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THE  
ENGLISHWOMAN

CICELY HAMILTON



British Life and Thought

THE ENGLISHWOMAN

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# THE ENGLISHWOMAN

BY

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THE ENGLISHWOMAN

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## THE ENGLISHWOMAN

### I. IN POLITICS

IT is difficult to generalise about your own people—so difficult as to be almost impossible—for the simple reason that you cannot see them as a whole. That outside, general view of a race is possible only to the stranger; when you speak a people's tongue and share its way of thinking, you must be more aware than the stranger of its many antagonisms, its divisions and shades of unlikeness. And for the same reason—because you stand so near—you may fail to notice, as the stranger does, the racial resemblances and characteristics that are common to all ranks and sections. As our English saying has it, you cannot see the wood for the trees.

And again it is almost impossible to survey your own people impartially; they have a power possessed by no other race to kindle both affection and annoyance; if love is a matter of contact, so also is anger—we are apt to quarrel readily with those who are near and dear to us. There may be Englishmen whose attitude of mind is so entirely international that they can look upon their England as dispassionately as if it were Siam or Peru, but of that detachment I know myself incapable—for good or for evil, my angle of vision is English. No one goes abroad more happily than I do and few, I think, can have kindlier friends of foreign blood; but all the same, when I land in England it is always with a stirring of the heart. Whatever other races and lands have given me, it is always good to be back among my own people; who may, at times, be annoying, even exasperating, but who, all the same, are my people, my English, who speak my tongue and understand more than my words; the outlook, the habit of thought that we have in common.

That being so, it is not without apology that I set myself to write of the Englishwoman; for what is needed (in addition to the impartiality that I do not possess) is the skill to achieve a composite portrait drawn from innumerable models; these models resembling each other in their Englishness, however dissimilar they may be in other

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respects. The wife and mother in all ranks of life ; the factory worker, the teacher, the typist, and the woman with leisure on her hands ; the member of Parliament, the journalist, the daily help ; the medical woman, the enthusiast for sport, and the artist. All these and many more would be among the models, since, despite their wide difference of income and manners, dwelling-place and habit, they could, one and all, lend something to the portrait of a typical Englishwoman. As I have said, such a portrait is beyond my skill, and in these few pages all that I can do is to touch on certain aspects of women's life in England which seem to me significant or typical—and to touch also on some of the changes that recent years have brought forth. And as we belong to a nation that still holds to parliamentary institutions—one of the dwindling number of democracies—it is fitting to begin with the political aspect ; the Englishwoman's rights as a citizen and the part she plays in public life.

It is twenty years and more since the women of Great Britain obtained the right to vote in the election of members of Parliament. That right was granted only after long agitation ; in the pre-War days (that now seem prehistoric) Votes for Women was a burning question, argued and re-argued in Parliament, on platforms and in print. In those days the suffragist who addressed a crowd had frequently to meet with an objection phrased something like this : " If we give you the vote, you won't be satisfied—as soon as you've got it, you'll be asking for women in Parliament ! " The speaker usually dealt with that objection by denying any such hope or intention and assuring her audience that she and her fellows were asking for nothing but the vote—the vote on the same terms as men ! And that assurance, as a rule, was made in all honesty. Thirty years ago when the suffrage agitation was still in progress, and a stubborn opposition was still to overcome, the goal of enfranchisement was still far away and it must, to most of us, have seemed impossible that a woman should ever be a member of Parliament—ever win an election against a male opponent and take her seat in the House of Commons, to vote on the making of our laws. If any there were who looked beyond the immediate gain of the ballot-box, they were only a small minority. . . . But in England, as elsewhere, events have moved swiftly in the last few decades and again and again what seemed impossible has become

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a familiar fact ; the parliamentary franchise was extended to women in 1918, the last year of the World War, and as early as the following year, 1919, the first woman member took her seat in the House of Commons. Lady Astor stood for a Plymouth constituency, won her election and so made English history. The trail that she had blazed others were not slow in following and though women, as members of Parliament, are still comparatively few, they are no longer so few and so far between that they are looked on as curiosities—at the last General Election the number returned was fourteen. So far, however, they have not obtained entry to the House of Lords ; a test case, claiming the right to sit, was brought by a peeress in her own right, Viscountess Rhondda, but the courts of law decided against her and the Upper House of Parliament is still a masculine preserve.<sup>1</sup>

Though the Lords have not followed the example of the Commons, there are many other public bodies on which women have the right to sit ; among them the County Councils which administer local government throughout Great Britain. Of these the London County Council is naturally the first in importance, controlling as it does the public services of the twenty-eight boroughs of the capital with their several millions of inhabitants—a larger population than that of many states of Europe. Into what is known as Greater London—that is, London with its ring of outer suburbs—all the Swiss who live in Switzerland could be transferred and provided with lodging, and yet leave half its houses empty ; all the Swedes in Sweden similarly lodged would leave plenty of room for more neighbours ; all the Dutch in Holland would just about fit in comfortably. Most of this huge agglomeration of streets and human beings is under the administrative control of the County Council ; it is responsible for the system of public education, from infant schools to technical colleges and evening classes for adults ; responsible also for the upkeep of numerous hospitals and health services in general, for protection of London's many millions from fire, for removal of slums and the building of dwellings to replace them. Parks and open spaces and means of public recreation ; the highways, the waterways, the drainage system ; all these are controlled by the London County Council—and the list is by no means exhausted.

The L.C.C.—as it is known for short—consists of a hundred and forty-four members, elected by the citizens of the twenty-eight London

<sup>1</sup> See Lady Rhondda's autobiography, *This was my World* (Macmillan, 1933).

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boroughs ; of these members, on an average, about five-and-twenty are women and, at moment of writing, the Council for the first time in its history has a woman chairman, or president—her name, Mrs. Eveline Lowe. Our County Councils, as an institution, are now half a century old and (as proof of how far we have moved since those days) it is interesting to note that at the first election to the London Council three women were returned as members—their election creating a sensation ! All three, by the by, were well known for their activity in social work ; one of them, Emma Cons, had spent her life in the service of her poorer fellow-citizens, as a worker in the cause of temperance and clean entertainment, and a pioneer of housing reform. In spite of their excellent qualifications, opposition to the membership of the women was strong ; government, local as well as national, had always been the business of men and men only, and when the law establishing the Councils was passed, it had never entered the heads of its supporters that women would come forward as candidates for membership, much less manage to get themselves elected. There was much consultation with high legal authorities and many learned articles were written in law journals on the subject ; until finally the legal authorities decided that men only were qualified to speak and vote on the Council—and that being so, the membership of the three daring women was annulled. That decision was made half a century ago, and it was not until nearly twenty years later that the law on the subject was altered and women were made eligible for election to County Councils.

“ Whether as representatives or officials, women have amply demonstrated their capacity in this sphere of public administration ” —so writes a commentator on the fifty years’ work of the London County Council. And the same approving comment could, I think, be made on the women who are, or who have been, members of Parliament ; few as they have been—a handful in comparison with their hundreds of male colleagues—they have often made their mark in the House of Commons and in one or two cases have held office as Ministers. This high level of capacity among women members must be due, in part at least, to the fact that a woman who stands for election—to Parliament or any other public body—is still handicapped, to a certain extent, by her sex ; she has still to cope with the tradition of her inferiority as regards intelligence, and although that tradition is weaker than of old, it still has a good deal of life in it. The ordinary

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citizen, when he makes his cross on his ballot-paper, is still inclined to put more trust in the male than in the female and, other things being equal, the likelihood is that in a man-and-woman contest he will give his vote to the man. It is obvious that his mistrustful attitude does not make matters easy for the woman candidate who, as a rule, will need courage, brains, and character if she is to head the poll. An incapable woman has less chance of election than an equally incapable man ; and as long as that is the case, the average woman candidate will need more than average intelligence or more than average good luck. As it tends to produce a good type of woman representative, the handicap of prejudice is not without its advantages.

The right to vote and the right to enter Parliament were granted simultaneously at the end of the first War with Germany ; in recognition, no doubt, of the work that had been done by the women of the nation during the four years of struggle—in the factory, the field, the office, and the hospital. All the same, it is unlikely that recognition would have taken that particular form if there had been no agitation for the franchise previous to the War ; the vote was given because it had been asked for with urgency. And the demand was of long standing ; it was nearly half a century before the passing of the Act of 1918 that a first meeting of suffragists was held in London, to a chorus of rebuke and ridicule—in those days it was considered almost immoral for a woman to speak from a platform. In spite of rebuke and ridicule, the movement persisted and grew in strength with the years, until finally, in the early nineteen-hundreds, it became not only persistent but violent ; and a law-abiding people (for such we English are !) saw with astonishment an outbreak of lawlessness on the part of a section of the suffragists. There were processions of women to the Houses of Parliament—illegal processions with which the police were bound to interfere ; there was breaking of shop-windows, there was arson. In consequence, perpetrators of these various offences were arrested and committed to prison by the score—this being exactly what they desired in order to advertise their grievance ! How far the cause of women’s enfranchisement was aided by this system of organised damage and annoyance it is even now difficult to judge—needless to say, there were many who strongly disapproved ; but whether or no it hastened the victory, it was an interesting and highly significant phenomenon, proving as it did that a considerable body of Englishwomen were ready, in the service of a cause they believed in, to break with the



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tradition of decorum in which women had been bred for generations.<sup>1</sup>

We are sometimes told that the results of our political enfranchisement have been disappointingly small ; the world is no nearer perfection than it was when we clamoured for the parliamentary vote. It is true, we have brought about no benevolent revolution, no security founded on peace between nations and between classes ; but looking back over British legislation of the last twenty years, it is clear that, in many respects, it has been influenced, and strongly influenced, by the woman citizen. The raising of the age at which marriage is permitted to the young ; the raising of the age of consent to sexual intercourse in girls ; the granting of money allowances to widows and orphans ; laws regulating the employment of children and dealing with the youthful lawbreaker—these and other measures of the same kind are distinctly traceable to the new influence in British political life.<sup>2</sup>

As regards the exercise of public functions other than military, our women today have, in theory, the same rights as men ; there is no legal bar to their appointment to high office in the service of their country. By an Act of Parliament passed in 1919 it was provided that no woman, because she is a woman, should be disqualified from the exercise of any public function. Custom, however, does not always keep step with the law, and actually there are many high offices and public activities from which custom, though not law, still debar the women of Great Britain and is likely to debar them for many years to come. Thanks to the above-mentioned Act of Parliament, it would be legal to appoint a woman as one of His Majesty's Judges or Colonial Governors, or to send a woman as His Majesty's Ambassador to Paris, to Washington or Rome ; it is doubtful, however, if any such appointment will be made in the lifetime of the present generation. But even though we may not as yet be Ambassadors or Judges, the fact remains that the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act did throw many barriers

<sup>1</sup> Those interested in the long, and at times exciting, struggle for women's enfranchisement should read *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, by Ray Strachey (Murray, 1931). Mrs. Fawcett was one of the leaders of the non-violent movement.

<sup>2</sup> *Our Freedom and its Results*, edited by Ray Strachey (Hogarth Press, 1936), is a volume to which five well-known women have contributed, dealing with the changes that have taken place from their five different points of view.



London News Agency

The Queen at an inspection of Girl Guides, accompanied by Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret Rose, in their Girl Guide Uniforms. In the background on the left is Queen Mary



An Englishwoman at home

*Keystone*



In the Children's Ward of an English hospital



In the laboratory at the Family Health Centre, Peckham, London

## *In Family Life*

down—as far as the law of the land is concerned, the Englishwoman of today has very little cause of complaint.

### 2. IN FAMILY LIFE

To turn from public to private life : from the citizen to woman in the home and engaged in the earning of her bread.

There have been many changes in the English home since the dawn of the twentieth century—changes which affect the manner of living of the woman who runs the home. Some of them are due to the fall in the birth rate ; in all parts of the civilised world, in the last fifty years, the average family has decreased in size and we in England are no exception to the rule. Our birth rate, nowadays, is one of the lowest in Europe ; only Sweden, I believe, produces fewer children in proportion to the total population. As elsewhere, there are conflicting opinions on the subject—sharply conflicting ; some there are who see danger in the fall of the birth rate and prophesy, before many years have passed, an actual dwindling of the race ; while others consider a low birth rate an advantage in a country as thickly populated as ours, a country, moreover, which for many years past has not found employment for all its able-bodied citizens. My purpose, however, is not to discuss the birth rate, as such, but some of the effects upon domestic life of the smaller size of the family.

Here it should be noted that, as usually happens, the death rate has fallen with the birth rate, and especially the infant death rate. I should not like to assert that our English mothers of the present day are fonder, or more careful, of their children than the mothers of a past generation, but they certainly care for them in wiser fashion since they manage to bring them up with a smaller percentage of loss. The twentieth century is the Age of the Child, and the tending of the modern infant is a branch of public service in every civilised nation ; thanks largely to the teaching the mother obtains, her care for her child is instructed as well as affectionate. The young mother of today is not left to learn by her own experience and the promptings of maternal instinct ; she has expert advice at her command. I sat not long ago in a “ Babies’ Welcome ” in a north of England city and watched the arrival of the welcome little guests and their weighing and inspection by a nurse ; each mother had an interview with the woman doctor in attendance,

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and when the business of the afternoon was over, there were cups of tea all round and half an hour's rest and talk. In that one northern city there are eighteen similar centres for infant welfare, served for the most part by voluntary helpers, and the periodical overhaul of babies is not their only form of activity. Demonstrations are held of diet for children and expectant mothers, showing how to select inexpensive meals that provide the right variety of nutriment and can be cooked with the simplest of resources; while to several of the centres mothers bring their youngsters once or twice a week and leave them, under kindly guardianship, to play in a pen with bricks and sand, and similar childish delights. All over the country work of that kind is carried on—in part by the State, in part by voluntary aid; small wonder that the tragedy of a baby's death is less frequent than it was in the days of our mothers and grandmothers. Young people of today take their parental responsibilities seriously; the girl who hopes to have children does not wait for their arrival in order to learn how to rear them; the likelihood is she has given time and study to the matter before she begins her married life. Thanks to the dissemination of what is known as mothercraft, in a recent quarter of a century—between 1905 and 1930—our infant death rate was reduced by 50 per cent. There are said to be nations more advanced than we are in the teaching of mothercraft and provision of maternity services; still, that 50 per cent reduction suggests that the Englishwoman of the twentieth century, whatever the class to which she belongs, has had the intelligence to profit by her teaching and is—take her all round—a competent and sensible mother.

One of the noticeable results of our smaller families is that the modern mother can be a companion to her one or two children as they grow beyond the childhood stage; unlike the Victorian parent of eight or nine, she is not occupied for year after year with the cares and pleasures of the nursery. She can share her young people's interest when they leave home for school, and pass from school into the world. I conclude that the decline in family numbers has produced much the same results elsewhere; but certainly in the average English home, there is more friendliness between mother and child than there was in the nineteenth century. I would not say there is more affection than in times past, but it is a different kind of affection; a companionable friendliness that bridges the gap between one generation and another.

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Another result—which affects the family in general but especially the housewife—is the new popularity of flat-dwelling. In most continental countries—perhaps in all—it has always been the custom to live in flats but it has not, until recently, been the custom of the English people. The English family, whenever possible, preferred to have a building to itself; a preference, oddly enough, not shared by the Scots, who have long been accustomed to the flat. Thus the English family of days gone by was brought up in its own separate house; the size of it varying, according to means, from a many-storeyed building to a cottage. No one now wants sole possession of the large town mansion, intended for the use of the Victorian family, with its six or seven children and its retinue of servants; the houses of that type that have not been pulled down have been divided, by floors, into offices or flats and let to several different tenants. And everywhere, as new housing is called for in cities and suburbs, there arise not the old-fashioned separate homes but blocks containing homes by the dozen, the score or the hundred. It is true that flats for well-to-do accommodation and tenement blocks for artisans' families were built in England half a century and more ago; but they were not built in any great numbers and it is only recently—within the last few years—that they have sprung up like mushroom growths. Almost with a rush we have changed our housing habits and taken to a manner of living that we formerly disliked. Partly, as I have said, because the average family is smaller than it was, and therefore needs less room; and partly—where the middle classes are concerned—because domestic help is not only expensive but hard to come by, and a flat of the modern, labour-saving kind can be run with the minimum of domestic help.

It has followed, from this change in her manner of living, that the middle-class woman of today is often more skilled in household matters than her predecessor of twenty-five or thirty years ago. The English "young lady" of the pre-War epoch was all too often ignorant of even the elements of cookery; the kitchen, in the ordinary household of those days, was looked upon as the special province of the cook—who, in most cases, would have resented the company of her mistress while she made her preparations for meals. In consequence, the daughter of a household, where a cook was kept, would usually grow up without skill in the preparation of food; it was only by exception that teaching was given either in the home or the school—the ordinary school for middle-class girls did not concern itself with the arts and

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crafts of the household. Those arts and crafts were the business of a particular class, who earned their living by their professional skill ; so it was not unusual for the young women who employed that class to marry and set up house with but vague ideas on roasting and boiling and kitchen economy in general.

I should not like to assert that this ignorance of matters connected with the kitchen is wholly a thing of the past ; if not so frequent as of yore, it is still to be met with. Good cooks we have among us, but we cannot claim to be a nation of good cooks ; it is an unfortunate fact that a good-class restaurant in London is usually run by a foreigner ; and it is still a blemish, a major blemish, of our system of secondary education that it does not sufficiently concern itself with matters of everyday usefulness. (Personally, I would teach something of the lore of the household to every boy as well as to every girl ; we are none of us the worse for knowing how to scrub and mend our clothes, and cook ourselves a breakfast or a supper.) But in spite of educational neglect of the kitchen, there are, I should say, more English housewives of the middle class who can turn out a meal that gives pleasure in the eating than there were at the beginning of the century ; more young women of that class, when about to marry, attend what are known as domestic economy classes and learn what they did not learn at school. One reason for this progress in the arts of the kitchen is the stress now laid on diet by the medical profession, and another the above-mentioned scarcity of domestic help ; although housework nowadays commands high wages, it remains an unpopular calling and nowhere more so than in England. It follows that the housewife who cannot afford to pay high wages to cooks and housemaids or dine every day in a service restaurant must herself practise some of those domestic arts which her mother could afford to neglect. School, fortunately, is not the only place where we acquire useful knowledge ; there is no better teacher than necessity and many a young woman of today is acquiring skill in the running of her house because there is no one to take its cares off her hands.

In connection with this pronounced reluctance of the English girl to earn her living by any form of housework, I was told recently by the *châtelaine* of a large country house—one of the historic country houses of England—that she thought it probable that, even if taxation became no heavier, these great mansions that a past aristocracy had built would, before very long, have to shut their doors for good.

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And the reason she gave for this melancholy prophecy was the difficulty, increasing year by year, of getting a domestic staff to run them. Even in a house of palatial size where so many servants must be kept that there is no lack of company, where wages are good and surroundings comfortable—even so, she assured me, when vacancies occur, it is anything but easy to fill them with young people of the right type. The days are gone by when a rustic family would esteem itself fortunate when one of its daughters was accepted for service in the local “ great house ” ; not even the comforts and amenities which are often provided in the “ great house ” of today can overcome dislike of domestic service or counteract the pull of the town. For however advantageous in other respects, these great country houses have one grave disadvantage in the eyes of the girl seeking work ; they are what they are called, country houses, standing well away from the liveliness of streets and shops. It is only the unusual working girl who prefers a country lane to a row of shop-windows, the quiet of the fields to the noise and bustle of the street. This preference for urban life and surroundings is not, of course, peculiar to Great Britain ; everywhere the town is a magnet to young people, and the drift from the land in many parts of the world is a problem for farmers and for governments. It would not surprise me to learn that ninety-nine English girls out of every hundred consider that wage-earning in a factory is infinitely preferable to wage-earning as parlourmaid or cook, even under first-class conditions. The machine-made labour of the factory is far more monotonous than that of the housemaid or cook, consisting, as it usually does, of the ceaseless repetition of a process ; but it has the advantage of definite hours, so that evenings are free, and of being performed in company, often in the midst of a crowd. And it must not be forgotten that around the work of the monotonous machine there grows up usually a community life which gives to the young the amusement and society they need ; the large modern factory has its clubs for recreation and its classes, its facilities for games and athletics, its dramatic and musical societies—all of them giving opportunities for intercourse and the making of friends when the day at the machine is over.

During my lifetime the factory girl has changed greatly in appearance ; she is a neater and smarter young woman than the factory girl of my youth. Not so many years ago, in the North of England, the thick woollen shawl was the customary garment of the textile worker

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—a warm and useful garment, serving both as cloak and hat ; while as footwear, the women employed at the mills went clattering through the streets of their Lancashire towns in the heavy shoes known as clogs. The modern young woman who works at a mill is not often seen in clogs—she prefers high-heeled shoes—and she seldom condescends to the old-fashioned shawl ; her wear today is the ready-made coat or costume. When I stayed recently in one of the centres of Lancashire industry, I doubt if I saw more than two or three shawls where once I should have seen them by the hundred. And the two or three I saw were worn by women of the elder generation, still holding to the custom of their youth.

All the world over the tendency is for class difference in dress to grow less and less noticeable. We live in the age of the machine-made, mass-produced garment which is no longer a shoddy and shapeless article but a neat and well-cut costume. In England, the trade in cheap ready-made clothing has increased rapidly in the last few years ; recently I was shown over a clothing factory where ten thousand men and women work at thousands of machines—and its trade, I was told, is still expanding. It is the output of such factories, the mass-produced suits, cheap frocks and coats and skirts, that have obliterated most of our class distinctions in dress.

And in England, as elsewhere, the day has gone by when the curled and waved head was confined to the owners of long purses ; on the contrary, the hairdresser is patronised nowadays by all sorts and conditions of women—his trade, one imagines, must be one of the flourishing industries. In another factory to which I paid a visit a year or two ago—a factory which employs several hundred girls and women and, incidentally, pays them very well—I noticed how glossy were many of the youthful heads and how frequent was the permanent wave ! Part of this increased attention to dress and coiffure is due, no doubt, to the comfortable fact that wages are higher than they were in the past ; the factory employee and the business girl have more to spend on their personal adornment than their predecessors of a generation ago.

### 3. IN EMPLOYMENT

In a novel of the bygone Victorian age—a novel in its time extremely popular—there is a chapter where an unsophisticated girl, the

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heroine of the story, pays her first visit to London and is escorted through the streets of its business quarter, the City. What strikes her there is the throng of men and the complete absence of women. “Where are they ?” she asks her companion. “Why is it there aren’t any women—only men in this part of London ?” To which the reply is something like this : The men she sees have all come to the City to work and earn a living, for their womenfolk as well as for themselves—the womenfolk being, where womenfolk should be, in their homes !

No present-day visitor to business London—or the business quarter of any large town—would repeat that Victorian question ; women, like men, now set out of a morning to earn their bread in the City. I do not know whether the typewriter had been invented at the date that particular novel was written, but it certainly had not come into general use ; the letters that business men dictated and filed were still written and copied with the pen, and good handwriting, not pace on the typewriter, was required of the clerk and the secretary. Typewriting, from the very beginning, has been a woman’s means of earning a livelihood—or, more correctly, a girl’s ; perhaps because women, taking them all round, are nimbler with their fingers than men. Whatever the reason, the English men and boys who earn a living by tapping on the typewriter are few indeed, as compared with the girls and women—according to a recent employment census, they are less than 2½ per cent of the whole typist population.

If you take your stand on the platform of a London terminus—say Waterloo or Liverpool Street—as the morning trains come in from the suburbs, you will see a veritable torrent of humanity pouring past the barriers and out into the streets ; there to disperse to its daily labours in office and warehouse and shop. And that torrent will be largely composed of women ; working women of all degrees, from the teashop waitress and the dressmaker’s assistant to the manager of a flourishing business. Many of them, you notice, are young, very young ; in our world of today there is seldom any lack of employment for the youthful, and between the ages of eighteen and twenty some 80 per cent of our girl population is engaged in wage-earning work. That is the high-tide age of employment ; as girls grow older, their working numbers drop, and drop quickly. Between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-four, the decline is already marked—only 65 per cent, instead of 80, continue to draw wage or salary. Marriage,

no doubt, is one of the factors—an important factor—in this rapid decline of paid employment ; twenty-one to twenty-four is a marrying age and the typist or shop girl, when she takes a husband, is more than likely to give up her wage-earning, cease her daily journeys to and from the suburbs, and settle in a home of her own. Marriage, however, is not the only reason why paid work among women (and not only among women) grows less frequent as youth is left behind ; in all industrial countries there are trades and callings where, thanks to the machine, every process has been simplified and the skill of the inventor has superseded that of the worker. In such (trades and they are many) experience is not much in demand, since the necessary knack is no longer a matter of years ; it can soon be acquired by youngsters fresh from school. The skill of the inventor is often hard on the middle-aged.

Here to be noted that it is not always of her own free will that a woman retires from her trade when she marries ; there are trades and professions where she has no choice, since marriage, for a woman, is the same thing as dismissal—when she gives her promise to the man who courts her, she resigns herself to the loss of her wage-earning job. Many of the public bodies in control of education refuse to employ married women as teachers ; they dismiss them in favour of the single. The objection, of course, has nothing to do with their attainments as teachers ; a woman, hitherto intelligent and capable, does not suddenly lapse into incompetence as soon as she has taken a husband. The reasons for dismissal are purely economic ; in the view of those who dismiss the married woman, she is, or should be, supported by her husband and therefore does not need a paid appointment—does not need it, at any rate, as much as the single woman who is dependent for her livelihood on her own exertions and attainments. This is a subject on which there is much difference of opinion and plenty of good reasons have been put forward as to why a teacher who has proved her value should not lose her post on marriage ; but the chances are that the practice will continue so long as unemployment is frequent in the teaching profession.

Teachers are not the only women workers who must expect to lose work and wage on marriage ; the same rule prevails in the Civil Service and there are many industries employing women which employ them only so long as they are single. Young people in love do not always look very far ahead ; all the same, the prospect of losing a

comfortable wage must sometimes hold up weddings. A girl who is earning good money of her own, money with which she can do as she likes, may hesitate before she parts with that certainty for a share in a husband's wage—which in some instances may not be much larger than the wage she herself can earn. There are indeed certain factories employing women until they marry—certain flourishing factories—where the girls are better paid than most of the men in the neighbourhood ; and these girls, if they are cautious, must think several times before they wed. This, however, is exceptional, very exceptional ; in England, as in most other parts of the world, the general rule is that women's wages are considerably lower than men's.

It is in the South of England that the practice of dismissal on marriage is most general ; in the staple industries of the North—the cotton mills of Lancashire, the woollen mills of Yorkshire—you will find wives and mothers still busily employed ; women who have spent all their working lives at the loom and, as likely as not, have brought up their children to follow the family trade. At the taking of the last census there were, in round numbers, 574,000 women employed in the textile industries and of these over two hundred thousand were returned as married. The textile industry, by the way, is chiefly a woman's industry ; the men employed are very much in the minority, and if its army of married women workers were turned out of the mills, the textile trade would be in a parlous state.

I conclude that the reason why there has never been any attempt to expel the married woman from the mills of the North is because her trade was originally practised in the home ; weaving was a family industry. Long before great woollen mills were built in West Yorkshire, the weaving of wool was carried on in little Yorkshire cottages, each of them furnished with its loom. The industrial age, as it centralised the trade, absorbed the little cottage factories ; the loom was removed from the home to the mill and the family of weavers, as a matter of course, followed their means of livelihood—the women as well as the men. . . . And that, I take it, is the reason why the presence of the wife and mother is accepted in the textile factory ; why you find her steadily drawing her wage when the manufacturer of sweets or tobacco would firmly refuse to employ her.

This barring of the married woman from certain trades and callings has no moral principle behind it ; as already pointed out it is merely a method of preventing unemployment by preventing congestion

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of the labour market. We are at present a somewhat overcrowded people, but if there were a shortage of labour there would be no hesitation about bringing in the wife and mother.<sup>1</sup>

### 4. THE UNMARRIED WOMAN

It was during the last War, when I was working as secretary at a hospital in France, that one of our French neighbours (I will call her Madame A) surprised me one day by entering my office and saying she had come for advice. Our previous acquaintance had been slight—a matter of two or three brief meetings; I knew only that my visitor was the wife of a doctor who, on the outbreak of war, had been called from his civilian practice to the army and that she had a child, a daughter of eleven or twelve. I was still more surprised when I found that the advice Madame A was in need of related to this child—(whom I barely knew by sight)—and the manner in which she should be educated.

I should here explain that the hospital to which I was attached—a British hospital, with a British staff, but working for our French allies—was in one respect an unusual institution; it was run throughout by women. Its surgeons were women and so were its porters and chauffeurs; the only men within its walls were the patients sent us from the front. And it was this fact, that the hospital was run, and successfully run without assistance from the stronger sex—the fact that the women who ran it had struck her as having a purpose in life—that had suggested to Madame A the idea of consulting a member of the staff with regard to the training of her daughter. As she and her husband belonged to the careful French bourgeoisie, as a matter of course, since their daughter was born, they had year by year laid by something for her *dot* and, until war broke out and the foundations of their careful little world were shaken, they had taken her future for granted; given a dowry of suitable dimensions, she would, when the time came, make a suitable marriage, as her mother had done, and live, like her mother, in a comfortable middle-class milieu. But the War came and the War dragged on; and by degrees it was borne in on Madame that this orthodox future could no longer be counted on; French lads a few years older than her daughter were dying at the front

<sup>1</sup> See *Women's Place in Industry and Home*, by Sylvia Anthony (Routledge, 1932), and *Modern England*, by Cicely Hamilton (Dent, 1938).

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in their thousands and their tens of thousands—and that being so, for some years to come the number of marriageable girls in France must far exceed the number of marriageable men. The doctor's little daughter might be among those for whom there was no matrimonial future and, being a sensible woman, her mother had faced the possibility. She did not intend that the girl's life should be spoiled, should one form of happiness, wifehood and motherhood, be denied her. She must not be allowed to look on marriage as a certainty, must have other interests and ambitions. Madame A explained that she came to me because she understood that there was in England a very large class of unmarried women; people like myself and the majority of our hospital doctors, who, although they lacked husbands, seemed to get on well enough and find plenty of interest in life.

I have doubts as to whether my diffident advice was of any real use to Madame and her daughter, but my reason for recalling the incident here is because I think she was fairly accurate in her estimate of the unmarried Englishwoman. If a woman is destined to go through life unwed, my country of England has many advantages as a domicile; there are, I imagine, few parts of the world where the once traditional contempt for the spinster is more thoroughly a thing of the past. Time was—and not so very long ago—when the middle-aged Englishwoman who had not found a husband was considered fair game for the jester; by the humorists of the Victorian age she was always depicted as a figure of fun—an unattractive creature who, in spite of all her efforts, had failed to induce a man to marry her. That was the old maid as a past generation saw her—and as we do not see her today; we have too many unmarried women successful in business or professional life, distinguished in literature, science, and art, to be able to keep up that joke.

Englishwomen for several generations have had to face the fact that there were far more women than men in the country, and therefore not enough husbands to go round; a nation with possessions and commercial interests overseas must inevitably send away from the homeland a steady stream of young men—the number of women who also migrate being comparatively few. Other countries beside the British Isles have sent out their streams of emigration, but from the British Isles this stream until lately was continuous for several generations—with the result that a large class of Englishwomen, for several generations, was debarred from the ordinary life of the home and had



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to seek interests unconnected with marriage or motherhood. Humanity usually adapts itself to environment; and as the unmarried Englishwoman established herself in professions and trades, as she earned her living and made her way, she ceased to regard herself as superfluous—or to be so regarded by others.

To be noted, before leaving the subject, that the disparity between the sexes is no longer on the increase in England—the numbers are gradually becoming less unequal. One reason being the dwindling of the stream of emigration, which means that more men remain in the country; and another that drop in the infant death rate of which I have already spoken. Boy babies on an average are more difficult to rear than girls, and when the death rate is high, it means that they die in greater numbers; but thanks to the wiser nursing methods of today, a higher percentage of the delicate sex now survives the first dangerous months. If the check on emigration continues and more boys grow to maturity, the time may come, at some not too distant future, when the young men and women of the nation may be fairly equal as to numbers.

### 5. SCHOOLS, PROFESSIONS AND CLUBS

There are, I should imagine, very few left of a class that must once have been numerous in England, the class of residential governess; teachers we have, in their tens of thousands, but the teacher's sphere of influence is the school, not the private house. The type of parent who, in days gone by, would have engaged a governess to live in the house and teach a daughter her French and arithmetic, her smattering of history, grammar, and music, now sends the girl to one of the large boarding-schools which are a feature of our modern educational system—and which have superseded not only the governess but the small private school where the pupils used to walk out two and two. There was room to lodge the governess in the large Victorian house, there is none in the neo-Georgian flat; and that perhaps is one of the reasons for her complete disappearance from the educational scene.

These modern boarding-schools for girls, where the pupils may run into hundreds and the standard of teaching as a rule is high, are in many respects the counterpart of our "public" schools for boys;

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the education given is on much the same lines, games being part of the curriculum—an important part. I am old enough to remember the time when conservative members of the medical profession were accustomed to issue periodical warnings concerning the unwisdom of encouraging the future mothers of the nation to take part in games and athletics; warnings which had little effect on the future mothers who continued their gymnastics and their cricket as before. Those conservative voices have long been stilled and, in every type of school, education nowadays means training of the body as well as of the mind—the little lasses of an elementary school trot by my window of a morning on their way to a London swimming-bath.

It is the rule in England that boys and girls, once they have passed the stage of the infant school, shall be educated apart. To this rule, however, there are certain exceptions; we have our advocates of co-education and scattered about England are a number of boarding-schools where their principles are put into practice. Although some of these schools have been in existence for a good many years, they are still in a small minority; co-education does not find favour with the generality of British parents—they have their doubts concerning its wisdom and are inclined to look upon those who prefer it as cranks. And even the progressive among British parents, who would venture on experiment in other directions, may hesitate to experiment where the future of their children is concerned. So far, therefore, co-education has not really established itself; the school where the sexes are taught side by side has had only a limited influence on the education of young England.

In any of our numerous universities young women today work side by side with young men, and it is almost laughable to remember that when, in the mid-Victorian epoch, the first woman's college was founded at Cambridge, it was thought advisable to build it at a distance from the town—an inconvenient distance of miles. For the town of Cambridge contained the men's colleges, and in the mid-Victorian epoch a chaperone was necessary at the meetings of young women and young men; it was, I believe, the difficulty of chaperoning their young women on all occasions that decided the pioneer founders of Girton to avoid any possibility of scandal by building well away from the neighbourhood of male undergraduates. When, a year or two after the foundation of Girton, a second college, Newnham, was established at Cambridge, and established more conveniently in the

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town itself, there was headshaking over the unwisdom of the step, even on the part of the progressive.<sup>1</sup>

The last half-century has seen the disappearance of the old taboos and prohibitions whereby women's education was hampered in the England of yesterday. The chaperone today is extinct as the proverbial dodo; Oxford, like Cambridge, has its colleges for women, the newer, non-collegiate universities admit them on the same terms as men, and women can be members of university senates. Free access to the university has meant an all-round improvement in the methods of girls' education; in their schools today the standard of teaching in many subjects is as high as in boys' schools, and sometimes even higher.

Not all the young women who take their degrees at British universities are intended for a professional career; it is, I think, more usual with us than in some continental countries for the university graduate to earn a living in trade. For the higher ranks of the teaching profession a degree is of course an essential and intending teachers are numerous among women students; judging, however, by a census taken a few years ago at all universities throughout Great Britain, one of the most popular professions for women is the medical—so popular indeed that there is talk of overcrowding. According to this census, in a recent period of seven years the number of young women who were studying medicine increased (in round numbers) from 1100 to 1750. This increase is the more remarkable because there had been no similar increase in the total number of women university students; on the contrary, it showed a slight decline—due probably to the slump conditions prevailing when the census was taken.<sup>2</sup>

There can be little doubt that this extreme popularity of medicine among women is due to the fact that it is one of the callings in which they have really made good and in which the ambitious can hope to make a career. The first steps towards success were not easy, but distrust of the medical woman is a thing of the past, and today we take her so much for granted that it is hard to believe that the pioneer women of the last century had to fight their way into the profession.

<sup>1</sup> See *Newnham: An Informal Biography*, by Mary Agnes Hamilton (Faber & Faber, 1936).

<sup>2</sup> For the various trades and professions in which women can now hope to make their way, see *Careers and Openings for Women*, by Ray Strachey (Faber & Faber, 1937).

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To read the details of that fight for entry is to realise not only the courage of the pioneers but the strength of the feeling against the innovation; the public opinion with which they came in contact was not only resentful, it was shocked. Life was sometimes made almost unbearable for the women who entered such medical schools as would condescend to admit them. Led by the indomitable Sophia Jex Blake, five young women of Edinburgh University fought a stubborn battle that lasted four years—against insult and annoyance from their fellow students and discouragement on the part of the authorities. They were told that their studies were incompatible with modesty, and so bitter was the prejudice against them that on occasions they had to be protected from actual violence. They were denied the prizes and scholarships to which they were entitled by their work; they were even refused facilities for clinical study and attendance at necessary classes. In the end, in spite of their stubborn courage, they had to realise that it was useless to continue the struggle in Edinburgh; against such determined opposition they would never win through to success. But though they retreated from the university, they did not give up their hope of success, and in the year 1870 there was founded the London School of Medicine for Women—which for many years was the only school in the capital which instructed women in medicine. Even at the present day there are one or two large London hospitals which refuse to admit women students to their schools, but everywhere else there is no discrimination and opportunities for study and examination are the same for one sex as for the other.

In the other learned profession of the Law there is not, as yet, the same record of attainment and success; no woman has yet risen to prominence at the Bar and the number of women solicitors and barristers is still very small as compared with the thousands who practise in the United States. This is partly, no doubt, because the law, as a profession, was open to American women for many years before it was open to the women of Great Britain. It is only twenty years since the first women were called to the English Bar—whereas in France they had had the right to practise as far back as 1900. Only in 1920 were women permitted to invade the Inns of Court for the purpose of "eating their dinners"—a curious phrase which signifies study of the law! To become a member of the English Bar it is necessary to "keep terms" at one of the four Inns of Court—Gray's Inn, Lincoln's Inn, the Inner and Middle Temple; proof of

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keeping terms being the presence of the student at a certain number of dinners in the hall of the Inn he has joined. This curious rule of compulsory attendance at meals is a survival from the days when most of the education a young barrister received was by word of mouth from the experienced lawyer ; hence the advisability of meals in common, where students could learn from the talk of their instructed elders. The education of a barrister is no longer a matter of table-talk, but the legal profession is conservative and clings to old customs and ceremonies. Being conservative, it refused for many years to admit women to its company ; but despite its reluctance, the barrier was removed in the period of change and innovation that followed the ending of the War.

The Law, however, is one of the callings where women have so far been handicapped by the fact of their sex ; the ordinary litigant has not yet given them full confidence. Women doctors, once they had proved their capacity, were naturally in demand by women patients, but the woman who is taking a case into court will not necessarily prefer to be represented by a woman solicitor or barrister—the relation between lawyer and client has not the same closeness and personal intimacy as that between patient and physician. The law is an uncertain profession for men, not to be entered on by those who cannot afford years of waiting ; and for women, at present, its uncertainty is even greater, while fewer among them can afford to wait, since fewer among them are possessed of a comfortable income—all the world over, more men than women belong to the propertied class.<sup>1</sup>

One of the characteristics of the English race is the faculty or knack of being “clubbable” ; by which is meant that we associate readily in groups or clubs, whether for work or recreation. It should, I think, be counted as a merit, since no association can run without friction or long hold together if its members lack consideration for each other ; all men and women who belong to the groups that we call committees

<sup>1</sup> Books recommended in connection with women's professions and callings are: *Myself when Young* (Muller, 1938)—a collection of autobiographical sketches by well-known women whose activities range from Parliament to the Stage ; and two other autobiographies, *Oil Paint and Grease Paint*, by Dame Laura Knight, R.A. (Nicholson & Watson, 1938), and *Life Errant*, by Cicely Hamilton (Dent, 1935).



The typists' room in a London business house

*Keystone*



In a carpet factory at Kidderminster

*London News Agency*



A class of girls learning to use a tractor plough, at East Sussex Agricultural College, Plumpton

*Photographic Publications Ltd.*



An air-raid rehearsal : Members of the Women's Transport Service carrying off a "victim" of an imaginary air attack during a training class

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must be prepared to give and take, to control irritation and exercise patience in their dealings with those who oppose them. And we, as a nation, are addicted to committees—hundreds of committees must sit every week with thousands of women as members. A friend of my own once complained to me that she had moved from London to a country cottage in the hope and expectation of a restfulness the town denied her ; but instead of the leisure she had planned to enjoy, her life was a veritable round of committees—social, political, and charitable. Time was when the knack of association was supposed to be peculiar to the male of the human race ; but that idea flourished only for so long as women's interests were confined to the home and the life domestic ; it died a natural death when they began to concern themselves with public affairs and started clubs of their own.

Where a woman's club in England sometimes differs from a man's is in having its more serious, more cultural side ; it is not just a place where its members drop in to spend their leisure—where they idle in comfort, dine, read the papers, or play bridge. Not that the corresponding type of woman's club is without its reading-rooms and dining-rooms, its facilities for the playing of bridge ; but the best-known among them have, in addition, their intellectual amenities. They are given to debates and the hearing of lectures ; they have, in addition, their " circles " of members who meet from time to time because they are interested in some particular subject or belong to the same profession. This distinctly serious side of club life is, in all probability, a legacy from the founders of the first women's clubs who were pioneers braving public opinion and, often enough, the ridicule that goes with disapproval. The members who joined in those early days were doubtless like-minded with the founders ; that is to say, they were more concerned with women's education and progress in general than with leisure and comfortable chairs.

Another form of club-association that has become of late years exceedingly popular is the women's luncheon club ; it flourishes especially in provincial towns and in some of the larger among them its membership will run into hundreds—with a long waiting list in the background. As the name betokens, the meetings of the club take place at a midday meal ; this is held at intervals (as a rule once a week) when the members assemble at some local hotel or restaurant with a room large enough to accommodate its numbers and partake of a fixed-price lunch. When the serious business of the meal is over and

the stage of cigarettes and coffee has been reached, the gathering passes on to its intellectual course—it is addressed by a speaker on some topic of general interest. As many of the audience are business women who will have to return to their work after lunch, the address is not over-long. To be present at a meeting of one of these luncheon clubs—in a restaurant dining-room thronged with its members—is to wonder who started the curious idea, entertained by our fathers, that women dislike each other's company.

The "clubbable" faculty is not confined to any one class of our people and there are, I suppose, few organisations more valued or more useful than the Women's Institutes which cater for the social needs and pleasures of the countrywoman. The Women's Institute is not of British origin; it came to us across the Atlantic, from Canada; but once imported by the Mother Country, it soon took root and spread, and in the course of a few years there came into being scores of local Institutes, all of them centres of interest and social life. The existence, in a village, of a Women's Institute means meetings for amusement, tea, and talk; informal addresses are given at intervals and instruction on matters of practical use to the members. As these Institutes exist for the benefit of the neighbourhood in general, with the object of promoting sociability and friendliness, politics, that destroyer of peace and goodwill, is wisely barred from the list of subjects they discuss. Handicrafts are encouraged and in many rural districts the Women's Institutes are preserving those traditional arts of the countryside which are everywhere threatened with extinction by mechanical progress and the overflowing output of the factory. But their chief merit is that they bring together for common activities the women of a district or a village and thereby create a society—a society founded on a club. Not many among us have deserved better of their fellows than the promoters of these Women's Institutes; which have brought interest and pleasure and variety to a class that was often badly in need of them—the hard-working women of the countryside.

#### 6. WAR WORK, PAST AND PRESENT

A few words before I bring this paper to an end on the public services for which, in a time of national danger, the women of Great

Britain are enlisted. There are various organisations—various aids to man-power—which came into being between 1914 and 1918 and are now a recognised factor in our system of national defence.

In the centuries behind us, war was the business of soldiers: they marched, they fought, were victorious or defeated—the civilian taking no hand. In our twentieth century war has widened its scope and is also the business of civilians, both women and men. When the first aeroplane rose from the ground, we did not suspect that it was bringing to an end the long tradition of women's immunity in warfare; yet so it was! The bomb descending on a crowded city thoroughfare is no respecter of persons; it strikes combatant and non-combatant indifferently. War in the twentieth century has returned to its primitive manner, the manner of the savage; it is waged against man, woman, and child and therefore is the business of us all. Women, like men, have their share in it; they are pressed into the making of guns and shells and may even be called on to enlist in their national armies. As already said, that happened in Great Britain in the war of 1914-18; before it had ended, our women, in their thousands, were enrolled as auxiliaries in the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. Not, of course, in the fighting units of the Services but to perform many of the non-combatant duties which are usually allotted to men—thus releasing men for active service, whether on land, sea, or air. The women auxiliaries were clerks, cooks, and bakers, chauffeurs and post-office workers; they were paymasters, telephonists, messengers, and porters, and a dozen other things beside.

Very well I remember the interest aroused in a French provincial town when there arrived at a camp on its outskirts a first contingent of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps. "Waacs" they were called by their countrymen, in ordinary talk—a word compiled from the initials of the Corps, W.A.A.C.; by the local populace, however, the young women in uniform were promptly christened *les soldates*. Many of the local populace, when the Waacs first arrived, were under the impression that the khaki-clad young women were, one and all, the wives of British soldiers—allowed by the Government to join their husbands in the camps outside the town and assist in light military duties. As a matter of fact, so long as the War lasted the wives of British soldiers were never allowed to join their husbands when the latter were serving abroad; while with very few exceptions the Waacs who served in France were unmarried.



Of these girls on foreign service I saw a good deal when I was working in the neighbourhood of some of their camps, and more than once I was assured by their officers that it was not only with respect to their military duties that their record in France was good. The majority of those who joined the Corps were quite young and they came from every type of environment, including the rough and unmannerly. There were many among them who had never left England—some who had never even left their homes—until they were put into their khaki uniform and sent across the Channel to the strange surroundings of France—a war-time France, moreover, where they were in daily contact with the men of the neighbouring camps. There must have been frequent opportunities for misconduct, and it is to the credit of the girls who served in France that occasions for complaint were few.

The best testimony to the organised service of women in those years of peril is the fact that when war again became a threat and possibility that service was again in demand. In 1914, at the outbreak of the struggle, the need for women's work had not yet been realised and there was no immediate desire, on the part of the authorities, to avail themselves of the aid of the many women who volunteered for national service—except on lines that were sanctioned by tradition, as Red Cross workers in the service of the sick and wounded. Offers to undertake other types of work were turned down, more or less decidedly. But as time went on and likewise the War, and the drain on the nation's manhood continued, more and more women were called to the nation's aid. Long before the conflict had dragged to its end, the munition factories of the country were staffed to a great extent by women's labour; while with the need to increase the supply of home-grown food—a pressing need by 1917—there came into being a body of volunteers for agricultural work; a body many thousands strong and known as the Women's Land Army. And in addition to the girls who laboured on the land and who worked in factories; in addition to the various corps attached to the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, and the host of women employed in hospitals and convalescent homes, there was another host that worked in canteens and drove ambulances, cars, and lorries. The old line of division between men's work and women's was broken down during the war; and the fact was remembered twenty years later when the shadow of disaster again loomed large. This time there was no reluctance to make use

of the nation's woman-power; the call on it was made as a precautionary measure, without waiting for the storm to break.

The Waacs had been disbanded at the end of one War but, a few months before the beginning of another, they came to life again as an Auxiliary Corps of the Territorial Army. The training of these women soldiers in peace-time involved a stated number of attendances at drill and occasionally a week or a fortnight in camp; with the outbreak of war, as a matter of course, they were called up for whole-time duty. Similar auxiliary corps are attached to the Navy and the Air Force and for none of them is there any difficulty in obtaining recruits; there are more young women eager to enlist than recruiting officers have need of.

Other war-time duties for which women have been trained and enrolled in large numbers are those connected with the peril from the air. Every district has its body of air wardens, men and women instructed in the measures to be taken when raids occur—and who meanwhile keep an eye on our windows, lest we show unnecessary light. A cruelty of modern warfare is the incendiary bomb and the probability of its use against towns has called for an increase in the number of our fire-fighters; here, too, women have been enlisted for certain duties with the Fire Brigades.

The Women's Land Army has also been revived, to provide trained help for the various departments of farm-work—for the care of poultry and pigs, for work in market gardens or the harvest field. The sturdy young women of twenty years ago were set to every type of country work, from the feeding of chickens to the felling and sawing of timber, and their successors of today are no less capable and willing; if the war should prove a long one, they will be needed not only to replace the gardeners and ploughmen called from their work to the colours, but to provide the additional labour needed in order to increase the food production of the country. Some among the land girls are instructed in special mechanical duties, such as driving of tractors and care of agricultural machinery; others in the work of the dairy and the cowshed—milking, the making of butter and cheese, and the care and feeding of stock. Many of these volunteer field and farm workers are employed locally, in the fields and market gardens of their own neighbourhood, but primarily the Women's Land Army is intended to be a mobile body; the workers of most use in time of emergency are those who can be sent from place to place at short notice, to undertake

farm-work in any district that has need of them. In the season of haymaking, harvest or fruit-picking, a contingent of land girls is sent to any district where there is a shortage of labour. Like the other war organisations, the land girls go clad in uniform—a sensible uniform, befitting the nature of their work. Their wages they receive, as a rule, from the farmer on whose land they are employed, but a local committee in every district is responsible alike for their lodging and their general welfare.

As for the traditional work of women in time of war, that has been organised in all its new developments. In wars of the past it was only the hospitals and convalescent homes that called for the service of auxiliary nurses, as aids to their professional staff; today the auxiliaries are needed by thousands in the first-aid posts for the treatment of air-raid casualties. These posts are staffed, on the nursing side, by women who have undergone Red Cross training—in London alone seven thousand such women have been called up, in the first two months of the war. My own district of Chelsea—one of the twenty-eight boroughs of London—has established no fewer than eight first-aid posts, each of them in charge of a woman commandant; the personnel is always on duty, half of it by day and half by night. And “on duty” means more than waiting for the call that may, or may not, come; the temporary nurse is expected to carry on her training while she waits, to study and attend demonstrations by doctors and qualified nurses.

The notice directing to a first-aid post is familiar enough in the England of today; it indicates, as a general rule, the convenient basement of some public building—a town hall, a library, a school—which local authority has taken in hand and transformed. Its doors and windows are protected by sandbags, its interior is fitted with all necessary equipment for first aid to the injured and the gassed. A veritable army must be employed in these posts throughout the country, for they are staffed not only by doctors and nurses but by stretcher-bearers, telephonists, and clerks.

Last but not least on the list of war-time duties are those connected with evacuation from the towns; to the women of the nation fall most of the cares and burdens connected with the safety of children. One of the results of modern warfare is migration on a vast scale; sometimes by ruthless decree of a dictator, sometimes by flight before advancing armies, sometimes by way of precaution. So far, in Great

Britain, we have experienced only the precautionary type of migration; the removal of the child population of London and our larger industrial centres to districts less likely to invite attack from the air. Householders in the safer districts are compelled by law to billet boys and girls from the danger zones—receiving, of course, a billeting allowance for the keep of their juvenile guests. Not always an easy job for the housewife, the care of strange youngsters, used to other ways and surroundings—but work of the first importance for the nation's welfare and security.

“Without the aid of women it would have been impossible to win the War”—so, twenty years ago, said a Minister of Munitions, referring to the women employed in factories and engineering shops. There, so long as the struggle lasted, they engaged in work for which no one would formerly have dreamed of employing them; work that was heavy as well as highly skilled, in shipbuilding and motor manufacture. Practically all the gas-masks supplied to the men at the front came from factories staffed by women, and in the metal industries alone the number of women workers increased by well over four hundred thousand. It was a high authority of the iron and steel trade who stated that, in certain processes, “using the same machine and working the same hours, their output was more than double that of the trained mechanic”, and an expert in engineering whose comment was that women who had recently entered the trade “were doing work of which any skilled mechanic might be proud”. And the hard work, the rough work called for in the War years was done by women of all classes; this I will say for the majority of my countrywomen—when they take on a job, they do not shirk dirt and disagreeables. Show them good reason why coal should be carried or mud should be cleared and, whatever their usual habits or dislikes, they make no complaint about dirty hands and smudged faces.

The above is an outline—a very brief outline—of the war-time duties, past and present, undertaken by the women of our nation; duties which we hoped, when the last war ceased, would never again be required of them. But since they have been required; since, in spite of our efforts, our fears and our hopes, the supreme disaster has again befallen us, there can be little doubt that the women of today, however long the struggle, will show themselves as ready as the women of yesterday, to give of their service and sacrifice.

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Readers who wish to follow up this subject are recommended to consult "The Englishwoman", a select list of recent books, which can be obtained for twopence post free from the National Book Council, 3 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.2.

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