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## Marriage

The institution of marriage was central to debates about the position of women in nineteenth-century Britain. The gendered and classed notions of equality limited extensions of the political franchise to middle-class men, restricted women's rights within marriage and denied them access to higher education. Any prospect of women's participation in the professions was similarly severely limited and subjected to scrutiny in ways that had implications for understandings of marriage and the role of men and women within it. The most influential of the critics of this orthodoxy were arguably John Ruskin and John Stuart Mill, whose views on women's role in society and marriage contributed to reshaping individual expectations and aspirations among professional and educated elites.<sup>1</sup> To Ruskin, women were innately different from men. Their particular nurturing capacities and sensitivities were better suited to the domestic and private world of the family. By contrast, Mill rejected innate difference and saw the confinement of women to the domestic sphere as a social construction that could be unmade. Fundamental as this difference of views was, there was common ground to be found. Each wanted higher education open to women. Each saw the family as the crucible in which the better society might be nurtured. Ruskin emphasised the role of the mother as moral guardian and was thus closer to the tradition of evangelical motherhood than Mill, whose rational secularism sought a pooling

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1 John Ruskin, 'Lecture II.—Lilies Of Queens' Gardens', in John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), Ward, Lock and Co., London, 1911; John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (1869).

of talent in the quest for the useful citizen. It is here, somewhere in the gap between Ruskin and Mill, that the marriages of the five couples of this study took shape in new world societies.

## Helen Connon and John Macmillan Brown: A marriage of two professionals

On 9 December 1886, Helen Connon, Principal of Christchurch Girls' High School, married her former Canterbury College professor, John Macmillan Brown, in the living room of her rented Lichfield Street home. The wedding and subsequent honeymoon in Sydney took place during the school and university vacation. Helen had instructed a pupil sitting a junior university scholarship examination that day to bring the exam papers to her shortly after the ceremony, so that they might review them together.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in her wedding as in much else, the historical image of Helen Connon bequeathed to us by her contemporaries is that of the dedicated, if not saintly, teacher. As student, graduate and teacher, she had come to symbolise an emerging womanly ideal that was taking shape amongst the educated colonial elite. Her particular combination of intelligence, colonial spirit and reassuring femininity provided comforting evidence that higher education for women was neither a masculinising nor de-sexing force. Indeed, her university and teaching successes were celebrated in self-congratulatory fashion within the city's professional community as an endorsement of colonial liberalism and as offering evidence that women's involvement in professional life did not threaten the social structure.

Any understanding of the Connon–Macmillan Brown courtship and marriage needs to be set against this public idealisation. Helen continued for eight years as a married principal of Christchurch Girls' High School, and the combination of professional career, marriage and motherhood was viewed with admiration by the city's educated community. In this sense, it was a marriage that was woven around their shared promotion of the higher education of young women. The difficulty in separating myth from reality has been exacerbated

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2 'Marriage', *Lyttelton Times*, 10 December 1886, p. 4; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, p. 60.

by the unique nature of its creation.<sup>3</sup> The received version derives from the biography written in 1905, shortly after Helen's death at the age of 46, by her close friend Edith Searle Grossmann.<sup>4</sup> As a protégé of Helen Connon at Christchurch Girls' High School and Macmillan Brown at Canterbury College, Grossmann brought intimate sympathy and personal crusade to the task of biographer. Her account stresses the deliberative and idealistic elements of her mentor's life. She emphasises Connon's commitment to transforming the position of women, stresses the innovative and radical nature of her contribution to girls' education, and presents her effort to combine the traditional woman's role of wife, mother and household manager with a professional career as driven by contemporary feminist perspective.

Like much else in the Macmillan Brown–Connon relationship, the story of their 'meeting and mating' is complex. Daughter Millicent claimed in her memoirs that her parents had become secretly engaged when Helen was a 20-year-old student and seven years prior to their marriage.<sup>5</sup> Grossmann suggests that the courtship began when Helen was studying at Canterbury College in the evenings, across the hall from Macmillan Brown's study. Contemporaries seem not to have noticed. James Reeve Wilkinson, a spurned suitor who had frequently walked Connon home from the university on such occasions, had not 'perceived the trend' of her affection for Macmillan Brown.<sup>6</sup> Margaret Lovell-Smith's recent biography sees such a relationship as unlikely, given the determination with which proprieties were observed in the interests of deflecting criticism from women students.<sup>7</sup> The firmest evidence points to a relationship that began sometime after Helen Connon assumed the principalship at Christchurch Girls' High School. In his *Memoirs*, Macmillan Brown places his decision in the context of his desire to put club life behind him:

3 Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 7–8, 25–26, 56–57, discusses the problems with sources about Helen Macmillan Brown.

4 Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*; Heather Roberts, 'Edith Searle Grossmann, (1863–1931)', *DNZB*, vol. 2, pp. 180–81. Grossmann attended Christchurch Girls' High School in 1879 (and was head girl), graduated from Canterbury College in 1885 with an MA in Latin, English and Political Science, and went on to work as a teacher, novelist and journalist. She was active in the New Zealand women's movement and wrote novels with a feminist slant, including *In Revolt* (1893) and *The Heart of the Bush* (1910).

5 Millicent Baxter, *The Memoirs of Millicent Baxter*, Cape Catley, Whatamongo Bay, 1981, p. 16.

6 James R. Wilkinson, 'Educational Reminiscences from 1866', p. 38, CMDRC, ARC.1992.54; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, p. 59.

7 Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 57–58.

I had long contemplated a domestic life, as I could not ask any students to the Club or offer them other hospitality. My eye had long rested on one of my earliest lady students, Miss Helen Connon, who had been the first woman to take an honours degree in the British Empire. She was a very beautiful girl, much admired by some of the most successful men students and by others who were not students. She was now head of the Girls' High School and was making it a great success ...<sup>8</sup>

Whenever the romantic attachment began, it flourished in a protégé–mentor relationship of unusual intensity. To Macmillan Brown, Helen's university successes and teaching career added lustre to his growing status within the colonial academic environment. For Helen, Macmillan Brown's constant support and guidance had paved the way for a career that held out the beguiling prospect of playing a part in transforming the lives of young women of talent. In accepting his proposal on the condition that she continue as principal of Christchurch Girls' High School after their marriage, she was in effect ensuring that in marriage, as in her career, she would be entering new and largely uncharted territory.<sup>9</sup> While the concept of a married female principal was a socially acceptable one with precedents in the old world as well as the new, it remained a novel one in the 1880s and was widely embraced as such by the city's liberal, educated elite.<sup>10</sup>

This deeply inculcated and shared sense of mission gave rise to idealised views of marriage. Grossmann describes the defining characteristic as a rare union of minds, which, for Helen, 'came near the true ideal

8 Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, p. 180.

9 Elementary schools run by married couples were popular in mid-nineteenth-century Australia. Small private schools headed by a woman, offering an accomplishment-style curriculum in a home-like setting were a common enough feature of the period also. Many of them were run as family businesses, and some by married women. Yet Helen Connon (and her fellow pioneering headmistresses), a university degree-holding certificated teacher and principal of a state school with an academic bias, represented something different. See Theobald, *Knowing Women*, ch. 2, 4, 5.

10 Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, p. 73, points to 'Another prominent Christchurch example', Emily Brittan, who had continued to teach at West Christchurch School after her marriage in 1882 and succeeded Helen Macmillan Brown as principal of Christchurch Girls' High School in 1894. Helen had something of a counterpart in the principal of state secondary school Sydney Girls' High, British-born Lucy Wheatley Walker Garvin, appointed in 1883, though she 'belonged to the pre-university generation' of female educational pioneers. She married in 1891 and proceeded to have three children while continuing as principal of the school (Theobald, *Knowing Women*, pp. 115–16). New South Wales introduced a marriage bar for female teachers in 1895, following the earlier example of the state of Victoria in 1893. New Zealand introduced a marriage bar for women working in the public service, including teachers, in 1913.

of Plato'.<sup>11</sup> To this fundamental, intellectual understanding, Macmillan Brown grafted a set of attitudes and expectations that derived from heroic literary models. Shakespeare's female characters loom large in the literary markers of his feminine ideal: Portia from the *Merchant of Venice*, Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing*, Rosalind from *As You Like It*, Viola from *Twelfth Night* (after whom the couple named their second daughter) and Coriolanus's wife, Virgilia, whom Ruskin had described as the 'loveliest' of Shakespeare's female characters.<sup>12</sup> From Greek mythology and literature Macmillan Brown found much to admire in Homer's wily, resourceful Penelope—faithful wife of Odysseus. Like Ruskin, Macmillan Brown found in these literary figures 'the highest type of humanity': a combination of physical and spiritual beauty, intelligence, and strength of character, infused with gentleness, self-sacrifice and submissiveness. The 'true woman', he said, discussing Portia in the *Merchant of Venice*, possessed a 'brave self-controlling gentleness and yieldingness'.<sup>13</sup> Helen, for John Macmillan Brown, came to represent his ideal heroine.<sup>14</sup>

The intellectual partnership to which the Macmillan Browns aspired in marriage has its origin in the development of Christchurch Girls' High School. Effectively an adjunct of Canterbury College, the school provided an academic education for girls that aimed to develop the 'whole being' and prepare them for university. Helen Connon had joined the staff while a student at Canterbury College, after being recommended by Macmillan Brown, and became 'Lady Principal' with his support. During her 11-year term as principal, as Gardner has demonstrated, her success at preparing students for university helped feminise the arts faculty and made Canterbury College New Zealand's leading women's university.<sup>15</sup> Her dedicated mentoring of talented girls for university was focused upon the close textual study of English literature and drew heavily upon methodologies she had

11 Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, p. 26.

12 Ruskin, 'Lecture II: Lilies', pp. 65, 62–93.

13 John Macmillan Brown, *Julius Caesar: A Study*, Whitcombe & Tombs, Christchurch, 1894, p. 148.

14 See, for example, Macmillan Brown's *Memoirs*, pp. x–xi, 180, 183, 188, 213–14.

15 Gardner, *Colonial Cap and Gown*, pp. 97–98, 106. See also Matthews, *In Their Own Right*, pp. 88–92, 105–6, 108–9, 111.

imbibed from Macmillan Brown.<sup>16</sup> Her influence, as he observed in a report on the girls' school written for Canterbury College in the years preceding their marriage, was such that the girls stopped 'little short of worship'.<sup>17</sup> This was precisely the mix of emulation and identification that he had sought to cultivate through his own teaching, and the combination is neatly captured in the diary jottings of a young pupil: 'I wonder shall I rise as Mrs Brown has risen? I am not in such a low position as she was and what is she now!'<sup>18</sup>

Historians of girls' education have discerned in women teachers who spearheaded the quest for higher education a set of progressive motivations they describe as 'discreet coterie feminism', which 'co-existed with the agendas of the traditional clientele'.<sup>19</sup> Such thinking lay behind Helen Cannon's dedication to her most able academic students, but we may also observe similar democratic purpose in her development of the school curriculum, especially in the promotion of vocational education.<sup>20</sup> To Helen and the women who taught with her, the introduction of shorthand and typing in 1884 was not simply catering for a new labour market demand, but provided young girls of modest backgrounds a pathway to economic independence. Similarly, the introduction of optional Saturday morning cooking classes was viewed not as a preparation for the domestic sphere, but as a skill that would facilitate independent womanhood.<sup>21</sup> To the elements of feminist expectation and academic evangelicalism that lay at the

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16 Canterbury College Girls High School Prize List and Prospectus, December 1883, pp. 8–9; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 46–47; Grossmann, *Life*, pp. 35–36; Barbara Peddie, *Christchurch Girls' High School, 1877–1977*, Christchurch High School Old Girls' Association, Christchurch, 1977, pp. 15–48.

17 Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, p. 180.

18 An entry from Elsie Lowe's 1891 diary, cited by Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, p. 67.

19 Theobald, *Knowing Women*, p. 94.

20 Coral Chambers, *Lessons for Ladies: A Social History of Girls' Education in Australasia, 1870–1900*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1986, p. 99, writes that the public girls' schools were arguably 'better adapters' to colonial circumstances than the public boys' schools, which strove to emulate English models with their emphasis on classics and mathematics and reluctance to introduce specialist vocational subjects.

21 Peddie, *Christchurch Girls' High*, pp. 40–48; Grossmann, *Life*, pp. 34–36; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 41–51; Ruth Fry, *It's Different For Daughters: A History of the Curriculum for Girls in New Zealand Schools, 1900–1975*, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Wellington, 1985, pp. 26–36; Theobald, *Knowing Women*, pp. 90–129; Melanie Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State*, Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2000, pp. 112–22; Chambers, *Lessons for Ladies*, pp. 94–103.

heart of Connon's teaching career, marriage added an intensity which derived much of its strength from the protégé-mentor basis upon which it was built.

The gender roles within the Macmillan Brown household at Holmbank remained essentially the traditional ones. Their joint incomes allowed them to employ two domestic servants, a gardener and odd-jobs man. Helen seems to have assumed the role of household-manager as her natural territory, and John just as naturally assumed it so. After years residing at a men's club, he took particular pleasure from the creation of Holmbank's five-acre garden, notable for its native trees and plants, and in many ways it represented the putting down of roots, and of laying the sense of exile that had infused his departure from Scotland to rest.<sup>22</sup> With Helen as a 'splendid helpmate', the domestic world of Holmbank enabled the full realisation of the academic ideal that he had absorbed at Oxford from Benjamin Jowett.<sup>23</sup> Sunday became an 'at home' day, when he held breakfasts for specially chosen students and friends—all members of the professional establishment, all of them male and all of them *his* rather than Helen's friends. At such times, it fell to Helen to be the busy hostess, overseeing the cooking and the serving of breakfasts by her sister, Maria, and trusted young girl pupils.

Parenthood came quickly. Their first child, Millicent, was born a little more than a year after their marriage, in January 1888, three weeks before the school year resumed.<sup>24</sup> The practicalities of Millicent's day-to-day physical care were left to others. As a baby she was bottle-fed, and the carers were drawn from a pool of trusted former pupils and students chosen for their capacity to follow Helen's instructions and preferred methods meticulously. In this initial nurturing, we glimpse the beginning of an educational experiment, designed and overseen, if not implemented, by Helen and John themselves. In essence, as we shall observe in greater detail in Chapter Six, it sought to implement, in the domestic context, their belief that the best form of education for young children was one based upon the careful nurturing on

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22 Thelma Strongman, *The Gardens of Canterbury: A History*, A.H. & A.W. Reed, Wellington, 1984, pp. 158–60.

23 Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, p. 183.

24 Baxter, *Memoirs*, p. 16.

a one-to-one level of individual needs and talents.<sup>25</sup> Whatever its educational merits, it was an idealistic experiment that relied for its implementation upon Helen.

Both the Macmillan Browns believed that the experiment would be enriched by the presence of another child, but it was to be some eight years before their second daughter was born.<sup>26</sup> A frustrating succession of miscarriages undermined the couple's confidence and seemed a fateful confirmation of the widespread general belief that the strain of higher education and paid employment undertaken by women would jeopardise maternal health. By 1892 Helen was exhausted.<sup>27</sup> The pair took six-months leave and travelled to Europe, where they consulted a leading Edinburgh obstetrician. Macmillan Brown took Helen to visit Oxford, where his mentor Benjamin Jowett, according to Grossmann, took 'her aside and told her how greatly he admired her fulfilment of the double duty and how much he thought it would do for the cause and development and position of women if she could continue ... in the principalship'.<sup>28</sup>

Upon their return to New Zealand, Helen continued to perform her 'double duty'. The strain under which the pair now laboured soon manifested itself in insomnia. In a bid to exhaust her body as well as her mind, Helen threw herself into a vigorous exercise program of rowing, cycling, hiking and horse riding. Throughout 1894 it became even more evident that the 'double life' had become an insuperable burden. At the urging of her husband, who thought that the miscarriages had taken an irreversible toll on her well-being and state of mind, Helen resigned the principalship in 1894.<sup>29</sup> She had held the position for 11 years, eight of them as a married woman and seven as a wife and mother.

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25 'Diary of Millicent Amiel Macmillan Brown Born 8 January 1888', JMBP, A11/13; Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 48–52; Macmillan Brown, *Modern Education*, pp. 18–21, 23–30; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 63–66.

26 Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, pp. 186–88.

27 'Girls' High School Lady Principal asking for leave', 17 May 1892, Canterbury College Inwards Correspondence, MBL 5334/1892.

28 Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 52–53; Helen Connon to Maria [Connon Brown], 24 and 26 October 1892, JMBP, A18 Correspondence 1870–1934; Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, pp. 187–88.

29 Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 52–54; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 68–69, 73–75; Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, p. 187.



The consequences of her retirement for the marriage may be briefly stated. Helen became a veritable headmistress of the household. She involved herself more directly in her daughter's education, personally taking control of lessons for several hours each day. A governess, however, continued to implement the educational program as prescribed and supervised by Helen. She continued to mentor former pupils as they endeavoured to pursue careers, but in other respects seems to have made a conscious decision to make a clean break from her former career. Indeed, she slipped quietly into the traditional female activities of her class: she made and received calls, managed the household, and diligently maintained her exercise regime.<sup>30</sup> Those women closest to her—her mother and sisters and friend, and later biographer, Grossmann—thought her behaviour and demeanour indicated restlessness and dissatisfaction. They point to her wanderings in the Port Hills, continued insomnia and a growing preoccupation with physical and mental fitness that flowed over in to an obsession with Millicent's health and development.<sup>31</sup> Such a reading suggests an intellectually oriented woman struggling to find fulfilment within the traditional female role of wife and mother.

Helen's dilemmas were lost in the more public nature of her husband's resignation from Canterbury College in March 1896.<sup>32</sup> The decision derived from an academic disillusionment, in which he began to question the importance he had placed upon the study of English literature as a guide to building the better society. Whatever its intellectual origin, the decision to retire came as his perception of failing personal health reached new levels of hypochondria. The eye-strain that had troubled him during his student days returned. A six-month holiday in Europe followed almost immediately. Its benefits were quickly realised: within a year of the couple's return to Christchurch their second daughter, Viola, was born.<sup>33</sup> The arrival of the new child confirmed the increasing conventionality of the marriage. For Helen

30 Baxter, *Memoirs*, p. 28; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 79–82.

31 E. B. Craig to Helen Macmillan Brown, 5 February 1896, 28 February 1896, 8 May 1902, JMBP, A19/7-9; Pata [Maria Brown] to Helen Macmillan Brown, 25 April 1902, 13 June 1902, JMBP, A19/10, A19/13; Mrs Connon, 'Mother', to Helen Macmillan Brown, 4 July 1902, JMBP, A19/11; Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 82–88; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 109–12; Penny Griffith, *Out of the Shadows: The Life of Millicent Baxter* [October 2015], PenPublishing, Wellington, February 2016, p. 53.

32 'Canterbury College: Farewell to Professor Brown', *Lyttelton Times*, 16 March 1896, p. 2; 'Professor Brown', *Press*, 2 April 1895, p. 4; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, p. 76.

33 On 16 November 1897.

this meant absorption in the domestic routines of the household and the education of her daughters. Conversely, freed of his university obligations, Macmillan Brown could now follow his intellectual interests wherever they led him, becoming something of a public intellectual with a particular interest in education and anthropology, and a proclivity for publishing his lectures and writing utopian novels.<sup>34</sup> It was in these conventional roles and within a context of deteriorating health that the final years of the marriage were played out. Early in 1900, the entire family embarked on a European tour that lasted nearly two years. Helen suffered a further miscarriage early in 1901, from which she 'never fully recovered'. Upon their return to Christchurch in January 1902, she withdrew to the family cottage in the seaside suburb of Sumner, leaving the children with her husband at Holmbank. In February she was diagnosed with diphtheria and died on 22 February 1903, aged 46.<sup>35</sup>

What sets the Connon–Macmillan Brown marriage apart from the others in this study is the extent to which it was publicly associated with the expectations of the embryonic feminist movement. It is an association that has produced considerable scrutiny of her marriage. As the nation's first female principal and the most prominent of Christchurch's first generation of middle-class educated women, Helen's attempt to combine marriage, motherhood and career posed fundamental questions about the institution of marriage and gender roles within it. Grossmann's assessment, written in 1905 shortly after Connon's death and from a feminist perspective, confronts the limitations of Connon's achievement. Helen had 'proved perfectly that a profession does not make a woman forfeit her womanliness, but the question of married women carrying on a public career she left unanswered'.<sup>36</sup> For Grossmann, the ambiguities grew from the particularities of colonial circumstances. The absence of a developed servant class that underpinned the achievements of middle-class women in the old world made the domestic aspects of the professional

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34 Macmillan Brown's utopian novels, *Riallato*, Putnam, New York, 1901, and *Limanora, the Island of Progress*, Putnam, New York, 1903, were published under the pseudonym Godfrey Sweven.

35 Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 86–88; Baxter, *Memoirs*, p. 29; Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, pp. 213–14; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 93, 105–6, 110–14.

36 Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, p. 53; Grossmann, 'Employment of Married Women as Teachers', *Canterbury Times*, 26 October 1893, p. 8.

marriage comparatively more difficult in newer communities.<sup>37</sup> The 'double duty' that she and contemporaries perceived as the preserve of women became insuperably more difficult for those like Helen Connon, whose marriage was imbued with a sense of personal mission.

Viewed from a wider historical perspective, the Connon–Macmillan Brown marriage can be seen as being shaped by a highly personalised form of academic evangelicalism and colonial middle-class feminist aspiration. The fusion of these lofty goals produced a marriage that both partners saw as possessing a shared intellectual basis. As Noel Annan has observed of intellectuals in another context, 'those who have clear ideas on what life ought to be always have difficulty in reconciling themselves to reality'.<sup>38</sup> The realities that operated within the domestic world required of the professional couple a capacity to cast aside prevailing gender assumptions—not only the male-as-sole-breadwinner, but also the female domestic manager. There is no evidence that the Macmillan Browns ever discussed their marriage in these terms. Each accepted roles that conformed to prevailing conventions and they did so in ways that reflected their individual personalities. The gentle, quiet, reserved Helen simply shouldered the 'double duty' and added the absolute control of the domestic sphere to her teaching responsibilities. The energetic, charismatic, self-absorbed John Macmillan Brown welcomed the ordered domesticity at Holmbank as a congenial setting for his academic endeavours and as a symbol of the moral verities of life. In short, the Macmillan Brown marriage sits on the cusp of social changes, the consequences of which were in the 1880s and 1890s only dimly understood. The intellectual union and equality that they sought and believed they had achieved as a professional couple required adjustments within marriage that neither contemplated.<sup>39</sup>

37 Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 53–54.

38 Annan, *The Dons*, pp. 21–22.

39 A notable comparison is Macmillan Brown's former colleague, chemistry professor Alexander Bickerton and his wife Phoebe, who established a federated home in 1896 at Wainoni, Christchurch, in which domestic chores were meant to be shared between the female and male residents. See Tolerton, *A Life of Ettie Rout*, pp. 28–31.

## Orme and Mary Masson: 'A kind of decent partnership'<sup>40</sup>

Orme Masson's aunt, Emily Andrews (1823–1862), was immortalised in 'The Angel in the House', a popular narrative poem written by her husband Coventry Patmore (1823–1896), which depicts the ideal wife of the Victorian era as selfless, submissive and docile.<sup>41</sup> While it was not an image that appealed to either Orme or Mary, their marriage nevertheless took a more conventional, middle-class form than that of the Macmillan Browns and was built around the notion of husband as breadwinner and wife as household manager, helpmate and mother. Mary proved to be the more conservative and traditional, nowhere more so than in the education of their adolescent daughters. On this issue and others, the Masson marriage and family experience encapsulates some of the ambivalence that characterises late nineteenth-century redefinitions of femininity.<sup>42</sup> For an understanding of these ambiguities, we are reliant upon correspondence between family members, observations made by friends, and the published reminiscences of the Masson daughters, Elsie and Marnie.

Orme Masson and Mary Struthers's whirlwind romance was anything but pragmatic or rational. They had become engaged three weeks after a first meeting in Edinburgh, arranged in traditional fashion from within the closed network of family and friends by Orme's sister Nell. Two years passed before marriage, as Orme conformed to the middle-class expectation that a gentleman should not embark upon marriage until he had secured a future that provided material comfort for his wife and family.<sup>43</sup> The nuptials and departure were in accord with the norms of Scottish middle-class professional family life: the marriage

40 Elsie Masson Malinowski to Bronio Malinowski, n.d., in Helena Wayne (ed.), *The Story of a Marriage: The Letters of Bronislaw Malinowski and Elsie Masson*, vol. 1, 1916–1920, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 183.

41 The poem was first published in 1854 and expanded until 1862, but did not become popular until later in the late nineteenth century; Ian Anstruther, *Coventry Patmore's Angel: A Study of Coventry Patmore, His Wife Emily and the Angel in the House*, Haggerston Press, London, 1992; Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, p. 3.

42 Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 145–94; Desley Deacon, 'Reorganising the Masculinist Context: Conflicting Masculinism in the New South Wales Public Service Bills Debates of 1895', in Magarey et al. (eds), *Debutante Nation*, pp. 50–58.

43 Orme Masson, 'Notes', ms, DOMFP, box 7/10/3; Mary Masson, 'Household Lists', ms, 1886, DOMFP, box 7/10/5; Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, pp. 17, 23–24.

took place in the drawing room of the Struthers's home in Migvie, Aberdeenshire; extended families and friends showered the couple with more than 100 wedding presents; the eight-day honeymoon was spent rushing about farewelling family and friends. In these familiar rituals, we may glimpse the ingredients that were to shape the Masson experience of marriage and migration: a companionable union of an educated couple comfortable within the middle-class Scottish environment, drawn to the new world by professional prospects, leaving the old with regret and a sense of separation, and jostling with the excitement of a future in their own hands.

It is possible to discern two phases in the evolution of the Masson marriage: an early phase in which the overlapping processes of establishing career and family defined marriage roles narrowly and in ways that are consistent with separate spheres; and a later phase in which individual and parallel lives are created that transcend the public/private categories of separate spheres. Our knowledge of the private working out of this transition is heavily dependent on the later reflections of the two Masson daughters, Marnie and Elsie. Such views bring with them emotional and generational judgements that demand caution. Nevertheless, the personalities and life experiences of the two daughters give their observations individual and complementary perspectives, and offer insights that might otherwise elude historians.

The early years of Mary Masson's marriage highlight a dilemma familiar enough amongst middle-class, educated young wives. Her education fitted her to become a companion to her educated husband—'a better wife and mother'—but left her ill-prepared for the domestically orientated and maternal role this would entail. Accustomed to depending upon servants, she had arrived in Melbourne clutching an 1880 edition of *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* and, as her daughter puts it, barely able to make her own bed. Servants were quickly found—one general domestic/cook to begin with, and later three, including a nursemaid for the children—and Mary quickly became an efficient mistress of the household. She was to remain keenly aware of her lack of practical know-how and was rarely confident enough to work alongside servants in household tasks.

With the assistance of the university gardeners, she did, however, help create a garden at the Chanonry and filled the half-acre of land with the familiar plants of her Scottish homeland.<sup>44</sup>

Motherhood came quickly, intensified the sense of loneliness and bred doubts about whether she and Orme would be able to realise in Australia the 'kind of decent partnership' they sought.<sup>45</sup> She later confided something of these anxieties to her daughter Marnie. By her account, Mary had carried from childhood the image of her mother lying on a couch in the family drawing room, struggling to direct servants, as she recovered from the birth of one of her seven children or prepared for the birth of the next. It was an experience she did not wish to repeat. Sheltered from the practical realities of child-raising throughout her life by the presence of nursemaids, she came to motherhood in Australia ill-equipped to cope with its constant demands and, until the approach of her third child, without the assistance of a nursemaid. It was at this point, Marnie records, that her mother wept uncontrollably as she tried to dress her and at the same time respond to the demands of her older brother.<sup>46</sup>

It is also from Marnie that we learn something of the essential separateness of parental lives within their daily routines. In *Once upon a Time*, she writes of watching from the nursery window with her brother and sister each morning as their father walked swiftly towards his laboratory, 'absorbed in thought, trencher on bent head', and excitedly watching for his return home.<sup>47</sup> He took his evening meal with Mary and then retired to the 'private world' of his study or returned to the laboratory. Mary, after tucking the children into bed and reading them stories, retired to the equally 'private world' of her drawing room where she played her piano.<sup>48</sup> The failure of this routine to meet Mary's expectations of personal fulfilment contributed, in Marnie's opinion, to her continued bouts of homesickness.<sup>49</sup> It is an experience that points to the more general dilemma of the growing

44 Bassett, *Once upon a Time*, pp. 53–58, 63; Marnie Bassett, 'Once upon a Time', Address to the Lyceum Club, 1972, ms, Flora Marjorie (Marnie) Bassett Papers, UMA, 1980.0079, 7/26/13.

45 Elsie Masson Malinowski to Bronio Malinowski, n.d., in Wayne (ed.), *The Story of a Marriage*, p. 183, (cited in Michael Young, *Malinowski: Odyssey of an Anthropologist 1884–1920*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2004, p. 584).

46 Bassett, *Once upon a Time*, (1985), p. 55.

47 Bassett, *Once upon a Time*, p. 64.

48 Bassett, *Once upon a Time*, p. 66.

49 Bassett, *Once upon a Time*, pp. 59–60, 61, 66, 71–73.

number of highly educated, upper middle-class married women frustrated within the narrow confines of the traditional domestic role. Society was increasingly allowing for the expansion of the horizons of the female mind, but provided limited opportunities for this to be put to practical purpose outside the role of 'better wife and mother'. In Mary's case, as for many others of her generation, it was a dilemma that was not resolved until World War One provided opportunities for an expansion of the voluntary and charitable work traditionally regarded as appropriate for women of her class and social position.

The disruption occasioned by migration that added to Mary's sense of unfulfilled aspiration was not accompanied by any lessening of commitment to the joint quest for 'a kind of decent partnership'. It does, however, highlight an unevenness of personal fulfilment within marriage, especially within the early years of childrearing. If Mary's problems were those of isolation—both from her homeland and those generated by the traditional confinement to the home during pregnancy—Orme's frustrations were those engendered by academe. Researchers have suggested that marriages between members of the same class and occupational category have historically produced more enduring intimate unions.<sup>50</sup> The observation is built around the notion that such couples are 'familiar with the work that characterizes their class' and 'more likely to share a similar understanding of one another and the world'.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, endogamy could scarcely have better illustrations than in the marriage of Orme and Mary Masson. Their understandings of the world and each other underpinned an enduring union.

Despite the tensions generated by migration and early motherhood, as the children grew older, the partnership to which the couple aspired took on its conventional, mature form. Mary now emerged from an almost self-imposed domestic seclusion to play an auxiliary role in Orme's professional and university life and assumed a separate and more public role for herself. As helpmeet within the university community, she fostered academic relationships and social networks and provided hospitality to Orme's colleagues. When Orme's career

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50 Marco H. D. van Leeuwen and Ineke Maas, 'Endogamy and Social Class in History: An Overview', *International Review of Social History* 50, Supplement, 2005, p. 17; see also Tosh, *A Man's Place*, e.g. pp. 64–66; Peterson, *Family, Love and Work*, pp. 163–66.

51 Leeuwen and Mass, 'Endogamy', p. 17.

within the national scientific movement blossomed, Mary 'kept pace', as Marnie puts it, 'with sympathy and constructive ideas and by making Chanonry a hospitable meeting ground'.<sup>52</sup> As the daughter of a professor of anatomy, this was familiar territory for Mary and evidence of the advantages of 'occupational endogamy': a source of enhanced status by association and preparation for the more public and independent role she was to play during and after the Great War.

That the role of 'helpmeet' and voluntary philanthropic endeavour met Mary's expectations of the 'decent partnership' is perhaps best indicated in her attitude to the education of her daughters. This will be examined more fully in chapters 6 and 7; here it is sufficient to observe that the education of Marnie and Elsie Masson was a subject upon which the parents held different views, and that Mary's more traditional and conservative attitude prevailed. Despite her family background—both her parents had championed the higher education of women, including the right for women to undertake medical degrees—Mary did not think it appropriate for her daughters to study for degrees or paid employment. Orme deferred to his wife on the matter and was later to say that he had left it 'too late' to question an approach which he thought both wrong for their daughters and out of touch with changing attitudes.<sup>53</sup> In the gap between their views, Mary's stance held firm. It later became a point of tension between mother and daughters that reflected a wider generational conflict within middle-class families, as they confronted the redefinitions of femininity which accompanied changes in the position of women.<sup>54</sup>

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52 Bassett, *Once upon a Time*, pp. 71–72; Weickhardt, *Masson of Melbourne*, pp. 72–73; Obituary: Marnie Bassett, *The Times*, 29 February 1980.

53 Marnie Bassett, 'Notes', ms, 8 February 1874, Marnie Bassett Papers, UMA, 7/26/13.

54 On the topic of intergenerational conflict see, for example, Caine, *Bombay to Bloomsbury*, pp. 294–326, 327–54; Carol Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family in England 1880–1939*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, pp. 22–27. Steve Mintz, in *A Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture*, New York University, New York, 1983, focuses on family conflicts that reflect wider social changes.



It was this generational divide that gave rise to the most acute assessment of the marriage of Orme and Mary. It came from the pen of the younger Masson daughter Elsie, who, as a young woman in the 1910s, belonged to 'The Clan', the Melbourne equivalent of the English Bloomsbury set.<sup>55</sup> Her premarital relationship with Bronio Malinowski (1884–1942), a Polish anthropologist detained in Melbourne as an alien during World War One, shocked conservative circles in Melbourne, not to mention her parents. In a letter to Malinowski, after they married, she observed:

Mother's idea of marriage seems to be a kind of decent partnership which forms a practical excuse for love, which otherwise is something which should be repressed; the husband's business in the firm lies in doing work which will raise him in repute and give him weight in the eyes of the world, and the wife's duties consist in helping him to get on.<sup>56</sup>

The suggestion of emotional emptiness and calculation, in which status is valued above any sense of intrinsic worth, is at times put even more bluntly: 'I'm sure I cared more for your work than she has ever really cared for father's, and I care for yours because I believe in its worth and value, not for what it will bring you.' To Malinowski's claim that 'love is like art and is really an end in itself, and one of the things making life worthwhile', she responded that her mother believed that 'love is only permissible when it is rendered disciplinary by the bringing up of children'.<sup>57</sup> These were harsh judgements. They sit somewhat uncomfortably alongside the considered response of her parents to her proposed marriage to Malinowski at a time when he was widely thought, within the Melbourne University community at least, to be a philanderer:

Elsie has the right to decide for herself and—which is more to the point—it is too late to be raising objections when she and you have made up your minds. Elsie's happiness is really the only consideration that counts with her mother and me, and that now rests with you.<sup>58</sup>

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55 Young, *Malinowski*, pp. 457–58.

56 Elsie Masson Malinowski to Bronio Malinowski, c. 1920, Wayne (ed.), *Story of a Marriage*, vol. 1, p. 183; Young, *Malinowski*, p. 584.

57 Wayne (ed.), *Story of a Marriage*, p. 183; Young, *Malinowski*, p. 584.

58 Orme Masson to Malinowski, 18 October 1918, Wayne (ed.), *Story of a Marriage*, pp. 177–78; Young, *Malinowski*, pp. 577–78.

## Leeper's Angels: 'What a strange complex love story we have had'<sup>59</sup>

Alexander Leeper was married twice. His first wife, Sydney-born and raised Adeline Allen, died in 1893 when barely 40 years old after 14 years of marriage. His second marriage in 1897, at the age of 49, to 37-year-old Mary Moule, a Melburnian, lasted until his own death in 1934. Both unions brought children: four with Adeline and a further three with Mary. The first marriage involved differences in class and wealth largely absent from the second: Adeline was from a close, long-established, rich, influential, legal, political and philanthropic family, whose intense emotional ties and dynastic concerns exerted a major influence in her marriage and in the lives of her children after her death; Mary Moule was a member of an established, if somewhat less wealthy, Melbourne legal family and more comfortable in the city's professional society. At the heart of each marriage, and in sharp contrast to the other marriages discussed in this study, were strongly held religious beliefs. The Allens were a prominent and devout Wesleyan-Methodist family; the Moules were committed Anglicans. The interaction of these particular religious beliefs with Leeper's intense brand of Anglicanism shaped gender roles within both marriages. The discussion that follows will focus upon the marriage of Adeline and Alexander.

Writing of the mid-Victorian age, John Tosh argues that 'almost all forms of Christian belief were shot through with assumptions of sexual inequality. St Paul's injunction, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" underpinned unequal marriages in countless devout households.'<sup>60</sup> The late Victorian period, to which Leeper's marriages belong, witnessed a liberalisation of such religious beliefs, the emergence of a 'gentler pattern of family relations' and a trend toward declining deference of wives and children to their husbands and fathers.<sup>61</sup> Something of this transition can be observed in both of Leeper's marriages. Adeline and Mary were cast, and *cast themselves*, firmly in the traditional role of their husband's helpmeet and supporter. The mercurial Leeper is not so readily categorised.

59 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper on her deathbed, 1893.

60 Tosh, *A Man's Place*, p. 72.

61 Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 146–69.

Though often paternalistic in his attitude towards women, he rarely assumed a patriarchal stance. Ambivalent towards the changing role of women, he championed their right to higher education, admired professional women who retained their feminine charms, and promoted the ordination of women within the Anglican Church, but did not think women were ready for the vote. A romantic, he adored and idealised women.<sup>62</sup> Tormented by a fear of death, racked by religious doubts and a deep sense of personal sin and inadequacy, he saw a sweetness, gentleness and purity in Adeline that could bring about his own redemption.<sup>63</sup> To Adeline, Leeper seemed a troubled and worthy man in need of emotional and practical support.

Adeline Allen and Alexander Leeper first met in Sydney in 1869. After a tortuous 10-year courtship that rivalled the machinations of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Romeo and Juliet*, they were married on 30 December 1879 in a private chapel at Toxteth, the Allen family's estate. Much of the courtship had been conducted by correspondence, initially between Leeper and Adeline's mother and younger brother Boyce. Leeper was first invited to the Allen household in 1869 as a teacher for the two eldest boys. To the family, he seemed a somewhat romantic figure; a charming conversationalist, a clever, cultured, devout and earnest young man. The nature of Adeline's early response to Alexander is well captured in her diaries:

I have thought of him a good deal lately—It seems to me that he is the only man I have ever met who in any way comes up to my ideal of what a man should be. I cannot help thinking about him—wishing to see him so that I may know him as he is. If he really is what I think I should like to have him as a friend. He would raise me—make me better, nobler, wiser—and I could almost worship him.<sup>64</sup>

Whatever his considerable virtues, Leeper's poor health and precarious financial position made him, in the considered assessment of Sir Wigram Allen, a dubious marriage prospect for Adeline. In 1870 Alexander returned to Ireland, his captivation with Adeline thwarted,

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62 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 27.

63 Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 54–56.

64 Adeline Allen's 1875 diary, (day and month not recorded), ALP, T5, box 38; Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 54.

unrequited, but undiminished: 'What a bright shining little creature she is. Oh I would to God that I were fine and noble enough to win or deserve to win her love!'<sup>65</sup>

The correspondence with Adeline's mother and brother continued unabated, and, in the process, Leeper seems to have become obsessed with the *idea* and the *ideal* of Adeline as the 'perfect angel'. In 1875 Leeper returned to Melbourne and began to write directly to her, seeking unequivocal support in winning over her reluctant father.<sup>66</sup> His close friend, Reverend George Wildig, captures the essence of the developing relationship:

My dear Sandy, you have created a phantom and pursued it all your life long, not in loving a good woman, but in giving the reign to an exorbitant fancy, and letting your idea of AA take the place of reality ...

Adeline Allen is a very respected, well-intentioned young woman, perhaps pretty, probably accomplished, and endowed with quite the ordinary amount of sense ... AA is not half or a quarter as sentimental as you—that is plain, and your flights of rodomontade give her pain, annoyance and discomfort.<sup>67</sup>

Adeline's responses to the avalanche of letters from Alexander demonstrate how readily she adopted the role of soother, comforter and provider of emotional support and advice that she would maintain throughout their marriage: 'Your letter this morning only made me long inexpressibly to soothe & cheer you. I hardly understand what hypochondria means'; '[d]on't add to your troubles & perplexities by making new ones'; 'never mind all your faults and shortcomings. I daresay I have quite as many though I do not think so much about them. Put away all those unhappy thoughts—they are not good for you or for me either. I will not let your morbidness affect me.'<sup>68</sup>

65 Alexander Leeper's 1870 diary: 4 April 1870, ALP, T5, box 35; Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 30.

66 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 36–39.

67 Rev. George Wildig to Alexander Leeper, 28 February 1876; Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 78.

68 Adeline Allen to Alexander Leeper, 16 July 1879 (telegram), 26 July 1869, 4 December 1879, ALP, T1, box 22/44; Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 93, 94, 98.

For all his romantic idealism, Alexander Leeper was conscious of the everyday economic realities and practicalities of marriage. As he put it to Adeline, 'I sometimes think I scarcely explained to you fully enough what sort of thing it is to be married to a man of small means':

If you turn out the clever wise little housekeeper that I expect you to be, I shall be much better off. I do want you, however, to begin to pay attention to small sums of money; for it is in small sums that incomes go chiefly & will you also begin to practise keeping accounts, that you may grow expert at it before we marry. Poor little victim. I know you will hate it ... You said in your sweet foolish way last Friday week that you thought 'saving to be such fun' my dear innocent Adeline, you little know—It is very unpleasant.

But what I want you to think of is this. You must realise what is the meaning of a 'small income'. They are simple words enough; yet truly dear I doubt if you quite know what they mean. In your own home, a want is no sooner felt than it is supplied ...<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, when Adeline writes that her life had not been a particularly 'useful' one and that she welcomed marriage as a means of fulfilling her predestined role as wife and mother, Alexander responds in a manner that confirms his sister's worst fears, which is that he would make his new wife 'attend on you too much'.<sup>70</sup>

You must find comfort in thinking how faithfully I have worked and waited for you, and also how greatly your power and usefulness will in all probability be increased in your new life. It is said often that a man is never a complete man until he has married. But it might be said even more truly, I think of a woman, that until she marries, she has not discovered the hundredth part of the possibilities of her own nature, that she does not know what life and duty really mean.<sup>71</sup>

As a self-proclaimed 'man of small means', married to a daughter of a rich and influential Sydney family, Leeper lacked the power and authority over his wife that most men typically derived from their sole-breadwinner role. Adeline did not come to marriage with a dowry. Her father had feared that if she did, the money might be eaten up in Leeper's efforts to make the financially struggling Trinity College

69 Alexander Leeper to Adeline Allen, 5 July 1879, ALP, T1, box 22/44, envelope 33.

70 Diary of Adeline Allen, c. 29 September 1877 (Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 83–84); Freda Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 1879, ALP, T1, box 30/70; Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 80.

71 Alexander Leeper to Adeline Allen, 5 July 1879, ALP, T1, box 22/44, envelope 44.

viable. Instead he provided her with an annual allowance of £200 that might be revoked at his discretion.<sup>72</sup> The money gave Adeline a degree of economic independence and made possible a range of personal comforts to which she had been accustomed. She controlled the allowance as a personal fund separate from family finances. In practice, Leeper had few qualms about asking Adeline for money and Adeline was generous in her support of the college.<sup>73</sup>

The allowance symbolises the central role the Allen family assumed in the evolution of the marriage. In his biography of Alexander Leeper, John Poynter observes shrewdly that the 'Warden's Lodge in Trinity often seemed a mere outpost of a family based in Sydney'.<sup>74</sup> It was an outpost from which Adeline frequently retreated. She spent much of the first decade of the marriage and the full-term of three of her four pregnancies with her family. Her absences from Trinity were responses to a paternal 'imperious ... decree' that insisted the Sydney family home offered superior care to that available at Trinity College.<sup>75</sup> Adeline's ready compliance was perhaps a tad too quickly given to rule out an element of complicity. The cloistered and sometimes fractious nature of Leeper's life at Trinity College sat uneasily with her. Whatever the personal calculation, her prolonged absences, as Alexander's daily letters to Adeline testify, reduced him to the role of hapless supplicant: 'I have been living a bachelor life—I hate it'; 'Give my love to your heartless family, not one of whom bestows upon me a moment's thought'; 'I suppose by the time this reaches you, you will be a mother again'; 'I think [your mother] seems to think the baby is her own'; 'How strange it seems to have a child one has not yet seen'.<sup>76</sup> Scarcely a letter passes without a plaintive request for confirmation of her imminent return to Trinity College.

Paradoxically, the correspondence generated during the frequent and lengthy periods apart also provides more direct comment on the physical and sexual aspects of marriage than exists for any of the other couples. Most of what we learn comes from the pen of Alexander and

72 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 120–21.

73 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 25 January 1888, 3, 9, 13 February 1888, ALP, T1, box 22/51.

74 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 119.

75 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 119.

76 Alexander Leeper to Adeline Leeper, 5 March 1893, 19 July 1892, 19 March 1888, 9 August 1882, 24 April 1888, ALP, T1, box 22, box 23.

is best understood in the context of a personality that took much of its shape from a profound sense of religious guilt and a deeply ingrained hypochondria. The one fostered the perception that he possessed an excessively lustful personality, the other induced the fear that marriage would unleash passions that would, as current Victorian thinking suggested, prove physically destructive. His father had bluntly attributed the tortuous courtship of Adeline 'to the Great Victorian Sin of "self abuse"' and 'self-medication ... with oils': 'If that terrible habit had been given up to which you were so addicted your health would have been long ago restored. The quantity of oil you imbibed increased aphrodisiac tendencies, and so the flame of Onanism was fed!'<sup>77</sup> A recently married friend, Reverend George Wildig, advised him to 'get married as soon as you can', and added the personal observation that 'Indulgence once a night' did not 'fatigue me one bit'. The 'difficulty of restraint' would disappear, he assured Leeper:

[with] a loving and sensible wife ... keeping you from over-indulgence. The very first night of your married life you will be able to tell her ... that matrimony is weakening & she must help you to be reasonable ... regular lawful indulgence removes entirely all inclination to lustful thoughts and irregular desires ...<sup>78</sup>

Wildig's advice rested upon the conventional view that prevailed within the Anglican Church: the sexual relationship once sanctified by God within marriage transcended its physical dimension and assumed a spirituality that took individuals a step closer to 'selflessness'. It is in these terms that Leeper's letters to Adeline engage frequently with intimate aspects of their marriage: 'Dear, what a beautiful thing marriage is, and married love'; 'What a real glory it is to have the deep and passionate love of such a woman as you. May God make me worthy of it, and help me to sanctify myself ...'.<sup>79</sup> At times Leeper was moved to contemplate marriage as an eternal union:

if you survive me, I shd like you to be happy, & I wd not have anything cause a cloud between you & any one who might be worthy of your love. I suppose in the face of such verses as 'they neither marry nor

77 Canon Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 18 and 19 November 1878, Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 90.

78 George Wildig to Alexander Leeper, 28 September 1875, ALP, T5, box 38; Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, pp. 52–53.

79 Alexander Leeper to Adeline Leeper, 15 August 1889, 19 June 1891, ALP, T1, box 21d, box 23.

are given in marriage' one is not justified in dwelling on the thought of eternal union & yet I cannot help it. Selfish man that I am, I want you to be mine always. Is that the lower part of my nature that speaks? ... give your heart to God before you get hardened, like me, & teach the children to love God & to hate sin.<sup>80</sup>

There is a suggestion that Adeline did not fit the sexually repressed stereotype of the Victorian middle-class woman.<sup>81</sup> At the end of an evening's work in his study during one of their more lengthy separations, Leeper recreates a familiar intimate interlude:

If you had been at home you would have been up here before now. I am afraid you would have come in boldly without knocking and the chances are would have walked up to me and seated yourself on my knee and perhaps you would have kissed me ...<sup>82</sup>

If Adeline's absences from Trinity mitigated the worst fears of Alexander's family that he would require his wife to 'attend' on him too much, the realities of the couple's married life at Trinity fell short of their best hopes. Reviewing Leeper's retirement from Trinity College, John Poynter suggests that Leeper was 'surrounded by women who supported and deferred to him, as he had been virtually all his life'.<sup>83</sup> Adeline's willing embrace of a life of service to the needs of others—a capacity to withdraw to Sydney notwithstanding—exposed her to the full force of Leeper's obsessive and mercurial personality. That she did not at first appreciate his total absorption in the task of making Trinity College a truly academic institution is clear from her suggestion—made shortly before their marriage—that he might find a more congenial life by returning to teaching at Melbourne Grammar or entering the Church.<sup>84</sup> Trinity was his mission, not hers. By her own admission, she lacked any ambition outside family life: 'I am afraid I have led a very selfish life for a long time & have thought only of you & the children & my own happiness ... I have been content & have not looked out for opportunities that I might easily have found.'<sup>85</sup>

80 Alexander Leeper to Adeline Leeper, 15 August 1889, ALP, T1, box 21d.

81 Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2001, pp. 1–18.

82 Alexander Leeper to Adeline Leeper, 21 June 1891, ALP, T1, box 21d.

83 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 411.

84 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 96; Adeline Allen to Alexander Leeper, 8 September 1879, 10 September 1879, ALP, T1, box 22.

85 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 21 July 1889, ALP, T1, box 23.



Her conception of family life was a broad one that embraced not only the interests and preoccupations of husband and children and the extended Allen family in Sydney, but also those of Alexander's ageing parents and unmarried sisters in Dublin. As the latter's circumstances became increasingly precarious in the late 1880s, Adeline contemplated bringing them to Melbourne.<sup>86</sup> When this proved too difficult to accomplish, she used her annual allowance to initiate a 'money scheme' that involved remittances to Alexander's parents and both sisters. It was an act that invoked surprise and familial gratitude well captured in Freda Leeper's response:

the money scheme which I confess I only half believed in, seems an accomplished fact ... I must thank you & Adeline, more especially her, on whose part it seems almost too great an act of generosity. I scarcely know whether it is right for you both to take so much from your children, but as I look on it principally for the benefit of my father and mother, I can say nothing against it ...<sup>87</sup>

Above all else, Adeline's ready involvement in the predicaments of Alexander's parents and siblings points to a generosity of spirit and to her absorption in what might be called a colonial form of the long family, in which remittances to the old world played an important role.

Absorption in the fabric of family life and companionable self-sacrifice was thus central to Adeline's perception of her role within marriage. The fact that it was a shared perception is, ironically, perhaps most clearly evident in the prescription Alexander addressed on the eve of his marriage to Mary Moule, three years after Adeline's death:

you know, dear Mary, that I want you to be my companion in everything—a real helpmate—not a nurse, not a drudge, not a manager, not a leading philanthropist, not a society celebrity, not a Champion of the Women's Cause (with a big C), but a sweet loving helpful equal comrade, friend, counsellor, wife and darling.<sup>88</sup>

86 Adeline Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 7 July 1889, 21 July 1889, ALP, T1, box 23.

87 Freda Leeper to Alexander Leeper, 23 August 1888, 7 July 1889, ALP, T1, box 21d, box 30.

88 Alexander Leeper to Mary Moule, 18 January 1897, ALP, T1, box 36; Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p. 262.

## Henry and Mary Alice Higgins: Private sanctuary—public pronouncement

Like John Macmillan Brown and Alexander Leeper, Henry Higgins married a colonial woman. Geelong born and raised, Mary Alice Morrison was part of the first Australian-born generation of the Morrison clan, a distinguished educational dynasty of Scottish migrants. Her Celtic sympathies became increasingly important to the evolution of a marriage that was built around a set of conventional, educated, middle-class understandings of gender roles and expectations. The sharply drawn separation between the domestic and public spheres of the couple's life together developed within a framework that differed in several ways from that of the other four marriages in this study: it matured within and in relation to both the patriarchal and matriarchal extended families; its establishment phase occurred without financial pressures that might serve to modify gender roles. These differences and the attitudes they encouraged were consolidated by the restriction of their family, on medical advice, to one child, and by Mary Alice's reaction to the increasingly public and often controversial nature of Henry's career. For Henry and Mary Alice Higgins home became a 'private sanctuary', and marriage a personal and emotional refuge.

The year-long European tour that followed their wedding was meticulously planned and pursued enthusiastically.<sup>89</sup> They returned to Melbourne in 1886 and, aided by two servants and a gardener, settled into a lifestyle of elegant simplicity that was relatively modest by the standards of the booming 1880s. The birth of their only child Mervyn, in October 1887, was a difficult one. Heeding medical advice that further pregnancies might prove dangerous, they refrained from having further children. In his biography of Henry, John Rickard speculates that from this point on, the Higgins's marriage was an entirely cerebral and emotional one.<sup>90</sup> Whatever the reality, there were other and more visible consequences. As we shall see when we examine the upbringing of Mervyn in Chapter 8, it led to intense emotional ties between the family of three. Conversely, it allowed a fuller development of Henry's role within the lives of his extended

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89 Palmer, *Higgins: A Memoir*, p. 106.

90 Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, pp. 66–67.

family. Through the lives of his parents, siblings, nieces and nephews, he created an 'intimate family life' from which, one of his nieces has written, he drew 'inspiration'.<sup>91</sup>

Henry Higgins and Mary Alice have left behind impressions rather than intimate details of their marriage. Where Julia Wilding, like most diarists, wrote with posterity in mind, Mary Alice sought to shut it out. She destroyed the letters Henry wrote to her every day he was on circuit as a judge.<sup>92</sup> They were part of a private life that she believed should remain so. She emerges from the comments of her nieces as a somewhat enigmatic figure, meticulous in her attention to the detail of household management, 'preternaturally tidy' and bound, as strongly as her husband, by a work ethic and self-discipline that was expressed in strict adherence to routine.<sup>93</sup> The intensity with which Mary Alice dominated the household 'frightened the Christ out of' one young niece.<sup>94</sup> Others were less easily intimidated and found charm, humour and strength of character in a purposeful demeanour. It is tempting to characterise her as a 'gatekeeper', a headmaster's daughter, maintaining order and decorum on the domestic front and protecting her husband from unwanted intrusions on his time. Viewed in this way, the Higgins marriage exhibits much that fits the stereotypical Victorian domestic ideal, in which Mary Alice as 'mistress of the household' fosters a private sanctuary, 'a haven from the heartless world', to which Henry could retreat and turn to his books and his family.<sup>95</sup>

Such a characterisation derives its form from Mary Alice's perspective. Pursued from the same vantage point, we can see, in the quest for order, decorum and sanctuary, a desire to avoid standing out conspicuously from the professional set to which they belonged. A naturally private person, she shunned the controversy and notoriety that accompanied her husband's increasing involvement in radical politics. In a letter written from London in 1914, Nettie Palmer describes her 'aunt's terror' at the prospect that Henry, who was 'going about and lunching with all sorts of radicals—Sidney Webb and such like' might 'speak

91 Palmer, *Higgins: A Memoir*, pp. 181, 232.

92 Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, plate 20 caption, pp. 60, 270–71, 310–11.

93 Nancy Adams, *Family Frescoes*, F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1966, p. 52; Marnie Masson's interview with John Rickard 1974, Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 128.

94 Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 60.

95 Palmer, *Higgins: A Memoir*, pp. 181, 232, 266.

out too loud about his political friends'.<sup>96</sup> She was unsettled by the discomfort Henry's public pronouncements engendered within the Morrison clan. It is difficult—in the absence of the correspondence that might have opened a window on the subject—to determine the extent to which the companionate nature of the marriage embraced engagement with the concerns of Henry's public life. It seems likely that Mary Alice loyally listened and supported and stuck even more resolutely to her role as gatekeeper, guardian and mother. As her niece Nettie Palmer would later put it, 'she found complete self-expression through her work in the home and for her family'.<sup>97</sup>

To view the Higgins's marriage as a conventional middle-class union, in which the domestic and public spheres remained rigidly separate in a manner that preserved gender roles, is to ignore the senses in which the marriage is also defined by its relations with the extended Higgins family. Doona and Killenna stood nearby each other in Malvern as reminders of an Irish past and symbols of a continuing and resilient family solidarity. Henry's success in the public sphere ensured that he remained 'de facto' head of household of the Malvern branch of the extended family. It was in this role that he and Mary Alice came face to face with the changing nature of middle-class female expectations and, to a lesser extent, those of working-class women. We may best glimpse their private exposure to these changes in the life experiences of Henry's sister Georgina Higgins. Commonly known as Ina, she was some 10 years his junior and until recently as securely hidden from history as Mary Alice, in ways which confirm the marginalisation of unmarried, middle-class women at the end of the nineteenth century.

In a study that traces the 'waves' of feminism that shaped the Australian women's movement across three generations of the Higgins family, Deborah Jordan provides a context that sharpens our appreciation of the dilemmas that confronted Ina and those like her.<sup>98</sup> With her younger sister Anna, Ina was amongst the first intake at the Presbyterian Ladies' College, when it opened near Melbourne's

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96 Nettie Palmer to her mother, quoted by Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 126.

97 Palmer, *Higgins: A Memoir*, p. 8. Palmer said this of Henry's mother and it applied just as much to his wife.

98 Deborah Jordan, "'Women's Time': Ina Higgins, Nettie Palmer and Aileen Palmer', *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 79, no. 2, November 2008, pp. 296–312.

Fitzroy Gardens in 1875.<sup>99</sup> The less academically inclined of the sisters, she nevertheless went on to qualify as one of the first female landscape designers in Australia and practised intermittently.<sup>100</sup> She appears in a received family narrative that survives in the recollection of great niece Helen Palmer, as 'the classic unmarried stay-at-home, whose career was interrupted in order to look after the grandmother'.<sup>101</sup> The sketchy historical record of her life suggests other interpretations. Effectively a single woman dependent, as were others at Killenna, upon her breadwinner brother, Ina also participated in a range of collective activities that defined the middle-class women's movement of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Melbourne. She signed the 1891 petition for the enfranchisement of women, became secretary to the United Council for Women and, in 1899, was one of two women elected to a Board of Advice within the municipality of Malvern. She was a member of the provisional committee that established the Richmond Club for Working Girls in 1896 to help their 'less fortunate sisters'. Inspired by the example of the Collingwood Working Girls' Improvement and Recreation Club and aware of the need to avoid the stigma associated with middle-class charity, the committee sought 'cultivated, genial young women' to assist them to provide opportunities for sociability, learning and recreation that might enrich lives and engender a sense of togetherness.<sup>102</sup>

These excursions into public prominence might, as Deborah Jordan suggests, describe an emerging first-wave feminist.<sup>103</sup> They also illustrate the range of middle-class female perspectives present within the extended Higgins family. It is a diversity framed within generational and personal contexts. Anne Higgins, as ageing matriarch,

99 M. O. Reid, *The Ladies Who Came to Stay: A Study of the Education of Girls of the Presbyterian Ladies College, Melbourne, 1875–1960*, Council of the College, Melbourne, 1960, pp. 51, 105, 248–49; Kathleen Fitzgerald, *PLC Melbourne: The First Century, 1875–1975*, Presbyterian Ladies College, Burwood, Victoria, 1975.

100 A. P. Wizenreid, *Green Grows Our Garden: A Centenary History of Horticultural Education at Burnley*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1991, pp. 25–30; Ina Higgins, 'Women and Horticulture', in Frances Fraser and Nettie Palmer (eds), *Centenary Gift Book*, Robertson & Mullens for The Women's Centenary Council, Melbourne, 1934, pp. 134–36.

101 H. Palmer, 'Foreword', Introduction to the proposed reprint of Nettie Palmer's *Henry Bourne's Higgins*, c. 1979, cited in Jordan, "'Women's Time'", p. 308.

102 Melbourne *Argus*, 5 June 1896, p. 6. Ina Higgins was also a member of the Women's Political Association, the Women's Peace Army and a women's farm at Mordialloc that provided employment for women and distributed its produce to the unemployed and struggling working class families.

103 Jordan, "'Women's Time'", p. 297.

saw little need for women's suffrage.<sup>104</sup> Ina and Mary Alice, of broadly similar age, took different stands. Ina, as an unmarried young woman, secure within the extended Higgins family and keen to apply her undoubted talents in the world of work, saw the suffrage as essential to the widening of opportunities for women and as a step along the road to full female citizenship. For Mary Alice, content within her role as wife and mother, the suffrage was an admirable cause, but not a pressing one.

Historians have found paradox in the fact that Ina's brother Henry, as President of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Court, defined a gendered wage system that limited women's industrial citizenship.<sup>105</sup> If the paradox was recognised within the Higgins households at Killenna and Doona, it was less keenly felt and merged readily with shared perceptions of the family as the basis for social betterment. The public pronouncements and judgements that form the core of Henry Higgins's judicial career say a great deal about the importance he attached to marriage and the family. Indeed, as John Rickard observes, by 'insisting that the basic wage acknowledge the worker's right to marriage and children, Higgins explicitly incorporated the institution of the family in the theory of wage regulation'.<sup>106</sup> His celebrated Harvester Judgement of 1907 wryly assumed marriage to be 'the usual fate of adults', and set a minimum male wage at a level thought sufficient to support a family of 'about' five (a male breadwinner, economically dependent wife and three children) in a condition of 'frugal comfort'.<sup>107</sup> His subsequent decisions in the Fruit-Pickers' case (1912) and the Archer case (1919), in which he set minimum wages for women in the fruit-picking and clothing industries at lower rates than those for male employees made his gendered conception of industrial citizenship explicit.<sup>108</sup>

104 Jordan, "'Women's Time'", p. 299; Jordan, *Search for an Aesthetic*, pp. 20–21.

105 Jordan, "'Women's Time'", pp. 300–1, 309–10; Mark Hearn, 'Securing the Man: Narratives of Gender', pp. 1–24, cited by Jordan.

106 Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 175.

107 Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, pp. 61, 172–76.

108 Mark Hearn, 'Making Liberal Citizens: Justice Higgins and his Witnesses', *Labour History*, no. 93, November 2007, pp. 57–72; Joe Isaac and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The New Province for Law and Order: One Hundred Years of Australian Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York and Victoria, 2004, pp. 207–8, 220–22; Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists*, pp. 132–37.

Historians have set their discussion of these momentous decisions in a variety of contexts. Some, as Frank Bongiorno points out, see the 1907 definition of family as a recognition of the declining size of families in Australia and the wider Western world towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>109</sup> Susan Magarey, for example, writes that while it was not Higgins's intention, his ruling 'could have been understood as an incitement to family planning and contraception'.<sup>110</sup> For Marilyn Lake, Higgins's Harvester Judgement was the embodiment of the victory of the women's movement's domestic ideal in a sex war, beginning in the 1890s, against the forces of the unrestrained 'masculinism' of the lone, nomadic bushman celebrated in the pages of the *Sydney Bulletin*.<sup>111</sup> Desley Deacon sees Higgins's family wage as consistent with the 'rationalist, paternalistic masculinism' of government officials, who, in the early twentieth century, sought to create an efficient society regularised by the new 'normalising' methodology of professional experts.<sup>112</sup> Central to most interpretations is the notion that by enshrining the principle of the family wage in law Higgins envisaged the establishment of a social compact between male breadwinners and the state. In return for a state-guaranteed standard of living that conferred greater rights of self-governance and citizenship, the male breadwinner was expected to be a prudent, sober, thrifty, temperate, self-improving, responsible, home-loving family man and respectful husband.<sup>113</sup>

However we locate Higgins's wage pronouncements, and whatever historical significance we attach to them, it is not possible to treat them in isolation from his personal and generational understandings of marriage and family. Notions of gender and work were, as Erik Olssen has written in another context, 'woven into the very tissue of people's deepest emotions'.<sup>114</sup> The poverty of the Dublin families and the burdens borne by the wives and mothers within them that

109 Frank Bongiorno, *The Sex Lives of Australians: A History*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2012, pp. 62–63.

110 Magarey, *Passions*, p. 137.

111 Lake, 'Feminism Contests the 1890s', in *Debutante Nation*, pp. 2–14; Bongiorno, *The Sex Lives of Australians*, pp. 63–64; Hearn, 'Making Liberal Citizens', pp. 58–59, 66–67.

112 Desley Deacon, 'Reorganising the Masculinist Context', in Magarey et al. (eds), *Debutante Nation*, pp. 56, 58; Hearn, 'Making Liberal Citizens', pp. 60, 62–64, 70.

113 Bongiorno, *The Sex Lives of Australians*, p. 63; Hearn, 'Making Liberal Citizens', pp. 58–59, 66–67; Lake, 'Feminism Contests the 1890s', pp. 12–14.

114 Erik Olssen, 'Working Gender, Gendering Work: Occupational Change and Continuity in Southern Dunedin 1890–1939', in Brookes et al. (eds), *Sites of Gender*, p. 64.

Higgins witnessed as a young man, while he distributed religious tracts in the slums, were firmly etched in his mind. So, too, was the memory of his own mother's struggles to cope with the demands of seven children within the genteel poverty of a Wesleyan household in the aftermath of the famine.<sup>115</sup> He remained acutely conscious, as his niece Nettie Palmer has written, that his mother 'stinted herself and overworked continually' to ensure that her children did not know want or hunger.<sup>116</sup> Migration and establishing the family in Melbourne drew Henry, as eldest son, more and more into the role of de facto head of household and cemented a strong emotional bonding between them.

What family experience suggested, theoretical opinion endorsed. In essence, building on the views of the major enlightenment thinkers and the writings of John Stuart Mill, Higgins sought to protect married women from the burdens and degradations of paid employment, which he believed diminished a civilised society, and at the same time provide a buffer against poverty. He brought to the role of industrial arbiter the belief that 'the main impulse in the movement for better wages comes from the wonderful family instinct, the desire of parents to build up sound, sane, and well-nourished children'.<sup>117</sup> His view of the family unit as a fulcrum for social progress and individual fulfilment is made clear in *A New Province for Law and Order*:

Give them relief from their materialistic anxiety; give them reasonable certainty that their essential material needs will be met by honest work, and you release infinite stores of human energy for higher efforts, for nobler ideals, when 'Body gets its sop, and holds its noise, and leaves soul free a little'.<sup>118</sup>

His recognition of what he called the 'problem of female labour', and his choice to set a basic wage for women that was equal to that of men only where men and women were carrying out the same work, has been variously characterised by historians. Rickard warned against 'applying the standards of today to decisions made in 1907–1912'.<sup>119</sup> Hearn has dismissed the implication that Higgins 'simply reflected

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<sup>115</sup> Palmer, *Higgins: A Memoir*, pp. 8, 22, 42.

<sup>116</sup> Palmer, *Higgins: A Memoir*, p. 22.

<sup>117</sup> Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 176.

<sup>118</sup> Henry Bournes Higgins, *A New Province For Law & Order*, Constable & Company, London and Sydney, 1922, p. 38.

<sup>119</sup> Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 177.



community values and standards' and 'imposed' a 'gendered liberal governance'.<sup>120</sup> Whether or not that was out of line with community opinion, it was a view that was perfectly consistent with the views on gender roles within marriage and family that prevailed at Killenna and Doona.

## Frederick and Julia Wilding: Marriage and the ideal family

Julia and Frederick Wilding's marriage lasted for over 50 years, ending in 1936, when they were parted by death. On the face of it, their marriage was based upon a division of labour that reflected middle-class social norms. Within this apparent conventionality, they built a companionate marriage around an idealised conception of the family. Put simply, as 'joint heads of household' they sought to create an environment in which individual talent might flourish. The path to this end required, as they saw it, a marriage in which prevailing gender roles were not so much challenged as modified in rational ways that shrugged off the stereotypical Victorian romantic ideal with its concomitant truncating of individual potential. Their companionate marriage was thus shaped within understandings of society that were both idealistic and pragmatic.

The picture that emerges of the Wildings' marriage is gleaned from sources generated, for the most part, by Julia. Before her departure for New Zealand she had written articles for the *Hereford Times* about marriage, childrearing and the women's movement. As a wife and mother she created a detailed record of family life in the pages of household management diaries, events diaries, visitor books and the life events diaries she kept for each of her five surviving children. Julia was also keeper of correspondence and archivist of the public record of family activities. While she rarely comments directly upon her own marriage, it is possible to construct, from what she has left us, the texture of married life within the Wilding household. The fact that the processes and thinking involved in raising children are the

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<sup>120</sup> Hearn, 'Making Liberal Citizens', pp. 65, 59.

most thoroughly documented element of their lives reflects the focus of their marriage. Furthermore, it also makes it possible to gain an understanding of Frederick as father and husband.

Marriage and migration were for the Wildings inextricably linked. Details surrounding their engagement are sketchy, though it was likely to have been a lengthy one, given middle-class beliefs about the necessity of securing a firm economic basis for a comfortable life and the appropriate education of children prior to marriage. Julia argued in an article on 'Marriage' in the *Hereford Times* that:

While the intrusion of sordid or worldly motives in the contemplation of marriage is justly regarded as despicable and wrong, so also are the contractions of such unions, when the means are not within reach of living comfortably and properly bringing up and educating a family, recognised as not only weak but also wicked.<sup>121</sup>

The only direct comments we have from Frederick about his impending marriage were expressed in the formal and conventional terms in which public farewells were conducted. 'Bound up with my fate in the long expedition which I am about to take', he told a gathering of Hereford Liberals on the eve of his wedding day, 'is the happiness of one who is dearer to me than I know how to express ... Tomorrow I know will be the happiest [day of my life].'

If we leap forward 18 years, we glimpse 44-year-old Julia, soon after the birth her sixth child, reflecting ecstatically upon her role as wife and mother. In a note to herself that she sealed in an envelope to be opened on her 70th birthday she wrote:

Oh the joy of love and the joy of Life when one has love, full and brimming over. Is it possible to imagine greater happiness than the joy and love of motherhood, interwoven with, and inseparable from the love of husband and father? Here I am sitting at our bedroom window with our darling new baby Edwyn in his cot close by, ten days old, and the fruit trees in full blossom outside, the sun shining, and the breath and scent of spring coming in at the open window,—and I feel almost *too* happy. Our other darlings will be in soon,—my wise and beloved Gladys, who is already a comfort and a help to me,—my sturdy old Anthony, who although rather self-willed and difficult sometimes now, will I know grow up into a noble man—Franky wum,

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<sup>121</sup> Julia Anthony, 'Marriage', *HT*, 7 November 1874, p. 18.

still my little sunbeam,—and last but not least my sweet loving little Cora. How I love and worship them all, and how the love of them makes the world all bright and radiant. God grant my love of them may not make me selfish and lead me to think—not too much of them, that could not be—but not enough of others ... The future however lies in the laps of the Gods, and I will not go forward and anticipate disappointment, but make the most of my present happiness. My one prayer though is that my darlings, Gladys and Cora, may some day meet good true men, who will make them good husbands. A woman has not lived who does not know what it is to be a happy wife and mother.<sup>122</sup>

Her sense of personal fulfilment within domestic and family life embraced a conception of women's place in society that prized freedom of choice: marriage and motherhood should ideally be one pathway among the many that should be available to all women.

Julia Wilding's article on marriage was, as noted, one of a series of articles she wrote for the *Hereford Times* during the 1870s on the position of women in society. It drew heavily upon John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869), described recently by Barbara Caine as 'one of the most searing and critical pictures of marriage to emerge in the nineteenth century'.<sup>123</sup> Julia, however, constructed her article around what she described as, 'Mill's beautiful passage on the ideal of marriage':

What marriage may be in the case of two persons of cultivated faculties, identical in opinions and purposes, between whom there exists that best kind of equality, similarity of powers and capacities with reciprocal superiority in them—so that each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other, and can have alternately the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development—I will not attempt to describe ... this only, is the ideal of marriage.<sup>124</sup>

122 Note by Julia Wilding, 8 October 1897, Cora Wilding Papers, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, MB 183, Family and Personal Correspondence, box 4.1.

123 Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780–1980*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, p. 104.

124 John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), in Alice S. Rossi (ed.), *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill: Essays on Sex Equality (with an introductory essay by Alice S. Rossi)*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1970, p. 235, quoted by Julia Anthony, 'Marriage'.

As she saw it, the institution of marriage amongst the middle classes was currently imprisoned within two older ideals: 'the ivy twining round the oak—the beautiful and helpless woman supported by the intellectually and physically strong man—or again the pattern housewife, who only appears to a studious husband in the light of a pleasant companion to while away his leisure moments'.<sup>125</sup> Abandoning these older ideals was necessary, because, she told her readers, quoting Mill: 'The moral regeneration of mankind will only really commence, when the most fundamental of the social relations is placed under the rule of equal justice, and when human beings learn to cultivate their strongest sympathy with an equal in rights and in cultivation.'<sup>126</sup>

Evolution towards the new ideal was already, she believed, taking place, but needed to be given a nudge. Education for women that matched that available to men held the key. It would pave the way for the removal of the legal disabilities that allowed the will of tyrannical husbands to prevail within marriage. Better education would also allow more women to become 'helpmates to men in the highest sense' and diminish the number of wives whose narrow domestic interests frequently dragged their better-educated husband down, so that he became 'a purely domestic man, with no interests or ambition beyond his own hearth and calling'.<sup>127</sup> Thus, by cultivating the full potential of women, the ideal marriage that Julia envisaged provided a means of improving individuals and the communities to which they belonged: 'the world might be a little better, its aims and rule of life a little higher, if this picture of marriage were universally accepted as the ideal one, and if people would strive to mould their aspirations after some such example'.<sup>128</sup> To those who may have struggled to accept such a shift in the place of women within marriage, she offered the reassurance that the 'call[ing] into play of not only the physical and emotional, but also the intellectual and higher faculties of our nature' would result 'not in the destruction, but the ennobling and exalting of all that is best and most sacred in the marriage tie'.<sup>129</sup>

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125 Julia Anthony, 'Marriage'.

126 John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in Rossi (ed.), *Essays on Sex Equality*, p. 236; Julia Anthony, 'Marriage'.

127 Julia Anthony, 'Marriage'.

128 Julia Anthony, 'Marriage'.

129 Julia Anthony, 'Marriage'.

The young Julia's public comments on marriage make fleeting mention of the 'physical bonds of marriage' and tread warily around the issues raised by John Stuart Mill's unconventional union with Harriet Taylor.<sup>130</sup> The pair had married in 1852 after a 20-year-long intimate intellectual and spiritual relationship, while Taylor remained with her husband John Taylor. Mill's autobiography, published in 1873, depicts his marriage with Harriet and their prior relationship as an ideal one—a purely cerebral and spiritual union, in which baser animal instincts had been overcome. Most historians accept that it was a sexless union. The Mills, it seems, would hardly have found this goal difficult to achieve: John Stuart Mill's friend and biographer Alexander Bain was of the opinion that 'in the so-called sensual feelings, he was below average'; Harriet Taylor viewed the early years of her marriage to John Taylor as ones of sexual slavery, and, after the birth of their third child, insisted that she and Taylor abstain permanently.<sup>131</sup> Mill came to view the average marriage as a form of enslavement of women, sexual and otherwise. On the eve of his marriage to Harriet Taylor, he therefore renounced in writing all legal rights over Harriet Taylor that marriage would bestow upon him as her husband, and proceeded, in the eyes of his contemporaries, to allow Harriet to dominate him.<sup>132</sup> Phyllis Rose, in *Parallel Lives* (1984), suggests that Mill's behaviour towards his wife was a form of atonement for the collective crimes of a patriarchal society against women.<sup>133</sup> It is unclear if Julia shared Mill's vision of an ideal marriage as a non-sexual relationship. Her conventional public reticence on the subject did not mean, as we shall see later, that the marriage partnership she envisaged skirted the issue of sexual equality.

Similarly, within her *Hereford Times* articles, she does not address in any detail the issue of whether married women, and particularly mothers, should take paid employment. In general she followed Mill's arguments; she does not, however, seem to have fully shared his conviction that adding paid employment to a married woman's duties in the home was a form of cruelty, a distraction from her maternal role

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130 Julia Anthony, 'Marriage'.

131 Phyllis Rose, *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1984, pp. 123, 109–11.

132 Rose, *Parallel Lives*, pp. 119–20.

133 Rose, *Parallel Lives*, pp. 135–37, 140.

within the family and devoid of any compensating benefit.<sup>134</sup> Her views on contemporary calls for legislation to prevent mothers working were derived instead from her elder brother Charles Anthony's *The Social and Political Dependence of Women*.<sup>135</sup> Published in 1867, before Mill's essay on marriage and heavily dependent upon the less cautious Harriet Taylor Mill's essay on the *Enfranchisement of Women*, it argued that legislation was both undesirable, in that it would restrict personal choice, and unnecessary, insofar as 'natural laws' would deal with any individual instances of incompatibility between women's paid employment and their responsibilities as mothers.<sup>136</sup>

Thus it was that the Wildings left Britain with a set of idealistic expectations of marriage, tied to Mill's conception of the family. As they envisaged their new domestic world, it would become 'a school of sympathy in equality, of living together in love, without power on one side or obedience on the other'.<sup>137</sup> In a variety of ways the migratory experience and the need to build anew facilitated, indeed demanded, more active partnership within marriage. The process of establishing themselves on their small farmlet on the outskirts of urban Christchurch took place within a context that facilitated a sharing of responsibility and placed a premium upon the useful rather than the decorative wife. 'His and her' spheres were blurred and power and authority more evenly distributed between them than either would have experienced in Hereford. The process undoubtedly derived some of its dynamic from the fact that Julia brought a remittance from her father to the first few years of the marriage. As a productive unit, Fownhope, with its vegetable garden, orchard, hens, dairy cows and horses, met the needs of the household and generated income. In its daily operation Julia found abundant opportunities to make herself

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134 John Stuart Mill, *Subjection of Women*, in Rossi (ed.), *Essays on Sex Equality*, pp. 178–79; Rossi, 'Sentiment and Intellect: The Story of John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill' (introductory essay), in Rossi (ed.), *Essays on Sex Equality*, p. 23; Caine, *English Feminism*, pp. 105–6.

135 Charles Anthony, jnr., *Social and Political Dependence*.

136 Julia Anthony, 'Suffrage', *HT*, 15 February 1873.

137 John Stuart Mill, *Subjection of Women*, in Rossi (ed.), *Essays On Sex Equality*, p. 175.

useful—tending to the hens and selling their eggs, working in the orchard and churning butter.<sup>138</sup> The farmlet was a site, moreover, where she and Frederick frequently worked alongside each other.

If necessity and colonial circumstance played a part in shaping the partnership that flourished in this domestic environment, developing a professional career determined a broadly traditional division of household labour. Julia was never to take on paid employment away from the home, while Frederick's legal career took him into the public domain, and the separation of his study from the rest of the household tended to reinforce the division.<sup>139</sup> Yet he wore the role of breadwinner lightly. Matters of household management were left to Julia, and the meticulous and methodical recording of financial details, household budgeting and domestic routines indicate that she took her responsibilities seriously, and that, in the prosecution of them, she became an unchallenged joint-head of household. Indeed the quiet sense of satisfaction evident in her discussion of them suggests that the role satisfied her quest to feel and be useful.

It is, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, in the nurturing of their children that Julia and Frederick's marriage most clearly exhibits its idealism. Their approach was grounded in John Stuart Mill's assertion that 'what is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing'—a social construction—and that women could be men's equals in ability and accomplishment.<sup>140</sup> But they would cease to be 'decorative and dependent creatures' only when 'little girls were brought up in exactly the same fashion as little boys'.<sup>141</sup> The dictum carried with it the implication that within the family greater paternal involvement in the education of children would be a necessary precondition of change. It was an implication that the Wildings embraced. They jointly

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138 This is an oblique reference to English middle-class migrant Jane Maria Atkinson's comment that in her new colonial New Zealand home, where servants were in short supply, she took delight in performing household chores, as it made her feel useful for the first time in her life. See Frances Porter, *Born to New Zealand: A Biography of Jane Maria Atkinson*, Allen & Unwin and Port Nicholson Press, Wellington, 1989, pp. 61–63. See also Raewyn Dalziel's classic article, 'The Colonial Helpmeet: Women's Role and the Vote in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *NZJH*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1977, pp. 112–23.

139 Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 16–17, 21, 60, 182.

140 John Stuart Mill, *Subjection of Women*, in Rossi (ed.), *Essays on Sex Equality*, p. 148.

141 Rose, *Parallel Lives*, p. 136; Rossi, 'Sentiment and Intellect', in *Essays On Sex Equality*, pp. 59–60; John Stuart Mill, *Subjection of Women*, in Rossi (ed.), *Essays On Sex Quality*, pp. 141, 154–55, 148, 168, 181, 182, 190, 202, 218–23.

endeavoured to give their sons and daughters similar upbringings, including a general education that would encourage individual talent and inculcate the values of useful citizenship. This, they believed, would provide one of the many building blocks needed to promote social cohesion and progress.

The introduction to this chapter suggested that the understandings which supported the marriages discussed might be placed somewhere in the gap between the thinking of John Ruskin and John Stuart Mill. Each of the five couples envisaged marriage in ways that reflected a variety of idealistic positions. All imagined a future that could be made better by educated families and which cast aside male dominance. Each couple believed they had constructed a form of liberal partnership within their marriage. Whatever their specific nature, with only the one exception, they conformed to the conventional marriage partnership that was built around a male breadwinner. Helen Connon and John Macmillan Brown's attempt for some six years to sustain a marriage within a relationship that embraced occupational equality stands apart from the others. Whatever the individual and idiosyncratic elements of the difficulties they faced, the ultimate failure of their experiment underlines the dilemmas faced by middle-class men and women who attempted to break with the conventions of their day.



This text is taken from *Family Experiments: Middle-class, professional families in Australia and New Zealand c. 1880–1920*, by Shelley Richardson, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.