

Just a note on this first set of documents:

They all come from the book *Victorian Women: A Documentary Account of Women's Lives in 19th century England, France, and the United States*, edited by Erna Olafson Hellerstein, Leslie Parker Hume and Karen Offen.

Each set of documents have a short note from the editors explaining who wrote the documents and when. This is in italics (sort of). Then the documents follow. I've cut out the American documents and some of the others, so, for example, with the first two documents they are listed as ii. (by Dr. Marc Colombat) and iii. (by James Compton Burnett).

Please take note of what types of documents we have for this period.

17. Purity, intellect, and puberty: Advice for the middle classes

In these selections from advice manuals a Boston abolitionist, a Parisian physician, and a London homeopathist caution parents to protect their daughters from intellectual labor and the hazards of boarding school during the dangerous crisis of puberty. In the first selection Lydia Maria Child (1802-80) advises American mothers to maintain open and confidential relations with their daughters to guide them safely through their troubled adolescent years. (Interestingly, this famous author of 'The Mother's Book' was childless.) The second selection is from a work on the illness and hygiene of women by Dr. Marc Colombat (1797-1851), a Parisian professor of the relatively new speciality of obstetrics and gynecology. The American translation of this work, which was directed to both a professional and a popular audience, went

SOURCES: (i) Lydia Maria Child, *The Mother's Book*, 2d ed. (Boston, 1831), pp. 130-31, 148-52. Originally published in 1831. (ii) Marc Colombat, *A Treatise on the Diseases and Special Hygiene of Females*, tr. Charles Meigs (Philadelphia, 1850), pp. 544-47. First published in Paris in 1838. (iii) J. Compton Burnett, *Delicate, Backward, Puny, and Stunted Children* (Philadelphia, 1896), pp. 89-92. Originally published in London in 1895.

(ii) Marc Colombat

When a young girl shows, by the unfolding of her physical faculties, that she is approaching the completion of her full development, she needs the closest watching, and a management having a different object from that towards which her childish constitution tended. Whereas before puberty she existed but for herself alone, having reached this age, the spring time

of life, when all her charms are in bloom, she now belongs to the entire species which she is destined to perpetuate, by bearing almost all the burthen of reproduction.

During infancy, the vital forces tend to act equally upon all her organs, but at the epoch of puberty, the chief efforts of the organism are in some sort concentrated upon the sexual parts, whose functions are executed only during the second period of life.

As at this period, the instinct of modesty often leads young girls to conceal their first menstrual haemorrhage, it becomes the duty of mothers to inform them of the revolution they are about to undergo, and to announce to them that the sanguine discharge, which they are to become subject to, is a natural function upon which their health will henceforwards depend. Young persons, kept in entire ignorance upon this point, and taking their new condition for some shameful infirmity, have been known to oppose the salutary efforts of nature, by means of lotions, injections, and other equally dangerous agents. The exact truth, therefore, should be told to girls just arrived at puberty, because, though it is dangerous to know too much, it is more dangerous to be entirely ignorant.

The general attention required by women at entering the brilliant and stormy crisis, which is terminated by the appearance of the menses, consist in fulfilling two principal indications: 1, to moderate the excitement and disorder resulting from the momentary plenitude of the circulatory system; 2, so to direct the efforts of nature, that they may exert their chief action upon the sexual organs, in which the vital forces ought, so to speak, to centre and terminate.

A carefully regulated regimen is of all means the most appropriate for fulfilling the first indication; the food of a young girl at puberty ought to consist principally of vegetable substances, of preparations of milk, of the tender meats, and of light and easily digestible substances. . . .

To fulfill the second indication, to wit, to place the genital organs, especially the uterus, in a condition favourable to their becoming the seat of the irritation which precedes the menstrual exhalation, we should advise gymnastic exercises, walking and riding, running, the games of battledore, the jumping rope, the hoop, and riding on horseback; lastly, frictions about the pelvis and inferior extremities, the use of flannel-drawers, etc., are additional means very useful for inviting the flow of the menses. If the important function delays its appearance too long, and particularly if the girl suffers any of the evil effects of amenorrhœa, we should resort to very warm hip-baths and pediluvia; to aromatic fumigations; to applications of cups to the thighs, and leeches to the vulva; and finally, to the various means pointed out under the head of essential amenorrhœa. At this period, in particular, we must forbid the wearing of corsets with busks and whalebones, and of tight clothing, which obstruct the free development of the pelvis, of the thorax, and of the neck, and which might prove the origin of most of the diseases whose sad picture we have just sketched.

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It will be well, at the same time, to pay attention to the moral condition of the patient, and for this reason, it is of the highest importance to remove young girls from boarding-school, when they approach the age of puberty, in order to exercise a constant watch over them. We should prevent, as far as possible, the false emotions produced by the reading of licentious books, especially of the highly-wrought romances of the modern school, which are the more injurious, as all the faculties become, as it were, overpowered by the desire to experience the sentiment which these works always represent in an imaginary and exaggerated strain. Frequent visits to the theatre ought to be carefully avoided, because they, also, may give rise to sensations conformable to the moral condition, which is, naturally, at puberty, already too much exalted. These powerful, exciting agents, and still more frequently, the violent intimacies formed at boarding-school, tear the veil of modesty, and destroy, for ever, the seductive innocence which is the most charming ornament of a young girl. Endowed with an organization eminently impressionable, she soon contracts improper habits, and constantly tormented by an amorous melancholy, becomes sad, dreamy, sentimental and languishing. Like a delicate plant, withered by the rays of a burning sun, she fades and dies under the influence of a poisoned breath. The desires for happiness and love, so sweet and attractive in their native truth, are in her converted into a devouring flame, and onanism, that execrable and fatal evil, soon destroys her beauty, impairs her health, and conducts her almost always to a premature grave! . . .

From the epoch of puberty to the critical age, the menstrual discharge requires certain cares and precautions, which it is important to understand. While the haemorrhage is present, women ought to refrain from taking baths, and from washing the hands and genital organs with cold water; they should also avoid cold feet; they should not remain with the arms or neck uncovered, and must abstain from iced, exciting and alcoholic drinks, such as sherbets, coffee, tea, liqueurs, etc.; coïtus, also, ought to be proscribed, because the excitement determined by it in the genital organs, may occasion either metorrhagia, or more or less complete suppression, and secondarily utero-vaginal inflammation. It is well, also, to avoid sitting upon cold and damp places, for example the earth, a stone bench, a grassy bank, etc. The napkins, or *chauffours*, employed to receive the fluid of the menses, as it escapes from the genital parts, ought always to be well aired, and in winter warmed before being applied. If the discharge is too abundant, it may be remedied by a vegetable and milk diet; by repose; by the horizontal position; by cooling and sedative drinks, as barley water, whey, weak lemonade, etc.; if the female is of lymphatic temperament, she must use, on the contrary, a tonic diet, composed chiefly of roast meats, feculent substances, and rich soups. When menstruation is entirely or partially suppressed, in consequence of some imprudence or unexpected occurrence, it is necessary to endeavour to recall it; by means of a warm infusion of balm and orange flowers. Rest in bed; warmth to the thighs and legs, maintained by bottles filled with warm water, are other means which should not be neglected. . . .

very "humorous"

It is likewise very important that they should abstain, during the presence of the discharge, from all intellectual labour, and from severe study, which, by establishing high cerebral excitement, determine an unequal distribution of the vital forces, and cause an afflux towards the brain of the blood which ought to flow towards the genital apparatus. Before concluding what we had to say upon the attention to hygiene that menstruation requires, we will add, that so long as the function lasts, women ought to be the object of the most attentive kindness, and of a solicitude capable of preserving them, as far as possible, from the unhappy influences of the physical and moral causes which affect them more strongly than at any other period. It is well to say, also, that if some amongst them become subject at these periods to caprices, to sadness and unequal temper, we should always bear these transient humours with indulgence, because they depend upon the action of the body upon the mind, and upon an active irritation, which is radiated from the uterus towards the other organs, and especially towards the brain.

(iii) James Compton Burnett

Only the Almighty can make a New Woman. Put broadly, up to the age of puberty, the girl, all other things being equal, beats the boy; with puberty the damsel throws away every month a vast amount of fluid power in the order of Nature. Let us call this *pelvic power*. Assuming the girl to be the superior of the boy up to the pelvic power stage,—which, indeed, any one can observe for himself, in his own sphere,—but once arrived at the stage of pelvic power, and the damsel is left behind in her lessons by her brother in the natural order of things, or else the girl's brain saps the pelvis of its power, when she will also lose in the race with the boy, because he will be physically well, while she, with disordered pelvic life, must necessarily be in ill health more or less. The whole thing is a mere question of quantity of energy. . . . The New Woman is only possible in a novel, not in Nature. . . . I have very many times watched the careers of exceedingly studious girls who spent the great mass of their power in mental work, and in every case the pelvic power decreased in even pace with the expenditure of mental power. Not one exception to this have I ever seen, and all the lady students of the higher grades whom it has been my duty to professionally advise were suffering in regard to their pelvic lives and power.

visits, of *promenades*, of parties, of balls, she may appear only with her mother, or with a lady of her acquaintance who will take her mother's place. . . .

[When visiting], one does not leave the table before the end of the meal except for an unexpected call of nature. If this unpleasantness should happen to a lady, she asks a friend to accompany her; a young lady withdraws with her mother. . . .

The gait of a woman should be neither too fast nor too slow. . . . Her expression must be sweet and modest.

It is not in good taste for a woman to speak with too much animation or too loudly. When she is seated, she should never cross her legs. . . .

But what is especially insufferable in a woman is a restless, bold, domineering manner, for this manner goes against nature. . . . No matter what her worth, no matter that she never forgets that she could be a man by virtue of her superiority of mind and the force of her will, on the outside she must be a woman! She must present herself as that creature made to please, to love, to seek support, that being who is inferior to man and who approaches the angels.

(ii) Louise Alq

When getting into a carriage or going through a door . . . girls, until the age of twenty-one, go before their parents, because it is supposed that the parents must always have their eyes on them. On an outing, no matter where, children and young girls thus walk in front of their fathers and mothers. . . . A young girl never remains alone in the drawing room with a masculine visitor.

(iii) Sarah Stickney Ellis

The young girl cannot too scrupulously shroud her modest feelings from the unsparring test of fashion. The bloom of modesty is soon rubbed off by vulgar contact; but what is thus lost in the young female can never be restored. And let her look to the risk she incurs. What is it? On the one hand, to be thought a little less fashionable than her friends and neighbours—on the other, to be thought a little more exposed than a delicate woman ought to be. Is there any comparison between the two? Or is there one of the daughters of England, who would not rather be known to choose the former?

If possessed of any genuine feeling on these important points, a young woman will know by a kind of instinct, that a bare shoulder protruding into sight, is neither a delicate nor a lovely object; that a dress, either so made, or so put on, as not to look secure and neat, is, to say the least of it, in bad taste; and that the highest standard at which a rightly-minded woman can aim with regard to dress, is, that it should be becoming, and not conspicuous. In order to secure this last point of excellence, it is unquestionably necessary to conform in some measure to the fashion of the times in which we live, and the circle of society in which we move; yet, surely this may be done to an extent sufficient to avoid the charge of singularity, without the sacrifice either of modesty or good taste.

19. Forming the lady: Comportment and dress for young women

For young French and English girls of the middle and upper classes, schooling in comportment and dress formed an integral part of their upbringing. The advice manuals decreed that both the behavior and the appearance of the young girl should be appropriate to her station in life and distinct from that of the older woman. Although many of the formal rules of etiquette and fashion governed French and English girls alike, the English authors stressed internal states as the truest guide to correct behavior, whereas the French depended heavily on external controls and surveillance. In America, young girls were generally freer from such constraints on their behavior, but European etiquette manuals were still widely read in the United States.

(i) Mme Celnart

Everyone knows that no matter how much a young lady's dowry is, her manner of dress must always . . . be less elegant and less brilliant than that of married women. Expensive cashmeres, very rich furs, diamonds are forbidden her, as well as much other showy attire. . . .

Until the age of about thirty, a young lady can never go out without being accompanied. For her errands in the city, to shops, to visit intimate friends, to church, she may go with a maid; but when it is a question of ceremonial

SOURCES: (i) Elisabeth-Felicité Bayle-Mouillard (Mme Celnart), *Manuel de la bonne compagnie, ou guide de la politesse et de la bienséance* (Paris, 1834), pp. 39, 48, 134-36, 262. (ii) Louis Alquié de Rieusseynoux, *Le Nouveau Savoir-vivre universel* (Paris [ca. 1880's]), 1: 25, 255. (iii) Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Daughters of England* (London, 1842), pp. 230-31. (iv) *The Habits of Good Society: A Handbook for Ladies and Gentlemen*, author anonymous (New York, 1864), pp. 300-302. Originally published in London in 1859.

I think never goes out of style

(iv) 'The Habits of Good Society'

An agreeable, modest, and dignified bearing is, in the younger period of a woman's existence, almost like a portion to her. Whatever may be the transient tone and fashion of the day, that which is amiable, graceful, and true in taste, will always please the majority of the world. A young lady, properly so called, should not require to have allowances made for her. Well brought up, her address should be polite and gentle, and it will, soon after her introduction to society, become easy "to be civil with ease."

. . . There is a way also of looking that must be regulated in the young. The audacious stare is odious; the sly, oblique, impenetrable look is unsatisfactory. Softly and kindly should the eyes be raised to those of the speaker, and only withdrawn when the speech, whatever it may be, is concluded. Immediate intimacy and a familiar manner are worse than the glum look with which some young ladies have a habit of regarding their fellow-mortals. There is also a certain dignity of manners necessary to make even the most superior persons respected. This dignity can hardly be assumed; it cannot be taught; it must be the result of intrinsic qualities, aided by a knowledge very much overlooked in modern education—"the knowledge to behave." It is distinct from pretension, which is about the worst feature of bad manners, and creates nothing but disgust. A lady should be equal to every occasion. Her politeness, her equanimity, her presence of mind, should attend her to the court and to the cottage.

Neither should private vexations be allowed to act upon her manners, either in her own house or in those of others. If unfit for society, let her refrain from entering it. If she enters it, let her remember that every one is expected to add something to the general stock of pleasure or improvement. The slight self-command required by good society is often beneficial to the temper and spirits. . . .

sire. In contrast, Pierre Briquet, from whose great treatise on hysteria the second case study was taken, argued that the disease was primarily mental in origin. He theorized that hysteria had its source in an impressionable type of personality that was extremely common in women but could also occur in men, that hysteria attacked the poor more often than the rich, that it was exacerbated by harsh treatment and scanty food rather than by coddling and luxury, and that its manifestations were not necessarily linked to genital malfunction or sexual continence. The excerpt presented here comes from Briquet's long case study of Marie Gaudin, a twenty-six-year-old washerwoman. Both documents reflect the class bias of the French medical establishment: the demoiselle in the first case study is protected by anonymity, whereas the working woman in the second case is named.

(i) Jean-Baptiste Louyer-Villermay

A young female person of twenty-one years, endowed with a good constitution and regular in her menstrual periods, who had habitually enjoyed perfect health, met a young man several times in society who succeeded in inspiring a violent passion in her. The parents of this young lady objected to the match that she so ardently desired. From that time on, a slight disturbance in her health became noticeable, and her menstrual cycle became irregular. In the space of six months she experienced several hysterical attacks with convulsive movements, the sensation of strangulation, hysterical boils, choking, tingling in the uterus, etc. Medical treatment was limited to the prescription of a few leeches to the vulva.

Shortly afterwards, this young person found a letter from her sweetheart in her parents' possession, which they refused to give to her. She was immediately seized by an attack much stronger than the preceding ones, which was accompanied by a lethargic coma, an absolute loss of feeling and movement, and lockjaw and rigidity of the pharynx to the extent that swallowing was nearly impossible. Her regular doctor prescribed copious bleeding by means of six leeches applied behind each ear for this condition, but the symptoms in no way diminished, and three days passed without the slightest change. It was then that I was called. I found the patient unconscious and unable to respond to questions addressed to her; she appeared to be very ill and to understand nothing at all. Her face was slightly flushed and bright, her eyes fixed, her eyelids constantly closed, and her teeth clenched, and the obstruction in her swallowing remained the same. Respiration was troubled; the pulse was faint but regular and not far from its natural state. I prescribed an infusion of lime-blossom tea, an antispasmodic potion, and two blistering agents to the thighs.

The next day, the patient was in nearly the same state. She did, however, utter a few words; but they made no sense, although they did seem to relate to her attachment [for the young man]. Moreover, a general clamminess began to manifest itself. It was deemed advisable to apply a new blistering agent to the nape of the neck, and when the sweating had been completed, com-

23. Two case studies of hysteria in young Frenchwomen

Medical records are valuable for revealing details about women's lives that Victorian reticence prevented many women from discussing. The following case studies from standard medical works for practicing physicians epitomize the two dominant and conflicting French views of the nineteenth-century "disease," hysteria. In the first case Jean-Baptiste Louyer-Villermay (1776-1837), a distinguished Parisian authority on hysteria, describes an extreme case of hysterical paralysis, apparently provoked by the rigid parental surveillance of a love-struck young woman of the upper classes. The genital treatments applied by Louyer-Villermay and the other doctors in this case stemmed from the prevailing French medical view that hysteria was caused by reproductive disorders, menstrual irregularities, and suppressed sexual de-

SOURCES: (i) *Bibliothèque du médecin-praticien* (Paris, 1844), 2: 226-27. (ii) Pierre Briquet, *Traité clinique et thérapeutique de l'hystérie* (Paris, 1859), pp. 56-61.

presses of salty water and vinegar were applied to her head. In addition, her neck was rubbed with oil, camphor, laudanum, and ether; finally she was given injections and partial injections of camphor and asafetida.*

At the end of seven days, this young woman recovered the use of her senses, retaining only a vague memory of the crisis that she had experienced.

(ii) Pierre Briquet

Marie Gaudin, washerwoman. Born and raised in the country until the age of twelve; mother hysterical without attacks; father sickly, subject to stomach disorders since the age of twenty-five. One healthy brother, another brother with stomach disorders, a sister hysterical with attacks.

This girl received an average education; as a child, she was very feeble and impressionable, often subject to migraines and with an irregular appetite. Since birth she has been subject to very frequent attacks of convulsions. During childhood, they often took place several times a week, and they rarely occurred less often than every two weeks. In most cases they were provoked by the slightest emotion. Since she is intelligent, she has carefully observed these attacks, which continued until the age of twenty-six. . . .

Menstruation began at age twelve; she was then large enough, but weak and always sickly. The first menstruation was painful. Her period then appeared every fifteen or twenty days; it was continuous and abundant, lasting six to eight days. The first day was usually painful. . . .

At eighteen, a painful pregnancy with frequent vomiting, and because of many vexations, frequent attacks [of convulsions]; normal delivery; the child lives and is healthy. She took refuge in Paris at nineteen, in order to escape the reproaches made to her on account of her pregnancy. Since then, she has had many difficulties. At the age of twenty, rheumatic disorders in the joints and muscles. At the age of twenty-three, she felt impelled to marry, more from reason than from taste; her family opposed her inclination, and from this, new griefs and the appearance of headaches and an intense pain in the middle of her back and down the right side of her spine. . . .

Entered the Charity Hospital September 26, 1854.

Woman of twenty-five, rather thin, medium height, face without color, white skin, auburn hair, normal intellect, very frequent headaches of the temporal lobe that occurred both while she was at rest and while moving.

[Reporting that all her senses were severely impaired on the right side but normal on the left, Briquet continued:]

Almost complete numbness on the right side of the trunk of the body and on the right arm and leg. . . . The right breast is insensitive to pin pricks; the labia majora and minora are numb on the right side; there is little sensitivity on the right side of the vagina; clitoris is insensitive when not erect, but becomes acutely sensitive during erection, which can be produced easily without creating any pleasant sensations. . . .

Treatment.—Iron tonic, 20 centigrams; extract of *nux vomica*, 7 centigrams; mustard plasters to the epigastrium; double portions of food.

* I.e. vaginal douches of anti-spasmodic drugs.—EDS.

No observable change during the months of October, November, and December; a single attack of hysteria. . . .

Toward the middle of May, 1855, the patient experienced no noticeable improvement; she constantly experienced dizziness, headaches, indigestion. . . . The numbness on the right side persisted. . . . Weary, she lost courage and wanted to leave the hospital. . . .

This woman, having seen a neighboring patient seized by paralysis improve under the influence of the same treatment, was heartened, and taking advantage of her new attitude, we pursued the treatment energetically, supplementing it with massage of the limbs, iron tonic, Bordeaux wines, and a good diet. . . .

February 3, 1856. . . . Released from hospital.

This young woman returned to her family, where she was welcomed; her health improved; all nervous symptoms disappeared; and eighteen months after, I learned that she was in perfect health and no longer had any traces of weakness or numbness.

24. A young Englishwoman dies of consumption: Emily Shore

The daughter of an English minister and private tutor, Margaret Emily Shore (1819–39) began keeping a journal at the age of eleven. From her writings, she emerges as an extremely sensitive and precocious young girl, who was an acute observer of everything she encountered. Educated at home, she was an eager student of history, poetry, and natural science, and spent much of her time studying and drawing plants and animals. At sixteen Emily contracted tuberculosis, the notorious “consumption” that took so many lives in the Victorian period. The following excerpts from her journal chronicle the progression of her illness and depict the almost painfully matter-of-fact fashion in which she faced death. She wrote the last entry on May 27, 1839, two weeks before she died, at the age of nineteen.

March 7, 1836.—I have been confined to the house, and partly to my bed, by a cough—a thing which I have not for many years had, except before my last fever. So that, unless I get out very soon, I am afraid that I shall miss the first singing birds of passage. I see from the windows that several crocuses are in blow. I am likely to miss the first violets and primroses also.

June 6, 1836.—To me, all this spring and part of the summer are quite lost, and it might almost as well have been continual winter. From the first day of March up to my illness, I have not been altogether out of the house more than sixteen different days, including going to church and a few drives, and some occasions on which I merely stepped out of the house for a few minutes; and during the whole year I have been in a state of very indifferent health, not to speak of this month of fever. So that I have been quite debarred this year from rising at four or five o'clock, and walking in the woods at will to watch the

SOURCE: Margaret Emily Shore, *Journal of Emily Shore* (London, 1891), pp. 137, 139–42, 174–75, 219–20, 256, 263–64, 350–51.

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birds and hear their songs. I shall not now recover my strength for many weeks; and my mind, even my memory, is equally enfeebled. The very slightest fever completely upsets all one's powers.

June 29, 1836.—I get stronger, but my cough gives way very slowly, and my pulse continues high and strong. There is certainly danger of my lungs becoming affected, but we trust that, if it please God, the sea will restore me to health and remove the possibility of consumption. I know, however, that I must prepare myself for the worst, and I am fully aware of papa's and mamma's anxiety about me.

July 5, 1836.—To-day was effected the chief object of our stay in town, the consultation with the physician. . . . Dr. James Clark is of middle height, rather thin, very dark, and of a grave and quiet demeanour, speaking very little. His aspect, however, is very pleasing and amiable. My illness has made me exceedingly nervous, and his presence agitated me greatly. I trembled all over, my heart throbbed, my pulse quickened, and the perspiration broke out from every pore. Dr. Clark examined me most minutely, tapped me, and tried his stethoscope on my chest, neck, back, side, shoulder. He said nothing about the result of his observations, but retired with mamma to another private conference. I, in the mean time, was left in a state of anxiety amounting almost to agony. I could by no means compose myself; the doctor's tapping had given me pain of the left side of my chest, and I had no small reason to apprehend the pulmonary disease had already begun. I prayed earnestly for submission to the Divine will, and that I might be prepared for death; I made up my mind that I was to be the victim of consumption.

At length mamma re-entered the room, and told me Dr. Clark's opinion, viz. that my lungs are by no means at present diseased, but that there is the greatest danger of it, unless extreme care be taken of me. This was much more than I had dared to hope, and I thanked God for it.

Dec. 25, 1836.—Yesterday I was sixteen years old, to-day I am seventeen; the sound of the words seem to effect a greater change than the actual space of time. I lay awake last night for a long time, kept awake by a little matter which has disturbed my equanimity and put me into a painful state of mind. I heard the midnight clock strike twelve; I counted every stroke, and when the last had sounded, I had completed my seventeenth year, and entered on another.

I look back on the year I have just finished with many mingled feelings, most of a painful nature. . . . When I have felt happy, I have also felt that something more was wanting to complete that happiness, and for that something I have ardently wished and longed. This feeling has always rankled within, with various degrees of intensity, sometimes so little acknowledged to myself (never to anyone else) that it has seemed no longer to exist, and for a time my life has glided on in calm and uninterrupted enjoyment. I remember that last year I had no outward impediment to happiness. All was prosperous around me, I could pursue unchecked all my favourite studies and amusements, and I grew more and more attached to the world and estranged from heaven. In this state I felt my danger. I felt as if no ordinary call could awaken me from my dream of happiness; I almost wished and prayed for

God's wrath?

affliction, if there were no other means of correction. And has not God answered this half-indulged wish? Has He not chastised me by withdrawing me from those things which chiefly formed the delight of my life? It is a striking, an impressive circumstance, in which I cannot fail to see His fatherly hand.

There is completely a world within me, unknown, unexplored, by any but myself. I see well that my feelings, my qualities, my character, are understood by none else. I am not what I am supposed to be; I am liked and loved far more than I deserve. I hate—yes, I truly hate myself; for I see the depths of sin within me, which are hidden from all other eyes. No one ought ever to feel satisfied with himself, with his progress in holiness; but they may feel peace of mind; and much must I be changed before I can reach this state! Yet I have now many advantages, which I hope to improve. I have more leisure for serious thought; I have a dangerous illness hovering over my head to warn me; I am, by my removal to Devonshire, removed also from the temptations to some of my chief faults.

Sept. 18, 1837.—In looking back on the beginning of my illness, I feel sure that one of the principal causes of it was overworking my mind with too hard study, which is no uncommon cause of consumption. For many months before I was actually ill, I tasked my intellectual powers to the utmost. My mind never relaxed, never unbent; even in those hours meant for relaxation, I was still engaged in acquiring knowledge and storing my memory. While dressing, I learnt by heart chapters of the Bible, and repeated them when I walked out, and when I lay in bed; I read Gibbon when I curled my hair at night; at meals my mind was still bent on its improvement, and turned to arithmetic, history, and geography. This system I pursued voluntarily with the most unwearied assiduity, disregarding the increasing delicacy of my health, and the symptoms that it was giving way.

Oct 1, 1837.—My cough is gradually returning with the approach of winter, more than it did last year. My short breath and palpitations of the heart on moving or lying down are very annoying; my heart beats so loud at night that it is like the ticking of a clock. I am subject, too, to pains in the chest and side; and altogether I am very weak and out of health. I feel as if I should never recover the strength of body and unwearied vigour and activity of mind I once possessed. God's will be done, it is meant for the best, though so early in life, when I have but just quitted childhood; it is a painful prospect, and a severe trial both in endurance and anticipation.

July 1, 1838.—I have been addicted of late to growing faint after breakfast. I do not much mind it myself, only that it alarms papa and mamma. Poor papa is so anxious about me, that one would think every cough I utter is my death-knell.

I suppose I am never to be strong again. It is nearly three months since I have walked into the Forest, and now I am always left behind when others go out. This evening I could almost have cried when I saw mamma, Aunt Charlotte, Cousin Susan, and the four children set forth joyously to ramble in some of the loveliest glades, and poor I was obliged to content myself with the dull drawing-room. It was a sweet, still summer's evening, such as is proper

for the enjoyment of the Forest, and I would have given worlds to have gone too. However, I had a partner in misery, poor papa, who is at present equally unable to walk. So we remained quietly conversing at home, and certainly I enjoyed it very much. I grew envious again of the strong party, when they returned at nearly nine o'clock, extolling the beauties they had seen, and bringing in a handful of butterfly orchises, whose delicious fragrance scented all the room, and recalled me to those long-past days when I used to gather them at Woodbury.

July 14, 1838.—Here is a query, which I shall be able to answer decidedly at the end of this volume, most likely before. What is indicated by all these symptoms—this constant shortness of breath, this most harassing hard cough, this perpetual expectoration, now tinged with blood, this quick pulse, this painfully craving appetite, which a very little satisfies even to disgust, these restless, feverish nights, continual palpitations of the heart, and deep, circumscribed flushes? Is it consumption really come at last, after so many threatenings? I am not taken by surprise, for I have had it steadily, almost daily, in view for two years, and have always known that my lungs were delicate. I feel no uneasiness on the subject, even if my ideas (I cannot call them fears) prove right. It must be my business to prepare for another world; may God give me grace to do so!

May 18, 1839.—On the 4th of April I broke a blood-vessel, and am now dying of consumption, in great suffering, and may not live many weeks. God be merciful to me a sinner.

God be praised for giving me such excellent parents. They are more than any wishes could desire, or than any words can sufficiently praise. Their presence is like sunshine to my illness.

May 22, 1839.—I have suffered much with lying long, and have just been put on our hydrostatic bed. Relief wonderful. My portrait has just been taken; they say excellent.

I linger on in the same way, and do not yet sink. Alas! I can never see Richard [her brother] again.

May 27, 1839.—I feel weaker every morning, and I suppose am beginning to sink; still I can at times take up my pen. I have had my long back hair cut off. Dear papa wears a chain made from it. Mamma will have one too.

Part II

The Adult Woman: Personal Life



Documents 25-62

25. 'The Angel in the House'

The phrase the angel in the house is now much more famous than the poem from which it derives, but in Victorian England—and America—"The Angel in the House" (1854-56) by Coventry Patmore sold better than any other poetic work except Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King.' Its simple plot, inspired by Coventry's intense love for his wife, Emily Andrews Patmore (1824-62), describes the courtship and marriage of a young couple. Coventry originally intended to include a description of the bliss of domestic life in his poem, but after ten years of marriage and six children, Emily contracted tuberculosis, and he could not bring himself to complete the work. Although the poem tells us little in specific detail about the nature of Victorian domesticity, it is a very full expression of the idealization of womanhood that is central to the theory about woman's separate domestic sphere. The angel is introduced as purer than Eve, but she is not simply innocent; she exercises power in secret and subtle ways.

The angelic woman was not a British creation alone: the French literature of domesticity was replete with angels. Feminists took on the angelic ideal and charged that the self-sacrificing demands it placed on women were coercive. In the second selection Maria Deraismes (1828-94), a leading French feminist, gives a speech in Paris denouncing the angel. In the excerpt here Deraismes is taking issue with her fellow republican Jules Michelet, whose best-selling books on women romanticized love within marriage.

(i) Coventry Patmore

The Rose of the World

Lo, when the Lord made North and South
And sun and moon ordained, He,
Forthbringing each by word of mouth
In order of its dignity,

SOURCES: (i) Coventry Patmore, *Poems*, 4th ed. (London, 1890), 1: 23-24, 88-91, 123-24, 146-47. (ii) Maria Deraismes, "La Femme et le droit," public address given in the late 1860's, in *Eye dans l'humanité* (Paris, 1891), pp. 16-17.

25. 'The Angel in the House' 135

Did man from the crude clay express
By sequence, and, all else decreed,
He form'd the woman; nor might less
Than Sabbath such a work succeed.
And still with favour singled out,
Marr'd less than man by mortal fall,
Her disposition is devout,

Her countenance angelical;
The best things that the best believe
Are in her face so kindly writ
The faithless, seeing her, conceive
Not only heaven, but hope of it;
No idle thought her instinct shrouds,
But fancy chequers settled sense,
Like alteration of the clouds
On noonday's azure permanence;
Pure dignity, composure, ease
Declare affections nobly fix'd,
And impulse sprung from due degrees
Of sense and spirit sweetly mix'd.

Her modesty, her chieftest grace,
The cestus clasping Venus' side,
How potent to deject the face
Of him who would affront its pride!
Wrong dares not in her presence speak,
Nor spotted thought its taint disclose
Under the protest of a cheek
Outbragging Nature's boast the rose.
In mind and manners how discreet;

How artless in her very art;
How candid in discourse; how sweet
The concord of her lips and heart;
How simple and how circumspect;
How subtle and how fancy-free;
Though sacred to her love, how deck'd
With unexclusive courtesy;
How quick in talk to see from far
The way to vanquish or evade;
How able her persuasions are
To prove, her reasons to persuade;
How (not to call true instinct's bent
And woman's very nature, harm),
How amiable and innocent

Her pleasure in her power to charm;
How humbly careful to attract,

without
being

can influence people
earlier
thing about
being nice
to everyone

Though crown'd with all the soul desires
Connubial aptitude exact,
Diversity that never tires.

The Changed Allegiance

Watch how a bird, that captived sings,
The cage set open, first looks out,
Yet fears the freedom of his wings,
And now withdraws, and flits about,
And now looks forth again; until,
Grown bold, he hops on stool and chair
And now attains the window-sill,
And now confides himself to air.
The maiden so, from love's free sky
In chaste and prudent counsels caged,
But longing to be loosen'd by
Her suitor's faith declared and gaged,
When blest with that release desired,
First doubts if truly she is free,
Then pauses, restlessly retired,
Alarm'd at too much liberty;
But soon, remembering all her debt
To plighted passion, gets by rote
Her duty; says, 'I love him!' yet
The thought half chokes her in her throat
And, like that fatal 'I am thine,'
Comes with alternate gush and check
And joltings of the heart, as wine
Pour'd from a flask of narrow neck.
Is he indeed her choice? She fears
Her Yes was rashly said, and shame,
Remorse, and ineffectual tears
Revolt from his conceded claim.
Oh, treason! So, with desperate nerve,
She cries, 'I am in love, am his;'
Lets run the cables of reserve,
And floats into a sea of bliss,
And laughs to think of her alarm,
Avows she was in love before,
Though his avowal was the charm
Which open'd to her own the door.
She loves him for his mastering air,
Whence, Parthian-like, she slaying flies
His flattering look, which seems to wear
Her loveliness in manly eyes;

His smile, which, by reverse, portends
An awful wrath, should reason stir;
(How fortunate it is they're friends,
And he will ne'er be wroth with her!)
His power to do or guard from harm;
If he but chose to use it half,
And catch her up in one strong arm,
What could she do but weep, or laugh
His words, which still instruct, but so
That this applause seems still implied,
'How wise in all she ought to know,
'How ignorant of all beside!'
His skilful suit, which leaves her free,
Gives nothing for the world to name,
And keeps her conscience safe, while he,
With half the bliss, takes all the blame
His clear repute with great and small;
The jealousy his choice will stir;
But, ten times more than ten times all,
She loves him for his love of her.
How happy 'tis he seems to see
In her that utter loveliness
Which she, for his sake, longs to be!
At times, she cannot but confess
Her other friends are somewhat blind;
Her parents' years excuse neglect,
But all the rest are scarcely kind,
And brothers grossly want respect;
And oft she views what he admires
Within her glass, and sight of this
Makes all the sum of her desires
To be devotion unto his.
But still, at first, whatever's done,
A touch, her hand press'd lightly, she
Stands dizzied, shock'd, and flush'd, like one
Set sudden neck-deep in the sea;
And, though her bond for endless time
To his good pleasure gives her o'er,
The slightest favour seems a crime,
Because it makes her love him more.
But that she ne'er will let him know;
For what were love should reverence cease
A thought which makes her reason so
Inscrutable, it seems caprice.
With her, as with a desperate town,
Too weak to stand, too proud to treat,

Doesn't
know
his power?

he has
some
power
over

be
beautiful
for
him.

sex is
shocking

But that she ne'er will let him know;
For what were love should reverence cease
A thought which makes her reason so
Inscrutable, it seems caprice.

How
if she
tells him
he'll not
take her
any more!

The conqueror, though the walls are down,
 Has still to capture street by street;
 But, after that, habitual faith,
 Divorced from self, where late 'twas due,
 Walks nobly in its novel path,
 And she's to changed allegiance true;
 And prizing what she can't prevent,
 (Right wisdom, often misdeem'd whim,)
 Her will's indomitably bent

On mere submissiveness to him;
To him she'll cleave, for him forsake
 Father's and mother's fond command!
 He is her lord, for he can take
Hold of her faint heart with his hand.

In Love

If he's capricious she'll be so,
 But, if his duties constant are,
She lets her loving favour glow
As steady as a tropic star;
 Appears there nought for which to weep,
 She'll weep for nought, for his dear sake;
 She clasps her sister in her sleep;
 Her love in dreams is most awake.
 Her soul, that once with pleasure shook,
 Did any eyes her beauty own,
 Now wonders how they dare to look
 On what belongs to him alone;
 The indignity of taking gifts
 Exhilarates her loving breast;
A rapture of submission lifts
Her life into celestial rest;
 There's nothing left of what she was;
 Back to the babe the woman dies,
And all the wisdom that she has
Is to love him for being wise.
She's confident because she fears,
 And, though discreet when he's away,
If none but her dear despot hears,
 She prattles like a child at play.
Perchance, when all her praise is said,
 He tells the news, a battle won,
 On either side ten thousand dead.
 'Alas!' she says; but, if 'twere known,

She thinks, 'He's looking on my face!
 'I am his joy; whate'er I do,
 'He sees such time-contenting grace
 'In that, he'd have me always so!
 And, evermore, for either's sake,
 To the sweet folly of the dove,
 She joins the cunning of the snake,
 To rivet and exalt his love;
~~Her mode of candour is deceit;~~
~~And what she thinks from what she'll say,~~
 (Although I'll never call her cheat,)
~~Lies far as Scotland from Cathay.~~
 Without his knowledge he was won;
 Against his nature kept devout,
 She'll never tell him how 'twas done,
 And he will never find it out.
 If, sudden, he suspects her wiles,
 And hears her forging chain and trap
 And looks, she sits in simple smiles,
 Her two hands lying in her lap.
 Her secret (privilege of the Bard,
 Whose fancy is of either sex),
 Is mine; but let the darkness guard
 Myst'ries that light would more perplex.

The Married Lover

Why, having won her, do I woo?
 Because her spirit's vestal grace
 Provokes me always to pursue,
 But, spirit-like, eludes embrace;
 Because her womanhood is such
That, as on court-days subjects kiss
The Queen's hand, yet so near a touch
Affirms no mean familiarness,
 Nay, rather marks more fair the height
 Which can with safety so neglect
 To dread, as lower ladies might,
 That grace could meet with disrespect,
 Thus she with happy favour feeds
 Allegiance from a love so high
 That thence no false conceit proceeds
 Of difference bridged, or state put by;
 Because, although in act and word
 As lowly as a wife can be,

1 she
 saying
 Lesbian

Her manners, when they call me lord,
 Remind me 'tis by courtesy;
 Not with her least consent of will,
 Which would my proud affection hurt,
But by the noble style that still
Imputes an unattain'd desert;
 Because her gay and lofty brows,
 When all is won which hope can ask,
 Reflect a light of hopeless snows
 That bright in virgin ether bask;
 Because, though free of the outer court
 I am, this Temple keeps its shrine
 Sacred to Heaven; because, in short,
She's not and never can be mine.

(ii) Maria Deraiemes

Of all woman's enemies, I tell you that the worst are those who insist that woman is an angel. To say that woman is an angel is to impose on her, in a sentimental and admiring fashion, all duties, and to reserve for oneself all rights; it is to imply that her specialty is self-effacement, resignation, and sacrifice; it is to suggest to her that woman's greatest glory, her greatest happiness, is to immolate herself for those she loves; it is to let her understand that she will be generously furnished with every opportunity for exercising her appetites. It is to say that she will respond to absolutism by submission, to brutality by meekness, to indifference by tenderness, to inconstancy by fidelity, to egotism by devotion.

In the face of this long enumeration, I decline the honor of being an angel. No one has the right to force me to be both dupe and victim. Self-sacrifice is not a habit, a custom; it is an extra! It is not on the program of one's duties. No power has the right to impose it on me. Of all acts, sacrifice is the freest, and it is precisely because it is free that it is so admirable.

26. French dowry inquiries

Propertied French families—from the peasantry to the aristocracy—traditionally viewed marriage as a financial arrangement, where affection if it developed came only after the couple and their families had assured themselves of the economic and social suitability of the match.

The gentleman in the first selection, who writes to inquire about the

SOURCES: (i) George Sand Papers, G-37, Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris. (ii) Gouever letters in possession of Mlle Vaudoux, Villerable (Loir-et-Cher), France. The editors are grateful to Mlle Vaudoux for permission to use these letters and to Professor Judith Silver, University of New Hampshire, who arranged for us to use the letters and translated and annotated them.

dowry of Aurore Dupin (the future writer George Sand; 1804-76) on behalf of a friend who has never met her, follows the conventions dictated by his social class. This letter offers a vivid contrast between the delicacy of manners and discourse necessary for such an inquiry and the bald precision of the financial information requested.

The three letters in the second selection indicate that economic considerations were equally important among the French peasantry. In the first letter a local suitor, a coach driver at the nearby chateau, formally requests the hand of Céline Gouever, a woman in her early twenties living with her parents in a small village in central France; he obviously considers her a good catch since she will inherit her uncle's land and house. The second letter presents the negative reaction of her uncle, the local parish priest, and the third is Gouever's evaluation of another suitor a year and a half later.

(i) Aurore Dupin (George Sand)

Monsieur,

One of my friends who intends to establish his son, and who has heard people speak favorably of the granddaughter of Madame Dupin, owner of Nohant, desires to obtain some indispensable information. If I have been well informed, you, more than anyone else, are in a position to give me some specifics. I should like to know if Madame Dupin envisions marrying Mademoiselle her granddaughter in the near future; to know the dowry of this young lady, the fortune she may one day count on, whether this fortune consists exclusively of real estate, or if there is money invested, what the approximate amount is, and finally, whether Mlle Dupin's father left any debts.

Please, Monsieur, be so good as to respond to these different questions with the most scrupulous exactitude. I am addressing you confidentially; the discretion that I require of you is a sure guarantee of my own. If things were to take a favorable turn, M. le Vicomte and Mme la Vicomtesse de Montlevé could eventually give all the explanations required concerning Mlle Dupin.

Please accept. . . .

Laisné de Ste. Marie
 rue Bannière No. 109
 Orléans—Loiret
 [March 3, 1821]

(ii) Céline Gouever

[Paul Noulain asks M. and Mme Gouever for the hand of their daughter, 1889.]

M., Mme Gouever

Undoubtedly, you found it strange that I presented myself three times in such a short period of time at your place. I've made my face known to you but you don't know me or my family. I shall ask for permission to get better acquainted.

That is why I am coming today to ask for the hand of your *demoiselle*.

My parents live in Savigny-sur-Braye and live on their income and my father is in the guano business. There are two children, my brother is married.

Since you are not acquainted with me I am taking the liberty of quickly tackling a difficult question.

My parents will add 2,000f to my present savings of 3,000f. Consequently I will then have 5,000f.

Knowing that you want your *demoiselle* to stay with you, I would accept that willingly.

I will furnish all the necessary information on my family background as well as on my immediate family. As for me you could ask the priest of St. Ouen and his mother who both know me, having known me at M. Martelliere's where I worked for six years. As for my family ask M. Prudhomme. I write as quickly as possible now because our masters are away for a month and I could visit more easily.

I hope that my letter will be well received and hoping to have a response.

Paul Noulin, driver

[Céline Gouever's uncle counsels her to reject Noulin's suit.]

Your dark, handsome, beardless suitor, mounted on his black horse, reminds me of two handsome beasts one mounted on top of the other. That is the impression he made on me when I read his letter. But I am wrong to speak like that because in truth the price he offers your parents for you, 5,000 and a few hundred francs, is obviously what you're worth, what do you think? Of course, I would not have offered as much. *damn!*

What you should say to him is that the price is not suitable, that he should go to the fair; he seems to be a real horse trader.

[Céline Gouever writes to her uncle about a second suitor, Dec. 17, 1890.]

Now let us talk about la Roche.* You ask me how Mama handled it. First she spoke about their wealth, saying that theirs was greatly superior to ours. They replied to her that they weren't concerned with money. That it was the young girl they were asking for and not anything else. Mlle V.† and Mama decided that the young man should come and he came to make an offer fifteen days ago. Friday Mama saw her sister again. She told her that I hadn't yet made up my mind. She said that we would see a little later, that there was no hurry, that they should give me some time, and that she shouldn't give up hope. Just as we had thought, Lizot, on his way back from Thore, didn't hesitate to give his opinion. Everybody at Meslay tells me the same thing. My ears are still ringing from all the advice. Everybody who knows them tells me they are decent people and I couldn't find anyone better than this boy on every count, so that I am very confused. Even more confused than I was, what should I do? I haven't the faintest idea. O my poor uncle, there is nothing worse than being a *demoiselle* of marriageable age.

* The home of the suitor's family.—EDS.

† A female relative of the suitor. The Lizot mentioned below was a maternal relative of Céline's.—EDS.

I'm confused

know it to be capable of much more—whether time & increasing intimacy is likely to produce any favorable change in my feelings is yet to be tried—but I feel that it is due to you to comply with yr [desires/wishes] as far as regards a more confidential communication of our thoughts & ideas on this most important subject—more I cannot promise at present, how it will terminate must yet be doubtful—but I can assure you that you will never have reason to complain of the want of sincerity & openness on my part.

There are some other difficulties existing in my mind of which I may hereafter speak to you—but I shall reserve them to some further communication—if you are still desirous of a continued intercourse.

Believe me my dear friend.

Your's with great sincerity
H.B.

28. A Parisian bourgeoisie contemplates marriage: Stéphanie Jullien

Not all nineteenth-century Frenchwomen accepted the mercenary view of marriage. In the following letters Stéphanie Jullien (1812–83), the only daughter in a large Parisian bourgeois family, expresses her anguish about choosing a suitor. In contrast to her brothers, all of whom had entered the liberal professions, Jullien's own role and security in life depended on marriage. Further, her father was pressing her to choose a husband and settle down, and in her indecision she sorely missed the counsel of her mother, who had died when Jullien was twenty-one. In these excerpts Jullien writes to her brother Auguste and her father about two suitors, the second of whom, Simon Lockroy, she finally accepted. It seems clear from these letters that Jullien not only sought economic security in marriage, but insisted on emotional satisfaction as well. Her wishes appear to have been realized, for her marriage to Lockroy was reportedly very happy.

[Stéphanie Jullien to her brother Auguste, March 6–7, 1833, Dieppe]

Mon Dieu! Such indecision! Such perplexity! What should I do! I almost wish I were not so free, that I were restrained or controlled, so that I would not have the responsibility for my future unhappiness or happiness. Because the more I think about it, the more confused I become, the more I hesitate. I get lost in my thoughts and can't make up my mind. Yesterday I decided to broach the subject to my aunt. She's so good, so affectionate with me, I think of her almost as a second mother. Besides, she has experience and she could help me to unravel my thoughts, to see what I have in my head, which I don't

SOURCE: Jullien Family Papers, 39 AP 4, Archives Nationales, Paris. The editors are grateful to Barbara Corrado Pope, University of Oregon, for making her translation of these letters available to us and for providing the information on Jullien's life and family.

even know myself. I left our small company of four or five people gathered in the salon, the music and the romantic ballads, and I went to my room with my aunt. We talked a long time. She promised the strictest secrecy. And when I told her everything and explained everything, she raised the same objections that you did. She was very opposed to the realization of the project in question and left me more indecisive than ever and almost persuaded me that it would be madness to accept. Moreover, she told me to wait for your letter, your advice. I have read and reread it and I am more confused than ever. This is not child's play, this is a matter of my whole life, of my future, of my happiness. *Mon dieu!* What should I decide? He is so young, and does not have a position. It's all so chancy. . . . Who can assure me that he will succeed? And if he loves me now, how do I know that he will always love me in the same way? Perhaps I'll be paving the way for lots of trouble if I accept, but if I refuse, what will I do?

Thursday, March 7.—It's me again. Perhaps you are waiting for a positive response. *Mon dieu!* I am just more confused, more indecisive, wavering and irresolute, I just got a letter from Alphonse* to which I'm going to respond—but what should I say? As with you, that I don't know what to do or to say or how to balance things, that I am lost in my thoughts? I could, I think, ask the advice of the whole universe and yet nothing could make me decide. As for writing to Adolphe and papa,† I already know what they will say. Nothing that Adolphe could say would relieve the pain I would feel in refusing. And nothing that papa would say could keep me from thinking that accepting is madness. Yes, it's madness; the more I think about it, the more I am persuaded. But, shall I tell you all? That it is an act of madness that I am on the verge of undertaking. Because to refuse would be painful to me—very painful. (It takes all my confidence in you to add the word very.) But to accept? To decide my fate once and for all, my whole destiny? I don't dare do it. I recoil, I tremble. And then, two years. Two years! It's a long time when one is afraid, and anxious and suffering and hoping and despairing. Two years when the end of it is happiness or unhappiness, life or death. Two years when a day can change all one's ideas, and one's irresolutions, when life is so short, when I could die tomorrow. I am having trouble getting my thoughts together. Oh, when I had my good mother I could have waited five or six or ten years, all the time that anyone could have wished. I was so happy then. But now, now that I will return home alone and sad and in such an awkward position that I want every day to escape from it and the family dissensions. And now with papa's fortune running out. But to become engaged? How do I know that in two years he won't change his mind or that I myself will not want to marry someone else? When one is not tied to another the heart can change. The

* Alphonse was a year older than Stéphanie. They had spent much of their childhood together. It is probable that he was a friend of the suitor, Léon Forestier.
—EDS.

† Adolphe, an elder brother, liked to advise the family on all financial matters.
—EDS.

stronger the emotion, the more fleeting it is. And if I, cold and calm, if I refuse his entreaties and little by little I become attached to him, and then, he grows weary of me and draws away from me, then in two years I'll almost be an old maid, and he'll still be so young that he'll scarcely be of an age to marry. Is that reasonable? And what guarantees me that he'll succeed at getting a position? It may take him ten years to assure it; he might not even be able to present himself in two years. I'll wait, watching as the beautiful years of my youth slip away, losing little by little the hope and the means of being advantageously established. Then the situation that I will put myself in by promising to wait will be even more uncomfortable. There will be cause for fear, for jealousy.

But it is necessary to answer him. We can't leave him in this incertitude for two years. I believe it is great madness to accept and I don't have the heart to refuse. I'm telling you everything, Auguste, everything. You asked me to take you completely into my confidence; you seem to have some ulterior motive. But now you know everything that's going on inside me, maybe better than I. My aunt is dissuading me, dissuading me as much as she can. All of her reasons seem so cold. Calculation! Always calculation! As if wealth were happiness. No, but it does help. I feel that and must take it into account. *En voilà!* Enough! My indecision is probably tiring you out. Oh this indecision is a torment, a frightful torment.

[Stéphanie Jullien to her father, April 6, 1833, Dieppe]

M. Forestier came to the house and asked me if I would become angry if he offered to marry me. . . . I was quite embarrassed by the question and told him to talk to you about it. . . .

The three great obstacles against him are his extreme youth (he is only six months older than me) and his lack of fortune (he can only bring 20,000 francs to the marriage). If I marry, I want to be sure that, if I don't marry a very rich man, at least I'll marry a man who has enough wealth to keep me from the brink of want, from worries and cares. Finally the third objection, on which my aunt lays great stress, is that he hasn't made a position for himself; that it will take him many years to do so; that his extreme youth [does not inspire?] confidence; that no one knows if he has talent, if he has a capacity to succeed in his chosen profession. . . .

However, I must confess that I have some distaste in refusing. M. Forestier is the first man to present himself to me. It seems, according to what I am told, that he has some fondness for me. Then, too, in the situation that I find myself—without my mother—I will frankly confess to you that I want to get settled one way or another, to have a position, a future. When I was with my good *maman*, I did not want anything but to stay as long as possible. But now that I am deprived of her, I find myself in a false, awkward, troublesome position; I want to break away. Moreover, if I want to get married it's time I started thinking about it. Time flies and I have come to an age when, if I put it off too long, I'll lose the hope and the means of getting established. On the other hand, it would cost me a lot to marry an unknown. It is very difficult to get to know the character of a man, particularly now that I am

alone and cannot get out much in society. I tremble to think of all the chances one takes in getting married. . . .

[Stéphanie Jullien to her father, Feb. 20, 1836]

You want an answer to your letter and I believe, in reality, that this is the best way to express a thousand things that one can lose sight of during a conversation in which one speaks only with difficulty and embarrassment. . . . I don't want to enumerate my anxieties about the future, the discord in my family that I felt more than anyone else, the vexations my mother endured and to which I was the only witness and consolation, the six months passed in anguish and despair over her deathbed. . . . I only want you to understand that I know grief. You men have a thousand occupations to distract you: society, business, politics, and work absorb you, exhaust you, upset you. But all these things also help you forcibly. As for us women who, as you have said to me from time to time, have only the roses in life, we feel more profoundly in our solitude and in our idleness the sufferings that you can slough off. I don't want to make a comparison here between the destiny of man and the destiny of woman: each sex has its own lot, its own troubles, its own pleasures. I only want to explain to you that excess of moroseness of which you complain and of which I am the first to suffer. My life has been sad, and my character shows it. But even now, when I do appear to be calm and happy, what anxieties, what worries about the future don't I have? I am not able to do anything for myself and for those around me. I am depriving my brothers in order to have a dowry. I am not even able to live alone, being obliged to take from others, not only in order to live but also in order to be protected, since social convention does not allow me to have independence. And yet the world finds me guilty of being the only person that I am at liberty to be; not having useful or productive work to do, not having any calling except marriage, and not being able to look by myself for someone who will suit me, I am full of cares and anxieties.

Is it astonishing that since any work that I could do would be *null* and *useless* for others as well as for myself, since it would not lead to anything, that I let myself be lazy, that I try to prolong my sleep in order to escape life? This laziness that you seem to reproach me for is really a means of discharging an excess of energy that has no outlet. If you believe that this *laziness* prevents me from doing anything, you are mistaken. I would quickly find courage and ardor again if I had some mission to fulfill or if some goal were proposed to me. But that is not the case. I don't have any calling, nor could I have one. That has been the most ardent of my wishes and no one will let me do it. I don't understand the reasons, and I'm not accusing anyone if I don't have a calling. I hope that one gives me the same benefit of a doubt, because it is not my fault. As for the sadness that I am accused of, one should not be astonished by it. This awkward position in which I find myself, my memories, my fears, my anxieties, often the delicacy of my health, are enough cause for it. . . . Would one be just if one reproached you for the annoyed and sad air that you often have?

I don't mean to say by all this that I don't have any faults. I have them, and I know they are very great. That is yet another reason why I hesitate to marry—for now it is time to talk about the matter at hand. I feel very keenly the urgent necessity of guaranteeing myself support. I have gone over and repeated to myself all the arguments that you have addressed to me. I know all the reasons why this party is so suitable and that it will be difficult, perhaps impossible, to find someone else as fitting. . . . That is why I hesitated for so long, that is why I did not say *no* three months ago. I have reflected a great deal, perhaps *too much*—although you appear to doubt it—and it is these reflections that make me irresolute.

I am asking for more time. It is not too much to want to see and know a man for ten months, even a year when it is a matter of passing one's life with him. There is no objection to make, you say. But the most serious and the most important presents itself: *I do not love him.* Don't think I am talking about a romantic and impossible passion or an ideal love, neither of which I ever hope to know. I am talking of a feeling that makes one want to see someone, that makes his absence painful and his return desirable, that makes one interested in what another is doing, that makes one want another's happiness almost in spite of oneself, that makes, finally, the duties of a woman toward her husband pleasures and not efforts. It is a feeling without which marriage would be hell, a feeling that cannot be born out of esteem, and which to me, however, seems to be the very basis of conjugal happiness. I can't feel these emotions immediately. Indeed, considering the bustle and bother that this affair has caused, it would not be surprising if I never felt them. Let me have some time. I want to love, not out of any sense of duty, but for myself and for the happiness of the one to whom I attach my life, who will suffer if he only encounters coldness in me, when he brings me love and devotion.

I am, you say, cold and not very hospitable. How else could I be with someone that I do not love, that I would marry for reason's sake, in order to give myself *a lot in life*, who would be imposed on me by a kind of necessity? How could I be sufficient to his happiness? How could I hold onto him, if I do not love him and desire him?

I hesitate, then. I wait for duty's sake, for reason's sake, for necessity's sake. I don't think I'm being a prude or a coquette. I don't mean to turn anyone's head or inspire ill-fated affection. I only want to make sure that I don't risk my happiness and my virtue. I want to be sure that I will be able to fulfill my duties. If I am cold and reserved, it is because I fear becoming involved. I fear giving hopes to someone that perhaps will not be realized. As for the rest, I don't have *any* kind of inclination for *anyone at all*. I enter into emotional attachment with great difficulty, and for that reason my attachment can only be more solid and more desirable.

So I ask for more time, reflection and patience. If one does not want to accord it to me, I will immediately renounce an engagement in which I will not feel it possible to fulfill my duties. I am striving that my heart should be in accord with my reasons and my desires. I don't want to make a marriage

for myself and for *another*, which will be the hell of which Dante spoke: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

hands. I just took pity on him and told him mighty plain dat he must limber up his tongue and ask sumpin', say what he mean, wantin' to visit them pigs so often. Us carry on foolishness' bout de little boar shoat pig and de little sow pig, then I squeal in laughter over how he scrouge so close; de slop bucket tipples over and I lost my seat. Dat ever remain de happiest minute of my eighty-two years.

30. The advantages of not marrying: Harriet Martineau

The daughter of a prosperous manufacturer, Harriet Martineau (1802–76) was born in Norwich, England. Her parents, committed Unitarians, believed that all eight of their children should be given a good education so they would be equipped to earn a living, and Harriet proved a hard-working and gifted student. Unfortunately, the rigid discipline enforced in the Martineau household, and the rough treatment she received from her siblings, made Harriet an extremely morbid and unhappy child. Ill-health served only to exacerbate her gloomy spirits: she had no sense of taste or smell, and suffered from deafness.

One of the most famous women writers of the century, Martineau's first published works appeared in 1827—"two little eightpenny stories." Though she never entirely left off writing, for a time the financial difficulties caused by her father's death and the subsequent failure of the family fortune forced her to take up needlework to support herself. Then, in 1832, she published a series of tales designed to popularize the subject of political economy; these stories made her a "literary lion." Despite her persistently poor health, Martineau remained a prodigious author all her life.

Although Martineau died a spinster, at the age of twenty-four she briefly contemplated marriage to one of her brother James's fellow students. After much unhappiness, her fiancé went insane and died. In this selection, Martineau expresses relief that her courtship did not end in marriage and exults in the freedom and independence that she has enjoyed as a spinster.

And now my own special trial was at hand. It is not necessary to go into detail about it. The news which got abroad that we had grown comparatively poor,—and the evident certainty that we were never likely to be rich, so wrought upon the mind of one friend as to break down the mischief which I have referred to as caused by ill-offices. My friend had believed me rich, was generous about making me a poor man's wife, and had been discouraged in more ways than one. He now came to me, and we were soon virtually engaged. I was at first very anxious and unhappy. My veneration for his *morale* was such that I felt I dared not undertake the charge of his happiness: and yet I dared not refuse, because I saw it would be his death blow. I was ill,—I was deaf,—I was in an entangled state of mind between conflicting duties

SOURCE: *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography and Memorials of Harriet Martineau*, ed. Maria Weston Chapman (Boston, 1877), 1: 99–102.

and some lower considerations; and many a time did I wish, in my fear that I should fail, that I had never seen him. I am far from wishing that now;—now that the beauty of his goodness remains to me, clear of all painful regrets. But there was a fearful period to pass through. Just when I was growing happy, surmounting my fears and doubts, and enjoying his attachment, the consequences of his long struggle and suspense overtook him. He became suddenly insane; and after months of illness of body and mind, he died. The calamity was aggravated to me by the unaccountable insults I received from his family, whom I had never seen. Years afterwards, when his sister and I met, the mystery was explained. His family had been given to understand, by cautious insinuations, that I was actually engaged to another, while receiving my friend's addresses! There has never been any doubt in my mind that, considering what I was in those days, it was happiest for us both that our union was prevented by any means. I am, in truth, very thankful for not having married at all. I have never since been tempted, nor have suffered any thing at all in relation to that matter which is held to be all-important to woman,—love and marriage. Nothing, I mean, beyond occasional annoyance, presently disposed of. Every literary woman, no doubt, has plenty of importunity of that sort to deal with; but freedom of mind and coolness of manner dispose of it very easily: and since the time I have been speaking of, my mind has been wholly free from all idea of love-affairs. My subsequent literary life in London was clear from all difficulty and embarrassment—no doubt because I was evidently too busy, and too full of interests of other kinds to feel any awkwardness,—to say nothing of my being then thirty years of age; an age at which, if ever, a woman is certainly qualified to take care of herself. I can easily conceive how I might have been tempted,—how some deep springs in my nature might have been touched, then as earlier; but, as a matter of fact, they never were; and I consider the immunity a great blessing, under the liabilities of a moral condition such as mine was in the olden time. If I had had a husband dependent on me for his happiness, the responsibility would have made me wretched. I had not faith enough in myself to endure avoidable responsibility. If my husband had *not* depended on me for his happiness, I should have been jealous. So also with children. The care would have so overpowered the joy,—the love would have so exceeded the ordinary chances of life,—the fear on my part would have so impaired the freedom on theirs, that I rejoice not to have been involved in a relation for which I was, or believed myself unfit. The veneration in which I hold domestic life has always shown me that that life was not for those whose self-respect had been early broken down, or had never grown. Happily, the majority are free from this disability. Those who suffer under it had better be as I,—as my observation of married, as well as single life assures me. When I see what conjugal love is, in the extremely rare cases in which it is seen in its perfection, I feel that there is a power of attachment in me that has never been touched. When I am among little children, it frightens me to think what my idolatry of my own children would have been. But, through it all, I have ever been thankful

to be alone. My strong will, combined with anxiety of conscience, makes me fit only to live alone; and my taste and liking are for living alone. The older I have grown, the more serious and irremediable have seemed to me the evils and disadvantages of married life, as it exists among us at this time: and I am provided with what it is the bane of single life in ordinary cases to want,—substantial, laborious and serious occupation. My business in life has been to think and learn, and to speak out with absolute freedom what I have thought and learned. The freedom is itself a positive and never-failing enjoyment to me, after the bondage of my early life. My work and I have been fitted to each other, as is proved by the success of my work and my own happiness in it. The simplicity and independence of this vocation first suited my infirm and ill-developed nature, and then sufficed for my needs, together with family ties and domestic duties, such as I have been blessed with, and as every woman's heart requires. Thus, I am not only entirely satisfied with my lot, but think it the very best for me,—under my constitution and circumstances: and I long ago came to the conclusion that, without meddling with the case of the wives and mothers, I am probably the happiest single woman in England. Who could have believed, in that awful year 1826, that such would be my conclusion a quarter of a century afterwards!

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