to become increasingly motiveless as public opinion mellowed and became more subjective. In what sounds wearily like the archetype of the situation, Boswell in 1773 had attempted to extenuate the conduct of Lady Di Beauclerk to Johnson, only to be overwhelmingly answered:

I said, that he had used her very ill, had behaved brutally to her, and that she could not continue to live with him without having her delicacy contaminated; that all affection for him was thus destroyed; that the essence of conjugal union being gone, there remained only a cold form, a mere civil obligation; that she was in the prime of life, with qualities to produce happiness; that these ought not to be lost; and, that the gentleman on whose account she was divorced had gained her heart while thus unhappily situated. Seduced, perhaps, by the charms of the lady in question, I thus attempted to palliate what

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The apology for Darrell is largely an extenuation of the sin of Adam, irrational susceptibility to undue feminine influence. "Most especially, a handsome man like Darrell ought to be made of something different from flesh and blood, if he is to turn aside from all that is offered him, without his seeking." [Alice Wentworth, 1854, I, 64] He has no control over his natural instincts, though he is completely upright and honest in money matters. "Arthur himself is as English as ever, hates living abroad, though he makes up his mind to it; and he likes everything in this country, which is not always the case with travelled gentry. It shows he is right at the core." [Alice Wentworth, 1854, II, 113]

I was sensible could not be justified; for, when I had finished my harangue, my venerable friend gave me a proper check: 'My dear Sir, never accustom your mind to mingle virtue and vice. The woman's a whore, and there's an end on't.' [J. Boswell, Life of Dr Johnson, ed. G.B. Hill, rev. L.F. Powell. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1934, II, 246-7]

The ton inclined toward Boswell's view of the situation; Mrs. Ellis and followers tended to modify Johnson's. In 1856, (for the nominal date of the events in John Halifax is very nominal indeed) John Halifax attempts to persuade the erratic Lady Caroline Brithwood to return to her husband instead of eloping with Gerard Vermilye. She uses a Victorian version of Boswell's arguments and gets a characteristically Victorian answer:

"Tell me, Ursula, what constitutes a man one's husband? Brutality, tyranny--the tyranny which the law sanctions? Or kindness, sympathy, devotion, everything that makes life beautiful--everything that constitutes happiness and--"

"Sin." [John Halifax, Gentleman, 1856, II, 187]

This is as uncompromising as Johnson, but the argument is on a different plane. John Halifax's word "Sin" is a much more personal and emotional accusation than Johnson's judgment, "The woman's a whore." Sin is a theological concept; virtue and vice are philosophical. Philosophy implies "Take it or leave it; the idea is Platonically impersonal." Theology demands "Do something about it; it is an offense for which you are personally responsible."

One more permutation remained: the idea that it was not an offense because the individual was not responsible. In the year following the publication of John Halifax, the narrator of Guy Livingstone tells the tale of yet another wife who eloped from her husband, and this time Boswell has the last word:

It was the old unhappy story: her husband neglected Lady Caroline consistently; ill-treated her sometimes. Mohun pursued his purpose

with the relentless obstinacy of his character. Eighteen months after her marriage they fled together. ...

He varied the dull routine of seducers, it is true; for he never wearied of, or behaved unkindly to, the woman he had ruined. ... She never wearied her lover with her self-reproach, but crushed back her sorrows into her heart, and met him always with a gentle smile. ... If her destiny had been different; if she had died ripe in years, after a life spent in calm matronly happiness, with all that she loved best round her, would she have been nursed so tenderly, or mourned so bitterly, by the nearest and dearest of them all, as she was by her tempter to sin? ...

O rigid mother of the Gracchi! how we all respect you, trônante in the comfortable cathedra of virtue inexpugnable, perhaps unassailed! Your dictum must stand for the present. The Court is with you. But I believe other balances will weigh the strength of temptation, the weakness of human endurance, the sincerity of repentance, and the extent of suffered retribution. ... In that day, I think, the light of many orthodox virgins and dignified matrons will pale before the softer lustre of Magdalene the Saint. [Guy Livingstone, 1857, p.142-46]

By this time, Boswell's attempted palliation has become attack; and the sensation novel's extraordinary devotion to Magdalene the Saint at the expense of orthodox virgins and dignified matrons tends more and more to emphasize the weakness of human endurance and less and less to insist on the sincerity of repentance. By 1865 an agitated crop of reviewers was eyeing the trend with alarm:

In truth, we much doubt the wisdom or the morality of drawing fictitious portraits of noble-minded and interesting sinners, by way of teaching us to feel for the sinner while we condemn the sin. ... The fictitious character is but the sin personified and made attractive as the source and substance of many virtues. ... The sin is the primary idea, to embellish which the rest of the character is made to order. And where as a foil to this diamond with but a single flaw, is drawn the 'respectable' woman whose chastity is beyond the breath of scandal, but who sullies that one virtue by a thousand faults--cold, selfish, pharisaical, hollow-hearted, ill-tempered, &c.--to what does such a story naturally lead, but to the conclusion that, whatever a censorious world may say to the contrary, female virtue has really very little to do with the Seventh Commandment? Novelists of this school do their best to inculcate as a duty the first two of the three stages towards vice--'we first endure, then pity, then embrace;' and in so doing, they have assisted in no small degree to prepare the way for the third. ["Sensation Novels," Quarterly Review, CXIII (April 1863) 494-5]

It is possible that the tolerant attitude which greeted The Awakening Conscience had become vulgarized in this fashion by approximately 1860, and that the decline of standards noted by Margaret Dalziel in Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago (1957) is basically post-Crimean War in origin.

If fiction reflects any shadow of the sentiments of readers, the Quarterly reviewer's alarm was not entirely the nervous twittering of the two ladies in the country. Creative hope tends to reproduce the object of its contemplation. When the object is a paragon, a poor copy is like Aurora Floyd's cousin Lucy, negatively good through the absence of any other quality. But when the model is a noble-minded and interesting sinner, almost any quality tends to reproduce sooner than the noble mind, and interest covers a multitude of sins. When the pattern of a pure woman is taken from Clarissa Harlowe, the results are quite different from what they are when it is based on Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Wives modeled on Emilia Wyndham are more likely to have a sense of duty than those who share the natural instincts of Agnes Waring. One fiction counsels that hardship can be borne, the other that it cannot and need not. In spite of the increasing leniency of judgment which the cult of Magdalene the Saint inculcated, fictitious elopements displayed less and less motive that reason could construe into extenuation. If Johnsonian judgments in fiction are severe, it is because passion is recognized as a motive, but is judged insufficient as justification. There is no lack of condemnation for Adelaide Douglas in Susan Ferrier's Marriage (1818) for her "headstrong passions and perverted principles."

Criminal passion was exalted into the purest of all earthly emotions.

... So it was, that in something less than a year from the time of her marriage, this victim of self-indulgence again sought her happiness in the gratification of her own headstrong passions, and eloped with Lord Lindore, vainly hoping to find peace and joy amid guilt and misery. ...

Like many others, she had vainly imagined, that, in renouncing virtue itself for the man she loved, she was for ever ensuring his boundless gratitude and adoration: and she only awoke from her delusive dream, to find herself friendless in a foreign land--an outcast from society--an object of indifference, even to him for whom she had abandoned all. [Marriage, 1818, III, 267, 306]

Lady Bellamont's elopement ten years later also tended to prove that "passion without mutual esteem will not last": "Then came that disgust and ennui which is its inevitable consequence; no holy bond of union linked her and her paramour in the same chain of interests and of honourable pursuits--guilt threw off the mask, and Mr. Carlton already ceased to play the part of a lover."¹

But passion was not the sole motive for elopement. Anne Smith, one of the minor characters in The Cup and the Lip (1851), appears to have been modeled on Becky Sharp; her motives are largely mercenary, and she ends her career moderately pensioned, "a wretched existence, in what was for her extravagant tastes, penury; a degraded, disgraced woman,--the victim of her own evil character."² There was not much love on either side:

They became gradually estranged from each other. The lady took no pains to check an irritable temper, made no effort to amuse him, and in a few weeks Howard felt that he had brought a creature to his Indian home, who cared not the least for him, and whose extravagance and absurd whims were likely to give him trouble and even cause pecuniary difficulties. [The Cup and the Lip, 1851, III, 69]

¹

Flirtation, 1828, III, 302.

²

The Cup and the Lip, 1851, III, 72.

Darrell assuredly entertained nothing resembling passion for the Lady Emily he was eventually forced to marry, and she is summarily dismissed as "a vain and weak creature, unimproved by any moral culture or right principle."¹ Lord Claude Douglas, whose dishonorable proposal the governess Anne Sherwood rejects, apparently elopes with her employer's wife out of pique and spite:

He had never loved--never even admired Adelaide Curzon. The mystery of their guilty flight was a mystery indeed, and as such must remain. After a while the curious and the kind hearted alike dismissed from their thoughts the man who had betrayed his friend--the woman who had shared in the guilty treachery, and who had recklessly abandoned husband, children, and all the sanctities of home. [Anne Sherwood, 1857, III, 107]

Similarly, Lady Isabel Vane elopes with Francis Levison in East Lynne (1861) in a fit of violent groundless jealousy and repents almost immediately. She murmurs feebly something about "desertion of the heart" in extenuation of her actual adultery; but her guardian accurately dismisses this as "Desertion of a fiddlestick!" Adultery of the heart may constitute actual guilt,² but desertion of the heart does not in any comparable fashion constitute an excuse for misconduct.

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Alice Wentworth, 1854, II, 35.

2

Other condemnations of metaphysical adultery include Lady Kynnaston in Adelaide Lindsay (1850), who married Sir Thomas Kynnaston while still in love with someone else: "Her whole married life has been one long infidelity to her husband. ... Her whole heart and thoughts were devoted to another, and I can look upon her conduct in no other light. ... You cannot palliate that want of candour--I will not call it dissimulation--which led her to conceal the whole matter from her husband." [Adelaide Lindsay, 1850, II, 261-3]

Amabel Warner (Amabel, or The victory of love, 1853) accuses herself: I have not been a good wife to a husband who deserved a better woman. ... I never sought to gratify his tastes, or consult his disposition. I never tried to be the sort of woman that he fancied. I never tried to make the best of anything to please him. I never tried to secure
[Continued on next page]

Far more than any intolerable situation, elopement appears to be a matter of unstable temperament, unballasted by principle. Aurora Floyd is a prime example of the type. She does not elope from her husband, presumably because her whims are so entirely indulged that there is no imaginable incentive for her to do so; but one feels that only the absence of temptation intervenes. She says of her runaway marriage with the groom James Conyers, "I had no romantic overwhelming love for this man. I cannot plead the excuses which some women urge for their madness. I had only a school-girl's frivolous admiration of his handsome face."¹

[continued]

or to deserve his love. But, Mrs. Dryden, indeed--indeed--indeed, I never was, in thought, or word, or deed, unfaithful to my husband! Indeed, I love him! though I took so little pains to prove it. [Amabel, 1853, II, 125]

And May, of May and December (1854), having rendered her elderly husband jealous:

She was criminal in her own eyes, and conscious that she had much reason to blush for her past conduct; but she had done nothing which, in the lax morality of the world, need call forth a censure; she had sinned against her husband, in neglecting his comfort, disregarding his wishes, and trifling with his happiness; but he, she had no doubt, would readily forgive her. [May and December, 1854, II, 217]

Rita's "heart perjury" (1857) and Lady Isabel's "desertion of the heart" (1861) belong to a different kind of metaphysics.

The lax morality of the world begins to be faintly visible in John Cordy Jeaffreson's Isabel, or The Young Wife and the Old Love (1856). Isabel is a curious variant on Annie Strong, in David Copperfield: she is happily and blamelessly married to the aged Rev. Harrie Dillingborough (who wavers between being a fine old man and a doddering old fool), and at the same time cherishes the avowed love of her cousin Hugh. It may be the transparent innocence of "My Last Duchess," but it looks like mischief. Marguerite St. John in The Morals of May Fair (1858) has fully made up her mind to elope from her elderly husband, who has been like a father to her; but, her plans being discovered and denounced, she succumbs spectacularly on the doorstep to tuberculosis, technically innocent and deeply mourned by the author. In 1866 Mrs. Riddell permits Phemie Keller's plea that she "couldn't help it" in extenuation of her love for a worthless man not her husband because her husband, though a good man, is forty years her senior. Any basic agreement about good and evil between the author of Temptation and the author of Phemie Keller would obviously be impossible.

¹

Aurora Floyd, 1863, III, 92.

Her author says of her:

With these impetuous and impressionable people who live quickly, a year is sometimes as twenty years: so Aurora looked back at Talbot Bulstrode across a gulf which stretched for weary miles between them, and wondered if they had really ever stood side by side, allied by Hope and Love, in the days that were gone. [Aurora Floyd, 1863, I, 296-7]

Is it well, then, for impetuous and impressionable people to be allowed unrebuked the free indulgence of their whims, since one impression is so quickly replaced with another? It is the incomprehensible lack of any real motive that makes their desertion so terrible. General Monteith in The Wilfulness of Woman (1844) suffers a stroke from his inability to understand why Lady Sarah Carnegie should desert him:

If I had debarred her from those pleasures she prized so dearly--if I had wounded her by reproaches and vexed her with opposition, she might have had some excuse for quitting a home which was no longer indulgent. But to be untrammelled--allowed the most unrestrained liberty--unfettered--yet sink willingly into degradation--to leave me here--and so--for Captain--for who? [The Wilfulness of Woman, 1844, I, 258]

Surely it must be for the general good that people should be called upon to perform their duty and not taught to seek so much after their happiness, for pursued in this fashion it recedes like the horizon.

"The whole world is rushing after happiness, and yet, what mistakes are every day made in endeavouring to find it!"

"Happiness is intended to be the object of our lives, though," said Margaret.

"No; there I must differ with you. It is an old argument of ours; happiness is not to be our object; and if we make it such, we shall never obtain it." [Margaret Percival, 1847, I, 42]

Through the forties there was a Stoic tendency toward the belief that¹ "happiness is not a plant of this world," because "We might as well attempt to carry the ocean in an oyster shell, as to satisfy our immortal

¹
Marriage, 1818, II, 44.

souls with anything in this life." In this larger Carlylean frame of reference--"Love not Pleasure; love God!"--the most that is promised is content, based on what the eighteenth century would call self-approbation and self-control: "Perhaps Isabel, in a chastened, sober fashion, was now more nearly happy than many of us ever are. She could say, she did say, 'I am content.' ... Do many of us ever so say, 'I am content'?"³ I can because I ought; followed by Lady Southend's grim warning "your strength will fail if you waste it struggling to be happy into the bargain."

With increasing subjectivity, however, happiness became more and more important, not rational happiness, but something subjective and emotional.

The dressing bell rung; my maid came in with a muslin gown on her arm, and some camellias in her hand, and there was again a flutter at my heart, as if dressing and going down-stairs and dining, had been as different things yesterday from what they were to-day, as the tamest prose is from the most exciting poetry. [Ellen Middleton, 1844, II, 3]

The source of the private delight that divides yesterday from today is the fact that Edward has returned in the meantime. Gradually values also came to be measured on the same relative and sliding scale, determined by their association with happiness: "I had rather be a hoyden, Aunt Horsingham, and go on in my own way; I have much more enjoyment."⁴ "I can because I ought" became "I will because I want to," and Aurora Floyd⁵ "rebelled against sorrow as a strange and unnatural part of her life."

¹
Modern Flirtations, 1841, III, 272.

²
"The Everlasting Yea," Sartor Resartus, 1836.

³
Caste, 1857, III, 309.

⁴
Kate Coventry, 1856, p.131. See ante, p.76.

⁵
Aurora Floyd, 1863, II, 127. See ante, p.99.

But the itemized sum of human happiness as reflected in fiction does not appear to have been greatly increased by the change.

The Victorian idea of duty was admittedly demanding, for Victorian husbands' ideas were often lopsidedly like Angel Clare's. The severity accorded "My Last Duchess" (1842) was perhaps not without a good deal of contemporary precedent. Louisa Vansittart's Lord Elford promises

I will be indulgent in every respect, but my wife is my own property, and she belongs exclusively to myself. Her manners, her conversation I require to be easy and polite to all as becomes a highly bred woman; but her looks and her thoughts must be given to none save myself. [History of a Flirt, 1840, II, 286]

This is a condemnation of any approach to metaphysical adultery. Ellen Middleton's marble crusader Edward had warned her

I can conceive that, as a woman's reputation might suffer from trifles light as air, ~~as~~ a man's love might vanish from what would appear but a slight cause for such an effect. ... It is not because my love is weak, that a fault in you would seem to me as a crime in another. It is because, to discover that you were not pure and good and true, beyond any other woman in the world, would be so dreadful to me, that I doubt, if in that overthrow of all my pride and my happiness, my love could survive. [Ellen Middleton, 1844, III, 8-9]

Small wonder that the otherwise irrepressible Louisa regarded her engagement with a feeling of claustrophobia ~~not~~ unmixed with dread: "Marriage frightens me ... I fancy it four walls of enormous thickness with a small iron grating to peep wistfully through at the free world."¹

I felt I was deceiving him also ... in giving him a wife whose conduct had been evil, and whose charm to himself consisted in believing me innocent and ingenuous. ... My confessions would cast me from him, and my future days would be passed in continual fear of detection. [History of a Flirt, 1840, II, 320]²

1

The History of a Flirt, 1840, III, 28.

2

The skeleton in Louisa's cupboard is her broken engagement to Mr. Turner Ellis, who disapproved of her flirtation with Thelwal.

The hypersensitive Ellen loves Edward with a religious intensity of devotion which is nine parts fear:

For the first time I thought of what it would be to one in my peculiar situation, not only to love as I had long done, but to be bound by irrevocable ties to one who, ignorant of all the circumstances of my miserable fate, would wonder over each inequality of spirits I betrayed, condemn every tear I shed, read every letter I received, and, at the slightest appearance of equivocation or deceit, would banish me from his heart, and overwhelm me with his just anger. [Ellen Middleton, 1844, II, 273-4]¹

The usual charge against puritanism is dullness, but Edward is no more dull than the Inquisition. As a suitor, he forbids poetry and sentiment, and generally conducts his courtship in the style of a marble crusader, but he is not dull. The mind and spirit behind this passage has an edge like tempered steel:

Either a morbid sensibility, which I despise, or a mawkish affectation, which I detest, injures the tone of your mind, and the truth of your character. ... Do not let me hear that my wife cannot look upon the face of nature with a calm and hopeful eye, or on her past life with a self-approving conscience. I know there is no reality in such language. [Ellen Middleton, 1844, III, 7-8]

His domestic sentiments are expressed as "There are crimes which God may forgive, but which man cannot."² Seemingly the chances of living happily ever after would be slim indeed. And yet Victorian marriages could be radiantly happy.

1

Her existence is rendered nightmarish by the guilty fear that she has in a measure been responsible for causing the death of her little cousin Julia, and by the tempestuous love-making of Henry Lovell, her uncle by marriage, who extorts emotional blackmail out of his knowledge of the circumstances of Julia's death. The sin that occupies her mind is involuntary manslaughter, exaggerated into murder, since Henry never proposes anything less than marriage, and never attempts bigamy in the style of the sensation novel; but the straightforward and obvious sins are not the only ones in the calendar. It is transgression of the same kind if not to the same degree as adultery when he continues his emotional blackmail after his unwilling marriage to Alice, and the results are no less fatal to Ellen, since Edward believes her guilty.

2

Ellen Middleton, 1844, III, 229.

The archetypal Victorian marriage was a happy one, to the level of every day's most quiet need. If it never rose above the radiance of a rushlight, at least over the hours, days, and years of actual life, it remained brighter than Mrs. Riddell's fever, collapse, and shivering agony. It was long on fireside domestic comfort; it embraced a home and children; it expected troubles as one expects rain in due season; but it expected to be able to weather them, and to be made better by them. Domestic novels like John Halifax retail a type of happy marriage admirably designed for mass distribution; according to the definition of Biedermeier, it depends on "a naive observance of the simplest relationships of life ... the small joys of a restricted life with an eye to their utilitarian aspects."¹ John Halifax's marriage is not unalloyed sweetness and light, but its happiness is as high as the majority of mortals is able to reach; what have earthen pipkins to do with bliss and agony?

Some characters amalgamate well together and enjoy life to the close; I think those happy beings are generally of the class denominated 'common-place,' whose views being limited, and of blunted feelings, they are rarely susceptible of disgust, and know not the meaning of refinement. Stanhope's prosiness was a perpetual jest to his lady, and he was equally accustomed to her sonorous voice, and often questionable remarks; they were of course excellently suited to be companions and friends. [The History of a Flirt, 1840, III, 174-5]

Surely, surely, this couple appears in Eliot's The Cocktail Party?

Yet happy marriages are not essentially and inevitably a collection of commonplaces, trivial rounds, and common tasks:

You love? That's high as you shall go;
For 'tis as true as Gospel text,
Not noble then is never so,
Either in this world or the next. ²

¹

See note ante, p.104.

²

"The Attainment," Angel in the House, Bk. I, Canto III.

Guy Morville, the Heir of Redclyffe, was very happily married to Amy Edmonstone, though he died before the end of his honeymoon. Amy's happiness is of a kind measured more truly against eternity than in time, like Margaret May's engagement ring, made part of the chalice for Cocks-moor church in The Daisy Chain, "the 'relic of a frail love lost' ... becoming the 'token of endless love begun.' ... Theirs would indeed be a disheartening example ... if it did not shew the strength and peace that distance, sickness, death cannot destroy."²

Others achieved a more mundane sort of happiness that was nevertheless illumination. Louisa Vansittart, the flirt, learns through getting what she wanted in her first marriage, how to value Lord Elford's manly, unbending high principle. The alteration in her character promises well for the success of the second match. Nest Herbert, in Woman's Devotion (1855) and Lotty Beauvilliers, in Margaret and her Bridesmaids (1856), are consistently good wives, but in their second marriages they are blessed with good husbands. Adelaide Lindsay (1850) and Grace Lloyd, in Violet Bank and its Inmates (1858), learn through unfortunate first attachments how to value real worth. Prudence and Propriety Leigh (in Margaret and her Bridesmaids) eventually become excellent wives instead of ridiculous old maids.

1

Guy's death sounds uncannily like Prince Albert's, eight years later in 1861: both had been warned that the first serious illness might prove fatal, and neither seemed particularly inclined to contest the issue. "He may be healthy and active now; but he has no constitution, there is a tendency to low fever, and if he meets with any severe illness, it will go hard with him."--The Heir of Redclyffe, 1853, II, 162. "'I am sure if I had a severe illness I should give up at once, I would not struggle for life.' His old friend Stockmar had said many years before that any severe fever would kill him."--D.N.B.

2

The Daisy Chain, 1856, p.602, 605.

In Susan Ferrier's Marriage (1818) and Lady Charlotte Bury's Flirtation (1828) the unprincipled elopements of Adelaide Douglas and Frances, Lady Bellamont, are paired with their sisters' sounder principles and wiser choices. There is no reason to believe that Mary Douglas and Lady Emily did not live happily ever after. Their tastes were more modest than their fortunes, they habitually practiced self-control tempered with amiability, and they married men of principles whom they genuinely admired. Harriet Erskine, in The Wilfulness of Woman (1844), is inclined to dismiss her cousin Sydney's happy marriage with the idea that principle is really a lack of contrary inclination:

Were these methodists really and sincerely sacrificing their own feelings cheerfully? It was not likely. They had no feeling about some things, and it was their nature to disdain certain comforts, which did not enter into their tastes. Monteith was very good--most cousinly--but of course he did not object to locomotion. He made the best of husbands--but then he had no inclination to do wrong. He was always calm, and quiet, and serious; in short he was born a sort of methodist. [The Wilfulness of Woman, 1844, II, 145]

--but Laura Montreville in Mrs. Brunton's Self Control is the refutation of that idea. Principle requires hard work and long practice, but the happiness produced by it is not an illusion. There is no reason to suppose that Laura and De Courcy were not happy, nor that Emilia Wyndham was not eventually genuinely happy with Mr. Danby.

Principle and affection, in fact, were proof against most circumstances. Mary Vansittart, the sister of Louisa the flirt (The History of a Flirt, 1840) is contented as the wife of the gouty valetudinarian, Dr. Drinkwater.

All are seeking happiness, and life passes in the search. ... Mary had acquired it, for she looked happy, and her feelings always shone in her eyes. Her idea of content disgusted me. I spurned a life passed in seclusion, and the infliction of such a husband as the doctor would have driven me into suicide. Which succeeded best in

their search for happiness? She was decidedly happy; I was dragging on a useless existence without one pleasing recollection. [History of a Flirt, 1840, II, 23]

Marian Dunbar's Richard Granville--the features of whose character, like the features of his countenance, were unalterable--insists "I could live on the bread without the butter, for anyone I really liked, or even the butter without the bread."¹ Adelaide Lindsay accompanies the scholarly Charles Latimer to his post as chaplain to the convicts at X--. Flora Maynard, Grace Lloyd's impudent friend in Violet Bank and its Inmates (1858), who originally insisted on two ladies' maids and worked petticoats, eventually renounces them "now and for ever" to marry a penniless officer: "Flora is expiating the sin of having married for love, in the Mauritius, where Mr., now Captain Vernon, is one of the governor's lately appointed aides-de-camp. Mrs. Vernon keeps up a lively correspondence with Mrs. Miller, and is so obstinate, that she won't confess she is unhappy."² Were these methodists really and sincerely sacrificing their own feelings cheerfully? It was very likely. Assuredly they had no other motives--wealth, social position, importance, revenge.

Nor was it in a spirit of pious resignation and with a ravenous appetite for domestic martyrdom. Victorian brides are not always what one expects nineteenth century heroines to be, frivolous Doras and grave Agneses. Flora, at Violet Bank or in Mauritius, is a long way from being a conventionally tame jeune fille. So is Lady Emily Lindore, Mary Douglas's cousin.

¹
Modern Flirtations, 1841, III, 132.

²
Violet Bank and its Inmates, 1858, III, 284.

"I confess I should like that my husband's genius was at least as bright as my own ... but virtue and talents on the one side, and virtue and tenderness on the other, I look upon as the principal ingredients in a happy union."

"Well, I intend to be excessively happy; and yet, I don't think Edward will ever find the longitude. And as for my tenderness-- humph!--as Lady M'Laughlan says." [Marriage, 1818, III, 169]

There are variations in many particulars. Amid a host of heroines who were married under the age of twenty to husbands who were over thirty, Anne Partington becomes Lady Langham at the age of 37 in spite of being¹ "pale, with rather a tendency to a red nose." She is as virtuous as 1840 could make her, but in spite of her piety and her worsted work, she and her exceedingly agreeable baronet move through the background of three volumes like a ripple of gracious laughter. It sounds like an idyllic existence, a more sprightly domesticity than Victorians are usually credited with.

"We must end our visitation, for the servants to attend evening service."

Happiest of beings! ... This was just what he had always coveted.

"A wife of his own," as he termed it, and a circle of friends to cheer and be cheered by. [The History of a Flirt, 1840, II, 151]

It is not a stereotyped and purely conventional happiness.

Perhaps the most unexpected figure is Rhoda Maitland, in Lilliesleaf (1855), the trouble-filled sequel to Mrs. Oliphant's Margaret Maitland (1849). Rhoda is the untameable half-sister of the heiress Grace, who married the Scottish minister Claud Maitland in the first novel. In the sequel, Rhoda marries Austin Bernard, the poor tutor to the Elphinstone children at Lilliesleaf. It is not at all the kind of match one expects in 1855.

¹

The History of a Flirt, 1840, I, 8.

We are not like the lovers in books, Austin and I. ... We do think sometimes, after all, of something grand and spirituel and of great troubles and great sorrows and great courage, and of being all the world to each other. Oh, bathos! for I know what would happen if we were married. ... At home it would be all about money and the bad cook, and the poor little boy in buttons who never would grow into a big footman. It is always the way--you know it is, and however sentimental people are before, it is not sympathy and support, and all that stuff, but what is it to be for dinner, and how the bills are to be paid, after they are married--you know it is. [Lilliesleaf, 1855, III, 277-8]

It presents the greatest possible contrast to Grace and her husband, who are much closer to the Victorian ideal:

Claud looking down into Grace's e'en, seeking his full share of all her burdens, and the cloud of discontent upon Grace's face melting into a better and closer blessedness, and that, that had been hard before, growing sweet and pleasant to her at what he said. ... And so the two went away together with their one heart. [Lilliesleaf, 1855, II, 48]

Yet each must find happiness in his own way.

For all their outcasts, and the trouble they gave to sober folk, they were very well mated, in respect of being like one another, Rhoda and her bridegroom. They were both very ill bairns, and though there was but little reason between the two, I would not say but there was plenty kindness; and their upbringing had been after the same fashion, and the aim of both of them was toward the same thing. [Lilliesleaf, 1855, III, 281]

The active ingredient in happiness was harmony of mind and purpose, and that less instinctive than slowly acquired, not as a copybook maxim, but as experience.

Enough of the halo of the honeymoon yet lingered around this young couple to keep them in the misty delusion that they possessed but one "will of their own" between them. They had yet to learn that there is a higher, truer, nobler state of association to be arrived at, even here on earth--a state in which we recognize the deep happiness of being privileged to sacrifice our own desires to those of the being we love better than ourselves. A logician may stigmatise this as merely a refined phase of selfishness; but it is such selfishness as might cling to us in heaven and we yet remain sinless. [Harry Coverdale's Courtship, 1856, p.117]

This is not warmed-over ragout of Mrs. Ellis, for Harry Coverdale's Courtship has some claim to being considered as a sporting novel, and the author could certainly never be mistaken for a lady novelist. Harry is a sportsman, every bit as ham-fisted as Guy Livingstone, able to fell a poacher with a single blow, or to ride a winning horse in spite of a broken arm; entertaining the profoundest contempt for "muffs" of all kinds, whether they talked aesthetics, painted in watercolors, or affected the dandy. His courtship is a chromolithograph in which he stops runaway horses in a thunderstorm, diverts the attentions of a bull from a walking party, moodily suffers the torments of jealousy, and reads Tennyson aloud in a deep rich voice. But the story ran away with the author's intentions, and some three hundred pages after the wedding he looks back reflectively:

True, his married life had been a somewhat stormy one, still it had taught him the charm of that spiritual companionship with a beloved and loving woman, without which a man's best nature remains incompletely developed. To feel a deep, true, and unselfish affection for an object worthy of so precious a boon, raises a man's whole moral nature, and (if he is good for anything) makes him wiser and better; to be loved in return, renders him happy despite the toils and trials of life. [Harry Coverdale's Courtship, 1856, p.435]

It is a happy ending, which is earned rather than bestowed by a rich uncle ex machina. It is like Newman's liberal knowledge, a habit of mind rather than a solid and tangible possession; but it should not for that reason be dismissed as merely visionary idealism. If there were more novels which ended optimistically with a wedding, or rushed madly to the Continent in an elopement, or tamely sat and counted the coals in the grate and recorded the ticking of the clock, than novels which actually diagrammed the solutions to the problems of married life, it may be for much the same reason that makes Dante's Inferno and Purgatorio easier to

follow than his Paradiso. "It is possible to paint shade, not light," is the wise conclusion of Violet Bank and its Inmates, in refusing to give any but the haziest details of Grace's married life. The transcendent happiness which comes of love is so like the joy of heaven itself that novelists could only imperfectly and indirectly suggest it.

Victorian fiction not infrequently leaves the lettered reader with his nose metaphorically pressed against the glass. The universe as it appears in novel scenes is entirely based not on first-hand knowledge but on light reflected from so much that looks like solid domestic comforts: the inexhaustible laughter, the innocent accidents that arise from a world that amused itself with picnics and reading circles and country walks so like the joy of childhood or of a lost Eden, that one looks back at it wistfully. The sociologically-minded may shudder at the dark Satanic mills, the crossing-sweepers, the tyrannical husbands, and the obnoxious but in spite of "standards of living," the material conditions of life are not the sole determinants of its quality. The standard of living here, for example, is governed more by intellect than by economic

1

This passage from Woman's Devotion (1855) suggests a rather different reason for the reticence which modern commentators are so quick to ascribe to Victorian prudery:

The reader shall now be indulged with a privilege, possessed by no friend or relative of the Lady Jane Malcolm's, however near and dear. We will enter her boudoir, nay, we will go further, and venture to look into her heart, that heart, if we may judge by her countenance, now so beset with stormy passions. [Woman's Devotion, 1855, I, 42]

The interior of the heart is a good deal more intimate than the interior of the boudoir, and when the three-volume novel dealt so thoroughly with one, there was not much reason for the detailed analysis of the other.

repression and conventional yet a wider in context, neurotic anxiety about

III

Love as Value

Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,
 And men below, and saints above;
 For love is heaven, and heaven is love.

--Sir Walter Scott, The Lay of the
 Last Minstrel, 1805.

Victorian fiction not infrequently leaves the latter-day reader with his nose metaphorically pressed against the glass. The universe as it appears in novels seems so securely based and so firm-set; the rosy fire-light is reflected from so much that looks like solid domestic comfort; the inexhaustible laughter, the innocent merriment that rises from a world that amused itself with picnics and reading circles and country walks is so like the joy of childhood or of a lost Eden, that one looks back at it wistfully. The sociologically-minded may shudder at the dark Satanic mills, the crossing-sweepers, the tyrannical husbands, and the cholera; but in spite of "standards of living," the material conditions of life are not the sole determinants of its quality. The standard of living here, for example, is governed more by intellectual than by economic factors:

In-doors there were enormous glowing fires of peat, and plenty of disputes how peat fires should be made. The ladies worked in worsted, while my father read aloud, history, poetry, and Scott's novels. There was backgammon in the evenings, and battledoor [sic] and shuttlecock, and a great singing of glees and madrigals: Katie was found to have a sweet soprano voice;--and above all there was plenty of laughter. [Amabel, 1853, III, 121]

The psychologically-minded may worry about the baneful effects of repression and convention; yet somehow in context, neurotic anxiety about

these powerful forces sounds like the pre-railway predictions of disasters that would follow if men attempted to travel at fearful speeds up to twenty miles an hour: the human frame would never be able to endure it. The human frame, however, is more adaptable than psychology seems willing to believe, and much of what might appear repressive to a modern mind would be commended by Mrs. Brunton as necessary self-control, or by Charlotte Yonge as desirable self-discipline. Mrs. Trollope was right in calling the misapplication of it which produced family pride, "an art which nature makes, as she does that by which the culture of the gardener can metamorphose a flower." It is idle to call it unnatural. Rose-grafting as practiced by the Heir of Redclyffe is entirely natural to the Victorian turn of mind:

"And are you cutting that beautiful wild rose to pieces?"

"Is it not a pity?" said Amy. "We have used up all the stocks in the garden, and this is to be transplanted in the autumn."

"She has been consoling it all this time by telling it it is for its good," said Guy; "cutting off wild shoots, and putting in better things."

"I never said anything so pretty; and, after all, I don't know that the grand roses will be equal to these purple shoots and blushing buds with long whiskers."

"So Sir Guy was singing about the violets plucked to comfort you."

[The Heir of Redclyffe, 1853, I, 202]

And moral pruning-shears were not always instruments of destruction:

Unimaginative thousands view the Cathedral only from an architectural point of view; they set their watches by the clock over the great south door; they are aware that two daily services are gone through by a staff of eminently respectable clergy, supported by a posse of little boys with high spirits, shiny faces, and crumpled frills, guarded by a few men with silver pokers. [Kathie Brande, 1856, I, 7]

¹

Gertrude, 1855, I, 221; see ante, p.18.

The commonplace has seldom been rendered so thoroughly attractive; and in a quietly commonplace way, there has probably never been so much love expressed in literature as in the Victorian domestic novel. Love is perhaps easier to recognize in the sensation novel, where it closely resembles the same article currently being retailed in popular fiction; but more widely diffused in the domestic novel is love of a very different kind, perhaps more characteristically Victorian, love to the level of every day, for all the days, weeks, and years of actual life. The difference between them is the difference between affection and passion, and one is not merely the weak and watery form of the other. True, the same ambiguous word "love" designates both indiscriminately, and likewise stands for any imaginable mixture or combination of the two; yet they differ from each other not so much in degree as in kind. There are degrees of both, though the superlative of affection has rarely been explored outside the domestic novel, and perhaps nowhere except in the early Victorian period has affection been generally preferred over passion for any appreciable space of time.

Mrs. Opie had insisted at the beginning of the century that "Though the agency of the passions be necessary to the existence of all society, it is on the cultivation and influence of the affections that the happiness¹ and improvement of social life depend." Therefore she argues in favor of

¹
Adeline Mowbray, 1805, III, 207. Whatever the preference, the two seem to have been fairly consistently distinguished during the period under consideration. It was later, when innocence had become ignorance, that the two were confounded.

It was of the very essence of his peculiar creed that such women as he could think worthy of love need never realise--that a girl so innocent, stainless, chaste in thought as his young bride would not conceive, could
 [Continued on next page]

the imperfect institution of marriage, because it has a tendency "to call forth and exercise the affections and control the passions;"¹ and as late as 1858, in Violet Bank and its Inmates, much the same idea is still being repeated:

But Sylvia had also never come to understand that Hymen was a staid, quiet person, who hated Cupid's incendiary torch, as a most dangerous toy in his steady household. She, on the contrary, could not see her way without this perilous light, and in a selfish, inhuman manner, seized upon 'poor dear Oscar' as a sort of lucifer match. [Violet Bank and its Inmates, 1858, II, 180]

In 1862 however, M.E. Braddon was busy popularizing a very different kind of commodity:

What had been his love for his first wife but a poor, pitiful smouldering spark, too dull to be extinguished, too feeble to burn? But this was love--this fever, this longing, this restless, uncertain, miserable hesitation; these cruel fears that his age was an insurmountable barrier to his happiness ... these wakeful nights and melancholy days. ... At the sober age of fifty-five, Sir Michael Audley had fallen ill of the terrible fever called love. [Lady Audley's Secret, 1862, I, 13-14]

This emotional scourge became epidemic with the spread of the sensation novel. The symptomatic chills and fever had been recognizable earlier, but for some time they were regularly dosed with moral quinine and public opinion. The passionate characters in Ellen Middleton (1844) therefore feel themselves to be in the wrong.

"I do not call that love which never made the voice tremble, or the heart beat. Is that love which never betrays itself by emotion, Ellen? Can love leave the soul calm and the spirits unruffled?"

[continued]

not understand--the distinction between the passion and the affection which, in the highest mood of both, are called by the same sacred name. [Ivy, Cousin and Bride, 1881, III, 301]

So much for the notion that Jane Eyre discovered it.

¹

Adeline Mowbray, 1805, III, 207.

"Not yours--not mine, perhaps, Henry; but oh, let us not judge purer and higher natures than ours, by the tests of our own wayward and ill governed minds. Indeed--indeed, Alice loves you."
 "She loves me as she loves her grandmother, her brother Johnny, and half the children and the beggars in the square. You must excuse me if that is not my notion of love." [Ellen Middleton, 1844, II, 55-6]

But by the late fifties fictitious lovers were championing nature's instinct with crusading vigor. By the time Rita (1858) finishes her charges of "heart perjury," she contrives to make duty and affection appear pale by ill-regulated comparison, much as Talbot Bulstrode (1863), who felt¹ little capacity for loving on his own side, found the virtuous (and loving) Lucy Floyd "tame ... cold ... weak" beside "that Egyptian goddess, that Assyrian queen," her cousin Aurora. Rita is somewhat patronizing toward her sister Rose, whose "weak, affectionate heart ... was not capable of² the strong life-and-death attachment of more passionate natures," and declaims:

To me, the prospect of settling down for life beside one whose presence never made my heart hurry one beat faster--to whose thought my own never sprang up responsive--from whose tenderness I shrank back,--in short, to give only one half of myself, while the other was turned to stone, this was a life-solitude compared with which almost any other fate which I might voluntarily accept, would be preferable.
 [Rita, 1858, II, 161]

Of course a great deal depends upon the way in which the comparison is drawn. Ellen Middleton, though of a passionate nature herself, speaks scornfully of "perverted taste" which "sees more of beauty in the turbid stream than in the pure lake--in the flashing eye and stormy brow, than in the calm gaze of purity and love."³ The types do not change, but the attitude toward them does.

¹
 See ante, p.75.

²
Rita, 1858, II, 20.

³
Ellen Middleton, 1844, II, 246.

With more nearly perennial application, Caroline Norton observes in 1863 that "(allowing for exceptions), affection is the root of love in women, and passion is the root of love in men." ¹ It may therefore be possible that some of the preponderance of affection over passion in the novels of the first half of the nineteenth century may be traced to the disproportionate number of women writers; but to explain the phenomenon entirely in those terms is to oversimplify it. Before the agitation for women's rights, it would appear that most men (allowing for exceptions) were content to let women's love be affection, let man's love be what it might. There were of course exceptions, ranging from a cynical disbelief ² in the possibility of or genuineness of affection to the tempestuous Henry Lovell's insistence "If I could not see the woman I loved agitated by her love for me, I had rather see her tremble, shudder even at my presence, than look as if Mr. Manby had come into the room;" ³ but the love which Mrs. Ellis preaches unremittingly is more nearly a grammar of affection.

¹

Lost and Saved, 1863, II, 126. Mrs. Gordon Smythies embroiders luridly on the same theme in Married for Love (1857): "There is not more than one man in a thousand, Niece, capable of any love for a woman, but what you call passion, therefore, you see the most tender, ardent Lovers become the most indifferent or brutal Husbands. While women, whose love is almost all affection, grow the firmer and fonder the longer they cling." [Married for Love, 1857, II, 62]

²

You do not really suppose that love, such as you read of in books, exists in the world of fashion?--No, no! nothing beyond Flirtation is tolerated; when it goes openly farther, then away the parties go--for a time disappear or do not disappear--are only supposed to be invisible. A divorce ensues; and after a few years, perhaps a few months, if the parties are sufficiently great and powerful, or handsome and agreeable, to obtain absolution quickly, back they come on the scene with a change of name; and they both, as married people, begin to grow tired of each other in their turn, and commence new Flirtations. ... It is as regular as the return of the seasons--charming! [Flirtation, 1828, II, 280-1]

³

Ellen Middleton, 1844, I, 192.

She distinguishes between man's love and woman's, and takes as a basic assumption the idea that they should supplement rather than resemble one another. "The love of woman appears to have been created solely to minister; that of man, to be ministered unto."¹ That it should be so is no indication of injustice in the universe; it is merely the nature of things; and the love that Mrs. Ellis describes as having been created solely to minister is essentially affection, what Amabel, or The victory of love, (1853) calls Love the Principle, not Love the Passion. Rightly ordered, it is a woman's whole existence, not "her passion or her play, but life": "I am one of those who think that the most serious act of a woman's whole life is to love."² But it is neither feeble nor sentimental:

It is an act of injustice towards women, and one which often brings its own punishment upon talented men, when they select as their companions for life, the ignorant or the imbecile of the other sex, believing that because they are so, they must be more capable of loving. If to be incapable of anything else, implies this necessity, it must be granted that they are so. But of what value is that love which exists as a mere impulse of nature, compared with that which, with an equal force of impulse, combines the highest attributes of an enlightened mind, and brings them all with their rich produce, like flowers from a delicious garden, a welcome and appropriate offering at the shrine whereon the heart is laid. [Wives of England], 1843, p.156-7

It is too high an ideal ever to have been easy of attainment. "It asks for head and heart--how many are deficient in both. Idleness and vanity cause, in nine cases out of ten, that state of excitement which is called being in love."³ Real love was "the love of a virtuous object, founded upon esteem ... a pure and devoted attachment." "Unless I feel

¹ Wives of England, 1843, p.76.

² Daughters of England, 1842, p.379.

³ Romance and Reality, 1831, III, 89.

all this," insisted Mary Douglas in 1818, "I shall never fancy myself in love."¹ "Prepare to be an old maid," they told Lady Emily in 1828, "I see no hope of you if you continue to persist in these nonsensical resolutions."² In 1840, Louisa Vansittart was skeptical; but by 1840 the ideal seemed much less theoretical than it had earlier:

"All love exhibits itself in folly, does it not?"
 "Passion for a season is unreasonable, and most ladies, I suspect, do not credit a love which is clothed in dignity, but it wears better."
 [History of a Flirt, 1840, II, 284-5]

Love clothed in dignity was more, much more, than mere calculated prudence. It was a "rational though enthusiastic preference ... a passion that no external change could destroy--since it was founded on the unchanging qualities of the heart and mind."³ Esteem was not lightly given nor capriciously withdrawn; the qualities that inspired it were more likely to be real than imaginary, more objectively than subjectively admirable. It was thus that paragons were admired for their genuine excellence, which even the unprincipled acknowledged. Ellen Middleton's

¹
Marriage, 1818, III, 30. (See ante, p.78)

²
Flirtation, 1828, III, 11. Lady Emily's resolutions were to "Live for my husband entirely, devotedly ... be happy with him abroad, and still happier at home; make my house and my self agreeable to his friends, having no friends myself that were not his likewise; and being so very a part of himself that he could not do without me.--Liking the life he led, whether of gaiety or of seclusion; following his pursuits, or at least endeavouring to be interested in them; thinking of his interests, however much they might interfere with my previous habits and tastes; using my influence to induce him to attend to his public duties, if ever, through indolence or self-indulgence, he was inclined to forget them. In short, finding my own happiness in doing the duty of a wife. ... I never would marry any one I did not esteem and love, and then--"
 "Pho! how sick I am of that word love, so perpetually in your mouth; one would think it was meat, drink and clothing."
 "Ay, and so it is, dear sister! and more than all these things put together would be without it." [Flirtation, 1828, III, 10-11]

³
Adeline Mowbray, 1805, III, 144.

"instinctive homage to what is pure, intense admiration for what is good"¹
 does not juggle with the word goodness; it is not "what is pleasing to
 myself," but "what is acknowledged good by universal law."

The wrong is made and measured by
 The right's inverted dignity.
 Change love to shame, as love is high²
 So low in hell your bed shall be.

--and unfortunately good qualities have come to be badly parodied and
 clumsily copied in synthetics. It is possible that there were as many
 lead token copies in circulation then as now--Mrs. Ellis would imply it:
 "Were all men excellent ... these pages might be given to the winds"--but
 authors chose the examples that interested them differently, and preferred
 the rare reality, which to see was to admire, over the dull expected average.

Anna's person was every thing desirable by man, but Anna's mind and
 manners were chastity, delicacy, modesty, and innocence combined;
 they threw such a charm round her, that the most depraved must have
 approached her with respect. [A Bride and No Wife, 1817, I, 89]

With less abstraction and more fervor, Emilia Wyndham (1846) was beloved
 "for qualities, the very contemplation and association with which rendered
 him a better man. ... He had come to value her still more for the effect
 she produced upon his character."³ It is impossible after that not to feel
 a diminishing of intensity in finding Phemie Keller (1866) passionately
 adored for her auburn hair and blue eyes.

Esteem, moreover, was inseparably associated with honor, another
 objective universal quality,

¹
Ellen Middleton, 1844, II, 159.

²
 "Aurea Dicta," Angel in the House, Bk. I, Canto XI.

³
Emilia Wyndham, 1846, III, 18-19.

The fair sum of six thousand years'¹
Traditions of civility.

It was courtliness and justice, love as the fulfilling of the law. Self control was the measure of its strength, not of its weakness: "Oh, how degrading to the passion of love it is, that a woman, despising every moral tie, violating every principle of virtue or decorum, should dare to plead in excuse for her libertinism, that she acted under its influence."² It was not love if it was not honorable. The precept was stiffly ruled in Susanna Rowson's copybook,³ and gorgeously illuminated in Coventry Patmore's,⁴ and it made a kind of divine harmony of everything in heaven and earth.

And in our love we dimly scan
The love which is between Himself.⁵

¹ "The Cathedral Close," Angel in the House, Bk. I, Canto I, 5.

² Sarah, or The exemplary wife, 1813, p.105.

³ I do not think but that those who rush into guilt, and plead love as an excuse are mistaken in regard to the passion by which they are actuated. Darnley says Jessey loves him; he is deceived; I cannot believe it possible for a woman who loves a man with that pure, yet sacredly tender emotion, which I at present imagine real love to be, to suffer him to degrade himself in the eyes of the world, break the commands of his Creator, and infringe every moral obligation. [Sarah, or The exemplary wife, 1813, p.87-8]

⁴ I loved her in the name of God,
And for the ray she was of Him ...
My joy was no idolatry
Upon the ends of the vile earth bent,
For when I loved her most then I
Most yearned for more divine content.
... Him loved I most,
But her I loved most sensibly.
[Angel in the House, Bk. I, Canto X, 4]

⁵ "The Prototype," Angel in the House, Bk. I, Canto VIII.

"For love is heaven, and heaven is love"--yet the second half of the proposition must be taken seriously, to the depth and breadth and height the soul can reach, or the terms are not convertible. Perhaps all love borrows some of its light from religion, but one of the marked features of Victorian affection is its ineffaceable religious imprint, whether or not the characters themselves are religiously inclined. John Miller, in Violet Bank and its Inmates (1858), approaches love reverently:

Oh! Grace, my darling, what should I not have missed had I only met you in the world, without the opportunity of knowing you. How graciously God has dealt with my cold heart. Love for you has given me a glimpse of how God loves us all. He bestows blessings on us, not because we love Him, but because He loves us. Henceforth John Miller will strive to show that God's spirit of love dwells in him.
[Violet Bank and its Inmates, 1858, III, 205-6]

Sylvia Birch in the same novel uses words from the same source, but she uses them differently: "I loved him as I suppose one ought to love God, for the only words I could find to express what I felt I learnt in my catechism." Love as heaven had a radiance that glimmered like summer lightning; it dazzled Phemie Keller in 1866 and constituted the devotional creed of Estelle Vauban in 1859, but it was not fire from heaven unless

1

Violet Bank and its Inmates, 1858, II, 245.

2

See ante, p.125.

3

"While the world is so sweet, and God so good, how can we better fulfil our mission here than by enjoying it and loving Him? ... I feel that our warmest earthly affections come from God, and that in them we can best remember Him. I feel it, notwithstanding all I have heard upon the question, notwithstanding even what you have told me of the snare of human love ..."

"Yours is a dangerous creed," he said at last.

"No, no, Cyprian. It is the creed of all nature, and, therefore, must be right. Why, the very birds and flowers love--and are forgiven."

[Creeds, 1859, I, 88-90]

Annie Edwardes' characters are very long on nature's instinct, which is enough for birds and flowers; but they are remarkably short on human intelligence. In this instance Estelle's devotion to God permits her to love Cyprian, who is destined for the Catholic priesthood.

heaven came first. Mrs. Ellis was well aware of the danger of mistaking the source of the illumination--"Indeed, we never err more fatally, or do greater injustice to the nature and attributes both of religion and of love, than when we blend them together, and expect from one what the other only can bestow." Love's heaven was not permanent unless it genuinely partook of the nature of eternity.

Whatever enchantment resides in scenes of beauty, or in the powers of fascination, there is no true peace when the principle from whence that enchantment and that fascination spring, is not in itself pure and steadfast; when it does not tend to some ultimate end, which is sanctioned by virtue and followed up perseveringly. [Flirtation, 1828, III, 186]

Purity, constancy, character, and principle--the attributes of Victorian affection were high as the soul could reach; but they failed to retain their character if the soul's desire stopped anywhere short of infinity.

"You love?" says Patmore, "That's high as you shall go." Even passion is to some extent an alchemic purifier, however fleeting the effect; and indubitably the concentration on spirit during the early Victorian period intensified love's spiritual qualities. Love therefore figures prominently as an instrument of reformation.

The reckless dissolute Sir Patrick, who had long sneered at marriage, and even broken that holy tie for others, might find a charm in the pure, calm, high-minded Clara, which raised him above his ordinary self, and made him appear all she could most like or admire. [Modern Flirtations, 1841, I, 285]

The phenomenon is common and fairly constant; one recognizes instantly the form of despair that Caroline Norton describes in Lost and Saved:

There never was man or woman yet, who, in the presence of a great passion, did not undervalue personal advantages. Let beauty, wit, wealth, power, be all combined,--the deep instinct of the heart,

1

Wives of England, 1843, p.30-1.

with its sorrowful one want in this crowded world of wishes, feels that all are insufficient to balance what all would be given up to secure. ... Not enough to purchase the priceless treasure of that unit's love! And yet the creature loved may be as the creature loving, or utterly inferior. The mystery rests with Him who made the wayward human heart, and gave us laws to govern it, against which we for ever struggle and rebel. [Lost and Saved, 1863, II, 172]

"Love me, and I will try to deserve it," can be sincerely meant, whether
 1
 it derives from passion or affection; the question is, how long the effect will last?

I speak not here of love as what it might be, but as what it is. I speak not of that holy and seraphic ardour, which a guardian angel might be supposed to feel for the welfare of the being whose earthly course it watched with unceasing care; nor yet of that pure sentiment, scarcely less earthly in its tendency, the chastened and subordinate attachment of a redeemed and regenerated soul; I speak of love as a fitful and capricious passion, asserting unreasonable mastery over the human mind, rejecting all control, mixing itself with all motives, assuming all forms so as to work out its own purposes, and never failing to promise an earthly paradise to its blind followers. It is of such love, I repeat, that it must be kept apart from that great work which religion has to do alone. [Wives of England, 1843, p.31]

Love without amendment of life was somehow regarded as spurious, or a contradiction in terms, and heroines and their guardians not unreasonably required practical evidence of the sincerity of extravagant protestations.

1

Besides Horace D'Almayne's plea to Kate Marsden to leave duty and her elderly cotton-spinner and become "my leading star, my tutelary deity," [Harry Coverdale's Courtship, 1856, p.466] there was Rita's Lord Rawdon, who might really have reformed:

"Do you not feel it is in your power, and yours only, to lift me up from this mire--to lead me to purer and better things? My God! what woman ever had the influence over a man you would have? With you, perhaps, I might learn the way to heaven; without you, I must live out this hell on earth until I find oblivion in the grave."

"You strangely deceive yourself, Lord Rawdon. I am too little of a saint to help any one. I need, on the contrary, a firm, strong hand to prevent me from falling." [Rita, 1858, II, 73]

The active ingredient, however, is Lord Rawdon's love, not Rita's influence. Elizabeth Sewell, placing confidence where it best belongs, observes, "Neither John Hervey nor any one else can expect to find perfection--only love." [Ursula, 1858, II, 358]

"Did you refuse me your affection because, in my man's pride, I would take no advice how to win it?"

"No, Philip, that you know is not the case. I love what is good, great, generous, and frank. Did you act thus towards me?"

"I loved but you, Lotty."

"And yourself, Philip." [Margaret and her Bridesmaids, 1856, II, 273]

There is reason in Laura Montreville's insistence on Hargrave's probation; reason in Alice Wentworth's breaking her engagement to Darrell; reason in Adelaide Lindsay's reproach, "If you had truly loved me, you never would so selfishly have given me pain, for the sake of affording yourself a few weeks' miserable amusement,"¹ and reason in Ellen Barchard's re-enactment of Self-Control: "I said your life was wicked and I could not share it; a true-hearted man would have sought to lead a new life from that day and appear more worthy in the sight of her he loved--you grew more stubborn and depraved."² There is perhaps less reason in Mr. Edmonstone's refusal to trust Amy to the Heir of Redclyffe without a refutation of Philip's unjust suspicions; but Mrs. Edmonstone's perceptions are truer:

"Is it wrong that an earthly incentive to persevere should have power which sometimes seems greater than the true one?"

"There is the best and strongest ground of all for trusting you," said she. "If you spoke of keeping right only for Amy's sake, then I might fear; but when she is second, there is confidence indeed."

[The Heir of Redclyffe, 1853, I, 226]

Virtue for virtue's sake, not love's; only principle could really be trusted.

Yet where love was capable of elevating ordinary natures, intrinsically better natures were transfigured. Agatha, of Agatha's Husband (1853), meditates, "Might he not indeed be a husband given unto her of God--to

¹

Adelaide Lindsay, 1850, II, 53.

²

One and Twenty, 1858, III, 159.

lead her in the right way, and make a true noble woman of her? such as
 a woman is always made by the love of, and the loving of, a noble man."¹
 Man was almost by definition noble; and "in the bestowment of the affec-
 tions," says Mrs. Ellis, "few women are tempted to make choice of men of
 weak capacity. ... It is the constitutional want of woman's nature to have
 some superior being to look up to; and how shall a man of weak capacity
 supply this want?"² It was in the nature of things, therefore, that women
 should be made better by the contemplation of excellence. And when ideals
 were based on absolutes, the excellence was of a very high order. Ellen
 Middleton (1844) says of her marble crusader:

The very struggle to appear better than I was in Edward's eyes, wearisome as I often found it, kept up a certain degree of straining after better things, and some remorse at the contrast which the reality presented to the outward appearance. [Ellen Middleton, 1844, III, 73]

Amy Edmonstone, (1853), overwhelmed by the Heir of Redclyffe's declaration, imparts the news obliquely to her brother Charles: "You must make me so much better and wiser! Oh, if I could but be good enough!"³ To her sister she says,

If he should take me for more than I am worth. O Laura, Laura! What shall I do to be as good and sensible as you! I must not be silly little Amy any more. ... It won't do now, as you told me once, to have no bones in my character. I must learn to be steady and strong, if I can; for if this is to be, he will depend on me, I don't mean, to advise him, for he knows better than anybody; but to be--you know what--if vexation or trouble was to come! [The Heir of Redclyffe, 1853, I, 232-3]

Likewise in the semi-engagement of Flora Denys and Astley Boyle in Malvern, or The three marriages (1855):

¹
Agatha's Husband, 1853, II, 270.

²
Daughters of England, 1842, p.394.

³
The Heir of Redclyffe, 1853, I, 230.

He had been indeed, the grammar of her life--the source from which she had either consciously or unconsciously derived every rule of action, and almost every right idea she possessed. ... The rules he had given, the principles he had taught, she must learn to apply for herself, and she must trust that, if called on to walk alone, strength would come to assist her. [Malvern, III, 101]

And in the non-engagement of Dorothy Mowbray and Lance Clifford in Dorothy (1856): "I do not need Lance to tell me that I am wrong, but I do need his counsel and sympathy to keep me right." ¹ Perhaps nowhere save in the Victorian domestic novel has love popularly worn an appearance like this; but love for the days, weeks, and years of actual life is lighted by this kind of reflected glory. It is not mere dutiful submission.

The benefits, however, were not all on one side. Love is perhaps best known for its reformation of the natural frailty of man, though the effect was really reciprocal:

... Like the majestic reach
Of coupled suns, that, from afar,
Mingle their mutual spheres, while each ²
Circles the twin obsequious star.

It is possible that a generation or two of Clara Granvilles, insisting on consistent Christianity rather than Sunday observances, may have been responsible for raising the level of men's behavior between 1817, when Anna Woodville forgave what she had not the power of preventing, and 1857, when the love of the austere Constance Brandon eventually succeeded in softening the Greek hero Guy Livingstone into forgiving a slap in the face. At any rate, it would appear that the most effective reformation

¹
Dorothy, 1856, p.211.

²
"The Dance," Angel in the House, Bk. I, Canto XI, 1.

stemmed from principle, not passion, with affection as an important agent in the transaction.

It was not that passion produced no effect--

High thoughts had shaped the foolish brow,
The coward had grasped the hero's sword,
The vilest had been great, hadst thou,¹
Just to thyself, been worth's reward.

--but the effect did not last. "It is a terrible thing," says Mrs. Gordon Smythies lugubriously, "for a woman to marry a man because he loves her, and while that passion lasts, is a new being and then to find herself tied for life to a tyrant who loves her not."² "She who is by turns the slave of capricious passion, or the object of contempt or neglect," says Sarah, the exemplary wife, some forty years earlier, "must suffer a bondage more severe than the slave who is chained to the oar."³ The prospect⁴ is almost enough to justify Annie Carden's fears that since criminals could pass current in good society, no man was to be trusted. Yet as

¹
"Honour and Desert," Angel in the House, Bk. II, Canto IV. See also "Unthrift," Angel in the House, Bk. I, Canto III.

²
Married for Love, 1857, III, 171.

³
Sarah, or The exemplary wife, 1813, p.259.

⁴
In Malvern, or The three marriages, 1855. She at first refuses Edward Clarke's proposal because the detection of the criminal schemes of Astley's bogus uncle shakes her faith in English gentlemen.

Her notions of English gentlemen were rather exalted, she had hoped to find them a compound of honour, tenderness, courage, and integrity, and mentally supplied these qualifications from the abundance of her own good feelings, in her estimate of the characters around her. ... Where was the security of rank or station, or education, where were the impassable barriers, supposed to hedge in each domestic circle in England, and make home sacred, safe, and quiet, if such a man could thrust himself into a family, and be received by them? [Malvern, 1855, III, 287-8]

1

Caroline Norton insists, passion is not affection. For a time they may delusively resemble one another, but affection lasts and passion does not.

I speak of Love, the Principle,--not Love, the Passion. If you know love only as a passion, I have nothing more to say,--only this: it will not stand the wear and tear of married life, nor the cooling, on the other side, of conjugal attachment. [Amabel, 1853, II, 147]

Love the Principle may appear drably like duty in another guise; affection may seem a feeble rush-light beside the blaze of Cupid's incendiary torch; esteem may wear the glitter of ice-drops to Miss Mulock--but it is affection and not passion that bears it out even to the edge of doom.

Yes, poor Emmeline, he loved thee, with that passion which never long survived possession, and never will. Had he loved thee with a deep and pure affection--the love a Christian man should feel for a Christian woman--time would only have made the Wife dearer to the Husband's heart. [Married for Love, 1857, III, 237]

Love, says Mrs. Ellis, "may have been tried by absence, by caprice, by coldness, or neglect; but it has yet to be tried by the security of entire possession; by the monotony of sameness."³ In 1828 Lady Charlotte Bury was cynical about the transitory nature of Love the Passion: "You do not suppose that the red-hot love lasts after the chill of matrimony has passed over it! No, no; Flirtation comes in like a master of ceremonies, to hand Love off the boards very quickly."⁴ In 1840 she placed her emphasis on the other side: "Most ladies, I suspect, do not credit a love which is clothed in dignity, but it wears better"⁵--good fireside domestic comfort

¹
In Lost and Saved, 1863.

²
See ante, p.77.

³
Wives of England, 1843, p.150.

⁴
Flirtation, 1828, II, 281.

⁵
The History of a Flirt, 1840, II, 284-5.

1

that will wash and wear well. In 1842 Mrs. Ellis makes faithfulness one of the marks of the thing she was describing:

I have said, that woman's love, at least all which deserves that name, is almost universally exalted and noble in its commencement; but that still it wants its highest attribute until its faithfulness has been established by temptation and trial. [Daughters of England, 1842, p.386]

2

Affection could even stand trial by absolute possession.

1

Modern Flirtations, 1841. See ante, p.121.

2

Patmore says "Why, having won her, do I woo?" and concludes "She's not and never can be mine," in token of which he stresses love's high and ceremonious courtesy--possession is by gift and not by conquest.

Female and male God made the man;

His image is the whole, not half.

[The Prototype," Angel in the House, Bk. I, Canto VIII]

Love seeketh not her own; there is no self, even to deny. The courtesy of love ministered unto lies in not exploiting the gift.

Admittedly there was hardship in the state of things which, as Mrs. Norton discovered, allowed the wife no legal identity apart from her husband; but apparently the law was framed to fit a theoretical ideal situation in which marriage actually produced a unity, what Mrs. Ellis called The "marriage of true minds"--something which brings us nearer than any other circumstance in this sublunary state, to an apprehension of what must be the enjoyment of those regions of felicity, where all existences are blended into one, and where the essential principle of that one is love. [Wives of England, 1843, p.162]

Mrs. Ellis apparently regards it as something learned after marriage, in fulfillment of the law, by the assimilation of the wife's character to the husband's. The sensation novel tended to believe it was something spontaneous and instinctive, and to some extent independent of the law, calling for no assimilation. Agnes Waring, ten years after Mrs. Ellis, is extra-legal in her claim:

The true marriage bond which makes a man's superiority her highest pride; submission to the readily acknowledged master spirit, sweeter far than rule, and doubles her existence by merging it in another.

This, and this only, is the union which Christ ratifies with that solemn injunction, "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

[Agnes Waring, 1854, III, 210]

Anne Sherwood (1857) carried the idea to a fantastic extreme. (See p.173)

The difference the point of view made in marriages may be seen by comparing Judith Renelle's attitude in 1858 with Julia Maitland's in 1844:

We can never be happy together, because oil and water won't mix--because

I cannot alter your nature, or change my own ... because in marrying you,

I lost all sense of independence, all consideration, either for my own

[Continued on next page]

It is no doubt the faithfulness of affection which is at the bottom of the extravagant idea that a good woman can love only once. This is not at all the same thing as the untouched innocence of ignorance; the figure is far more elaborate and more intrinsically valuable than a tabula rasa or a snowbank--it is a cameo, a Venetian goblet, a sacred grove. Neither is it what Robert Palfrey Utter in Pamela's Daughters (1936) calls "Goldsmith's Law," the social convention prescribing that when lovely women stoop to folly, they should always retain delicacy enough to die of it. This constancy has nothing for which to reproach itself. Its best example is perhaps Dolores Nevil in The Cup and the Lip (1851). Her sister questions her motives:

"You do not believe in second love then?" said Flora, "and yet, Dora, it is possible to be attached more warmly the second time than the first. I had a foolish fancy for Mr. Kerr, but it passed away like a dream when I knew Harry Crawford."

"Ay, because it was only a fancy, Flora; and you had good cause to despise its object. Contempt must be a certain cure for love. But my affection for Walter Livingstone is founded on esteem, and has, I really believe, become a more enduring sentiment since duty has forbidden our union. I live in the hope that as years pass, we may

[continued]

or the world's good opinion--because you cheated and juggled me out of myself. [The Rich Husband, 1858, III, 126]

This was not Julia's own case. She loved him with the whole strength of her character, and the imperious attachment had totally changed her tastes. [The Wilfulness of Woman, 1844, III, 123]

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"A woman's heart is like a precious gem, too delicate to bear more than one engraving."--Romance and Reality, 1831, III, 97. "It was a genuine first-love--the great event of a pure and secluded life--destined, like the poison-draught fermenting in a goblet of Venice, to break the unsullied crystal in which it was contained."--Mrs. Armytage, or Female Domination, 1836, III, 276. "Its groves are sacred places, and woman may not pass through them twice, for a small spot which would not deface the garment of a vestal, can sally [sic] the purity of the bridal robe."--The Young Widow, 1844, III, 103-4. Perhaps in this last instance there is a slight suggestion of Sir Willoughby Patterne's exclusiveness.

be near neighbours, and that I may be permitted to comfort his declining age."

"You are very singular, Dolores."

"No, dearest, there are many like me among the spinsters of every day life." [The Cup and the Lip, 1851, III, 165-6] ¹

Both solutions are eminently Victorian in their high tone and quiet manner. Affection in both cases is founded on esteem: where Flora can no longer esteem, she will, with no inconstancy or inconsistency, no longer love. But where esteem is unimpaired, affection cannot be moved by any advantage or adversity, even though no question of duty is involved. Moreover, extraordinary constancy contrives to make itself appear commonplace and to avoid notice: "There are many like me among the spinsters of everyday life."

It was a Gothic extreme for the pangs of disprized love to end in death or madness where no folly was involved, and the vogue for this slaughter of the innocent appears to have run out somewhere around 1840. ² In The History of a Flirt (1840), Mary Pearson, one of the minor characters,

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Walter Livingstone, though "generous, just, and sensible"--the qualities for which Dora praises him (The Cup and the Lip, II, 283)--is the victim of hereditary insanity.

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Emily Arundel, who dies at the age of 21 at the end of Romance and Reality (1831), commits follies enough, but they are the follies of an adolescent in love with love, not the folly Goldsmith had in mind. If Sophia Armytage, in Mrs. Armytage, or Female Domination (1836), dies of a broken heart, she does it quietly and with decency:

Do not think so ill of me as to fancy that the affection which has been so long a part of myself, of my prospects, of my hopes for time and eternity, can be changed in a day, like the fashion of a garment! ... Whether Mr. Rainsford be lost to me or not, I am still unchanged, and still incapable of rewarding otherwise than with my graceless thanks the preference of another. [Mrs. Armytage, or Female Domination, 1836, II, 244-5] The real cause of Clara Granville's death in Modern Flirtations (1841) is tuberculosis. Margaret May in The Daisy Chain (1856) was sufficiently injured in the carriage accident that killed her mother to account for her death without charging it to Alan Earnescliffe's failure to return. (See ante, p.141.) The medical certificates therefore appear to become more and more realistic.

represents the Blanche of Deven tradition in wild words and mad wanderings; but she gets much less sympathy than the original Blanche. The early Victorians sincerely believed that Heaven would help those whose resignation helped themselves.

Which character ... most imposes upon our understanding?--the love, the sorrow, the selfish grief of the daughter, or the aged parent, in her trials, her self-command, and humble resignation? ... In Mary, passion is clothed in the garish drapery which deceives the eye; but our reason, if we will employ it, must, however reluctantly, give exclusive homage to religion, faith, and hope, in the tried patience of Mrs. Pearson. [The History of a Flirt, 1840, I, 102-3]

Paradoxically, constancy appeared under a number of guises.

I was again plunged in wonder, and meditated on the powerful effect of attachment upon different characters: the love which struck at the reason of Mary Pearson, wore a gentler aspect to Emma Brereton, and produced fearful contention in the bolder mind of Mrs. Fortescue. These women loved. They never changed the object or lost their purity of feeling. They suffered all its pangs, some in silence, one in erring action, but each in constancy and severity of virtue. How did I look with disgust upon my own senseless unprincipled conduct! [The History of a Flirt, 1840, II, 208]

Mary's madness is the extreme of the preceding period; Mrs. Fortescue, though "her heart ... and her principles disdained infamy," tended toward the period that was to follow; Emma, in patiently accepting without madness or murmur the tedious hardship of a long engagement, is peculiarly characteristic of the forties and fifties. Louisa herself suggests yet another aspect of the situation.

There is something almost over-precise about Anna Woodville's prim pronouncement in A Bride and No Wife (1817):

It is true my youth has not yet attained its prime, yet ere I knew the term love scarcely by name, my affections were disposed of--irrevocably, unchangeably given. Though years silvered my head, still would they be the same--I gave my heart once and for ever. [A Bride and No Wife, 1817, II, 89]

Perhaps if the idea were often enough repeated, it might come to be believed. Yet how if one were mistaken? "I will be true to my love whatever I do ... I know he isn't worthy of it; but I shall not be true to him, but to my love" ¹ is surely a mistaken constancy, in love with love instead of loving. But how then may constancy, love's "highest attribute," be reconciled to a second attachment?

Shame and dismay overpowered her; as it has overpowered many a good sincere heart conscious of such change, when to love more than once has seemed impossible. ... What! was she no better, in fact, than false Montagu? Was she such a poor, weak, sinful creature that she could not live without the stormy excitement of a love-passion? Was the sickening blank which Treherne's unworthiness had made in her heart, only to be filled by a renewal of eager fancies and fond yearnings, instead of by good and holy thoughts, and worthy deeds, and religious aspirations? [Lost and Saved, 1863, III, 197] ²

Yet the number of heroines who failed to die of broken hearts and brain fever is perhaps more significant than the number who did. Laura Montreville's exercise of timely self-control (1811) bestows her upon De Courcy instead of upon Hargrave, her first love. Louisa Vansittart (1840) speaks of her "senseless unprincipled conduct," her fatal propensity to flirtation, yet there is little that could be called levity about her marriage

¹
Flirts and Flirts, 1868, I, 50.

²

Compare also Louisa Vansittart's meditations: Good heavens! could another attachment bind me to earth? Was I again on the point of loving with energy and desperate affection? But this growing sentiment differed essentially from the mad love I bore to Thelwal. This influence, beginning in admiration of character, in a repenting spirit, in the remembrance of a past engagement, and in gratitude for gentle treatment, would be less tumultuous, but more insidious; it would be a love rooted into my soul, noiseless, enduring, and unextinguishable. [The History of a Flirt, 1840, III, 338]
Ralph Harley's debate with himself (Creeds, 1859, III, 94-97) merely tends to prove L.E.L.'s point that in spite of the gem-like nature of a woman's heart, "I doubt whether it be not an advantage for a lover to be able to contrast the finer qualities of one capable of inspiring a deep and elevated attachment with the falsehood or the folly he has known before." [Romance and Reality, 1831, III, 98]

to Thelwal, and even less in her marriage to Lord Elford. Harriet Erskine (1844) illustrates the wilfulness of woman more perversely in her first marriage to Trelawney than in her second to Dr. Meadows. Emilia Wyndham (1846) loved Col. Lenox first, but when circumstances married her to Mr. Danby, she eventually joined love to honor and obedience without equivocation. Adelaide Lindsay (1850) by her own admission first loved Claude Mostyn and later married Charles Latimer. Flora Nevil's sentiments on second attachments (1851) have already been quoted.¹ Both of the principals in Mrs. Trollope's Second Love (1851) are twice married. Geraldine Jewsbury's Gertrude Morley, having endured the sorrows of gentility in her first marriage, marries a tanner the second time (1856). Grace Lloyd almost refuses to listen to the widower John Miller's proposal in Violet Bank and its Inmates (1858) because of her broken engagement to Dr. Mansell, yet the end is infinitely happier than the beginning. Beatrice Brooke's eventual solution to the conundrum of second attachments quoted above rather oddly suggests her author's second marriage in 1877. None of these women are portrayed as commonplace--"mild sweetness which is ever ready to answer love with love"²--their affection is far from being affectation--and yet it was bestowed twice, delicate gems and Venetian goblets to the contrary.

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See ante, p.166.

2

The Head of the Family, 1852, I, 316--"the nature of many, nay, of most women, gentle and good," specifically the nature of Hope Ansted, who is also married twice, though the circumstance proves nothing in connection with the present argument. Of the heroines named above, Gertrude Morley's two marriages should perhaps likewise be discounted, since very little that resembles any kind of affection enters into either of them.

There is an unexpectedly strong strain of common sense in Victorian affection, in spite of its idealism. Its constancy is more than mere stubbornness. It is not easily transferred, even from an unworthy object: "A woman's sense may be enlightened, and yet her heart not be able to detach itself; at least, not till after a long season of mourning for its
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dead"--but it remains subject to reason and duty:

To you it may be easy to love here to-day, and there to-morrow, wherever fortune and your fancy may lead you.--But I cannot play fast and loose with my affections.--I loved you as truly and sincerely as I believed you loved me. But now, I do so no longer,--your conduct has been its own cure--I cannot love where I no longer esteem.
[Adelaide Lindsay, 1850, II, 51]

Its high-mindedness is not always appreciated, however:

"Enough," he said. ... "You never had a heart--you never knew what it was to have a heart; you are a cold, calculating, conventional being--and you call that morality!"

"I call it honour and gratitude," she cried, excited beyond her usual self. [Emilia Wyndham, 1846, III, 117]²

Certainly not all the shapes taken by "one love in a life" were as admirable as the second love that still loves honor more. Paralleling the weeping-willow constancy that drooped and died or went mad is a type of monomania, "mixing itself with all motives, assuming all forms so as

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Violet Bank and its Inmates, 1858, I, 147.

2

Mrs. Ellis had evidently heard arguments of this kind:

Some complain that they are naturally so grateful, it is impossible for them to resist the influence of kindness; and thus they fall in love, perhaps with a worthless man--perhaps with two men at once; simply because they have been kindly treated, and their hearts are not capable of resisting kindness. Would that such puerile suppliants for the charity they ill deserve, could be made to understand how many a correct and prudent woman would have gone inconceivably farther than them, in gratitude, and generous feeling, had not right principle been made the stay of her conduct, and the arbiter of all her actions. Love which arises out of mere weakness, is as easily fixed upon one object as another; and consequently is at all times transferable: that which is governed by principle; how much has it to suffer, yet how nobly does it survive all trial! [Daughters of England, 1842, p.385-6]

to work out its own purposes," and still insisting "I have been faithful in my fashion." Nature's instinct toward constancy sometimes led to curious contradictions, wives who sedulously avoided "heart perjury" by committing the legal version of the same thing. Perhaps the most spectacular example is Anne Sherwood (1857), the poor governess who falls disastrously in love with Lord Claude Douglas, whose remarkable constancy equals her own: "He finished by calling on the holy Heaven to witness the eternity of his love, adding, 'I shall never marry.'"¹ Whereupon Annie witnesses the eternity of her devotion by marrying a wealthy 71-year-old colonel, who dies immediately after the ceremony. Claude retaliates by eloping with Annie's former employer, Lady Adelaide Curzon. As soon as Lady Adelaide's husband can get a divorce, Annie marries him for the sake of his title. But not for love, she insists, not for love!

"Did I say so--did I ever say so, my Lord?"

"A thousand times, by act, look, and tone!"

"But by words, never. No, my soul is clean of that falsehood! I would it were as white from other sins!" [Anne Sherwood, 1857, III, 159]

2

Her constancy goes even further:

I know I am not your wife in the eyes of Heaven; for to make a marriage, God must be the priest, and join hearts and souls. Are ours

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Anne Sherwood, 1857, III, 52.

2

Constancy in this fashion really belongs to the excesses of the sensation novel, and should probably be attributed to passion rather than to affection: it is dubious whether its extravagance would ever survive possession. In the present group of novels no other character quite equals Anne Sherwood; but two minor characters, Lady Kynnaston in Adelaide Lindsay (1850) and Mme. Duchenois in Agnes Waring (1856) each marries one man while remaining romantically devoted to another. In 1850, Lady Kynnaston's duplicity was denounced as tantamount to adultery (see ante, p.134), though by 1856 Mme. Duchenois is regarded as more sinned against than sinning. A sub-variety of mistaken constancy is also to be found in characters like Guy Livingstone's Flora Bellasys (1857), sirens whose one unattainable romance is their nearest approach to virtue.

joined? No; I am not your wife: I will not live dishonoured. I have vowed to Heaven that none shall ever touch the lips on which the kisses of Claude Douglas are not yet cold, though our love be in ashes. Mine is not a spirit to turn away from the banquet of the gods and feast on carrion! I am not your wife; I never will be! [Anne Sherwood, 1857, III, 167]

Honor interpreted by nature's instinct was sometimes weirdly unrecognizable, not only a word, but a Humpty-Dumpty word, meaning whatever the impassioned speaker chose it should. Affection was considerably more objective, and its constancy was consonant with honor in all respects, resisting even the powerful temptation to self-deception.

"Your peace of mind, your reputation, Ellen, are dearer to me than life itself; and such love as mine cannot be selfish."—"Henry, Henry, your very words belie you. I am indeed fallen low in your eyes, since you, the husband of another, dare to speak of love to me." [Ellen Middleton, 1844, II, 72]

It might be argued that Ellen Middleton could afford to be objective where her own feelings were not involved; but the same clarity of vision persisted even when enlisted against itself, if the person loving were a person of principle. Frederica Rittesberg, in Mrs. Trollope's Second
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Love:

The knowing she was beloved by Henry was not new to her; the knowing that she loved him was an idea equally familiar to her mind. These two facts she had long known and dwelt upon as the great calamities

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Before meeting Frederica, his intellectual second love, Henry Harley had met and engaged himself to Louisa Selcroft, who has nothing but beauty to recommend her. Louisa's clerical father, playing a devious game of ecclesiastical politics, puts Henry off on the plea of Louisa's poor health; Henry genuinely believes her dying at the time he becomes aware of Frederica's superior attractions. But once Mr. Selcroft secures his living, Henry is recalled to fulfil his engagement, which he conscientiously does. Upon his marriage, Frederica marries Lord Otway, who is older than her father, "in the full confidence that it would be in her power and in her will to contribute to the happiness of the amiable old man, and that the doing so, by leading her to the performance of active duties, would furnish the most effectual antidote against the state of mind she most wished to avoid." [Second Love, 1851, III, 301] The difficult situation above ensues after Louisa dies in childbirth.

of her earthly destiny; but the idea that this calamity might degrade her into vice was as new to her as any notion of robbery or murder could have been. [Second Love, 1851, III, 142]

The constancy of affection was love as immoveable object, based not on one aspect of life, but on the whole of it: "To have loved faithfully, then, is to have loved with singleness of heart and sameness of purpose, through all the temptations which society presents, and under all the assaults of vanity, both from within and from without." ¹ It illuminated all of existence with its unearthly radiance, like sun and candle light. It is perhaps primarily domestic, since the limits of domesticity give love its widest scope.

It is only in the married state that the boundless capabilities of woman's love can ever be fully known or appreciated. There may, in other situations, be occasional instances of heroic self-sacrifice, and devotion to an earthly object; but it is only here that the lapse of time and the familiar occasions of every day, can afford opportunities of exhibiting the same spirit, operating through all those minor channels, which flow like fertilising rills through the bosom of every family. [Wives of England, 1843, p.141]

By "self-sacrifice" Mrs. Ellis does not mean misguided domestic martyrdom-- which existed in her day as well as in ours, and against which she warned her readers--but rather a very high order of unselfishness.

She who entertains this sentiment in its profoundest character, lives no longer for herself. In all her aspirations, her hopes, her energies, in all her noble daring, her confidence, her enthusiasm, her fortitude, her own existence is absorbed in the interests of another. [Daughters of England, 1842, p.383]

2

--forgetting, as Margaret Cecil admonishes, even that there is any self to deny:

So pure, so devoted was her love for Harold, that she asked for no return of his love to her, but that he should perform his duty to God

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Daughters of England, 1842, p.386.

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See note ante, p.114.

and his people. Anything she could bear towards herself, so that he was irreproachable in character and name. [Margaret and her Bridesmaids, 1856, II, 160]

It is not missionary zeal for the Society for the Suppression of Vice that leads Mrs. Ellis to speak of neglecting no means or opportunity of raising a husband's character to the highest scale which man is capable of attaining. It is his benefit and not her own that the wife seeks. Absorption in the interests of another is enlarged by affection into its widest and highest dimensions, welfare temporal, spiritual, and eternal; affection is love exalted and exalting.

If by the marriage vow, you hoped to unite yourself to an immortal mind--and I cannot believe of my countrywomen that more grovelling thoughts would be their's at that solemn hour--you must desire to sustain and cherish such a mind, in all its highest aspirations, and in all its noblest aims. In fact, I know not what love is, if it seeks not the moral and intellectual perfection of its object. [Wives of England, 1843, p.61]

The marriage of immortal minds in no way involves any divorce from practical and prosaic comfort; it simply does not stop at sustaining the body. The calm level of every day's most quiet need is also to measure the depth and breadth and height the soul can reach, for the soul's nourishment is the more important of the two. Pushpin was very definitely not as good

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This aspect of affection is more commonly but not exclusively feminine. Vernon Clavering in Temptation (1839):

The proof that Vernon's love was not of that common and baser kind, of which we see such frequent instances, was its very disinterestedness, its generosity. He was ready to sacrifice even his love, for the sake of the being he worshipped.

And it is ever thus with pure and ardent devotion:--there is no thought of self mixed up with it. From another, it derives its being and in another's happiness, all its hopes lie centred. [Temptation, 1839, III, 31-2]

And Emilia Wyndham's Mr. Danby (1846):

The infection of vice is great, but the infection of virtue is greater still. The influences of her just and generous sentiments began gradually to purify the selfishness of his own; he was beginning to feel it possible to desire her happiness, though he himself was not to form it. [Emilia Wyndham, 1846, III, 231]

as poetry.

Is it right that creatures endowed with capabilities for the highest and holiest enjoyment, should be satisfied with this? Nay, is it possible that happiness of so low a grade, if one may call it such, can fill the heart? ... That which elevates the soul in its capacity of enjoyment, is always worthy of our care, while that which lowers it, is always to be shunned and feared. In nothing is this more important to be observed, than in the preservation of earthly love. That which degrades the standard of affection, degrades the whole being; and that which raises this standard, raises also every faculty which can be connected either immediately or remotely with the exercise of the affections. [Wives of England, 1843, p.198-9]

Wives conscientiously promised love, honor, and obedience; the honor and the obedience were unequivocal; and by a kind of Parkinson's Law, love expanded to fill the work available, and looked for more. Hence the Victorian idea of duty, which, granted the existence of love, was fool-proof: ¹ "The wife's love had been deemed inseparable from the wife's position. And love alone, eternal, courageous, and most mighty, can fight ² for the possession of its beloved—even against the powers of darkness." And when the powers of darkness meanly took the form of trivialities,

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Mrs. Ellis:

Let me however ask what this duty is? It is not merely to serve him: a hired menial could do that. The duty of a wife is what no woman ever yet was able to render without affection; and it is therefore the height of presumption to think that you can coldly fulfil a duty, the very spirit of which is that of love itself. [Wives of England, 1843, p.10]

Therefore Agnes Waring reproaches herself:

How had I striven for the welfare of my husband? had I sought to win him from the materialism of his life or to transmute him by the fine alchemy of affection? No, I had disdained and left him to the unmitigated influence of all that I considered most debasing to his moral nature. ... "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health," means something more than material poverty or material health. [Agnes Waring, 1854, II, 160-1]

2

Ethel, or The double error, 1854, p.240. Ethel's double error consists first in refusing to marry the man she does love for fear she would not be good for him, and second in marrying a man she does not love in the hope of reforming him.

love stooped to them as well and made home comfortable. Mrs. Ellis was nothing if not practical:

On a closer and more experimental view of human life, we find that affection is more dependent upon the minutiae of every day existence; and that there is a greater sum of affection really lost, by filtering away through the failure of seeming trifles, than by the shock of great events. [Women of England, 1839, p.278]

Yet her practicality had a touch of poetry: "After all, what is it that man seeks in the companionship of woman?--an influence like the gentle dew, and the cheering light. ... It is in fact a being to come home to,¹ in the happiest sense of that expression." In the home, woman's love was made to minister; man's to be ministered unto.

The childish and most unsatisfactory fondness that means nothing but "I love you," goes but a little way to reach the heart of man; but let his home be made more comfortable, let his peculiarities of habit and temper be studiously consulted, and social and familiar gratifications provided for his daily use; and, unless he is ungrateful beyond the common average of mankind, he will be sure to regard the source from whence his comforts flow with extreme complacency, and not infrequently with affection. [Women of England, 1839, p.218-9]

It seems highly probable that the emphasis placed by affection on comfort may have had a great deal to do with men's complacency at the order of the universe which prescribed that woman's love should be affection; but to explain Victorian love stories solely on those terms would also be an oversimplification.² The love which passion concentrated on

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Wives of England, 1843, p.110.

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Lady Charlotte Bury, discussing Mme. de Stael, concludes with a general observation on the constitutional temperament of Englishmen: "The love of such a creature, so brilliant, so engrossing public attention, must enthral the senses, but could not occupy long the mind of an Englishman, who requires a calm existence and loves domestic quiet." [The History of a Flirt, 1840, II, 294]

Lady Bulwer Lytton's invective against husbands in general and her own in particular is embellished by practical advice of a similar nature, [Continued on next page]

one--"its sorrowful one want in this crowded world of wishes"--affection diffused and distributed. A colder generation which interprets love differently calls the Victorians sentimental, or falsely over-emotional, and at the same time imagines horrors from restraint or compulsion placed on nature's instinct; but the thing they would substitute for Victorian home affection leaves one hungry and cold by contrast. Passion is exclusive and individual; all society may benefit from the gentle dew and cheering light of affection.

Affection is round us like sunshine, and there is no use in measuring and comparing. We must give it out freely ourselves, hoping for nothing again ... bargaining for nothing again. It will come of itself if we don't exact it; but rivalry is the sure means of driving it away. ... The only security is, not to think about ourselves at all, and not to fix our mind on any affection on earth. The least share of the Love above, is the fulness of all blessing, and if we seek that first, all these things will be added unto us. [The Daisy Chain, 1856, p.18-19]

[continued]

which apparently owes nothing whatever to love or affection by any permutation of terms:

A wife, to be worthy of the name, should as thoroughly understand the art (for it is an art and one of the very finest) of domestic economy, in all its branches; and the science of comfort in each of its myriad phases; in short, how to be able to make her husband's home happy when he is well, and how to turn illness itself into a luxury by gentle, intelligent, anticipatory, and noiseless nursing. Believe me, my dear young ladies, a little such homely, womanly lore as this, would place you on a far higher pedestal--than the smattering you now receive of those ephemeral and bird-lime accomplishments, which may, indeed, snare a husband, but will never secure him. [Very Successful, 1856, I, 7]

Miss Mulock is likewise down-to-earth practical--

It's a curious and melancholy fact, which we don't ever learn till we are married, that all the love in the world is thrown away upon a man unless you make him comfortable at home. A neat house and a creditable dinner every day go more to his heart than all the sentimental devotion you can give. It's all very well for a man in love to live upon roses and posies, and kisses and blisses, but after he is married he dearly likes to be comfortable. [Agatha's Husband, 1853, II, 302-3]

--Though her commonplace practicality too is at least faintly touched by a glimmer of something else: "For pervading everything was the consciousness, 'It is his home I have to make comfortable.'" [Ibid.]

It was first of all domestic in origin, the domesticity of families not only large, but elastic. Family affection was strong--"There are ties that bind together those of one family, stronger than those of taste, or choice, or friendship, or reason; for they enable us to love, even in¹ opposition to them all"--but its very fullness spilled over and included those outside it. In Grace Aguilar's Home Influence (1847, and in all Mudie catalogues to 1884), Mrs. Hamilton, who has four children of her own, takes in an orphan niece and nephew, in a story designed to prove that all children should be treated with equal affection. Florence Leslie, in Woman's Friendship (1850), is actually the daughter of a friend whom Mrs. Leslie has brought up as her own child.² Cecil Clare,³ Hope Ansted,⁴ Guy Morville,⁵ and Lance Clifford are all wards, brought up like members of the family. "Twas half my home, six years ago," says Patmore's poet Vaughan of Sarum Close, in a similar situation; and marriages that blossomed thus tranquilly at home were unlikely to be anything but equally homelike, since they added the bond of family to a sure knowledge of mind and character and a proved similarity of tastes. Flora Denys' cousin⁶ Astley (1855) and Kate Coventry's cousin John (1856) likewise were familiar companions from childhood. "Six thousand years' traditions of

¹ Marriage, 1818, III, 272.

² In The Quiet Husband, 1840.

³ In The Head of the Family, 1852.

⁴ The Heir of Redclyffe, 1853.

⁵ In Dorothy, 1856.

⁶ In Malvern, or The three marriages, 1855.

civility," extending the family's welcome to the stranger within the gates, is surely in part a high and courteous affection. And when in The Daisy Chain "The time the good Doctor had chosen for bringing a helpless convalescent to his house, was two days after an eleventh child had been added to his family,"¹ Dr. May's charity is the Christian virtue whose name is sometimes rendered love.

Nature's instinct apparently varies with the interpreter of it; for this kind of family affection--"that beautiful instinct ... which is implanted by the hand of the Creator"--together with a dutiful respect for parental authority, also instinctive, is in earlier fiction one of the marks of the good sister: "She thought, that not to love one's relations, particularly any thing so near and dear as a sister, was quite impossible."² Subsequently it became less of an approved convention and more of a real emotion--e.g., the impatient Dorothy's deep love for her sister Blanche that found railways not fast enough in bridging distance (1856), or Ursula's intense devotion to her brother Roger.

"You love Roger better than any one else in the world."

"I love him better than my own life," I said. "I would be thankful to sacrifice every hour of my existence to him. I wish for nothing better than to live with him always. There are many kinds of love in the world, Mr. Hervey, I don't see how we are to measure them. I only know that a sister's love for a brother may make earth a Paradise." [Ursula, 1858, I, 439]

Yet though Ursula's attitude toward Roger's wife is faintly tinged with jealousy, as is Theodora Martindale's attitude toward her sister-in-law Violet in Heartsease (1854), there is no indication that among the many kinds of love in the world family affections had any unnatural tendencies

¹
The Daisy Chain, 1856, p.10.

²
Flirtation, 1828, II, 273.

in the style of Mourning Becomes Electra. Strong feeling was natural, though Elizabeth Sewell and Charlotte Yonge clearly believe its jealous propensity to be wrong-headed.

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Friendships, particularly women's friendships in these women's novels, also had a strength and intensity that a generation obsessed with aberrations might regard with some of the horror the Victorians bestowed on religious unorthodoxy. Yet we never err more fatally than when we confound religion and love, and expect from one what the other only can bestow. The Victorians, more charitable than ourselves in a number of ways, accepted a multiplicity of right answers for love if the love of God came first.

A woman's development especially comes through the exercise of the affections. I grant that to some women this development appears more difficult because the natural channels for the outpourings and the ingoings of a loving interest seem closed. I grant that your position is difficult and exceptional; so is that of the Old Maid. So was Milton's--"Does God exact day labour, light denied"?
[Amabel, 1853, II, 148]

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The Damon and Pythias kind of friendship does not appear in the domestic novel, though it may in the adventure story. The nearest approach to it is in Robert Mackenzie Daniel's The Young Widow (1844), in which Gerald Maccor leaves his bride to go to the rescue of his friend's African mission; but very few of the emotions in the story are in any way convincing. Friendship (not love) between men and women not related to each other was regarded dubiously.

"Friendship between young people of opposite sexes is, at the best, only a pleasant fiction ending in disappointment and alienation."

"Oh, Mrs. Norton, do you hold to the common idea, that friendship must turn into love."

"It very often does, beyond a question; and so far as my experience goes, when it does not, the only other alternative is indifference--not on the woman's part. I believe women are capable of entertaining sincere friendship for those whom they could not love."

"Then you do not think men are?"

"No, indeed, not according to a woman's idea of friendship, which includes reciprocal confidence and trust, as well as esteem. They have sometimes, we know, entertained this for each other; but friendship for a woman is, as I said, a mere temporary fiction." [Malvern, 1855, I, 208-9]

Passion was not the only kind of love, and affection was rooted and grounded in honor. Friendship was something more than a matter of first names, even in an age when formality gave first names a greater significance than they have now. It included affection. There is now a dutiful aspect to social relationships, just as there was then an idea of duty for wives, and though perfectly complied with, one duty may be as empty as the other if there is no love in it. An uninhibited age tends to be shy of affection that means anything and lavish of affection that means nothing at all.

"Not Miss Vivian--Mildred, if you will--we have so many interests in common." She took Bertha's hand affectionately. That little movement!--Bertha could never have made it herself,--but it touched the secret chord of cherished and hidden feelings; she forgot that Mildred was a Vivian as she answered, "I always hear you called Mildred, but few call me Bertha." [Cleve Hall, 1855, II, 52]

What may not be possible to passion is part of the nature of affection--its diffusion like light among friends and strangers, grandmother, brother Johnny, and half the children and beggars in the square. This is the true use of Isabel Wold's "love that owes nothing to the merits of the creature loved, but is poured forth freely from the abundance of the lover."¹ Ursula says of nursing her other sister-in-law, Leah, "Such anxieties are scarcely dependent upon affection. I did not love Leah, but I could have willingly taken her place, and been in her danger to save her."² This is something beyond the art of noiseless nursing. If the spirit that prompted it was not affection, it seems highly likely

¹

Caste, 1857, III, 271. See ante, p.118.

²

Ursula, 1858, I, 424.

that it was Christian charity.

The unmarried woman must not seek undivided return of affection, and must not set her love, with exclusive eagerness, on aught below, but must be ready to cease in turn to be first with any. . . . To love each heartily, to do her utmost for each in turn, and to be grateful for their fondness was her call; but never to count on their affection as her sole right and inalienable possession. [The Daisy Chain, 1856, p.661-2]

But whenever the same kind of esteem that was the best foundation for marriage--"that love of excellence, which is the only permanent source of mutual attachment"¹--met a suitable object, the result could be a lasting friendship--"that happiness springing from principle and affection, which alone could satisfy her heart."² One of the most attractive examples in fiction is the relationship between Diana of the Crossways and Lady Dunstane. It is perhaps remarkable in being adult; the full fervor of it is more often found in adolescent girls than in grown women.

It is a common thing to jest at the rapid growth and exaggeration of girlish friendships. Strange, how soon we forget our youth! True, they do not last. What very simple, serene, and sincere sentiment in this world ever did? We have soon scarcely affection enough for even our nearest and dearest. Instead of laughing at such early attachments we might rather grieve over the loss of the unsuspecting kindness that gushed forth in feelings now gone from us for ever. [Romance and Reality, 1831, III, 245]

But it is not all the sheer effervescence of adolescence, and when it is not, it is not necessarily pathology either. Alicia Percival, writing about The English Miss To-day and Yesterday (1939) cautions

Those who throw about such 'psychological' terms as 'Lesbianism' need to study both in theory and in practice the development of the growing girl, and to realize how often and how naturally these friendships and enthusiasms pass into the next stage, and only serve to widen and deepen her character. Of course, there are unhealthy

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Modern Flirtations, 1841, II, 65.

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Modern Flirtations, 1841, II, 166.

attachments ... as there will always be human beings whose love of power or emotional gratification urges them to exploit the weakness and affection of others. [p.223]

The Victorians were more interested in good examples than in bad, and vivid friendships are not portrayed as vicious ones. Margaret Percival's attachment to the Countess Novera (1847) is something more than even high regard, or it would not despond, "She does not love me. Love is a word too holy, too deep, for the chance regard of this world"¹--and whatever the nature of the Countess's response, it made her Italian protégé Lucia furiously jealous--but the only danger apprehended by the author is from the Countess's Catholicism, which is not equated with depravity. Our generation would tolerantly hold that no danger need necessarily be apprehended from the one; its own day held there was not necessarily any danger in the other. Love alone can fight for the possession of its beloved, even against the powers of darkness; Emilia Wyndham's friendship for Lisa Hesketh eventually proves itself in a heroic struggle to save Lisa's marriage, though she is married to Emilia's own first love.

Love is too deep and too holy a word for chance regard, but it is in no sense misapplied to Victorian friendships, which illustrate affectionate love as immovable object as well as any tales of constancy and devotion do. The love in them is of a piece with the sunshine of affection that makes Victorian life as seen in novels seem so much solidier than our own, life that still has the eighteenth century stability of universal principles --no choice but to establish justice--irradiated with the subjective warmth of the universal principle that Mrs. Ellis called the law of love. As

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Margaret Percival, 1847, II, 373.

Margaret Cecil (1851) explained it to children,

I think the law of love requires more, requires us to be anxious and careful not to offend even through inadvertence. I think Norah would tell us, that the law of love has no concern with what others have a right to expect from us, that its only standard is, what can I do for the comfort or happiness of those with whom God has brought us into connexion? [Margaret Cecil, 1866, p.198]

Such a spirit carried love into all aspects of life, court and camp and grove, and immeasurably sweetened its entire duration. "It takes more than the length of mortal life to wear out mortal love," says a minor character in Maude Talbot, who says almost nothing else; but the words could almost serve as an epitome of the love story of Victorian affection whose radiance was every day's sun and candle light, love as immoveable object.

Toward the mid-fifties, however, one finds the idea growing up that the true nature of love is more nearly irresistible force, a conclusion Lady Bulwer Lytton arrives at logically: "Reason indeed is generally an unequal antagonist to passion, and philosophers will advise that some stronger passion should be opposed to it; but if such can be found, then the passion so opposed is not love." Roughly from that basic assumption on, the picture of love in fiction alters. Taste seems to have shifted, like the wobble in the inclination of the earth's axis which produces an alteration in the pole star. The fixed stars do not change, but the earth's inclination toward them does, and about 1856 the wobble in terrestrial inclination swung from affection to passion. The degree of alteration may often be so slight as to be almost imperceptible, but it is

¹
Maude Talbot, 1854, I, 48.

²
Very Successful, 1856, II, 233-4.

almost visible in passages from two of "Holme Lee"'s novels, two years apart. The course of Maude Talbot (1854) is steadily set by "love and household affections":

As I hold that happiness cannot exist without the sanctifying presence of love and household affections--things she had only guessed at-- I may safely say that Miriam Sedley had but little idea of what happiness meant, and if she had never been happy, her feelings were immature--it may be, were never to learn the ripening influence of that vivifying sun. [Maude Talbot, 1854, I, 61-2]

Kathie Brande (1856) ends in love and household affection: "Fireside happiness--calm, pure, equable--cannot be much dilated on. Our united lives have flowed smoothly and pleasantly, and I think not that our long¹ separation has been without its good for both." But inclination veers uncertainly in a hypothetical calm:

God help that soul in its loneliness, and God help those who through the livelong day see but the dull, leaden arch of a loveless life! The fiercest gust of passion that ever wrecked a soul were better than that dead torpor of the heart. Verily, to love and to suffer is better than to love not at all. [Kathie Brande, 1856, I, 240]

At the same time Kate Coventry was insisting, "I'd rather be a hoyden and go on in my own way." In the year following, Guy Livingstone was praising Magdalene the Saint at the expense of virtue "perhaps unassailed," and Emily Jolly in Caste set loving wisely and loving well in opposition to each other.

After the sober dominion of reason, nature's instinct was vivid and violent; it could not help itself; it felt and knew that it felt, and it rejoiced in the power of feeling. It was unreasoningly and unreasonably happy, for love is heaven--while it lasts. "Who ever repented or regretted during the reign of that sweet madness when one beloved object was

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Kathie Brande, 1856, II, 318-9.

more, ay a thousand times more, than the world forgotten for its sake?"¹

The account is past reckoning, or the power of reckoning:

... Immeasurable bliss
Gains nothing by becoming more!
Millions have meaning; after this
Cyphers forget the integer.²

Like infinity it can only be comprehended by measuring it against all the world; but where the strength of affection is measured by its assimilation to the best it knows, passion is gauged by the magnitude of the things it opposes. It overrules duty and judgment: "I must consider him as a mere acquaintance! must! away with such cords of sand. They cannot bind the heart! He was more a thousand times to me than all the world besides."³ It is oblivious to pain:

His love ... is a fatal accident for Claude, but for me--for me it is the crown of existence, even though it be destined to perish in the furnace of affliction. To be loved by Claude one day--one hour--might well be bought by years of suffering. [Anne Sherwood, 1857, III, 2]

And it monopolizes sense: "The man I married I loved--oh, how I loved him! I would as soon have done without the air I breathe."⁴ But it does not last.

It does not last; and even at the moment that it promises heaven, it inflicts a certain amount of hell. Mrs. Riddell laments that Phemie Keller unwittingly chooses to forego "bliss and agony ... doubts and distractions ... fever and collapse ... mad pulse and shivering agony."⁵

¹
Romance and Reality, 1831, I, 117.

²
"The Revulsion," Angel in the House, Bk. II, Canto VII, 1.

³
Agnes Waring, 1854, II, 211.

⁴
Violet Bank and its Inmates, 1858, II, 245.

⁵
See ante, p.125.

Sir Michael Audley identifies love as genuine by its "fever ... longing ... restless, uncertain, miserable hesitation." The misery prevailed, whether one failed or succeeded. Anne Sherwood raves:

I loved him, oh, so madly, with that love that hurls down destruction on the idolator! Ellen, you know none of these things, absolutely nothing. Your pure, innocent love, God has blessed and approved. You can't enter into the miseries of consuming passion, still less can you understand the fierce pangs of jealousy. [Anne Sherwood, 1857, III, 230]

And Sylvia Birch, who was wretched till she got the man she wanted, was equally wretched afterwards: "I don't know about other people, I only know what I suffer." Was it really worth all this?

The influence of the new guiding star did include a strain of madness. Its principal feature was violence, "that intense and overwhelming feeling, before which all others sink into nothingness," mixing itself with all motives to work out its own purposes. It is the same dazzling nova against which people had been warned that its brilliance meant that it could not last--but to earthen pipkins without even a rushlight, it was blindingly better than darkness.

1

See ante, p.151.

2

Violet Bank and its Inmates, 1858, II, 245.

3

Romance and Reality, 1831, III, 89.

4

Morton to Lady Montgomery: "The very intensity of such passions makes it impossible they should last--time cannot fail to cool them; and when indifference has succeeded to the idolatry which once was so intoxicating, then comes the time for reflection!"--Temptation, 1839, III, 108.

5

Carlyle's description of society reduced to a cash-nexus is not confined to the Hungry Forties or to the sphere of economics: "To live miserable we know not why; to work sore and yet gain nothing; to be heart-worn, weary, yet isolated, unrelated, girt-in with a cold universal Laissez-faire: it is to die slowly all our life long. ... This is and remains for ever intolerable to all men whom God has made."--"Democracy," Past and Present (1843).

Unhappily, however, the glare was not only fleeting but variable.¹
 Impetuous and impressionable people like Aurora Floyd burned with Pater's
 hard, gem-like flame, living always where the sensations meet, and passing
 swiftly from point to point; it was part of the nature of impulse and im-
 pression. The wavering brilliance was one of the weaknesses of Love the
 Passion, "that passion," as Mrs. Gordon Smythies says, "which never long
 survived possession and never will."² Mrs. Smythies regards it as a "dis-
 ease one does not suffer twice;"³ but in many instances it more nearly
 resembled a form of intermittent fever. The secret of constancy, accord-
 ing to Mrs. Norton, lies not so much in the merit of the person loved as
 in the nature of the person loving, and where love is not based on esteem,
 "The greatest of all charms, in the eyes of unprincipled men, is novelty;
 and that charm the most charming must lose, even if all other attractions
 could remain stationary."⁵

1

See ante, p.136.

2

See ante, p.164.

3

Married for Love, 1857, III, 11. "If he has had a real passion for
 her, it is very unlikely she will ever feel one again for any other woman.
 It is a disease, and like most other diseases, few people have it twice."
 But the number of imaginary passions could be virtually unlimited. Mrs.
 Smythies counsels the wife to convert passion into affection if possible,
 by making the husband's home comfortable. Beyond that, "Make your Husband
 a little afraid of you. When love dies, a little fear comes in very handy,
 and does almost as well."--Married for Love, 1857, II, 63. Much of her
 advice sounds practical, but little of it sounds like love of either style.

4

Lost and Saved, 1863, II, 127.

5

Lost and Saved, 1863, II, 214. Fatmore approaches the question from
 another direction:

I vow'd unvarying faith, and she,

To whom in full I pay that vow,

Rewards me with variety

Which men who change can never know.

["Constancy Rewarded," Angel in the House, Bk. II, Canto XI]

This is particularly true because while affection's concern is with its object, passion's concern is with itself. The shift in orientation, therefore, alters the nature of constancy from an active virtue to a passive habit.

There is something absurd in vowing constancy in love. Love depends on impulse and impression; now, over neither of these have we any control. The only security is, that we soon exhaust our impulses and grow callous to impressions, and the attachment has then become a habit, whose chains are of all others, the most difficult to break. [Romance and Reality, 1851, II, 180]

If she be not so to me-- As standards became more and more subjective, moral worth tended to inspire not lasting admiration but something uneasily like aversion, since it was measured not against what ought to be, but against one's own inclinations: "We respect the good--we even venerate them and hold them up as models for imitation; but we do not as a rule, love them best. ... It is because we are wicked ourselves that we feel more sympathy with those who easily fall." One comes to love the sin for the sake of the sinner.

"I could not love such an egotist."

"Nay, if you loved him, you would not be aware that he was one. The veil love casts over our faults is mercifully a very thick one, or few men could hope to retain the affection they had won, after custom has rendered them careless of pleasing. Moreover, we sometimes take a perverse fancy to faults themselves--they are part of the individuality of the person--it may be that Catherine loves Richard the better because he is an egotist. It is very certain she does love him fondly." [The Cup and the Lip, 1851, II, 5]

And good and evil and conscious reason have very little to do with the matter:

Half our loves and hates proceed from association more than reason. ... We find ourselves drawn to some because their faces remind us of those dearly loved former days, and turn with aversion from others

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Temper, 1854, III, 184-5.

for no better cause than that they resemble persons who have proved sources of unhappiness to us. ... And we call ourselves reasoning and ruminating animals, and yet are as powerless to shake off the magic spell of association, as if fancy were to be the rule of our action through life, and caprice and sentimentality the companions thereof. [The Ruling Passion, 1857, III, 85-6]

Furthermore, where half of love and hate is association, the other half is very likely to be imaginary.

I see how wild and fanciful my love had been; not knowing his nature, not wanting to know it; "caught," said she, in tones of bitter vehemence, "by the sunshine on his hair!" [Lost and Saved, 1863, III, 125-6]

Women are perhaps more easily deceived, since their idealism mistakes promise for reality; but according to Mrs. Ellis, men are particularly subject to delusion because they tend "to attach more importance to what is immediate and tangible, than what is remote or ideal." So Watkins Evans Jones, in The Wilfulness of Woman (1844):

He was blinded, duped, and destroyed, by the potency of a passion which believed all it desired. He never studied the character of her with whom he desired to pass his life. She was graced with outward gifts, and his spirit was subdued by them. If this made Mr. Jones "silly," there were thousands of remarkably silly men floating upon the surface of society to bear him company. [The Wilfulness of Woman, 1844, III, 160]

The nobility of man's nature made him fancy more than was there.

It often seems to me that women are like the blocks in a barber's shop, which each man dresses up to suit his own fancy. The block may be worth something, or it may not be, it matters little for the time being. What a man falls in love with is not the reality but the appearance; so it happens that the cleverer, the better, and more kind-hearted a man is in himself, the more danger probably there is of his making a blunder in his choice, because, you see, he has such a charming notion of what a woman ought to be, all ready prepared in his mind, that he has nothing to do but to fit it to the first girl he meets, of a right age, and look, and manner, and there is his perfect wife, ready made. [Ursula, 1858, II, 100]

A man of principle endures his disappointments and makes the best of his

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Wives of England, 1843, p.82.

mistakes; this is the compromise that emerges as domesticity and household affection. But a churl is forever in pursuit of the unattainable.

This marks the Churl: when spousals crown
 His selfish hope, he finds the grace
 Which sweet love has for even the clown,¹
 Was not in the woman, but the chace.

Churlishness is not domesticity and cannot be domesticated. Its spectral projection on the clouds was not the gleam the earlier half of the century followed in its pursuit of perfection. Where perfection is absolute, where heaven is love, one measures approximations to it in terms of the actual. Where a subjective and relative standard prevails, one runs grave risks of being mistaken, of limiting one's ideas of perfection to the imperfect, and so of being sold short. "The first step either to goodness or to happiness," says L.E.L. in 1831, "is to believe in their existence."² Idealism of this kind is probably on the whole less visionary than the cynicism which prefers imperfection in its own image. It may be that one of the great mistakes of the nineteenth century was in ceasing to love perfection best, and in narrowing its horizon to the preference of one kind of imperfection over another. It was certainly a mistake for the Victorians to come to love the commonplace for itself and not for the uncommon excellence it was capable of attaining.

Love rules the court, the camp, the grove-- As the nineteenth century progressed, it would appear that the love of men below and that of saints above came to be more and more widely separated; and at the same time the love of men below came to play a larger and larger part in the

1

"The Churl," Angel in the House, Bk. I, Canto XII.

2

Romance and Reality, 1831, I, 304.

shaping of human affairs. Perhaps one of the reasons for it was an increasing subjectivity, which became more and more microscopic in its analysis of motive, and less and less concerned with whether motives and actions were morally right or wrong. "I don't know about other people, I only know what I suffer."

One scarcely recognizes love stories as such until love becomes a monomania, and yet it might be argued that there is more real love actually displayed in the domestic novel, where it is, so to speak, part of the atmosphere, and taken for granted--taken for granted, as if streets were paved with gold! Yet far from debasing the currency, it reserves the name "love" for the best emotions framed by the human heart, till "in our loves we dimly scan the love which is between Himself." And in spite of all this, in approximately 1856, the balance of public opinion bestowed the name "love" preeminently upon the capricious passion instead of upon the radiant affection, and so it has remained ever since.

The question here is wider than the mere matter of fashions in popular love stories. In this paper I have assumed that fiction is a reasonably accurate reflection of the ideas and attitudes of the society contemporary with it. The record of what anyone loves and admires is the measure of the best that is in him; and the power of a sincere love, or even of an illusory passion, to alter character is very like the moral equivalent of atomic energy. The moral equivalent of champagne tastes and a beer income is not unknown; but such a taste is surely better than a taste for methylated spirit. Moreover, it is very difficult to keep one's taste in ideals from influencing the actual. Beliefs that are

sincerely held do mix themselves with all motives and assume all forms to work out their own purposes; one inevitably acts according to the principles he believes govern the universe. Therefore fiction which supplies attitudes about behavior, and novels which constitute a second-hand extension of experience, are not negligible, even though readers regard them as passive recreation.

Kathleen ... had formed her ideas of life very largely from the novels of the day; and indeed it would be difficult to know where to form a better idea of it, if people would not only in a general way confine themselves to one particular class of novels. [Flirts and Flirts, 1864, II, 217]

Fiction not only supplies ideas, but it influences action when readers apply the ideal to the situation in hand:

To crown all, she had painted what she could do and feel for such a love. We are all imitative, young girls especially; what Mildred would have done, Emmeline resolved she would do; and she did love Claude, and had never had even a passing fancy for any other man; but yet, for all that, he had pleaded for two years in vain! [Married for Love, 1857, I, 48]

The less people are willing to accept responsibility for their actions, the greater the burden which is placed upon literature. The impressionable Aurora Floyd curses the man she married for no more than a school girl's admiration of his handsome face, and Eve-like shifts the blame to the serpent:

I look upon you as the first cause of my father's wretchedness. Yes, even before my own mad folly in believing in you, and thinking you--what?--Claude Melnotte, perhaps!--a curse upon the man who wrote the play, and the player who acted in it, if it helped to make me what I was when I met you! [Aurora Floyd, 1863, II, 263]

Such an attitude of course bestows far too much importance on Bulwer Lytton's The Lady of Lyons. The name changes, but the situation is endlessly repeated. And in turn Aurora herself, and Lady Audley, and Kate

Coventry, and Rita, and Lady Isabel Vane, to the extent that they capture popular imagination, tend to influence behavior.

Therefore it is not an entirely trivial circumstance that in approximately 1856 the post-Crimean War generation changed its ideas about love, and championed Magdalene the Saint above orthodox virgins and dignified matrons, and found what was acknowledged the "highest, holiest, and best" "tame ... cold ... weak." Love is the most profound response to the perception of value, and the values involved in the two cases are very different. Love as irresistible force promises heaven, promises it so vividly and tangibly that, like Faustus, one willingly sells his soul in exchange. To possess happiness, to hold it in one's hand, is worth one's life; but like the effort to pour the ocean into an oyster shell, it cannot be captured that way. Love as immoveable object is also love as supreme value; but value participated in rather than purchased. One does not own it; one becomes it, at the price of one's entire life, not signed recklessly away in a moment, but paid in installments all one's life long. One does not forfeit one's soul for it; one gains a soul by it.

The 1856 change of direction, the abandonment of the ideal standard, did not interfere with the nineteenth century's material prosperity or its social progress. Yet there are other tides in the affairs of men, and the tide was rapidly ebbing on Dover Beach in 1867, leaving neither joy nor love nor light behind. Assuredly there is little in the celluloid, tabloid, and paper-backed love of the present generation to bring it back. Love is heaven, and heaven is love; though if our literature is to be believed, we inhabit a species of hell. It is our own fault; for like

Mudie's subscribers in 1860, we do not want to be advised. No man can choose our values for us. We get what we ask for; the victory of love is that it makes what is truly desired out of the material at hand, so that Frederick Graham's wife Jane comes in time to be merged with the ideal Honoria:

And bright within the mirror shone
 Honoria's smile, and yet my own!
 'And, when you talk, I hear,' she sigh'd,
 'How much he loved her! Many a bride
 'In heaven such countersemblance wears
 'Through what Love deem'd rejected prayers.' ¹

It is always unwise to reject the ideal. It is not for their material prosperity that we envy the Victorians, but for the comfortable firelight of their domestic affections.

But it is the penalty of either kind of love, of any real choice of values, that willy-nilly one gives his entire life in exchange for it-- "Precisely an existence; the market price, they said." No man is an island, entire to himself; his choices, his example, in turn influences others. No one, however qualified, can force good books upon a reader; but whether or not readers choose wisely, perhaps it might be well for the writers of fiction to pay closer heed to what they give the public.

1

The Victories of Love, Bk. II, VIII, "From Jane to Frederick."

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF NOVELS

- 1805 OPIE, Amelia. Adeline Mowbray, or The mother and daughter. Longmans, 1805.
D.N.B. gives date of 1st ed. as 1804.
- 1811 BRUNTON, Mary Balfour. Self control, a novel. Colburn and Bentley, 1832.
B.M. has 4th ed., Manners and Miller, 1812, but not 1st ed., Manners and Miller, Longman, 1811. Citations are from Bentley's Standard Novels ed., 1832.
- 1813 ROWSON, Susanna. Sarah, or The exemplary wife. Boston, Williams, 1813.
First pub. as "Sincerity" in Boston Weekly Magazine, 1802.
- 1817 MOSSE, Henrietta Rouviere. A bride and no wife. Minerva Press, 1817.
- 1818 FERRIER, Susan. Marriage, a novel. Edinburgh, Blackwood, 1818.
- 1828 BURY, Lady Charlotte. Flirtation, a novel. 3rd ed. Colburn, 1828.
English Catalogue gives first ed. as 1827.
- 1831 GORE, Catherine. Mothers and daughters, a tale of the year 1830.
Colburn and Bentley, 1831.
LONDON, Letitia Elizabeth. Romance and reality, by L.E.L. Colburn and Bentley, 1831.
- 1833 HOOK, Theodore. Love and pride. Whittaker, 1833.
Also pub. under title The widow and the marquess. Bentley, 1842.
- 1836 GORE, Catherine. Mrs. Armytage, or Female domination. Colburn, 1836.
Also pub. under title Female domination. C.H. Clarke, 1862.
- 1837 DISRAELI, Benjamin. Henrietta Temple, a love story. Colburn, 1837.
- 1839 GASCOIGNE, Caroline. Temptation, or A wife's perils. Colburn, 1839.
- 1840 BURY, Lady Charlotte. The history of a flirt, related by herself.
Colburn, 1840.
PICKERING, Ellen. The quiet husband. T.W. Boone, 1840.
- 1841 SINCLAIR, Catherine. Modern flirtations, or A month at Harrowgate.
Edinburgh, William Whyte, 1841.
- 1843 GORE, Catherine. Modern chivalry, or A new Orlando Furioso. J. Mortimer, 1843.
- 1844 BURY, Lady Charlotte. The wilfulness of woman. Colburn, 1844.
DANIEL, Robert Mackenzie. The young widow. T.C. Newby, 1844.
FULLERTON, Lady Georgiana. Ellen Middleton, a tale. Moxon, 1844.
SEWELL, Elizabeth Missing. Amy Herbert. Longman, 1844.
- 1845 SMYTHIES, Harriet Maria Gordon. The breach of promise, a novel.
T.C. Newby, 1845.
- 1846 MARSH CALDWELL, Anne. Emilia Wyndham. Colburn, 1846.
- 1847 AGUILAR, Grace. Home influence, a tale for mothers and daughters.
Groombridge, 1847.
SEWELL, Elizabeth Missing. Margaret Percival. Longman, 1847.
- 1849 OLIPHANT, Margaret. Passages in the life of Mrs. Margaret Maitland of Sunnyside, written by herself. Colburn, 1849.
Usually cited as Margaret Maitland.
- 1850 AGUILAR, Grace. Woman's friendship, a story of domestic life.
Groombridge, 1850.
DOUGLAS, Christiana Jane. Anne Dysart, a tale of every day life.
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and Blackett, 1856.
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- 1863 BRADDON, Mary Elizabeth. Aurora Floyd. Tinsley, 1863.
- NORTON, Caroline. Lost and saved. Hurst and Blackett, 1863.
- OLIPHANT, Margaret. Salem Chapel. Blackwood, 1863.
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- 1881 GREG, Percy. Ivy, Cousin and bride. Hurst and Blackett, 1881.

AUTHOR AND TITLE INDEX

TO CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF NOVELS

- Adelaide Lindsay, by Anne MARSH CALDWELL. 1850.
Adeline Mowbray, by Amelia OPIE. 1805.
Agatha's Husband, by Dinah Maria MULOCK. 1853.
Agnes Waring, by Annie French HECTOR. 1856.
AGUILAR, Grace. Home influence. 1847.
Woman's friendship. 1850.
AIDE, Hamilton, Rita. 1858.
"AIKIN, Berkeley." See KORTRIGHT, Fanny Aikin.
"ALEXANDER, Mrs." See HECTOR, Annie French.
Alice Wentworth, by Noell RADECLIFFE. 1854.
Amabel, or The victory of love, by Elizabeth WORMELEY. 1853.
Amy Herbert, by Elizabeth Missing SEWELL. 1844.
Anne Dysart, by Christiana Jane DOUGLAS. 1850.
Anne Sherwood, by Fanny Aikin KORTRIGHT. 1857.
[Anon.] Corvoda Abbey. 1860.
The fair Carew. 1851. (Attributed to Miss Bigger)
Aurora Floyd, by Mary Elizabeth BRADDON. 1863.
AUSTEN, Catherine Anne. See HUBBACK, Catherine Anne Austen. (m. 1842
John Hubback)
- BELL, Catherine Douglas. Margaret Cecil, or I can because I ought. 1851.
BEWICKE, Alicia E.N. Flirts and flirts, or A season at Ryde. 1868.
BIGGER, Miss. See The fair Carew. 1851.
BRADDON, Mary Elizabeth. Aurora Floyd. 1863.
Lady Audley's secret. 1862.
The breach of promise, by Harriet Maria Gordon SMYTHIES. 1845.
A bride and no wife, by Henrietta Rouviere, Mrs. MOSSE. 1817.
BRUNTON, Mary Balfour. Self control. 1811.
BULWER LYTTON, Lady. Very successful. 1856.
BURY, Lady Charlotte. Flirtation. 1828.
The history of a flirt. 1840.
The wilfulness of woman. 1844.
- Caste, by Emily JOLLY. 1857.
CHATTERTON, Georgiana, Lady. Life and its realities. 1857.
Cleve Hall, by Elizabeth Missing SEWELL. 1855.
COLLINSON, Julia Cecilia. Margaret and her bridesmaids. 1856.
Woman's devotion. 1855.
COLVILE, Margaret Agnes. Dorothy. 1856.
Corvoda Abbey. [Anon.] 1860.
CRAIK, Mrs. George Lillie. See MULOCK, Dinah Maria. (m. 1865)
Creeds, by Annie EDWARDES. 1859.
The cup and the lip, by Laura JEWRY. 1851.
- The daisy chain, by Charlotte YONGE. 1856.
DANIEL, Robert Mackenzie. The young widow. 1844.
DAVIES, Mrs. Charles Greenall. See DOUGLAS, Christiana Jane.

- DE WINTON, Mrs. Walter. See COLLINSON, Julia Cecilia. (m. 1831 Walter Wilkins, who took surname De Winton, 1839; m. 1857 William Richard Stretton)
- DISRAELI, Benjamin. Henrietta Temple. 1837.
Dorothy, by Margaret Agnes COLVILE, 1856.
- DOUGLAS, Christiana Jane. Anne Dysart. 1850.
Onwards. 1859.
- DRURY, Anna Harriet. Eastbury. 1851.
- Eastbury, by Anna Harriet DRURY. 1851.
- EDWARDES, Annie. Creeds. 1859.
The morals of May Fair. 1858.
- EDWARDS, Amelia. The ladder of life. 1857.
Emilia Wyndham, by Anne MARSH CALDWELL. 1846.
Ethel, by Marian JAMES. 1854.
- The fair Carew. [Anon.] 1851. Attributed by the Shakespeare Head Bronte to Miss Bigger.
- Female domination. Alternative title for Mrs. Armytage, or Female domination, by Catherine GORE. 1836.
- FERRIER, Susan. Marriage. 1818.
Flirtation, by Lady Charlotte BURY. 1828.
Flirts and flirts, or A season at Ryde, by Alicia E.N. BEWICKE. 1868.
- FRENCH, Annie. See HECTOR, Annie French. (m. 1858 Alexander Hector)
- FULLERTON, Lady Georgiana. Ellen Middleton. 1844.
- GASCOIGNE, Caroline. Temptation, or A wife's perils. 1839.
Gertrude, or Family pride, by Mrs. TROLLOPE. 1855.
- GORE, Catherine. Mrs. Armytage, or Female domination. 1836.
Modern chivalry. 1843.
Mothers and daughters. 1831.
- GREG, Percy. Ivy, cousin and bride. 1881.
- Guy Livingstone, by George Alfred LAWRENCE. 1857.
- Harry Coverdale's courtship, by Frank SMEDLEY. 1856.
"HAWTHORNE, Rainey" See RIDDELL, Charlotte. (m. 1857 J.H. Riddell)
- The head of the family, by Dinah Maria MULLOCK. 1852.
Heartsease, by Charlotte YONGE. 1854.
- HECTOR, Annie French. Agnes Waring. 1856.
Kate Vernon. 1854.
- The heir of Redclyffe, by Charlotte YONGE. 1853.
Henrietta Temple, by Benjamin DISRAELI. 1837.
High church, by Frederick William ROBINSON. 1860.
The history of a flirt, by Lady Charlotte BURY. 1840.
Home influence, by Grace AGUILAR. 1847.
- HOOKE, Theodore. Love and pride. 1833.
- HUBBACK, Catherine Anne Austen. Malvern, or The three marriages. 1855.
May and December. 1854.
- Isabel, by John Cordy Jeaffreson. 1856.
Ivy, cousin and bride, by Percy GREG. 1881.

JAMES, Marian. Ethel, or The double error. 1854.
 JEAFFRESON, John Cordy. Isabel. 1856.
 The jealous wife, by Julia PARDOE. 1855.
 JENKIN, Henrietta Camilla Jackson. Violet Bank and its inmates. 1858.
 JEWRY, Laura. The cup and the lip. 1851.
 JEWSBURY, Geraldine. The sorrows of gentility. 1856.
 John Halifax, gentleman, by Dinah Maria MULOCK. 1856.
 JOLLY, Emily. Caste. 1857.

Kate Coventry, by G.J. WHYTE MELVILLE. 1856.
 Kate Vernon, by Annie French HECTOR. 1854.
 Kathie Brande, by Harriet PARR ("Holme Lee") 1856.
 KORTRIGHT, Fanny Aikin. Anne Sherwood. 1857.

L.E.L. See LANDON, Letitia Elizabeth.
 The ladder of life, by Amelia EDWARDS. 1857.
 Lady Audley's secret, by Mary Elizabeth BRADDON. 1862.
 LANDON, Letitia Elizabeth. Romance and reality. 1831.
 LATIMER, Mrs. Randolph Brandt. See WORMELEY, Elizabeth.
 LAWRENCE, George Alfred. Guy Livingstone. 1857.
 "LEE, Holme." See PARR, Harriet.
 Life and its realities, by Georgiana, Lady CHATTERTON. 1857.
 Lilliesleaf, by Margaret OLIPHANT. 1855.
 LITTLE, Mrs. Archibald. See BEWICKE, Alicia E.N. (m. 1886)
 Lost and saved, by Caroline NORTON. 1863.
 Love and pride, by Theodore HOOK. 1833.
 LYTTON. See BULWER LYTTON.

Malvern, by Mrs. HUBBACK. 1855.
 Margaret and her bridesmaids, by Julia Cecilia COLLINSON. 1856.
 Margaret Cecil, by Catherine Douglas BELL. 1851.
 Margaret Maitland. Alternative title for Passages in the life of Mrs.
 Margaret Maitland, by Mrs. OLIPHANT. 1849.
 Margaret Percival, by Elizabeth Missing SEWELL. 1847.
 Marriage, by Susan FERRIER. 1818.
 Married for love, by Harriet Maria Gordon SMYTHIES. 1857.
 MARRYAT, Emilia. Temper. 1854.
 MARSH CALDWELL, Anne. Adelaide Lindsay, 1850.
 Emilia Wyndham. 1846.
 Maude Talbot, by Harriet PARR ("Holme Lee"). 1854.
 MAXWELL, Mrs. John. See BRADDON, Mary Elizabeth (m. 1874)
 MAY, Marabel. Wedded and winnowed. 1860.
 May and December, by Mrs. HUBBACK. 1854.
 NELVILLE, G.J.W. See WHYTE MELVILLE, George John.
 Miriam May, by Arthur ROBINS. 1860.
 Mrs. Armytage, or Female domination, by Catherine GORE. 1836.
 Modern chivalry, by Catherine GORE. 1843.
 Modern flirtations, by Catherine SINCLAIR. 1841.
 The morals of May Fair, by Annie EDWARDES. 1858.
 MOSSE, Henrietta Rouviere. A bride and no wife. 1817.
 Mothers and daughters, by Catherine GORE. 1831.
 MULOCK, Dinah Maria. Agatha's husband. 1853.

- MULOCK, Dinah Maria. The head of the family. 1852.
John Halifax, gentleman. 1856.
- NORRIS, Mrs. Henry Edmonds. See MARRYAT, Emilia. (m. 1862)
- NORTON, Caroline. Lost and saved. 1863.
- OLIPHANT, Margaret. Lilliesleaf. 1855.
Passages in the life of Mrs. Margaret Maitland. 1849.
Salem Chapel. 1863.
- One and twenty, by Frederick William ROBINSON. 1858.
- Onwards, by Christiana Jane DOUGLAS. 1859.
- OPIE, Amelia. Adeline Mowbray. 1805.
- PARDOE, Julia. The jealous wife. 1855.
- PARR, Harriet. Maude Talbot, by Holme Lee. 1854.
Kathie Brande, by Holme Lee. 1856.
- Passages in the life of Mrs. Margaret Maitland, by Mrs. OLIPHANT. 1849.
- PAUL, Mrs. Kegan. See COLVILLE, Margaret Agnes. (m. 1856 Charles Kegan Paul)
- Phemie Keller, by Charlotte RIDDELL. 1866.
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- The quiet husband, by Ellen PICKERING. 1840.
- RADECLIFFE, Noell. Alice Wentworth. 1854.
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The rich husband. 1858.
The ruling passion, by Rainey Hawthorne. 1857.
- Rita, by Hamilton AIDE. 1858.
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One and twenty. 1858.
- ROUVIERE, Henrietta. See MOSSE, Mrs. (m. circa 1816)
- ROWSON, Susanna. Sarah, or The exemplary wife. 1813.
- The ruling passion, by Charlotte RIDDELL. 1857.
- Salem Chapel, by Mrs. OLIPHANT. 1863.
- Sarah, or The exemplary wife, by Susanna ROWSON. 1813.
- Second love, or Beauty and intellect, by Mrs. TROLLOPE. 1851.
- Self control, by Mrs. BRUNTON. 1811.
- SEWELL, Elizabeth Missing. Amy Herbert. 1844.
Cleve Hall. 1855.
Margaret Percival. 1847.
Ursula. 1858.
- SINCLAIR, Catherine. Modern flirtations. 1841
- SMEDLEY, Frank. Harry Coverdale's courtship. 1856.
- SMYTHIES, Harriet Maria Gordon. The breach of promise. 1845.
Married for love. 1857.
- The sorrows of gentility, by Geraldine JEWSEBURY. 1856.
- STRETTON, Mrs. William Richard. See COLLINSON, Julia Cecilia. (m. 1831
Walter Wilkins who took surname De Winton 1839; m. 1857 William
Richard Stretton)

- Temper, by Emilia MARRYAT. 1854.
- Temptation, by Caroline GASCOIGNE. 1839.
- "TRAFFORD, F.G." See RIDDELL, Charlotte. (m. 1857 J.H. Riddell)
- The trial, by Charlotte YONGE. 1864.
- TROLLOPE, Frances Milton. Gertrude, or Family pride. 1855.
 Second love, or Beauty and intellect. 1851.
- Ursula, by Elizabeth Missing SEWELL. 1858.
- VALENTINE, Mrs. Richard John Scobell. See JEWRY, Laura. (m. 1853)
- Very successful, by Lady BULWER LYPTON. 1856.
- Violet Bank and its inmates, by Henrietta Camilla Jackson JENKIN. 1858.
- Wedded and winnowed, by Marabel MAY. 1860.
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- Woman's devotion, by Julia Cecilia COLLINSON. 1855.
- Woman's friendship, by Grace AGUILAR. 1850.
- WORMELEY, Elizabeth. Amabel, or The victory of love. 1853.
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