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Theme 5: The Woman Question—and the Bachelor's Reveries
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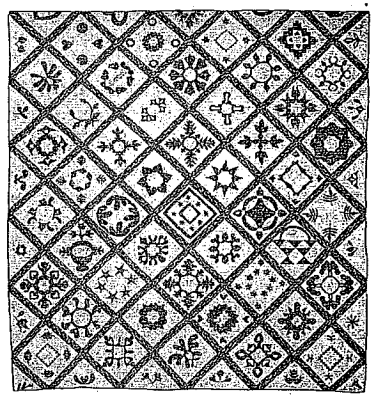
—Jay Parini, Middlebury College

The Woman Question—and the Bachelor's Reveries

Gender and Separate Spheres

The nineteenth century saw immense challenges to earlier formulations of identity based on race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, and class. The particular attention paid in this thematic section to how gender might be situated in a particular antebellum historical moment does not omit entirely the interconnected categories through which these selections address gender. What we now think of as women's rights initiatives were often addressed as "the woman question" before the Civil War; the questions for young men sometimes appeared, as here, in the form of an address by a "bachelor." In either case, ideas about gender often appeared in a context that has come to be called "separate spheres."

The so-called separation of spheres depended on separating the labor of men, at first agricultural and later tied to urban living, from the housekeeping and childrearing activities of women. When women joined the work force in factories, a serious challenge to this separation occurred. And when the supply of land to be distributed along the eastern seaboard began to diminish because of increasing populations, many young men began to travel to new markets and adventures, such as those supplied by the California gold rush. The words of Horace Greeley, "Go West young man!" became the rallying cry for this displacement of populations and indicated as



Unidentified artist. *Quilt [Album, Signature, Friendship (Massachusetts or New Hampshire).* 1847–1862. Cotton, plain weave]
The quilt represents a communal art form practiced by women. Often such quilts would be signed by all the makers, providing artistic evidence of its collective origins.
Courtesy of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University. Gift of Nancy Rosenthal Miller, Class of 1961, 86.060.001.

well that the population displaced was mostly male. Conversely, in the early days of textile mills, much of the laboring population was female, reflecting both the traditional association of women with sewing and the need for small fingers to work with the warp and woof of fabric.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, more than half of the population of the United States crowded along the eastern seaboard. These populations, a mixture of newly arrived immigrants in cities and earlier arrivals who had settled on farms, gathered there in part because the primary mode of transportation was by water. Early textile mills were also located along streams in order to make use of running water for energy. Rapid advances in alternative means of reaching markets and settling new communities occurred first through the development of a canal system and second through the extraordinary explosion of railroads. By the middle of the nineteenth century, much of the eastern half of what had newly become the United States was accessible through a combination of rivers, canals, and railroads. In the western regions of the United States, limited access to such means of transportation encouraged subsistence agriculture and communal organizations of people and goods. All of these economic factors, as well as heated debates about slavery, immigration, and the battles over land seizures with Mexico and other nations such as the Cherokee, affected the formative conditions for thinking about gender in terms of separate spheres.

Women's Rights

The status of women as an important issue emerged at the time of the American Revolution, was subsequently embraced by intellectuals like Mercy Otis Warren, and then became submerged under more traditional understandings of gender in the early republic. While producing compelling portraits of tormented men and women seeking adventures in the early United States, the novelist Charles Brockden Brown also concentrated on women's rights. Male supporters of women's rights did not argue that it was the "natural" right of women to be equal, but that it was socially necessary for the future health of the new nation. In arguing for such national health, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's famous "Declaration of Sentiments" of 1848 is a political document whose phrasing echoes the Declaration of Independence.

Later in the century, the renowned minister Henry Ward Beecher wrote *Woman's Influence in Politics* (1860) to support women's political involvement for the benefit of their "new spheres of influence." He argued that women in the political arena would make the United States appear more civilized. According to Beecher, giving a nod to his sisters Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, civilization also meant that "women dawned into literature and changed the spirit of letters." Women becoming avid readers also changed the role of the male author: "When she became a reader, men no longer wrote as if for men." In this new world of literature, "a woman's hand is becoming more influential than the orator's mouth." Beecher

Lilly Martin Spencer, *Young Husband: First Marketing.* [c. 1854 Hunter Museum of American Art] One of the very few successful women painters of the nineteenth century, Spencer here portrays a scene whose "reversal" of gender roles would have generated much amusement among initial viewers. This image shows a more humorous expression of general American anxiety toward "the woman question."

continued to imagine that women were separate even as he tried to dissolve differences: "I do not ask, then that woman should change her nature." Keeping such a separation, and obliquely retaining gender distinctions, Beecher declared, "we want her *as* a woman, and because she is a woman—not a man." In leading to a somewhat radical political assertion, he claimed "Therefore, we seek not to unsex woman, but to unite in public affairs ... man's life and woman's life." Because of this unity, he declared, "*Woman ought to have the same right of suffrage.*" If women voted, they would refine "the broad sphere of public affairs" and "the voting of woman will be the sifting of men throughout the nation."

A milder challenge regarding gender appears in William Rounseville Alger's *The Friendships of Women* (1868). This book on friendships includes chapters on "Friendships of Women with Women," "Pairs of Female Friends," and "Needs and Duties of Women in This Age." Writing in the midst of the Civil War, when widows' losses and the dearth of men seemed to mandate other alliances, Alger presents quiet alternatives. Even as he explicitly models alternatives to romantic heterosexual love, he presents a discreet necessity: "There never were so many morally baffled, uneasy, and complaining women in the earth as now." With this "tragedy of the lonely and breaking heart," an "obscure mist of sighs exhales out of the solitude of women in the nineteenth century." The antidote, he declares, is "supplementary passions ... to assuage disappointment in one direction by securing fortifications in another." One must celebrate the friendships of women, declares the book: "No other vein of sentiment in human nature, perhaps, has so much need to be cherished." After defining friendship, Alger announces that it can be "the comforting

substitute for love." The need for a substitute for love derives from the slaughter of so many men during the Civil War; and Alger turns bluntly to war: "war is an evil." Further, "Women, being out of it, had best keep out of it. No one desires to have women become soldiers." Such an emphasis on female friendships both confuses the matter of how women should survive the losses of war and emphasizes the relation of war to gender.

Gender and Race

What can be most difficult in describing the gender roles of the early nineteenth century in the United States is the need to account for race. In particular, there seems to be little relation between the situation of white middle-class literary women, whose sense of ambition comes into conflict with the propriety of the drawing room, and the extraordinary declarations of Sojourner Truth, whose famed rhetorical question "Aint I a woman?" is framed by the appearance of her body, her six-foot stature buttressed by the flexed muscles of her laboring arm as well as notoriously through her disclosure of the breasts that she knew her audience would associate with her gender.

Such a separation occurs as well when contrasting Frederick Douglass's account of manhood with the reveries of the conflicted bachelor who cannot decide whether single blessedness by the fireside might be preferable to the risks of loss incurred by marriage and children. Masculinity becomes a matter of class affiliation and class warfare in "The Working Men's Declaration of Independence." Indeed, the concepts of gender and labor fed inexorably into redefinitions of how home and work might exist, and contributed to debates about the use of leisure time, especially in cities.

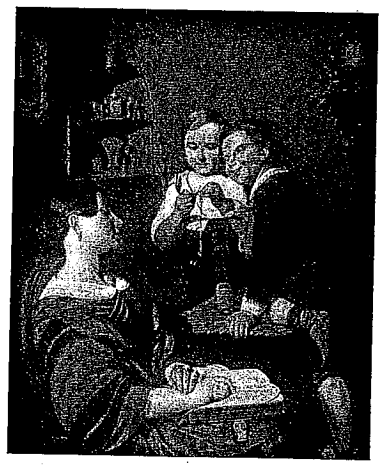
Gender and Reform

Popular stereotypes about gender fed the stories told by writers in reform movements as they turned their attention to the enormous changes in urban and suburban populations. The tremendously popular work of the prolific novelist T. S. Arthur often involved a polemic, as in *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, and What I Saw There,* about the appropriate vigilance of a small town in ensuring safe marriages and safe upbringing for children. In other words, the writings of men here look out for children. T. S. Arthur relates the story of the horrific decay of a small town population in part as retribution for its misguided investment in giving middle class respectability to the appalling addiction to alcohol.

The concept of reform included attention to the education of women. An important and influential early feminist, Margaret Fuller crusaded for the right of women to have access to all spheres of intellectual and political life. One of the most intelligent and most elusive women of the nineteenth century, her real genius was said to lie in conversation, and indeed she scheduled Conversations that were eagerly attended in Boston in the 1840s. Since Fuller lived in a time when "the subject of the

rights and the wrongs, the joys and the griefs, the hopes and the fears, the duties and the plans, belonging to the outer and inner life of womankind in the present age, happens just now to be one of the chief matters of popular interest and agitation," her condensed expression of the significance of the relationship between men's expectations and women's performance is all the more important.

Reform questions also applied to behavior, as in the humorous comments made by Eliza Leslie on the appropriate way to handle the newly emerged category of women authors. And reform was an extremely influential aspect of journalism and urban life. Newspapers increasingly contained the work of crusading journalists, and the writings of Fanny Fern were among the most provocative and most widely read of the nineteenth century. Just as significant, the poetry of Lucy Larcom spoke for the rights of laboring women, and the poetry of Adah Isaacs Menken, sometimes defying classification, spoke a new language of women's ability to express violence and desire.



James Goodwyn Clonney, *Mother's Watch.* [Ca. 1850 Oil on canvas, 27x22 wide] Producing tranquil domestic scenes, James Goodwyn Clonney (1812–1867) reassured viewers of the harmony of rural and family life. *Courtesy Collection Westmoreland Museum of American Art, Greensburg, PA.* Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Norman Hirschl, #1975.102.

Eliza Leslie 1787–1858

Eliza Leslie was born in Philadelphia in 1787 and lived in England as a child. By 1840, Leslie had become the source of conventional wisdom for all matters relating to proper etiquette and maintaining a well-run household. Her numerous works included a number of popular cookbooks, *The House Book; or, A Manual of Domestic*

Economy (1840), and *The Behaviour Book: A Manual for Ladies* (1853), a guide that advised women on the appropriate conduct in nearly any situation. Even though Leslie published fiction as well, including one novel—*Amelia; or, A Young Lady's Vicissitudes* (1848)—it was as a nineteenth-century domestic doyenne that she earned her reputation. Leslie remained an influential cultural presence until her death in 1858.

From The Behaviour Book

CHAPTER XX.

CONDUCT TO LITERARY WOMEN.

On being introduced to a female writer, it is rude to say that "you have long had a great *curiosity* to see her." Curiosity is not the right word. It is polite to imply that, "knowing her well by reputation, you are glad to have an opportunity of making her personal acquaintance." Say nothing concerning her writings, unless you chance to be alone with her. Take care not to speak of her first work as being her best; for if it is really so, she must have been retrograding from that time; a falling off that she will not like to hear of. Perhaps the truth may be, that you yourself have read only her *first* work; and if you tell her this, she will not be much flattered in supposing that you, in reality, cared so little for her first book, as to feel no desire to try a second. But she will be really gratified to learn that you are acquainted with most of her writings; and, in the course of conversation, it will be very pleasant for her to hear you quote something from them.

If she is a writer of fiction, and you presume to take the liberty of criticising her works (as you may at her own request, or if you are her intimate friend) refrain from urging that certain incidents are *improbable*, and certain characters *unnatural*. Of this it is impossible for you to judge, unless you could have lived the very same life that she has; known exactly the same people; and inhabited with her the same places. Remember always that "Truth is stranger than fiction." The French say—"Le vrai n'est pas toujours le plus vraisemblable,"—which, literally translated, means that "Truth is not always the most truthlike." Also, be it understood that a woman of quick perception and good memory can see and recollect a thousand things which would never be noticed or remembered by an obtuse or shallow, common-place capacity. And the intellect of a good writer of fiction is always brightened by the practice of taking in and laying up ideas with a view toward turning them to professional use. Trust in her, and believe that she *has* painted from life. A sensible fictionist always does. At the same time, be not too curious in questioning her as to the identity of her personages and the reality of her incidents. You have no right to expect that she will expose to you, or to any one else, her process of arranging the story, bringing out the characters, or concocting the dialogue. The machinery of her work, and the hidden springs which set it in motion, she naturally wishes to keep to herself; and she cannot be expected to lay them bare for the gratification of impertinent curiosity, letting them become subjects of idle gossip. Be satisfied to take her works as you find them. If you like them, read and commend them; but do not ask her to conduct you behind the scenes, and show you the mysteries of her art—for writing is really an art, and one that cannot be acquired, to any advantage, without a certain amount of talent, taste, and cultivation, to say nothing of genius. What right have you to expect that your literary friend will trust you with "the secrets of her prison-house," and put it into your power to betray her confidence by acquainting the world that a certain popular novelist has informed you with her own lips ("but it must on no account be mentioned, as the disclosure would give mortal offence, and create for her hosts of enemies,") that by her character of Fanny Gadfly she really means Lucy Giddings; that Mr. Hardcastle signifies Mr. Stone; that Old Wigmore was modelled on no less a person than Isaac Baldwin; that Mrs. Baskings was taken from Mrs. Sunning; and Mrs. Babes from Mrs. Childers—&c. &c. Also, do not expect her to tell you on what facts her incidents were founded, and whether there was any truth in them, or if they were mere invention.

Be not inquisitive as to the length of time consumed in writing this book or that—or how soon the work now on hand will be finished. It can scarcely be any concern of yours, and the writer may have reasons for keeping back the information. Rest assured that whenever a public announcement of a new book is expedient, it will certainly be made in print.

There are persons so rude as to question a literary woman (even on a slight acquaintance) as to the remuneration she receives for her writings—in plain terms, "How much did you get for that? and how much are you to have for this? And how much do you make in the course of a year? And how much a page do you get? And how many pages can you write in a day?"

To any impertinent questions from a stranger-lady concerning the profits of your pen, reply concisely, that these things are secrets between yourself and your publishers. If you kindly condescend to answer without evasion, these polite enquiries, you will probably hear such exclamations as, "Why, really—you must be coining money. I think I'll write books myself! There can't be a better trade," &c.

Ignorant people always suppose that popular writers are wonderfully well-paid—and must be making rapid fortunes—because they neither starve in garrets, nor wear rags—at least in America.

Never ask one writer what is her *real* opinion of a contemporary author. She may be unwilling to entrust it to you, as she can have no guarantee that you will not whisper it round till it gets into print. If she voluntarily expresses her own opinion of another writer, and it *is* unfavourable, be honourable enough not to repeat it; but guard it sedulously from betrayal, and avoid mentioning it to any one.

When in company with literary women, make no allusions to "learned ladies," or "blue stockings," or express surprise that they should have any knowledge of

housewifery, or needle-work, or dress; or that they are able to talk on "common things." It is rude and foolish, and shows that you really know nothing about them, either as a class or as individuals.

—1853

Catharine Esther Beecher 1800–1878

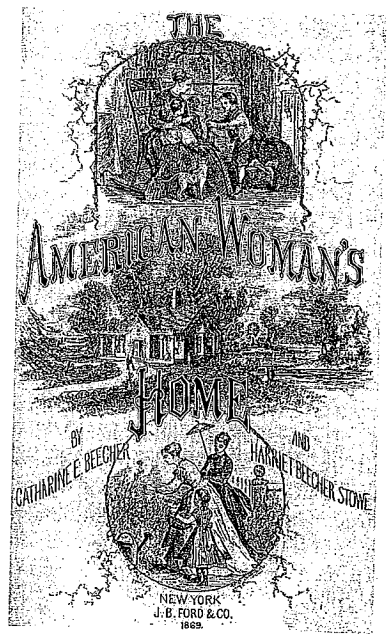
Catharine Beecher was an educator, author, philosopher, and reformer. The founder of schools for women and author of treatises on education and homemaking, she advocated female domesticity, expanded educational opportunities for women, and advanced the pursuit of teaching as a female profession. Her philosophy, derived from experience and study, was essentially pragmatic. Consistent with her era, she believed that women had unique traits that innately suited them to roles as wives, mothers, and educators. Although traditionalist in ascribing moral duty to sexual identity, she pioneered advances for women. She favored a full liberal arts curriculum for female students, elevated the status of homemaking to that of a domestic science, and understood the importance of providing women with adequate education and career training.

Catharine Beecher was born in East Hampton, Long Island, the eldest child of a large and prominent family. Her sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, authored *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; her father, Lyman Beecher, was a renowned minister. The family moved to Litchfield, Connecticut, when she was ten years old. When Catharine was sixteen, her mother died and she readily assumed maternal responsibilities until her father remarried. She received a typical education for girls of her social class, but soon surpassed this modest level, teaching herself mathematics, science, Latin, and philosophy. In her twenties she taught school in New London, Connecticut. Plans for marriage were disrupted and her religious faith challenged by the sudden death of her fiancé in 1822, whereupon she resolved to remain single and "to find happiness in living to do good." In 1823, she opened a school for women, later named the Hartford Female Seminary, which expanded to over 150 students and became known for its advanced curriculum, including calisthenics and moral philosophy. She published *The Elements of Mental and Moral Philosophy, founded on Experience, Reason and the Bible* in 1831, which expressed her view that women were morally superior to men because of their capacity for self-sacrifice.

She moved westward with her father in 1832 and organized the Western Female Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio. She collaborated with William McGuffey on an elementary textbook, joined the Cincinnati temperance movement, and endorsed abolitionism to the extent that it left women in their rightful domestic sphere. Two popular books, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841) and *The Domestic Receipt Book* (1846), gave priority to the imperatives of housework and showed her technological and architectural savvy. *Treatise*, revised with Harriet Beecher Stowe, appeared as *The American Woman's Home* in 1869. Catharine Beecher traveled throughout the 1840s, lecturing and writing. In *The Duty of American Women to Their Country* (1845) she stressed the importance of training teachers, particularly to educate children in the west. She organized the American Woman's Educational Association in 1852 to accomplish her goals and also founded colleges for women in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Dubuque, Iowa; and Quincy, Illinois. She returned to the east in the 1860s, teaching briefly at Elmira College. Resistant to the politics of late nineteenth-century feminism, she nonetheless believed that women wielded great public power through their work in homes and schools. Beecher died in Elmira, New York in 1878.

Further Reading Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis, *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere* (1988); Catherine Villanueva Gardner, "Heaven-Appointed Educators of Mind: Catharine Beecher and the Moral Power of Women" *Hypatia* 19.2 (2004): 1–16; Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (1973); Nicole Tonkovich, *Domesticity with a Difference: The Nonfiction of Catharine Beecher, Sarah J. Hale, Fanny Fern, and Margaret Fuller* (1997); Barbara A. White, *The Beecher Sisters* (2003).

—*Carol J. Singley, Rutgers University, Camden*



American Woman's Home; or, Principles of Domestic Science. Catharine Beecher originally published her *Principles of Domestic Science* in the 1840s to energize a sense of the importance of domesticity for American women. After her younger sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, became a famous writer, the two collaborated on a revision that expanded the concepts of home management to discussions of how to design homes and how to concoct medications. As an innovative way of organizing the domestic space of the kitchen, Beecher's illustrations suggested that the business of running a home could be constructed in a logical and even scientific way.
Courtesy of Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, Hartford, CT

From The American Woman's Home

TO

THE WOMEN OF AMERICA,

IN WHOSE HANDS REST THE REAL DESTINIES OF THE REPUBLIC, AS
MOULDED BY THE EARLY TRAINING AND PRESERVED
AMID THE MATURER INFLUENCES OF HOME,
THIS VOLUME IS

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

THE AMERICAN WOMAN'S HOME.

INTRODUCTION.

THE AUTHORS of this volume, while they sympathize with every honest effort to relieve the disabilities and sufferings of their sex, are confident that the chief cause of these evils is the fact that the honor and duties of the family state are not duly appreciated, that women are not trained for these duties as men are trained for their trades and professions, and that, as the consequence, family labor is poorly done, poorly paid, and regarded as menial and disgraceful.

To be the nurse of young children, a cook, or a housemaid, is regarded as the lowest and last resort of poverty, and one which no woman of culture and position can assume without loss of caste and respectability.

It is the aim of this volume to elevate both the honor and the remuneration of all the employments that sustain the many difficult and sacred duties of the family state, and thus to render each department of woman's true profession as much desired and respected as are the most honored professions of men.

When the other sex are to be instructed in law, medicine, or divinity, they are favored with numerous institutions richly endowed, with teachers of the highest talents and acquirements, with extensive libraries, and abundant and costly apparatus. With such advantages they devote nearly ten of the best years of life to preparing themselves for their profession; and to secure the public from unqualified members of these professions, none can enter them until examined by a competent body, who certify to their due preparation for their duties.

Woman's profession embraces the care and nursing of the body in the critical periods of infancy and sickness, the training of the human mind in the most impressible period of childhood, the instruction and control of servants, and most of the government and economies of the family state. These duties of woman are as sacred and important as any ordained to man; and yet no such advantages for preparation have been accorded to her, nor is there any qualified body to certify the public that a woman is duly prepared to give proper instruction in her profession.

This unfortunate want, and also the questions frequently asked concerning the domestic qualifications of both the authors of this work, who have formerly written upon such topics, make it needful to give some account of the advantage they have enjoyed in preparation for the important office assumed as teachers of woman's domestic duties.

XV

DOMESTIC MANNERS.

Good manners are the expressions of benevolence in personal intercourse, by which we endeavor to promote the comfort and enjoyment of others, and to avoid all that gives needless uneasiness. It is the exterior exhibition of the divine precept, which requires us to do to others as we would that they should do to us. It is saying, by our deportment, to all around, that we consider their feelings, tastes, and conveniences, as equal in value to our own.

Good manners lead us to avoid all practices which offend the taste of others; all unnecessary violations of the conventional rules of propriety; all rude and disrespectful language and deportment; and all remarks which would tend to wound the feelings of others.

There is a serious defect in the manners of the American people, especially among the descendants of the Puritan settlers of New-England, which can never be efficiently remedied, except in the domestic circle, and during early life. It is a deficiency in the free expression of kindly feelings and sympathetic emotions, and a want of courtesy in deportment. The causes which have led to this result may easily be traced.

The forefathers of this nation, to a wide extent, were men who were driven from their native land by laws and customs which they believed to be opposed both to civil and religious freedom. The sufferings they were called to endure, the subduing of those gentler feelings which bind us to country, kindred, and home; and the constant subordination of the passions to stern principle, induced characters of great firmness and self-control. They gave up the comforts and refinements of a civilized country, and came as pilgrims to a hard soil, a cold clime, and a heathen shore. They were continually forced to encounter danger, privations, sickness, loneliness, and death; and all these their religion taught them to meet with calmness, fortitude, and submission. And thus it became the custom and habit of the whole mass, to repress rather than to encourage the expression of feeling.

Persons who are called to constant and protracted suffering and privation are forced to subdue and conceal emotion; for the free expression of it would double their own suffering, and increase the sufferings of others. Those, only, who are free from care and anxiety, and whose minds are mainly occupied by cheerful emotions, are at full liberty to unvail their feelings.

It was under such stern and rigorous discipline that the first children in New-England were reared; and the manners and habits of parents are usually, to a great extent, transmitted to children. Thus it comes to pass, that the descendants of the Puritans, now scattered over every part of the nation, are predisposed to conceal the gentler emotions, while their manners are calm, decided, and cold, rather than free and impulsive. Of course, there are very many exceptions to these predominating characteristics.

Other causes to which we may attribute a general want of courtesy in manners are certain incidental results of our domestic institutions. Our ancestors and their descendants have constantly been combating the aristocratic principle which would exalt one class of men at the expense of another. They have had to contend with this principle, not only in civil but in social life. Almost every American, in his own person as well as in behalf of his class, has had to assume and defend the main principle of democracy—that every man's feelings and interests are equal in value to those of every other man. But, in doing this, there has been some want of clear discrimination. Because claims based on distinctions of mere birth, fortune, or position, were found to be injurious, many have gone to the extreme of inferring that all distinctions, involving subordinations, are useless. Such would wrongfully regard children as equals to parents, pupils to teachers, domestics to their employers, and subjects to magistrates—and that, too, in all respects.

The fact that certain grades of superiority and subordination are needful, both for individual and public benefit, has not been clearly discerned; and there has been a gradual tendency to an extreme of the opposite view which has sensibly affected our manners. All the proprieties and courtesies which depend on the recognition of the relative duties of superior and subordinate have been warred upon; and thus we see, to an increasing extent, disrespectful treatment of parents, by children; of teachers, by pupils; of employers, by domestics; and of the aged, by the young. In all classes and circles, there is a gradual decay in courtesy of address.

In cases, too, where kindness is rendered, it is often accompanied with a cold, unsympathizing manner, which greatly lessens its value; while kindness or politeness is received in a similar style of coolness, as if it were but the payment of a just due.

It is owing to these causes that the American people, especially the descendants of the Puritans, do not do themselves justice. For, while those who are near enough to learn their real character and feelings can discern the most generous impulses, and the most kindly sympathies, they are often so vailed behind a composed and indifferent demeanor, as to be almost entirely concealed from strangers.

These defects in our national manners it especially falls to the care of mothers, and all who have charge of the young, to rectify; and if they seriously undertake the matter, and wisely adapt means to ends, these defects will be remedied. With reference to this object, the following ideas are suggested.

The law of Christianity and of democracy, which teaches that all men are born equal in rights, and that their interests and feelings should be regarded as of equal value, seems to be adopted in aristocratic circles, with exclusive reference to the class in which the individual moves. The courtly gentleman addresses all of his own class with politeness and respect; and in all his actions, seems to allow that the feelings and convenience of these others are to be regarded the same as his own. But his demeanor to those of inferior station is not based on the same rule.

Among those who make up aristocratic circles, such as are above them are deemed of superior, and such as are below of inferior, value. Thus, if a young, ignorant, and vicious coxcomb happens to have been born a lord, the aged, the virtuous, the learned, and the well-bred of another class must give his convenience the precedence, and must address him in terms of respect. So sometimes, when a man of "noble birth" is thrown among the lower classes, he demeans himself in a style which, to persons of his own class, would be deemed the height of assumption and rudeness.

Now, the principles of democracy require that the same courtesy which we accord to our own circle shall be extended to every class and condition; and that distinctions of superiority and subordination shall depend, not on accidents of birth, fortune, or occupation, but solely on those mutual relations which the good of all classes equally require. The distinctions demanded in a democratic state are simply those which result from relations that are common to every class, and are for the benefit of all.

It is for the benefit of every class that children be subordinate to parents, pupils to teachers, the employed to their employers, and subjects to magistrates. In addition to this, it is for the general well-being that the comfort or convenience of the delicate and feeble should be preferred to that of the strong and healthy, who would suffer less by any deprivation; that precedence should be given to their elders by the young; and that reverence should be given to the hoary head.

The rules of good-breeding, in a democratic state, must be founded on these principles. It is indeed assumed that the value of the happiness of each individual is the same as that of every other; but as there must be occasions where there are advantages which all can not enjoy, there must be general rules for regulating a selection. Otherwise, there would be constant scrambling among those of equal claims, and brute force must be the final resort; in which case, the strongest would have the best of every thing. The democratic rule, then, is, that superiors in age, station, or office have precedence of subordinates; age and feebleness, of youth and strength; and the feebler sex, of more vigorous man.*

* The universal practice of this nation, in thus giving precedence to woman has been severely commented on by foreigners, and by some who would transfer all the business of the other sex to women, and then have them treated like men. But we hope this evidence of our superior civilization and Christianity may increase rather than diminish.

There is, also, a style of deportment and address which is appropriate to these different relations. It is suitable for a superior to secure compliance with his wishes from those subordinate to him by commands; but a subordinate must secure compliance with his wishes from a superior by requests. (Although the kind and considerate manner to subordinates will always be found the most effective as well as the pleasantest, by those in superior station.) It is suitable for a parent, teacher, or employer to admonish for neglect of duty; but not for an inferior to adopt such a course toward a superior. It is suitable for a superior to take precedence of a subordinate, without any remark; but not for an inferior, without previously asking leave, or offering an apology. It is proper for a superior to use language and manners of freedom and familiarity, which would be improper from a subordinate to a superior.

The want of due regard to these proprieties occasions a great defect in American manners. It is very common to hear children talk to their parents in a style proper only between companions and equals; so, also, the young address their elders; those employed, their employers; and domestics, the members of the family and their visitors, in a style which is inappropriate to their relative positions. But courteous address is required not merely toward superiors; every person desires to be thus treated, and therefore the law of benevolence demands such demeanor toward all whom we meet in the social intercourse of life. "Be ye courteous," is the direction of the apostle in reference to our treatment of *all.*

Good manners can be successfully cultivated only in early life and in the domestic circle. There is nothing which depends so much upon *habit* as the constantly recurring proprieties of good breeding; and if a child grows up without forming such habits, it is very rarely the case that they can be formed at a later period. The feeling that it is of little consequence how we behave at home if we conduct ourselves properly abroad, is a very fallacious one. Persons who are careless and ill-bred at home may imagine that they can assume good manners abroad; but they mistake. Fixed habits of tone, manner, language, and movements can not be suddenly altered; and those who are ill-bred at home, even when they try to hide their bad habits, are sure to violate many of the obvious rules of propriety, and yet be unconscious of it.

And there is nothing which would so effectually remove prejudice against our democratic institutions as the general cultivation of good-breeding in the domestic circle. Good manners are the exterior of benevolence, the minute and constant exhibitions of "peace and good-will;" and the nation, as well as the individual, which most excels in the external demonstration, as well as the internal principle, will be most respected and beloved.

It is only the training of the family state according to its true end and aim that is to secure to woman her true position and rights. When the family is instituted by marriage, it is man who is the head and chief magistrate by the force of his physical power and requirement of the chief responsibility; not less is he so according to the

Christian law, by which, when differences arise, the husband has the deciding control, and the wife is to obey. "Where love is, there is no law;" but where love is not, the only dignified and peaceful course is for the wife, however much his superior, to "submit, as to God and not to man."

But this power of nature and of religion, given to man as the controlling head, involves the distinctive duty of the family state, *self-sacrificing love.* The husband is to "honor" the wife, to love her as himself, and thus account her wishes and happiness as of equal value with his own. But more than this, he is to love her "as Christ loved the Church;" that is, he is to "suffer" for her, if need be, in order to support and elevate and ennoble her.

The father then is to set the example of self-sacrificing love and devotion; and the mother, of Christian obedience when it is required. Every boy is to be trained for his future domestic position by labor and sacrifices for his mother and sisters. It is the brother who is to do the hardest and most disagreeable work, to face the storms and perform the most laborious drudgeries. In the family circle, too, he is to give his mother and sister precedence in all the conveniences and comforts of home life.

It is only those nations where the teachings and example of Christ have had most influence that man has ever assumed his obligations of self-sacrificing benevolence in the family. And even in Christian communities, the duty of wives to obey their husbands has been more strenuously urged than the obligations of the husband to love his wife "as Christ loved the Church."

Here it is needful to notice that the distinctive duty of obedience to man does not rest on women who do not enter the relations of married life. A woman who inherits property, or who earns her own livelihood, can institute the family state, adopt orphan children and employ suitable helpers in training them; and then to her will appertain the authority and rights that belong to man as the head of a family. And when every woman is trained to some self-supporting business, she will not be tempted to enter the family state as a subordinate, except by that love for which there is no need of law.

These general principles being stated, some details in regard to domestic manners will be enumerated.

In the first place, there should be required in the family a strict attention to the rules of precedence, and those modes of address appropriate to the various relations to be sustained. Children should always be required to offer their superiors, in age or station, the precedence in all comforts and conveniences, and always address them in a respectful tone and manner. The custom of adding, "Sir," or "Ma'am," to "Yes," or "No," is valuable, as a perpetual indication of a respectful recognition of superiority. It is now going out of fashion, even among the most well bred people; probably from a want of consideration of its importance. Every remnant of courtesy of address, in our customs, should be carefully cherished, by all who feel a value for the proprieties of good breeding.

If parents allow their children to talk to them, and to the grown persons in the family, in the same style in which they address each other, it will be in vain to hope for the courtesy of manner and tone which good breeding demands in the general intercourse of society. In a large family, where the elder children are grown up, and the younger are small, it is important to require the latter to treat the elder in some sense as superiors. There are none so ready as young children to assume airs of equality; and if they are allowed to treat one class of superiors in age and character disrespectfully, they will soon use the privilege universally. This is the reason why the youngest children of a family are most apt to be pert, forward, and unmannerly.

Another point to be aimed at is, to require children always to acknowledge every act of kindness and attention, either by words or manner. If they are so trained as always to make grateful acknowledgments, when receiving favors, one of the objectionable features in American manners will be avoided.

Again, children should be required to ask leave, whenever they wish to gratify curiosity, or use an article which belongs to another. And if cases occur, when they can not comply with the rules of good-breeding, as, for instance, when they must step between a person and the fire, or take the chair of an older person, they should be taught either to ask leave, or to offer an apology.

There is another point of good-breeding, which can not, in all cases, be understood and applied by children in its widest extent. It is that which requires us to avoid all remarks which tend to embarrass, vex, mortify, or in any way wound the feelings of another. To notice personal defects; to allude to others' faults, or the faults of their friends; to speak disparagingly of the sect or party to which a person belongs; to be inattentive when addressed in conversation; to contradict flatly; to speak in contemptuous tones of opinions expressed by another; all these are violations of the rules of good-breeding, which children should be taught to regard. Under this head comes the practice of whispering and staring about, when a teacher, or lecturer, or clergyman is addressing a class or audience. Such inattention is practically saying that what the person is uttering is not worth attending to; and persons of real good-breeding always avoid it. Loud talking and laughing in a large assembly, even when no exercises are going on; yawning and gaping in company; and not looking in the face a person who is addressing you, are deemed marks of ill-breeding.

Another branch of good manners relates to the duties of hospitality. Politeness requires us to welcome visitors with cordiality; to offer them the best accommodations; to address conversation to them; and to express, by tone and manner, kindness and respect. Offering the hand to all visitors at one's own house is a courteous and hospitable custom; and a cordial shake of the hand, when friends meet, would abate much of the coldness of manner ascribed to Americans.

Another point of good breeding refers to the conventional rules of propriety and good taste. Of these, the first class relates to the avoidance of all disgusting or offensive personal habits: such as fingering the hair; obtrusively using a toothpick,

or carrying one in the mouth after the needful use of it; cleaning the nails in presence of others; picking the nose; spitting on carpets; snuffing instead of using a handkerchief, or using the article in an offensive manner; lifting up the boots or shoes, as some men do, to tend them on the knee, or to finger them: all these tricks, either at home or in society, children should be taught to avoid.

Another topic, under this head, may be called *table manners.* To persons of good-breeding, nothing is more annoying than violations of the conventional proprieties of the table. Reaching over another person's plate; standing up, to reach distant articles, instead of asking to have them passed; using one's own knife and spoon for butter, salt, or sugar, when it is the custom of the family to provide separate utensils for the purpose; setting cups with the tea dripping from them, on the table-cloth, instead of the mats or small plates furnished; using the table-cloth instead of the napkins; eating fast, and in a noisy manner; putting large pieces in the mouth; looking and eating as if very hungry, or as if anxious to get at certain dishes; sitting at too great a distance from the table, and dropping food; laying the knife and fork on the table-cloth, instead of on the edge of the plate; picking the teeth at table: all these particulars children should be taught to avoid.

It is always desirable, too, to train children, when at table with grown persons, to be silent, except when addressed by others; or else their chattering will interrupt the conversation and comfort of their elders. They should always be required, too, to wait in silence, till all the older persons are helped.

When children are alone with their parents, it is desirable to lead them to converse and to take this as an opportunity to form proper conversational habits. But it should be a fixed rule that, when strangers are present, the children are to listen in silence and only reply when addressed. Unless this is secured, visitors will often be condemned to listen to puerile chattering, with small chance of the proper attention due to guests and superiors in age and station.

Children should be trained, in preparing themselves for the table or for appearance among the family, not only to put their hair, face, and hands in neat order, but also their nails; and to habitually attend to this latter whenever they wash their hands.

There are some very disagreeable tricks which many children practice even in families counted well-bred. Such, for example, are drumming with the fingers on some piece of furniture, or humming a tune while others are talking, or interrupting conversation by pertinacious questions, or whistling in the house instead of out-doors, or speaking several at once and in loud voices to gain attention. All these are violations of good-breeding, which children should be trained to avoid, lest they should not only annoy as children, but practice the same kind of ill manners when mature. In all assemblies for public debate, a chairman or moderator is appointed whose business it is to see that only one person speaks at a time, that no one interrupts a person when speaking, that no needless noises are made, and that all indecorums are avoided. Such an officer is sometimes greatly needed in family circles.

Children should be encouraged freely to use lungs and limbs out-doors, or in hours for sport in the house. But at other times, in the domestic circle, gentle tones and manners should be cultivated. The words *gentleman* and *gentlewoman* came originally from the fact that the uncultivated and ignorant classes used coarse and loud tones, and rough words and movements; while only the refined circles habitually used gentle tones and gentle manners. For the same reason, those born in the higher circles were called "of gentle blood." Thus it came that a coarse and loud voice, and rough, ungentle manners, are regarded as vulgar and plebeian.

All these things should be taught to children, gradually, and with great patience and gentleness. Some parents, with whom good manners are a great object, are in danger of making their children perpetually uncomfortable, by suddenly surrounding them with so many rules that they must inevitably violate some one or other a great part of the time. It is much better to begin with a few rules, and be steady and persevering with these, till a habit is formed, and then take a few more, thus making the process easy and gradual. Otherwise, the temper of children will be injured; or, hopeless of fulfilling so many requisitions, they will become reckless and indifferent to all.

If a few brief, well-considered, and sensible rules of good manners could be suspended in every school-room, and the children all required to commit them to memory, it probably would do more to remedy the defects of American manners and to advance universal good-breeding than any other mode that could be so easily adopted.

But, in reference to those who have enjoyed advantages for the cultivation of good manners, and who duly estimate its importance, one caution is necessary. Those who never have had such habits formed in youth are under disadvantages which no benevolence of temper can altogether remedy. They may often violate the tastes and feelings of others, not from a want of proper regard for them, but from ignorance of custom, or want of habit, or abstraction of mind, or from other causes which demand forbearance and sympathy, rather than displeasure. An ability to bear patiently with defects in manners, and to make candid and considerate allowance for a want of advantages, or for peculiarities in mental habits, is one mark of the benevolence of real good-breeding.

The advocates of monarchical and aristocratic institutions have always had great plausibility given to their views, by the seeming tendencies of our institutions to insubordination and bad manners. And it has been too indiscriminately conceded, by the defenders of the latter, that such are these tendencies, and that the offensive points in American manners are the necessary result of democratic principles.

But it is believed that both facts and reasoning are in opposition to this opinion. The following extract from the work of De Tocqueville, the great political philosopher of France, exhibits the opinion of an impartial observer, when comparing American manners with those of the English, who are confessedly the most aristocratic of all people.

He previously remarks on the tendency of aristocracy to make men more sympathizing with persons of their own peculiar class, and less so toward those of lower degree; and he then contrasts American manners with the English, claiming that the Americans are much the more affable, mild, and social. "In America, where the privileges of birth never existed and where riches confer no peculiar rights on their possessors, men acquainted with each other are very ready to frequent the same places, and find neither peril nor disadvantage in the free interchange of their thoughts. If they meet by accident, they neither seek nor avoid intercourse; their manner is therefore natural, frank, and open." "If their demeanor is often cold and serious, it is never haughty or constrained." But an "aristocratic pride is still extremely great among the English; and as the limits of aristocracy are still ill-defined, every body lives in constant dread, lest advantage should be taken of his familiarity. Unable to judge, at once, of the social position of those he meets, an Englishman prudently avoids all contact with him. Men are afraid, lest some slight service rendered should draw them into an unsuitable acquaintance; they dread civilities, and they avoid the obtrusive gratitude of a stranger, as much as his hatred."

Thus, *facts* seem to show that when the most aristocratic nation in the world is compared, as to manners, with the most democratic, the judgment of strangers is in favor of the latter. And if good manners are the outward exhibition of the democratic principle of impartial benevolence and equal rights, surely the nation which adopts this rule, both in social and civil life, is the most likely to secure the desirable exterior. The aristocrat, by his principles, extends the exterior of impartial benevolence to his own class only; the democratic principle requires it to be extended *to all.*

There is reason, therefore, to hope and expect more refined and polished manners in America than in any other land; while all the developments of taste and refinement, such as poetry, music, painting, sculpture, and architecture, it may be expected, will come to as high a state of perfection here as in any other nation.

If this country increases in virtue and intelligence, as it may, there is no end to the wealth which will pour in as the result of our resources of climate, soil, and navigation, and the skill, industry, energy, and enterprise of our countrymen. This wealth, if used as intelligence and virtue dictate, will furnish the means for a superior education to all classes, and every facility for the refinement of taste, intellect, and feeling.

Moreover, in this country, labor is ceasing to be the badge of a lower class; so that already it is disreputable for a man to be "a lazy gentleman." And this feeling must increase, till there is such an equalization of labor as will afford all the time

needful for every class to improve the many advantages offered to them. Already through the munificence of some of our citizens, there are literary and scientific advantages offered to all classes, rarely enjoyed elsewhere. In most of our large cities and towns, the advantages of education, now offered to the poorest classes, often without charge, surpass what, some years ago, most wealthy men could purchase for any price. And it is believed that a time will come when the poorest boy in America can secure advantages, which will equal what the heir of the proudest peerage can now command.

The records of the courts of France and Germany, (as detailed by the Duchess of Orleans,) in and succeeding the brilliant reign of Louis the Fourteenth—a period which was deemed the acme of elegance and refinement—exhibit a grossness, a vulgarity, and a coarseness, not to be found among the very lowest of our respectable poor. And the biography of the English Beau Nash, who attempted to reform the manners of the gentry, in the times of Queen Anne, exhibits violations of the rules of decency among the aristocracy, which the commonest yeoman of this land would feel disgraced in perpetrating.

This shows that our lowest classes, at this period, are more refined than were the highest in aristocratic lands, a hundred years ago; and another century may show the lowest classes, in wealth, in this country, attaining as high a polish as adorns those who now are leaders of good manners in the courts of kings.

—1869

George Henry Evans 1805–1856

George Henry Evans was born in England in 1805 and moved to upstate New York with his family in 1820. Evans became a printer and publisher after an early apprenticeship and soon had his own printing company. In 1829, Evans began editing and publishing the *Working Man's Advocate*, the second labor newspaper to be published in the United States. The paper broadly addressed labor reform, and the publication of "The Working Men's Declaration of Independence" highlighted the key grievances of the movement, including issues of taxation and laws that were unfair to workers. By 1841, Evans had become increasingly concerned with the issue of public lands in the West, which he felt should be given to settlers. In support of this view, he founded the National Reform Association in 1844. Evans is credited as a central figure in the passage of the 1862 Homestead Act, which would eventually make the land distribution goals of the Association a reality.

The Working Men's Declaration of Independence

"When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary" for one class of a community to assert their natural and unalienable rights in opposition to other classes of their fellow men, "and to assume among" them a political "station of equality to which the laws of nature and of nature's God," as well as the principles of their political compact, "entitle them; a decent respect to the opinions of mankind," and the more paramount duty they owe to their own fellow citizens, "requires that they should declare the causes which impel them" to adopt so painful, yet so necessary, a measure.

"We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are *created equal;* that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are *life, liberty*, and the *pursuit of happiness;* that to secure these rights" against the undue influence of other classes of society, prudence, as well as the claims of self defence, dictates the necessity of the organization of a party, who shall, by their representatives, prevent dangerous combinations to subvert these indefeasible and fundamental privileges. "All experience hath shown, that mankind" in general, and *we as a class in particular*, "are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves," by an opposition which the pride and self interest of unprincipled political aspirants, with the more unprincipled zeal of religious bigotry, will wilfully misrepresent. "But when a long train of abuses and usurpations" take place, all invariably tending to the oppression and degradation of one class of society, and to the unnatural and iniquitous exaltation of another by political leaders, "it is their right, it is their duty," to use every constitutional means to *reform* the abuses of such a government, and to provide new guards for their future security. The history of the political *parties* in this state, is a history of political *iniquities*, all tending to the enacting and enforcing oppressive and unequal laws. To prove this, let facts be submitted to the candid and impartial of our fellow citizens of all parties.

1. The laws for levying taxes are all based on erroneous principles, in consequence of their operating most oppressively on one class of society, and being scarcely felt by the other.

2. The laws regarding the duties of jurors, witnesses, and militia trainings, are still more unequal and oppressive.

3. The laws for private incorporations are all partial in their operations forming one class of society to the expense of the other, who have no equal participation.

4. The laws incorporating religious societies have a pernicious tendency, by promoting the erection of magnificent places of public worship, by the rich, excluding others, and which others cannot imitate; consequently engendering spiritual pride in the clergy and people, and thereby creating odious distinctions in society, destructive to its social peace and happiness.