



Anne Carre Riddell on her wedding day.

R. DE FEGELY

MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God . . .

ON A FINE SPRING MORNING Annie Riddell and Charles de Fegely were married by the Bishop of Melbourne in St Mary's Church of England at Caulfield, not far from the city of Melbourne, before an assembly of 200 friends and relations. Everyone seemed 'to harp upon their delight that the engagement was so happily fulfilled', reported the bride's widowed mother, Mary Ann. Annie's father, originally a Western District squatter who had settled his family in the Elsternwick mansion Cavers Carre more than twenty years earlier, had died in 1879. Mary Ann handled the brilliant affair capably, proud of her new son-in-law, another grazier of good prospects. Annie's sisters Jane and Bessie and her brother Tom were there, with spouses and children. Only the youngest, Wally, was absent on a European tour. His mother wrote apologetically that the couple had not delayed the wedding until his return: 'I know you will forgive their impatience and dread of waiting any longer.' She gave Wally a complete description of the festive day.

'Dear Annie woke in great spirits and made jokes all the time she was getting up which she had not done lately', Mary Ann Riddell wrote. The wedding dress was beautiful, quite simple, made of splendid satin with a veil of plain tulle which fell straight to the end, the Howden lace and orange blossom the only trimming, which 'did not obscure the *innocence* of the whole dress'. She wore the usual wreath of orange blossom in her hair, and a necklace which was her bridal gift from the groom: a crescent of pearls with a star studded with a single diamond. 'Annie looked so lovely she had such a sweet modest and happy look.'

The Riddell family left Cavers Carre in two conveyances, a landau and pair and a carriage and pair. The church was decorated with flowers in the couple's initials, A and C, picked out in roses and daisies, surrounded by arums and acacia.



The bridegroom, Charles de Fegely.

R. DE FEGELY

Annie said all her responses clearly and signed her name looking so nice. Charlie looked very well in his *frock* coat and was so happy looking and gentle. They looked such an interesting couple standing together . . .

Mary Ann Riddell, mother of the bride.

RIDDELL PAPERS, LA TROBE LIBRARY



Then it was back to Cavers Carre, the 'dear old place', the verandah newly sealed and carpeted for the occasion, and a splendid marquee in front of the drawing room windows. The four-tiered cake, which weighed thirty-six kilograms, was crowned with a silver basket of white lilac from their own tree.

The bishop, Dr Field Flowers Goe, made a most charming, humorous and apt speech. He called Annie 'the beautiful bride', and quoted the lines from *Punch* about higher education for women, with particular reference to the new college for them at Cambridge: 'Where are you going to my pretty maid/Going to Girton Sir she said.' This 'pretty maid', he said approvingly, 'was going to fulfil her duties and live the true woman's life'. There were further speeches and toasts, including hearty cheers for the distant Wally. Finally the bride and groom drove off to the Caulfield station, the guests departed, and the Riddell family 'sat down like Cinderella amidst the spent gorgeousness'. Mary Ann Riddell concluded her letter to Wally, 'and now darling goodbye God bless you—as he has blessed me in giving you to me'. The family had launched a new couple into the married state. The absent family member had been included in the circle of affection.

The congregation had been told the purposes for which marriage was ordained: for the procreation of children; to keep pure those who did not have the gift of continency; and for mutual support. Charles vowed to be sexually faithful to Annie, to love and care for her as long as they both lived. Annie made the same vows, and gave a promise to obey her new husband. They committed themselves to this future in front of family, friends and neighbours, who believed in the ideals of marriage as described in the words of the Church of England service, and who would support the couple as they established a new family.

Many couples took these and similar vows in 1888, and many more were living within the social framework they prescribed. How husbands and wives, parents and children behaved towards each other was influenced by the family's wealth or poverty and by the means through which its livelihood was gained. Some marriages were blighted by domineering or brutal husbands, by poverty, by bereavement or by personal incompatibility. Some couples, like the de Fegelys, could rely on the support of a wider circle of kin; others faced life's troubles alone. 'All happy marriages are alike', Leo Tolstoy had written in his novel *Anna Karenina* a decade earlier, 'but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion'. In real life, though, most families experienced both happiness and sadness, and even happy families were happy after their own fashion. Consider, for example, the contrasting lives of Julia Suttor, the newly widowed wife of a Bathurst grazier, mother and grandmother, and Ann Currie, the busy wife of a hardworking Gippsland farmer.

On New Year's Day, Julia Suttor, aged 58, attended the Church of England at Peel near Bathurst with two of her daughters, Emily and Agnes, and Emily's children. Later in the day her oldest son visited Emily's home, where Julia was living. Company she had, yet she wrote in her diary:

What sad recollections this time of the season comes back to me the loss of my dear and affectionate husband has been a great trial to me . . . God grant that I may have less sorrow and trouble to go through this year . . . I do feel so lonely and miserable at times.

Julia's husband, John Bligh Suttor, a wealthy grazier and politician, had been dead nineteen months. Because of legal problems in proving John's will, Julia had limited



Walter Riddell, absent brother.

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Cavers Carre, the Riddells' residence at Elsternwick.

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means, and throughout 1888 she lived in the homes of relatives awaiting a settlement. She had many homes to welcome her, for she and John had reared four sons and five daughters, only the youngest of whom, nineteen-year-old Agnes, remained unmarried. For most of the year Julia lived, by turns, with her daughter Emily and her sister Addy. Emily had married a cousin, Herbert Suttor, owner of the property Brucedale; she had five young children and a sixth in 1888. Addy had also married a Suttor, William, a prominent politician and grazier. Julia's oldest son, Arthur, managed her original home, Wyagdon; another son was on the land, one in the law and one an engineer in Bathurst. Her daughters had married well, Nina and Flo into well-to-do Sydney families, Nellie to a stipendiary magistrate. There was a fast increasing brood of grandchildren on whom Julia could lavish her affection.

Julia Suttor was not only the centre of her own family, but part of a formidable clan. She had cared for her own parents in their old age, and now kept in close touch with her brothers and sisters. The Suttor family into which she had married was large and complex, and both male and female members maintained constant links. The Suttor men were connected through business ventures. They consulted each other about their properties, illnesses among sheep, the shearing, and the transporting of stock. Suttor men in business and the law in Sydney belonged to the lucrative network of property management and investment and they looked after their families as they did their properties. The Suttor women helped each other, monitored the progress of the young, the pregnant and the newly delivered, the behaviour of children and the well-being of the old. Julia was kept busy assisting her daughter and her sister. Emily's and Addy's husbands' work took them out of the home on most days and away on frequent short business or political trips. The men appeared at table to entertain guests, and were on hand to escort their wives to dinners or public functions. But they scarcely involved themselves in the day-to-day life of the household.

The hard work of running a large home was done by maids, three in Emily's household. Addy had a cook and a general servant, as did the other Suttor



John Bligh Suttor.

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A pastoral family. The McConnells of Cressbrook on the Upper Brisbane River. The pioneer David McConnel died in 1885 and his son John took charge of the property and cared for his widowed mother Mary. Wealthy pastoral families maintained close family, social and financial ties.
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establishments. When a new baby appeared, there was an immediate search for a nurse girl. Emily, with four children of school age, employed Miss Oswald as a governess. She taught the children daily in the schoolroom and supervised most of their time. 'Ossi' was more a companion to the Suttor women than a servant, and she also acted as a companion for the restless young Agnes.

A seamstress was employed to make special dresses, but making ordinary clothes for the women and children and preparing household linen required much work from the ladies themselves. Julia helped with the sewing, using a foot-operated sewing machine. Supervising the leisure time of her grandchildren, nieces and nephews, fell often to Julia's lot. When Emily gave birth to her sixth child at the end of June, Julia was swiftly on hand to assist with the baby's care. She looked after the baby while Emily went to town: 'so good, not one bit of trouble to me'. She took the young ones to church, for walks, on visits to relations and to the dentist. She attended speech days and concerts, listened to the older girls singing and playing the piano and was a constant chaperone. She was a fond aunt and grandmother.

Because her children were older, Addy had time for an active social life as a charity worker and hostess. When the new bishop was installed at Bathurst in January, Addy put up important visitors. Julia wrote,

all the Bishops and Clergy at afternoon tea in the Garden . . . my sister I am sure will be glad when her visitors have gone she looked very tired and done up yesterday . . .

Julia joined her sister in mission meetings, visits to the poor and a meeting to discuss 'women's work'. At the end of May they organised a ball to aid the hospital.

Through all the year's activity, Julia still grieved for her husband. Christmas was a sad time to be without him. Christmas Day at Emily's was marred by the illness

of her little granddaughter, Eileen, and next day she stayed home with Eileen so that the others could attend a concert. On 28 December she went to Wyagdon to spend the day with Arthur, returning with two geese for Emily, and the next day shopped in Bathurst with Emily. On 31 December Julia wrote, 'I must now say goodbye to 1888 and most sincerely trust that the next may be a brighter and better one for me'.

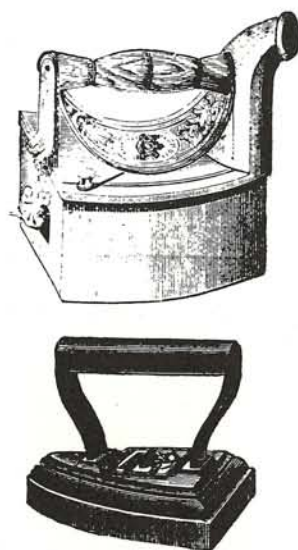
The world of Julia Suttor was far from that of 42-year-old Ann Currie on the 175-hectare dairy farm Brandie Braes near Drouin in Gippsland. For Ann, a new year simply meant hard work as usual for all the family, even for her elderly father who was visiting them. 'How can we make anything Farming the grasshoppers and wallabies takes it all', she wrote gloomily in her diary in January. Ann's husband John, or 'Daa' as she called him, worked the selection with the help of their three older children; Kate in her early twenties, Tom, aged eighteen, and twelve-year-old Bert. All three had left school years before, Tom and Bert at the age of ten. There were two small girls, new to school, Fernie and Rose. One baby had died in infancy and another little daughter had drowned in the well in 1880 at the age of twelve months.

The Suttor women enjoyed plenty of leisure time. Ann Currie's life, by contrast, was one of constant hard work. She performed a wide variety of household tasks: cooking and sewing, washing and cleaning, with no help from paid domestic servants. When Kate was not needed by her father for farm work, she helped her mother. The Suttor women occasionally made jam, more as a hobby than anything else. Ann's produce and preserves were an essential part of the family's diet, and she sold the surplus to bring in necessary cash. She organised the picking of fruit in season, made jam and syrup and preserved apples and plums. In November she picked cherries and sold them in Drouin at 3d a pound, and wondered if she should go to Warragul, where fivepence was the going rate.

The land supported thirty cows, and the Curries owned nine horses. Ann bred fowls, ducks and geese and sold eggs and poultry. Sometimes she killed an old drake for the table. She cured bacon and hams for sale and made sausages. Her main job was butter making. She helped with the milking, and then churned the butter, somewhere between ten and eighteen kilograms a week, depending on the season. She sat up late on hot summer nights, or rose at 2am to catch the coolest hours, so that the butter would not be too soft. 'I had 32 lbs [14.5 kilograms] this week', she wrote one day in May, and the next month, 'I am quite pleased at having 25 lbs [11.3 kilograms] in June. I never had so much in June before.' The June butter cheque was £9 11s 7d, less than the March cheque of £14 5s, but still pleasing. Ann also made cheese for the family.

One hot clear day in mid-November Ann wrote wistfully: 'I was saying it would be lovely weather for a picnic.' Picnics were rare in her life. There was church, an occasional social event in the hall, but her social visits were usually brief expressions of neighbourly concern. When her sister came for a short holiday, they visited a neighbour for an afternoon's gossip, and she noted: 'I took a Dozen pillow slips. We nearly finished them.' Pleasure was usually mixed with business. Often she suffered from dreadful headaches. 'I am not half well. hardly able to crawl about. took a Dose of Senna tea', she wrote one day in November. She seldom rested.

John Currie worked day in and day out at the back-breaking tasks of the farm. Although he had helped in the house when the babies were born, not once in 1888 does Ann's diary mention him doing a household chore: the farm demanded all his energy, and more. Like Ann he seldom gave in to injury or illness. 'Daa not very well. but knocking about . . .' Ann wrote in March, and two weeks later, after a day spent chopping logs: 'Daa thinks he has hurt his back. He can hardly move to night.'



Two commonly used irons in the 1880s were the box iron (top), which was filled with coals, and the sad iron (bottom), which was heated on top of the stove. Australasian ironmonger, 1 Nov 1888.

Next day: 'Must rest whether he will or not Managed to put some logs together in the croft.' A few days later: 'Daa resting ie making Butter Box ...'

Kate, Tom and Bert worked on the farm, and both boys looked for work elsewhere. In January Tom left to work as a porter for the Victorian railways in Melbourne, and stayed in the job, despite unhappiness, until September, when he returned home. Ann hated to see him go. Bert, who turned thirteen in July, took the butter into town and had a mail round. One of the family, usually Ann, took him lunch and a fresh horse every day. The proportion of Kate's time spent working at farm rather than household tasks increased in the months Tom was away. Little Fernie and Rose occasionally helped with clearing the paddocks.

Twice a day throughout the year the cows had to be milked. In autumn there was ploughing and in summer harvesting and hay making. All year round was the constant and tiring job of clearing the land. All the family, including the children, worked at cutting scrub, grubbing in the paddocks, clearing stumps, ringing and felling trees. 'Kate started to clear away titree stumps in the swamp very tired' Ann recorded in March, and the next month 'all made an early start for Jubilee Paddock—got all the logs put together ... even Fernie and Rose are picking up sticks'. Ann often recorded that one or other of the children was 'knocked up'.

Ann's hard work, and the money she made, might have given her more independence than some city women. In October she went to a sale and bought a bed and blankets and a trap and harness. 'Bert says I am elated with my purchases', she wrote. 'I think I managed very well.' Ann worried about the bad temper of her husband, who did not take kindly to criticism or independent action. In January, when Bert was sick, his father was forced to take the mail round. Ann wrote

I think I never saw Daa do anything with as bad grace as he left here this morning. It was very vexing certainly as he was anxious to be at the hay. I would much rather have went myself—as it is I feel very bad about *him* going.

In February husband and wife disagreed about when to burn off. Ann was afraid of fire, and noted that John 'is very angry with me ... when he gets in such passions I get too frighten to speak ...' When Ann went to Melbourne for a brief holiday in October Kate continued her diary for her, and recorded: 'Post card from mother saying she will not be home till Tuesday. Dad seems awfully put out about it thinks he will go down for her.' Go down he did, and brought her back before she could do her planned shopping. Tom's bad cough was worrying him, he told her.

John's moods were doubtless made worse by overwork and tiredness. Ann had little escape from them. While she seldom put her feelings into words, Ann always watched her family with intense concern. She noted whenever her husband was tired or unwell. She worried about Tom during the months he was in distant Melbourne, about his colds and night shifts. If no card arrived from him she could not sleep. Day after day she feared that Bert would get wet on his mail round: 'I feel so thankful it is fine today for my Laddie', she would note. She was anxious when Kate returned home late from shopping in Warragul.

John's brother had lived on an adjoining farm until his death; but now, unlike the Suttors, the Curries were not living near relations, although their links with kin remained as close as time, distance and money permitted. Ann's father and sister visited the farm and Ann visited relatives near Melbourne, but kin were not central to the family's economic life. Neighbours were. They swapped foodstuffs, borrowed tools and horses, visited bereaved households with gifts of food and called to see new babies and new brides. Ann's friend Mrs Cornish made dresses for the Currie girls, and it was Ann who on Good Friday gently broke the news that the beloved sister of Mrs Cornish had died.



Milking the cows. A Garran (ed), Picturesque atlas of Australasia, Sydney 1886–88.



The corner of the paddock, by Julian Ashton. A rich and well-watered dairy farm, painted at Richmond on the Hawkesbury. Ashton was a newspaper and magazine illustrator who painted scenes for the Picturesque atlas of Australasia. Watercolour, 1888.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

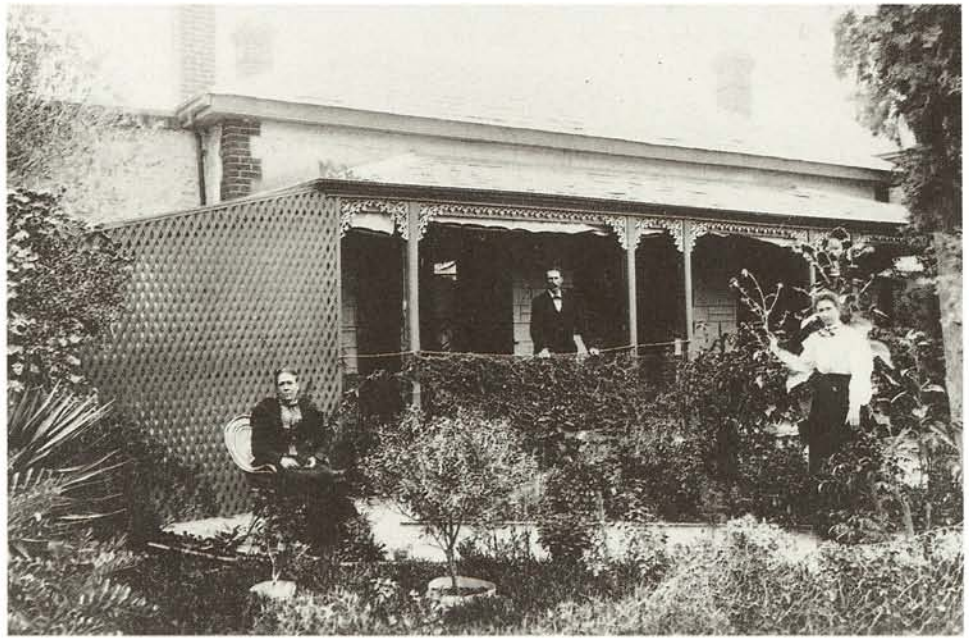
The year ended for the Curries as busily as it had begun. Ann tried to organise a magic lantern show for the children of the district, but had to settle for a party with 'as much cakes and Fruit as they could eat', followed by a short address from the minister. For Christmas dinner they ate curried hare, and some neighbours called, but 'Daa had to finish putting in his Maize'. Haymaking began; Grandad, who was visiting again, took out the lunch. On the last day of the year Ann wrote

Daa mowing not at all well. Damp morning. So Tom went to cut scrub. thundering day. Started to rain about 4 o'clock . . . Bert got soaked . . . this closes another year—10 o'clock wet and Dark looking all in the House asleep Bar one.

Ann Currie and Julia Suttor were unique individuals, but they also represented contrasting types of rural families. The clan that enclosed and sustained Julia reflected the financial connections of the Suttors' far-flung pastoral enterprises. Like the Wrights, the McArthurs and other established pastoral families, they had the self-confidence of an aristocracy. Their sons would go to university, some even to Oxford and Cambridge. Some would enter politics, most would play some part in public life. Their daughters would become the accomplished and charming wives of other rich men. Suttor women who married cousins or neighbouring pastoralists further consolidated their family's social and economic power.

The Curries belonged to another, equally important tradition of rural family life—the agricultural landholder. Throughout the wheat and dairy country the family farm was the basic unit of production. Where the land was rich and well-watered, a family might live well on a couple of hundred hectares, but on the edge of the outback or in the newly settled hill country of Gippsland or the Northern Rivers, it took the combined energies of a large family simply to survive. Father, mother, children and even grandparents were enlisted in the hard contest with the land. Children left home not to launch themselves into society but because the farm could no longer keep them.

In cities, where the advantages of family enterprise were smaller, close family networks like those of the Suttors and the Curries might have been unusual. The



Two generations outside their house in West Terrace, Adelaide, 1888.

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typical urban family was a household of parents and children living apart from other kin. Such 'nuclear' families might have improved their members' prospects of survival in a changing society. And yet a remarkable amount of extended family contact survived in the crowded suburbs of the capital cities. Newlyweds continued to live with their in-laws, old folk lived with their children. Country cousins boarded with relatives. Married brothers and sisters settled in the same neighbourhood or street. Such arrangements offered advantages in the form of cash, household help, child-care and nursing.

Marriage meant many things to many people. 'Is marriage a failure?' asked Adelaide woman Mona Caird in a much-discussed newspaper article of 1888. Each reader viewed the institution of marriage through the lens, rosy or dark, of his or her own individual experience. Common, however, to almost all their debates was the traditional Christian idea of marriage.

THE PROCREATION OF CHILDREN

First, [marriage] was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of His holy Name.

Julia Suttor had nine children and her sister Addy seven. Ann Currie bore seven children. Julia's daughter Emily had six children by the time she was thirty-four and still had many fertile years ahead of her. Completed families were large; wives who were born in the years 1841-46, and had passed their fertile period by the late 1880s, had on average seven children. More than sixty women in a hundred born in those years had six children or more, eighteen women per hundred had four or five, and only twenty per hundred had three children or fewer.

In some places women had an average of eight or nine children, which meant some families of ten, twelve or fourteen children. These fertility rates were high compared with the places in Britain or Europe from which these women or their parents had originally come. Their first babies usually arrived within fifteen months of marriage and thereafter at two-yearly intervals over most of their fertile span.

Women often bore their last infants in their forties, though fewer did so in the 1880s than in previous decades. The physical burden of childbearing on colonial women was heavy.

Childbirth was often a dangerous time for the mother, and was anticipated with dread by nervous young couples. Between five and six women in a thousand died giving birth in 1888, from puerperal fever resulting from infection, from convulsions or haemorrhage, or from 'accidents of childbirth'. Deaths resulting from childbirth were seriously underestimated as they reflected poorly on the attendants, and the real cause of death was often disguised on death certificates. By far the greatest number of births took place in private homes: hospital beds were offered to particularly needy women, and a high proportion of illegitimate births took place in hospital. Between half and two-thirds of all births were attended by midwives, who were considerably cheaper to employ than (male) doctors, and who also cared for the new mother and baby in the days following the birth.

Victoria alone had about nine hundred and thirty midwives in 1888. A few were trained nurses, but most had learned through informal apprenticeship. Many were married women. In the towns, families, especially the better-off, called on doctors, who were beginning to claim greater expertise. Doctors, we saw in chapter 14, were now disparaging the traditional practices of midwifery. The president of the Obstetrical Society of Queensland declared that



John Poole and family. Colonial families were typically large and families of eight children or more were common.

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many cases of septic mischief arise . . . from the filthy condition of a midwife or nurse, whose nails as we sometimes see them, are of a most funereal hue. The gross ignorance prevalent among some of these women is a matter to be deplored, but I am thankful to see that the old race of midwives is dying out . . .

Doctors occasionally used anaesthetic, a pad soaked in chloroform held over the woman's face. They used forceps, but rarely performed caesarean sections, which had a mortality rate of one in two. Craniotomy, or crushing the baby's head before delivery, was sometimes employed when the mother's life was in danger. It was generally agreed that the mother's life should have priority. Any medical intervention, however, was dangerous in a day when the principle of antisepsis was still not generally observed.

Women did not expect medical treatment through the nine months of pregnancy. They were advised to get ample sleep, to exercise in the fresh air, eat nourishing food and avoid heavy work, although one doctor suggested 'it is much better for the woman to go about doing her usual work than to spend her time pitying herself, and lolling on a bed or sofa'. If, he said, women suffered from morning sickness, they should eat a little before they got up in the morning, and take small amounts of food at frequent intervals. For constipation they should eat fruit or oatmeal, or take senna, liquorice powder or Epsom salts. If they suffered from indigestion they should avoid drinking tea, and for swollen legs they should keep their feet up. After the confinement women should rest for at least ten days—two weeks was more usual—and undertake no heavy work for six weeks.

A first birth was an anxious as well as a momentous occasion in a couple's life. In Adelaide, Fred Coneybeer was a troubled witness to his wife Maggie's long and painful labour. 'Maggie was bad all night', he wrote in his diary, 'but about half past three I began to get a bit frightened she was so bad and I got her at last to go and speak to her Mother'. His mother-in-law sent Fred off at once to fetch the doctor and nurse, but from their arrival until nearly midday

the Poor Girl suffered some most fearful agony no mistake Bothe the Doctor and Nurse said they had never seen sutch a case the suspence was something fearful . . . I could not rest half a Minnet in one place.

Finally, with relief—even more so, he thought, for Maggie—he heard that he was the father of a fine large baby girl. 'I must admit', wrote Fred, 'I felt a bit Disappointed that it was not a Boy'. When he was called in to see the mother and child he found the baby a pretty little thing, 'but their I suppose you will say I would be sure to say that': the doctor thought she had her father's head. Maggie was weak and looked 'fearful queer'.

Fred went down to the shop, and thence to the York Hotel with his workmates to drink the baby's health (his own toast being non-alcoholic). After his dinner, Maggie being in the nurse's hands, Fred went with his brother-in-law to see the Tritons play the Blue Ribbons at cricket. He stayed home after tea, however, and 'did what running about was required and you may depend their will be a little of that for a while'. A bed was made up for him on the sofa downstairs, and he fell asleep, tired out, about midnight: 'thus ended our First Babys Birthday and may it have Many Happy Happy Years before it is the wish of its Mother and Father'.

For Edward and Harriet Dyason, the coming of their fourth child was no less anxious. On New Year's Day 1888 Edward attended communion service and asked God to help him be kind and considerate of all he knew, and 'affectionate to my poor little wife and babies—more coming this year—I trust all will be well with Harriet'. He worried about her making jam in case she overtaxed her strength, and



*Edward and Harriet Dyason
and their children.*
DYASON FAMILY

pressed the servant girls to greater effort: 'wife fears for her children's health when she is laid up and so do I'. The summer heat was hard on Harriet in the last two months of pregnancy, and she complained of sleepless nights. 'Poor littel woman—life a burden for her just now . . . wife thought she wouldn't sleep—chatted to her for an hour and she went off.' He took her for evening walks, read to her, encouraged her to take cool baths. Harriet's sister was at the house often, and the women prepared the cradle and basket for the newcomer.

March arrived, and deeper foreboding. On 1 March Edward wrote

This month will be eventful month for me *and* hope it will end well—wife to be confined—always an undefined dread of evil attending this event—can only trust in a merciful Providence—but can't help thinking how dreadful for all if mother go.

On 5 March, Edward and Harriet spent a quiet evening at home, playing duets on the piano:

can't help dread of these evenings being last ones—and to have to look back on them some day when she is gone child beds always time of dread Poor little soul . . .

But when the baby son arrived on the evening of 13 March, everything went smoothly. Labour pains had started early in the morning, but had eased off. When they began again early in the evening, 'Harriet was nervous and frightened—Tried to cheer her up as did her sister'. The doctor and nurse arrived, Edward chatted to the doctor at intervals and read the paper, and to his surprise, since he had heard nothing, the nurse came in at eleven to announce the baby's safe arrival. Soon afterwards he saw Harriet, well except for weakness and pains, though this baby



Husband, wife and baby under canvas, Queensland. The earliest phase of farming was perhaps the hardest of all for families.

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was the largest of all: 'God be praised for his mercies to me and mine which I don't deserve ...' The children were delighted in the morning with their first sight of the new brother, Harriet was well and peaceful, and the servants promised to do their best.

Not all pregnancies and births were attended with such concern and care. Hardworking women in towns and on farms had little chance to consider their health and comfort. Constance Ellis recalled the birth of her first baby in a two-roomed humpy on a remote property in outback Queensland. It was a bachelor establishment; the owner lived in a slab house where Constance worked as housekeeper, and her husband Tom was a station hand and bookkeeper. The property had two jackeroos and some Aboriginal station hands with their families. Constance had been five months pregnant when she and Tom arrived.

Late in July, Tom rode to town to buy cloth and to bring back, he hoped, the local nurse. He returned a week later with almost five and a half metres of stout calico and grey and black striped shirting flannel, which Constance had somehow to turn into a wardrobe for the infant. She cut up an old lawn robe of her own for the baby's shirts, made nightgowns of calico and cut up her own garments for flannels. For booties she would tie pieces of woollen material around the baby's feet. Unfortunately the nurse, 'that cruel woman' as Tom called her, had refused to come—the only obstacle she had faced was a twelve mile swim for her horse'. Tom was anxious, but Constance did not worry, as, she wrote, 'I had no idea as to what was to happen'. She went into labour one dinner time while she was organising the meal at the main house. She returned to the humpy and to the providential news that a family had just arrived by covered cart, including a woman who claimed nursing experience. She came to Constance immediately—'not at all a bad sort of woman'. Labour proceeded all night and next day until 6.20 the following evening when a son finally arrived. Constance was horrified at how small he was, after all the struggle to give birth, but the nurse reassured her that he was a normal weight. Tom finally appeared—he brought a couple of men with him, needless to say—to view the new baby.

On the first morning of her convalescence the nurse arrived to tidy up the humpy and wash the baby. Next day, however, when Tom had gone off early with the men to muster sheep for the shearing season, no nurse appeared. She was asleep,

drunk from a bottle of brandy Constance had given her. It had been purchased as their sole preparation for the confinement, but not used. Constance had to get up and wash the crying baby. She made up the fire, put water on to boil, gave the baby his bath, dressed and fed him, cleared up the mess and made herself some tea. Since she had managed so well, Constance told the nurse not to bother coming again, but asked her to take on temporary supervision at the main house. The experience of motherhood for Constance, as for many women, had to be fitted into a busy working life.

A REMEDY AGAINST SIN

Secondly, [marriage] was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication: that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.

Sex was not a topic of polite conversation. If people did discuss sex in public, they did so hesitantly, obliquely and generally. The Church of England marriage service, however, was unfashionably forthright. However innocent Annie Riddell appeared in her pure white dress, she was informed frankly, as was every one of the congregation, that marriage must precede intimate sexual relationships.

Margaret Chirnside wrote to her husband Robert on their eighteenth wedding anniversary: 'What would have become of us if we had never met, and how full our hearts are now!' Margaret had given birth to eleven children. Her letters reveal a close romantic relationship with her husband, and so do many other diaries and letters of the time. The Christian heritage established the boundaries. Only heterosexual relations within marriage were moral, and marriage was expected to last until the death of one partner.

Almost all adult women in Australia were married by the time they had reached their middle years. In 1888 only about three women in every hundred had not married in Queensland, about six in New South Wales and South Australia, seven in Victoria. The marriage rate for women was not as high as in earlier times, when as few as 3 per cent of colonial women remained unmarried, but it was still high. The imbalance of the sexes gave less favourable marriage prospects to men. In 1888 some fifteen in a hundred mature men were unmarried in South Australia, nineteen in Victoria, and twenty-five in a hundred in New South Wales and Queensland.

Brides married, on average, around their twenty-third year, and grooms around their twenty-seventh. Men were more likely to marry if they lived in the city, which had a higher concentration of women; for the same reason more urban women remained spinsters. Working-class couples tended to marry earlier than others. Death was a common occurrence within one or two decades of marriage, for men through accident and for women through complications of childbirth; and as men remarried more easily than women, there were many widows. Between eight and nine men in a hundred who married in 1888 were marrying for the second time following the death of a wife; approximately seven in a hundred women married for the second time.

It does not follow from the high marriage rate that churches were successful in controlling sexual behaviour. Many unmarried people had broken the injunction they heard at the altar: in some districts as many as one in three brides were pregnant on their wedding days. The fathers of babies conceived out of wedlock came from all levels of society. Young women of the upper classes were the most likely to be virgins on their wedding day, since their leisure time was under closest surveillance and their knowledge of sex was the most restricted.



'A bush wedding.' *Supplement to Illustrated Sydney News, May 1882.*

A newspaper correspondent recommended the closing of public reserves after dark, since in the parks, every evening, 'hundreds of young men and women can be found perfectly happy in their dog nature'. A summer evening stroller at St Kilda was astonished by the number of 'young ladies and gentlemen strowed on a beach doing a spoon'. Many unmarried people, it seems, lacked the gift of continence. Couples were having sex when they had no intention of marrying or were prevented from doing so. The amount of homosexual activity is hard to discover. Illicit heterosexual relations commonly became public knowledge.

About 6 per cent of births in 1888 were illegitimate. Some were the issue of stable de facto unions, where some obstacle, such as the previous marriage of one partner, prevented marriage. People seeking separations or divorces often referred to the incidence of adultery and the existence of de facto relationships established by unfaithful partners. Some illegitimate births were to prostitutes. The number of prostitutes is uncertain, but police records establish that they were numerous in the centres of the main cities, and that their customers included men from all sections of society. Women were driven to prostitution largely by poverty. Some prostitutes were mothers of young children, for whom prostitution was one of the few avenues of income. A doctor who visited a poor Melbourne home where a child had suffocated described such a situation.

There were three women, who worked in a factory, living in this house; two of them had illegitimate children. Two worked and the third looked after the house and the children, one of whom she smothered when sleeping with them. I went and asked these women how they lived, and they said they lived partly by work and partly by prostitution.

Men outnumbered women and married later, and there was a ready market for prostitution. By insisting on marriage to one partner for life, society offered no escape, other than adultery or prostitution, for married men who could not find sexual fulfilment with their wives. Respectable women shackled to uncongenial husbands had no escape at all. A double standard prevented them from flouting traditional morality. It was the prostitute, not her male customer, who was condemned by society. Traditional Christian teachings were beginning to be opposed and modified by new standards derived from biology and political economy. While polite society strove to restrain open discussion about sex and keep its young innocent of 'the facts of life', doctors and moralists continued a lively public debate.

Experts believed that men's sins against the moral code were more excusable than women's, since the male had a stronger sexual drive than the female. They did not think that women were asexual, or that celibacy was preferable for either sex, but proclaimed the ideal of *moderate* indulgence in sex as an essential of the healthy and happy life. In his book *The generative system in health and disease*, Dr James Beane explored the problems of sexual excess. The body, he believed, possessed only a finite amount of energy, and if too much of this energy was spent in sexual activity, the effects could be harmful. Australians were especially vulnerable, because the climate tended to intensify sexual desire, so that 'the freedom of intercourse between the sexes is almost unlimited, and, as a natural consequence, the checks upon sexual extravagance are, in a great degree, absent'.

Celibacy, however, was not the answer. Walter Balls-Headley, an eminent Melbourne gynaecologist, believed that frustrated female desire could lead to inflammation of the cervix and diseases of the fallopian tubes. The sexual appetite, he maintained in *Evolution of the diseases of women*, was as normal as the desire for food and as natural in women as in men. While 'sexual appetite', or the desire for



Susannah Rogers, dressed for her wedding to John Cooper Coates. The average age at which women married was 23. In Victoria, where Susannah Rogers lived, seven in every 100 women had not married by the time they reached middle age.

MRS E. SALKIN

gratification, was stronger in men, 'sexual instinct', or the urge to reproduce, was stronger in women. He observed: 'there are thousands of women who want intercourse only once or twice a month, and who submit to more frequent intercourse only out of a sense of duty or affection'. Women, however, had more sensitive nervous systems, and could therefore experience a more intense enjoyment of sex.

Reformers who accepted these teachings sought to mould people's sex lives to socially beneficial ends. Though sex was natural and good, its consequences could sometimes be evil. Not every child came into the world wanted and loved. A temperance reformer, Mrs Bessie Harrison Lee, wrote to the Melbourne *Herald* deploring the fact that women in her neighbourhood were worn out by constant childbearing and the burden of rearing children. She saw 'little children coming unwished for, and unprovided for, a burden rather than a blessing, wearing alike the ill-paid father and the overworked mother'. The only answer, she believed, was for married couples to abstain from sex except when they wished to conceive a child. Wives should have control of their own bodies, and a young bride should not find that the new husband

claims sole right over her body, whether she wills it or not. I believe that the woman who works and suffers for her children should have the right to say whether she will have the little ones or not.

Mrs Lee's ideal of 'voluntary motherhood' implied that sex was not necessary for a good marriage. Other reformers, who thought it was, nevertheless sought to spare women the burden of perpetual childbearing. They advocated not abstention but artificial contraception. Long before knowledge of contraception became generally available, Australians had sought to limit their offspring through such methods as withdrawal (*coitus interruptus*), prolonged suckling and abortion. Popular newspapers carried thinly disguised advertisements for quack methods of abortion. Towles Penny Royal and Steel Pills, their makers promised, 'will quickly correct all irregularities and relieve the distressing symptoms so prevalent among the sex', while Beecham's pills would remove 'any obstruction or irregularity of the system'. Doctors were often asked to perform abortions, and some did so. Amateur abortionists and pregnant women resorted to a variety of methods: ergot of rye or penny royal taken by the mouth or a hat pin or knitting needle inserted in the uterus were among the most popular. The last-named were particularly dangerous, for the uterus often became infected or perforated. Coroners knew better than most people how strong were the pressures on women to avoid unwanted children.

Contraception became controversial in 1888 through the activities of a free-thought lecturer and bookseller and the verdict of an enlightened judge. In Sydney William Whitehouse Collins had been convicted on a charge of obscenity for selling *The law of population*, an English pamphlet describing certain means of contraception. Mr Justice Windeyer of the Supreme Court of New South Wales overturned his conviction on the ground that the material contained in the book could be found already in expensive medical books. 'Information cannot be pure, chaste and legal in morocco at a guinea, but impure, obscene and indictable in a paper pamphlet at sixpence', he ruled. The court had to decide whether it was lawful to argue 'the right of married men and women to limit the number of children to be begotten by them'. If the argument against contraception was that it was unnatural, then the logical conclusion was that every woman should marry very young and bear as many children as possible. Where was the immorality in a woman using contraceptives if her pelvis was too small for her to give birth safely?

Or where a woman was married to a drunkard and already had more children than she could care for? In any case, Windeyer said, 'it is idle to preach to the masses the necessity of deferred marriage and of a celibate life during the heyday of passion'.

Leading the campaign for contraception were the men and women of the Australian Secular Association. One member, Mrs Brettana Smythe, who ran a chemist's shop in North Melbourne, recommended as the most effective method the *preventif pessaire* (cervical cap), used without a spermicide but followed by a vinegar douche. She also advertised sheaths at 10s 6d or 5s 6d a dozen. Others recommended a sponge soaked in a spermicidal solution (usually alum), douches or pessaries of quinine, alum or zinc sulphate. A radical Sydney bookseller, Robert Bear, advised his customers that 'Lambert's improved check pessary' could be used 'without inconvenience or knowledge of the husband'.

While doctors damning contraception thundered about the penalties of thwarting nature, Brettana Smythe declared it a matter of women's rights. 'If a woman has a right to decide any question', she declared, 'it certainly is as to how many children she shall bear'. Late marriages, she believed, turned young men to vice, and left 'thousands of our women to drag out miserable lives . . . in which their womanly instincts become blunted and their natures narrowed and soured'. She argued that it was 'much more moral to prevent the conception of children than after they are born to desert or slowly murder them by want of food, air and clothing'. Mrs Smythe, however, was the voice of a tiny minority of enlightened city folk. Most Australian women knew little of the facts of life and viewed motherhood as the natural, and inescapable, consequence of marriage.

MUTUAL SOCIETY, HELP AND COMFORT

Thirdly, [marriage] was ordained for the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.

Marriage defined the economic and social roles of men and women. Because women bore and suckled children, it seemed natural that they should also be the home keepers, caring for the physical and emotional needs of the rest of the family. Men were considered physically stronger and more aggressive, so theirs was the responsibility for the family's livelihood. The husband was the head of the household, the wife was in charge of its daily routine. Men's work got public recognition, and defined the place of the whole family in society; women, who laboured in private, generally had no status of their own.

These, at least, were the conventions that ruled family life; but the domestic responsibilities of individual men and women varied from household to household, depending on its place in society and its source of income. Men seldom did household chores, other than gardening, house repairs, carpentry and other, minor, activities perceived as masculine. Some husbands helped to mind the children in their leisure hours, but their household work was unscheduled and their childcare was voluntary. Middle-class men, whose work was less arduous and time-consuming, were probably more inclined to help around the house than their working-class counterparts.

Reynell Johns was a model middle-class husband. In middle age he had risen to become clerk of the court of petty sessions and deputy coroner for Fitzroy, Collingwood and Carlton. With his wife and young family he lived on a fashionable crescent in the inner Melbourne suburb of North Fitzroy. The Johns household comprised eight people: Johns himself, his thirty-one-year-old wife Alice, their five children—Harold aged twelve, May and Nell, ten and seven,

three-year-old Arthur and eight-month-old Clare—and their servant girl Florrie. Johns was an ambitious man, devoted to his work and destined for higher things; in November 1888 he was promoted to police magistrate and coroner for the Shepparton district. But the centre of his loyalties remained his home and family.

Having only one servant, Johns was more involved in household affairs than the Suttor men. Every day from 9 am to 5.30 pm and every Saturday morning he attended to his business at the courthouse. It was a red-letter day if he got home by 4.30, and extra book work and the misdemeanours of his drunken assistant often kept him back till 7 pm. Occasionally he called on a friend or relative on the way home. But usually at the end of the working day Johns hurried towards the sanctuary of peace and affection maintained by his darling Alice.

In his leisure hours Reynell engaged in carpentry and cultivated a small garden, enjoyable hobbies that also contributed to the family's well-being. He made a whatnot and varnished and polished its shelves. He french-polished tables, cleaned carpets, mended chairs and toys. One Saturday afternoon he started a fernery, and he regularly top-dressed, raked and mowed the grass plot. Cleaning was generally regarded as women's work, but every Wednesday Reynell cleaned out the parlour, and on Thursdays he dusted it. On Cup Day, in beautiful weather when the rest of the family went out, 'I took up and mended the stair carpet, washed the stairs, polished the rods, and laid it down again...' When the servant, Florrie, had three weeks holiday he shared the extra work with Alice, including laying the table and washing up.

Florrie relieved Alice Johns of the routine washing, ironing and some cooking and cleaning. But Alice worked harder in the house, and was more constantly with her children than the Suttor women. She had time for visiting, outings and shopping expeditions, sometimes without her children, although she breastfed Clare until Christmas and had another child not at school. The main drain on her time and spirits was children's illness. 'Poor Al had a bad day' Reynell noted early in April. 'Harold came home early with headache, Arthur fell and cut his lip deeply, and May and Clare have bad colds, which makes the latter very troublesome...' At such times their mother's care was essential, though Reynell did what he could. He also looked after the baby while his wife went to watch the procession for the opening of the Centennial Exhibition on 15 August—'Clare is teething, and kept me in close attendance on her, Al having given our girl, Florrie, a holiday'.

Johns was a devoted father who closely followed his children's daily activities and cherished their demonstrations of affection. He noted on his return from Sydney: 'Thank God, all were well and gave me a joyous greeting. Even little Clare soon knew me and stretched her arms to come to me...' He felt the wrench of his departure for the new post at Shepparton: 'Tucked the children in their beds for the last time for how long?' Five days later he was home again for the weekend.

Reynell and Alice's marriage was an unequal but mutually supportive partnership. He was protector and provider, she the constant helpmeet. When he left home for a few days on business she mended and pressed his clothes, rose before dawn to prepare his morning cup of coffee and stood at the tram stop, babe in arms, to wave him goodbye. Before he departed, Reynell made arrangements for Alice to draw on his bank account and while they were apart they wrote to each other every day. Their interests—his in amateur science, hers in the church—drew them into overlapping circles of like-minded friends whom they visited and entertained together. For the Johns, the 'mutual help, society and comfort' of marriage was a bond that excluded almost all other ties.

Working-class couples like Fred and Maggie Coneybeer might have been equally devoted, but they shared life's burdens differently. Fred's work as a horse



*The house of the Johns family,
Alfred Crescent, North
Fitzroy, Melbourne.*
BRUCE RIGBY



An Adelaide family in the garden of their Flinders Street home, 1888.

STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

collar maker took him away from home for long hours of the day and evening and, unlike Reynell Johns, he spent most of his leisure time in the company of other men. Maggie's brothers, as well as his friends and workmates, joined in this male world of cricket, football, fishing, drinking and singing.

Fred's home was a precious but strictly limited part of his life. As 1888 began he was in the bosom of his family at Mackinnon Parade, North Adelaide. 'I did not go out at all today', he wrote.

We spent the day nice and quietly at home. The number at the table at New Year's dinner was the same as Christmas dinner—Mrs. T., Polley, Maggie, Olive, Will and I. This is the baby's first new year.

Mrs Thomas was Maggie's mother, and Polley and Will were her unmarried sister and brother; the young couple lived with the Thomas family. Absent from the festive dinner were Maggie's father and brother Edward, who were working at Broken Hill. The youngest member of the family and the apple of everyone's eye was the eleven-month-old baby, Olive.

Living with in-laws freed Fred from domestic and child minding responsibilities, and the comradeship of the workshop strengthened his ties to the circle of menfolk. But every Sunday he stayed at home, reading, writing, mending shoes, making Will a schoolbag or putting up a shelf in the kitchen. He kept an eye on little 'Ollie', who 'poked around' near her father. Fred and Maggie often took the baby for a walk—to the zoo, the botanical gardens or the city. On Saturday nights they sometimes went shopping in the arcade. In October Fred took Maggie and Ollie to Melbourne, where they rented a room in Carlton and did the sights of the city and the Centennial Exhibition. For Maggie particularly it was a welcome break from domestic routine. 'I shall not forget for a long time the way Maggie laughed', Fred remarked after their visit to the switchback railway. Alone together and away from the competing claims of work and in-laws they grew closer to each other.

Fred did not display the exclusive concern for his small family that characterised Reynell Johns. But he did care intensely for them. When baby Olive developed sore, swollen eyes, he felt her pain almost as his own. 'If I could bair it myself I wouldn't mind for the poor little girl', he wrote. He 'flapped about' when she fell

into a duckpond and commiserated with her teething pains. He recorded her age week by week in his diary. On his feelings for Maggie, and her role within the household, Fred's diary said little. He was too busy even to 'keep up' her birthday. 'I know she will take the will for the deed', he wrote.

Though Fred records little of her daily life, we may be sure that Maggie, like most wives, was mainly devoted to the physical and emotional care of her family. In servantless households the women were responsible for cleaning, washing clothes and linen, cooking, sewing and mending. They were responsible for the children, for nursing the family through illness and for caring for the elderly. They maintained links with their husbands' families and their own, as well as with neighbours, so preserving the networks of mutual aid that were often the family's best defence against bad times. Time spent on different kinds of women's work varied with the family's social position. Poor families in both city and country had to fit housework and childcare around the routines of gaining a livelihood. Ann Currie spent much of her time in farm work. City women sometimes helped to run a family business, while widows and deserted wives often worked in factories or took in laundry.

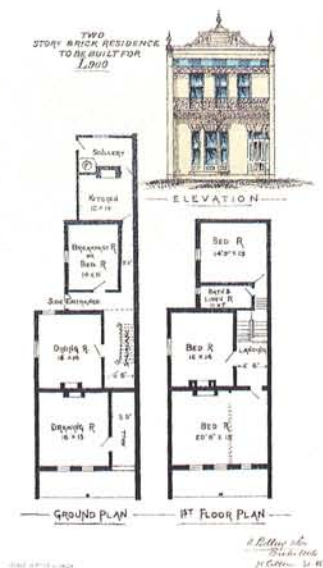
In well-to-do families like the Suttors and the Johns, servants took over the heaviest and most tedious household chores, allowing their mistresses to devote more time and attention to children and grandchildren. Most wives, however, could expect no help at all, unless a grown-up daughter or a maiden aunt came to their rescue. Nearly everyone who had servants complained about them; only when the servants had a day off was Julia Suttor forced to recognise their contribution to the smooth running of the household. Reynell and Alice Johns took more kindly notice of their maid-of-all-work. Harriet and Edward Dyason kept up a running battle with their 'girls'. Protective towards his wife, Edward found the servants too slow with their work. They stayed up late at night wasting gas and doing no work. They let the children eat unripe fruit and returned the baby from her afternoon walk after nightfall. Harriet, he thought, was partly to blame: 'poor little wife not firm enough'.

The house of 1888 was designed to create housework. The servanted villa, with its large, heavily furnished drawing rooms and open fires, took hours to clean. Carpets had to be lifted and beaten, chiffoniers, bookcases and mantelpieces dusted and polished. There were sofas, chairs, tables, cabinets, a piano and walls covered with photographs, engravings and paintings to be cleaned and re-arranged. In cottage and villa alike, ashes and dust had to be cleaned from fireplaces and wood and coal carried in daily during the winter months.

Bedrooms were more sparsely furnished and easier to clean, with a bed, washstand and rail, a toilet table, chest of drawers and perhaps matting or carpet on the floor. Kitchens needed hard scrubbing of tables, cupboards and floors and the range needed blacking at least once a week. The women used simple equipment: a hair broom, hearth brush, scrubbing and blacklead brushes, slop pails, homemade cleaners. Water for personal washing was carried to bedrooms each morning, and chamberpots were emptied in the pan closets or earth closets in the backyard. Hot water for baths had to be heated on the kitchen range and carried to bathroom or washhouse—often a lean-to or outhouse in the yard. Waste water was thrown on the garden or into open drains. It was difficult to keep the surroundings clean, particularly in the cramped single-fronted cottages of the large cities.

Cleaning clothes and linen was probably the most exhausting of women's tasks. Monday was the usual washing day, following the day of partial rest. A fortunate family had a wood-fired copper, in which linen could be boiled with shredded hand-made soap or soda, before being hauled out into tubs with a wooden stick,

Elevation for a two-storey house. Sands and McDougall, Melbourne directory, 1885.



rinsed, wrung by hand or mangle, and hung on rope clotheslines. Other clothing would be scrubbed by hand against a corrugated wooden washing board, for many wives the only means of washing at their disposal. Blankets, sheets, and men's work clothes were heavy to handle, but lighter clothing with frills or starched material was more difficult to iron. Women usually owned two irons, and had one heating on the range as they worked away with the other.

Cooking was hard work. A few lucky wives in Sydney and Melbourne had gas stoves, but most women cooked on a wood or coal-burning range or the simple colonial oven, shaped like a box with a fire above and below. Some, especially in the country, cooked on an open fire, with billy or pan suspended from a crossbar with a hook and chain. In country areas a good deal of food was home-grown and bread home-baked, and summer fruits were preserved for the winter. City wives had to organise supplies, delivered or fetched frequently, since storage of fresh food was difficult. Simple safes with water or saltpetre, or more rarely ice, were used for cooling, with meshing to keep out the flies.

Meat, usually beef or mutton, was often eaten at three meals a day, as sausages, chops, steaks or roasts, or cold with bread. Most people ate a cooked breakfast. The midday meal was the main meal in the country, where it was called dinner, while many city dwellers ate their heaviest meal in the evening; the richer called it dinner and the poorer called it tea. The menu might consist of soup, meat very well cooked, stewed, roasted or fried, with potatoes and one other vegetable; cabbage was common. For the next course came boiled or baked pudding made from rice, sago, bread and butter or suet. Stewed fruit was more common than fresh fruit. Poultry and fish were eaten more rarely. Colonists drank a good deal of tea with their meals, rarely alcohol, although the men drank, often heavily, between meals. Children were offered more cereals and milk, and less meat. Manuals advised that

*A drawing room apparently
designed to create housework.*
OXLEY LIBRARY



the best way to keep a husband happy was to give him punctual and satisfying meals. A few dietary reformers questioned the nutritional value of the diet.

Clothing was still largely homemade, though factories were beginning to turn out mass-produced garments. Nearly all women had to do some sewing, making clothes, patching and darning, or knitting and crocheting. The wardrobes of the rich were varied; Julia Suttor made dresses for all Agnes's varied social engagements with the help, which most households lacked, of the sewing machine. Poorer wives worked hard to cut down and make over old clothes. Many a visit to friends or neighbours was turned into a sewing bee.

Rose Field, eldest daughter of a farming family, described the housework that she, her mother and sisters performed. One Monday in September she noted: 'Started to business straight to the wash tub Annie and I done the washing and sundry other things . . . Annie and I folded the clothes and went to bed early.' Next day: 'Done baking and ironing', and on Wednesday: 'We made some melon and green ginger jam . . . I had a read in evening untill it was time to set the bread.' The day after: 'Baking all the morning in the afternoon Annie and I cut up some oranges and lemons to make marmalade . . .' Rose and her sister Annie did the washing, ironing and baking, her sister Jennie and their mother the cooking, and her mother also saw to the butter-making, the vegetable garden and the poultry. Saturday, cleaning day, was the hardest. 'Usual slavey day', Rose called it. She felt reluctant to get up and by nightfall she was often 'limp as a rag' and ready for bed.

Many farm women also performed hard outdoor work when the family could not afford paid labourers. City women helped to support their families by working in small businesses, hotels, tailor's premises, workshops, private schools and shops. The English immigrant Thomas Dobeson started a small grocery store in partnership with his wife. The unpaid labour of women and older children helped many such shoestring enterprises to survive; the Dobesons', though, was one of many to fail. Many women eked out a family budget by taking in boarders.

OBEY HIM AND SERVE HIM

Then shall the priest say unto the Woman, Wilt thou have this Man to thy wedded husband . . . Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour and keep him in sickness and in health . . . ?'

Marriage was an unequal partnership: husbands promised to love and comfort, wives to serve and obey. Middle-class wives such as Alice Johns and Harriet Dyason were loved by their families, but it was their husbands who controlled their destinies. Husbands usually held the purse strings. Ann Currie, who earned and spent a little money of her own, nevertheless remained subject to her husband's moods, while the widowed Julia Suttor found herself, temporarily at least, without a home of her own. Middle-class children, particularly daughters, came under the firm if benevolent hand of their fathers. Even in his absence, the middle-class husband exercised power over the family's life.

When Harry Barren, a Church of England clergyman, took up a new parish, he left his wife Adeliga behind in Portland, western Victoria, with their seven children—Bertie, Mary Ann, Gertie, Ethel, Mabel, Willie and Baby. The stipend did not allow for servants and the older girls helped with the housework. From the moment of his departure, as she and her eldest daughter watched his buggy out of sight until all they could see of him was his hat, Adeliga sought, lovingly and anxiously, to maintain his regime. She was frightened he would be annoyed when he found that Mary Ann had scorched the cuff on his nightshirt: if she sent him a new cuff, would he be able to sew it on? Bertie, the eldest, wanted permission to



Agnes Rose Field, of Kialla West near Shepparton, Victoria. Rose was one of eleven children.

MRS Z. LATIMER

play in a football match between the college boys and the academy from Casterton. Would Harry send a telegram if he did not wish Bertie to play? In a later letter, Adeliga admitted that she wished Harry had refused, as 'they get so excited', but she had not tried to influence Harry's decision.

Adeliga was penniless except for the barest necessities, and had to account for every expense. 'I suppose you will like to know how I spent the pound—I had to buy an umbrella for Mary Ann going to school', she wrote once, and enclosed a note setting out all she had bought. 'This is the last stamp I have', she added, 'if you want to hear from me Please send me a couple of stamps I have collection for next Sunday only'. The journalist in *Weigel's journal of fashions* might have had husbands such as Harry Barren in mind when she insisted that wives should have a set weekly allowance for their own use.

Some wives have not this, and they shrink from asking their husbands for money every time they need boots, clothing, and the common necessities of life; they should not be forced to do such an unpleasant thing.

Families were the site of the strongest affection and of the deepest misery. Women, having promised to obey, were disadvantaged even in the happiest of marriages. But where husbands were violent, improvident, drunken or unfaithful, marriage could become a living hell. Some women, chafing under the restrictions of traditional family roles and angry at the burdens borne by women in unhappy marriages, in 1888 were promoting the cause of equality between the sexes.

The crusaders seldom rejected the family; the *reformed* family was their goal, and to achieve it women needed to achieve equality in the family, the workforce and the political world. Catherine Elliott, secretary of the Victorian Woman Suffrage Society, pleaded for votes for women, seeing

one half of the community degraded by the fact of their sex to the condition of slaves, morally, politically and in the labour market, who can have tolerable lives only by the grace of good men connected with them, and whose defenceless state, in law, is a temptation to brutal humanity to torment them because of their weakness ... How can women so degraded by our laws and consequent social customs teach honesty, courage, patriotism, self respect and all the enduring virtues to their sons and daughters? They are unfit to do so, because their condition necessitates the vices of slaves.

The right of women to enter public life was approached more cautiously by women in the temperance movement. Woman's work began at home. But there were many evil outside influences, such as the public house and male drunkenness, which threatened the home, and which women could fight only in public. It was such evils that led women to advocate universal suffrage.

The reformers Bessie Harrison Lee and Brettana Smythe, divided on the question of birth control, were at one on the evils of drink. Bessie Lee told the international temperance convention meeting at the Melbourne town hall that she had been brought up 'with the idea that woman's mission was to stay at home and rest and say nothing, but learn'. She had learned her first sharp lesson that 'a woman might stand forth and do something for the benefit of her fellow beings' when she held a baby left starving because of the parents' drunkenness. 'Would you take the bread out of our mouths?' asked the indignant publicans. 'Out of your mouths and into the hands of starving children', Bessie Lee replied. People said that women who rocked the cradle ruled the world, Mrs Smythe told a meeting of the Temperance Hall. Then let women get a better training for power. No satisfactory solution to the evils of the drink trade would be found until women got the vote.



IS MARRIAGE A FAILURE?

Though in 1888 divorce was still rare, its incidence was alarming enough for the Daily Telegraph to wonder whether marriage was a failure. This cartoon from the Bulletin comments on the issue by having a divorce court judge remark: 'Well if it wasn't, where would my salary come from.' Bulletin, 20 Nov 1888.

They needed also to be recognised as equals in the workplace. 'Do not subject her to menial and degrading offices, and when she performs man's work, let her receive man's pay.'

Public discussion of family life had an anxious tone. Traditional values were under attack. More and more women were entering the paid workforce. The typewriter was opening new opportunities for clerical work, and some women were entering the professions. 'It would be impossible and incandid to deny', asserted one writer, 'that women are now coming to the front in many ways which warn men to look to their weapons and hold their own'. Another noted an ominous sign:

if the number of women who depend on daily work for their daily bread is increasing every year, it must be remembered that . . . the number of marriages is decreasing every year in a somewhat similar proportion.

Most women in the paid workforce were there from necessity rather than choice. When breadwinners died, deserted or became ill, were drunk or unemployed, married women were driven to gain the pitiful wages they could earn by unskilled labour. Some, like Mrs Wilson of Brisbane, worked in factories. Her husband had died in 1888, leaving her with six children. The two oldest boys, one only eight years old, found jobs, and the mother joined the younger one at Peacock's jam factory, sometimes working for weekly wages, sometimes on piecework. She trudged the five kilometres to and from the factory each day, and worked from 7.30 am to 5.30 pm. She never made more than 12s a week, unless she was on piecework. Other poverty-stricken mothers took in sewing farmed out by subcontractors from factories on piecework rates, a practice known as sweating. They worked at home far into the night. Mrs Elizabeth Rogers of Adelaide had an invalid husband and four young children. By working from 7.30 in the morning until 12 or 1 the next morning she could earn 14s a week. 'I am not all the time at my machine', she explained. 'I have my family to attend to. That is why I work such late hours at night. There are dozens around me who have to do the same.'

When Rose Hussey in Brisbane left her husband because he ill-treated her, she

The telephone exchange, Melbourne. The introduction of the telephone provided new jobs for women. A. Garran (ed), Picturesque atlas of Australasia, Sydney 1886-88.





*Women employed at the
Government Printing Office,
Sydney.*

NSW GOVERNMENT PRINTING
OFFICE

took her three daughters aged seven, nine and eleven years. Rose and the two older girls sold newspapers on a street corner, earning 9s a week between them. She scrubbed out a Wesleyan church once a week for one shilling. Asked by a charity woman whether she had thought of putting the children in an orphanage, as they were getting no schooling, Rose replied that she would be willing for the oldest girl to go into service, but she could not bear to lose the others. 'I am very delicate,' she explained, 'and it is only my children who keep me up. I should not like to part with them all'.

FORSAKING ALL OTHERS

... and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live.

Life's troubles sometimes parted married couples sooner than death. Many split up and formed new partnerships regardless of the laws of church and state. Some eminent people, including premier Sir Henry Parkes and former premier James Service, lived in such irregular unions. Getting a divorce was still a cumbersome, expensive and disreputable business. In most colonies, as in Britain, a man could divorce his wife for adultery alone but a woman could divorce her husband only if his adultery was combined with cruelty or desertion or other offence. In New South Wales, women had the right to divorce for simple adultery. In that colony in 1886 and Victoria in 1887 bills had been introduced to liberalise the laws, but they had not yet been enacted.

In May 1888 Louisa Lawson, herself a runaway wife, launched her feminist newspaper, the *Dawn*, a journal for Australian women, with an editorial on the 'admirable' divorce extension bill introduced by Sir Alfred Stephen into the New South Wales parliament.

There are few questions so important for the consideration of women as those of the laws of marriage and divorce, since full half the sorrows of women rise from marriages foolishly made, or from nuptial ties, which being made cry out for severance.

How could male legislators, she asked, not respond to the sight of 'a woman bound by ill-made laws, and by the crude pruderies of public opinion to a life of hourly sorrow and perennial torture?'

It is hard to estimate how many marriages broke down. Some bitter marital disputes found their way into the courts and thence to the papers. James Leighton, a storekeeper and commercial traveller of North Fitzroy, petitioned the supreme court for a divorce from his wife Philena for her adultery with a temperance missionary named John Yates. Philena had been a tailoress before her marriage. She had first met Yates in 1881 and he had been a frequent guest in their house. The Leightons had seven children, ranging in age from two to seventeen. James asserted that after the birth of their seventh child, Philena had refused to have sexual intercourse with him, 'alleging as a reason that she did not want to have any more children', though they continued to sleep in the same bed. Philena constantly interfered when James reprimanded the children, another source of conflict. One day when he returned from a business trip, he discovered that she had left, taking the youngest child. Philena's brother informed James that she had received 'endearing letters' from John Yates and the children confirmed that Yates had stayed all night while James had been away. Philena denied that she had refused cohabitation or committed adultery. She claimed, however, that James' wilful neglect of her was conducive to adultery. She reported that James had frequently gone away leaving the family without means of subsistence, and that she had been forced to work at dressmaking and millinery to keep them alive. James was cruel, he had on occasions beaten her, and when drunk he used foul language. He had finally deserted them. A decree absolute was granted, and the co-respondent was ordered to pay costs of £247 7s 8d.

A court in Melbourne heard the suit of Frances Mary Stephen against her husband Francis Sydney Stephen. He was aged 30, a solicitor in the Melbourne suburb of Prahran. The couple had three children aged six to eleven years. For some years, Frances Mary claimed, Francis had led a dissolute life, returning home intoxicated and bad-tempered. He gambled heavily, leaving herself and her children unable to buy clothing 'suitable to their position in life'. He had visited prostitutes and committed adultery, once with a servant girl in his own house. Shortly after their marriage Frances contracted venereal disease from him, which he knowingly inflicted, and it had recurred. At first the doctor did not tell her the nature of the disease, but she suspected venereal disease with the second attack, and her husband confessed. On the third occasion she left him for three weeks, but returned when he promised to reform. On his wife's testimony, Stephen was also a violent man; he often twisted her arms until they hurt or grabbed her by the throat. Finally, one night he came home drunk at midnight, she said, while she was asleep in bed with her child. He caught her by the throat, and let go only when she and the child screamed loudly. Next day she took the children and moved in with her sister at Gisborne. The court granted a decree absolute, and Francis was ordered to pay Frances Mary £4 a week in maintenance for the rest of her life.

Divorce remained rare. In Victoria, only 28 divorces were granted in 1888—there were 38 petitions—which represented 0.34 divorces for every 10 000 marriages. The married state into which Annie and Charles de Fegely had entered on that spring morning was a bond that in most cases was to be dissolved only with the death of one of the partners. For the poor the death of one partner, particularly the breadwinner, could lead to disaster. But for the luckier ones, the network established by marriage would play a dominant part in the life of the survivor. Within the family most people would find a measure of security to carry them through sickness and misfortune and continue into old age and death.



Mary Annie Rogers and Edwin Moore Davis on their wedding day.

MRS E. SALKIN