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FROM CHATTEL TO CHALLENGER: THE CHANGING IMAGE
OF THE AMERICAN WOMAN, 1826-1848

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
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The Ohio State University
1967

Approved by

[Signature]
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"There are so many truths which creep into society, awaiting but the majority, to make them held sacred as principles."

Auguste Carlier
VITA

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INTRODUCTION

Studies of the women's rights movement in America all share the premise that the public image of the American woman changed in the early 1800's from the traditional one of women as simple, home-bound chattels to one of women as intelligent, influential individuals. The usual assumption is that this shift in image was necessary before changes could be made in legislation and actual practices regarding women, or before an organized women's rights movement could develop. The causes of this change have been thoroughly explored, and factors such as Jacksonian democratic philosophies, the social reform movement, new inventions and machines, increased leisure, immigration, and women's entry into the labor force have been suggested as possible explanations.¹ No one, however, has examined the specific processes by which the public's image of women changed, even though the change itself appears to be seminal to the later women's rights movement.

The initial problem in undertaking such an investigation is the definition of "images." Henry Nash Smith has tried to define them as "larger or smaller units of the same kind of thing ... an intellectual

construction that fuses concept and emotion . . . with the further characteristic of being collective representations rather than the work of a single mind. Gordon Allport similarly defines an image as the "ideational content of a category" which may be favorable or unfavorable, based on some facts or none. Clearly, images are difficult to delineate, so for the purposes of this study they will be loosely characterized as collective beliefs about a group which are based on routinized habits of thinking and judging. As Smith and Allport both point out, whether or not images correspond to reality is irrelevant. Images are worthy of study only because they represent people's attitudes which in turn affect people's actions. It is not necessary, for example, to know whether women were actually stronger physically in the 1830's and thus able to engage in more activities than they were in the first years of the century. What is important is that people believed women were stronger and were therefore willing to allow them to attempt more activities. In other words, the image's influence on action, not its essential truth, is what is significant.

The next obstacle is to determine where images are to be found. Because images are collective, the prospective source must reflect collective thinking; and because it is necessary to determine long-range changes in images, the source must also be continuous over a relatively long period of time. These criteria eliminate such individual sources as

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diaries, journals, and letters which embody personal ideas at specific points in time. This leaves the mass media which in the early 1800's consisted primarily of newspapers and periodicals. But newspapers also fail to meet the necessary standards because they concentrated on the current news item and were usually short-lived.

Fortunately, some periodicals fit both criteria. Although most periodicals of this period had an average life of only two years, two or three major journals with established reputations and widespread circulation lasted from several decades to more than half a century. These journals can be expected to mirror collective thinking because magazine editors shaped editorial policies to appeal and sell to a specific group by reflecting their interests, their likes and dislikes, and their self-concepts. William L. Chenery observed that "every magazine that looks to readers for support is designed to interest a particular group, large or small," and thus its editors must consider the readers' habits, interests, and points of view. In short, if a magazine does not appeal it will not sell. Any periodical with respectable circulation figures can therefore be assumed to have had rapport with its readers and their attitudes and beliefs. Periodicals also indicate current attitudes and thinking by the way editors tried to change their readers. An editor's attempts to refine manners and improve morals in particular ways

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says something about his readers' current manners and morals. This is particularly true of the American society of the early 1800's which was still relatively crude and conscious of itself as a new society. Editors tried to appeal to this audience by giving it the ideas, information, entertainment, and stories it wanted.

Periodical literature is especially significant for the early 1800's because of the unrivaled position it held. Increased leisure, money and education was producing a large new reading public with an insatiable appetite. Of the available media magazines had the greatest appeal to this new audience because they provided entertainment which the newspapers did not, and because they were less expensive than books. After 1825 there was such a flurry of activity in magazine publishing that the New York Mirror termed it "the golden age of periodicals!" As early as the 1860's many Americans realized that their periodicals would be outstanding relics to future generations and that through them current thoughts and sentiments on all topics would be communicated.

On these grounds, periodicals appear to be the best prospective source of images. But which is the best periodical? Without a doubt,

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Godey's Lady's Book is the answer. It has been called an "American institution" which,

... affected manners, morals, tastes, fashions in clothes, homes, and diet of generations of American readers. It did much to form the American woman's idea of what she was like, how she should act, and how she should insist that she be treated.9

The many favorable remarks made concerning Godey's in other journals and in newspapers of its own time substantiate the claim that it was the Bible of every "right-thinking American woman."10 It had the advantage of being published in Philadelphia, the seat of the "ripest culture" in America and the center of wealth and fashion.11 Its circulation figures were astronomical but even they cannot tell the whole story of its widespread influence because not only was it passed from hand to hand, but many of its readers were influential members of society.12 What makes Godey's even more attractive as a source for this study is that its major concern was the American woman. This does not mean that it was read only by women, for it was not; but it does indicate that it was concerned primarily with American ideas concerning women.

One objection that might be raised against Godey's is that it appealed primarily to the middle class, but this is a superficial

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observation. Godley's was based on middle class attitudes, but because class lines were so fluid and opportunity to rise so great, the lower classes aspired to leisure class life and tried to emulate their middle class superiors in preparation for their own rise. Godley's, for example, was filled with stories concerning women with servant problems, yet its tremendous circulation could not possibly all have gone to women with servants. More importantly, since the change in the image of the American woman was primarily a middle class movement, it is not important that the working class be thoroughly represented.

Godley's, as well as other related source materials, will be examined for the years 1828 through 1848. The year 1828 was chosen as a starting point because it marks the beginning of publication of the first successful ladies' magazine in America. This was the opening of an era in which women, now given more education and more leisure, formed a major part of the reading public. Sixty-four ladies' magazines began publication between 1830 and 1850. This wide appeal to women seems to indicate that the image of them was already changing and that they were beginning to be defined as a separate interest group.


14 Most journals did not yet conceive of "women" as a specific topic. They seldom printed articles on or about women, and made little attempt to influence public opinion regarding women. Those that did gradually begin to deal with "women," such as The Knickerbocker and the Ladies' Companion, will be used in conjunction with Godley's.

The 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, which is often cited as the beginning of an organized women's rights movement in America, provides a convenient termination point. This date is not meant to indicate that the American woman's image stopped changing in 1848, or that the women's rights movement itself did not contribute to further change, for obviously the image of the American woman is still undergoing constant reformulation today.

Within these bounds then this study will closely examine the process which changed the public image of the American woman from that of a chattel to that of a challenger. Hopefully, this will provide fuller insight into American thinking during the 1830's and 1840's, and into the actions and goals of the early women's rights movement in the United States.
CHAPTER I

ONCE A CHATTEL, ALWAYS A CHATTEL

American beliefs about women in the 1820's were derived from what previous generations had believed about their women. This traditionalism was reinforced in the 1820's on the one hand by the current religious revivalism which stressed a return to fundamentalism and the good old days, and on the other, by vague fears about women created by the first stirrings of industrialization which caused people to seek security by reaffirming old beliefs. The ideal family pattern was the extended family, a pattern derived from the days when the American economy was based almost entirely on agriculture. Under this system each family member had his own job, and family objectives overrode the individual's personal desires. It was economically wise to marry and have many children. The mother's role thus centered on child-bearing while the father's role, because of his physical strength, was that of director of the family-farm organization. The family formed an isolated unit which was economically and socially self-sufficient. Because this system provided a workable solution for so many years, it gradually came to be idealized as what American families ought to be.¹

A leading characteristic of the traditional family was the conception of women as passive members of the family. They were subordinate and inferior in all ways; their function was to serve men, and their only possible goal in life was marriage. That these ideas were widespread is clearly illustrated by the observations of contemporary foreign visitors to the United States. Auguste Carlier, for example, recorded that "the excessive privileges granted [the husband] are an anomaly in a democratic country. They cannot be justified by any plausible reasoning, except the force of tradition."²

Apparently this force was strong for traditionalist beliefs about women and families pervaded contemporary literature. Popular novels were replete with the joys of family living and preached that the duty of women was to marry and then to stay in the home. Submissive endurance was the feminine ideal, and winning helplessness was seen as woman's greatest charm. These represented the cherished, idealized beliefs of the generation to such an extent that almost nowhere did there appear the slightest hint of discontent or doubt.³

A similar picture was presented by guide books on feminine behavior. Mrs. Hester Chapone's Letters advised young girls to cultivate humility and sincerity, to develop patience and fortitude, and to regulate temper and seek complacency. She also advised learning the necessary

²Auguste Carlier, Marriage in the United States (Boston: DeVries, Ifarra and Co., 1837), p. 56.
accomplishments among which she ranked reading first, followed by dancing and French.\(^4\) Another popular tract, Dr. Gregory's "Legacy," opened with the comforting thought that women need religion more than men because they have to bear their sufferings in silence. He advised his daughters not to try to win a man by acting like men, but to use modesty as their protection in saving themselves for the one man. Their ultimate happiness would come only through marriage, but even then they must never reveal the full extent of their love because this would lead to satiety and disgust, and Nature had put the duty of reserve upon them.\(^5\) Similarly, Lady Pennington advised her daughter to give allegiance to God while learning all the domestic duties and skills necessary for a wife and mother. With great practicality, she cautioned her daughter to marry a good man so that it would be easy to obey him, but in any case to maintain patient submission.\(^6\)

Another type of guide for young girls is to be found in collections of exemplary vignettes. In one of these, *Good Wives*, the author stated that she was on guard "lest the household virtues become neglected and obsolete" and that she was presenting the subsequent sketches as examples of "domestic love and virtue." In each biography the wife clung to her husband through all sorts of trials, quietly enduring and


\(^{6}\) Lady Pennington, "A Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters," in Chapone, *Letters*, pp. 211, 221, 236-244.
performing her wifely duties. One sketch concluded with the thought that "domestic love was strengthened by the hardships she had endured, and that in her husband's gratitude she found a rich and abundant reward." That this kind of thinking tapped a receptive public is demonstrated by the rave reviews Good Wives received. The American Monthly Review, for example, lauded the author because "she proclaims unhesitatingly the fealty due from the wife to her liege."

This type of feminine ideal was reflected by and reinforced with particular effectiveness in the periodicals which were filled with stories and sketches of women serving their men. In one typical story, "The Wife, or Domestic Heroism," lovers were thwarted by the lack of a dowry. He did, however, possess some land in the West to which she very bravely consented to go. Once there, she worked hard, was always cheerful and patient, and as a result they prospered and lived happily ever after. A very different service was performed by the heroine who saved her lover from joining Shays' men in their rebellion because she learned the terrible things guns could do when she saw a quail shot. This talent of saving men from imminent death was a common theme. In another

7Lydia Maria Child, Good Wives (Boston: Carter, Hendee, and Co., 1833), pp. xxi-ix, 239.
case a wife saved her husband from a death sentence by pleading personally and eloquently for his life. The real tear-jerker, however, was the story in which the wife, just up from child birth and with a raging fever, helped her soldier husband escape his pursuers. Such service was by no means restricted to wives, but included daughters as well. There is the case, for example, of the child who successfully begged the Queen for her father's life which was to be taken because he was a Catholic in opposition to English law.

Paradoxically, these stories of courageous women were published side by side with chivalric tales of frail, passive maidens. In one such tale a father fended off a designing king by putting a sword to his trembling daughters' breasts and threatening to kill them rather than see one of them dishonored. The king, immediately brought to his senses by such courage, fell down on his knees before the daughter of his choice and begged her to marry him. In a less happy saga a delicate lady patiently waited while her lover gained enough honor on the field of battle to become her suitor only to see him killed on the very eve of their wedding.

The resolution of these seemingly contradictory pictures lies in the idea that woman's frailty could be overcome only in extreme circumstances when her man was in real trouble. It was much more usual, however, for a woman to serve a man in her daily routines as a wife, and marriage was therefore regarded as her only fulfillment in life. One father typically advised his daughter that "the happiness of a virtuous young woman, is to make an honest man happy ... your fate through life depends on your marriage."16

It was further believed that women were created expressly for matrimony and love. Most Americans would have agreed with the author who wrote, "Yes, girls will love--there is no hindering it--they cannot help it themselves--they were created for it."17 A more lyrical expression of the same thought read, "She is formed to adorn and humanize mankind, to smooth his cares and strew his path with flowers."18 One writer exhorted:

> We know, from every record under heaven, from the sacred page to that of the heathen world, that woman was made to be the helpmate of man--that ... she is the assuager of his pains, the solacer of his woe, the sharer of his joys, the chief agent in the communication of his sublunary bliss.19

Another raised the question, "Where shall we seek to find a mind sufficiently sceptical to doubt the promises of love, to repulse those

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17 "The Bachelor's Dream," Godsy's Lady's Book, IV (January, 1832), p. 27.


flattering vows poured into the ear, and which sink so quietly into the heart!" He was forced to conclude that, "If there does such a mind exist, at least it is not WOMAN'S!" This idea was carried to such extremes that one article suggested that all women garden in order to have something on which to lavish their oversupply of love. Another author suggested that wives actually liked their husbands to fall ill so that they could expend their loving care upon them.

At any rate, conscientious mamas everywhere could not rest until they had seen their daughters married, at age 17 or 18 if at all possible. Once married, however, the daughter's problems were her own, and it was thought that the best way to meet them was through patient submission. One of Godey's little tidbits effectively preached this idea.

> How continually, in retirement and in the world, is the lesson of submission forced upon woman. To suffer and be silent under suffering, seems the great command she has to obey; while man is allowed to wrestle with calamity, and to conquer or die in the struggle.

No sacrifice was ever too great for women. They were always patient, always ready to care for the afflicted, always ready to meet any calamity head-on. To find true happiness in the married state a wife need only have sympathy and be ready to follow her husband to shame, death, or ignominy.

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While they were developing these wifely virtues, women were advised also to keep up their physical charms to demonstrate "a desire of pleasing" their husbands. True beauty, the advice ran, was to be found in temperance and cleanliness, in a "sweet disposition, gentle manners, and winning deportment." Paints of any kind were absolutely prohibited, not only because they contained poison but because the real thing was always the best. Dress was best kept simple and modest, for it reflected a woman's character. Women were cautioned never to spend more on clothes than their allowance, since "This quality will be a gem in [your] husband's eyes; for, though most of the money-getting sex like to see their wives well-dressed, yet . . . they would rather owe that pleasure to your taste than to their pockets!"

One heroine, who followed all of this advice, was said to be "admired even by her husband, although five years had passed since their union." On the other hand, those who pursued fashion and false beauty invariably met with difficulty. The woman who spent all her money on

clothes and all her time on calls to impress her friends was soon
withered and bitter, while her poor but happy sister long retained her
simple beauty and her agreeable life. The most common danger, however,
was that encountered by the heedless and negligent wife whose "husband
finds his home wearisome" and then goes astray, for "the nature of man is
such, that where there is no excitement there he is faithless; like the
bee, he is constant to no flower, after the charm has worn off."33

One of the major concerns of the periodicals was to help women
avoid these pitfalls. They were therefore filled with beauty hints,
advice on proper dress, and the latest fashions, notably Godey's famous
hand-colored fashion plates. This advice was also relevant for the
unmarried girl, for it was generally felt that,

Whom is there, who in the sanctuary of his hidden thoughts,
would balance a moment, in forming a partnership for life,
between a flaunting belle, though robed in the finest silks of
Persia, and tinted over so brightly with native or apothecary's
vermillion, and a plain young lady, neat, modest, intell-
gent, instructed with a full mind and regulated heart.34

If any young lady failed to believe this, it was driven home by story
after story in which the fashionable city belle lost her lover to her
more natural country cousin.35

32 "Morning Calls," Godey's Lady's Book, II (January, 1831),
pp. 46-47.

33 "Advice to a Bride," Godey's Lady's Book, IV (June, 1832),
pp. 286-287.

34 "Maternal Traits of Feeling," Godey's Lady's Book, II
(February, 1831), p. 93.

35 "A Sketch of Fashionable Life; A Tale," Godey's Lady's Book,
If a young girl took these lessons to heart, she was then presumably very attractive to any young man she might meet. Once she had secured her particular man, however, she was pledged to the strictest fidelity, and was not expected ever to love again. If unfortunate enough to encounter thwarted or unfaithful love, genteel young ladies were usually expected to fade dramatically away in a darkly shaded room. A typical example is the heroine Adelaide who, after being told that her lover since childhood had been killed in a battle, languished and died according to form. Similarly, the American girl who sacrificed her lover because he was an Englishman, also promptly died when she learned that independence had been declared. Another standard was the rich girl who responded by dying when her lover forsook her for another woman.

Although many young ladies preferred to fade away, others chose a more dramatic death as their escape from love problems. One love-struck young girl killed herself when her lover was hanged as a rebel. In another case an Indian girl, denied the love of a white man by his interfering sister, retaliated by drowning herself in the sister's own

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36 "Frederick and Adelaide," Godey's Lady's Book, XIII (October, 1836), p. 145.


A more common problem was the early death of a lover. When it claimed one young lady's intended husband she promptly drowned herself. The most tragic of all was the case of the artist who painted a portrait of his true love but killed himself when she rejected him. Sadly enough, she had really loved him but had been forced by her mother to agree to a better match. Naturally, when she heard of the painter's death she too died before she married the other man.

If a young girl were fortunate enough to live through the assorted problems of courtship long enough to marry, felicity then became an absolute with any deviation almost certain to result in death. Maria, for example, fooled by the charms of a gambler, married him, soon found herself deserted, and promptly died of grief. The author concluded, "Maria is in heaven!" and presumably left the gambler husband to his inevitable damnation. That divorce was as fatal as desertion was illustrated by the case of Sophia who, unhappily married to a prince, attempted escape, but was captured and imprisoned. Her husband obtained a divorce, she immediately died, and he followed her example several months later. Both were obviously struck down in the cause of righteousness.

40 Mrs. Trollope, "The Lake of Canandaigua," Godey's Lady's Book, VI (February, 1833), pp. 58-64.
43 "Maria," Godey's Lady's Book, II (October, 1831), pp. 206-207.
44 "Sophia, Princess of Zelle; or, the Sybil's Warning," Godey's Lady's Book, IV (June, 1832), pp. 282-285.
Since women's lives and destinies were closely related to "love," it is not surprising that their home was considered their only "sphere." Common advice to wives ran, "Let all your enjoyments centre in your home. Let your home occupy the first place in your thoughts; for that is the only source of happiness." Because a woman's character was reflected in her home and children, a truly modest woman would be found "flourishing in the retirement of home, secluded from the vanities of a crowded life, and adorning with her bloom the abode of domestic affection." That a woman could not have both a career and her home was illustrated by the girl who chose to devote her life to art. For reasons the author thought too obvious for explanation she had to sacrifice the man she had intended to marry for her career.

Far from being considered harsh, these ideals of womanly behavior were thought to be paternalistic and protective of woman's inherent inferiority. Not only was woman's brain smaller and weaker than man's, but she quite obviously lacked his physical prowess. Furthermore, her very nature was basically different from man's. One author was convinced that "women in their nature are much more gay and joyous than men," but

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couldn't decide whether this was because "Their fibres are more delicate, and their animal spirits more light and volatile," or because there is "a kind of sex in the very soul." In any case, he was sure that, "As vivacity is the gift of women, gravity is that of men." Another writer saw the difference manifested in parents' love for their children. A father's love might be as intense as a mother's, but it could never be so uncalculating due to his "superior strength of mind," and her "superior strength of heart."51

The obvious conclusion was that, "The female being delicate and timid, requires protection, and is capable of making an engaging figure under the good government of a man possessed of penetration and solid judgment." Wives were continually told that, "Your husband is, by the laws of God and man, your superior." The unfortunate daughter of a poor widow who married a nobleman, only to find him a robber captain, was told by her husband, "I love you, and will remember that I am your husband; but recollect that I am also your lord." Even women's own periodicals, the "ladies' magazines," were condescending in tone and treated their readers like children to be directed and ordered, unlike

50 Godey's Lady's Book, VI (January, 1833), p. 32.
51 "Maternal Traits of Feeling," Godey's Lady's Book, IV (February, 1832), p. 93.
the men's magazines which treated their readers more subtly and made suggestions instead of giving directions.

On the basis of women's supposed mental inferiority, they were believed to require little education. Certain basic studies, however, were useful to complement beauty or to offset a lack of it, to fill up otherwise vacant hours and thus ward off unattractive ennui,\(^55\) and to avoid female nervous disorders.\(^56\) A love of reading was especially helpful, one father advised his daughter, since it not only filled idle hours but would keep her contently at home where she belonged.\(^57\) Further, because a wife was expected to carry on the personal correspondence of the family, a knowledge of English and essay writing was also beneficial. But since women's brains were weak it was not felt that they were able to go much beyond these basic studies. Women's limited academic capabilities were perhaps best defined by the satirical "Journal of a Scientific Lady" whose author wrote that she was going to note a journey, not using "the frivolous tittle-tattle to which many of our sex are addicted, but to attempt a scientific journal worthy of our studies." True to her studies, she produced a chain of vignettes describing dinners, dances,


\(^{58}\)"The Escritoire," *Godey's Lady's Book*, II (March, 1831), pp. 121-123.
and parties with a few of what she thought of as "scientific" words thrown in here and there for effect.\(^{59}\)

If women were not regarded as intelligent, at least they were thought to be "clever," and the rest of their education was filled with learning attractive skills. Dancing was taught to develop grace,\(^{60}\) and painting was regarded as the best art to occupy the "female mind."\(^{61}\)

Singing and playing the piano were almost required accomplishments, and both *Godey's* and *Graham's* appealed to ladies by printing sheet music as part of their monthly publications. Embroidery was apparently a commonly taught art, for the periodicals also regularly contained intricate embroidery patterns but never any directions, which indicates that the patterns were self-explanatory to any properly-trained lady. The creative young lady was instructed in the arts and crafts so *Godey's "Ornamental Artist"* gladly supplied directions for such articles as hyacinth stands, what-nots or card receivers, and oriental tinting.\(^{62}\)

Properly-educated young ladies were also initiated into the intricacies of polite conversation, for which proper topics could always be found in *Godey's* informative articles on such matters as the Cadet's Monument at West Point, the origin of horn music, or the process of insect transformations.\(^{63}\)

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\(^{62}\) "Ornamental Artist," *Godey's Lady's Book*, II (June, 1831), p. 308.

Training in domestic skills was not included in the formal curriculum and in the hundreds of articles directing female behavior, and young women were only infrequently reminded to develop their domestic competence. It apparently was assumed that women would naturally know how to cook, clean, and care for children, and that any enhancement of these innate abilities would come through their duties in the family home. Articles and books on how to cook, sew, manage a food allowance, handle servants, raise children, and other related topics of domestic management were rare. Even the brief recipes which were offered by the periodicals required prior knowledge and the command of a household to be of any value. Perhaps periodicals did not try to provide this type of information, or to act as a guide book to woman's trade or profession, because homemaking was not considered as such. In the early 1800's domestic skills were believed to be as inherent in every woman's nature and life as the great need to love or the physical inferiority also attributed to her.

These innate qualities automatically excluded women from more worldly pursuits, and it was a widely-held maxim that if a woman remained womanly she could not be useful or influential in the "world." With her mental and physical inferiorities, she was not capable of pursuing a career, much less of fulfilling her home duties at the same time. Politics were too complex and strenuous; buying and selling, contracts, and property were all too crass and technical; and even current events were too intricate for her understanding. The general feeling was that all of this was irrelevant to her life anyway, and thus was more properly left to the greater capabilities of men. The women's periodicals reflect
these attitudes through a conspicuous absence of material on these or related topics. An article on a Polish war widow was judged suitable for feminine readers, but never a narrative of the war itself. Infringement on male territory was conscientiously avoided by the periodicals, and the Ladies' Magazine reassured the public that, "Husbands may rest assured that nothing found in these pages shall cause her [his wife] to be less assiduous in preparing for his reception or encourage her to 'usurp station' or encroach upon the prerogatives of men."65

It is odd that this innate nature of woman, although so clearly defined as womanly, was at the same time in a strange way sexless. Certainly, Victorian ideals and Romantic notions of chivalry limited discussion of sex-related topics. It has also been suggested that the Christian tradition of worshiping the Virgin Mary further proscribed any relating of women and sex.66 At any rate, the periodicals were not only extremely careful about using "limb" for "leg," but they always referred to women as "females" or "ladies." Any other usage was regarded as vulgar. Almost no mention was made of women as mothers, and problems of mothers were not dealt with in articles or stories. Even the many articles on beauty and fashions never mentioned weight problems or ways to enhance the figure, or gave hints on anything that might be construed as sex appeal. Furthermore, the threat of seduction apparently did not exist, and young girls were never given advice on how to maintain the proper distance from young men.

66Groves, American Woman, p. 15.
During his visit to the United States in 1834, Michael Chevalier commented on this custom of treating women in a particular way because of their sex.

... the woman is exempt from all heavy work, and she is never seen, for instance, taking part in the labours of the field, nor in carrying burdens. ... Not only does the American mechanic and farmer spare his wife, as much as possible, all the hard work and employments unsuitable to the sex, but he exhibits towards her and every other woman, a degree of attention and respect, which is unknown to many persons amongst us, who pride themselves on their education and refinement. In public places and in the public conveyances, in the United States, no man, whatever may be his talents and services, is treated with any particular attention; no precedence or privilege is allowed him; for all men are equal. But a woman, whatever may be the condition and fortune of her husband, is sure of commanding universal respect and attention.67

Evidently, woman's "natural right" to respect became so idealized in America that any representation of her as an object of sexual desire was unthinkable. Her idealized purity was unassailable, and sexual deviation impossible. As Chevalier observed, "The unfaithful wife would be a lost woman; the man, who should seduce a woman, or should be known to have an illicit connexion, would be excommunicated by the popular clamour."68 Sex, for the American woman, was in all probability little more than an integral part of the submission so widely associated with her role.

Because the American ideal of womanhood was so widely held, not only was sexual deviation unthinkable, but even minor deviations from the

68 Ibid., p. 430.
image were highly criticized. The evils of deviation were well illustrated by the case of the young woman whose cousin based his refusal to marry her on the grounds that she was odd because she rode well, was athletic, outspoken, and very well read. This left her no recourse but to languish and finally to die in a needless riding accident.69 In another incident the hero was immeasurably shocked when a girl who had once saved him from falling off a cliff reestablished their relationship by writing him a note asking him to meet her in the woods alone at night. When he finally decided to keep the appointment he was further taken aback by her declaration of love for him. After undergoing a traumatic crisis of decision he ultimately resolved to reject the world's opinion of her actions and to marry her, but the clear impression was left in the reader's mind that this was an exception and could occur only in order to surmount obstacles to true love.70

Another type of deviation was the old maid who was usually represented in the periodicals as an odd creature. One typical old maid story was the satire which presented the heroine as highly romantic yet not really concerned about matrimony. Although she was past the marrying age, she still had a guitar-playing lieutenant left as a last suitor. When he eloped with her much-mistreated serving girl, she promptly concluded that she was very glad to be a "happy" spinster.71 Although old


maids appeared only infrequently in popular literature, it was usually in an unfavorable light, and one author went so far as to conclude their fate must be predestined, thus implying that no woman would choose such a life. 72

But deviation from the traditionalist image of women does not appear to have been a major problem. Many women were perhaps even more resolute than men in clinging to the security of the old and accepted ways. Women's traditionalist image seems to have been so strongly reenforced by almost every aspect of society that it is remarkable that there was any deviation at all. That the image itself could be modified within a few short years is even more remarkable.

CHAPTER II

THE CHALLENGE IN THE MAKING

At the very time when the traditionalist conception of women seemed to be most firmly entrenched in America, a slightly different and vastly more promising interpretation of women's role was evolving. Its foremost developer was Mrs. Sarah Josepha Hale, one of the first and best known of the emerging "literary women" of the pre-Civil War years.

Mrs. Hale had never planned a career in literature or in any other area. But as a young girl she had shown literary talent which the education given her by her father and the course of reading she later pursued with her husband had encouraged. Yet even as her poems and stories multiplied and met with increased acceptance, she still thought of herself as a wife and mother rather than as a writer. When after nine years of marriage she found herself widowed with five children to support, she turned to millinery rather than literature, probably because she thought it a more suitable pursuit for a woman. She soon found, however, that millinery did not fully engage her mind, and she continued to write in her spare moments. In 1823 her first small volume of poems was published through the kindness of several Masonic friends of her late husband. There was nothing indicative in it of her future ideas, for her works were typical of the Romanticism of her age. The publication met with enough popular approval to encourage Mrs. Hale to send her stories.
and poems to magazines under the pseudonym "Cornelia." These won several prizes and established her as a regular contributor to *Spectator* magazine.

These successes led Mrs. Hale to attempt her first novel, *Northwood* (1827), which was published just before her acceptance of a new position in Boston as the editor of a ladies' magazine. She was understandably hesitant about this undertaking for, as she later wrote, "A magazine edited by a woman for women had never been conducted, so far as I know, either in the Old World or the New; and it seemed, at first, impossible for me to accept." After deliberation, however, she decided that "this change seemed to me to be the ordering of Divine Providence."^1

Public acceptance of Mrs. Hale as editor of the new *Ladies' Magazine* was insured by her literary reputation and by her being a widow who had to support her children rather than a mother who was "deserting" her family. When she assumed the editorship, however, it soon became clear that she had other goals in mind than improving her own reputation. She immediately rejected the sentimental poetry and saccharine love stories which constituted the women's pages of other magazines and decided to make the *Ladies' Magazine* a journal of "female improvement." In her first issue she assured men that her purpose was not to make women poorer wives by distracting them from their obligations, but to make them more competent in their domestic duties while at the same time making them more agreeable companions.\(^2\) This was to be achieved through female education, a cause which she strongly supported in story, verse, song, and essay.

^1*Godey's Lady's Book*, XCI (December, 1877), pp. 522-524.

Mrs. Hale thought female education was necessary because women were the moral and refining forces of the modern world. To exert their purifying influences effectively, Mrs. Hale argued, women's own knowledge and understanding of the world had to be developed and heightened through suitable education. Evidently there was no public outcry against this reasoning because by the beginning of the second year of the Ladies' Magazine Mrs. Hale boldly restated her purpose to "add somewhat to the knowledge of our sex . . . to make females better acquainted with their duties and privileges . . ." and to unite "excellent mothers and excellent instructresses, with the name of woman." Every issue of the second volume not only reemphasized her ideas on the nature of women, but also supported her "favorite project," the employment of women as teachers.

By 1830 her efforts had resulted in a favorable reputation and a respectable circulation for the Ladies' Magazine. This demonstration that a woman's magazine could be successful caused a competitor, Godey's Lady's Book of Philadelphia, to appeal to the female audience. Its editor, Louis Godey, was much more interested in circulation than in female improvement and his approach to his prospective reading public was that of a shrewd businessman. He, unlike Mrs. Hale, sponsored no "causes" but rather filled his pages with romance and chivalry. The sentiments expressed in the pages of Godey's were much more typical of the age and more akin to traditionalist views of women than were those

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4Ladies' Magazine, II (January, 1829), pp. 2-5.
in the *Ladies' Magazine*. Although *Godey's* soon became a formidable competitor, Mrs. Hale was undisturbed. During the early part of the decade she increased her use of material supporting the moral force of women, the education of women, and the advantage of women as teachers.

Perhaps Mrs. Hale's complacency in supporting the cause of women resulted from her realization that women in many countries were beginning to advocate ideas similar to hers. Although she was effective in popularizing her theories about women, she was not necessarily their originator. She is more properly seen as a part of the reform tradition of the Jackson years. Actually, her thoughts on the nature of women were somewhat limited by traditionalist beliefs. As editor of the *Ladies' Magazine* she made it clear that she believed that woman's place was in the home and that her potential influence on the world was only indirectly extended through the male members of her family. Even the "acceptable employments" were to be pursued only before marriage or in case of dire need. Paradoxically, her attempt to combine old traditions with new ideals is the very characteristic that made her ideas so appealing.

Very possibly Louis Godey's purchase of the *Ladies' Magazine* was based on his recognition, as an astute businessman, of the increasing popularity of Mrs. Hale's ideas. The more apparent causes were the financial difficulties of the *Ladies' Magazine* which were heightened by the financial problems of the country, and *Godey's* increasing circulation.

list, which demanded editorial assistance. In any case, Mrs. Hale and Mr. Godey became joint editors of *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1837. From the first issue it was clear that *Godey's* had not only absorbed Mrs. Hale's magazine, but had adopted her causes as well. In her first editorial, a "Conversazione," she asserted that journals "must differ, as do the minds of the sexes." She did not see this difference as originating in the "strength of intellect, but in the manner of awakening the reason and directing its power." To Mrs. Hale, it was a fact that the "strength of man's character is in his physical propensities" while "the strength of woman lies in her moral sentiments."

Mrs. Hale took the position that woman should be both a companion to man and an influence on him. To fulfill these roles successfully, however, she must have training and intelligence. Mrs. Hale conceded that since the application of woman's knowledge was different from man's, her education might be different. But Mrs. Hale qualified even this concession by insisting that women should study anything that could help them make their loved ones successful and happy. According to her, women desired this enlarged role not to achieve worldly fame, money, or ego satisfaction, but simply to make them more effective in performing the traditional duties of a woman. She concluded by emphasizing that the goal of *Godey's* was now to,

... carry onward and upward the spirit of moral and intellectual excellence in our own sex, till their influence shall bless as well as beautify civil society. These principles we

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7"Editor's Table," *Godey's Lady's Book*, XIII (November, 1836), p. 237.
shall guard with scrupulous care, and watch that nothing be introduced to undermine those sacred relations of domestic life, in which the Creator has placed the sceptre of woman's empire.®

Mrs. Hale, assured of a receptive public and with the stature of Godey's supporting her, did not hesitate to follow the "Conversazione" with a plethora of copy defining and developing her ideas. Her determination to improve women became a veritable crusade in which she employed all available tactics. For example, two of her innovations were "Outlines of Life and Character," which presented sketches of female writers;® and "The Ladies' Mentor," which covered anything relating to education and schools for women.® Mrs. Hale also liked to indoctrinate her readers more subtly through moral romance. Apparently, however, she came under some attack for this because in 1838 she had to defend editorially the number of love stories appearing in Godey's. She pointed out that in real life thoughts of love were prominent to everyone and that stories of love were therefore not "excited sensibility." She closed the matter by firmly maintaining that a "well regulated mind" was not "obtained by a prohibition of the pure, disinterested exhibition of the tender feelings of our nature."®

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®"Editor's Table," *Godey's Lady's Book*, XVI (April, 1838), p. 191.
But whatever their form, all of Mrs. Hale's arguments and exhortations regarding women were derived from the one basic tenet that women were the moral guardians of society. William R. Taylor has suggested that this development of the woman's role was a convenient response for a society that was replacing the old Puritan morality with more practical business ethics. As Americans sought new value systems for their rapidly changing world, they were more than willing to allow improved domestic morality to balance decreasing social and business morality. Women were the ideal guardians of morals because they were not directly involved in money-making. They therefore did not actually interfere with the realistic demands of an industrial society, but at the same time their morality paid lip service to traditional ethical beliefs. Furthermore, women could preserve such important aspects of society as the home, the family, and idealism. By leaving women as a hostage in the home, men not only provided for stability in a changing society, but also took a preventive step against emerging feminism by giving women more power within their own sphere. As Taylor phrased it, men were willing to give women the home if they would agree to stay in it.12

12William R. Taylor, Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character (New York: George Braziller, 1961), pp. 96-99, 119, 140, 166. Some of Taylor's analysis was anticipated by at least one contemporary commentator who in 1837 explained that because the world's rapid change was endangering the values traditionally associated with home, woman's influence was increased so that she might act as an offsetting force. Review of Letters to Young Ladies, by Mrs. L. Sigourney, American Monthly Magazine, IX (March, 1837), pp. 290-292.
Accordingly, Mrs. Hale's policies were both a reflection and a reenforcement of contemporary thinking. The sheer weight of repetition of the moral guardian theory leaves no doubt of its popular appeal. As early as 1837, Mrs. Hale noted that "a great change is being effected in public opinion respecting the estimation in which the influence of woman should be held." She later claimed that the way in which the female was treated was indicative of the state of civilization, for if women, representative of the moral power, were degraded there could be no moral improvement for the society. The concomitant of this argument was that men could reach great moral development only with the aid of a cultivated female intellect. In other words, "the character and condition of men is to receive its last and best improvement" only through the elevation of females.

Woman's great morality apparently was part of her God-given nature for Mrs. Hale lyricized that,

When she sinn'd, 'twas Wisdom tempted,
Earnest purpose God to scan;
This is why she lives exempted
From the toil imposed on man.

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16 "Editor's Table," *Godey's Lady's Book*, XVIII (February, 1839), p. 94.
He must work—the world subduing
Till it blooms like Eden bright;
She must watch—his faith renewing
From her urn of Eden light.\textsuperscript{17}

In another similar poem she not only defined women as innately good, but implied that men were innately evil.

The outward World, for rugged Toil design'd,
Where Evil from true Good the crown hath riven,
Has been to Man's dominion ever given;
But Woman's empire, holier, more refin'd,
Moulds, moves and sways the fall'n but God-Breath'd mind,
Lifting the earth crushed heart to hope and heaven:
As plants put forth to Summer's gentle wind,
And 'neath the sweet, soft light of starry even,
Those treasures which the tyrant Winter's sway
Could never wrest from Nature, --so the soul
Will Woman's sweet and gentle power obey--
Thus doth her summer smile its strength control;
Her love sow flowers along life's thorny way;
Her star-bright faith lead up toward heaven's goal.\textsuperscript{18}

The logical conclusion of these thoughts came when, also in verse, she claimed heaven itself as the special province of women.

The world's proud empire leave to man,
But by maternal love,
Oh! raise his hopes, his aims, to share
Your heritage above.\textsuperscript{19}

Because this moral nature of women was inherent, there was no magic age of maturity when it was achieved. Young girls were not separated from women by their moral powers, but were believed to have their own field of moral influence. In the role of sister a young lady

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18}Mrs. Sarah J. Hale, "The Empire of Woman," \textit{Godey's Lady's Book}, XXXI (July, 1845), p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{19}\textit{Godey's Lady's Book}, XVII (February, 1841), p. 78.
\end{itemize}
might set a good example for the younger children as well as work for the moral development of her brothers. As an eligible prospect for marriage she might favorably influence her beaux. But most importantly, as a daughter she could serve as a moral guide for her father. "The Convict's Daughter," a typical story treating this theme, concerned a young girl who worked to reform her father after his release from prison. Although he never repented enough to return the money he had stolen, she never gave up hope or deviated from her "filial duty." Rather,

She clung to the belief that by patience and long-suffering she might finally rescue his soul from the slough of sinfulness and bring him to a sense of moral responsibility.... Her best years were stealing from her unmarked and unregretted, for she still hoped, even against hope, that the time for the reformation would yet come. Ah! that trusting faith of woman's heart! how much it doth hope--how much doth it often win by its simple devotedness!

In another situation, a more successful daughter reformed her alcoholic father who had squandered the family fortune and persuaded him to take a job as a prison warden. This remarkably moral young lady not only helped him with his new job, but also took over the duties of her ill mother, acted as her mother's nurse, cared for the younger children, reformed many of the prisoners, and gained the deepened respect of her lover.

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21 Femelle Autorité, "Godey's Lady's Book*, XXXV (November, 1847), pp. 264-266.


Mrs. Hale never missed an opportunity to prove that women were as exemplary in fact as in fiction. In an article on Queen Victoria, for example, she defined Victoria "as the representative of the moral and intellectual influence of women throughout the British empire." While she had the reader's attention, she also pointed out that although much "human improvement" had occurred under the English queens, there had been little progress under the licentious and tyrannical kings. She concluded that the promotion of females could make Victoria's the greatest reign in history, but added, as always, that this improvement was not for the glory or fame of women, but rather to heighten their moral powers. 24

As female morality became more and more important, it naturally came to be stressed as a desirable quality in a mate, and story after story warned young men not to overlook it. In the case of the unhappy young man who had married for money, the author concluded that "moral fitness must be considered first in the catalogue of excellences." 25 In a similar situation a young girl who had been forced into a marriage by her father due to his desire for wealth ran away from her husband. After he obtained a divorce, she married another man who died within a year, and she spent the rest of her life in unhappy solitude. The author moralized that the young lady's problems were caused by the "fashionable" training she received as a girl in place of the proper schooling in morality. 26

24 "Queen Victoria," Godey's Lady's Book, XIV (March, 1838), pp. 97-98.
26 Mrs. Mary H. Parsons, "The Mother and Daughter," Godey's Lady's Book, XX (June, 1840), pp. 242-252.
This myth of woman's morality gradually became so widely accepted and firmly established that its truth was nearly unassailable. For example, when an article appeared exposing women as the primary falsifiers of insurance data and asserting that "women do not scruple to deceive," Godey's published a scathing denunciation of this "grossly malignant falsehood." Its author charged that,

No man with a tender reverence for his mother—a warm, generous affection for a sister, or a spring-like home feeling for the friends of his youth with whom he has danced and sung in early life, and for whom he has held the prayer book in church, could ever have disgraced his manhood by so foul an accusation.

He righteously concluded that women "may be assured that the harmony of the whole moral system depends on the respectful consideration with which they are regarded." 27

Although these attitudes may appear extreme today, they were in harmony with the age. One of Mrs. Hale's contemporaries claimed that "women's influence in ameliorating . . . human nature is in an increased ratio to their numerical importance" and that this was "confirmed by revelation, historical testimony, and experience." This author was so positive of the validity of this thinking that she concluded that "God's purposes towards the female sex will necessarily remain as immutable and permanent as any other formed by his unchangeable mind, and can never be counteracted with impunity." 28 An article in the Ladies' Companion


28 Margaret Coxe, Claims of the Country on American Females (Columbus: Isaac N. Whiting, 1842), pp. 6, 48.
similarly claimed that not only did the "prevailing manners of an age depend ... on the conduct of women," but that "this is one of the principal things on which the great machine of human society turns." A later issue went even further to state that the influence of women was "the all-mighty principle in the order of social economy." The Ladies' Repository also asserted that women were "the model of humanity to the race," and that "philosophy itself [must] retire abashed in the presence of its long-sought idol, the restored image of the Good, the Beautiful, and True." Another article pointed out that woman's "more delicate sensibility is the unseen power which is ever at work to purify and refine society." The Ladies' Repository, like Mrs. Hale, also put these ideals in verse.

Chain a woman—if you darest—
Task her, mock her, crush her low;
Scourge her—if thou art a devil—
Is she sordid? abject? — NO!

While the image of women as morally superior beings met with wide acceptance, there were a few dissenters. One author pointed out that everyone's virtues are tempered with vices and that women should not be

30 J. W. Neat, "The Influence of the Female Character in All the Relations of Life," Ladies' Companion, XX (May, 1844), pp. 24-25.
31 "Woman," Ladies' Repository, VI (October, 1846), pp. 304-305.
32 "Woman as Wife," Ladies' Repository, III (February, 1843), p. 54.
represented as angels. Mrs. Hale, however, was satisfied that her theories were generally accepted, but was impatient with the slow pace of practical results, and did not hesitate in indicating her own sex for laxity in the cause. In 1842 she wrote: "She must seek to elevate the standard of female education; she must dwell with pride on the genius of those women who have done honour to the sex; she must encourage female talent; she must be kind, charitable and true in her feelings, then she will rise." She admitted, though, that females could not be blamed entirely for their faults because they were the products of a deficient education and a restrictive environment.

Mrs. Hale believed that the major obstacle to woman's progress was the authoritarian male. In a bitter attack on men who disregarded the abilities of women she wrote, with unusual sarcasm, "When we meet with men who treat us as moral and intellectual beings, who encourage us in our attempts to improve ourselves and society around us, we ought to feel grateful in proportion to the obloquy which others have heaped upon us." So that her meaning might be absolutely clear, she followed this with a Biblical allegory demonstrating how women cleaned up men, gave them culture, and ministered to their woes.

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35 "Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXIV (June, 1842), pp. 342-343.

36 "Selections from a Real Correspondent," Godey's Lady's Book, XIV (March, 1837), pp. 113-116. It is interesting to contrast this vehemency with the apologetic tones she addressed to men in the first issue of the Ladies' Magazine in 1828.
With increasing aggressiveness, Mrs. Hale threatened the American male that "the moral power, in which [women] excel, is yet to rule the world. The empire of physical strength, in which lay man's superiority, is waxing old, wearing out." To her it seemed that Nature really intended women to be the predominant sex. "The reign of brute force is now over;" she announced, "and that of intellect and feeling is at hand." Since woman's mind was of a finer texture it would shoot ahead if given an equal opportunity. Add her beauty to this and "what on earth is to prevent the fair from being the dominant sex?"

Mrs. Hale's near-militancy is difficult to reconcile with her continued admonitions that woman's place was in the home. Was she only paying lip service to traditionalism when she wrote, "Does not the sacred fulfillment, in its highest sense, of this first earthly duty of a married woman, her conjugal vow, include all excellence, all loveliness, all honour?" In all probability Mrs. Hale was too imbued with the traditionalism of her youth to mock it. Perhaps, whether she consciously admitted it or not, she had come to the realization that women could gain power most effectively by working through the accepted channels. A brief outline of this point of view can be found in her statement that:

As the sanctity of the marriage convenant, according to the Christian formula, is the foundation of all our social institutions which elevate woman, and insure her moral

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39 "Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXX (June, 1845), p. 280.
influence and mental equality with man, it is of the highest moment that she should guard the temple of Hymen as zealously as the priestesses of old did the sacred fire. It will be death to her happiness should the conjugal tie become weakened and easily dissolved.\footnote{Mrs. Sarah J. Hale, "Winter Evening Amusements at Home," \textit{Godey's Lady's Book}, \textbf{XX} (March, 1840), p. 123.}

She further revealed a subtle change in attitude when she declared that "The true arena for woman's awakened intellect is, as we hold, at home, and (italics mine) in promoting the progressive improvement of her own sex."\footnote{"Editor's Table," \textit{Godey's Lady's Book}, \textbf{XXVI} (May, 1843), pp. 249-252.}

If Mrs. Hale's aggressiveness was conscious, its subtlety has fooled several generations, for many of her biographers have claimed that she was absolutely non-militant. One even theorized that the massive bulk of Mrs. Hale's clothing was indicative of her belief that women were not intended to lead an active, involved life.\footnote{Richardson Wright, \textit{Forgotten Ladies: Nine Portraits from the American Family Album} (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1928), p. 189.} But it might be countered that Mrs. Hale wrote literally hundreds of articles calling for more simplicity in dress so that women could be more active. She clearly did not think of herself as a militant reformer in the sense that Wollstonecraft or Wright were, for she disparagingly termed their writings "sophisms."\footnote{Mrs. Sarah J. Hale, "New-Year at Home," \textit{Godey's Lady's Book}, \textbf{XX} (January, 1840), p. 4.} Whether she was a militant feminist or not depends only on a definition, and to quibble of definitions is to miss the significance of Mrs. Hale's ideas.
At first appraisal the moral guardian theory appears innocuous. It served the needs of an emerging industrial society while staying within the bounds of the traditionalist conception of family life. But, whereas traditionalism stressed women as passive members of society, the moral guardian theory conceived of them as active, influential members of the community. This was the first time that any power had been attributed to women, and its implications were tremendous. The assignment of women as the moral keepers of society was the key that could eventually open every imaginable field of endeavor, influence, or control to them. For example, the moral guardian theory could be construed into the following arguments: if a mother is to mold her children correctly, she must have a good education to heighten her own moral sense; if novels are to be morally improving, they must be written by women who are the moral shapers of society; if women are to influence male legislators wisely, they must understand politics and current events; if children are to mature properly, they should be taught by moral women rather than evil men; if the poor and destitute are to be aided, it must be by moral women through charity organizations.

In short, if women were regarded as morally superior, then they were qualified for any function or social situation that could benefit from morality. As Barbara Welter has observed, the ultimate conclusion of this reasoning was that if women were so superior why should they not personally direct the world rather than doing it at second hand through
men, especially since men were creating such chaos.\footnote{Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," American Quarterly, XVIII (Summer, 1966), pp. 151-174. Unlike this study, Welter interprets women's moral virtues as a "Cult of True Womanhood" which was basically a persistence of the traditional stereotype of women. She argued that the "True Woman" image carried the seeds of its own destruction because it caused guilt and hesitation in women who were being exposed to new forces of the nineteenth century and had to respond in ways which differed from their training and beliefs. Welter, however, fails to understand that by becoming the stabilizing force of society women did not create an outdated role for themselves, but on the contrary made themselves virtually indispensable to a rapidly changing society.} If Mrs. Hale, or any of her contemporaries, were purposely using the moral guardian theory for any of these ends, or even conceived of them as possibilities, they were shrewd enough to keep it to themselves instead of alerting the male population. It is more likely that the ramifications of the moral guardian theory developed so gradually and in such insidious ways that neither its developers nor later scholars have attempted to examine the process.

In fact, it is widely assumed that the demand for change and more rights for women originated with the early factory women. This has been variously attributed to their new power as money-earners, to their desire to solve the new problems of factory rather than home work, and to their new acquaintance with the world outside of their homes.\footnote{See, for example, Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 17 and Groves, American Woman, p. 113.} Although these suggestions seem reasonable, they are largely myth, for they are all based on the assumption that the Industrial Revolution opened endless economic opportunities to women. In reality, the new use of machinery restricted many women and took away their jobs. For example, the wife
who earned extra money by doing spinning on the side for local ladies now had to give it up in favor of the more efficient and cheaper factory produced goods. Even if she had the technical skill and capital to conduct her business on the new larger scale, emerging ideas of luxury and refinement barred her from any such commercial undertaking. 46 She could not replace her sideline home employment with a job because her idleness was now a status symbol for her husband. As this desire for status increased, those men who could afford it even relieved their wives of household duties by hiring domestic servants. 47 All of this increased her financial dependence on her husband, took away her feeling of usefulness to the family, and gave her increased leisure time to reflect on her problems and needs.

The women who actually went into the new factories as workers were those whose labor had always been absolutely necessary to keep their families economically solvent. They were not liberated. They simply shifted their work from home to factory. Where they had woven cloth and produced the necessary family goods at home, now they wove cloth in a factory and used their income to purchase the necessities. 48 So it was not the working woman who was the impetus for reform. She was still an integral economic part of the family unit and thus felt needed and useful.


47 Papashvily, All the Happy Endings, pp. 18-20.

Even if she had objections to her lot at home or at work, it would be difficult for her to voice them effectively. She was often illiterate and usually unread; her time was fully occupied by her home and her job; she was in competition with waves of immigrants just to hold her job; she had no legal recourse through the vote; and although the record of the first trade organizations of women dates to 1825 they were generally sporadic and ineffective.\(^{49}\)

It was the middle class woman who was searching for a new function in life. Furthermore, she had the leisure, the education, and the position to work for reform. The fact that it was the middle class, rather than the working class woman, who desired and worked for change explains why the moral guardian theory was the ideal argument. If the working woman had really desired change she at least could have stated that her lot was bad and that she wanted it bettered. But the middle class woman could not say this, for her lot was already "good." She had her home and her family, and the time to care for and enjoy them. She couldn't possibly justify her wish for a job or an interest outside of her home except through her desire to be an effective moral influence. To cite some specific illustrations: If a middle class woman liked to write stories she could not be so employed because it would reflect upon her husband's earning power and would make her appear negligent toward her family. But, if she wrote because it was her "duty" to exercise her moral influence, her employment not only became acceptable, but she became a paragon of virtue. If a young lady did not wish to sit back and

look pretty while waiting for her man to appear, she might overcome her family's objections to her employment as a teacher by arguing that she wanted to use her moral powers for the good of future generations. If a spinster or widow did not want to be genteely dependent on a male relation, she could point out that it was her moral obligation to become a missionary. Or the bored housewife, with nothing to do but oversee her children and servants, could gain a few hours out of the house each week by convincing her husband that it was her mission to work in the slums.

An additional advantage of this moral guardian argument for the middle class woman was that it made a wife and a home an absolute necessity for every man for his own "moral good." Since industrial developments had made wives luxuries for the middle and upper class man rather than economic necessities as they still were for the working class man, middle and upper class women had feared for the security of the marriage relationship. Although they desired a little freedom, they were not ready for complete independence; therefore the moral guardian argument was used to insure their value, morally rather than economically now, to men.

The possibilities of the moral guardian argument were unlimited, and the many benefits that accrued through its use were gradually generalized from middle class women to all women. Its ultimate effect was to make it easier and easier for women to stay in their own "sphere" because it was being made to embrace more of the world each day.
CHAPTER III

THE CHALLENGE AT SCHOOL

Women who desired reform seemed intuitively to realize that education was the most effective issue with which to begin their campaign. But first they had to disprove the traditional belief that women's minds were smaller and weaker than men's, and that women were therefore not educable. Since it could not be empirically demonstrated that women's minds had abilities equal to those of men's, the logical argument was that equality, or the lack of it, could only be proven by giving women the same educational opportunities. This had been suggested as early as 1796 by Mary Wollstonecraft who had argued that women acted like a frivolous and simple-minded sex only because they were trained as such.\(^1\) Mrs. Hale later expanded this point in Godey's by challenging the belief that women were non-intellectual and subject to certain faults by their natures. Instead, she claimed, these flaws were due to an environment which blocked women's development. Mrs. Hale firmly believed that if it were not for dissenting public opinion, women in general would soon demonstrate their ambition and talents.\(^2\) She explained that man's


\(^2\)"Female Education," *Godey's Lady's Book*, XIV (June, 1837), p. 252.
intellect appeared greater because he had more opportunity to attain knowledge and because his time was not largely consumed by domestic duties.³ Give women "equal advantages," Godey's maintained again and again, and women will achieve as much intellectually as do men.⁴

Although this argument seemed at first glance unanswerable, it almost immediately met with a major obstacle. Why should women be given equal educational advantages? What difference would it make if their minds were equal to men's since they did not have to use them in the same ways as men used theirs? These traditionalist questions, which would have squelched reform attempts ten years earlier, now were not merely answered but were negated by the idea of the moral influence of women. In the traditionalist view, mothers had been caretakers who fed, bathed, and dressed their children until they gradually learned to do these tasks for themselves. But now that women's profound morality had at last been realized, mothers were idealized as teachers of reason, virtue, and spirituality. They were far more than caretakers in the physical sense; they were now regarded as the sole molders of the morality and character of future citizens. Therefore, the argument went, mothers should be well and thoroughly educated to heighten their own moral sensibilities. This would make them superior mothers who could mold superbly moral members of future generations.⁵

³"Importance of Female Education," Godey's Lady's Book, XX (February, 1840), p. 92.


⁵"Woman," Godey's Lady's Book, XXI (July, 1840), p. 34.
"Mothers must constantly be employed on what the world terms small or trifling matters," Mrs. Hale declared. "Yet this care, if rightly understood and improved, may be productive of results greater and more beneficial than any which the proud philosophy of learned men have given to the world." She pointed out, for example, that the evils of her time, greed and lust for riches, could be eliminated in a future and better world by mothers who teach their children "right" values. While she did not wish "to see our own sex attempt to emulate the schoolmen's fame," she made it clear that the mother's "mental and moral improvement" was necessary for the true happiness and improvement of her family.

This theme also appeared in fiction, and story after story preached the value of a wise mother's influence. One such story concerned a foolish mother who, after arguing the father into a fashionable boarding school education for their daughter, later found herself deserted by her "fashionable" daughter. The author concluded that the mother had misused her trust by miseducating her daughter, and was only paying the deserved consequences. In another situation, one cousin was reared primarily in domestic virtues while the other had been taught only the fashionable graces. After deciding that they each had but part of

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6 "Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXXI (September, 1845), p. 128.

7 Mrs. Sarah J. Hale, "Cause and Cure; or, Conversations by the Fireside," Godey's Lady's Book, XXIV (February, 1842), pp. 112-115.

8 "Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXII (December, 1841), pp. 294-297.

the necessary training, the domestic cousin insisted that,

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\ldots \text{my daughter shall not only be made acquainted with the particular duties that belong to woman, nor yet acquire them to the neglect of the more important graces of the mind, or at the cost of the elegancies and proprieties of life, which fit us as well to be the companion as the help-mate of man, and as much the instructoress as the nurse of his children.}\]

Another young lady, given up for adoption by her dying mother, became too worldly. Her defective character development was clearly caused by the lack of a mother's influence, for when her mother, who had not died after all, returned to her after an absence of seventeen years, the evil was quickly remedied.\[11\]

The theme of a mother's benevolent moral influence can also be found in a new type of guidebook designed to help mothers fulfill their moral duties toward their children. One of these, Mrs. Signourney's Letters to Mothers, was enthusiastically received because as one reviewer phrased it, "Her precepts to mothers are all based on the law of heavenly and maternal love; and it has been her privilege to perceive the obligation imposed on women to cultivate the young mind in the right way."\[12\]

But the height of this idealization of motherhood was the tendency to attribute the deeds of great men to their mother's unending influence. The epitome of this was the monument built to George Washington's mother at Fredericksburg. When it was dedicated not only did crowds of


officials, several bands, and hundreds of onlookers attend the great ceremony, but the President of the United States himself was present to dedicate the statue. 13

In the event that there were any dissenters who dared raise objections to motherhood, the argument was broadened to include the welfare of men as well as children. Like the case for educated mothers, it asserted that since women were the moral shapers of men, they could be much more effective if they had enough knowledge to understand the situations which men faced. An unsigned article in Goday's stated it succinctly.

God created the woman as a help-meet for man in every situation; and while he, in his pride, rejects her assistance in his intellectual and moral career, he never will succeed to improve his nature and reach that perfection in knowledge, virtue and happiness, which his faculties are constituted to attain. 14

Mrs. Hale, a leading advocate of this theory, sagely concluded that "Men will never be wise while women are ignorant." 15 In a later issue, she became bold enough to add that "In education, literature, religion, she is the companion, in truth, often the mentor, of the stronger sex. . . . The destiny of the human race is thus dependent on the condition and conduct of woman." 16

13 "Monument to the Mother of Washington," The Knickerbocker, II (July, 1833), pp. 72-73.


16 "Editor's Table," Goday's Lady's Book, XXIII (August, 1841), p. 94.
If, at this point, someone objected that while it might be true that more education increased women's moral influence on men and children, it might also decrease their abilities as housewives, the reformers were ready with another answer. "A well balanced mind." Catherine Beecher explained, "is the greatest and best preparation for her varied and complicated duties. Woman, in her sphere of usefulness, has an almost equal need of all the several faculties." Godey's added that "Learning versus Housewifery" was a specious debate because in reality the two were complementary. For example, it was argued that a knowledge of chemistry was very helpful both in planning a family's nutrition and in the actual cooking of food. A proponent of this position concluded that,

With candour and seriousness, we must say that we cannot entertain a very favorable opinion of the intellect of those men who would restrict the acquirements of females to those branches of knowledge which were thought sufficient for them forty or fifty years ago. The change of public sentiment on this subject, we consider one evidence that the world is advancing to a perfect state of civilization.18

Godey's also considered "Intellect versus Affection" an invalid dichotomy. The educated woman actually had more love to give her family because she not only used knowledge as a "means of sustaining her inward life," but she also learned that "the gift of life is a holy responsibility, that it is a germ from which it is her duty to cultivate a plant

17Catherine Beecher, Suggestions Respecting Improvements in Education, Presented to the Trustees of the Hartford Female Seminary, and Published at Their Request (Hartford: Packard and Butler, 1829), p. 42.

worthy of being transplanted to an immortal garden."\(^{19}\) The educated wife could also provide for more than the physical welfare of her family. This was proven by the case of the uneducated young wife who saw her husband turn to her more educated sister for advice, sympathy, and conversation. After some serious study, the wife was able to become more than just a housekeeper and to gain her place as her husband's intellectual companion.\(^{20}\)

On the practical level, Godey's maintained that the house of an educated woman was usually very well managed because she wasn't busy displaying her fashionable accomplishments, but was quietly and modestly efficient in the interest of the true happiness of her family.\(^{21}\) Furthermore, it was argued that education trained and regulated a woman's mind, and that "a well-regulated mind can find time to attend to all."\(^{22}\) Thus, rather than becoming a poorer housewife, an educated woman would be both efficient and modest in her domestic achievements.

While these arguments became more and more popular, female education in the United States was gradually changing. Emma Willard's Troy Seminary and Catherine Beecher's Hartford Seminary were the two outstanding leaders of reform in female education. As early as 1819, in

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\(^{19}\) "Intellect vs. Affection--In Woman," Godey's Lady's Book, XXXIII (August, 1846), p. 86.


\(^{21}\) "Intellect vs. Affection--In Woman," Godey's Lady's Book, XXXIII (August, 1846), p. 86.

her famous address to the New York Legislature, Mrs. Willard had deplored
the fact that female education had been left to "chance" and expressed
the hope that publicly supported female seminaries "would constitute a
grade of education, superior to any yet known in the history of our
sex..." Although this plan was unsuccessful, both she and Miss
Beecher worked to inform the public of abuses and wastes in female
education, and to suggest alternative plans of action.

Unfortunately, much of the reform energy in the United States was
dissipated in the unending debate over what girls should be taught. In
1837 Carlier commented that,

Ideas in America do not yet seem to be sufficiently settled
in reference to the range of women's education. This is
often superficial; at other times it embraces the Latin
language, mathematics, trigonometry, algebra, etc.

Reformers generally felt that too much time was given to training a
young woman in the "superficial attainments" and that more effort should
be given to making her a mature and responsible individual. But there
was little agreement on how this goal could best be achieved. While one
author argued that "There is no incapacity in the female mind for
exertion in the highest departments of literature and science," another

23 Mrs. Emma H. Willard, Address to the Members of the Legislature
of New York Proposing a Plan for Improving Female Education (Middlebury:


25 Carlier, Marriage in the United States, p. 75.

26 Mrs. Lydia H. Sigourney, "Superficial Attainments," Godey's

felt that women's formal education should be even better than a man's because of the great and varied demands placed on a mother. One author maintained that women's education should consist mostly of training in the home since "The best schools in the world, can never supply the want of nursery culture,—of early moral and intellectual training." As a compromise, one female educator suggested that women's education should be pursued through public schools so that formal training could be properly supplemented by home influences.

In addition to this confusion over methods, another major hurdle to meaningful reform was fear of the American male's reaction. One very frank article warned young women that although men may not be superior, they liked to think they were, and since women depended on men for support, the educated lady must acquire knowledge with great modesty while "looking up" to men. A similar essay admitted the superiority of men, and warned girls to show dependence in everything as gratitude for any support they might receive from men. Yet another wrote that,

We are grateful for our heightened privileges. We hope that those who have bestowed them, will be no losers by their

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29 "Education of Young Ladies," The Knickerbocker, VI (November, 1835), p. 381.
31 "Thoughts on the Happiness of Woman as Connected with the Cultivation of Her Mind," Godey's Lady's Book, XV (November, 1837), p. 204.
liberality. Still we believe that an increase of benefits may be made profitable both to giver, and receiver.33

Even one of the most liberal female educators publicly announced that her reforms were not directed toward making her young ladies into "learned women." Godey's shared this fear of the male ego to the extent that it assured men that the education of women would not cause them to compete with men for honor or renown, but rather would be used for "happiness in private life."34

By 1844 some progress seemed to have been made, for the Ladies' Repository exclaimed that "The importance of educating the female mind is now so generally acknowledged in every intelligent, Christian community" that it seems useless even to discuss it.35 Yet, less than a year later, Margaret Fuller Ossoli's Woman in the Nineteenth Century leveled a bitter attack at men for blocking improvement in women's education. She charged,

Men will not help this work, because they are under the slavery of habit. We only ask of men to remove arbitrary barriers. Ye cannot believe it, men; but the only reason why women ever assume what is more appropriate to you, is because you prevent them from finding out what is fit for themselves.36

While men provided convenient scapegoats for the problems of reform in women's education, many realized that the hesitancy of women themselves would have to be overcome. Mrs. Hale constantly admonished

33 Sigourney, Letters to Young Ladies, p. 10.
36 Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Woman in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Greeley and McElrath, 1845), pp. 51, 107, 158.
women that reform and improvement in their education would not come from "without." Women, she wrote, must unite in their own behalf and turn their charity toward themselves.\(^{37}\) She advised them to prove women's capabilities and desires for education by beginning a systematic course of reading and study which would remedy some of the defects in their knowledge.\(^{38}\) She followed this with lists of recommended titles, and with suggestions urging women to find a learned correspondent, to write brief sketches of everyday events, to jot down their thoughts, and to keep a commonplace book, all in order to keep their minds alert and to clarify their thoughts.\(^{39}\) Mrs. Ossoli similarly enjoined women,

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I\text{ entreat, I conjure you, before it is too late. It is my belief that something effectual might be done by women, if they would only consider the subject, and enter upon it in the true spirit, a spirit gentle, but firm, and which feared the offence of none.}^{40}
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The situation regarding female education as a whole might best be summed up by another comment of Mrs. Ossoli's.

Thus vaguely are these questions proposed and discussed at present. But their being proposed at all implies much thought and suggests more. Many women are considering within themselves, what they need that they have not, and what they can have, if they find they need it. Many men are considering whether women are capable of being and having more than they are and have, and, whether, if so, it will be best to consent to improvement in their condition.\(^{41}\)


\(^{38}\)"Editor's Table," \textit{Godey's Lady's Book,} XVI (March, 1838), p. 143.

\(^{39}\)"Editor's Table," \textit{Godey's Lady's Book,} XVI (April, 1838), p. 190.

\(^{40}\)Ossoli, \textit{Woman in the Nineteenth Century,} p. 153.

\(^{41}\)Ibid., p. 19.
Those who desired changes were of course pleased that there was so much discussion and thought on the subject of female education by both men and women. But they also realized that although some female seminaries were being founded, the issue was still too abstract. To achieve more concrete progress, a campaign was begun to involve women directly in education as teachers.

The idea of women as moral guardians was ideally suited to justify women as teachers. It was pointed out that since children's minds were unformed they should be shaped only by the pure and delicate moral sense of a woman teacher. Unlike men, women had an innately high character which particularly suited them for teaching the young. Not only was woman "constitutionally fitted by her Creator for the duties of a teacher," but it was really her mission to educate since her sphere of living embraced all areas of knowledge and thus fitted her by experience for teaching. Furthermore, she had a capacity for affection which would make the students anxious to respond to her, and she had maternal instincts which would allow her to build a greater familiarity and rapport than would be proper for the "other sex." Mrs. Hale

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believed this reasoning to be so obviously logical to everyone that she vehemently declared that,

We have always scrupulously avoided any encroachment on the peculiar privileges and rights of man—the government of the world is his—the politics and policy of society—the learned professions and the regulation of business belong to him—but the teaching of the young does not belong to him, except he pursues it in conjunction with or under the superintendence and direction of a woman!47

Since there are no employment figures available for this period it is impossible to determine the actual increase in the number of women teachers. Mrs. Hale either believed they were increasing or wished to make her readers believe it, for time after time she rejoiced that "the station of instructress is constantly gaining, in importance and respectability, on the public mind."48 She was delighted when a leading male educator, Horace Mann, advocated female teachers on the basis of their moral influences. "The great advantages of employing female teachers in preference to men are beginning to be understood," she wrote, "Horace Mann ... has given his opinion thus: 'Females govern with less resort to physical force, and exert a more kindly, humanizing and refining influence upon the dispositions and manners of their pupils.'"49 Mrs. Hale's views were also shared by another educator, Henry Barnard, who worked zealously to establish women as teachers. His teachers'
institutes did much to elevate the position of women and he proudly claimed that the "introduction of a large number of female teachers, in winter as well as in summer, has greatly improved the discipline, moral influence, and manners of the Rhode Island public schools." Female teachers were further advocated by the woman educator, Mary Lyon, who believed that

Teaching is really the business of almost every useful woman. No woman is well educated who has not all the acquisitions necessary for a good teacher. She needs thorough mental culture, a well-balanced character, a benevolent heart, an ability to communicate knowledge and apply it to practice, an acquaintance with human nature, and the power of controlling the minds of others.

With the efforts of such enthusiastic reformers behind them, it is not surprising that many women were employed as teachers beginning in the 1830's. Mrs. Hale, however, confidently attributed this trend to the influence of Godey's. In 1846 she claimed that the Lady's Book had

... been the pioneer of all these improvements in female education, and the steady advocate for this enlarged sphere of female talent and influence. Very few females were employed as teachers in the schools in Boston, even, when we first began to advocate the plan: now they are employed, not only there but throughout the state, during winter as well as summer, in the proportion of nearly two female teachers to one of the other sex.

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53 "Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXXIII (November, 1846), p. 236.
If women teachers were "fast becoming the fashion" as she claimed,\(^{54}\) it is probably more valid to attribute it to the willingness of men to give up a profession that offered neither wealth nor respect for a more rewarding position in industry. Men also seemed hesitant to go into barely settled frontier areas as teachers, thus creating opportunities for women. Missionary and other societies were formed for the specific purpose of recruiting and sending female teachers westward, and their efforts were enthusiastically supported by female reformers.\(^{55}\) It has further been suggested that when the financial panic of 1837 forced destitute "ladies" to support themselves they found teaching ideal since they usually had some education. Their financial need absolved them of strongmindedness or feminist aggressiveness, so that their entry into teaching tended to cast a glow of "respectability" over all women teachers.\(^{56}\)

The significance of the employment of women as teachers is not only what caused it, but how it changed American beliefs about women. As more and more women became teachers and proved themselves willing and capable, many Americans accepted teaching as part of woman's sphere. Not only was she now considered educable, but she could enter, with public acceptance, a profession which always had been dominated by men. By the

\(^{54}\) "Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXXVI (April, 1848), p. 247.


1840's the majority of Americans agreed, consciously or unconsciously, with the female educator who had said,

The profession of teaching is, then, one which is open to those of our sex who are disposed to gain for themselves an honorable standing and support, to be useful to the world, and to cultivate the talents which God has given them.⁵⁷

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A few outstanding women had made names for themselves in American literature from colonial days on, but they had always been regarded as exceptional cases. Their talents were not disparaged, for the gift of genius seemed to be somehow above the inferiority or superiority of sex, but there was always an uneasy feeling that women authors were neglecting the part of their lives that was of true importance to them. They were tolerated rather than encouraged, and it is not to be wondered at that Mrs. Hale was hesitant to join them. When she first became the editor of the *Ladies' Magazine* one extremist who desired reform in every field, John Neal, exclaimed that, "We hope to see the day when she-editors are as common as he-editors. . . . The Philadelphians who first started the idea of employing a female editor deserve a piece of plate from the women of America."¹

Neal, however, was like the proverbial voice in the wilderness, and it was left to Mrs. Hale and her contemporaries to legitimize and eventually popularize women authors. In this, they were both a reflection and a reinforcement of contemporary developments. Men were now away from the home most of the day and were involved in practical business affairs;

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therefore, the culture and morality of the family was left to the mother. It was natural that she should turn for help to literature both past and present. She was most interested in works that dealt with the everyday situations of family living and which would thus have the greatest relevance for her and her family. This created a demand for a "domestic" novel which was at first written by men. But it soon became apparent to many women that since they knew the most about domestic affairs they were the best suited to write a domestic novel. More importantly, since these novels were to teach ethical principles and awaken their reader's minds to their moral duties, women authors were particularly "fitted to excel" because of their own great moral sense. Therefore, the moral guardian theory was reshaped to argue that,

There are some things which women do better than men; and of these, perhaps, novel-writing is one. Naturally endowed with greater delicacy of taste and feeling, with a moral sense not blunted and debased by those contaminations to which men are exposed, leading lives rather of observation than of action, with leisure to attend to the minutiae of conduct, and more subtle developments of character, they are peculiarly qualified for the task of exhibiting faithfully and pleasingly the various phases of domestic life, and those varieties which chequer the surface of society.

Since poetry was also intended to elevate the human character, women were considered to be "poets of Nature" due to their pure sensibilities. It was often claimed that not only had female authors created

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3 "Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXIII (December, 1841), p. 294.

a "purity of taste," in literature in general, but that their effect on poetry had been particularly salutary since they had eliminated the "crudities" of the age of Pope.

That female authors and poets were increasingly popular in the 1830's and 40's can be easily proven by the hundreds of sickly sentimental and highly moralistic novels and poems that have since been lost in library dust. This proliferation of women writers was particularly gratifying to reformers because it substantiated the claim of women to "mental eminence" in a field previously dominated by men. Godey's particularly rejoiced that "Our generation is remarkable for an increase of female talent," and never missed an opportunity to present a laudatory sketch of a successful female "authoress." It continuously impressed upon its readers that "If ever there were an age, in which woman's genius--genius associated with virtue--was pre-eminently distinguished, it is the present."

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10 "Miss Jane Porter," Godey's Lady's Book, XI (November, 1835), p. 217. The well-known Lowell Literary Offering was not cited as an example of women's success in literature. Since middle class reformers were not attempting to defend women factory workers, the achievements of the Lowell factory girls were not directly relevant to their cause.
Their popularity, however, does not indicate that female writers were allowed any freedom they desired. On the contrary, it was stressed again and again that these women were first wives and mothers whose minds were always occupied with "maternal anxiety" for their families. It was argued that they could actually give more love to their families because of their "heightened sensibilities." Literature was only their recreation, "... surely as rational a mode of occupying the leisure of a lady, as the morning call or the evening party." Although "genius, circumstance or fortune, or ... the providence of God" might draw a woman into literary efforts, she would find only bitterness and unhappiness if she neglected her family for her work. This was forcefully illustrated by the fictional poetess who neglected her home and husband. He was driven to leave her, and soon died a horrible death, a victim of the plague. Although her own lesson came too late to save her happiness, she advised her talented niece not to be so foolish, but to use her "gift of God" for happiness rather than sorrow.

In addition to the female authors' behavior, their material was also strictly circumscribed. It is paradoxical that while their morality

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was the justification for writing in the first place, it at the same time limited them to moral subjects only. "Who would wish to see a work on civil engineering or medical jurisprudence from the pen of a woman?" a typical critique read. "When a woman publishes on such unworthy topics we can no longer conceive of her as woman, as possessing all those qualities which men of pure minds and warm hearts love to associate with the term." Madame De Stael was one of the few female authors who dared pass the bounds of propriety, and she came under bitter attack from the purists. In a critical analysis of her work, Godey's took the position that,

While, then, we commemorate admiringly the many excellent qualities of the heart which distinguished Madame De Stael, and class her with the most powerful intelligences and eloquent writers of the age, we find her far less respectable, as she must have found herself, with all her celebrity, and far less happy, for want of delicacy of conduct, than the Mores, the Edgeworths, and the Hamiltons of Britain, whose lives and writings conspire to strengthen the sacred delicacy of the sex, and to teach the true ends of female ambition.17

As the 1830's progressed and as women became more accepted as authors, they did dare to branch out gradually into areas other than the purely moralistic work. It eventually became commonplace to see articles in the periodicals reviewing literary works, describing travels, or discussing topics of general interest written by women. Books too became broader in their range. In 1839, for example, Mrs. Caroline Kirkland launched her literary reputation with a chatty account of the


problems of settlement in the West, which neither directly concerned "women" nor preached any particular moral. 18

Attitudes regarding women authors also began to broaden, and by the 1840's apologies for ladies' works were no longer necessary. On the contrary, stories began appearing which presented women writers in a new light. In one tale a well-known young poetess, asked by her lover to give up her writing as a condition to their marriage, replied that she could not make such a promise.

I could only promise to love you through all life, with the proud love of freedom and equality; a love which, trust me, is feminine in the voluntary homage of conscious strength, though not abjectly dependent by the necessity of weakness; a love which the intellect sanctions, which is the concentration of the power and poetry of a life.

When he refused to accept this answer, she continued her career without bitterness presumably to find happiness later with a more understanding mate. 19 In another case a wife wished to write but feared her husband's objections. When she communicated her thoughts to him he nobly replied,

Your soul's high and beautiful aspirations need not unfit you for cares or duties. The more of Heaven you can mingle with earth, the better for the dwellers upon the earth. No one, dear Minna, will more highly prize your intellect, even its fancies and dreams, than your husband, provided his meals are ready in time, his comfort attended to, his home duly cared for. All this you can attend to, and yet be left free to fancy, and have time enough to dream. It is the province of the mind to take care of the body. 20

18Mrs. Caroline M. Kirkland, A New Home—Who'll Follow? or, Glimpses of Western Life (New York: C. S. Francis, 1839).


20Miss Mary Orme, "Minna Harmon; Or, The Ideal and the Practical," Godey's Lady's Book, XXXVII (December, 1838), p. 338.
As a result of his sympathy, she not only became a well-known author, but her works were remarkable in their combining of the practical with the idealistic.  

The degree to which the attitude toward women writers had changed is best illustrated by a short story whose heroine was in reality Madame De Stael. The author explained that although everyone thought Madame De Stael to be cold and unwomanly, "she knew that her gifts were perilous ones to a woman's happiness. . . . Yet was her heart full of womanly tenderness and abounding in all human charities." The tale closed with the thought that Madame De Stael had been misrepresented to the world because "Men could not forgive the ugliness of a woman who possessed such superiority of intellect, for the two qualities involved a double sin against themselves."  

Apparently the application of the moral guardian theory to literature had created another acceptable profession for women by the 1840's. This gave women in general a feeling of achievement and importance, for women had not only accomplished mental exploits, but they had been publicly and favorably recognized for them. Furthermore, women were now able to identify with the new type of heroine; one who experienced change, alteration, and often achievement. Women were no longer slaves to or intimidated by a home from which there was no relief or escape. Instead, they now dominated the home, both by gaining concessions from men who

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21 Ibid.


feared that their wives would take advantage of their new opportunities, and by becoming the cultural arbiter of the home through the moral novel.

As moralistic women authors gained stature, they also grew more aggressive in defining women's relationships to men and demanded increased respect for womanhood. Men were ridiculed, for example, because they assumed the knowledge to criticize women's fashions. In 1831 Godey's lamented that women would not dare criticize men's fashions, but by 1843 Godey's itself launched a satirical attack on the ridiculous and slavish styles men followed.

Men were also warned that women's affections were serious and not to be sported with. "Male coquetry" was portrayed as very unbecoming, with the probable punishment of being rejected when finally finding a true love. Men were cautioned to be earnest, honest, and to consider thoroughly before making a commitment to a young lady. Once committed, they should be faithful to their intended or, like the fictional hero who deserted his first love to make a more ambitious match, they might find themselves miserable and be forced to separate from their mate. Men were impressed with the idea that first attachments "can never be violated with impunity" because "misery will always follow a deviation from principle, and broken vows call down upon us the severest judgments."

The harshest censure of all was directed toward those men who rejected the value of "true womanhood" by remaining bachelors. The attacks were often indirect and subtle, for example through articles supposedly written by bachelors themselves. One supposed bachelor recorded in song the discomforts of a bachelor's life and concluded that not having a wife was a disgrace he was going to rectify.\textsuperscript{28} Another, Bachelor Bob, was so mystified by his best friend's serenity and great happiness that he investigated, only to discover that its source was matrimony.\textsuperscript{29} There were also direct and open attacks on bachelors. One of these, "The Slovenly Bachelor," explained in great detail the dirt and filth in which single men groveled because they lacked the salutary influence of a wife.\textsuperscript{30} Another essay humorously proposed that bachelors be taxed, but decided that they had such little value they could not be considered as taxable.\textsuperscript{31} Widowers also came under attack. A typical story described a widower who refused to remarry but was appalled that his children were becoming so incorrigible. When he finally found them a "mother," her mere presence almost immediately remedied the situation.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{28}"Bachelor's Hall," \textit{Godey's Lady's Book}, XXII (August, 1843), pp. 91-92.

\textsuperscript{29}N. P. Willis, "Bachelor Bob's Discoveries," \textit{Godey's Lady's Book}, XXVI (February, 1843), pp. 91-93.


In addition to these open comments about men, a related and more subtle effect of the rise of the moral woman author was a literature in which man was frequently characterized as amoral or immoral. This was an inevitable outcome of the idea that women were the moral influences of society, for if men needed to be "shaped," they apparently lacked natural morality. One recent investigator has claimed that the development of this anti-male literature was heightened by the fact that many of these new women authors were upper or middle class women who began writing to avoid the threat of sudden poverty. Their imminent financial disaster was usually due to the failure of a man, a grievance which they aired by subtly and viciously presenting men as swaggering braggarts who ultimately failed to fulfill their boastful promises.33

Men were often enjoined that woman "is qualified, even when deficient in what the schools call learning, to be his teacher and model."34 It was considered to be "against God" to think that woman was created as a slave for man. She had "a much higher and nobler station in life than this,"35 because of the "good breeding and good sense" in which she always excelled.36 Men were also accused of being deficient in their capacity for affection. Woman's natural capacity for love was

33Papashvily, All the Happy Endings, pp. xvi-xvii.
34"Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXI (September, 1840), p. 142.
36"Comparative Ease and Grace of the Sexes," The Knickerbocker, XIV (July, 1839), p. 93.
"Ever deeper, stronger, more absorbing than man's," so much so in fact that every "wife and mother living . . . has suffered acutely from the want of an adequate return to her affection."  
Perhaps these ideas are best illustrated by the story about the count who was forced to marry against his choice by provisions in his uncle's will. When he neglected his wife she had the "strength of mind" to demand a separation. This forced his reform and their eventual reunion, at which point the author moralized, "How blind he must have been, not to discover sooner that true happiness was only to be found in the society of a virtuous and amiable woman."

Most women, however, were usually able to effect reforms in their husbands through patience and constancy rather than separation. In one such case a husband who inherited a fortune became a gambler and rake. His wife endured it all without reproach, and when he returned to her one night almost ruined financially and in a high fever, she forgave all and prayed for him. Of course he not only recovered, but also reformed because of her great love and example of morality. They had just enough of his fortune left to live happily ever after.

Another case concerned a wife whose husband ran off to a foreign land with her own cousin. When she heard that he was dying she went to his bedside and forgave him, thus showing "woman's love triumphing over


pride and cruel desertion." He also reformed because of her influence, but unfortunately died. Presumably, however, she had insured his entrance into Heaven. 40 Another story involved an orphan girl who married her lover against his father's wishes, only to see him disinherited and consequently become intemperate. She stuck with him, forgave all, and was commended as an "excellent woman" and "excellent wife." She was rewarded by his recovery and his ensuing great industry which eventually provided them with a comfortable life. 41 In an especially effective reform, the sociable husband not only began going home "as a well-trained (italics mine) ought," but he also reformed a friend. 42

For those men who did not heed the advice of their wives, it was made clear that retribution would be quick and serious. For example, when the reformed roué who married an orphan heiress returned to his old ways and was jailed for debt, she came to his rescue. But he had been untrue to her trust and so lost her when she succumbed to a fever. 43 Similarly, the married gambler who did not reform lost his fortune at the...
gaming table, his wife in childbirth, and was left with no recourse but to kill himself. When another gambling husband was shot in a duel arising from a dispute over cards, the author proclaimed,

For what purpose did he utter the marriage vow? Was it merely to find a good housekeeper to wait upon his lordly presence when he chose to be at home, or only as a necessary appendage to his establishment. . . . Society should decidedly mark its reprobation of such a man, as a moral pestilence. . . . and induce young men to seek amusement in the society of cultivated females, the best conservators of morals, and the purest source from which can emanate respectability and happiness.

It was inevitable that eventually this great moral dichotomy between women and men would also be applied to sexual relationships. In the traditionalist view, she had been submissive, he had been dominant, and both had been faithful. If she were now his moral preceptor, however, then she alone was accountable for sexual morality. Because he was basically degenerate, he could not be expected to be faithful except under the strong influence of a woman. If he slipped, he had to be forgiven, for after all he did not have any inherent morality, only what came to him from the other sex. This theory released the male from standards of fidelity, and thus set the pattern for the double standard of sexual behavior. On the other hand, women now achieved a new sexual dominance, for it was up to their great moral sense to dictate to men what was "good" for them. How much sex, when, how, why, all became questions that moral women answered. This gave women a weapon, the

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44 Miss Mary E. Macmichael, "The Gambler's Fate, A Brief Sketch," Godey's Lady's Book, XIII (July, 1836), pp. 41-45.

withholding of sexual gratification, to coerce men with, but it also made
them strictly liable for their own lapses from morality.

Since sex was not a topic of open discussion, these developments
have to be traced through fiction. In an early story dealing with sex
problems, a young girl who was dishonored by the landowner's son was
forced to flee her home and family. She later died, after which her
illegitimate child found her way back to the father. Both lived happily
ever after, and the moral was very clear that it was the woman, who had
transgressed her own inherent morality and its responsibilities, who had
to suffer. In a very similar situation a wife found herself tempted by
the attentions of a former suitor because her own husband left her night
after night for his political activities and ambitions. She resolved the
situation and punished herself for being tempted by taking poison.

This trend intensified by the middle 1840's and the double
standard was openly discussed by the story in which the husband not only
gambled and whored, but brought his dissipated friends to the house to
share the company of his wife. When she finally fell into adultery with
one of them, the husband was so outraged that he drove her out of the
house to die in the snow on a strange doorstep. He was considered an
honorable man by society, well justified in his actions. This idea was

46 Mrs. S. C. Hall, "Minna Mordaunt," Godey's Lady's Book, XIV

(August, 1841), pp. 58-60.

48 Henry W. Herbert, "The Outcast Wife; or, Which Is the Guiltier,"
Ladies' Companion, XX (July, 1844), pp. 107-112.
further articulated by the work about the girl abandoned with her baby by a rich young man. Her landlady quite frankly told her that she should not expect to obtain a service job since no lady would have her in the house. "They are dreadful particular about any little false step by one of our own sex," the landlady explained. "If you but dampen the soles of your feet, it is as bad as if you were up to your neck in the mire; but men may plunge in over their heads and ears, and they are just as welcome to their houses and as good husbands for their daughters as your Josephs..." Poor Fanny found this to be very true, for even when she spotted her man and revealed his crimes to the mother of the girl he now courted, the mother defended him. This left Fanny and her baby no recourse but to die.  

At least one contemporary observer was aware of these developments and questioned their validity.

Is wrong in woman right in man?  
And is it our's or Nature's plan  
To give morality two sexes?  

And, husbands, moderate your blame,  
Ye upon female rights who trample,  
If, now and then, some bolder dame  
Prove that her nature is the same  
As yours, by copying your example.  

But this query was unusual, and in most cases literature continued to reinforce the sexual morality of women. This is not to say that women never appeared in the literature as having faults for a story would

49 Miss C. M. Sedgwick, "Fanny McDermot," Godey's Lady's Book, XXX (February, 1845), pp. 75-83.

50 "The Rights of Women," The Knickerbocker, XXVII (February, 1846), pp. 151-152.
occasionally appear that presented a woman as having a flaw. A favorite
was the tale about the conceited young belle who was brought to her
senses by losing a beau to a more simple and modest girl. Another was
the story, such as the one about the Woodbridges, which concerned the
undomestic young wife whose inefficiency was making her husband miserable.
After months of spending all her household money on herself, serving poor
meals, letting fires go unlit, and generally victimizing her husband,
Mrs. Woodbridge finally realized her errors when her father lamented the
same faults in her mother. Her reform was quick and total, with no
possibility of relapse in sight. As with these examples, women's
faults were almost always minor, and quickly rectified, often on the
slightest comment of a husband or other man.

This deification of women probably did quell many fears about the
future of sexual morality in an industrial society which was offering
more freedoms to its members every day. But at the same time that
women were being idealized as sexually pure, they were also assuming the
first characteristics of sexual attractiveness. They were no longer
plump, motherly figures who sat at home and waited, seemingly unaware of
sex and its related problems. Women were now becoming shapely, womanly
figures who made the sexual decisions and who were very much aware of
sex and its problems.

52 "Mr. and Mrs. Woodbridge," Godey's Lady's Book, XXII (February, 1841), pp. 74-78.
Women's emerging sexuality was manifested by an increasing interest in an alluring figure and an enhancing appearance. There was therefore a great emphasis on exercise, diet, health, beauty, and fashion. The basis of this trend was the argument that women could only exercise their moral duties and responsibilities effectively if they were healthy and strong. Since women had to care for both children and men, they needed to learn the laws of health and how to take the proper care of themselves. "Let the lady who expects to be or to make others happy," Godey's sermonized, "cultivate high health by out-door exercise." The "delicate" young lady was definitely passe, as was the sedentary life of confinement that produced her. Rather, a new standard of beauty based on health emerged and young women were advised,

Go forth into the fields and woods, if you live in the country,—take long walks in the cool morning and evening hour, if you are in populous cities pent,—let the minimum of these daily excursions average at least two miles.

The robust young lady was now the fashion. Girls, whether eight or eighteen, were to spend many hours in the open air, to run and romp, and to play games. When inside, dancing was considered excellent exercise as was the performing of the more modest calisthenics.

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55 "Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXXVII (November, 1848), p. 317.
57 "Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXII (June, 1841), p. 281.
58 Mrs. Sarah J. Hale, "How to Begin," Godey's Lady's Book, XXIII (July, 1841), pp. 41-42.
plates were justified under this philosophy. They were no longer to amuse the idle and inactive housewife, but were now for her "moral improvement." Godey's launched a campaign to do away with their former stiff and pudgy fashion figures, and to replace them with healthful, graceful figures. The new fashion plate was to be responsible for everything from taste and rationality to economy, grace, charm, health, and beauty.

Women, then, were not only becoming standards of moral, and of sexually moral behavior, but they were becoming attractive, active, and desirable figures in the process. Perhaps this was because under the traditionalist philosophy women had to submit to men so needed to be protected by non-sexuality. Now, however, women were so morally and sexually pure that they were inherently unassailable, and thus could display their charms.

In any case, woman had effectively used her moral powers to establish most aspects of the home as her own personal domain. She was a queen, perhaps trapped in some ways by her own greatness, but always very sure to exact her homage and fealty from her liege.

59 "Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXVII (January, 1843), p. 56.
61 "Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXVI (February, 1843), pp. 105-108.
CHAPTER V

THE CHALLENGE AT LARGE

Dissatisfied with increasing success in the schools and homes of America, reformers decided to enter the world "outside" of the realm of children and family. Women took an initial step toward this goal when they reinterpreted the moral guardian idea by arguing that they should go out of their homes to engage in charity work. Since it had traditionally been the women of the family who had saved parcels of old clothes or given handouts from the back door, it was not a totally alien idea that they should extend their efforts outside of their homes. When it was added that "woman's mission is moral," it became quite clear that "she must use her talents, learning and influence for the good of others."^1

Women were thus admonished not to let their "manifold domestic duties so to engross our feelings and our time" to the exclusion of the "social claim" upon them.^2 Godey's encouraged the charity activities of its readers by supporting Ladies' Fairs held for charitable purposes.3

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^1"Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXV (July, 1842), p. 58. This was a particularly relevant argument for an era that believed what the poor needed most was moral guidance and instruction. See Robert H. Bremner, From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States (New York: New York University Press, 1956), p. 33.

^2Mrs. S. E. Farley, "Domestic and Social Claims on Woman," Godey's Lady's Book, XXIV (March, 1842), p. 149.

^3"Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XVIII (June, 1839), p. 283.
and by suggesting that there should be institutions to train female nurses and "visitors of the sick and poor."^4 Mrs. Hale personally set a good example by her interest in such activities as the women's movement to support the Bunker Hill Monument, and the development of the Seaman's Aid Society.^5 Gradually similar efforts of active female philanthropists like Rebecca Gratz became publicly known and commended. Eventually women in fiction too began to perform acts of charity and a favorite story was the one in which a benevolent woman sallied into the slums to save a bereft mother and her starving infant. Although women were entreated to "do right, dare to be useful, the conventional forms of society notwithstanding,"^6 there were some very practical objections raised against the unescorted, obviously well-to-do woman entering a slum area. Even this, however, was answered by the superior morality of women. It was reasoned that,

The province of our sex, though subordinate, is one of peculiar privilege: sheltered from temptation, and in league with those silent and sleepless charities, which bless us without seeking applause. The duty of submission, imposed both by the nature of our station and the ordinances of God, disposes to that humility, which is the essence of piety; while our physical weakness, our trials, and our inability to

^4"Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXXV (December, 1847), pp. 330-332.

^5"Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXI (October, 1840), p. 189. For further discussion of women's charitable activities see Mary B. Treudley, "The 'Benevolent Fair': A Study of Charitable Organization among American Women in the First Third of the Nineteenth Century," The Social Service Review, XIV (September, 1940), pp. 509-522.

protect ourselves, prompt that trust in Heaven, that implicit leaning upon a Divine arm, 'which is the most enduring strength, and the surest protection.'

This interest of women in good works led to their involvement in established charity organizations under the auspices of religious bodies. This initial and apparently harmless toehold eventually grew into an assault on the masculine dominance of the church. Women felt that their moral nature made them better fitted for the ministry than did the debased nature of men. Their direct communication with the "Higher Authority" not only made a learned minister unnecessary but invalidated any pronouncements on religious matters by men.

Ministers were not easily intimidated by the morality of women, however, and they kept a firm hold on the ministry and the government of the churches. But women were undaunted and soon discovered opportunities as missionaries. Articles and sketches began to appear encouraging them to enter the missionary field. "Christianity," one of these maintained, "not only elevates woman to her proper sphere, and insures her the respect to which, by nature, she is entitled, but also opens a wide field for the exercise of those peculiar talents and virtues which under the influence of a pure religion are resplendent in her character." Young girls were encouraged to "picture forth in their own lives, all that is

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7 Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies*, p. 91.


9 Papashvily, *All the Happy Endings*, pp. 105-106.

lovely in woman's character, or sanctified and ennobling in woman's high ambition," by planning a future as a female missionary." Those women who actually became missionaries were lauded as more courageous than the knights of old, and their biographies were frequently reprinted to encourage other women to aspire to such moral fulfillment. With women entering religious charity organizations, becoming missionaries, and even gradually taking over as Sunday school teachers, reformers felt they were making some progress. Mrs. Hale even went so far as to claim that "America owes much of her glory to the character of her women" who aid the "cause of Christian missions, Sabbath schools, and charities of every kind."13

Certainly women made several direct gains from their early religious involvement. Not only were they brought together in a common pursuit where they could discuss their problems and aspirations, but they got outside of their homes, they learned techniques of organization, and they associated the stature of the churches with their efforts.14 All of this surely heightened their awareness of what they were being denied in the world outside of their own homes and made them more effective in their demands for extended rights.

12 Rufus W. Griswold, "The Heroism of the Knights Errant and of the Female Missionaries of America," Godey's Lady's Book, XXXVII (August, 1848), pp. 61-68.
In any event, scattered demands began to appear for certain civil rights, particularly the right to own property. Women had long experienced legal death, including the loss of personal control of their property when they married. But as their capacity for moral influence came to be more generally accepted, they were gradually conceived of as mature and responsible individuals capable of handling their own affairs. It was argued that to deprive them of their livelihood, often for the benefit of a greedy or profligate husband, was unfair, especially when the wife possessed the business acumen but the husband devoured the profits.

In 1837, when a revolutionary bill was introduced in the New York Legislature to give married women certain property rights, Mrs. Hale commented, The barbarous custom of wrestling from a woman whatsoever she possesses, whether by inheritance, donation, or her own industry, and conferring it all upon the man she marries, to be used at his discretion and will, perhaps wasted on his wicked indulgences, without allowing her any control or redress, is such a monstrous perversion of justice by law, that we might marvel how it could obtain in a Christian community, if we did not take into account the force of habit in reconciling the mind to evils, injuries, and suffering of every sort.

Later in the decade, when Tennessee adopted a similar measure, it was concluded that "The Justice of such a measure seems at once so apparent,

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16 Mrs. Hofland, "Real Conversation; or, Recollections of the Past," Godey's Lady's Book, XVI (January, 1838), pp. 1-4.

that it is a matter of wonder why it is now, for the first time to be established."^®

Perhaps what made property rights for married women seem threatening were the implications of equality involved. Godey's, for example, suggested that reformers did not wish to make a wife independent, but only to put her interests on the same footing as her husband's.^® In other words, all contracts and relationships involved in the marriage should be equally understood and equally binding on both parties regardless of sex. As another periodical phrased it, woman "might be lifted up from her state of servitude and vassalage to that of partnership."^®

A few reformers went beyond the property question to discuss women's possible "role" in politics. It was pointed out that although men voted, held official positions, and made laws, it was really the moral influence of women that determined the ways in which men did these things. According to Mrs. Hale, "woman must influence while man governs, and . . . their duties, though equal in dignity and importance, can never be identical."^® "From the foundation of character and constitution

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^®"Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXXII (February, 1846), pp. 94-96.
which every mother establishes for her children," she continued in a later issue, "must emanate the habits and condition of the world. We form the lawgivers, and if the laws are not good, it is a sure proof our part was not well done."  

As "allies of legislators" women were advised to learn the basic principles of American government, to take an interest in passing events, and to read newspapers and journals thoroughly. Although women were further advised not to lose their true dignity by "aspiring to direct the affairs of state," they were encouraged to "feel an interest in the welfare of their country," and to amass "enough information respecting the constitution and principles of its government, to be able to listen intelligently to the conversations of those who have knowledge and wisdom on these topics." Mrs. Hale most succinctly summarized the argument in an attempt to reassure men that their power was not in danger. "These views do not contemplate the least infringement on the station or privileges of the other sex," she wrote. "All the external regulations of government, all the honours and offices of public life belong to men;  

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23 "Editor's Table," *Godey's Lady's Book*, XXXIV (January, 1847), pp. 50-53.  
28 "The Cousins; or, Fireside Sketches," *Godey's Lady's Book*, XXXI (July, 1845), p. 29.
but to qualify them for the performance of these high and responsible duties, they must have the aid of the enlightened moral sentiment of woman."  

While women were apparently willing to let men do the actual work of government, they were not willing to let the welfare of the country as a whole rest in male hands. Women claimed not only that their intellectual and moral attainments would improve society, but that they would "even decide, as it were, the destiny of our country." The logic of this was that the stability of government and society were dependent on national morality which was shaped by women. The American woman was reminded that "the destiny of this mighty republic is under your control, and hence the consequent freedom and the political and moral elevation of humanity throughout the world." If men raised objections to this, they were threatened that "woman's influence--powerful in its gentleness, strong in its beauty, firm in its support while it seems dependent in its weakness, is still around you; and as you cherish or neglect it, so will the Republic stand or fall."  

29 Mrs. S. E. Farley, "Domestic and Social Claims on Woman," Godey's Lady's Book, XXIV (March, 1842), pp. 148-149.  
30 "Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXII (June, 1841), p. 281.  
Paradoxically, women frequently maintained that they were not working for women's rights. When Yankee editor and reformer John Neal gave a public lecture supporting extended rights for women, some of his most vehement critics were women. One woman, who called his ideas "insane crudities," found it "gratifying to remark that women themselves have been the prominent satirists of the characteristic absurdities put forth on the occasion alluded to." Similarly, the fictional heroine who worked for women's rights and equality with men, was deserted by her lover and rebuked by her uncle.

He represented to her, that she was losing caste, among the discreet and good--that she was taking a step, the folly of which, she would surely live to repent. He placed the subject before her in its true light--he told her of the stigma she would bring upon her family--he delineated in eloquent and forcible language, a delicate female descending from her high station of loveliness and truth, to follow phantasy--to acquire an unenviable and unfeminine notoriety.

When she continued with her activities, she not only hastened her parents' deaths, but she finally "met with her down fall from all that was womanly; and became the derision of the other sex, as she was already the contempt of her own." She was so broken that she was committed to an insane asylum where she died. Meanwhile, her former lover married her cousin who righteously proclaimed "It shall not be my fault if they (her children) attain maturity without acknowledging and illustrating the

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happy effect which a well directed maternal influence is calculated to exert for the moral regeneration of mankind." 36

This controversy concerning women's rights, and indeed the whole notion of "moral guardianship," was given its most far-reaching and most frightening interpretation by Mrs. Hale when she wrote:

Some reformers there are who are zealously urging the cause of "Woman's Rights"--we are anxious she should be instructed to perform her duties. If she will faithfully discharge the latter, she need not trouble herself about the former. Will a good son consent that his mother--that any mother should be wronged or oppressed? Let all mothers train up their sons to be good men, and we should have good legislators, who would speedily reform what is now unjust and injurious in our laws. And remember that good sons will make good husbands and fathers, thus securing and perpetuating the happiness, and improvement of social and domestic life. 37

After all, what more was there for women to desire when the world was theirs for the making? Only the feminist movement of the next decade could provide the answer.

36 Ibid., pp. 150-156.

37 "Editor's Table," Godey's Lady's Book, XXII (February, 1841), p. 95.
CHAPTER VI

THE NEW WOMAN: THE CHALLENGE SURVIVES

By the end of the 1840's some of the more aggressive women reformers decided that they were no longer satisfied by shaping the world through their moral influence alone. They came together in a convention at Seneca Falls in July of 1848, and here they composed their "Declaration of Rights" demanding more personal liberty, control of their own property, and participation in government.¹ Although their demands met with much derision in the press and public opinion, other conventions followed. Seneca Falls marked the beginning of an era in which women were to organize on their own behalf, and of their rejection of the belief that women's influence should be only indirect. The idea of women's superior morality had served its purpose, for its arguments had changed the image of the American woman from a servant confined to her home to an aggressive individual engaged and accepted in many fields of endeavor.

This new image of women was derived from the belief that they were capable of determining alternatives, deciding among them, and acting upon their decisions. For example, there was increasing stress

¹For a discussion of Seneca Falls see Augusta G. Violette, Economic Feminism in American Literature Prior to 1848 (Orono, Maine: University of Maine Press, 1925), pp. 99-100 and Elizabeth C. Stanton et al., The History of Woman Suffrage (Rochester, New York: Charles Mann, 1889), pp. 53-73.
upon women as courageous heroines, not just when it was necessary to save their men, but in all kinds of dangerous situations. In the mid-1840's Godey's began to publish sketches about heroic women of the American Revolution as a regular feature. "The women of that era were equal to the crisis," one of the authors wrote, for they contributed "active assistance, by the labor of their hands; by the sacrifice of their luxuries; by the surrender of what had been deemed necessaries." One of these heroines was a woman who overheard a conversation between British officers and then at the peril of her life warned General Washington of an intended attack. In addition to such early American heroines, more recent examples were also cited. One long tale appeared in which an explorer's life was saved innumerable times by women, while another story celebrated the wife who realized that a robber was hidden under the bed and detained him by staying in the room for two hours until her husband returned to deal with him.

Women's new image can also be found in the increasing demands that they not be idle. They were to use their faculties and talents in some way: in reading, sewing, housework, overseeing servants, charity work, and so on. They were to act, and any type of industry was now

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3 "Heroic Women of America, Quaker Heroism," Godey's Lady's Book, XXXI (July, 1845), pp. 2-4.

4 Seba Smith, "Examples of Female Heroism," Godey's Lady's Book, XXXI (July, 1845), pp. 267-269.

5 Miss C. M. Sedgwick, "Fanny McDermott," Godey's Lady's Book, XXX (February, 1845), pp. 84-88.
regarded as preferable to idleness. Not only were women no longer ornaments, but they were no longer considered "natural housekeepers" either. Domesticity was now only one of their alternatives. It was not inherent in women's natures, nor an uniform part of every girl's socialization, but an art requiring study even by adults. Godey's reflected this new trend by initiating a series of articles on domestic economy which were designed to teach young women the elements of housekeeping. The wise young lady was encouraged to learn how to cook, for example, because it was "the art of preserving health, of saving expense, of preventing waste, and of promoting the real and innocent enjoyments of home." Even if she was to have servants, it was still necessary for her to know how to do everything herself so that she could properly direct them and insure an efficiently managed household. It was commonly preached that the girl who did not act on her own behalf to learn the domestic arts would be victimized by her servants, would make her husband's life miserable, and would be very unhappy herself.

Of course marriage was still considered the most important event in a woman's life, but it was no longer to be rushed into at sixteen or seventeen years of age just to get a man and start a family. Young girls were no longer looking for a man to serve, but for one whose personality and character would be compatible with their own. Accordingly, they were

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8 Mrs. Emma C. Embury, "Married Too Soon; or A Lesson from Life," Godey's Lady's Book, XXV (November, 1842), pp. 229-234.
advised to wait until their own character had time to form so that they knew what they desired in a mate. It was argued that,

A maiden of twenty is cooler, more thoughtful and more cautious. . . . A fond, wayward child of sixteen may chance to marry and do well, spite of all the drawbacks she may meet; but this is only in case she happens to marry a man of good sense, warm affections and great kindness and forbearance. He can bear with her as a father bears with a capricious child . . . 9

Accordingly the courtship was considered crucial because the decision made then would determine the rest of the girl's life. She was not only to be cautious, but to turn to her parents and friends for advice. 10 Her first love was no longer necessarily her true love, and eligible young ladies now commonly rejected many offers before their man finally appeared. 11

This kind of thinking indicates that marriage no longer filled primarily an economic need, but served personality needs as well. Industrialization had helped break the extended kinship family into a conjugal family composed only of the parents and their children. Because this was relatively lonely, the woman had to be not only a wife and a mother but also a companion. 12 Submission in a wife was no longer valued, but rather "a spirit that spurns at a tyrant's control" was considered


12 Dykas and Clarke, Social Problems, pp. 98-106.
desirable. It was frequently asserted that women should stand "side by side with man, a help-meet for him in all his pursuits and improvements." Helpmeet was now conceived of as a companion, and definitely not as a housekeeper. Because "the sexes were intended as companions for each other," it came to be thought that the husband should always "consult the wife, and he should engage in no important enterprise without her advice and approbation; because their interests are identical, courtesy—if not necessity—demand consultation."

The more liberal women scorned the conservatives who did not demand the adoption of these attitudes by their husbands. "You who give yourselves 'to be supported,' or because 'one must love something,'" Margaret Fuller Ossoli charged, "are they who make the lot of the sex such that mothers are sad when daughters are born." Similarly, the Dial encouraged women to give up the idea of being taught and led by men. If women would only assert themselves once, they would find that they were forever freed from helplessness.

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13 "Female Charms," *Godey's Lady's Book*, XXXI (February, 1846), p. 52.


16 "Editor's Table," *Godey's Lady's Book*, XXXV (November, 1847), p. 270.


Women could achieve such liberation from their dependence on men in many ways. Before marriage they might pursue careers. One fictional young lady supported herself by her art and met her husband through it, while another pursued scientific studies for several years before deciding to marry. Within marriage they could be "rational, intellectual, useful," as in the case of the wife who reorganized and carried on her own, and her less courageous sister's family after their husband's business failures. In case of a husband's death they had a choice of several ways to support themselves and their children without the help of a man. This lesson was demonstrated by a typical story concerning a widow who refused to take a chance on the way a second marriage might turn out until after she had raised her children herself and had seen them married. Even if a woman's husband turned out to be a rogue, she was no longer destined to endurance or death. If she herself had acted without reproach she could leave her husband, and it would generally be assumed that she had a just cause. In one such situation, a young girl who married a rake was forced to leave him and return to her parent's

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20 Virginia De Forest, "The Sketcher," Godey's Lady's Book, XXVI (February, 1843), pp. 61-64.
21 Cited in Calhoun, Social History of the American Family, p. 115.
home. This fortunately emancipated female was not even required to perish of disappointment in love. Even the daughter who created her own troubles by marrying a drunkard and gambler against her father's wishes was welcomed back into her father's home. In a revolutionary reversal of roles, the husband conveniently died, leaving her to live happily ever after.

It was even possible that a woman might decide against marriage altogether because "old maids" were now conceived of as useful and necessary to society. In a typical case, a rich young girl, whose lover deserted her when her father lost his fortune, started a school and later raised her former lover's three children when he killed himself over a business failure. The moral was drawn that she had actually been more useful and happier than she would have been as his wife. One of the most popular types of old maid stories concerned "aunts." There was, for example, Aunt Mercy who morally regenerated her sister after her sister's husband was violently killed, and who so inspired a careless young man that he became a minister. Similarly, Aunt Mary devoted herself to the poor and raised her brother's three children when his wife died.


26 Miss E. A. Dupuy, "The Wilful One; or Scenes from the Life of Marie Hamilton," Godey's Lady's Book, XX (June, 1840), pp. 253-263.


29 "My Aunt Mary," Godey's Lady's Book, XXXIII (September, 1846), pp. 103-106.
fictional old maids concluded that they would "do it over again" or as a poem in the *Knickerbocker Magazine* phrased it,

> And we are spinster both, dear Kate!  
> Yet happy ones, I trow;  
> There's many a wedded wife I know  
> Who wears a sadder brow;  

The revolutionary admission that one could be happy and fulfilled outside of marriage, and unhappy in it, also led to increased tolerance of bachelors. One very bitter bachelor publicly proclaimed that marriage always cured love because it was so full of "uncertain annoyances." He lamented that a beautiful and accomplished wife often turned out to know little about anything useful, and might even have a temper as well.

This suggestion that women were not as perfect as they had been represented was not isolated, for this thought was beginning to appear rather frequently in literature. In a typical story a young man married a rich and silly young girl who squandered his fortune and ruined his business. When he was totally bankrupt, she deserted him and sailed for France with a "bearded foreigner." He quickly divorced her, started over again as a clerk, and eventually worked his way back to financial security and happiness. Although most Americans still clung to the idea of the sanctity of the marriage relation and the infinite morality of women,

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some men and women were apparently beginning to realize that since there were possibilities open to them outside of marriage, they no longer had to defend it as an absolute necessity.

Naturally many Americans were hesitant to accept what they considered to be revolutionary new beliefs about women. There were still those who reminded women that,

To thee, indeed, no narrow bound
Has God or man assigned;
Duties within thy HOME are found,
Worthy thy noblest mind.

Take care of your children, parents, brothers
But if on thee no duty falls,
As sister, daughter, wife,
Still enter not the noisy halls
Of fierce debate and strife.

Still, still fulfill the glorious plan,
So full of love to thee,
Which gives the commonwealth to man,
Home's empire thine to be! 34

Some even complained that education had been reformed too drastically.

"Woman with us is educated for the world," one such critic lamented, "and not for her natural and only appropriate sphere—domestic life." 35

The literature of debate on the position of women grew so rapidly in the early 1840's that the Dial commented that women were the most talked of topic in America. 36 For the first time "women" as a topic could be found in the indexes of periodicals, and even etiquette books added a

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chapter on "equality" and the new social relationships with men.27

One of the most significant aspects of this discussion concerning women was that alternatives were no longer presented as black and white. A young woman could love several times before making her final choice; if disappointed in love, she did not have to die but could pursue a career or even love again; and if she were not quite as moral as she should be according to society's standards, she would be censured, but she certainly would not die.

In the 1830's and early 40's death had almost always been the answer for several reasons. During these years women were status symbols for their husbands and were therefore associated with their husbands' egos. Any stain on her honor was seen as an injury to his ego and therefore called for severe punishment.28 In addition, the image of women had become so highly idealized that any lapse had to have extreme results. At the same time the rapid changes in society caused Americans to fear increased sexual freedom and therefore to try to maintain the old standards through harsh punishments.

In the mid-1840's, however, the evil woman began to appear and to survive in fiction. Perhaps frustrated by the ideal woman, men began to desire more reality in the opposite sex. Perhaps too, the fear of change was beginning to dissipate. In the 1820's and 30's a woman's deviation from the status quo inevitably led to her death. But as social change

27T. S. Arthur, Advice to Young Ladies on Their Duties and Conduct in Life (Boston: Phillips and Sampson, 1848).

28Davis, Homicide in American Fiction, pp. xiii, 151, 171, 183.
came to be accepted as a condition of life, women could adjust and select among alternatives rather than either conforming or dying.

This change in attitude is central to the emerging women's rights movement. In less than two decades the image of the American woman was transformed from a chattel to a challenger. Whether Americans were willing to admit it to themselves or not, the stage was set for challenges to become demands.
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