

The Employment of Women in Great Britain
1891-1921

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1967

Abstract

This is a study of women's employment in Great Britain from 1891 to 1921 with special reference to its division from men's. It examines, first, the occupational distribution of the nation's labour force during the 1891-1914 period and finds a definite division between the work done by women and the work done by men. It then asks what factors underlay women's absence from the work men did and women's presence in and men's absence from the work women did. After answering these questions it shows and accounts for the major changes that occurred in women's employment between the pre-First World War years of 1891 to 1914, the First World War years of 1914 to 1918, and the post-First World War years of 1918 to 1921 and considers what effect they had on the sex division.

Of secondary interest is the reaction of women to their own employment position. The 1891-1921 period coincides with the advance of the so-called woman's rights movement whereby women, as active agents in furthering their interests as citizens, wives, mothers, and persons also undertook to improve their position as workers. Why was there dissatisfaction with it? What were the measures taken to better it? How effective were they? What did they signify for the sex division of labour? This thesis encompasses these questions as well.

Descriptively this thesis sets out, in more statistical and narrative detail than has ever before been attempted for the 1891-1914 period and for Great Britain as a whole, the existence of a sex division, secondly, its extensiveness, and thirdly, the position of the dividing line.

Analytically it isolates the principal factors affecting the determination of what was women's and what was men's work. In the process it shows that any analysis that begins with the character of the supply and demand for male and for female labour as given facts cannot adequately explain the sex division as it fails to explain why sex as such appears as a differentiating factor. For this, account must be taken of how males and females were transformed into masculine and feminine persons and how masculinity and femininity as contemporaneously defined affected a person's labour attributes and, directly and indirectly, an employer's choice of labour.

Finally this thesis, by considering women's employment over a period of time, becomes a record of how it changed as the factors affecting its determination were modified. Moreover, by focusing attention on the contemporary developments making for change between 1891 and 1921, this thesis provides a springboard for analyzing subsequent changes in women's employment.

The thesis proper is divided into three periods: 1) Pre-War, 1891-1914; 2) War, 1914-1918; and 3) Aftermath, 1918-1921. The first supplies not only the occupational data for showing the prevailing sex division but also the background data for understanding it. The second period embraces the years the economy was increasingly committed to satisfying the military needs of the First World War. Thus it serves to portray the effect upon women's employment of a sudden and temporary diversion of a sizeable proportion of the regular civilian male labour force into combatant service at a time when the demand for labour on the home front continued without abatement. The third, with its rapid demobilization of men from military service and the change from a war to a peace economy, provides the setting for re-examining women's employment in both its content and its division from men's and for analyzing what lasting effect, if any, the innovations of wartime had on its normal course.

Period One begins with a description of women's employment relative to men's (Part One) and uses as evidence original statistical tables developed from data contained in the Censuses of 1891, 1901 and 1911 as supplemented by contemporary observations and studies, both official and unofficial. Some of the more important of these are the *Report and Appendices: Summaries of Evidence etc.*, of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, the reports on women's employment of the Assistant Lady Commissioners of the Royal Commission on Labour, the *Annual Reports* of the Factory Department, Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London*, the employment surveys of the Women's Industrial Council, and various vocational guidance books for women.

The description covers six chapters. The first relates the technical difficulties of portraying the sex division and outlines and evaluates the method finally adopted. It then shows the overall occupational distribution of the sexes among the economy's three major sectors—Primary, Manufacturing and Service—and women's relative share in each. Chapters 2 through 6 show the sex division in greater detail by examining each major Occupational Order in turn, from those classified to the sector of most (Service) to those classified to the sector of least (Primary) numerical and proportional importance to women. The descriptive section concludes with a statistical summary which reduces the respective occupational distributions of the sexes to two clearly discernible patterns.

This thesis then searches for clues to this schematic division. It begins by asking what distinguished the work of the sexes and whether, as would seem to be implied by the clean-cut division, there was any one general and overriding factor (Chapter 7). Physiology, tradition, skill, working conditions, and other likely factors are considered. Although those pertaining to the nature of the work and the conditions under which it was performed appear to be more closely correlated with sex than any of the others examined, yet even they are of limited application—demarcating all women's work from but a small proportion of men's or else not providing an absolutely clear-cut demarcation between all of men's and all of women's work.

Finally the amount that the work paid is examined. All available evidence points to full-time earnings in the men's work of an occupational category being higher on the average than full-time earnings in its women's work or, in the case of one-sex categories, full-time earnings for given grades of labour in exclusively male categories being higher on the average than full-time earnings for corresponding grades of labour in exclusively female categories. Moreover, so few exceptions to this pattern were found and so broad was its application that it can be said that of all the forms of division noted, none demarcated the work of the sexes so consistently. Furthermore, inasmuch as the earnings differential was apparently unassociated with a corresponding hours differential, the exceptionally close correlation of the sex division with the amount a job paid suggests that they were related in some way but what that relationship might be is not readily apparent.

Accordingly this thesis probes deeper and asks whether the supply and demand for female as compared to male labour possess any peculiar characteristics which throw light on the sex division and its exceptionally close correlation with the amount a job paid.

The ensuing investigation (Chapters 8 through 11) finds, on the supply side, the occupational potentials and financial outlooks of men and women differentiated to such a degree that age for age and grade for grade their labour was not alike. On the demand side it finds the law and employed men imposing restrictions on the demand for female labour and, secondly, the employment practices of employers dividing the work for which women were wanted from the work for which men were wanted.

These supply and demand findings now bring to light the principal factors which account for women's absence from men's work and women's presence in and men's absence from women's work (Chapter 12). They also make intelligible the exceptionally close correlation of the sex division with the amount a job paid. Even so, they offer no more than a superficial explanation of the sex division proper. For they still leave unanswered why the supply and demand for male and female labour were of such a nature as to result in a sex division.

A still wider framework of analysis is needed and is provided by extending the analysis back on the supply side to the source of the particular distinctions noted between male and female labour, the

respective upbringings of the sexes whereby qualitatively distinct masculine and feminine persons were created. The analysis could, of course, be extended back even further by seeking to understand the content of that upbringing but this is not necessary because an adequate understanding of women's employment is achieved without it.

On the demand side the analysis is similarly extended by not only describing but also showing why the relevant employment practices of employers and the restrictions on female labour imposed by the law and by employed men were correlated with sex.

This further broadening of the analytical framework not only makes women's employment from a static viewpoint more intelligible but also provides important clues to its dynamics inasmuch as it draws attention to the background conditions which affected it significantly such as the prevailing consumer demand, technology, industrial organization, availability of male labour, and woman's status in society.

Changes in these background conditions now become the means of understanding trends in women's employment. Analyzed first are pre-war changes in the character of the supply of and demand for female labour (Chapters 13 and 14). To explain them, contemporary developments in the industrial and social spheres are particularly singled out. Industrially it was a time when mass production, specialized distribution and their necessary corollary—large-scale business organization with its administrative record keeping on an unprecedented scale—were on the rise. This in turn was creating an unprecedented demand for manual operatives¹ and for low-grade distributive and clerical workers, a demand which this study shows profoundly affected women's employment opportunities.

Socially it was a time when democratic thought and practice were rapidly gaining ground. Facets of this movement which were of special concern to women's employment were the "woman's rights" movement, "new unionism" and socialism. The first sought, among other things, to improve the economic position of the "second sex". The other two, by seeking the same for the unorganized and the "sweated", affected women not only indirectly as dependents of the many men included in these categories but also directly as workers in their own right because of the high proportion of working women also included in them.

The separate analyses of the supply and demand trends are then integrated into an explanation of women's changing employment pattern (Chapter 15).

Next the wartime changes of the 1914-1918 period and the circumstances underlying them are described and their occupational consequences for women are analyzed (Chapters 16 to 18). The main sources used are the Board of Trade's State of Employment figures for July 1914 and November 1918 as supplemented by both official and unofficial authoritative narrative sources. The more important among them are the two Home Office reports entitled *Substitution of Women for Men during the War* and *Substitution of Women in Non-Munition Factories during the War*, the reports of the Women's Employment Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction, of the Health of Munition Workers Committee and of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, the *Annual Reports* of the Factory Department and the special State of Employment reports issued by the Board of Trade. Among unofficial sources are the contemporary study of men's replacement by women sponsored by the Economic Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and various descriptive and historical monographs, concerned with the economic and social effects of the First World War, produced under the auspices of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Finally the post-war changes of Period Three are considered (Chapters 19 and 20). Problems connected with their statistical measurement and the method finally selected are outlined. Next follows an analysis of the back-to-normalcy process and, finally, an evaluation, in the light of the trends already operating before the war, of the war's lasting effect upon women's normal course of employment.

Of the four appendices of supporting evidence, the first gives in full detail the occupational tables developed from the Census data upon which the statistical analysis of women's employment for 1891-1914 is based. The second lists the contemporary restrictions on female labour imposed

¹Workers engaged in manual work requiring only a short period of training or none at all, and only a moderate degree of judgment, manual dexterity or muscular force.

by some principal trade unions normally and in wartime. The third contains the statistical tables derived from the Board of Trade's State of Employment figures upon which the statistical analysis of women's employment between 1914 and 1921 is based. It also evaluates the figures for the purposes of this study and reviews the more important of the supplementary sources used. The fourth contains the statistical tables derived from Census data upon which the statistical analysis of women's employment between 1911 and 1921 is based.

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Introduction

This is a study of women's share in the gainful work of the British economy from 1891 to 1921. During these years the work of men and women differed to such an extent that the integration of the country's economy was achieved not by an assimilation but by an aggregation of their respective work. Moreover, so habitual to everyday experience was this pattern of divided labour that women's work and men's work meant not only work coincidentally done by persons of a specified sex but also work properly belonging to them.

By reason of this division, sex became the most basic factor associated with an individual's work. Although other factors such as class, geographic location and individual ability were also associated with it, none cut across as many lives at any given time as the sex differential.

Why should sex have been so closely correlated with the work a person did? For productive purposes females as such no more constitute a homogeneous group than persons of a particular creed or race. The same is true for males. Only in the reproductive function can it be maintained that the sexes differ absolutely, yet the logical connection this has with the sex division of labour is not readily apparent. Especially is this true when one considers that there were both men and women in whom the reproductive function was quiescent, namely those who never attained parenthood or whose reproductive period either had not yet begun or had past.

The study is foremost an attempt to understand the why of women's work. Why was it divided from men's and why did it encompass the occupations it did? Secondly, this thesis focuses upon the reaction of women to their own employment status. The 1891-1921 period coincides with the advance of the "woman's rights" movement² whereby women, as active agents in furthering their interests as citizens, wives, mothers, and persons, also undertook to improve their status as workers. Why was there dissatisfaction with it? What were the measures taken to better it? How effective were they? What did they signify for the sex division?

The answers to both sets of pivotal questions are sought in the occupational experience of women relative to men between the years 1891 and 1921. Statistical considerations were uppermost in determining the particular boundary years. Being Census ones there exists for each, as well as for 1901 and 1911, a comprehensive record of the occupational distribution of the sexes.

As for the particular period, it was sufficiently near to the present in occupational practice and outlook to contribute to an understanding of contemporary women's employment. On the other hand, it was sufficiently remote to enable occupational patterns and trends to be ascertained. Moreover it provided the opportunity to study women's employment in both a peacetime and wartime setting.

This thesis is divided into three periods: 1) the Pre-War, 1891-1914; 2) The War, 1914-1918; and 3) The Aftermath, 1918-1921. The first provides not only the occupational data for showing the prevailing sex division but also the background data for explaining it. The second period embraces the years the economy was increasingly committed to satisfying the military needs of the First

²Purposely the movement has not been described as feminism. Whereas feminism sought to secure rights for women equal to men's, the "woman's rights" movement was much broader. Not only did it embrace "feminists" but also those who, while basically content with woman's relative status, sought only to remedy specific grievances arising from it.

World War and thus serves to portray the occupational impact of a sudden and temporary diversion of a sizeable proportion of the regular civilian male labour force into combatant service at a time when the demand for labour on the home front continued without abatement. The third, with its rapid demobilization of men from military service and the change from a war to a back-to-normalcy economy, provides the setting for re-examining women's employment in both its content and its division from men's and for judging what lasting effect, if any, the innovations of wartime had on its normal course.

For the purpose of this thesis, "woman" and "man" are defined as any person of the respective sex ten years of age or over. Ten has been chosen because that is the lower age limit used by both the Census of England and Wales and the Census of Scotland in their occupational tables for the years 1891, 1901 and 1911.³ Because in 1921 the Census authorities, consequent upon a recent rise in the school-leaving age, raised the lower age limit to twelve, the potential work force of 1921 has been computed on the basis of a lower age limit of ten so as to permit comparison with the three earlier Censuses.

In general the Census definition of the term "gainfully employed" is the one adopted here. In those instances, however, where the comparability of the data relating to women's employment is importantly affected by a change in definition from one Census year to the next, the figures have been adjusted so as to make at least a rough comparison possible.⁴

It might be claimed that no study of woman's employment is complete that ignores prostitution. Reliable statistical and descriptive data about it, however, are virtually non-existent. As an "unrecognized" pursuit, along with robbery, gambling, begging, and the like, the Census excludes it from its definition of gainful employment. As a "shameful" pursuit, secrecy surrounds its conditions. Lacking an alternative, this thesis follows Census practice and similarly denies prostitution the status of a gainful pursuit but does not ignore it altogether. Its economic relevance is still recognized, even if less directly, as one way among others that female labour was subsidized.

Little attempt has been made to relate the findings of this study with those of others. The few analyses which were found of women's employment for the 1891-1921 period were made on a fragmentary basis with definitions and elaborations lacking or insufficiently developed. Consequently they do not invite critical agreement or disagreement. At best referral can only be made to them and to assorted interpretations given to various aspects of women's employment prior and subsequent to the 1891-1921 period which are representative and which bear on the central questions raised here.⁵

³The 1891 Census of Scotland included occupied persons under ten years of age but the numbers involved are so small that their inclusion may be disregarded.

⁴For numerical adjustments made see Appendix A.

⁵See *Report of the Royal Commission on Equal Pay 1944-46*, chap. 8, pp. 187-193, app. xi; 1945-46 Cmd. 6937, xi and *Appendices IX and X*, 1946 Non-Parl. *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, pp. 69-75, 257-272; app. II; 1919 Cmd. 135 and Cmd. 167; xxxi *A Study of the Factors which have operated in the past and those which are operating now to determine the distribution of Women in Industry*; 1929-30 Cmd. 3508, xvii. E. Canaan, *Wealth*, 3rd ed., London: King, 1928, pp. 210-216. G. Cassel, *The Theory of Social Economy*, London: Unwin, 1923, I, 314-316. J. Mallon "The Wage Census of 1906" in B. Hutchins, *Women in Modern Industry*, London: Bell, 1915, pp. 234-238. J. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, 8th ed., London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1878, I, 489-491. A. Pigou, *The Economics of Welfare*, 3rd ed., London: Macmillan, 1929, pp. 506-507, 563-570. W. Smart, *Studies in Economics*, London: Macmillan, 1895, chap. 4. F. Taussig, *Principles of Economics*, 3rd ed. rev., New York: Macmillan, 1929, II, 149-152. A. Scheinfeld, *Women and Men*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1947, chaps. 22 and 23. F. Wallker, *The Wages Question*, London: Macmillan, 1886, pp. 372-384. D. Barton, "Equal Pay for Equal Work?", *Women's Industrial News*, vol. 22, new series, no. 82, Jan. 1919, pp. 6-16. E. Boucherett, "The Fall in Women's Wages", *Englishwoman's Review*, vol. 29, new series, no. 11, Apr. 1898, pp. 73-81. F. Edgeworth, "Equal Pay to Men and Women for Equal Work", *Economic Journal*, vol. 32, no. 128, Dec. 1922, pp. 431-457. F. Edgeworth, "Women's Wages in Relation to Economic Welfare", *Economic Journal*, vol. 33, no. 132, Dec. 1923, pp. 487-495. M. Fawcett, "Equal Pay for Equal Work", *Economic Journal*, vol. 28, no. 109, Mar. 1918, pp. 1-6. M. Fawcett, "Mr. Sidney Webb's Article on Women's Wages", *Economic Journal*, vol. 2, no. 5, Mar. 1892, pp. 173-175. P. Florence, "A Statistical Contribution to the Theory of Women's Wages", *Economic Journal*, vol. 41, no. 161, Mar. 1931, pp. 19-37. E. Gore-Booth, "Women's Wages and the Laws of Supply and Demand", *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 76, no. 450, Aug. 1914, pp. 384-393. D. Jones, "The Cheapness of Women", *Englishwoman's Review*, vol. 40, new series, no. 4, Oct. 1909, pp. 235-243. S. Webb, "The Alleged Differences in the Wages Paid to Men and Women for Similar Work", *Economic Journal*, vol. 1, no. 4, Dec. 1891, pp. 635-662. M. Dobb, *Wages*, Cambridge: University Press, 1960, pp. 149-155. K. Rothschild, *The Theory of Wages*, Oxford: Blackwell: 1960, pp. 79-82.

Part I

THE SEX DIVISION: 1891-1914

The period 1891-1914 is divided into three parts. The first describes how the labour of the sexes was divided. The second accounts for the division and for women's side of the dividing line. The third concerns the what and the why of changes in women's employment.

Chapter 1

Methodology and Over-all Division

1.1 Methodology

Because the sex division of labour is fundamental to the argument of this thesis, the method employed to reveal it needs to be explicitly stated. To show how and to what extent women's work differed from men's was not simply a process of collecting a list of the occupations in Great Britain and then classifying them into those customarily done by women, those by men, and those interchangeably by either. Certain conceptual and technical obstacles had first to be surmounted before it was possible to proceed.

The raw material of occupational analysis is the finite job. At this level worker and work meet and at this point labour, hitherto amorphous, is shaped by the job requirements into an identifiable form. Because the combination of processes which define the job requirements are infinitely varied, the forms that labour assumes are also. Thus to know what was *really* men's and women's work nothing less than a complete job analysis of industry, branch by branch, would have sufficed. Yet no such records exist. Consequently, the first methodological problem was to find a way to infer with reasonable accuracy the work men and women did in their specific jobs.

The second problem was an offshoot of the first. Assuming the collection of the required job data, there was still the need to "manufacture" them into an analytically usable product. What was required was a system of job classification whereby similar jobs could be grouped together into more conceptually manageable categories. These categories would then form the analytical unit for assessing the respective work of men and women.

To satisfy this purpose, any classification system adopted would have to be not only logically defensible but also have categories 1) sufficiently general to reduce the diverse array of finite jobs to a workable number of "occupations", 2) sufficiently concrete to manifest relevant sex differences, and 3) sufficiently precise to make possible a reliable correspondence between the term and the "fact" it embraced. To achieve this last end, definitions would have to be explicit and boundary lines between categories distinct.

Assuming such an ideal classification system, one final procedural problem remained. Some method would have to be devised to disentangle from the fact of a man or woman performing a given occupation at a given time the fact that sex or sex-connected attributes were not merely incidental to but in some way associated with his or her employment.

Though no foolproof source of data exists by which to answer the three methodological problems of 1) inference, 2) classification, and 3) interpretation, the Census is by far the best available. Contained in its reports of 1891, 1901 and 1911 are detailed occupational tables on a sex basis incorporating the gainful occupations, as enumerated on the householder's schedule, for virtually every person ten years of age and over in the resident population.

Furthermore, these data are presented in a usefully digested form. The many thousands of terms by which people described their occupation had been entered in a dictionary of occupations. These in turn had been classified by the Census authorities, with all their experienced judgment to assist them, into analytically manageable categories, in their most detailed form as headings numbering a few hundred and in their most general one as Orders, some twenty odd.

Here essentially was the data needed to show the sex division. But still required was a way to interpret it. How was the factor of chance to be disentangled from the fact that a man or woman engaged in a given occupation? By rendering a statistical answer possible, the Census data again proved helpful.

According to statistical theory if the sex of the worker was an indifferent employment factor, the proportion of men to women in any occupation of appreciable size would be similar to their proportionate numbers in the total work force. Deviations from this so-called normal distribution, on the other hand, would indicate that sex-connected factors were affecting occupational distribution. In order to utilize this key conceptual tool of "normal distribution" the relative share of the sexes in each occupational category and in the total labour force needs to be known. Since this information is readily obtainable from the Census data, the concept of "normal distribution" can be used to distinguish between what is only an apparent and what is a real sex division.

Since any analysis is only as sound as its factual base, it is important to mention at this point the drawbacks of the Census data. From the viewpoint of this thesis, their most serious flaw lies in the way the information was obtained. The Census derives its occupational tables from returns filled in by the people themselves. This method of occupational self-diagnosis would not in itself be of concern if the terms ascribed were based on any clearly defined and generally accepted system of occupational nomenclature. But in fact the contemporary occupational vernacular was highly imprecise.

The populace adhered to no set principles in assigning occupational ratings. All too often mere chance or custom decided whether work recognizably different in content was or was not dignified with a separate title. Thus even the Census had to admit its difficulty, for example, in deciding whether a person returned as a baker was a maker or a seller of bread. In many cases the demarcation was non-existent, thereby adding to the classification problem. Farm servant was another imprecise term. Did it mean a domestic servant on a farm or a farm labourer? Was a machinist a maker of machines or a machine operator? And Census efforts to the contrary, the heading Accountants not only included the intended professional accountant but accountants' clerks and commercial clerks as well.

Similar inconsistencies obtained regarding work of a comparable nature. Many workers described their calling merely in terms of the article produced, the material used, or the service rendered. Thus, under the existing conditions of enumeration, a purely occupational tabulation could not be secured and persons engaged in work of a similar character would on occasion be diversely classified to the manufacture, trade or service with which they were connected.

The occupational returns of women presented special problems of their own. Since a substantial amount of women's work was of a subsidiary or casual nature, many gainfully employed women were just as liable to return themselves as wife or housekeeper, and therefore be "unoccupied" according to Census definition, as charwoman, cook, or assistant in a shop and therefore be "occupied". Not until the Census of 1911 was there a definite instruction on the schedule to consider as "occupied" women who were regularly engaged in assisting relatives in trade or business. So considerably did this new instruction increase the number of occupied women in agriculture, as dealers and as boarding and lodging house keepers that the returns for these particular occupations in so far as they related to women were no longer considered comparable with those of the two earlier Censuses.

As long as no authoritative machinery existed to settle questions of definition, common usage remained the final arbiter. But as the product of rules of thumb and of *ad hoc* decisions, it is incapable of producing occupational concepts free from ambiguity.

Though constituting the crux of the analytical problem, the conceptual weakness of the contem-

porary occupational nomenclature is not its sole shortcoming. Since the occupational focus is to be a dynamic one, the need is not only for reliable occupational data as such but data comparable over a period of time. Once this additional requirement is imposed, a conceptual difficulty of yet another order arises.

The nearly quarter of a century encompassed between 1891 and 1914 was a period in which many occupations, no matter how loosely perceived, were actually in a state of flux. Consequently, even if a heading persisted in the Census reports throughout these years, that in itself was no guarantee that it retained intact its pristine meaning. Such was the case with the heading embracing teachers. Prior to 1911 teachers in training were included under it because much of their training was obtained through part-time or whole-time teaching. By the 1911 Census, teacher training methods had changed and in recognition of this fact the Census now considered intending teachers as whole-time students, and as such “unoccupied”.

Also occupations once of sufficient importance to be separately listed became merged into more generalized headings as their significance to the economy receded. The ticket, label-writer of 1891 was by 1911 but one of many Other Workers in Paper, and the Shawl Manufacture of the earlier Census year was included among Other Workers in Dress by 1911.

On the other hand, with the passage of years the labour demand was entering new channels and the rise of new occupations or the development of old ones was introducing new terms into the occupational vernacular.¹ For example, though listed subsequently, there was as yet no reference in the Census of 1891 to Lock, Key-Makers or Gas Fittings Makers but only to the craftsmen Locksmiths and Gasfitters. The existence of the first two presupposed the mass manufacture of locks, keys and gas fittings, which in 1891 was not yet a recognized feature of the economy.

Yet despite its shortcomings, the Census is capable of showing the sex division in broad outline. This is partly because the sex division was such a common occupational phenomenon that regardless of ambiguities in meaning various occupational titles did tend to fall consistently on either women’s or men’s side of the dividing line. Thus even the Census considered itself justified to base its classifications of certain imprecise returns upon the principle of sex division. A woman simply returning herself as a machinist was assumed to be a sewing machine operator and as such was allocated to the Dress Order.² A man with the same occupational designation was automatically classified to the Other, General and Undefined Workers and Dealers Order as Machinists, Machine Workers (undefined). If a woman designated her occupation as box maker she was listed as a cardboard box maker. A man similarly returning himself was considered a wooden box maker and classified accordingly.

The adequacy of the Census data is also partly due to the efforts of the successive compilers of the Census reports to give guidance on matters affecting the comparability of the statistics with those previously published. Especially is this factor of account in 1911 when comparable figures for 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911 were published in full detail on a sex basis for England and Wales.³

And finally the very lack of Census comparability from Census to Census offers in itself some key occupational insights. For each Census is a compromise between the need for data comparable with the past and the desire to make improvements that will give better information about the population and its characteristics than had previously been obtained. Thus the very development in Census procedures is a record of occupational change which serves to highlight changing aspects of women’s employment for the period under review.

Although the Census data permit the sex division to be depicted in broad strokes, that is not enough. With most of the Census headings containing some women it would seem that in many cases men and women were engaged in the same work. Yet such a conclusion fails to take account of subtle sex distinctions. The common occupational label might obscure a branch or process distinction.

¹The trend was towards an increasingly diverse economy and the Census dictionary of occupations mirrored this development. Whereas in 1891 it included roughly 12,000 terms, and in 1901, 15,000, by 1911 it included some 30,000 terms.

²The Dress Order of the Census is incorporated into the Clothing Order of this study. See Appendix Table A.8.

³*Census of England and Wales, 1911*. X, i, Tables 25 and 26; 1913 Cd. 7018, lxxviii.

Thus from the Census it can not be known how many men and women were typists since the most detailed listing given for persons engaged in this work is Commercial Clerk, a term including, among others, typists, stock clerks, cashiers, electric light collectors, invoice clerks, bookkeepers and adding machine operators. Moreover, within each branch or process, the work might be further sex-divided such as according to the shifts worked, the skills exercised or the weights handled. Consequently, more detailed data than the Census is capable of providing are needed if the division is to be shown in its full dimensions,

Furthermore, for providing a dynamic picture of the sex division, the Census' quantitative measure is not sensitive enough to distinguish between a real and only an apparent change. For a change in the occupational sex ratio is no guarantee that a true displacement had occurred. It might be merely statistical in source. Or it might simply reflect a decrease in the demand for the work performed by one sex relative to the other without any change in the occupational demarcation line between them. Thus when the sewing machine was applied to straw hat manufacture, the sewing process as such remained, as it had hitherto been, in women's hands. But the greater efficiency of machine sewing had reduced the number of sewers needed by the industry. As a result women's share in straw hat manufacture declined without any actual transfer of demand from women to men.

Nor are the Census figures capable of showing the full extent of displacement if simultaneously other types of work encompassed by the same heading were expanding or contracting. Tobacco manufacture provided one such instance. When men machine cigarette makers began to displace women hand cigarette makers after the turn of the century, the figures failed to reflect fully the change. For to some extent compensating for the decline of the female cigarette maker was the increased employment of women to assist the male cigarette machine operators and to pack by hand the greatly increased output produced by the machines.

The need, therefore, was to enlarge the Census occupational picture so that the actual job assignments of the sexes could be seen in greater detail. Fortunately contemporary records do exist to suggest how the work was allocated between men and women. One such record is Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London*.⁴ The Royal Commission on Labour's report on *The Employment of Women*, written by the first official women investigators of women's industrial conditions, provides another key source.⁵ Also fruitful are the reports of the lady factory inspectors. Their detailed observations of women's employment gained in the course of their factory and workshop inspections were duly noted in the annual reports of the Factory Department. The Home Office memoranda *Substitution of Men for Women during the War* and *Substitution of Women in Non-Munition Factories during the War*⁶ as well as the *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*⁷ also contain much relevant data about the customary pre-war sex division of processes and services. Numerous industrial surveys carried on privately by such bodies as the Women's Industrial Council,⁸ the Ratan Tata Foundation⁹ and the Fabian Women's Group¹⁰ provide yet further instances of sources from which the respective job contents of men and women can be inferred. So do assorted contemporary vocational guidance books.¹¹

The fundamental shortcoming with data of this nature, however, is not so much its validity as its reliability. For instance, in obtaining her information about women's industrial conditions in the Birmingham, Walsall, Dudley and Staffordshire areas, one of the Assistant Lady Commissioners for

⁴Second Series: Industry, new and rev. ed., London: Macmillan, 1903.

⁵1893-94 C. 6894, xxxvii, pt. I.

⁶Both 1919 Non-Parl.

⁷1919 Cmd 135 and Cmd. 167 xxxi.

⁸E.g., C. Butler, *Domestic Service*, London: Bell, 1916; C. Black (ed.), *Married Women's Work*, London: Bell, 1915.

⁹E.g., R. Tawney, *The Establishment of Minimum Rates in the Tailoring Industry under the Trade Boards Act of 1909*, London: Bell, 1915; M. Bulkeley, *The Establishment of Legal Minimum Rates in the Boxmaking Industry under the Trade Boards Act of 1909*, London: Bell, 1915.

¹⁰E.g., E. Morley (ed.), *Women Workers in Seven Professions*, London: Routledge, 1914; B. Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, London: Labour Research Dept. and Allen and Unwin c. 1920.

¹¹E.g., Central Bureau for the Employment of Women, *The Fingerpost: A Guide to the Professions and Occupations of Educated Women*. London, 1906; Mrs. Philipps et al., *A Dictionary of Employments Open to Women*, London: Women's Institute, 1898.

the Royal Commission on Labour listed her sources as follows:

Evidence has been obtained from 125 persons, of whom 48 are employers or representatives of employers engaged in the manufacture of buttons, picture frames, bedsteads, buckles, boots, furniture, screws, boxes, silver chains, jewel and spectacle cases, umbrella furniture, jewellery, pens, saddlery, earthenware, cocoa, and clothing, 24 are women or girls engaged in factories or workshops in processes connected with the manufacture of pens, gold chains, hairpins, nails, pearl buttons, whips, wire guards, saddlery, earthenware and men's clothing, 14 are women and girls working in their own homes, 12 are dressmakers, shop assistants and milliners, and the remaining 28 include amongst them medical officers, factory and sanitary inspectors, managers of homes or evening clubs for girls, and trade union officials¹²

On what basis these particular 125 persons were chosen remains obscure as does the size of the universe of which they formed a part. Thus subject to question is the sampling method employed. The same sampling difficulty emerges in connection with most of the other descriptive sources.¹³ Nevertheless as occupational amplifiers they can be used with confidence because regardless of how each obtained its data, their findings as to the sex division are not contradictory but corroboratory.

With the methodological problems and approach briefly indicated there remain but a few minor points to mention. The occupational content of the 1891-1914 period is here broadly conceived as consisting of twenty specific categories and one miscellaneous and undefined manufacturing one, a total of twenty-one in all. Except for minor adjustments to express more clearly the sex division or to assist in its analysis, these categories, or what may be loosely termed "industries", are basically the Orders found in the serial tables of the 1911 Census of England and Wales referred to above. However, to reflect more precisely the adjustments and to use more up-to-date expressions, the Census nomenclature has not been adopted in its entirety.¹⁴

Those "industries" most important to women generally receive the most detailed treatment, but this rule is modified under the following circumstances: 1) when an "industry" of minor importance in the 1891-1914 period, such as Metals, subsequently becomes important, 2) when the sex ratio in an "industry" changes between 1891 and 1911, and 3) when men and women are found in what appears to be "equal work" within an "industry". By supplementing the over-all description of the sex division with these additional enlargements, valuable insights into the reasons for its existence can be ascertained which would otherwise be hidden if the only criteria for emphasis were numbers alone.

As hitherto noted, the Census of England and Wales for 1911 provides comparable figures on a sex basis for the years 1881, 1891, 1901, and 1911. Although comparable tables were published for Scotland as well, they were only given on a consolidated basis, thereby rendering them of little use for a detailed analysis of the sex division. Thus to obtain figures for Britain as a whole, the Scottish figures for 1891 have been taken from the 1891 Census of Scotland, and for 1901 and 1911, from a comparative listing given in the 1911 Census of Scotland.¹⁵ These figures have then been juxtaposed against their English and Welsh equivalents as given in the serial table of the 1911 Census of England and Wales. In this way a statistical picture of the occupational distribution of the sexes in Great Britain has been secured.¹⁶

The figures used in the text, unless otherwise indicated, are averages of the Census returns for 1891, 1901 and 1911. To give each Census year equal weight and so avoid the bias introduced into average figures by the fact that the labour force expanded with each subsequent Census, only

¹²Royal Commission on Labour, *The Employment of Women, op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹³The one notable exception is C. Booth's, *Life and Labour of the People in London*. A description of his method can be found in B. Webb, *My Apprenticeship*, London: Longmans, Green, 1926, pp.216 ff.

¹⁴For terms used see below p. 10; for adjustments made in definition and terminology see Appendix A.

¹⁵"Summary of the Occupations of the Inhabitants of Scotland, Distinguishing the Sexes, Under and Above 20 Years of Age", *Census of Scotland. 1891*, II, ii, 3-9; 1893-94 C. 7134, cviii. *Census of Scotland, 1911*, II, Table D1; 1913 Cd. 6896, lxxx.

¹⁶For statistical tables constructed in accordance with this method see Appendix A.

averages of percentages computed on the basis of each Census year will be used. For example, women constituted 31.31 per cent of the work force in 1891, 29.88 per cent in 1901, and 29.56 per cent in 1911, thus giving an average figure of 30.25 per cent for the period under review.

There will be a number of details included in the descriptive section which strictly speaking lie outside its scope. Data relating to an occupation's working conditions, organization and localization will at times be included for the subsequent bearing they have on the question of women's work. However, since all explanations of the sex difference are best considered in a unified way the particular relevance of any seemingly extraneous data will not be made evident prior to the explanatory chapters.

1.2 Over-all Division

Before proceeding to the crux of this part's subject matter, the occupational relationship between the sexes, perspective is gained by first showing their distribution relative to the total work offered by the economy. To portray this simply, the economy is viewed as consisting of three sectors—Primary, Manufacturing and Service—respectively made up of the following “industries”:

1. PRIMARY

- (a) Agriculture and Fishing
- (b) Mining

2. MANUFACTURING

- (a) Textiles
- (b) Clothing
- (c) Paper
- (d) Food, Drink and Tobacco
- (e) Skins and Leather
- (f) Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc.
- (g) Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass
- (h) Wood
- (i) Metals
- (j) Construction
- (k) Miscellaneous

3. SERVICE

- (a) Personal Service
- (b) Professional Service
- (c) Distribution
- (d) Public Administration
- (e) Commerce
- (f) Transportation and Communication
- (g) Public Utilities
- (h) National Defence

Table 1.1: Per Cent Distribution of Occupied Males and Females and of All Occupied Persons in Great Britain by Sector, 1891-1911.

Sector	Females				Males	Persons
	1891	1901	1911	Average 1891-1911	Average 1891-1911	Average 1891-1911
Service	57.10	59.49	60.11	58.90	35.25	42.41
Manufacturing	39.51	37.66	37.41	38.19	43.84	42.13
Primary	3.39	2.85	2.48	2.91	20.91	15.46

Table 1.2: Females as a Per Cent of Total Work Force in Great Britain by Sector, 1891-1911.

Sector	1891	1901	1911	Average 1891-1911
Service	44.94	41.64	39.67	42.08
Manufacturing	28.08	26.52	27.73	27.44
Primary	6.56	5.72	4.77	5.68
All Sectors	31.31	29.88	29.56	30.25

The nation's work force was apportioned as follows: Manufacturing and Service evenly divided between them eighty-five per cent of the occupied population; Primary, the remaining fifteen per cent. If men and women had been indifferently employed, their occupational distribution would have been similarly proportioned. Instead, their respective distributions varied notably from that of the nation's as a whole. Service was by far women's most important sector. Manufacturing, in second place, lagged considerably behind while Primary offered women virtually no scope. With men, Manufacturing was in the lead, and though Primary, as with women, was of least importance, it still provided men with a substantial amount of employment as fully one-fifth of the male labour force owed its livelihood to it.

In other words six out of every ten occupied women were in service occupations while four out of every ten occupied men were. In contrast, two out of every ten occupied men were engaged in primary occupations while relatively few women were found in this work. Only in manufacturing was there any semblance of an employment outlet being as important to women as to men. For both sexes, roughly four out of every ten were so occupied.

To complete the over-all picture, women's relative share of the nation's work now needs to be considered. From this it can be seen that women, accounting for three-tenths of the total work force, were less than "normally" represented in the primary occupations, more than "normally" represented in the service occupations, and close to "normally" represented in the manufacturing occupations.

Having shown in broad strokes the occupational position of men and women relative to the available work, the next step is to show how their work differed. The analysis will proceed on a sector basis from the one most important to women to the one least important.

Chapter 2

The Service Sector and Personal and Professional Services

2.1 The Service Sector

Although the Service Sector embraced eight distinct “industries”—Personal, Professional, Distribution, Commerce, Public Administration, Transportation and Communication, Public Utilities, and National Defence—, only the first three made much use of female labour. Personal Service, towering well over the other two, accounted for seventy per cent of all women service workers. Distribution and Professional Service between them used another twenty-five per cent, leaving but five per cent of the women service workers to cover the five remaining “industries”.

Men’s distribution differed. Transportation and Communication was men’s most important “industry”, followed by Distribution and Commerce. As for Personal Service, it accounted for only one out of every ten men service workers.

Women formed the majority sex only in Personal Service where they accounted for eighty-five out of every one hundred workers. They were also well-represented in Professional Service where they constituted close to one-half of the total work force. Public Administration and Commerce, on the other hand, relied much less on female labour, Transportation and Communication, hardly at all, while in Public Utilities, only a handful, and in National Defence, not a single woman was employed.

The work of men and women within each service “industry” will now be examined beginning in this chapter with women’s work *par excellence*, Personal Service, followed by Professional Service.

Table 2.1: Per Cent Distribution of Male and Female Service Workers in Great Britain by “Industry”, 1891-1911.

“Industry”	Females			Males	
	1891	1901	1911	Average 1891-1911	Average 1891-1911
Personal Service	75.38	70.35	65.35	70.36	9.18
Distribution	12.15	14.06	15.39	13.87	23.40
Professional Service	10.13	11.13	11.75	11.00	8.78
Commerce	.93	2.56	4.81	2.77	14.31
Public Administration	.65	.98	1.53	1.05	4.90
Transportation and Communication	.76	.92	1.18	.95	33.63
Public Utilities	-	-	-	-	1.49
National Defence	-	-	-	-	4.32

Table 2.2: Females as a Per Cent of Total Service Work Force in Great Britain by “Industry”, 1891-1911.

“Industry”	Average			
	1891	1901	1911	1891-1911
Personal Service	87.08	84.84	81.97	84.63
Professional Service	46.80	48.04	48.10	47.65
Distribution ^a	29.99	29.99	29.99	29.99
Public Administration	10.36	10.07	15.51	12.98
Commerce	5.25	11.30	17.47	11.34
Transportation and Communication	1.76	1.88	2.36	2.00
Public Utilities	.02	.06	.08	.05
National Defence	-	-	-	-
All Service Workers	44.94	41.64	39.67	42.08

^aFor explanation of uniformity of figures see below p. 24

Table 2.3: Per Cent Distribution of Male and Female Personal Service Workers in Great Britain by Branch, 1891-1911.

Branch	Females			Males	
	Average				
	1891	1901	1911	1891-1911	1891-1911
Domestic	80.93	77.36	76.90	78.40	28.61
Food and Lodging	8.88	12.15	14.25	11.76	52.25
Laundry	10.11	10.38	8.61	9.70	2.64
Hairdressing	.07	.09	.23	.13	9.95
Sanitary	.01	.01	.01	.01	6.54

2.2 Personal Service

For analytical purposes, Personal Service is divided into five branches, namely, Domestic, Laundry, Food and Lodging, Hairdressing, and Sanitary. The Domestic Branch accounted for four-fifths of all women personal service workers: Laundry, and Food and Lodging for almost all of the rest. In contrast Food and Lodging Service was men’s most important branch with five out of every ten men personal service workers so engaged. Domestic Service, men’s next largest branch, accounted for another three, while among Hairdressing, Sanitary, and Laundry Services the remaining two were absorbed. Thus a little over fifteen per cent of the men were in branches which accorded women hardly any openings.

In terms of relative shares, Domestic and Laundry Services were mainly performed by women, Food and Lodging Service about equally divided between the sexes, Hairdressing and Sanitary Services mainly by men, and they are considered in that order.

2.2.1 Domestic Service

Domestic service was performed privately for families and non-privately for institutions and for business and government establishments. Though the non-private sector employed proportionally more and the private sector proportionally fewer occupied women with each succeeding Census, the latter sector nevertheless continued as the backbone of the demand for female labour not only in Personal Service but in the labour market as a whole. Even as of 1911 one-fourth of all occupied women were private domestics.

Table 2.4: Females as a Per Cent of Total Personal Service Work Force in Great Britain by Branch, 1891-1911.

Branch	Average			
	1891	1901	1911	1891-1911
Laundry	96.49	95.79	93.09	95.12
Domestic	94.72	94.18	92.42	93.77
Food and Lodging	53.18	55.91	56.25	55.11
Hairdressing	4.84	4.77	9.20	6.27
Sanitary	1.56	.68	.36	.87
All Personal Service Workers	87.08	84.84	81.97	84.63

private domestic service

Occupationally, women's work as private domestic servants had developed into three basic specialties: cook, parlourmaid and housemaid. With these three types of servants a household was considered functionally complete. All other household arrangements were merely a development of this theme, ranging from the less-specialized one- and two-servant households in which mistresses and grown daughters would themselves share in the housework to that of the "grander establishments"¹ where even servants would have servants to assist them.

In addition women served as nursery-maids and lady's maids. The former catered to the wants of babies and young children. The latter, usually very accomplished persons, skilled both as dressmakers and hairdressers, were found only in wealthy households. Women were also privately engaged as laundrymaids.

Men's work as indoor servants² took such forms as butler, footman, valet, caretaker, and scullery man. Though the butler's work was in many respects similar to that of the pantrymaid found in the less elaborately organized households, the butler performed a service not shared by her. In an age when fashion insisted on the presence of a man in fine livery at the front door, the butler was also able to serve his employer as a hallmark of respectability. Another special feature of the male indoor domestic was that he was largely spared from the household's heavier routine tasks. As one British conferee remarked at a meeting of the International Council of Women, in "all their houses it was the men who cleaned the silver whilst the women scrubbed the floor".³

Private domestic service was peculiarly organized in that it was the period's only numerically important occupation carried on upon the employer's premises with board and lodging added to money wages.⁴ But though residence with the family was the rule, a new development received its first formal recognition in the 1911 Census of England and Wales when the heading Day Girl was introduced for the first time, grouping together those workers who returned themselves as daily cook, morning girl, and nurse domestic (daily). In previous Censuses these so-called day girls were included under the more general heading of domestic indoor servant. But by 1911, they were of sufficient numerical importance in England and Wales to be listed separately.

Domestic service was both an urban and rural trade. But its most concentrated demand came from those areas where the wealthy congregated—fashionable suburbs, health resorts and the residential districts near London.

¹C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London* Second Series: Industry, new and rev. ed., London: Macmillan, 1903, IV, 218.

²Apart from gamekeepers, persons employed in private outdoor domestic service, almost all men, were mostly classified by the Census as transportation or agricultural workers, depending on the nature of their work. Not only has the Census practice been followed here but gamekeepers have also been classified as agricultural workers so as to make private domestic service a purely indoor branch.

³*Report of Transactions of the Second Quinquennial Meeting Held in London. July 1899*, London: Unwin, 1900, VI, p. 56.

⁴Soldiers, sailors, merchant seamen and diminishing numbers of agricultural labourers, shop assistants and apprentices also shared this particular condition of employment, but the numbers of each were insignificant relative to those of private domestic servants.

Though the existence of a so-called servant question was apparently not new to the 1891-1914 period,⁵ the form it took in the latter period was perhaps without precedent. Beginning in the eighties and becoming “acute” in the nineties⁶ the supply of female domestic servants declined proportionate to the population while the demand for their services at prevailing rates and conditions not only failed to slacken but continued to expand as more families, sharing in the rise of the national wealth, sought the comforts of living which, in the period under review, only the system of private domestic service was prepared to supply.⁷ Especially were servants in short supply in those areas offering alternative employments for women.⁸

non-private domestic service

Throughout the period under review the pre-existing trend for institutions to replace such traditional family functions as sick care, child education and assistance to aged and destitute members, and for industry to pass from the home to office, workshop and factory continued, bringing in its wake an increasing demand for domestic servants to meet the housekeeping requirements of the growing numbers of institutions and commercial establishments.

Non-private domestic service followed much the same sex division pattern as its private counterpart. The women so engaged, though assortedly titled chambermaids, scrubbers, charwomen, kitchenwomen and the like, differed little in function from the private domestic. Men also tended to be but counterparts of those privately employed so that even the newly developing children’s playgrounds and small recreation grounds in urban areas were placed in the charge of male caretakers. However, compared to private household work, men in the non-private sector had greater scope as indoor domestics. Particularly was this the case in institutions such as colleges and clubs which catered exclusively for men.

2.2.2 Laundry Service

Traditionally laundering was a domestic hand industry relying almost exclusively on female labour. Even its supervisors and managers were mainly women, a practice which distinguished it from most other industries of the period. In 1891, when the Census of that year revealed laundresses as constituting ninety-six per cent of all those in Laundry Service, these women were still predominantly hand workers occupied in their own home or on their employer’s premise.

The work they did was sectionalized into three major divisions—washing, ironing, and packing and sorting—with no interchange of employment among them except in the very small laundries. The ironers were the most important group. Not only did they dominate it numerically but they alone of all laundry women possessed any degree of manual skill. The finery ironers, the aristocrats among the ironers, had to undergo a long period of training.

Men’s scope in the hand laundry trade was very narrow.⁹ To a limited extent they participated in laundry management. They were also occasionally found in the wash house as “dollymen” for the

⁵See M. Steuart, “The Servant Question in Fiction”, *Englishwoman*, vol. 11, no. 33, Sept. 1911, pp. 301-308.

⁶R. Ensor, *History of England. 1870-1914*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936, p. 272.

⁷Not until later in the twentieth century were labour saving devices adapted for use in the home. The gas cooker was unknown in England prior to the turn of the century. Cooking in the bigger households was normally done on immense kitchen ranges. Stainless steel was not yet available to replace the many “brights” all of which had to be kept clean and polished. Carpets were hand swept and furniture and knick-knacks were hand dusted. Jams, preserves and pickles were made still largely at home. In winter there was much coal carrying as open fires in all the living rooms had to be laid, lighted, and replenished during the day. And in middle-class country and suburban homes the washing was usually done in the home right to the end of the century. See A. Bott and I. Clephane, *Our Mothers*, London: Gallancz, 1932, p. 65.

⁸Indicative of how acute the servant shortage appeared to contemporaries was the policy adopted by The British Women’s Emigration Association. Although it aimed to decrease the “oversupply” of female labour by encouraging the emigration of working women, it refused financial assistance to servants on the ground that the country could not spare their services. *Annual Report, 1909*. pp. 13-14.

⁹The relatively few men employed in the hand laundry industry were mostly delivery men and as such were classified as transportation workers by the Census.

heavy work of punching or pounding the clothes in a large tub with a wooden instrument called a dolly.

After 1891, however, this largely home industry underwent such rapid mechanization that by 1910 one factory inspector reported that the disappearance of the hand laundry was only a “matter of time”.¹⁰ The transition from a hand to machine industry was already in evidence in the 1870s, with washing the first to undergo complete mechanization. Only straight items, at that time, were ironable by machine. Then came the adaptation of the machine to an ever-widening range of ironing work. As late as 1896 it was noted that with the exception of collars, all articles requiring unusual care still depended on manual labour.¹¹ By 1900, however, a factory inspector was noticing that “a single shirt will pass through seven or eight different machines in the process of ironing alone,”¹² and in 1906 another inspector mentioned a new collar machine that was ironing three thousand collars per hour.¹³ By 1911 a shirt that used to be washed and finished by one or at most two pairs of hands now passed through as many as eighteen from start to finish,¹⁴ indicative of the great metamorphosis that had occurred in the industry in the course of a few short years.

As the laundry industry changed its methods, its structure also changed. Whereas in 1891 there had been only a few large steam laundries, in the London of 1900 there were now rows of small dwelling-houses converted into steam laundries by a common source of power. In addition there was a rapid multiplication of large companies operating well-equipped laundries that were organized into departments in which the division of labour was a marked feature.

For women the trade’s transition meant a smaller share, fewer jobs, reduced opportunities as managers and supervisors, and relatively more younger laundresses. In 1891 there were twenty-seven women to each man employed in the laundry trade. By 1911 the ratio was down to fifteen to one. In part this “serious displacement of women by men”, as one contemporary viewed the change,¹⁵ was due to the greater productivity of the factory system which required fewer women to produce a given amount of work. But it was also due to more of the trade’s work going into men’s hands. The change over to machine washing was largely responsible. Displacing the hand washerwomen were male machine minders who, among their other duties, did the heavy work of loading and unloading the washing machines.

Also underlying women’s “displacement” was its changing organizational structure. As long as laundering was a hand industry, women’s opportunities for managing and supervising its operations were present to an unusual degree. Training presented no special problems. Besides their traditional familiarity with the laundering processes as homemakers, women could arrange to train in public or commercial laundries or could engage a teacher to organize and manage the business for them until they acquired the necessary business acumen. Capital outlay was nominal compared to most other businesses. Not only was no expensive machinery needed but also there was no cost of raw material, as with manufacturing industries, to add to the cost of labour and plant. In addition the small scale operations of the hand laundry enabled the women managers to supervise every detail themselves, thereby making the possession of managerial skill *per se* much less a requirement for business success.

With the development of steam laundries the managerial role changed. Persons were now needed who through foresight could coordinate the large scale operations of a mechanized industry increasingly characterized by a marked division of labour. Detailed supervision was now a far less satisfactory substitute for managerial skill. Furthermore, the capital requirements were much higher for steam than for hand laundries. Already in 1898 the estimate was given as about four times as much.¹⁶ Men were increasingly employed as managers under these new conditions.

¹⁰ *Factory Report. 1910*, p.112; 1911 Cd. 5693, xxii.

¹¹ C. Booth, *op. cit.*, 1st ed., 1896, VIII, 256.

¹² *Factory Report, 1900*, p.382; 1901 Cd. 668, x.

¹³ *Factory Report. 1906*, p.190; 1907 Cd. 3586, x.

¹⁴ M. Bird, *Woman at Work*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1911, p.123

¹⁵ D. Haynes, “A Comparative Study of the Occupations of Men and Women, with Special Reference to their Mutual Displacement”, *Women’s Industrial News*, vol. 19, new series, no. 71, Oct. 1915, p. 381.

¹⁶ Mrs. Philipps *et al.*, *A Dictionary of Employments Open to Women*, London: Women’s Institute, 1898, p. 84.

Finally, although continuing as a trade composed predominantly of adult women, its mechanization altered the age composition of its female work force. Whereas hand ironing was an adult women's preserve, machine ironing used young girls to put articles in and take them out of the calendar. Concomitant with this development was the decline of the hand washerwomen who on the whole were in the forty-five years and over age group. Operating in unison, these two trends resulted in there being relatively more younger and fewer older laundresses in 1911 than in 1891.

Though a cousin to the laundry industry, job dry cleaning and dyeing had not developed a sufficient identity of its own by 1911 to be classified by the Census of that year as a service trade. Instead it was grouped with Bleaching, Printing, Dyeing, etc., as a sub-order of Textile Fabrics.¹⁷

Within the trade, dry cleaning was the expanding branch and the dyeing of used articles was the declining one. This change in emphasis little affected women's work for it was an established practice for men both to clean and dye. Women were the trade's subsidiary workers, occupied in such capacities as sorters, ironers, folders, menders and feather curlers. Virtually the only men found in these departments were supervisors.

2.2.3 Food and Lodging Service

Food and Lodging Service expanded in the wake of the contemporary rural migration to the cities and of the growing number of suburban commuters that followed upon the development of electric trams and motor buses around the turn of the century. For it was the increasing distances between work and home which underlay its rapid development.

Boarding and lodging house keepers were mostly women many of whom had the status of employer. The services they rendered often entailed little more than incorporating a few lodgers into their own private household arrangements. The provision of restaurant services *per se* was about equally shared between men and women. In hotel and public house keeping, however, men prevailed, the women engaged in this work being commonly female relatives of the male owners.¹⁸

As assistants in eating and lodging house service, men and women were found as waiters and waitresses, barmaids and barmen, cellarwomen and cellarwomen, and cooks. Their numbers expanded as the habit of eating out grew and the changing occupational listings of the Census reflected this development. Domestic indoor servants of catering establishments were not listed separately from those in private service until the Census of 1901. Likewise barmaids and barman were not given a separate listing from Others in Inn, Hotel, and Eating House, etc.—Service until 1901, while waiters and waitresses were not separately listed until 1911.

Constituting a little over one-half of those engaged in table waiting in 1911,¹⁹ women were most in demand for the light refreshment branch of the catering trade, namely the teashop. Rarely, on the other hand, were women found where the pressure of work needed exceptional power of endurance such as banquet waiting or where excellence of services required an unusual degree of skill. Nor were they found in the most fashionable establishments.

However, since the female-employing light refreshment branch of the restaurant trade was undergoing rapid expansion throughout the period under review, women's opportunities as commercial waitresses followed a similar trend. For though the first teashops only dated from the 1880s, so popular did they prove that already by the turn of the century "taking tea and cream buns at one of the new teashops", as noted by one social historian, had become a recognized public dissipation.²⁰

¹⁷As reported by the *1911 Census of England and Wales*, (X, i, ci) there were 2,407 men and 3,041 women engaged in the trade. Since no mention has been found of their numbers in the two previous Censuses or in any of the Scottish ones, no attempt has been made here to transfer these figures to Personal Service.

¹⁸Women's share computed only from 1911 figures because of the uncertain inclusion of assisting female relatives in 1891 and 1901.

¹⁹Figures pertain to England and Wales only as no listing of Waiters apart from Others in Inn, Hotel, Eating House, etc.—Service is given in the 1911 Census of Scotland. With the number of Scottish waiters and waitresses relatively small, their lack of inclusion little affects the overall sex ratio.

²⁰A. Bott and I. Clephane, *Our Mothers*, London: Gollancz, 1932, p. 12.

Barmaids were in every section of the trade except the smallest public house where their duties were performed by the wife or daughter of the publican. There was, however, a marked trend to replace barmaids by barmen in the rough public houses of the dock and market districts with the result that the barmaid was an almost unknown figure in such establishments by 1914. Apart from this one shift, the line dividing the work of the sexes on the whole remained constant. In such establishments where there existed both a saloon and a public bar section, men were usually employed in the latter and women in the former. In railway refreshment rooms, theatres and music halls, women were almost exclusively employed. In beerhouses, on the other hand, they were rarely present. The heavy work of moving barrels, drawing pulleys and scrubbing the bar was considered men's work and assigned to a so-called potman. Most public house cellarwork was also in the hands of men.

In 1911 women constituted forty-one per cent of those serving behind bars. But compared to 1901, when they represented forty-six per cent of the trade, their relative share had declined. The changing sex ratio followed in the wake of a growing public sentiment against barmaid work as a fit occupation for women.

The belief that so-called demoralizing temptations were inseparable from the barmaid calling led to organized agitations to close it to women. Such organizations as the Women's Temperance Association, the Church of England Temperance Society and the Women's Total Abstinence Union were involved but on the whole the anti-barmaid agitation was channelled through the Joint Committee on the Employment of Barmaids formed soon after the turn of the century.²¹ Though the Committee was never successful in its aim to close the occupation to women legally, it was sufficiently influential to have its proposed bill to restrict the employment of barmaids introduced into Parliament in 1906 and the bill's contents incorporated into a clause of the government's new Licensing Bill of 1908. Even though the clause was subsequently withdrawn for reasons of expediency,²² the attending publicity had aroused the public conscience and the exclusion the Committee failed to achieve formally was to some extent achieved informally as employers, especially in the roughest establishments, evidenced a growing reluctance to use barmaids.

Somewhat more women than men were cooks but in hotels and restaurants men were almost always in the more responsible positions and a man chef was not considered replaceable by a woman. In those restaurants requiring unusually heavy or skilled cooking, usually all the kitchen employees were male. Women predominated in the kitchens of teashops but in effect they were little more than unskilled workers with few if any qualifications as a cook.

2.2.4 Hairdressing Service

In the predominantly male trade of hairdressing,²³ the men were normally used for both women's and men's hairdressing and the women for women's hairdressing alone. However, compared to the men, these women were but amateurs, having trained but a few years to the average man's seven. Exceptionally women did barbering and men's haircutting but neither of these practices was generally approved of by the trade nor by the best class of customers. The rare woman found running a male hairdressing establishment was usually the widow of a former proprietor who catered to a low class of clientele.

2.2.5 Sanitary Service

Women were sparingly employed in Sanitary Service and then mostly as dustwomen who hand sifted and sorted refuse. With the rapid urbanization of the country, however, the quantity of refuse had expanded to such a degree that local government authorities could no longer sell their refuse

²¹Its case for closing the barmaid calling to women can be found in its *Women as Barmaids*, London: King, 1905.

²²See 195 *H.C. Deb.* 4s. 2 Nov., 1908, col.811. For debate see cols. 801-802, 806, 809, 811, 828, 840, 870-900.

²³Significantly, however, the number of women included under the heading Wig Makers, Hairdressers increased from 1,351 to 4,973 between 1891 and 1911, an intimation of the coming age of the beautician and beauty parlour.

to private contractors for subsequent sorting and sale but instead had to pay to have it removed. Destructors were developed to deal with the growing mass of refuse and, as that method came into widespread use, the end of the dustwoman was but a matter of time. By 1911 less than one hundred women returned themselves as engaged in this work.

2.3 Professional Service

Generally understood, professional work refers to those callings which can be followed only after a specified course of training which culminates in the attainment of a formal recognition of proficiency by some responsible authority. As defined by the Census however, the concept was much broader. It not only included assistants without professional standing, such as law clerks, but also embraced entire branches of work not ordinarily considered at all professional. For example, persons engaged in the provision of entertainment were so classified though they might be no more than theatre ticket collectors. Because the Census figures are too inextricably presented to permit, by rearrangement, a clearer reflection of the professional concept as defined above, they have been used as given. Since the major aim of this descriptive section is to show how the nation's work was divided between the sexes, little is lost by the lack of purity of the Census' Professional Order.

Professional workers so-called were about equally divided between men and women, the proportion being 91 women for every 100 men. But to consider the occupational category as a whole is of little value statistical or otherwise since the branches of which it was composed were so dissimilar.

Its major branches were the traditional ones of law, medicine and religion and those of teaching, engineering, literature, and the arts, yet only teaching and medicine made any substantial use of women. In them, four-fifths of all so-called women professional workers were concentrated as contrasted with one-third of all professional men. In teaching, women's most important professional outlet, women outnumbered men two and one-half times to one. In medicine, they outnumbered men two to one. Yet, however indicative, an inter-branch analysis of the sex division fails to reveal its total extent. To achieve this end as intra-branch analysis is also required.

2.3.1 Teaching

Though admittedly "teacher" was an elusive term meaning anything from a "Regius Professor to ... an alphabet-teaching nursery maid",²⁴ the work of the woman teacher differed in some marked respects from her male counterpart. In regard to the ages of pupils taught, women monopolized the infant school teaching of those below eight years of age, and constituted the majority sex in the junior school teaching of pupils between eight and twelve years of age. Beyond the age of twelve, women predominated in the secondary education of girls and men in that of boys. Among university teachers the proportion of women was very small and then their scope was almost entirely confined to women's colleges. The few women university extension lecturers mostly taught women's groups.

In terms of subject, women monopolized the teaching of domestic science and needlework. Manual training was a male province, as were commercial subjects other than language or typing. Physical training, originally the monopoly of the retired army drill sergeant, was becoming increasingly women's work as the weekly drill to inculcate habits of mechanical obedience was replaced by exercises designed to promote physical development from infancy to adult life. By 1914 women predominated as physical training teachers.

There were also geographic sex differences. Rural schools were much more apt to be staffed solely by women than urban ones. Likewise, the teaching of handicapped children was sex divided. Women largely undertook the teaching of the deaf, the mentally deficient, the blind, and the crippled. Only in the manual training of such children were men's services enlisted to any extent.

²⁴B. Webb, "English Teachers and their Professional Organisation-I", *New Statesman*, Special Supplement, vol. 5, no. 129, Sept. 25, 1915, p. 2.

Degree of responsibility formed yet another basis for sex division. The most responsible positions were usually filled by men. Headships of schools for boys were virtually all men. This was also the general pattern in mixed schools other than those catering to the youngest age groups. In them and in girls' schools women usually held the top positions. At the university level, only the women's colleges provided women with administrative scope of the highest order. In co-educational institutions, their administrative work was largely confined to posts, such as the Dean of Women students, of far less responsibility than those normally accorded men. In local art schools it was not usual for women to be head teachers. Nor in mixed poly-technics did women hold the most responsible posts. When administratively employed in such schools, their authority was limited to the women's side of the training programme.

2.3.2 Medicine

Although the medical profession embraced doctors, dentists, veterinary surgeons, midwives, nurses, and pharmacists,²⁵ women's work within it was almost totally confined to nursing and midwifery, skills which their sex practically monopolized. Men's contribution to medicine lay elsewhere. In sharp contrast to the ninety-seven out of every one hundred figure for women, no more than three out of every one hundred medical men were nurses or midwives.

Though as doctors men performed a similar function, no men were actually midwives.²⁶ But in the nursing profession men had a specialized scope. They monopolized the nursing of male mental patients both in hospitals and in private homes. And in general hospitals men were used to nurse male patients suffering from venereal disease. Nursing also provided an example of the rare situation of women normally supervising men. In military nursing, soldier and sailor hospital orderlies served as assistants to the women nurses.

Because nursing, with its almost exclusive dependence on female labour, was a rapidly growing occupation, increasing numbers of women were entering the professional world through the nursing door. Scientific medicine and surgery underlay the unprecedented demand for professional nursing services. Prior to the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century, women of the domestic servant class were considered sufficiently qualified for the work. However, as medical techniques became increasingly complex, trained nurses drawn from the educated classes made their entrance, gradually replacing their less-qualified sisters. But the transformation of nursing from a domestic to a professional service was by no means complete by the outbreak of the First World War, the very co-existence of the two conceptions calling forth a demand for the state registration of nurses from those wishing to eliminate the "unqualified" from its ranks.

As with nursing, midwifery also was in the process of changing from an amateur calling to a skilled profession. Already by 1902 public concern with the problem of infant mortality had led to the passage of a Midwives Act. Its aim was to limit the large number of maternal and infant deaths as well as the serious amount of suffering and permanent injury to women and children caused by ignorant midwives. Henceforth all midwives were required to meet definite training standards. However, since those practising prior to 1902 were permitted to continue, the complete professionalization of midwifery was still not achieved by 1914.

Most medical practitioners were men despite the number of women doctors increasing fivefold between 1891 and 1911. For even with this increase, they still numbered no more than a few hundred. These women were probably among the most highly trained body of women in the world. Yet even their exceptional training did not place them on a professional par with men. The clientele of the female general practitioner was almost entirely limited to those women who wished to consult a doctor of their own sex. In fact so non-interchangeable were the sexes that it was considered useless for a woman to buy a man's practice

²⁵The Census included pharmacists under Chemists and Druggists which statistically has been allocated to the Distribution Order because most persons so classified were in effect dealers.

²⁶According to one official estimate, midwives attended three-fourths of all English confinements in the years just prior to the war. *Memorandum on Subsidiary Health and Kindred Services for Women*, p. 3; 1918 Non-Par1., Ministry of Reconstruction.

Very few women were in specialist work. Hospital staff positions, the means for acquiring the necessary training and experience to become a specialist, were monopolized by men. Thus even surgery, with its need for a light and delicate touch, was a male preserve. So was obstetrics and gynecology. Only in the one hospital founded by women, the New Hospital for Women in London, did women fill all the staff positions. The few women at work in other hospitals were almost invariably in minor posts.

Women doctors were finding an increasing outlet for their services in government employment, especially in the rapidly expanding public health services where, after a "strenuous battle" and with the "able support" of the British Medical Association, they were finally granted "equal pay for equal work".²⁷ But if two or three posts of varying grades and remuneration were created under a health authority, women nearly always received the lowest, whatever their qualifications and experience. On the national level, they were used for the most part as medical officers for female institutional inmates and for female government employees. They were also used as medical inspectors for such institutions as schools and asylums. However, as members of the medical inspectorate, they rarely filled any of the higher administrative posts.

The woman dentist²⁸ and veterinarian were practically unknown figures. The woman pharmacist, though equally uncommon in the 1890s, was becoming more numerous by the outbreak of the war.²⁹ Only a handful were in this work in the early nineties. By 1911 some two hundred were on the chemists' and druggists' register.³⁰ Few practised on their own. Usually they headed dispensaries in institutions or were in the employ of doctors. Or else they worked in the laboratories of wholesale houses or as assistant pharmacists in chemist shops.

2.3.3 Law

As of the outbreak of the war there were no women lawyers. Only as law clerks did women participate to any extent in the country's legal affairs, though even that work was essentially men's, with men constituting ninety-eight per cent of those so occupied. But the trend was in women's favour. In 1891 not even one out of every 100 law clerks was a woman. By 1911, the figure had risen to five. The developing practice of typing legal documents was bringing women typists into legal offices at the expense of male hand copyists.

2.3.4 Religion and Social Work

With rare exception, women's work of a religious character was of a subordinate kind such as nun in the Catholic Church and sister or deaconess in the Church of England. Though the nonconformist bodies used women to preach, the preaching they did was usually without ministerial status as was the case with Biblewomen who combined nursing of the poor with religious preaching. The Salvation Army offered women exceptional scope in its evangelistic and institutional branches where they had the same status as men and the same opportunities to rise to positions of lieutenant and captain.

As for the profession of social work, it was still in its incipient stage in the 1891-1914 period. Not even the 1911 Census dictionary of occupational titles included the term "social worker". People so called, when noted at all, were variously listed under such headings as rescue worker, police court missionary, sick visitor, or temperance society service. Even so, the Census was not sensitive enough to record the complete range of titles by which the newly developing profession was identified. For example, though the pioneer hospital almoners had made their entrance in the nineties and though the number of women welfare officers in industry had sufficiently increased to justify the calling of

²⁷A. Morley (ed.), *Women Workers in Seven Professions*, London: Routledge, 1914, p. 139.

²⁸The Census affords no reliable indication of the number of women dentists. Surgical dental apparatus makers were included under Dentists in 1891, and though subsequently excluded by definition, this was not successfully achieved in practice. Moreover, dental assistants were included under Dentists throughout the period under review.

²⁹Indicatively, women's share as Chemists and Druggists rose from 6.52 per cent in 1891 to 11.25 per cent in 1901 and to 16.95 per cent in 1911.

³⁰M. Bird, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

their first conference in 1909, the Census did not formally acknowledge either group. Yet since social work was to be of much subsequent significance for women, its very earliest beginnings, as forming part of the contemporary occupational scene, deserve mention.

The nineties witnessed both a growing public awareness of the destitute circumstances of the poor and the anxiety of the middle classes to do something for them. Simultaneously they produced both a demand and a scope for voluntary charitable services far in excess of anything previously experienced. As service and not money became the basic qualification of benevolence, women entered upon the new work of voluntary social service in rapidly increasing numbers, almost to the exclusion of men. For though the administration of charitable societies was mainly a male function, the individual act of charity was traditionally regarded as women's work.

Partly from the newcomers' feelings of inadequacy and partly from the increasing appreciation of the complexities of the task of charity in an industrial society, came a growing demand for social work training. As the public became more aware of the need for trained workers and as the supply of such trained voluntary workers was at a premium, payment for the rendering of social welfare services became increasingly common, thereby opening up an entire field of gainful employment which hitherto had not existed. Thus from its original unpaid amateur status in which feelings of benevolence were all the qualification deemed necessary, social work gradually began to assume a professional character for which payment was expected. Gainful social services, as with voluntary ones, continued in women's hands.

2.3.5 Literature, Science and Engineering

Relative to men's, women's share in the world of literature was insignificant. Only one-tenth of the nation's writers were women. As authors they were most successful as fiction and cookery book writers. As journalists they reigned supreme in the newspaper departments of dress and society while men reported the more serious political and diplomatic happenings. Women's entrance into journalism coincided with the changing tone of newspapers as they attempted to increase their circulation figures. Whereas originally they catered to men's interests, by the eighties topics of special interest to women began to appear. By 1914 the lady's page, both written and edited by women, was a newspaper institution. As for librarianships, most were in the hands of men. The few women found in library work served mainly as assistants. As a rule they lacked full professional qualification. Natural scientists were almost exclusively men.³¹ So were professional engineers.

2.3.6 The Arts

Music and drama were the two areas of artistic expression in which women were on a numerical par with men. As singers women were used for the higher-pitched singing, and men for the lower-pitched. Women's scope as musicians was largely confined to music teaching.³² In contrast, men not only taught but were used for professional playing. They dominated every instrument except the harp. In drama, women normally acted women's parts and occasionally youths, while men were used to portray male parts.

Architecture offered women barely any scope. Although the other fine arts offered them considerably more, still, relative to men, they had but a minor share with only one out of every four "artists" a woman. On the whole women's work in the artistic world presented a stable picture. The one notable exception was photography. Whereas in 1891 there were nearly three men to every woman photographic worker, by 1911 the ratio had dropped to a little over two to one. Women's growing importance was concomitant with the industry's transfer from cottage to factory beginning in the eighties. In the course of that transfer the photographic processes were sub-divided with the result that the photographer proper no longer performed every operation. Instead women were introduced

³¹The few women scientists mostly taught. Like the Census, they are here classified as teachers.

³²Like the Census, music teachers are here classified as musicians.

to do the less-skilled finishing processes of touching up, spotting and mounting. The more skilled ones of picture taking and developing continued, as hitherto, in men's hands.

2.3.7 Entertainment and Recreation

Art, Music, Theatre–Service, and Performers, Showmen: Exhibition, Games–Service, composite headings embracing such workers as professional sportsmen and attendants at racecourses and music halls, were expanding employments, a by-product of the contemporary rise of commercial entertainment and recreation industries. Between 1891 and 1911 both sexes increased their respective numbers fourfold. Accordingly, the increase little affected the sex ratio and so these services continued as male strongholds with men filling eighty-seven out of every one hundred places.

Chapter 3

Other Service “Industries”

This chapter surveys the sex division in the remaining service “industries” of Distribution, Commerce, Public Administration, Transportation and Communication, Public Utilities, and National Defence.

3.1 Distribution

Distribution, embracing dealers in various commodities and their assistants, was in a state of transition throughout the 1891-1914 period. In the nineties there was as yet no clear-cut division between makers and dealers, both functions being commonly combined in the same person. The Census of 1891 made no attempt to separate the two in the majority of trades. By 1901, however, the first such attempt was made. Between the two Census years, distribution had assumed a sufficient identity of its own to warrant a separate listing. With its specialization came its organization on a company basis. Newly developing distributive companies began to compete with the hitherto existing shops largely carried on as family businesses passing from father to son. Thus it was no mere coincidence that in 1911 the Census introduced for the first time the new heading Multiple Shop, Multiple Store. It was giving but official recognition to an emerging occupational fact of life. Yet, however much a definite trend, the specialization of distribution was not yet an accomplished fact by the outbreak of the war. Not only were the wholesale and retail branches still largely undifferentiated but the figures for dealers themselves were of tenuous value because of the difficulties encountered even then in trying to disentangle makers from distributors.

With distribution in a state of flux and with the Census figures mirroring this fact, women’s average share on a branch basis was either impossible to compute or, when possible, of little worth. Moreover, not until 1911 were women “regularly engaged in assisting relatives in trade or business” explicitly defined by the Census as “occupied”. Since such female assistance was an important feature of the distributive trades throughout the 1891-1914 period, its uncertain treatment in the earlier Censuses makes their figures unreliable for showing the sex division. As the Census of 1911 both separated dealers from makers and included assisting female relatives, it, of all three Censuses, provides the best statistical record of men’s and women’s work within distribution. Moreover, no data has been found to indicate that the relative positions of the sexes, apart from a few branches, materially altered between 1891 and 1911. Thus the 1911 figures may be assumed to provide a fairly representative picture of the period as a whole,¹ and they alone have been used in the, branch analysis that follows.

Dealers fell into two main groups, those selling the perishables of food, drink and tobacco and

¹Accordingly, in an attempt to obtain a more accurate overall picture of women’s share in Distribution in 1891 and 1901, the same proportion of women to men that prevailed in 1911 has been assumed to have existed in the earlier Censuses.

those selling non-perishable products. For purposes of analysis the latter category has been further divided into textile and clothing and into non-textile and clothing thereby making Distribution an "industry" containing three major branches —1) Perishable Goods, 2) Textile and Clothing Goods and 3) Other Non-perishable Goods. In all three, men were in the majority. Women's share, however, varied not only among the major branches but also among the numerous sub-branches of which each was composed.

In Perishable Goods, women were used most extensively in bakery and confectionery dealing where they were in the majority and in tobacco dealing where they approximated men in numbers. On the other hand, only three out of every ten fruit and vegetable dealers and cheese, butter and provision dealers were women, and only two out of every ten grocers, milksellers, and fish, poultry and game dealers were. Relying least on female labour were the distributive trades of meat, spirituous drinks, and corn, flour and seed.

In Textile and Clothing Goods, drapers and their assistants constituted by far the largest group. As of 1911, women with their fifty-five per cent share, outnumbered men in this work for the first time. Admittedly the 1911 figures were somewhat inflated due to the definite inclusion of female relatives assisting in business. Nevertheless, the trend was clearly in the direction of women's increasing importance as in 1891 women formed forty-one per cent of the total and in 1901 forty-nine per cent.

The rapid rise of the woman draper paralleled the development of large drapers' shops and department stores. Whereas the selling of perishable goods continued as the province of small family businesses catering to the everyday needs of local neighbourhood areas, the selling of non-perishables was changing in character. The growth of cheap rapid urban transport at the turn of the century had enlarged the potential market for such goods inasmuch as people were prepared to delay their purchases in order to enjoy the wider selection and better bargains offered by periodic town buying. Thus in response to the opportunities presented by a mass market, the selling of non-perishables, especially in large urban centres, became increasingly the province of large-scale businesses. Internally they were able to sectionalize their operations, thereby simplifying the job of the shop assistant and rendering the prevailing apprenticeship system obsolete.

In the drapery trade, men were largely employed in the heavy cloth and mantle sections while women were almost entirely confined to the lighter sections and to women's and children's wear. Men were generally in charge of the shops. "Living-in" continued a common tradition of employment for drapery assistants throughout the 1891-1914 period.

Clothing distribution was predominantly in men's hands except for hat and bonnet dealing in which women formed the majority sex. In distributive enterprises of any size, the only scope for women as owners and managers lay in women's dress and outfitting.

In Other Non-perishable Goods, women formed an important part of the work force only in the selling of rags, of stationery and other paper supplies, and of earthenware and china; in the first two, roughly one-half, and in the latter, two-fifths. Otherwise, women's share was either minor or insignificant. Those trades in which it was about one-third were newspapers, and instruments and toys. Next came street selling, art, precious metals and jewellery, books, pawn-brokers, chemists and druggists, furniture, pets, and skins and leather in which two out of every ten workers were women. Men, on the other hand, virtually monopolized the selling of coal, stone, wood, brick and cement, farm animals, and newspapers on the street and were well in the majority of those selling metals, meat for animals, and oils, colours, greases, soap and the like.

However indicative, the sex division as revealed by the Census figures still obscures its full dimensions. Even when the sexes nominally shared the work of a trade, the tendency was for women to serve in retail quantities and for men to do not only this but also whatever heavy lifting was required. Thus female labour was especially sparse in wholesale houses where commodities were handled in bulk. If used at all, it was as a rule for labelling, and for folding and packing the lighter items. Furthermore, throughout the distributive trades, articles personal to a sex were usually sold by a member of the same sex. In consequence men had a virtual monopoly of establishments and departments dealing in men's wear, and women of those dealing in ladies' wear.

Table 3.1: Females as a Per Cent of Total Distributive Work Force in Great Britain by Branch, 1911.

Branch		
Perishable Goods		27.01
Bakers, Confectioners (Dealers)	60.66	
Tobacconists	46.55	
Greengrocery, Fruiterers	30.44	
Cheesemongers, Buttermen, Provision Dealers	25.10	
Grocers, Tea, Coffee, Chocolate Dealers	23.98	
Milk-sellers, Dairy-men	22.72	
Fishmongers, Poulterers, Game Dealers	18.97	
Wine and Spirit-Merchants, Agents	12.25	
Corn, Flour, Seed-Merchants, Dealers	10.88	
Butchers, Meat Salesmen	8.44	
Other Dealers in Food	9.39	
Textile and Clothing Goods		43.50
Hat, Bonnet, Straw Plait, etc. Dealers	59.20	
Drapers, Linen Drapers, Mercers	54.85	
Boot, Shoe, Slipper, Patten, Clog-Dealers	36.98	
Clothiers, Outfitters-Dealers	26.89	
Hosiers, Haberdashers	24.32	
Other Dealers in Clothing	67.13	
Other Dealers in Textile Fabrics	13.59	
Other Non-perishable Goods		26.46
Rag Gatherers, Dealers	54.95	
Stationers, Law Stationers, Other Dealers in Paper	48.64	
Earthenware, China, Glass-Dealers	39.94	
Newspaper Agents, News Room Keepers	35.58	
Dealers in Instruments, Toys, etc.	33.25	
Costermongers, Hawkers, Street Sellers	23.35	
Dealers in Works of Art	22.24	
Dealers in Precious Metals, Jewellery	19.29	
Book, Print-Publishers, Sellers; Newspaper Publishers	19.00	
Pawnbrokers	18.45	
Chemists, Druggists	16.95	
Furniture, etc. Dealers	16.53	
Dog, Bird, Animal-Keepers, Dealers	15.49	
Dealers in Skins, Leather, Hair, and Feathers	15.21	
Oil and Colourmen; Other Dealers in Oil, Grease, Soap, Resin, etc.	14.90	
Knackers; Catsmeat Dealers	13.93	
Ironmongers, Hardware-Dealers, Merchants	12.95	
Coal, Coke-Merchants, Dealers	6.02	
Timber, Wood, Cork, Bark-Merchants, Dealers	4.71	
Dealers in Stone, Slate, etc.	3.14	
News-Boys, Vendors (street or undefined)	1.65	
Brick, Cement Dealers	1.63	
Cattle. Sheep. Pig-Dealers. Salesmen	1.52	
Drovers. Lairmen	.06	
General Shopkeepers, Dealers	55.50	
Multiple Shop, Multiple Store	27.16	
Salesmen, Buyers (not otherwise described)	16.68	
Other Dealers in Metals, Machines, etc.	14.91	
Other Dealers in Sundry Industries	12.91	
Merchants (commodity undefined)	1.83	
All Distribution Workers		29.99

3.2 Commerce

Commercial Service is analyzed from the viewpoint of four main branches: (1) Clerical, (2) Insurance, (3) Banking, and (4) Miscellaneous, consisting of brokers, factors, commercial travellers, auctioneers, house agents and the like. The Clerical Branch was by far the largest. It was a composite of such workers as typists and shorthand writers, cashiers, electric light and gas collectors, adding machine operators, accountants and bookkeepers, invoice, stock and warehouse clerks, and non-private secretaries. Not included in the Census definition of commercial clerk, however, were persons performing similar duties in law, bank, insurance, government, and railway offices. These particular clerks were classified industrially and shall be treated accordingly in this study. But two categories have been allocated to the commercial clerk heading which were not originally placed there by the Census. They are Accountants, and Officers of Commercial Guilds, Societies, etc. The Census was not wholly successful in separating them from commercial clerks proper and so for analytical purposes they are considered as commercial clerks.

On the whole the nation's commercial work was performed by men but women were advancing rapidly into what had once been an almost exclusive male preserve. From constituting but five per cent of the work force in 1891, women's share had risen to seventeen per cent by 1911. This remarkable rise was almost entirely accounted for by the Clerical Branch.

3.2.1 Clerical Service

The entrance of the so-called lady clerk paralleled the rise towards the end of the nineteenth century of two developments in the British economy. The first was the growth of the corporation as a form of business organization. This resulted in enterprises of unprecedented size which were faced with the pressing need to coordinate their diversified and manifold activities. To achieve this end, written communications and records were relied upon to an ever-increasing extent. The second development that added to the office or "secretarial" side of capitalist enterprise was its growing concern with problems of business efficiency and of distribution as it began to be outsold by foreign competitors. Together these developments produced a steadily expanding demand for "black-coated" workers, especially in London, the nation's commercial centre. Between 1891 and 1911 the number of commercial clerks nearly doubled, and new employment opportunities for both men and women arose but proportionally more for women.

The changing demand for clerks, however, was not alone a numerical one. The growing magnitude and complication of business administration, the great development of joint stock companies with their peculiar legal obligations and the increasing recognition of the value of knowledge in international competition produced a demand for clerks with higher qualifications than those possessed by the clerk of a half century before—the ability to "read, write and add with accuracy and facility".² The rise of the profession of accountants was indicative of this new trend. The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, setting high standards of professional skill and general education, was formed in 1880.

But the very conditions which were upgrading the old-fashioned clerk's job were also leading to its simplification. For with the growth of the office side of businesses, the separation of the skilled from the unskilled aspects of the work became an economic proposition. The trend towards subdivision was promoted in turn by the invention of certain office machines, notably the typewriter, which made record keeping and written communications possible on a mass scale. Furthermore, the typing process itself required but a low grade of mechanical skill. In fact so simple did the work appear to contemporaries that they viewed the initial typists as no more than mechanical clerks.³

Women's growing use for clerical duties coincided with the global adoption of the typewriter among British firms in the nineties. Prior to its advent few women were employed in British business

²B. Webb, "English Teachers and Their Professional Organisation-II," *New Statesman*, Special Supplement, vol. 5, no. 130, Oct. 2, 1915, p. 9.

³H. Martindale, *Women Servants of the State, 1870-1938*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1938, p. 65.

offices⁴ but with its introduction came a growing demand for women typists whose services replaced those of the male copyist. Whereas in 1881 women formed but three per cent of the clerical work force, by 1891 the figure had risen to eight per cent, by 1901 to seventeen per cent, and by 1911 it had reached the point where one clerk out of every four was a woman.

As women proved themselves as clerk-typists, they were gradually introduced as shorthand-typists. And those with the highest qualifications and superior education, who were not only proficient in shorthand and typing but capable of reading and translating foreign languages, moved on to become secretaries, confidential clerks and bookkeepers. Some women even established typewriting business offices of their own. By the outbreak of the war women clerks were commonly found in shops, warehouses, manufacturing concerns, and non-profit organizations. Besides typing and shorthand, women were mostly engaged in the routine work of correspondence, bookkeeping and coupon filing.

Bookkeeping proper remained in male hands. The rare woman bookkeeper was usually not hired as such but promoted from the rank of clerk on showing conspicuous ability and trustworthiness. Public accounting, the most skilled branch of bookkeeping, was a male domain. The rare woman acting as an accountant was non-chartered and received most of her business from girls' schools, charities and women's organizations.

3.2.2 Other Commercial Services

Though women's employment showed the same phenomenal rate of growth in the non-clerical branches, in total impact it was far less noteworthy. In all but ten thousand women were engaged in banking, insurance and miscellaneous commercial services in 1911. By way of contrast, 325,000 men were so employed.

The banking and insurance branches were typically composed of large concerns each employing blocks of clerical workers doing the same or closely similar work. Women were sparingly employed in banks, constituting no more than two per cent of the work force even as late as 1911. They were used for bank note sorting and as typists and shorthand-writers. Almost as limited was the employment of women in insurance offices where they formed but four per cent of the staff in 1911. These women were used exclusively for routine clerical work—copying letters and filling in forms. All the higher duties were men's work. The exceptional woman insurance agent catered almost exclusively to a feminine clientele.

The handful of women stockbrokers were not members of the Stock Exchange itself but paid members of the Stock Exchange to act on their behalf. Their business mainly derived from other women. Appraisers, auctioneers and advertisers were virtually all men. So were agents and commercial travelers. The few women found in the last two categories were for the most part canvassers for laundries, advertising agents for ladies' fashion papers and travelling saleswomen for drapery houses.

Though both men and women functioned as house agents, they were not interchangeable. The male house agent construed his job to be rent collecting and attending to requested repairs. Women as house agents, an innovation begun in the person of Octavia Hill in 1865, served as social workers among the poor. Their aim was not only to collect rent but also to use their authority as house agents to improve the tenant's way of life. Though of no numerical importance relative to the demand for men, the demand for women house agents nevertheless slowly but steadily expanded throughout the period under review,

⁴Thus even as late as the nineties the foreign born male clerk, not as subsequently the woman clerk, was viewed as the British male clerk's most serious competitive threat. See *Clerks and Shop Assistants of Both Sexes, Their Grievances, Position and Advancement*, 1891, p. 7 and *Census of England and Wales, 1901: General Report*, p. 97; 1904 Cd. 2174, cviii.

3.3 Public Administration

On both a national and local level, Public Administration was employing more people. Indicative of this expansion were the number of census headings allocated to it. Whereas in 1891 seven sufficed, by 1911 the number had increased to nine.

Both men and women were occupationally affected by this expansion. The number of men rose from 146,000 in 1891 to 271,000 in 1911 while the corresponding figures for women were 17,000 and 50,000.⁵ But despite women's rising numbers, government work continued to provide women with relatively few jobs. Whereas in 1891 one-half of one per cent of occupied women were so employed, in 1911 the figure was one per cent. Women's marked absolute increase, on the other hand, did help to lessen the rarity of the woman government worker. Whereas in 1891 women formed ten per cent of the work force, by 1911 they formed sixteen per cent. Nevertheless, women's work continued highly circumscribed. While men were found in substantial numbers in every branch of governmental activity, women's distribution was much more concentrated.

3.3.1 National Government

On the national level, women's share in public administration was a small one, amounting to but fourteen per cent of those so employed. Their scope as government workers, however, was even more limited than would appear by the percentage figure alone. For prior to the war, except for the Post Office, the civil service departments of the national government employed very few women.

postal service

Against a background of considerable Post Office expansion during the years under review, women by 1911 formed one-fifth of all postal workers. Women were little known in the outdoor employments such as letter carriers and messengers, and in the engineering trades. The occasional woman letter carrier was only found in country districts. The postmistress was another rarity.⁶

The great bulk of indoor work was done by both sexes. But whereas men performed all classes of counter and sorting work, women did only the less responsible and lighter duties. Thus certain money order work and the heavy parcel handling common to some head offices were exclusively in male hands. To some extent women shared in letter sorting but outside of the smaller offices this was essentially men's work.

The sex division among indoor postal employees was to some extent one of working hours. Though both sexes worked the same number, men were liable for attendance at all hours of the day and night while women for the most part only worked the day shift. In consequence of their restricted hours, women were largely precluded from certain jobs. Whereas counter work, which was a daytime operation, used female labour extensively, letter sorting, which was mainly a late evening, night and early morning operation, was a male preserve. Overtime and Sunday work further demarcated the sexes as men rather than women were normally employed at such times.

It was as Post Office clerks that women's services relative to men's were most highly used. First experimentally introduced to this work in 1871, women formed about forty per cent of the clerical staff by 1911.⁷ Their growing employment paralleled two contemporary developments, the expansion of the Post Office financial services and the assumption by the Post Office of not only

⁵Like the Census of England and Wales, Post Office telegraph and telephone operators are classified here to Transportation and Communication. The Census of Scotland, however, combined Post Office operators with Post Office clerks under one heading. Thus it has not been possible to exclude Scottish operators from the Public Administration Order. Relatively, however, their numbers are so few that their inclusion can be disregarded for calculative purposes.

⁶Women engaged in such work were as a rule sub-postmistresses who undertook postal duties on a commission basis in addition to their own distributive businesses. Like the Census, they are classified here as dealers.

⁷Evidence from the Post Office Secretary, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc.*, p. 157; 1919 Cmd. 167, xxxi.

the manipulative but also the administrative responsibility for the nation's telegraph and telephone services.

Prior to the war the Post Office woman clerk formed the highest Civil Service grade open to women by competitive examination. In grade, it was analogous to that of the male second division clerk. However not only did women's entrance examination differ but also women's job scope. The male clerk was recruited for use throughout the civil service; the woman clerk, with limited exception, was recruited only for Post Office work. Within the Post Office the woman clerk usually performed her duties in a self-contained division under female supervision, segregated both from male co-workers and the public. Her promotion ladder reached no further than her own grade's supervision.

non-postal service

The few women employed in the nation's civil service departments other than the Post Office were found at the following levels: technical, institutional, clerical and shorthand-typing. Generally speaking the work they performed, irrespective of level, did not involve them in the mainstream of departmental activities but instead placed them in highly specialized compartments.

Technical. Women's entrance into the technical class, in which considerable judgment and administrative ability were required, virtually coincided with the period under review.⁸ They entered mainly as government inspectors whose duties were to supervise the administration of certain laws as they affected women and children. Aside from this specialized inspectorate work, instances of women with special knowledge being employed on technical government work were extremely rare. Since the phenomenon of the woman inspector forms part of women's employment history for the years under review, a brief record of her progress department by department now follows.

The English Local Government Board was the first department to use women inspectors. In 1873 it hired one to inspect workhouses and district pauper schools with special reference to their female charges. But upon her retirement a year later no replacement was made. Not until 1885 was there another woman inspector. Her job was to inspect poor law children boarded out beyond the Union where they belonged. Over a decade passed before she was joined by a sister inspector whose assignment was to inspect Poor Law institutions in the metropolis, particularly in regard to their maternity wards, nurseries, infirmaries, and nursing arrangements. By the outbreak of the war several more women had been added to the staff to assist in the inspection of boarded-out children and the Local Government Board of Scotland had made its first appointment of a woman inspector.

The Board of Education was the next department to introduce women inspectors. In the early eighties a Directress of Needlework was appointed to supervise the standard of needlework in state-supported schools.⁹ She was followed a few years later by an Inspectress of Cookery who later assumed the inspection of laundry work as well. In relation to their special subjects, these women inspectors had almost complete district charge and dealt directly with local education authorities. This was not the case with the women chosen to inspect infants' and girls' schools.

The first women to undertake such work were appointed in the late nineties. Their job was to assist the men inspectors but only in relation to girls' and infants' departments in elementary schools. The inspection of women's training colleges and of girls' secondary schools remained entirely men's work. These sub-inspectresses, as they were first called, were subject to the authority of the men officials to whose district they were assigned. But by 1905, with the Education Acts of 1902-3 bringing more secondary, technical and scientific education under the Board's control, the then eleven women inspectors were placed under their own female chief and assigned the duty, according to the Board's Report for 1904-5, of inspecting and enquiring "into all matters specially needing the scrutiny and advice of a woman".¹⁰ Gradually their scope was expanded to include women's

⁸Technically they were not civil servants but were hired under the powers invested in government departments to appoint suitable persons for special purposes.

⁹The first male school inspectors were appointed in 1839.

¹⁰As quoted in H. Martindale, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

training colleges and girls' secondary schools as well. In effect they functioned as specialists in girls' education without any district responsibility. By the outbreak of the war they numbered close to fifty.¹¹

The Scottish Education Department did not employ its first woman inspector until 1902. Two others were added in 1910. But they were strictly specialist inspectors for domestic economy subjects alone. On occasion, however, qualified women were employed on a fee basis to inspect girls' schools.

The appointment of the first women factory inspectors in 1893 marked women's official entrance into the Home Office inspectorate.¹² They were not in charge of any districts but, on a peripatetic basis, were used exclusively to investigate matters pertaining to working women. Though they had the authority to take up any question affecting working women, by their own volition they referred all problems of machine fencing to the men inspectors. In 1896 the women were formed into a branch of their own under a female head. Three years later they were given special district charge of certain women's industries. By 1901 they were assuming full responsibility for the fencing in two industries that made extensive use of women, namely the laundry and clothing industries. The scope of their department was further expanded in 1909 when the Secretary of State entrusted it with the duty of investigating and of acting upon reported cases of industrial poisoning and disease among working women. By 1914 their numbers had risen from an initial two to twenty-one,¹³ and instead of operating solely out of London they were now established in several of the nation's chief industrial centres.

The Home Office found further use for women in 1904 when it appointed the first woman as assistant inspector of reformatories and industrial schools. Another such appointment followed in 1914. A woman inspector of prisons made her debut in 1908 combining prison inspection with the inspection of inebriate reformatories. Prior to this date the highest prison post for women had been chief matron. These newly-appointed inspectors were used chiefly to investigate the women's side of institutional life.

As with the Home Office, 1893 also marked the first year any woman was employed in the higher branches of the Board of Trade. In that year the first woman labour correspondent joined the staff of the newly established Labour Department to assist it in its work of collecting information on labour conditions. Her specialized function was to investigate problems connected with women's labour. In 1903 she was promoted to the position of Senior Investigator for Women's Industries and another woman was added to the Department's staff as her assistant.

A new stage in the history of women in the civil service inspectorate occurred in the wake of the Trade Boards Act and the Labour Exchange Act of 1909. In both instances men and women were simultaneously recruited to administer the Acts instead of as formerly the case, having women "imposed" on an already existing male staff. In the administration of the National Insurance Act passed two years later a similar employment policy was followed. Both men and women were appointed as commissioners from the outset with not only comparable duties but, even more unusual for the period under review, equal pay.¹⁴ As inspectors under the National Health Insurance programme, women in England and Wales were segregated from the men, were confined to women's trades, and were under the direct supervision of a female head. In Scotland, on the other hand, men and women apparently worked interchangeably, dealing equally with men's or women's trades. Among its six districts, one was in the charge of a woman who had men as well as women working under her.¹⁵

Institutional. As matrons, waitresses, teachers, attendants and the like a few hundred women were employed in national institutional work.¹⁶ They were chiefly used for the care of the sick and of women prisoners.

Clerical. Although apart from the Post Office Department women had not procured admission

¹¹E. Morley (ed.), *Women Workers in Seven Professions*, London: Routledge, 1914, p. 245.

¹²The first male inspectors were appointed in 1833.

¹³*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, p. 19; 1919 Cmd. 135, xxxi.

¹⁴H. Martindale, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁶*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, op. cit.*, p. 19.

to the clerical services of the state, the establishment of local labour exchanges in 1910 and 1911 gave them an entering wedge. On a temporary basis¹⁷ both men and women were employed to cope with the mass of clerical detail involved in administering the Labour Exchanges Act and the National Insurance Act. Thus several hundred women¹⁸ found themselves engaged in work of much the same calibre as that performed by established civil service male assistant clerks.

Shorthand-typing. The Inland Revenue Department pioneered in the use of women typists. By the early 1890s seven departments were using them for work formerly the province of the male copyist. By 1914 almost eight hundred typists, shorthand-typists, and their immediate supervisors were at work in about one-half of the public departments.¹⁹ As a class they were common to the whole civil service but only in the Post Office were they recruited by open competition. Elsewhere they were nominated for the posts. Generally they were segregated from male staff and were under female supervision. No higher posts were open to typists than shorthand-writers and supervisors of their own grade.

3.3.2 Local Government

Local government service encompassed three major branches: 1) Police, 2) Poor Law and 3) Local Government Administration. No women shared in the nation's police work.²⁰ Nor did women to any extent participate in the administration of local government. Most women local government workers were in Poor Law Service, which in 1911 accounted for ninety-two per cent of them. In contrast, only twelve per cent of the men in local government work were so engaged.²¹

Women were gaining an increasing share in the rapidly expanding local government service. Its rise between 1891 and 1911 from seven to fifteen per cent, however, was more attributive to the expansion of the Poor Law branch than to any widening of women's scope.

Though women predominated in Poor Law work, they were largely absent from its administration. Almost invariably men were the relieving officers, whose duties included, among others, the receiving of applications for medical relief, especially admittance to the maternity wards, the visiting of sick and bedridden people in receipt of relief, and the apprenticing and visiting of girls under sixteen in service chargeable to the Guardians. Only with the passing of such legislation as the Infant Life Protection Act of 1897 and the Children's Act of 1908 did women begin to make any administrative advance as they were then employed as "visitors" and inspectors. Otherwise women were used almost exclusively for the care of women paupers and of the infirm sick and for workhouse and infirmary housekeeping. They served in such capacities as attendant, dressmaker, nurse, midwife, teacher, laundress, cook, and waitress. Men cared for the male paupers and had administrative charge of the workhouses. As workhouse masters, men were commonly assisted by their wives who functioned as workhouse matrons.

In local government administration proper, female labour was used very sparingly and then mainly for domestic and routine clerical work. However, a few women were engaged for certain specialized woman and child welfare functions. For example, sanitary inspection and health visiting became recognized occupational outlets for women in the period under review. Women's employment in such work was the merging product of two originally separate movements—workshop inspection and infant life protection. In the former, the passage of the Factory Act of 1891, which transferred the responsibility for workshop inspection from the Home Office to local authorities, provided the impetus for the appointment of women as inspectors of women's workshops. In the latter, the nation's growing interest in reducing infant mortality resulted in the official appointment of women

¹⁷Appointment was by appraisalment through personal interview supplemented by testimonials of qualities of character and intelligence. Examinations were dispensed with or used only as a qualifying test.

¹⁸E. Morley (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 268.

¹⁹*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, op. cit.*, p. 19.

²⁰The 1911 Census of Scotland lists 14 women in police work. In all probability they were police matrons or the like whom the 1911 Census of England and Wales classified to Municipal, Parish, and other Local or County Officers.

²¹Computed from English and Welsh figures only as the Census of Scotland does not list persons in Poor Law Service apart from Municipal, Parish, and other Local or County Officers.

as health visitors.

Eventually some local authorities combined the two functions under the woman sanitary inspector thereby markedly distinguishing her work from that of her male colleague. Whereas the man principally inspected drains, detected structural defects in houses, investigated cases of notifiable infectious diseases, enforced the food and drug sale law, and inspected workshops and factories, the work of the woman inspector took a different direction. She not only inspected women's workshops, laundries and homes of outworkers but also advised expectant mothers, promoted cleanliness in the home, investigated deaths of infants under one year, and lectured at mothers' meetings. Some local authorities employed women only for health visiting, reserving all sanitary inspection proper for men. Whenever this occurred women no longer had the same status as the men. Whereas the sanitary inspector had the legal right of entry, the health visitor could only enter a home by permission of the residents; and whereas the former had the legal power to enforce his edicts, the latter could only advise.

As for school administration, it was a male sphere except for the teaching of housewifery and physical training and the education of handicapped children. Even school attendance officers, whose work entailed home visiting and dealing with problems of home conditions and of children's health, were men.

3.4 Transportation and Communication

Although transportation and communication was one of the nation's top-ranking occupational categories, engaging substantial numbers in each of its five major divisions—railways, roads, waterways, docks and harbours, and storage, portorage and messages—women constituted but two per cent of the work force. Admittedly there were atypical instances of women dock labourers, bargewomen, river pilots, lighthouse keepers and the like, yet on the whole women's work was almost solely confined to transmitting messages by telegraph and telephone and conveying them by foot. In 1911 these functions alone absorbed nearly four-fifths of all the women in Transportation and Communication. In contrast not even one-fifth of the men were so employed.

3.4.1 Telegraph and Telephone

Already employed by the private companies as telegraphists and telephonists, women continued to be used for this work when the government assumed the full operation of the telegraph and telephone services of the nation in 1870 and 1912 respectively. As telegraph operators,²² women were the minority sex throughout the 1891-1914 period, constituting about one-third of the total.²³ In terms of duties the work of the sexes was closely comparable though there was a tendency to give the more demanding work to men. Thus the busiest wires, working to large towns and involving the manipulation of complex code and cipher messages, were commonly assigned to men. Likewise press work, which needed carbon copies, was generally done by men though sometimes women in the provinces, where less duplicates were needed, would perform this work. The busy and rapid telegraphy entailed by race meetings also fell to men as did all cable room work. The few women engaged in supervision were confined chiefly to supervising their own sex. Conditions of employment also served to demarcate the sexes. Women performed no night duty, and though liable, were generally exempt from Sunday and excessive late duties.

Telephony, which involved less skill than telegraphy, was a virtual female monopoly. The few male telephonists were almost exclusively used for night duty for which no women were employed. Women were also used for supervision on the day shift.

According to the combined telephone-telegraph Census figures, women's share compared to men's

²²Telegraphic work was often combined with sorting work in the Post Office branches.

²³Evidence from the Post Office Secretary, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices; Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 158.

progressively increased from decade to decade. Whereas in 1891 women were 29 per cent of the work force, by 1901 they were 41 per cent and by 1911 53 per cent of it. Not revealed by these figures, however, are the diverse trends followed by the telephone and telegraph branches. By the mid-eighties the telegraph system was suffering from the growing competition of the telephone. Thus despite the sex division remaining relatively static within each branch—the typical telegraphist a man and the typical telephonist a woman—the expansion of women’s branch at the expense of men’s was producing a sex ratio increasingly in women’s favour.

3.4.2 Other Conveying Services

Foot messenger work, commonly combined with porter and watchmen duties, was essentially men’s work. What made this type of work the second largest user of female labour in Transportation and Communication was not women’s particular share but rather the large numbers it employed. Though in 1911 women constituted only five per cent of the total, still with 258,000 Messengers, Porters, Watchmen (not Railway or Government), this meant that some 14,000 women were so engaged. They functioned mainly as shop errand girls, not as porters and watchmen.

In railways, women had for many years been used as waiting room attendants and cleaners. New to the period under review was their use as clerks, carriage cleaners and gate-keepers. These jobs, however, were just opening up to women a few years prior to the war and so did little to affect the average sex ratio for the period as a whole. Throughout it women did not constitute even one per cent of total railway work force.

The remaining few thousand women in Transportation and Communication were, in many instances, assisting female relatives to men engaged in cartage service businesses and to men working as bargemen and lightermen. A few hundred were also employed in a domestic capacity in the merchant marine service.

3.5 Public Utilities and National Defence

Female labour was barely employed in the public utilities of gas, water and electricity although all were expanding and by 1911 had use for 86,000 men. As already noted, National Defence was an entirely male “industry”.

Chapter 4

The Manufacturing Sector and Textiles and Clothing

4.1 The Manufacturing Sector

That women accounted for nearly thirty per cent of the manufacturing work force was almost entirely due to their extensive employment in Textiles and Clothing. These two “industries” alone accounted for eighty per cent of all women in manufacturing. Another thirteen per cent were divided among Paper, Metals, and Food, Drink and Tobacco, leaving but seven per cent for the six remaining “industries”.

Men’s main work was in metal manufacture and construction. Together they employed one-half of men, but only one-twentieth of women manufacturing workers. Moreover, in Textiles and Clothing, only two out of every ten men were found as contrasted with eight out of every ten women.

The same two branches of such numerical importance for women were also the ones in which women formed the majority sex. In Clothing they constituted close to seventy per cent of the work force and in Textiles, sixty per cent. In no other manufacturing branches did women even approach a majority. Thus Textiles and Clothing apart, manufacturing was predominantly a male activity.

Table 4.1: Per Cent Distribution of Male and Female Manufacturing Workers in Great Britain by “Industry”, 1891-1911.

“Industry”	Females				Males	
	1891	1901	1911	Average 1891-1911	Average 1891-1911	
Clothing	41.97	41.50	38.71	40.73	7.64	
Textiles	41.23	38.62	37.92	39.26	9.92	
Paper	3.38	4.92	5.74	4.68	3.36	
Metals	3.18	4.27	5.86	4.44	28.86	
Food, Drink and Tobacco	3.76	3.69	4.54	4.00	4.26	
Brick, Cement, Pottery and Glass	1.66	1.81	1.88	1.78	2.66	
Wood	1.34	1.43	1.41	1.39	4.51	
Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc.	.79	1.42	1.86	1.36	1.61	
Skins and Leather	1.12	1.42	1.49	1.34	1.62	
Construction	.15	.05	.04	.08	21.85	
Miscellaneous	1.42	.88	.56	.95	13.72	

Table 4.2: Females as a Per Cent of Total Manufacturing Work Force in Great Britain by “Industry”, 1891-1911.

“Industry”	1891	1901	1911	Average 1891-1911
Clothing	65.21	67.25	68.30	66.92
Textiles	59.40	61.21	59.44	60.02
Paper	30.21	34.99	37.14	34.11
Food, Drink and Tobacco	24.17	25.11	29.25	26.18
Skins and Leather	20.15	24.47	26.87	23.83
Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc.	19.72	25.96	25.25	23.64
Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass	20.66	18.59	21.56	20.27
Wood	10.98	10.08	10.37	10.48
Metals	4.85	5.09	6.30	5.41
Construction	.30	.08	.06	.15
Miscellaneous	2.83	2.42	2.24	2.50
All Manufacturing Workers	28.08	26.52	27.73	27.44

4.2 Textiles

As a handicraft, textile manufacture had been largely a domestic industry, with the lighter and less skilled preparatory and spinning processes and finishing operations delegated to women and children and the heavier and more skilled weaving process and finishing operations to men. Towards the end of the eighteenth century came the development of carding and spinning machinery, followed by the power loom in the early 1800s. Appearing first in cotton, these inventions gradually spread to the other textile branches, bringing to them, as they had to cotton years earlier, revolutionary changes in organization and technique.

By 1891 textile manufacture was essentially a mass production industry carried on in factories and requiring neither great physical strength nor high levels of skill from the majority of its workers. As was officially noted in the Poor Law Commission’s Majority Report, from “the rank and file in the textile industries, a very moderate level of intelligence seems demanded. Attendance on the machinery, and careful attention to it, are really more wanted than any great degree of skill. As one of the employers puts it: “The less the human element enters the better””.¹

The line dividing the work of the sexes varied with the particular fabric produced. Each entailed a difference in weight, trimming, and weaving and spinning skill. The division in Cotton and Wool, which together accounted for seven out of every ten women textile workers, is shown first, followed by the minor textiles of Hosiery, Silk and Lace. Subsequently considered are the rough textiles among which are Hemp, Jute and Rope, followed by Smallware and Miscellaneous. Providing the descriptive framework are the four processes basic to textile manufacture: 1) fibre preparation, 2) spinning, 3) weaving, and 4) finishing. Though not considered so descriptively, the finishing work of bleaching, printing and dyeing, which mainly consisted in watching and guiding cloth in and out of various troughs, vats or machines, is considered as a separate branch statistically. This was made necessary by the Census practice of grouping all such workers together without specifying the type of fabric handled.

4.2.1 Cotton

If numbers alone were the criteria, cotton was one of the most important manufacturing employments for women. Yet its general impact was less than might appear to be the case. This was because the cotton industry was a highly concentrated one, centred mainly in Lancashire and as of 1911 recruiting four-fifths of its work force from that one county alone. Thus it is important to remember

¹ *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws*, p. 347; 1909 Cd. 4499, xxxvii.

Table 4.3: Per Cent Distributions of Male and Female Textile Workers in Great Britain by Branch, 1891-1911.

Branch	Females			Males	
	1891	1901	1911	Average 1891-1911	Average 1891-1911
Cotton	47.22	48.64	50.26	48.71	44.31
Wool	22.09	20.75	20.08	20.97	23.84
Hosiery	5.35	6.34	6.68	6.12	3.40
Silk	4.73	3.68	2.78	3.73	2.56
Lace	3.03	3.52	3.74	3.43	3.05
Flax, Jute, etc.	7.93	9.34	8.65	8.64	6.78
Smallware and Miscellaneous	7.59	5.51	4.85	5.98	2.82
Bleaching, Printing, Dyeing, etc	2.06	2.22	2.95	2.41	13.23

Table 4.4: Females as a Per Cent of Total Textile Work Force in Great Britain by Branch, 1891-1911.

Branch	1891	1901	1911	Average 1891-1911
Cotton	61.50	63.35	61.94	62.26
Wool	55.16	58.33	57.39	56.96
Hosiery	67.23	75.26	75.89	72.79
Silk	66.63	70.64	69.39	68.89
Lace	61.90	64.03	62.37	62.77
Flax, Jute, etc.	63.72	67.58	65.55	65.62
Smallware and Miscellaneous	74.55	79.02	75.19	76.25
Bleaching, Printing, Dyeing, etc	23.05	20.01	21.67	21.58
All Textile Workers	59.40	61.21	59.44	60.02

that any discussion of workers in cotton during the 1891-1914 period is essentially a discussion of Lancashire men and women.

In cotton manufacture as a whole, women had a three-fifths majority. Nevertheless, this general figure conceals the variation by process. Women formed the majority sex in the preparatory and weaving sections while men predominated in the spinning and finishing ones. In fact, the over-all sex proportion was heavily weighted by the weaving section, which in itself absorbed the labour of close to one-half of all cotton operatives in 1911. Were it not for weaving's exceptional size compared to the other processes, the discrepancy between the numbers of men and women employed would have been much less marked.

Shifting the focus from cotton manufacture in general to each of its internal processes, the allocation of work between the sexes was as follows. In the preparation of the cotton fibre for spinning, men were almost exclusively employed for opening the cotton bales and loosening, cleaning and combing their matted contents. This work required much skill or strength, or both. In addition, the high-speed machinery used in these operations was dangerous for anyone lacking a so-called mechanical mind. Only exceptionally were women employed in this phase of the preparatory process, and then only as assistants to the male operatives in districts where men were in short supply for cotton work—namely Manchester, Wigan and Bolton—or in firms where the lighter Egyptian rather than the heavier American type of cotton was used. The remaining operations of attenuating the “sliver” and of giving it the light twist preparatory to the actual spinning were mainly in women's hands.

Spinning was a man's or woman's process depending on whether the machine used was the “ring” or the “mule”. The simpler ring frame was operated by women and the more complicated and cumbersome “mule” by men. The rare cases of women employed in mule spinning rooms occurred in those districts subject to a shortage of male cotton workers. There the women worked as assistants

to the mule minder. Since only the “mule” could spin the finer counts of yarn, the “mule” and the “ring” could not be indifferently used for any but the coarser counts.

Cotton doubling and twining was on the whole a female operation except for the skilled twiner minding and for doubling frame attending. In the latter it was common practice to run the machines day and night and during mealtimes. Only men doublers were employed in some firms. In others, women operated the machines by day and men by night. In still others, where doubling was solely a day operation, women were exclusively employed. The subsidiary work of gassing frame attending was another continuous operation and it showed the same sex variation as doubling attending.

Weaving, as practised by the handicraftsman, comprised three distinct operations: 1) the preparation of the warp, 2) the placing of the warp on the beam of the loom, and 3) the throwing of the shuttle through the warp. The preparatory and setting-up operations required much skill, though neither required as much time as the throwing of the shuttle.

As a factory process, however, the work of a weaver substantially altered. The skilled aspects were relegated to specialists with the result that weaving so-called now consisted of keeping the shuttles furnished with weft, placing the shuttles in the looms, replacing them by full ones as they became empty, repairing broken threads and stopping and starting the looms as the foregoing operations required. To reach the expected performance standards several years of training were necessary, but it was dexterity rather than intelligence or judgment that was required of the worker. Consequently manufacturers sought very young recruits as they were thought better training prospects than older persons whose fingers were less supple. At the earliest age permitted by law, both girls and boys began as “half-timers”,² running errands, fetching weft and carrying cloth for weavers. They gradually assisted in the actual weaving and by the age of thirteen or fourteen were given two looms, at fifteen three, and at sixteen or seventeen, depending on their skill, the normal adult’s allotment of four.

Weaving with its subsidiary winding and warping processes was predominantly women’s work. In the Census of 1911, roughly seventy per cent of those in such work were women. The winding of the yarn on to bobbins and then from the bobbins on to beams to form the warp of the woven cloth was almost exclusively done by women. Forewomen were commonly employed to supervise these processes. Although men also shared in the preliminary winding processes, they were confined to ball warping in contrast to the women’s simpler beam warping.³

After winding, the threads were then sized by a taperer who was always a man. His work not only entailed heavy lifting and long training but also embraced preliminary operations which were both light and relatively unskilled.

Next the twistors and drawers-in performed the skilled work of arranging the warp for the type of cloth to be woven. This was also the work of men except in a few districts where male labour was difficult to procure and then some women were used as well. They, unlike their male counterparts, did not lift the heavy beams but instead paid the men to do this work for them. Nor did they work on the fancy patterns which required long training.

Finally, when the warp was ready for the weaver, it was transferred to the loom and fixed there by loom overlookers. Although some of the beams weighed almost two hundredweight, mechanical means of moving them were not in general use.

The cotton weavers *per se* provided one of the rare examples of men and women working side by side under virtually the same conditions and receiving the same piecework rates. For the adults of either sex the loom complement was normally four. Only in exceptional districts did men attend to six looms with the assistance of a young boy or girl. With women, instances of exceeding the four-loom standard were even more rare.

²“Half-timers” were children under fourteen years of age who could be employed legally in factories only on a half-time basis. In 1891 the minimum age for half-timers was ten, rising by 1914 to twelve. Cotton and wool manufacture, alone of all factory trades in England and Wales, made any extensive use of them.

³In ball warping, a large number of threads were led together off the winders’ bobbins on to a “warping mill” in the form of a rope. This rope was then wound off the “mill” into a “ball” in which form it was sent to be bleached, dyed or mercerized.

The indiscriminate use of men and women as weavers had long prevailed in the industry despite the testimony of the cotton manufacturers' representative that weaving was "not a man's job".⁴ In some of cotton weaving's most important centres, where other men's work was not readily available, cotton weaving was very much a family operation, employing husbands and sons as well as wives and daughters. Nevertheless weaving remained a predominantly female occupation. In 1911 seventy per cent of the persons so returning themselves were women.

Though women were generally considered as good weavers as men,⁵ they were never promoted to the more responsible work of overlooker which entailed not only the actual supervision of the weavers but also of righting the threads, repairing the looms and, as noted above, lifting and carrying the heavy warp beams.

In the cloth warehouse, where the cloth was packed and inspected, very few women were employed. Cloth looking proper, which involved not only repairing defects but also sending for weavers and finding fault or correcting them when necessary, was almost invariably done by men.

As for the finishing processes of bleaching, dyeing and packing, women constituted an estimated one-fifth of the work force in 1911.⁶ They were used only in a subsidiary capacity, performing such operations as sewing together pieces to be manipulated on machines and banding and winding hanks of cotton. In velvet and cord dyeing, in which the pieces of cloth were lighter than in other sections of the trade, women also guided the material on stretchers. But as a rule all wet processes, which exposed the worker to great heat, steam, dirt, and chemical vapours, were male preserves.

The raising of the pile on fustian, corduroy and velveteen was done by both men and women called fustian cutters. Women handled the lighter materials and men the heavier. But the process was a rapidly declining one. Whereas some 8,200 were engaged in this work in England and Wales in 1891, the number had fallen to 4,200 by 1911.⁷ But accompanying the decline was a marked change in the sex proportion. From constituting sixty-one per cent of all fustian cutters in 1891, women by 1911 formed seventy per cent of the total. Their rising importance was associated with the introduction of lighter and cheaper classes of velvet which required less strength and skill to work.

4.2.2 Wool

In terms of numbers employed, wool manufacture, including both woollen and worsted goods, was only two fifths as important to women as cotton. Even so, the total of women wool operatives, ranging between 149,000 and 164,000 in the period under review, was not inconsiderable. As with cotton, wool manufacture was also highly concentrated. In 1911 eighty per cent of its workers resided in Yorkshire West Riding. Though still a major one, women's share compared to theirs in cotton was smaller. Also differing somewhat from cotton, was women's participation in the basic textile manufacturing processes.

Whereas in cotton, women were in the majority in the preparatory and weaving processes and men in the spinning and finishing ones, the majority sex in wool was reversed for the preparatory and spinning processes. Furthermore, even though wool weaving and finishing followed the sex pattern of cotton, wool finishing relied much less on female labour, as only an estimated eight per cent of its work force were women.⁸

Men did the initial wool sorting, carding, bowl-minding and wool-drying. This work was not

⁴*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc.* p. 81; 1919 Cmd. 167, xxxi.

⁵S. and B. Webb, *Problems of Modern Industry*, London: Longmans, Green, 1898, p. 59.

⁶Estimated from the number of men and women returned in 1911 as textile bleachers, dyers and printers in Lancashire where the cotton industry, to the exclusion of most other textile branches, was mostly concentrated.

⁷The trade was almost entirely confined to England. Accordingly, the Census of Scotland has no separate listing for fustian cutters.

⁸Estimated from the number of men and women returned in 1911 as textile bleachers, dyers and printers in Yorkshire West Riding where the wool industry, to the exclusion of almost all other textile branches, was mostly concentrated.

only of a heavy nature but certain aspects of it also subjected the worker to excessive heat. Women, on the other hand, were concentrated in the subsequent drawing and twisting operations. On night turns, which were a common feature of wool combing, men did the work women did in the day but with greater efficiency. Thus to a woman's two to three "laps" a man would produce three or four.

Though men in wool, as in cotton, monopolized mule minding, this failed to make spinning predominantly men's work. First of all, ring-type frames, operated by women, sufficed for the production of most worsted yarn. Secondly, though yarn for the manufacture of woollen cloth was spun on "mules", unlike the situation in cotton, women as well as boys normally served as assistants (piecers) to the male minders. In the Scottish tweed trade, where spinning was a highly skilled operation, women's share was entirely confined to piecing.

With the remaining textile processes, wool followed broadly the same lines as cotton. Compared to cotton, however, men's scope as weavers was much narrower. They were almost entirely confined to the Huddersfield men's suiting trade, for which a specially high degree of skill was required, and to heavy cloth weaving. On the other hand, women in wool had a larger share to play as piece goods examiners. Both after the cloth left the loom and in "finishing", they inspected it for irregularities and, where possible, mended those found. This work was often supervised by forewomen.

Although carpet manufacture did not confine itself to the use of wool, and accordingly was classified by the Census to the suborder Mixed or Unspecified Materials, for the purposes of this study it has been considered as a specialized branch of the wool trade. For even if not officially of it, carpet manufacture was so closely analogous to its heavier sections and at the same time of such little numerical importance that it is preferable to include it as a sub-division of wool than to treat it as a separate branch or to group it with less-related textile branches.

As a domestic industry, the heavy work of carpet weaving was men's and continued to be so even after the introduction of the power carpet loom in the 1850s. Despite the loom's mechanization, carpet weaving still demanded considerable strength. Women's work was mainly subsidiary and confined to the lighter and less skilled operations in the preparation and finishing sections.

But in the 1870s the royal axminster loom was introduced. Compared to those then in use, it was light to operate and women were introduced to them. Subsequently the axminster section of the trade advanced relative to the heavier ones and with its advance went a rise in the proportion of women carpet workers. Whereas in 1891 women formed forty-six per cent of the Carpet, Rug, Felt Manufacture work force, ten years later they were in the majority with their fifty-four per cent share. By 1911 it had risen still further, to fifty-seven per cent.⁹ Thus despite men's retention of the heavy loom weaving, consumer preference for the cheaper axminster carpets was producing a steady deterioration of men's position in the trade.

4.2.3 Hosiery, Silk and Lace

The minor textile trades of hosiery, silk and lace together did not employ as many women as wool. However, in the share they accorded women they surpassed both wool and cotton. On a combined average, close to seventy per cent of their respective work forces were women.

As long as hosiery was a domestic hand industry, the nation's knitters were normally women. Once knitting machines worked by manual power were introduced, however, the sex of the knitter changed even if the domestic nature of the trade did not. Henceforth male labour was mainly employed to operate the machines which were heavy to manipulate and women were used to spin and wind the yarn for the knitting machine and to add the finishing touches to the knitted goods.

In the seventies power was applied to knitting machinery. As a result there was a large decrease in the domestic sector of the trade and a growing concentration of the work in the factory. Men on the whole retained their position as machine operatives in the factory setting. Only in Scotland

⁹Although the Census combines under one heading felt, carpet and rug workers, women's computed share can be taken as a rough estimate of their share in carpet and rug manufacture proper because of the numerical insignificance of the felt section.

were there some instances of women performing such work. The new automatic Cotton's Patent Machine did little to lighten knitting. Its main value lay in so increasing output that fewer knitters were required.

But the key position of men as hosiery machine operators did not outlast the turn of the century. At about this time lighter circular and flat machines, which rendered Cotton's Patent Machine obsolete, came into general use. Depending on the district and the particular machine size, women were used to a varying extent to operate these new machines. The resulting displacement of men operators was reflected in the Census figures. Between 1891 and 1911 hosiery developed from a trade employing two times as many women as men into one employing three times as many. As hosiery machine operators women were generally on the smaller machines. When they operated the same machines as men they usually had fewer to mind. Nor did they, unlike the men, carry away the heavy rolls of fabric. Moreover all machine supervision was in male hands.

Since hosiery, in contrast to the textile branches already discussed, used ready-made yarn, its preparatory processes were of little account. On the other hand, hosiery provided more opportunity for light types of finishing work since its end product was not so much rolls of cloth as finished garments. Women were used for the subsidiary processes of winding, mending and for all the necessary sewing operations such as seaming and turning off toes and heels. Boxing of hose was also women's work except in Hinckley where it was done by men. There few employment opportunities existed for men outside of the hosiery trade. Dyehouse and presshouse work, which was generally heavy in nature, was a male monopoly.

Silk manufacture employed two times as many women as men. The material used was light compared to most other textile fabrics and the end products were often smallware items such as braids, tapes and trimmings. Women's work encompassed all operations but fibre preparation, hand weaving, supervision and general labouring. Only in the well-organized Leek district were men found regularly engaged in the weaving department, performing not only the weaving proper, whether by hand or machine, but the operations subsidiary to it.

The artificial silk industry dated from the turn of the century. The chemical processes were men's as well as spinning and finishing. Women figured prominently in the weaving department and in winding and sorting the yarn.

Lace-making was originally a handicraft carried on by women in their homes. By the nineties, however, factory-made lace, processed on machines operated by men, had almost superseded the hand-made product. Though on the whole the lace-making machines were heavy to operate, the narrow ones were moderately light and when used to produce simple piece goods their operation was neither particularly difficult nor exacting.

The custom had developed in the Midland area, where machine lace-making was concentrated, to work operatives on a split-shift system, ranging from the early hours of the morning to midnight. Women assisted these male operatives by winding the yarn on to brass bobbins. Because the bobbins had to be rewound as soon as they were empty, bobbin winding was also carried on both night and day. Women performed this work, however, only in the day while boys were used at night. In some instances women were dispensed with entirely and boys were used for both day and night operations. Women also did all the needlework and making up processes such as mending, clipping off ends, and scalloping. Men were employed in the heavy work connected with dyeing and bleaching while women performed the light work connected with drying and finishing lace.

Scotland was the centre of the curtain lace industry. Women's scope was much more limited there than in the Midlands. They neither assisted the machine operators as winders nor performed the lighter folding and finishing operations.

4.2.4 Rough Textiles

The jute industry, concentrated almost entirely in the Dundee area of Scotland, was predominantly a woman's trade. Compared to most other textile branches, the processes were much simpler and

little effort was made to obtain a fine finish. Women worked the spinning machines and with few exceptions the looms as well.¹⁰ Men's role was largely confined to supervision and to the preparing and finishing processes, work which required relatively few workers.

As in some of the cotton weaving districts, Dundee offered few alternative job prospects for men but, unlike the cotton trade, the jute mills made little use of adult men. Though both boys and girls entered the mills as bobbin shifters, only the girls rose to positions of spinner and weaver while the boys, with few exceptions, left the mills as they approached adulthood.

The sex division in flax and hemp followed closely that of jute with women doing the spinning and weaving and men the preparing and finishing.

Of the remaining "rough" textiles, only the rope section was of any numerical significance and thus only it is considered. Moreover, in the period under review, it was the only important textile trade in which men, on the average, approximated women in numbers. Initially, however, men's share had been much higher. Whereas in 1891 there had been 350 men to every 100 women employed, the ratio of men to women had dropped to 195 to 100 in 1901 and to 133 to 100 by 1911. Women entered the work in growing numbers as machinery was introduced to perform the heavy work hitherto done normally by men. Preparing remained a male preserve as did any of the work requiring skill, physical strength, exposure to the weather or contact with tar. Women operated the lighter machines and also did the lighter trucking and carrying. In the departments which women monopolized, women also commonly served as supervisors.

4.2.5 Smallware and Miscellaneous

Smallware and miscellaneous textile manufacture was a composite grouping of not only numerically insignificant textile trades but also of textile workers undefined. The manufacture of textile sundries *per se* used women to a greater extent than any other textile branch. Over four-fifths of its work force were women. The products manufactured, such as thread, were generally much lighter and smaller than those of the other textile trades.

4.3 Clothing

Women's close occupational connection with the textile industry did not end once the finished bolts of cloth were packed for distribution. Even more important to them than their employment in the production of cloth was their subsequent use for its manufacture into items of apparel. But whereas Textiles found a sizeable though admittedly minor place for men's labour, to the extent of forty per cent, Clothing embracing the major branches of Dressmaking, Tailoring, Shirtmaking and Needlework, Hat Making, and Boot and Shoe Making, and the minor accessory branches of Corsets, Buttons, Gloves, Artificial Flowers, and Umbrellas, used men's labour only to the extent of one-third.

Another difference in the sex division pattern between Textiles and Clothing lay in the branch distribution of the sexes. In Textiles, most men tended to be employed in those branches employing most women and least in those employing the least number of women. In Clothing, on the other hand, men's distribution followed no such consistent course. Instead, nine-tenths of the men were concentrated in Boot and Shoe where they outnumbered women four to one, and in tailoring where they about equalled women. Only in the minor apparel trade of umbrella making did men once more come into their own, slightly exceeding the number of women so engaged. In this instance, however, only a few thousand men were involved, making this exception of little relevance when the category as a whole is the analytical viewpoint.

Geographically, Clothing was a more widely dispersed occupational outlet for women than Tex-

¹⁰In the batching department of one firm, boy and female labour were used interchangeably and were paid the same time rate. See Royal Commission on Labour, *The Employment of Women*, p. 301; 1893-94 C.6894,xxxvii, pt.I.

Table 4.5: Per Cent Distribution of Male and Female Clothing Workers in Great Britain by Branch, 1901-1911.

Branch	Females		Males	
	1901	1911	Average 1901-1911	Average 1901-1911
Dressmaking	50.22	47.82	49.02	.55
Tailoring	16.60	17.69	17.15	38.05
Shirt Making, Needlework	12.46	11.45	11.96	1.32
Hat Making:	10.18	12.30	11.24	4.85
Millinery	7.11	9.33	8.22	.22
Hats and Caps (other than straw)	1.65	1.71	1.68	3.43
Straw Plait and Hats	1.42	1.26	1.34	1.20
Boot and Shoe	6.25	5.95	6.10	51.88
Accessories:	4.30	4.81	4.57	3.38
Corsets	1.67	1.73	1.70	.40
Gloves	1.05	1.18	1.12	.74
Umbrellas	.67	.56	.62	1.50
Buttons	.39	.55	.47	.36
Artificial Flowers	.35	.51	.43	.15
Others	.17	.28	.23	.23

Table 4.6: Females as a Per Cent of Total Clothing Work Force in Great Britain by Branch, 1901-1911.

Branch	1901	1911	Average 1901-1911
Dressmaking	99.73	99.21	99.47
Hat Making:	82.42	83.50	82.96
Millinery	99.10	98.50	98.80
Straw Plait and Hats	73.74	66.55	70.15
Hats and Caps (other than straw)	50.71	50.78	50.75
Shirt Making, Needlework	95.73	94.31	95.02
Tailoring	47.66	49.65	48.66
Boot and Shoe	19.31	20.35	19.83
Accessories:	74.17	73.95	74.06
Corsets	90.59	89.50	90.05
Artificial Flowers	84.89	86.63	85.76
Gloves	76.71	75.29	76.00
Buttons	70.66	75.95	73.30
Umbrellas	49.49	43.33	46.41
Others	63.64	70.76	67.20
All Clothing Workers	67.25	68.30	67.78

tiles with its characteristic concentration in a few centres. In two of Clothing's major branches, Dressmaking and Hat Making, the workers were dispersed throughout the country though in its other branches this was not the case. Tailors were concentrated principally in London and Leeds, shirt-makers in London and the Lancashire district, and boot and shoe makers in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire.

Another peculiarity of Clothing was that of all "industries" it was responsible for the largest number of women homeworkers. Dressmakers headed the list. Next were the shirtmakers and seamstresses, followed by tailoresses and hat makers. It also accorded women their greatest opportunities for self-employment and as employers.¹¹ Moreover, it provided one of the few occupations in which female apprenticeships were a characteristic feature. Especially was this the case with dressmaking and the millinery section of the hat making trade.

Basic to all clothing manufacture were the processes of 1) cutting, 2) sewing, and 3) finishing. Wherever applicable the following branch analysis of the sex division is made in terms of these three processes.

4.3.1 Dressmaking

As an occupational heading, dressmaking was second only to private domestic service in the amount of female labour it absorbed. It also held the record in regard to not only the number of women who worked at home but also who worked on their own account, while it was second only to boarding and lodging house keeping as a trade providing women with openings as employers. Exclusive of those employments which by definition were wholly confined to women—for example charwomen, day girl—it also surpassed all others in its female proportion of very nearly one hundred per cent. In the majority of dressmaking concerns there was not a single male employed. Though occasionally a cutter was a man, women normally performed all operations, including not only the skilled cutting and fitting but also the supervision and management.

But whereas in the nineties the typical dressmaker was an independent craftswoman working out of her own home and more or less competent to produce a custom-made garment from the first cut to the final button, by 1914 factory "ready-made" dresses were largely cladding the women of all classes and the disappearance of the dressmaker-craftswoman was now only a matter of time. Gradually replacing her was the urban factory operative, the occupational product of the application of power and mass production methods to the manufacture of women's dresses. The change in production techniques did not affect the sex compositions as much as the total source and the age distribution of female dressmakers. Fewer than formerly were now needed to supply the clothing requirements of women and children and of these, a rising proportion were in the younger age groups.

But the development of factory dressmaking was not entirely without some effect on men as well. The small number of males in the trade nearly tripled between 1901 and 1911, most of whom now entered the emerging dressmaking factories as employers, supervisors, and general labourers.

4.3.2 Tailoring

Before the invention of the sewing machine, men's outer clothing was, for the well-to-do, the handiwork of the craftsman tailor and, for the less well-to-do, of the wife in the home. Invariably the tailor was a man capable of making a garment throughout. Not only did he need to be skilled to "fit" the garments, especially the suitcoats, to the customer's individual proportions, but he also needed great strength in his fingers to hand sew the heavy materials employed in the garments' manufacture.

Is the 1840s, however, the sewing machine was invented and by the fifties it was being experimentally applied to the manufacture of men's clothing. The first operatives were men, but not of

¹¹See *Census of England and Wales, 1911*, X, i, Table 3; 1913, Cd 7018, lxxviii. *Census of Scotland, 1911*, Table XXVI, 1913 Cd. 6896, lxxx.

British origin. They were Jewish aliens from Eastern Europe who were beginning to enter Britain in substantial numbers at about this time. They shared neither the traditions of the country nor of the handicraft tailoring trade.

Initially the machine production of men's clothing little affected the handicraft tailor. The machine's consequent cheapening of the cost of the garments opened up a new market rather than made inroads into the custom-made or so-called bespoke branch of the trade. For the first time ordinary workmen could afford to buy their suits. But this stable situation did not last long.

By the 1890s ready-made clothing factories and workshops, organized on a mass production basis, had developed to such an extent that the trade of tailoring itself was in a state of transition. From the old handicraft system it was passing into a factory industry. Thus coexisting throughout the 1891-1914 period were both the declining journeymen tailor's bespoke branch and the expanding ready-made branch in various stages of mechanization and labour sub-division—from the single homemaker to the highly developed and mechanically perfected factory employing over a thousand workers. It is within this transitional context that the work of men and women is now portrayed.

The rise of the tailoress followed upon the application of the sewing machine to the trade. By the Census of 1911 tailoresses for the first time about equalled tailors in number. This marked change in the sex ratio within half a century was not a direct displacement of the male handicraft tailor by the tailoress. The bespoke branch remained, as it had always been, a masculine preserve. Instead it was the expansion of the ready-made branch, which used women to a high degree, at the expense of the bespoke branch that was responsible for women's growing predominance.

Even so, it was not as cutters, dressers, supervisors or warehouse workers that women displaced men. Cutting continued a highly skilled process requiring a long apprenticeship. The guillotine and the band-knife commonly employed were dangerous to use as no satisfactory guards had as yet been devised. Pressing was mainly a hand operation entailing weights of from nine to sixteen pounds. But towards the close of the period under review, a pressing machine was introduced which women operated and which could be used for all but the best and heaviest work.

Men's displacement came mainly in the sewing process but it was by no means complete by the outbreak of the war. The degree of displacement varied with the quality of the garment and the methods under which the garment was produced. Thus in the highest bespoke section of the trade, waistcoat making was the only skilled work which occasionally women performed. The suit coat and trousers, which required more skill, were in the hands of men although women assisted at times by performing any operations in which the sewing machine was used as well as simple finishing operations such as button holes. In the middle class bespoke work, where greater use was made of labour sub-division and the sewing machine, proportionally more women were employed. In this class of work, coats were always done by men but sometimes women sewed the trousers as well as the waistcoats. In the lowest class of bespoke work, both machine sewing and sub-division of labour were extensively applied. A higher proportion of women were engaged in this work than in the two higher grades. Women generally made the waistcoats and occasionally made trousers. Coats continued to be made solely by men. Only in the Jewish firms engaged in bespoke work did the sex pattern differ. Generally only men were employed and all the processes, including machining, elsewhere done by women, were performed by men.

The wholesale ready-made section of the trade was composed of both workshops and factories. In the former the labour was highly sub-divided. In the latter machinery had been applied to the already sub-divided processes. The result was labour so minutely graded that one operator might spend his or her whole time making but a thirtieth part of a garment. It was this development which led one contemporary to remark that "the cloth passes through so many hands that it is worn out before the garment is made".¹²

In the non-Jewish workshops, which made extensive use of homeworkers, nearly all machinists were women. Work was of a much lower grade than in the bespoke branch. The machining of trousers

¹²R. Tawney, *The Establishment of Minimum Rates in the Tailoring Industry under the Trade Boards Act of 1909*, London: Bell, 1915, p. 10.

and waistcoats and boys' suits was done exclusively by women. The few female coat machinists worked on coats of a much lower grade than those on which men were usually employed. In the Jewish workshops, women, when employed at all, were normally used only for such minor processes as felling, tacking and lining. In Glasgow, however, men occasionally were used interchangeably with women for "women's work", and were then paid at the "women's rate".¹³ In the factories, women were the sewing machine operators, and men were the cutters, pressers, warehousemen, and supervisors.

4.3.3 Shirt Making and Needlework

Shirt Making and Needlework was a composite of 1) persons indefinitely returned as button holers, hemmers, sewing machinists, and the like, who if properly returned would have been classified under some other heading in clothing manufacture or under a heading such as lace or hosiery in textile manufactures; 2) needle women either working on their own account or going to their employers' house to work; and 3) persons engaged in the manufacture of such items as shirts, collars, ties, and underclothing. Women monopolized the first two categories. Only in shirt making proper did men have any part to play and then only a minor one. According to one official estimate there were over eight women to every man shirtmaker.¹⁴

In shirt manufacture women's work consisted mainly of machining and the processes incidental to it. The materials were much lighter than those found in the tailoring trade. Also instead of the heavier pressing, the lighter process of ironing sufficed and ironers, unlike pressers, were for the most part women. Men's work was largely limited to the most skilled cutting operations and the heaviest warehouse ones.

4.3.4 Hat Making

As a branch, hat making was a composite of millinery, hats and cap making, and straw hat making.

Millinery, like dressmaking, was another trade in which women were commonly found as home-workers, employers, self-employed workers, and apprentices. During the period under review millinery was undergoing a transition similar to dressmaking and for the same reason. The application of power to the sewing machine was transforming the former craft of millinery into a mass production factory trade. Men, though virtually non-existent as milliners, nevertheless doubled their numbers between 1901 and 1911, most entering the trade at the skilled levels of cutting and factory management.

Changing fashions were responsible for the gradual supersession of silk hats by felt ones, and then of the felt by cloth hats and caps. In the declining silk hat trade women were in the minority. The only important female groups were the crown-sewers and trimmers. The skilled work of body-making, finishing and shaping were in men's hands. The sex division in felt hat manufacture was similar. But in its preliminary process of felting, district practice varied as to the sex employed. In the well organized Lancashire district, no women were found in the felting department while in the Warwickshire district they were. Their introduction there dated from the time of the men's unsuccessful strike in 1892.

Cloth hat and cap manufacture was a trade practically created by the alien Jews in Britain in the last half of the nineteenth century. Its processes closely resembled those used in the manufacture of other garments except that less skill was needed at each step and the material used was relatively light to cut and press. Women formed the majority sex in the trade which they shared with Jewish men.

Straw hat manufacture consisted of two sections: straw plait manufacture and straw hat manufacture proper. Both experienced marked changes in their sex ratios during the 1891-1914 period.¹⁵

¹³S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁴*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, p. 14; 1919 Cmd. 135, xxxi.

¹⁵The computations that follow are based on English and Welsh figures only as the Census of Scotland combines

Straw plait manufacture was traditionally a cottage handicraft employing many thousands of workers and employing female labour almost exclusively. But by 1911 there were no more than one thousand straw plait makers in the country and of these less than two hundred were women. Foreign competition had reduced the size of the trade and its mechanization had further reduced women's numbers as the machine operators were men. Whereas in 1901 women formed nearly three-fourths of the work force by the following decade they formed less than one-fifth.

Although women continued to predominate in the manufacture of straw hats, their proportion fell. The application of the sewing machine was largely responsible. As a hand trade, women had been the sewers and trimmers, and men the blockers and stiffeners. With the mechanization of the sewing operations the sex division remained unaltered. But now fewer women were needed as sewers. Thus without any direct or indirect displacement of women by men, women's relative share declined. Whereas in 1901 seventy-four per cent of all straw hat makers were women, in 1911 only seventy per cent were.

4.3.5 Boot and Shoe

As a hand trade, boot and shoe making was a male preserve but with its mechanization came the systematic employment of women and their having a one-fifth share by the period under review. However, within its major branches—1) Boot and Shoe, 2) Slipper, and 3) Patten and Clog—women's share varied widely, ranging from a high of thirty-four per cent in slipper manufacture to a low of one per cent in patten-clog manufacture.¹⁶ Then within Boot and Shoe itself there were further variations. A higher proportion of women were used in the manufacture of lighter than heavier footwear, while men formed an increasing proportion of the work force with every rise in the class of goods produced.

Women monopolized the "closing" of shoe uppers. This was true whether as a mechanized trade it was carried on in the home or factory. Factory shoe making, in addition, assigned to women the lighter side of the final stock room operations of treeing, cleaning and boxing. This gave women a slight majority in the stock room. Only exceptionally were women employed in any of the remaining departments, namely, 1) clicking in which the upper sections of the footwear were cut from skins, work which could only be done economically by those who had developed a considerable judgment of leather through long training and experience; 2) rough-stuff cutting in which the bottom material was cut by knives set in powerful machines; 3) lasting in which the uppers were placed over the last and attached to the bottoms; and 4) finishing in which the edges were blackened, the soles cleaned, and the shoes polished and trimmed. Much of the work in the men's departments was heavy. Those operations which were not, if also unskilled, were usually assigned to boys.

4.3.6 Accessories

No more than three per cent of all female clothing workers were engaged in the accessory trades. In all but umbrella making, women constituted the majority sex.

In corsetry, men did the platemaking which required considerable training. It was a hand process but gradually machines worked by women were being substituted. In the made-to-order section of the trade, the remaining corsetry processes were generally in the hands of women, but in the factory section men were used as cutters and pressers and were sometimes found in the warehouse.

As for glove manufacture, women generally monopolized all operations but the cutting and heavy warehouse ones. Men's work in umbrella making included the making of the sticks and frames and the setting out of the covers. Women, on the other hand, hemmed and seamed the covers and fitted them to the frames.

In the button trade, the sex division was mainly between the older and more skilled branches,

the few Scottish workers in straw plait and straw hat manufacture under one heading.

¹⁶Computed from 1901 and 1911 figures only as no branch ones are given in 1891.

such as the hand metal and pearl button sections, and the newer covered and linen button ones. The former group relied heavily on men and the latter on women. Artificial flower making used women for all operations but cutting and hand painting of the corollas.

Chapter 5

Other Manufacturing “Industries”

This chapter surveys the sex division in the following “industries”: 1) Paper, 2) Food, Drink and Tobacco, 3) Skins and Leather, 4) Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc., 5) Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass, 6) Wood, 7) Metals, 8) Construction, and 9) Miscellaneous.

5.1 Paper

In paper manufacture, men outnumbered women two to one. Since this was roughly the proportion of men to women in the total labour force, it might appear that there was no true sex division, each sex simply participating in proportion to its relative numerical strength in the labour market. But in fact the work of men and women in Paper, as in the other “industries” already reviewed, was quite distinct.

Paper manufacture fell broadly into two divisions: the making of paper itself and the manufacture of products from paper. The latter was largely centred in the London area and its major branches were 1) Stationery, 2) Paper Containers, 3) Printing, 4) Lithography, and 5) Bookbinding. Women formed the majority of workers in Stationery, Paper Containers and Bookbinding, and the making of paper containers was their major outlet as paper workers. In contrast most male paper workers were printers.¹

¹Branch computations based on 1901 and 1911 figures as the ones for 1891 are not altogether comparable.

Table 5.1: Per Cent Distribution of Male and Female Paper Workers in Great Britain by Branch, 1901-1911.

Branch	Females			Males	
	1901	1911	Average 1901-1911	Average 1901-1911	
Paper Containers	30.59	29.78	30.19	2.31	
Bookbinding	24.96	19.29	22.21	7.89	
Printing	13.77	22.71	18.24	63.48	
Paper Manufacture and Paper Staining	15.19	10.95	13.07	13.25	
Stationery Manufacture	10.13	11.72	10.93	3.40	
Lithography	1.95	2.64	2.30	7.38	
Other	3.42	2.91	3.11	2.29	

Table 5.2: Females as a Per Cent of Total Paper Work Force in Great Britain by Branch, 1901-1911.

Branch	1901	1911	Average 1901-1911
Paper Containers	88.73	87.40	88.07
Stationery Manufacture	65.21	63.99	64.60
Bookbinding	61.62	60.59	61.11
Paper Manufacture and Paper Staining	38.08	32.88	35.48
Lithography	12.49	17.36	14.93
Printing	10.54	17.32	13.93
Other	37.43	53.44	45.44
All Paper Workers	34.99	37.14	36.07

5.1.1 Paper Making

As paper makers, women were confined almost exclusively to 1) the preliminary work of rag and waste paper sorting and rag cutting, 2) the minding of the subsidiary machines that sized, glazed, rolled, or cut paper, and 3) the warehouse sorting, counting and packing of the finished sheets. The first of these, a virtual female monopoly, required a considerable amount of skilled judgment. In the second, women assisted men but only in the daytime. When the machines worked overtime or at night only men were employed. In the third, men did the heavier and women the lighter aspects of the work.

No women were used in the manufacturing process proper, whether done by hand or machine. The work was not only heavy but continuous. In addition, many of the operations required considerable skill. For the hand section of the trade, a formal apprenticeship was required. Although the machine section was less skilled, its machinery was generally very dangerous to operate.

A changing technology was serving to reduce further women’s already minor share in the trade. By the 1870s the process of extracting cellulose from wood had been developed. It eliminated the need for women to sort and cut rags. The new work of wood pulp manufacture, which was heavy in nature, went into male hands. In addition, the rag paper trade that remained was making increasing use of machines for rag cutting, thereby still further diminishing women’s openings as paper makers.

The Census figures mirrored this development. Whereas four out of every ten workers in paper making proper were women in 1891, only three out of every ten were in 1911. Despite the trade being an expanding one, women’s employment within it retrogressed both relatively and absolutely.

5.1.2 Printing

Until the middle of the nineteenth century printing was essentially a male trade. Women, if they participated at all, did only minor folding and sewing operations. Much of the printer’s work was heavy and a long apprenticeship was necessary to master its varied details which at that time encompassed type-founding, ink-making, press-carpentry, composing, folding, and bookbinding. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, however, the printing trade expanded considerably. The abolition of the stamp duties and paper tax, the spread of education and the improvement in publishing facilities promoted a large demand for printed matter which in turn revolutionized printing as a trade and led to the introduction of large machines. Pressmen became differentiated from compositors, minders from layers-on and takers-off, jobbers from bookhands, folders from makers-up, while bookbinding became a separate trade altogether. The result of this “printing revolution” was scores of different trades, each minutely subdivided in turn, and each containing processes requiring neither great physical strength nor a high degree of skill or responsibility. It was these processes which provided women with their opening wedge into the trade.

Printing proper consisted of two main processes: composing or setting up type by hand or by monotype or linotype machines and minding the printing machines, including the subsidiary

processes of feeding the machines with paper and taking off the printed sheets. Lithography formed a specialized section and will be considered separately.

Women, accounting for close to fifteen per cent of the printing work force, were almost entirely confined to the warehouse processes of folding, collating and sewing the already printed sheets, to proof reading, and to laying-on and taking-off sheets from the printing machine. This last work they partially shared with youths and more rarely with adult men. When youths and men were so employed, however, they were usually found on the larger-sized printing machines and their job content included operations not normally expected of the female feeder, such as washing up, lifting paper on to the feed board and taking it down. In no instances were women found preparing the printing machine or readying any job for the actual printing process. Both this work and the skilled machine minding were entirely in the hands of men.

Composing, whether by hand or by the newer machine methods which by the 1890s were making their first serious inroads into the trade, was almost always done by men. The work, the apprenticeship for which extended over seven years, was highly skilled.

The few female compositors, numbering less than seven hundred,² were almost entirely confined to the book section of the printing trade and then within it, principally to the Edinburgh district. The work of these women called for much less skill than that generally exercised by men. In Edinburgh, for example, where women's foothold into the trade came at the time of the male compositors' unsuccessful strike in 1872-1873, women rarely learned more than the actual type setting—setting up, correcting, and distributing the type back into the case. Imposing—the dividing of long galleys of type into pages and arranging them so that when the printed sheet was eventually folded each page would follow in its proper order—was in most cases men's work. So was the heavy work of locking up which entailed not only making the type firm within the forme by inserting wedges but also carrying the heavy formes to the press for the proof impression. Nor did women correct on “stone”, an operation requiring the worker to lean over in a doubled position. The heavy work of proof pulling was also a male preserve.

In Edinburgh, as elsewhere, women were rarely employed in commercial work with its versatile demands on both skill and strength. Nor were they found in the great London newspaper trade in which working under high pressure and at night in the composing rooms of the morning papers were characteristic features.

Despite London being the chief centre of the nation's printing trade, the only important group of London women compositors, numbering no more than about forty,³ were found in the Women's Printing Society. It was started by Emily Faithful in 1874 after the failure of a similar venture of hers in Edinburgh. Miss Faithful's wider aim was to find employment for educated ladies and she partially realized it in her printing establishment. Not only were women solely employed as compositors but here were trained virtually all the women all-round printers to be found in the country. In addition to setting the type, which about exhausted the scope of their sister compositors elsewhere, they also imposed. However, even in this female establishment male labour was not entirely eliminated. Men worked the printing machines and did the heavier aspects of composing.

Though these particular women compositors, with their three year apprenticeship, were the most highly trained women in the trade, they still compared unfavourably in skill with the average man compositor with his seven year apprenticeship. Had the Women's Printing Society had to rely on the ordinary commercial traffic, it is questionable whether it could have survived the competition of offices staffed by men. But because of its close connection with the feminist movement, the Women's Printing Society had what amounted to a guaranteed market from various contemporary women's groups who on principle allocated their printing orders to it.

In lithography women's scope was even more limited than in printing proper as they only did machine feeding. Their growing use for this work followed in the wake of the trade's developing boy labour shortage. Thus from eight per cent in 1891, women's share rose to seventeen per cent by

² *Factory Report. 1913.* p. 111; 1914 Cd. 7491, xxix.

³ M. Bateson, *Professional Women upon their Professions*, London: Cox, 1895, p. 81.

1911.

5.1.3 Paper Containers

From the eighties onwards, the growing custom of placing newly manufactured articles in individual boxes and bags created an expanding demand for workers to manufacture them. Thus from a total of 21,000 in 1891, its work force increased to 40,000 by 1911. Women, with their almost ninety per cent share, were well in the majority.

Compared to most manufactured articles, paper containers were usually light. Initially they were made by hand. Training to acquire the necessary finger dexterity began at an early age and lasted for two years for the plain boxes and three for the fancy ones. But gradually this hand trade was changing into a factory one as its various operations underwent mechanization. This transformation was by no means complete by 1914 with the result that paper container makers ranged from the homemakers with no appliances but a pair of scissors and a glueboard to the worker in a well-equipped factory where all the work was minutely sectionalized.

Whether made by hand in the home or workshop or by machine in the factory, female labour was almost invariably used except in the Jewish workshops where men often performed "women's work". As a rule, however, men's use was restricted to cutting, supervising and heavy labouring.

5.1.4 Stationery

Women's main work in stationery manufacture was folding paper and cardboard by hand or machine, fastening it together into envelopes and other stationery articles, and packing the finished products. They also did most of the stationery decoration. In some firms women did machine ruling and the less-skilled paper cutting. But these last two operations were on the whole men's. So was the dangerous "guillotine" cutting. Men, too, performed the women's processes of folding and fastening when the product was unusually heavy as with pattern and show card work. On the whole, the technology of the trade remained stable throughout 1891-1914. Machinery found limited use in a trade producing a large range of sizes in relatively small quantities. The sex ratio, unaffected by the great clerical expansion taking place in the trade, also remained constant. Both in 1901 and 1911 women formed close to two-thirds of all stationery workers.⁴

5.1.5 Bookbinding

Women, constituting three-fifths of all bookbinding workers, were highly concentrated in the less skilled processes of the trade. With newly printed books, they folded, collated, numbered, paged and perforated the pages and did all the necessary sewing operation. They also inspected books for flaws and did the dexterous operation of gold laying-on for gilded cover designs and letters. Of all these processes, machine folding was the only one they shared to some extent with men. Whenever the folding machines were used at night, men operated them.

In the rebinding section, women dismantled the book and then refolded, collated and sewed the pages together. They also made the repairs and removed the stains. In vellum-binding, which included such books as ledgers, account books and bank books, their employment was of much the same order as with newly printed books. The only marked difference was in the case of large day-books. Men performed the sewing operations which entailed elaborate hand sewing as each section of the book had to have a separate guard of linen.

All the skilled operations of bookbinding such as the actual binding of books to their covers and the finishing work of tooling and gilding other than gold laying-on were the province of the male bookbinder.

⁴No comparable figures exist for 1891.

Table 5.3: Per Cent Distribution of Male and Female Food, Tobacco and Drink Workers in Great Britain by Branch, 1911.

Branch	Females	Males
Food	73.24	72.36
Tobacco	22.61	3.77
Drink	4.15	23.87

Table 5.4: Females as a Per Cent of Total Food, Drink and Tobacco Work Force in Great Britain by Branch, 1911.

Branch	
Tobacco	71.27
Food	29.51
Chocolate, Cocoa-Makers	71.38
Jam, Preserve, Sweet-Makers	68.78
Fish Curers	61.03
Mustard, Vinegar, Spice, Pickle, etc.	49.42
Creamery Workers	29.09
Provision Curers	26.54
Bread, Biscuit, Cake, etc.-Makers	12.62
Millers, Cereal Food Manufacture	6.98
Sugar Refiners	5.71
Slaughterers	.99
Drink	6.71
Ginger Beer, Mineral Water-Manufacture	24.93
Distillers, Spirit Manufacture	9.91
Brewers	.65
Malsters	.16
All Food, Drink and Tobacco Workers	29.25

5.2 Food, Drink and Tobacco

The vast majority of women engaged in the commercial processing of food, drink and tobacco were in the Food Branch. Tobacco, next in importance, accounted for but a third as many while Drink was not even responsible for one-twentieth of the total female work force.⁵

Despite women's concentration in the Food Branch, seven out of every ten food workers were men. In Drink, the preponderance of men was even more striking. For every woman worker there were fourteen men. Only in the Tobacco Branch did women outnumber men, and then by almost three to one.

5.2.1 Tobacco

The nineties witnessed women becoming the majority sex in the tobacco trade and even though men, mostly alien Jews, predominated previously, women's minor share even then was expanding with each subsequent Census.⁶ Trade developments in the cigar and in the cigarette sections were largely responsible for the sex changeover.

In the cigar section, men made the higher quality hand cigars while women usually manufactured the inferior moulded variety. The latter required less skill but even so enough to require an appren-

⁵All Food, Drink and Tobacco computations are based on 1911 figures only as figures are not given for all branches in 1891 and though given in 1901 the separation of makers from dealers was not generally successful.

⁶See *Census of England and Wales, 1911*, X, i, p. cxli; 1913 Cd. 7018, lxxviii.

ticeship of from five to seven years. By the turn of the century machine-made cigars had replaced the hand product, thereby expanding women's share in tobacco manufacture at the expense of men's.

The cigarette section became established in the eighties. At that time cigarettes were made by hand, mainly by women. As cigarettes became increasingly popular, the cigar and pipe sections, in which men were concentrated, declined and consequently women's employment relative to men's expanded still further.

However, after the turn of the century, the mechanization of cigarette making began and gained momentum in the years just prior to the war. The cigarette-making machines were very expensive and complicated and required skilled operation to achieve maximum output. Men were put in charge of them, thereby making the total disappearance of the woman cigarette maker only a matter of time. Her displacement was to some extent compensated for by an expanding demand for women to assist the male machine operatives and to hand pack the now greatly increased cigarette output. Thus though there was a slight decline in women's share between 1901 and 1911, from seventy-three to seventy-one per cent, it was less than it would have been if no new employment opportunities had simultaneously opened up to women in the trade.

To some extent women also assisted in some of the preparatory processes such as sorting the leaf into grades and tearing the middle fibre from the tobacco leaf. But the most skilled and heavy parts of the preparatory work were wholly in men's hands. Thus men did the very hot stoving and steaming, the skilled liquoring and blending, and operated the dangerous leaf cutting machine.

Unlike the sex division found elsewhere in tobacco manufacture, in plug and bar making both girls and boys of fourteen to eighteen years of age were employed.⁷

5.2.2 Food

In the early nineties most of the food consumed on the nation's dining tables was the product of the unpaid homemakers' own cooking, baking and preserving. However by the outbreak of the war the transfer of food processing from the home to the factory was fast gaining momentum as new food processing techniques, combined with the mass demand of an urbanized population, made commercially prepared foods both possible and profitable. Leading the way were such foods as bread and biscuits, jam, preserves and sweets, chocolate and cocoa, cured fish and meats. And it was these same industries which were largely responsible for the entrance of the woman food worker.

As long as grain milling, sugar refining and bread baking virtually exhausted the list of food manufacturing processes, women were little known to the food industry. In the heavy, round-the-clock work of flour milling, women, when used at all, were confined to cleaning and repairing sacks. Only when the practice of pre-packaging began to spread at the turn of the century did women's scope extend slightly, as women were then employed to pack the retail bags of flour weighing but a few pounds. Sugar refining offered but a few light packing jobs for women. The rest of its work, much of it heavy, continuous, hot and wet, was in male hands. As for commercial bread making, the few thousand women so employed mostly cleaned and prepared tins. Bakehouse mixing, which entailed the handling of large quantities of dough, was heavy work. Night work was a perennial condition of the trade. Only in small domestic bakeries, following closely the pattern of home-made baking, were female bakers to be found.

It was the development of commercial biscuit making which gave women their first major inroad into the bakery trade. This branch, highly concentrated in a few firms producing on a mass scale, used the sexes in about equal proportions.⁸ Women were employed on light manufacturing operations such as icing and decorating biscuits by hand, chocolate dipping, and, in Scotland, making oatcakes by hand. This last work required considerable judgment as well as deftness. Women were also used for lining tins with paper, washing tins and packing the biscuits. Men were in the highly skilled work

⁷Evidence from Lambert and Butler, Ltd., *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices; Summaries of Evidence, etc.*, p. 114; 1919 Cmd. 167, xxxi.

⁸*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, p. 55; 1919 Cmd. 135, xxxi.

of mixing the doughs, creams, icings and fillings. This work required long training and experience and entailed the operation of dangerous machines such as dough mixers. Men were also normally in charge of all baking operations and performed the necessary labouring work.

In the other expanding trades of sugar confectionery, jam-making, fruit preserving, pickle and vinegar making, and cocoa manufacture, all of which were carried on by relatively large firms, women formed the majority sex. Their work consisted not so much in the actual mixing of the ingredients as in the semi-manufacturing processes such as moulding and filling fancy chocolates and in every kind of packing and wrapping.

In the growing meat processing trade, women's share was a minor one. Women did not work to any extent in the slaughtering or dressing departments. Instead their activities were confined to the processing departments which carried on such operations as trimming, tying sausage, weighing, and packing.

Women's work as fish curers was mainly confined to the Scottish herring trade in which women predominated. Since the practice of the trade was to follow the fish as they moved around the coast of Britain, the fish curers were a mobile work force. A recognized division existed between the work of the sexes. Thus in kippering making, women headed, split and gutted the fish while men salted, pickled and washed it in fresh water. The women then hooked the fish and handed the filled sticks to men in the curing room. Smoking the fish was men's work and required attendance throughout the night. In the morning men took down the herrings and women packed them into wooden boxes. In haddock curing, women shared in most processes in Scotland, but were confined to cleaning only at Hull and Grimsby where the practice was for boys to head and for men to do the rest.

The 1891-1914 period witnessed a considerable transfer of dairying from farm to factory as creameries, condenseries and cheese factories increasingly undertook the conversion processes formerly done on the individual farm. But as of 1914 few women were found in the majority of factory dairies. Most were small, employing at most some ten persons, and using few mechanical lifting appliances despite the heavy character of much of the work.⁹ In the flush milk season it was the universal practice to work very long hours while throughout the year seven days constituted the normal work week. In the larger dairies and condenseries women performed subsidiary operations in the warehouse and filled and soldered the tins, but all the main process work was men's.

5.2.3 Drink

Hardly any women were found in the manufacture of alcoholic beverages. The major processes of malting, brewing and spirit distilling were heavy in nature and commonly carried on both day and night. Women were employed in only a few breweries where they performed such unskilled work as bottle filling and washing, corking by hand and machine, labelling, stacking, trucking, and vat washing. Men also predominated in the expanding aerated water trade. Women's work embraced such unskilled operations as labelling, and bottle filling and washing.

5.3 Skins and Leather

Trades dealing with animal skins and their related products were typically filled by men. Women's share in the occupation as a whole was of little numerical importance with men outnumbering them three to one. However, pockets of women's work existed and are revealed by an analysis of its three major branches: 1) Skin and Leather Processing, encompassing furriers, tanners and carriers, 2) Leather Goods, and 3) Hair and Feather Goods.

In the furrier trade, men did the skilled aspects of fur dressing and making-up such as dyeing, cutting and major sewing operations. Women did the subsidiary work of combing and beating the skins and repairing defects prior to dyeing. They also sewed single articles such as fur bands and

⁹E.g., a standard milk churn held 17 gallons which when full weighed over two hundredweight.

mats and did some minor sewing on the more valuable articles. Women formed two-fifths of the work force.

Men monopolized leather tanning and currying. Exposure to dirt and damp were conditions commonly associated with this work and few mechanical appliances were used for lifting and transporting skins from process to process. Women's scope was limited to a few warehouse operations in the light leather section of the trade.

In leather goods manufacture—saddle, whip and harness, solid leather case, and fancy leather goods—the allocation of the jobs between men and women varied with the product manufactured. Men performed most of the work in the saddle trade, which was on the decline as motor transport came into increasing use after the turn of the century. Women did some machine sewing and other minor needlework operations such as stitching the fabric lining to the saddle. In the expanding leather case section, machine and hand sewing on the lighter cases about exhausted women's scope. On the other hand, the new and growing fancy goods trade used women not only for the sewing operations but also for much of the preparatory work such as paring and skiving of edges, lining up and pasting, turning edges over and creasing. Apart from the cutting room, which was a male domain, men were used only for the highest quality or especially complicated work.

In the brush and broom trade women were mostly confined to the toilet and clothes brush section. Men bored the holes in the brush stocks while women tied or wired in the fibre or bristle. Broom manufacture was essentially men's work. Here the fibre or bristle was dipped into pitch and fixed into the stock, not "drawn" as was the case with the toilet and clothes brush section. Paint bushes were also a masculine province as was fibre preparation. The only other work regularly employing women was light packing and polishing.

Gradually the boring of holes in stocks was being mechanized and women were introduced for machine boring. As this trend advanced so did the proportion of women. In 1891, when brush making was still largely a hand trade, women constituted thirty-nine per cent of the work force. By 1911, with mechanization more general, women's share had increased to forty-four per cent.

Feather curling was a feminine monopoly.

5.4 Chemicals, Oil, Grease. etc.

As an "industry", Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc., was a composite of extremely diverse branches, incorporating not only a variety of fine and heavy chemicals but also explosives, matches, colouring matter, oil, candles, soap, rubber, and glue, size and varnish. Nevertheless, apart from explosives, matches and rubber, women, when used at all, were chiefly confined to light warehouse operations. Men were used for all the main manufacturing processes, which often entailed the risk of burns and accident and exposure to heat, dirt, damp, or the elements. Much of men's work was also heavy and a certain proportion of it was carried on at night.

Match making, alone of all the chemical trades, made extensive use of female labour. Women were three-fourths of its work force.¹⁰ Men were used for the skilled mixing, dipping and drying operations while women did the examining, finishing and packing.

Forty-three per cent of those employed in explosive manufacture in 1911 were women. Though no women were found in the royal gun-powder factory prior to the war, they were employed by private explosive firms for such work as teasing cotton, paste mixing for cordite, weighing, blending and packing, and making blasting cartridges.

The rubber trade consisted of two recognized sections: india rubber and waterproof goods. In 1911, women had a thirty-one per cent share in the former and forty-five in the latter. They were little known in the actual rubber manufacturing processes which required the handling of seventy to one hundred pound weights and which exposed the worker to excessive heat. Instead they were employed in the manufacture of the smaller solid and sheet rubber goods such as boots and shoes,

¹⁰Computed from 1901 and 1911 figures only as no separate listing is given in 1891.

hot water bottles and surgical tubing. Men performed all the necessary cutting operations while women pasted, seamed, sewed, and packed. Women's work was similar in the waterproof garment section, which they shared on the whole with Jewish men.

Women's employment in paints and colours was, by the turn of the century, limited to a few minor warehouse operations. Previously it had also encompassed unskilled labouring work in connection with the manufacturing processes proper. Such work generally exposed the worker to the risk of lead poisoning.

5.5 Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass

Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass encompassed those trades using earthen matter for their staple raw material and consisted of four major branches: 1) Structural Clay Products such as brick and plain tiles 2) Plaster and Cement 3) Glass, and 4) Earthenware and China. Relatively few women were employed in the first three. Only in earthenware and china were they found in substantial numbers yet even here they were in the minority, accounting for but two-fifths of the work force.

The manufacture of structural clay products absorbed some 53,000 men in 1911, but less than 4,000 women. Most of the products—bricks, roofing tiles, chimney pots, furnace blocks and the like—were bulky or heavy to handle and most of the factories manufacturing them were small.

Of the few thousand women in this branch, most worked in the brickyards of Worcestershire and South Staffordshire where as yard-girls they normally wheeled weights of from forty to sixty pounds. They also assisted in some of the other brick making operations, a few doing the skilled work of handmoulding. But the once common custom of employing women in the brickfields was dying out in face of their increasing reluctance to enter the brickyards as alternative employments appeared in the areas where they lived.

Plaster and cement manufacture made almost no use of female labour. Much of the work involved great muscular effort, exposure to the weather, and night and Sunday work. Moreover, the processes were performed in scattered buildings which made any close supervision difficult.

In the production of glass products such as sheet and plate glass, and bottles, women's work was limited to a few of the simpler polishing, inspecting and light packing operations, which together gave them no more than an eight per cent share. Men alone were used in the glasshouse where the basic pressing, moulding and blowing processes took place. There the work was carried on both day and night and under exceptionally hot conditions. Generally the work was either heavy or skilled or both. Unskilled and light operations were performed by boys.

Contrary to the other branches, women's share in china and earthenware manufacture was not only sizeable but expanding as well. From thirty-eight per cent in 1891, women's share had increased to forty-one per cent by 1911. Women's growing importance paralleled the trade's technological trend towards greater process simplification.

As a handicraft, women's work was mainly limited to that of unskilled assistant to the male potter who usually worked on a contract basis, employing women and children to assist him. In the seventies, however, the large scale substitution of machinery for manual skill began. These new mechanical devices reduced the level of skill required. On the other hand they did not completely eliminate the need for strength, not necessarily great strength but sufficient for the firm use of one set of muscles at intervals of about a minute throughout the working day.

Pottery making, largely concentrated in the Staffordshire district, entailed the following main processes: 1) clay preparation, 2) shaping the clay, 3) firing the clay, 4) pottery decoration, and 5) warehouse operations. These processes were usually carried on in buildings poorly designed for the work, thereby requiring much heavy lifting of both clay and ware in the course of their manufacture. This lifting was commonly done by women.

Clay preparation was in the main a male department requiring either skill or strength or both for most of its operations. In the so-called potter's shop, where the clay was shaped, the work was

divided between men and women according to the size of the article handled and the difficulty of the shape. To men went the heavier and more complicated work and to women, the lighter and simpler. However, because no recognized basis existed for demarcating light from heavy, and simple from complicated, practice varied from firm to firm with the borderline cases.

The firing department had less use for women than the potter’s shop. Women’s work in the “kiln” consisted mainly of dipping the lightest articles, such as electrical fittings and small tiles, into the glaze prior to firing, and of assisting the male dipper by cleaning and polishing the ware. Placing the ware into the kiln and firing it was essentially men’s work.

Decorative processes were as a rule in women’s hands. However the highest quality work was performed by men. Women’s decorative work was more mechanical than artistic. Women transferred printed paper designs to the ware and filled in printed outlines with enamel. When they gilded edges or made lines and bands, their strokes were guided by mechanical devices.

As for warehouse work, women filled some of the lighter jobs but never any of the more responsible ones which called for considerable judgment and experience.

5.6 Wood

Wood Manufacture had two major branches: Furniture, and Wood Processing. In both, men formed the majority sex. The relatively few women wood workers were almost entirely confined to the Furniture Branch where they worked as french polishers and upholsteresses, forming, respectively, about one-fourth and one-third of the workers so engaged.¹¹ Their work tended to be lighter than their male counterparts’. Thus the french polishing of heavy furniture such as sideboards and bedroom suites, which needed to be moved about in the course of polishing, was men’s work. In upholstery, men made the frames of chairs and sofas; filled, drew and buttoned cushions and mattresses; fixed webs and springs; and seated pin-stuffed chairs. Their work required considerable wrist strength and the ability to wield a hammer and other tools. Women confined their activities to cover sewing, cording and finishing.

Except in the willow-cane section, female labour was little known in all the remaining sections of furniture manufacture—cabinet making, wood carving, funeral furniture, and house and shop fittings. In the cane furniture trade, women formed just under one-fifth of the total work force. Men did the heavier operations while women did the caning, rushing and upholstering.

5.7 Metals

Though the entry of women into the metal trades was not of recent date, they were almost entirely confined until the end of the nineteenth century to the few Birmingham metal trades producing a standardized product for a mass market. By far the bulk of metal manufacture was carried on by male handicraft workers who, when they used power machines at all, used them mostly as a substitute for strength rather than for skill.

But with the nineties came the beginnings of a new machine era which transformed the metal trades to such an extent that most of the industries producing finished metal goods were factory trades by the outbreak of the war. This was effected by a transformation of some of the older handicraft trades to factory methods, by the decline of those that formed the backbone of the manual methods and by the rapid rise of new machine-using trades such as cycle and motor vehicle manufacture.

The causes of this new machine era were numerous but one of the strongest factors was the supersession of wrought-iron as a staple material of metal using trades by cheap basic steel which could readily be manipulated by presses and machine tools. The innovation of cheap basic steel came

¹¹Computed from 1901 and 1911 figures only as no separate listing is given in 1891.

Table 5.5: Per Cent Distribution of Male and Female Metal Workers in Great Britain by Branch, 1901-1911.

Branch	Females		Males	
	1901	1911	Average 1901-1911	Average 1901-1911
Miscellaneous Metal Trades	55.48	51.10	53.29	15.15
Precious Metals, Jewels, Watches, Instruments, and Games	17.98	16.30	17.14	5.37
Tools, Dies and Arms	14.74	11.36	13.05	3.80
Electrical Apparatus	3.19	7.87	5.53	4.33
Vehicles	4.37	6.67	5.52	9.37
General Engineering and Machine Making	3.94	6.06	5.00	45.49
Ships and Boats	.31	.44	.38	8.50
Iron and Steel Manufacture	.01	.21	.11	8.01

in the eighties. As a consequence, the factory system was carried into trades that had remained unaffected during the earlier phases of the industrial revolution.

During the twenty-five years prior to the war there was also a great advance in applied metallurgy. New alloys were discovered and high speed tool steels permitting more rapid production were developed. Moreover, manufacturers began to produce more standardized commodities and this provided the opportunity to produce by presses and machine tools what had previously been made in the foundry and finished by hand. The expanding demand for machine tools resulted in new and complicated devices. Lathes became more complex. Planing, drilling, milling, and boring machines became widely employed and automatic and semi-automatic machinery of many kinds began to feature in production methods.

The changing nature of metal manufacture had the effect of more than doubling the number of women metal workers between 1891 and 1911, from 57,000 to 119,000. However, with the metal trades simultaneously offering expanding opportunities for men, the proportion of women to men was little affected. Whereas women constituted a little under five per cent of the total work force in 1891, they constituted only a little over six per cent by 1911.

Analytically, Metal Manufacture is viewed as having eight major branches: 1) Primary Metal Manufacture, 2) General Engineering and Machine Making, 3) Electrical Apparatus, 4) Ships and Boats, 5) Vehicles, 6) Tools, Dies and Arms, 7) Miscellaneous Metal Trades, and 8) Precious Metals and Instruments. In none did women form even a sizeable minority.¹² Their highest share came in the last three branches, in each of which they accounted for a little over fifteen per cent of the work force. Only to a very minor degree did women participate in Vehicles and Electrical Apparatus while in Primary Metal Manufacture, General Engineering, and Ships and Boats, their use was almost unknown.

5.7.1 Tools, Dies and Arms

In the manufacture of tools, dies and arms, women played almost no part except in the tool section. As tool workers, they formed the majority of those engaged in steel pen, and needles and pins manufacture. On the other hand, all the remaining trades of files, cutlery, saws, and trade and heavy-edged tools, were predominantly male.

The processes of pen manufacture had for a long time been subdivided among a large number of semi-skilled workers, many performing but a single press operation. Since press work, which was a female operation, accounted for the bulk of the trade's labour demands, it underlay the high proportion of women found in pen manufacture. Of the total pen workers, women constituted ninety

¹²Computed from 1901 and 1911 figures only as the 1891 ones are not altogether comparable on a branch basis.

Table 5.6: Females as a Per Cent of Total Metal Work Force in Great Britain by Branch, 1901-1911.

Branch	1901	1911	Average 1901-1911
Miscellaneous Metal Trades	16.09	18.87	17.48
Tools, Dies and Arms	16.49	17.52	17.01
Precious Metals, Jewels, Watches, Instruments, and Games	14.52	17.76	16.14
Electrical Apparatus	4.69	9.25	6.97
Vehicles	2.75	4.11	3.43
General Engineering and Machine Making	.44	.93	.69
Ships and Boats	.20	.33	.27
Iron and Steel Manufacture	—	.17	.09
All Metal Workers	5.09	6.30	5.70

per cent. Men were used only for the highly skilled tool setting, for supervision and for labouring.

The pin and needle trade used women to the extent of fifty-four per cent. The pin section, including not only pins but hooks and eyes, hairpins and wire gauze, had been highly mechanized for many years. Women were used for feeding and minding the machines and for wrapping, parcelling and attaching the various articles to cards. Women were similarly employed in needle manufacture which, by the period under review, had become largely a factory trade. The skilled machine setters in both sections of the trade were invariably men.

File making was a trade undergoing rapid mechanization from the 1890s onwards. By 1912 a factory inspector noted that files were now largely cut by machinery whereas but a decade or two earlier hand filing had been the practice.¹³ The transition from a hand to machine trade little affected the sex ratio. In 1901 and in 1911 the figure remained roughly four to one in men's favour. Both as hand and machine workers, women produced the smaller sized files and men the larger. Again, women continued, as formerly, to perform the light warehouse work of testing and wrapping. Cutlery, as of 1914, was still essentially a hand trade in which neither standardization of the component parts of the articles manufactured nor the sectionalization of the manufacturing processes had proceeded to any marked degree. Women's work was almost entirely confined to a few subsidiary manufacturing operations and some light warehouse ones. The principal processes—forging, grinding and hafting—required considerable strength, endurance, skill, and experience. In the years just prior to the war, however, signs of the trade's increasing mechanization began to appear. In 1910 a factory inspector reported that easily operated grinding machines worked by women were replacing the former skilled hand grinding of men.¹⁴ Men's displacement had further corroboration from the Census returns of the following year which showed women's share had risen from fourteen to seventeen per cent between 1901 and 1911.

Heavy edged tool making, including hay forks, spades, shovels, and axes, was not a large trade. Moreover, a wide range of articles, varying considerably in size and shape, was usually made at each firm. The variety of products and the relatively small numbers of each produced at any given time rendered repetitive work impracticable. Thus the nature of the trade demanded that each worker be capable of doing all operations. Men monopolized all the main processes. Women's work was limited to the warehouse operations of oiling, labelling, applying coloured paint, and light packing. The manufacture of trade tools was also highly skilled work in which female labour barely figured.

In the manufacture of hacksaws women were employed to a limited extent as shearers and millers and for punching, setting and marking.

In the other two sections of the Tools and Arms Branch—dies and type, and small arms—men were almost exclusively employed. There was a tendency, however, for the number of women in type-founding to rise as the boys hitherto used for certain finishing sections became more difficult

¹³ *Factory Report. 1912*, p. 152; 1913 Cd. 6852, xxiii.

¹⁴ *Factory Report. 1910*, p. 51; 1911 Cd. 5693, xxii.

to procure.

5.7.2 Miscellaneous Metal Trades

Miscellaneous Metal Trades was composed of a wide variety of unrelated small metal trades. The total working force of the largest among them numbered no more than 50,000 in 1911. Most employed but a fraction of that number. Women's share in each varied with the particular product manufactured. The highest proportions of women were found in nail, in bolts and nuts, and in gas fittings manufacture in which they constituted roughly two-fifths of the work force. Next came pewterers, lamps and lanterns, and anchors and chain in which three out of every ten workers were women, followed by bedstead and tinplate manufacture in which but two out of every ten workers were women. Next there was the group of trades that afforded women very little scope, namely lock and key, wire weaving, stove, brass and lead manufacture, and finally those that were virtual male preserves, namely zinc and copper manufacture.

Women's share in the declining nail trade, for the most part organized as a domestic handicraft, was high for a metal trade. In 1911 women formed a little over one-third of the work force. But their proportion had been even higher in 1891 when they constituted nearly one-half. The trade's increasing mechanization underlay their diminishing share. Whereas under the handicraft system nail making was common to all members of the family, under the factory system women were no longer so generally employed. Instead their scope embraced little more than some machine feeding and warehouse packing.

Women's work in gas fittings manufacture, a brass trade new to the period, is covered in the discussion of brass manufacture in general.

In direct contrast to nails, the manufacture of bolts, nuts, screws, and staples was employing increasing numbers of both men and women but the latter at a greater rate. Whereas three out of every ten workers were women in 1891, four out of every ten were in 1911. In bolt and nut manufacture women's expanding employment did not occur in the traditional hand forging section which involved heavy lifting and working within close proximity to large furnaces. Instead it occurred in the growing mechanized section which made its debut in the early eighties. Its labour demands were not for smiths but for skilled tool makers and a mass of machine operatives. Women were employed in the latter capacity for turning, screwing and pointing bolts and for facing and tapping nuts. As for the early mechanized screw trade, women operated machines for worming and turning screws. Their work in rivet making was similar in nature. They were also used for light warehouse packing of bolts, nuts, screws, and staples. Men, in all these trades, set and maintained the machines and did the heavier packing.

In the manufacture of lamps, lanterns and candlesticks the proportion of women steadily rose. Whereas in 1891 women's share was almost one-fifth, by 1911 it was almost two-fifths. Coinciding with women's expanding employment was a revolution in the production methods employed. A shifting demand from the ornate to the inornate had permitted products to be lighter and simpler in design. This in turn made possible the employment of machinery on a much greater scale. Hot pressings and stampings superseded castings for many purposes. The process of spinning on lathes was advanced and capstan lathes became more widely used during the nineties for these standardized articles. In consequence, the demand for the skilled handicraftsman declined while that for the unskilled and semi-skilled machine minder rose. Women were employed as light machine operatives and as polishers and lacquerers. They also did light warehouse packing. Men set and maintained the machines and filled the heavier jobs.

As pewterers, men outnumbered women two to one. Women monopolized the subsidiary polishing processes of buffing, sand polishing and hand burnishing of the lighter articles, especially spoons and forks. Men performed this work on the larger articles which were heavy to manipulate and also did lathe burnishing. In the major operations of the trade—making the article by casting, drop stamping or power press, working in silver, and plating—only a few women were employed. On the whole these processes demanded either skill or physical strength or both.

The manufacture of tinplate consisted of two major branches: tinplate manufacture proper and tinplate goods. Only a few thousand women were employed in the former, a trade localized in South Wales which had used women from its earliest beginnings in the 1700s. In the period under review women were found not in the actual smelting processes but in certain subsidiary operations, namely pickling and preparing plates for the tin bath, carrying packs of plates and separating them.

As for the tinplate goods section, it had become largely mechanized in the quarter century prior to the war. Nevertheless, it continued to be essentially a man's trade. Women were used only subsidiarily as solderers, as packers, and as finishers in such processes as mounting, painting, polishing, and blacking.

In the 1890s when locks and keys were still largely the province of skilled locksmiths, women had little part in the trade. Only subsequently when the older types of locks—with their cast-iron cases and forged or malleable iron parts which had been filed and assembled by skilled workers—were replaced by cases pressed out of steel and by bolts produced from drawn sections, and when the craftsman's file was replaced by the milling machine did women enter as semi-skilled operatives. The invention of the cylinder lock furthered this development for then even keys could be cut out and differentiated by machinery. Thus between 1901 and 1911 the proportion of women rose from eleven per cent to eighteen per cent.

In its sex ratio as well as in its numbers, anchor and chain making remained relatively stable throughout the 1891-1914 period. Almost all of women's three-tenths share was accounted for by the chain section. Though a machine had been introduced for the manufacture of the smaller chains used mainly for agricultural purposes, it was not yet in general use by the outbreak of the war. Thus the trade continued as the domestic hand industry it was traditionally, with women making the smaller hand-hammered chains and men both the larger hand-hammered ones and the better quality "dollied" or "tommied" ones. In the indeterminate area between the hand-hammered small and large there was no clear dividing line and in some districts women made chains of a size made by men elsewhere.

In the bedstead trade women were used chiefly to lacquer, varnish and blacken the products manufactured by men. This work gave them a one-fourth share.

Since no reliable figures exist for brass goods makers apart from brassfounders, the brass trade is considered as a composite of the two. Relatively few women were in it. Nevertheless, between 1891 and 1911 their share more than doubled. From five per cent it rose to twelve per cent.¹⁵ Furthermore, while men suffered both a relative and absolute decline, women experienced a relative and absolute increase. Coinciding with these changing sex proportions was a revolutionary change in production methods. Already underway in the eighties, when the stamp and press were extensively applied to the production of articles previously cast, brassfoundery was by the outbreak of the war a highly mechanized trade. Women were introduced as minders on the light machines which had eliminated the need for skilled craftsmen. They were also increasingly used in polishing departments and in warehouse wrapping.

In the rapidly expanding wire drawers and weavers trade men were by far the dominant sex. Women's work was largely confined to the production of the lighter types of wire on such processes as closing, continuous wire drawing and winding. To some extent they also participated in wire storekeeping. In the continuous wire drawing process, men operated at night machines operated by women in the day. In some plants, however, men operated such machines both day and night.

Women's work in the stove and crate trade followed similar lines to that of bedstead manufacture. They mainly lacquered and blackened. Virtually no women were employed in the manufacture of copper, lead and zinc products.

¹⁵Computation does not include Gas Fittings Makers although as workers in brass the text is applicable.

5.7.3 Instruments and Precious Metals¹⁶

The making of watches and clocks was initially a skilled hand trade, requiring apprenticeship and predominantly male. But as it underwent mechanization an increasing share of the trade went to women who were mainly used to operate automatic repetition machinery. Only to a slight extent did women participate in any of the skilled work and then only at the lower levels. For example, in dial painting, women were engaged in the simpler operations of colouring and marking the seconds while men performed the more skilled drawing and marking out of the figures.

Scientific instrument making, including the manufacture of optical, photographic, measuring, and surgical apparatus, demanded skill acquired only by a long period of training. Most firms operated on a small scale, with little division of labour. Men predominated in this work. The skilled craft of musical instrument making was also a male preserve.

Though still principally a male activity, the manufacture of sports and games equipment utilized women to a much higher degree than either scientific or musical instrument making. In 1911, two-fifths of its work force were women. On the whole, the objects manufactured—artificial flies, cricket and golf balls, and so forth—were light and required little skill other than manual dexterity.

Precious metals and jewellery workers were typically men. Women, as polishers, gold and silver chain makers, wire drawers, and operators of hand presses used in the manufacture of cheap gilt articles, performed the trade's subsidiary operations. Their share tended to rise as the press was increasingly applied to the production of jewellery previously made by hand throughout. Thus from constituting twenty per cent of the workers in 1901, women constituted twenty-seven per cent by 1911.¹⁷

5.7.4 Electrical Apparatus

With the growing use of electricity at the turn of the century, women found a new labour outlet in the manufacture of electrical apparatus, especially lamps which were made from small parts and required delicate handling. In lamp manufacture, women outnumbered men in 1911 by roughly three to one. Women were also found in some of the lighter operations in the manufacture of electric meters, dynamos, fittings, switches, cables, and telephones.

5.7.5 Vehicles

Women's work in vehicle manufacture, which encompassed bicycles, motor cars, railway coaches, coach carriages, wheels, and tram cars, was almost entirely confined to the bicycle branch. Even so, women constituted no more than a small minority of the bicycle work force.

The nineties witnessed the rise of the bicycle industry and the bicycle proved a highly suitable product for the application of mass production methods. This especially was true of bicycle accessories and parts and accounted for most of women's employment. In the cycle factories proper, where women's use was more limited, they were employed to a small extent with men as metal pressers and turners, polishers and enamellers, packers and wrappers, and in plating processes. However, when the sexes were found in the same departments, women did the lighter or more routine aspects of the work and men the heavier or more skilled. Though the division between adult men's and women's work was rather clear, it was not always so between women's and youth's work. District practice varied regarding the light and mechanical operations. Coventry, for example, used youths more extensively for work which in Birmingham was usually performed by women.

¹⁶Because of the unsuccessful exclusion of dealers and repairers, the figures do not permit of an overall branch statistical analysis.

¹⁷No comparable figures exist for 1891.

5.7.6 Other Metal Branches

General Engineering and Machine Making was one of the three metal branches making almost no use of female labour. For the manufacture of many of its products—boilers, engines, machinery—job work was the general rule and consequently a high level of engineering skill was needed. Some of the work, however, was beginning to take on a more repetitive character as sub-division of processes and the installation of automatic machinery came into wider use. But on the whole this less-skilled work went into the hands of less-skilled workmen, not workwomen. Therefore, up to the outbreak of the First World War, the few thousand women found in general engineering were confined mainly to purely automatic machines making small parts and fittings for such products as typewriters, sewing machines and textile machinery. Work of this kind was done in some districts by boys, but rarely anywhere by adult men.

Primary metal manufacture, the initial manufacture of metal from ores found in nature, was in effect a male monopoly. So was ship and boat manufacture. In a branch that employed many thousands of men in such capacities as riveters, shipwrights and ship painters, only a few hundred women were employed.

5.8 Construction and Miscellaneous Manufacture

Construction, whether of houses, roads, railways, canals or harbours, was confined almost entirely to men and was one of their largest employment outlets. The few women classified as construction workers were as a rule widows carrying on businesses of deceased husbands.

Miscellaneous Manufacture was on the whole a composite of undefined returns such as contractors, foremen, general labourers, and factory hands. Thus it does not afford sufficient detail for inferring the respective work of the sexes. Its main value lies in completing the over-all statistical picture of those employed in manufacturing in the first instance, and in the nation in the second.

Chapter 6

The Primary Sector and Summary

6.1 The Primary Sector

In the primary sector, women were little employed except in agriculture, and even then only one worker out of every ten was a woman.

6.1.1 Agriculture and Fishing

By 1911 half the women engaged in agriculture were relatives of farmers, particularly those with small holdings in the northern districts. The others consisted mainly of farm servants, labourers, casual seasonal workers, and agricultural specialists.

The female farm servant, combining both domestic and agricultural duties, still existed in the more pastoral districts of Britain, notably Wales, northern England and Scotland, but with each passing decade her services became more difficult to procure. Frequently, in the dairy districts, these farm servants would assist in butter and cheese making. In other districts they would feed the calves, pigs and fowl and would often be expected to help harvest hay. When they engaged in the latter, men normally did the heavier pitching and women the lighter raking.

The practice of employing women as ordinary field labourers had almost ceased by the nineties. This was an outcome of two developments. Beginning in the early seventies and continuing into the eighties and nineties, it became increasingly difficult to find women to hoe, weed, pick stones, and the like, work which on the whole was neither skilled nor unduly heavy. With this decline in the supply came also a decline in the demand consequent upon increasing mechanization and changing patterns of land use. The women field labourers in the 1891-1914 period were for the most part but seasonal workers¹ employed in the newly developing districts of fruit and vegetable growing and in the established districts of flower and hop growing.

At no time had it been customary to employ women for ploughing and other work with horses and machinery. Nor were there many shepherdesses. In the enclosed English countryside there was little need to watch sheep and keep them in the right meadow. Thus only the more arduous aspects of sheep tending remained and they were the province of the shepherd rather than the shepherdess.

In contrast to working around horses and sheep, dairying had been traditionally associated with women. In the period under review, however, women's connection with dairying had almost ceased. By then the nation's milk was in the main supplied by big dairy farms and much of the work was physically demanding.

¹As the Census was taken in the spring of 1891, 1901 and 1911, there is, no doubt, some underestimation of the number of women agricultural workers since those seasonally employed in the summer and autumn months would not necessarily be included.

The few women farmers in their own right were as a rule widows carrying on their husband's trade or women specializing in branches of agriculture such as small scale poultry-keeping, bee-keeping or dog and cat breeding. Large enterprises of this kind were monopolized by men.

Horticulture as a profession for women developed in the nineties with the opening of residential hostels for women at two horticultural training centres. The few entering the field confined themselves to the lighter sections such as market, jobbing and landscape gardening, work which entailed no heavy mowing or digging.

The rare woman in fishing did not engage in fishing proper but rather in such work as shell fish gathering or long-line baiting.

6.1.2 Mining

The woman miner was another rarity. No women worked underground. A few worked on the surface of coal mines as "pit brow lassies" engaged in coal screening and labouring work connected with it, such as oiling trams, pushing them to the screen and unloading them.

The tin streams of Cornwall provided the only other regular mining opening for women in the period under review. They did labouring operations on the tin mine surface. However, the substitution of automatic machinery and power-driven stone crushers for manual labour at the turn of the century did much to eliminate tin mining as a trade for women. Whereas one thousand women had been so employed in the nineties, less than two hundred were found in this work by 1911.

6.2 Summary

Most women were employed in Personal Service, Clothing and Textiles. Combined they accounted for seventy-two per cent of all working women. Yet only eleven per cent of all working men were so engaged. On the other hand, there were eleven "industries" each of which gave employment to less than a full one per cent of all working women. Yet in them forty-four per cent of all working men were to be found as contrasted with but four per cent of all working women. Finally, the remaining seven "industries" accounted for one-fourth of all working women as contrasted with nearly one-half of all working men. Thus from the viewpoint of their relative distribution, the sexes were noticeably divided with nine-tenths of the men in "industries" which accounted for but three-tenths of all working women and seven-tenths of the women in "industries", which provided men with but one-tenth of their jobs.

The division becomes even more striking as the focus changes from an inter- to an intra-"industrial" one. Out of the twenty-one "industries" listed, only three—Personal Service, Clothing and Textiles—were "women's" in the sense that women constituted the majority sex. In them, their majority was a sizeable one as on the average they were responsible for seventy per cent of the work force. "Men's industries", on the other hand, accorded women only an average seven per cent share. Since seven-tenths of all working women were employed in "women's industries" and nine-tenths of the men in "men's industries", it can be seen that the sexes were not "industrially" employed together to any extent.

Moreover, the presence of men and women within an "industry", the question of their relative proportions apart, did not signify that at least these particular men and women were engaged in the same work. For there were sex divisions by branch and within the branches by process and service. In the majority of cases the division was one of duties, but there were also divisions on the basis of working conditions, of place and, from a dynamic viewpoint, of period of time. Thus though men and women were found doing analogous work, it was not as a rule identical. The few instances of alleged interchangeability found the men to be generally either youths, Jewish aliens or Lancashire cotton weavers, and even these might have revealed certain subtle sex distinctions if more detailed information were available.

Table 6.1: Per Cent Distribution of Occupied Males and Females and Per Cent Females of Total Work Force in Great Britain by "Industry", 1891-1911.

"Industry"	Distribution					Per Cent
					Females	Females of
					Average	Total Work
	1891	1901	1911	1891-1911	Average	Force
					1891-1911	Average
Personal Service	43.04	41.85	39.28	41.39	3.24	84.63
Clothing	16.59	15.63	14.48	15.57	3.36	66.92
Textiles	16.29	14.55	14.19	15.01	4.35	60.02
Distribution	6.94	8.36	9.25	8.18	8.25	29.99
Professional Service	5.79	6.62	7.06	6.49	3.08	47.65
Agriculture and Fishing	3.27	2.75	2.37	2.80	12.92	8.56
Paper	1.34	1.85	2.15	1.78	1.47	34.11
Metals	1.26	1.61	2.19	1.69	12.57	5.41
Commerce	.53	1.53	2.89	1.65	5.06	11.34
Food Drink and Tobacco	1.49	1.39	1.70	1.53	1.87	26.18
Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass	.66	.68	.70	.68	1.17	20.27
Public Administration	.37	.58	.92	.62	1.74	12.98
Transportation and Communication	.44	.55	.71	.57	11.83	2.00
Wood	.53	.53	.53	.53	1.97	10.48
Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc.	.31	.54	.70	.52	.70	23.64
Skins and Leather	.44	.53	.56	.51	.71	23.83
Mining	.12	.10	.11	.11	7.99	.06
Construction	.06	.02	.01	.03	9.57	.15
Miscellaneous	.56	.33	.21	.37	6.09	2.50
Public Utilities	-	-	-	-	.53	.05
National Defence	-	-	-	-	1.53	-

Part II

**THE DIVISION EXPLAINED:
1891-1914**

Part One shows that almost without exception women's work differed from men's. Part Two is concerned with understanding why it differed and why it embraced the occupations it did.

Chapter 7

Kind of Division

This chapter searches for clues to an understanding of women's employment by asking what distinguished the work of the sexes and whether, as would seem to be implied by the clear-cut division, there was any one general and overriding factor. Several likely possibilities suggest themselves. Foremost it might be thought that the division was fundamentally a physiological one. Yet the one invariable physiological difference of the sexes, that of their reproductive function, apparently played no consistent part in their occupational distribution. Where this factor should have mattered least, among the children in the labour force—the ten to fourteen year olds—the work demarcation was already apparent from the day they first entered the labour market. Apart from the textile trades which used children of both sexes, the tendency was for the girls to enter domestic service and for the boys to enter coal mining and agriculture and to act as newsboys and messengers. Likewise the occupational pattern differed for men and women past their reproductive span.¹

Nor did the fact that women were the nation's mothers guarantee that they would be the ones gainfully engaged in maternity and child care and in child training. As midwives they shared the function of midwifery with doctors who were not only predominantly male but also the more competent. Most pediatricians were men. And though women formed the majority of the teaching staff, men were mainly the ones who decided what was to be taught and how. Nor did factors of morality superimposed upon the difference of reproductive function prove decisive. Admittedly some employers deliberately arranged their work so as to separate the sexes.² But so numerous were the cases where they worked side by side that such moral considerations, it can be concluded, little affected the overall occupational distribution of the sexes.

Furthermore, though in the service occupations women tended to serve women and children and men tended to cater to the needs of their sex, this manner of division was by no means clear-cut. School attendance and poor law relieving officers, who had considerable dealings with mothers and children, were almost always men. So were women's hairdressers despite their concern with matters of personal appearance. On the other hand, the nursing care received by men was almost invariably the work of women.

The general but not absolute secondary physiological sex difference of muscular strength also fails to constitute a consistent demarcating factor. Although men tended to do the nation's heavier and women its lighter work, this was not universally the case. Even when the work of youths and old men is compared with that of women in their prime—men with women at these particular life stages being somewhat on a physical par—no common employment pattern emerges.³ And as already noted above, the same holds true for boys and girls who, from a group standpoint, do not appear to vary considerably in strength.

Men were often found in very light operations such as examining in the clothing trades and

¹See *Census of England and Wales, 1911*, X, i, Table 3; 1913 Cd. 7018, lxxviii.

²See below pp. 121, 123.

³See *Census of England and Wales, 1911*, X, i, *op. cit.*, Table 3.

chipping and grinding lenses in the scientific instrument one. In the nation's physically lightest work of all, its "brain" work, men were in the majority. On the other hand women were not entirely absent from the more laborious operations. Contemporary observations made by the lady factory inspectors offer vivid proof of this. One told of seeing young girls "staggering under loads" that men would hesitate to lift in brick-making, in tinplate works, in iron hollow-ware establishments, and in the warehouses of the hardware trades.⁴ Another noticed women glass workers in pairs "carrying very heavy large iron trays" piled with dishes weighing from 112 to 120 pounds.⁵ Yet another drew attention to the heavy weights frequently carried by women and girls in the Manchester making up industry. As she noted, a "very usual weight carried is 82 lbs., but 90 and 100 lbs. are not uncommon".⁶

So far the examples given of women doing laborious work have been taken from trades of only minor importance to women. But also in women's most numerically important occupation, indoor domestic service, considerable physical strain was involved. According to the expert testimony of one woman doctor there was no manufacturing work performed by women as heavy as charring.⁷ Another doctor associated with a hospital for women's diseases reported to the Royal Commission on Labour that the greatest number of women who suffered through excessive strain were domestic servants.⁸ The Poor Law Commission, in trying to understand why female domestic servants formed the largest occupational group in Poor Law medical institutions, disclosed by its investigations that the work exacted, especially in the worst class of situations, was often responsible for a servant's physical breakdown.⁹ Male indoor domestic servants, in contrast, were not normally assigned the heavy work of washing and wringing sheets, carrying coals and scrubbing floors. Instead their duties, including as they did such work as answering the door, polishing the silver and waiting on the table, were in many cases much less physically demanding.

Though the female bone structure might appear to favour the development of finger dexterity, women neither monopolized nor excelled in work demanding such a facility. Despite allegations to the effect that women rather than men were on certain hosiery machines "owing to their intricacy and delicacy"¹⁰ or that men could not replace women in bricklaying owing to women's "superior capacity" for hand-moulding,¹¹ nevertheless, the light and delicate work of cotton twisters and drawers-in, of surgeons, of scientific instrument and jewellery makers, and of hand cigar makers was predominantly men's. Furthermore, the highly dexterous work of cotton weaving for which both men and women were trained from an early age gave no indication that women by nature had greater aptitude for such work than men. In this trade, where equal piece rates prevailed, no marked sex variation in weekly earnings was evident, the slight variation existing being, on the average, in the men's favour.¹²

With the work of the sexes not appearing to be closely associated with their respective physiological traits, attention next turns to the job attributes themselves. Was the division one of skill, of responsibility, or of working conditions?

Though men tended to be in the more skilled and women in the less skilled positions, there were numerable instances where women's training was as long as, if not longer than, that of many men. Whereas it was officially estimated that between seventy and eighty per cent of boys leaving elementary schools entered unskilled occupations,¹³ it was by no means uncommon for girls to

⁴ *Factory Report. 1900*, p. 375; 1901 Cd. 668, x.

⁵ *Factory Report. 1909*, p. 147; 1910 Cd 5191, xxviii.

⁶ *Factory Report. 1912*, p. 141; 1913 Cd 6852, xxiii.

⁷ Evidence from Dr. R. Adamson, Honorary Medical Officer of the Maternity Hospital in Leeds and Clinical Lecturer in Obstetrics at the Leeds University, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc.*, p. 203; 1919 Cmd. 167, xxxi.

⁸ Royal Commission on Labour, *The Employment of Women* p. 52; 1893-94 C. 6894, xxxvii, pt. I.

⁹ Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, *Reports on the Relation of Industrial and Sanitary Conditions to Pauperism*, Appendix, XVI, 28-29; 1909 Cd. 4653, xliii.

¹⁰ Evidence from the President of The Leicestershire Hosiery Union, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 90.

¹¹ *Factory Report, 1901*, i, 179; 1902 Cd. 1112, xii.

¹² See *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, p. 41; 1919 Cmd. 135, xxxi.

¹³ *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws*, p. 325; 1909 Cd. 4499, xxxvii.

undergo what was practically a five years' apprenticeship in the textile, millinery, dressmaking, and pottery trades. In cigar making, women's training period was sometimes as long as seven years. As compositors, bookfolders and booksewers, women often trained for three years, while women bookbinders existed who had served a four year apprenticeship. Women's two professional careers of teaching and sick nursing both required extensive training before proficiency was reached, the latter some three years, the former, by the outbreak of the First World War, not only a secondary school education but also several more years of advanced study.

Responsible posts, although mostly filled by men, were likewise a monopoly of neither sex. In the laundry industry, managers were typically women. They largely operated boarding and lodging house establishments and dressmaking and millinery firms, while in the nursing profession they held all the top posts. So too did women in girls' schools and colleges. Moreover, women supervisors were usually in charge of certain departments in the textile and needle trades, in government offices and in teashop establishments.

As for comparing the responsibilities of men's work and women's work as such, no criteria for measurement exist. But, in any case, who would maintain that the nursemaid's responsibility for the care of an infant was in any way less responsible work than that of a captain in command of a ship, or a teacher's responsibility for developing the mind and character of her charges less responsible work than that of a policeman maintaining law and order.

Again, though men tended to be concentrated in the more dangerous and unhealthy trades, women were frequently exposed to similar conditions. In the laundry trade, for example, the constant exposure to steam, the standing on wet floors, the great heat in which the work was carried on, and the existence of poorly guarded machines made laundresses especially liable to ulcerated legs, to tuberculosis and to accidents. In steam laundries women were in fact far more subject to accidents than men. The same was true for women in aerated water making establishments.¹⁴

Neither did women's work offer immunization against occupational diseases. The work of some women, especially in the pottery trade, exposed them to lead poisoning. Nor was "phossy jaw", a disease peculiar to the predominantly feminine match trade, without its female victims. Women workers also suffered from respiratory diseases caused by the dust emitted in the course of their work as, among others, electro-plate buffers, fur pullers, china scourers, and rag and refuse sorters.¹⁵

Other conditions of work yield the same inconclusive result. Dirt was not absent from women's work. Neither were heat, cold, exposure to the elements, night work, long hours, nor contact with unpleasant materials or situations. Admittedly men were more subject to such working conditions than women. Yet women's work of furniture and metal polishing, sack mending, rag and refuse sorting, as well as the sorting of soiled laundry were far from clean employments. Heat was one of the most severe complaints of laundresses, while women fish curers commonly worked in all kinds of weather with little if any protection from the elements. Night work was an accepted practice in nursing and, until it became illegal with the passage of the Factory and Workshop Act of 1907, in laundry work as well. Barmaids were known who normally worked from eighty to one hundred hours a week.¹⁶ As for private domestic servants, their usual working day started at 6:30 a.m. and did not end until 10.00 p.m. with only half a Sunday and one evening per week as "time off".¹⁷ Women likewise gutted herrings and did the necessary gut-scraping for the manufacture of catgut. They sorted out rotten fruit in jam factories and rotten eggs in egg preserving firms. And the sick nurses' intimate and continuous association with pain and not infrequent contact with death made the calling by no means a pleasant one.

If the job attributes offer no consistent basis for distinguishing the work of the sexes, perhaps the organization of the work does. Yet whether a trade was carried on at home or in a factory or a workshop, whether it was seasonal or casual or continuous throughout the year, there seems to

¹⁴See *Factory Report, 1901*, i, *op. cit.*, p. 169. *Factory Report, 1904*, i, 253; 1905 Cd. 2569, x

¹⁵For discussion of these and other dangerous processes to which women were exposed see A. Anderson, *Women in the Factory*, London: Murray, 1922, pp. 94 ff. Dame Anderson was Chief Woman Inspector in the Factory Department from 1897 to 1921.

¹⁶Royal Commission on Labour, *op. cit.*, pp. 199, 202-203.

¹⁷C. Butler, *Domestic Service*, London: Bell, 1916. pp. 48-49.

have been little sex correlation. The same is true whether a trade was carried on as a large-scale operation or a small one. Nor did the fact that a trade was expanding or declining in itself seem to have much bearing as to which sex would be utilized for the work at hand. (See Table 14.1, p. 147)

If not of job situation, perhaps the distinction between the work of the sexes was one of attitude. Was it that one sex consistently showed more industriousness and ambition than the other? Admittedly men tended to predominate in those jobs demanding such traits. Nevertheless, women were not entirely absent from them. To be a schoolmistress, a woman had to make up her mind at an early age and take her training seriously. One of the reasons for dressmaking's popularity among women was the opportunity it gave to advance to the position of cutter-out or forewoman. The Manchester Society of Women Employed in Printing and Bookbinding maintained its members would gladly undergo any training necessary to qualify for the most skilled jobs of the printing and bookbinding trades.¹⁸ And a cotton union official noted how the women weavers, though not legally permitted to work overtime, would risk being penalized before they would allow themselves to be outpaced by their male counterparts whose hours were unregulated by law.¹⁹

On the other hand, a lack of industriousness or ambition was not peculiar to any one sex. It was claimed that when men folders in the bookbinding trade were put on machines at night which women worked during the day, the men took it easy, six men doing the work of two women. Unlike the women, the men did not bother to walk up and down gathering, but sat in a row, handing sheets on from one to the other.²⁰ Furthermore, there were many instances of both boys and girls unwilling to submit to an apprenticeship but preferring instead blind alley employments that offered them no chance for advancement.²¹

Sentimental objections to doing the work of the opposite sex, though in evidence,²² also lacked sufficient universality to enable the work of the sexes to be distinguished on that basis. Apparently, men as night shift telephonists, wool combers and bookfolders willingly performed work of a kind normally assigned to women in the day and male doctors had no objection to performing midwifery. On the other hand, women sought to enter such male occupational strongholds as the law, the ministry and the upper ranks of the civil service.²³

Nor was the work of the sexes essentially a geographic division. Both were resident in areas where there was predominantly women's work, predominantly men's work and men's and women's work in fairly equal measure. A short supply of one sex in a district relative to the demand was no guarantee that the other sex would be utilized instead, no matter how plentifully available for work. In the Dundee jute trade, this was particularly in evidence. When brisk trade resulted in female labour being in short supply, no use was made of the surplus male labour endemic to that town. This same pattern usually persisted in other districts where the only alternative openings for men casually or seasonally employed was women's work. Despite the men's lack of employment and despite their wives already busy preoccupation with domestic affairs, it was the wife, not the husband, who took in home work or went out to work so as to tide the family over the unemployment period, her work as a rule ceasing as soon as the husband was once more employed.

On the other hand, there were cases of men being used for women's work and of women for men's when in a given area the preferred sex was in short supply. Youths were experimentally used as hand ironers in the London laundry trade when sufficient women could not be found. Boy sewing machine operators and embroiderers were used in place of the unavailable girls in Macclesfield silk mills and girls were introduced into "laying-on" in the Birmingham printing trade in consequence of the shortage of boys.

If the answer to the demarcation question did not appear to lie in the contemporary employ-

¹⁸B. Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, London: Labour Research Dept. and Allen and Unwin, 1920, p. 153.

¹⁹B. Drake, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

²⁰(Mrs.) J. MacDonald (ed.), *Women in the Printing Trades*, London: King, 1904, p. 81 n.

²¹As regards boys see *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, op. cit.*, pp. 325 ff.; as regards girls see below p. 100.

²²For example, it was alleged that sentimental objections underlay the reluctance of unemployed men in Dundee to do the "lassies' work" of jute weaving. *Factory Report, 1912, op. cit.*, p. 150. As regards women see below p. 100.

²³See below pp. 151 ff.

ment situation, perhaps it lay in the past. Was the dividing line fundamentally a traditional one? As homemakers women had been responsible for the personal well-being of the family members, performing such duties as making the meals, cleaning the house, laundering, caring for the helpless and training the young. In addition, there were the manufacturing functions of food-preserving, clothes-making and in a not too distant past, textile making as well. When the nation was largely rural, housewifery had also embraced kitchen gardening and caring for the family's domestic supply of livestock. Furthermore, when the family's livelihood was earned through some domestic-centred industry, the wife and children shared in this endeavour, considering it but another facet of the normal domestic routine. Thus, traditionally there were two sources from which divided labour might have evolved: the narrowly-defined housewifery functions *per se*, and the industrial assistance given to husbands engaged in domestic-centred trades.

There were those like the Senior Investigator for Women's Industries in the Labour Department of the Board of Trade who viewed the dividing line mainly in traditional terms. To her, contemporary working women were "almost entirely engaged in those industries for which women, in all races, at all times", had "shown special aptitude", such as the manufacture of cloth, the making of clothes, the preparing of food, and the copying of manuscripts.²⁴

In reality, however, as women's traditional work departed from the home the tendency was as much towards a displacement by men as towards such work continuing as a feminine monopoly. Women's non-gainful work of baking and brewing, of interior decorating and dairying, of knitting and lace-making, became men's once it transferred to a gainful status, women participating, if at all, only in a subsidiary capacity. Furthermore while institutional and commercial domestic service accorded men a growing occupational outlet, non-gainful domestic service was work with which they were traditionally unconnected. The same was true for commercial cooking, laundry work and table waiting. Men were also making small but increasing inroads into women's traditional spheres of dressmaking and millinery, nursing and midwifery. On the other hand there were cases of women making significant inroads into what had traditionally been considered male trades, such as tailoring, shoemaking and printing. Such inconsistencies consequently rule out tradition as a basic demarcating factor.

Judging from the equivalent character of much of men's and women's work, such as the amount of training, experience and strength required, the authority exercised, the extent of exposure to heat and dust, apparently many jobs on both sides of the demarcation line could have been competently filled by either sex. In particular instances of labour shortage this potential interchangeability was actually demonstrated. As previously mentioned, when a shortage of girls resulted in boys being employed in the Macclesfield silk trade to machine sew and embroider silk they were found to be "most capable".²⁵

Furthermore, throughout the period under review, Jewish men, sharing some processes with women in tailoring and in the manufacture of boxes, hats and caps, cigars, and waterproof garments, proved as capable as their feminine counterparts if not more so. Other instances of the co-ability of the sexes were the analogous jobs they performed in wool combing, telephone operating and bookfolding on different shifts, in teaching and cotton weaving, and in all-male or all-female institutions as domestic servants. Conversely, examples existed of women's potential ability to do what was essentially men's work. Women doctors had to meet the same standards as men to qualify for practice. The growing number of women government inspectors and the continuously expanding scope of their duties were indicative of women's successful performance of work which was on the whole a masculine preserve.

Since each likely factor so far examined fails to provide a clear-cut demarcation between men's and women's work, including even those which demarcated the work of the sexes more sharply than the others—those relating to a job's nature and working conditions—does this mean that no such factor exists? Other forms of division might be listed, such as work under water versus work above it or work underground versus work aboveground but then divisions of this kind are also of too limited

²⁴C. Collet, *Women in Industry*, London: Women's Printing Society, 1911, p. 19.

²⁵*Factory Report, 1905*, p. 269; 1906 Cd. 3036, xv.

application. They were relevant, of course, but what is sought here is not a way of demarcating a small proportion of men's work from all women's work but of demarcating all men's work from all women's work.

Finally the amount paid for the work of men and women is examined. Generally full-time earnings in the women's work of an occupational category were less on the average than full-time earnings in its men's work. Or, in the case of one-sex categories, full-time earnings for given grades of labour in exclusively female categories were less on the average than full-time earnings for corresponding grades of labour in exclusively male categories.²⁶

Despite limited wage data,²⁷ evidence of an earnings differential between full-time men's and women's work can be gathered from various sources. Foremost is the Board of Trade's 1906 enquiry into the weekly earnings and hours of manual workers in the United Kingdom. This was the first official wage survey to encompass a substantial number of working women. Its findings, which related to about one-third of all occupied women, were published in eight volumes between 1909 and 1913.

Below are tables showing the average weekly full-time earnings of men and women in those trades for which wage data on a sex basis are available.²⁸ Data for each of its recognized branches as well as for the trade as a whole are listed. However, it is important to remember that the common trade and branch labels shared by the sexes do not mean that within each trade they were engaged in the same work. As Part One shows, the contrary was true. Accordingly sex differentials in these instances do not mean the same work paid more or less depending on whether it was undertaken by a man or a woman but rather that the work done by men paid more than the different work done by women.

From the above it can be seen that the average full-time earnings of adult women (eighteen years of age and over) varied from a little over half those of adult men (twenty years of age and over) in the textile trades where the work of the sexes was most akin to a little over one-third in the paper trades. Though the gap between the average full-time earnings of girls and boys was less, the differential persisted in the boys' favour, thereby making girls' work for the industries covered the lowest paying work of all.

The legally fixed minimum rates of the trade boards²⁹ afford yet another indication of the earnings differential between men's and women's work. As of 1914 the following hourly rates for men and women were in force for the trades listed below.³⁰ Because the work of the sexes differed within

²⁶A better measure of the earnings differential would be average hourly earnings because then no amount of the differential could be attributable to differences in the average number of hours constituting full-time men's and women's work. But most contemporary wage statistics of a general character are available only on a weekly full-time basis (see n. 27 below) and, except for a very few trades (see Table 7.2, n. (c) and n. (e) and Table 7.3, n. (a)), the information on hours needed to convert weekly into hourly earnings is also not available. On the other hand, there is no evidence, official or otherwise, to suggest that within each occupation women's full-time hours were invariably shorter than men's or, where shorter, by an amount sufficient to account for the difference in earnings. (See, for example, the data on weekly hours differentiated by sex in the Board of Trade's (*Enquiry into the Earnings and Hours of the Workpeople of the United Kingdom*: II, 92-93, 211, 224-225. VI. 58. VII, 190-191. 1909 Cd. 4844, lxxx. 1911 Cd. 5814, lxxxviii. 1912-13 Cd. 6053, cviii.) Because of this, and also because this thesis is concerned with establishing the existence rather than the actual amount of the earnings differential, the full-time measure suffices.

²⁷For survey and assessment of data available see D. Zimmern, "Women's Wages", *Women's Industrial News*, vol. 16, new series, no. 58, July 1912, pp. 49-54. *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34. G. Wood, "The Remuneration of the Woman Wage Earner-I", *Englishwoman*, vol. 7, no. 21, Oct. 1910, pp. 263-264. D. Barton, "The Course of Women's Wages", *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, vol. 82, new series, pt. iv, July 1919, pp. 510-513.

²⁸Data regarding textile trades compiled from vol. I, tables on pp. xvi and xvii; 1909 Cd. 4545, lxxx. Clothing trades, vol II, tables on pp. xvi and xvii; 1909 Cd. 4844, lxxx. Woodworking trades, vol. III, table on p. x; 1910 Cd. 5086, lxxxiv. Metal trades, vol. VI, table on p. xiii; 1911 Cd. 5814, lxxxviii. Paper trades, pottery, brick, glass and chemical trades, food, drink and tobacco trades, and miscellaneous trades, vol. VIII, tables on pp. xviii, xxiii, xxvii, xxxii; 1912-13 Cd. 6556, cviii. Volumes IV, V and VII, covering public utilities, agriculture and railways respectively provide little, if any, data as to women's wages. The returns did not include home workers or self-employed workers. Neither did they include unpaid apprentices nor workers who were boarded and lodged in whole or in part. Because women tended to receive "adult rates" at an earlier age than men, the Board of Trade defined adult men and women as persons twenty and eighteen years of age and over respectively; "lads and boys" and "girls" as persons under twenty and under eighteen years of age respectively.

²⁹See below p. 145.

³⁰Compiled from table submitted as evidence by the Trade Board Section of the Ministry of Labour, *Report of the*

Table 7.1: Average Weekly Earnings of Workpeople in the Textile Trades of the United Kingdom Who Worked *Full Time* in the Last Pay-Week of September, 1906.

Branch	Men		Women		Lads and Boys ^a		Girls ^a	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Cotton	29	6	18	8	12	8	11	0
Woollen and Worsted	26	10	13	10	10	2	9	3
Linen	22	4	10	9	8	5	7	4
Jute	21	7	13	5	11	4	10	0
Silk	25	8	11	2	8	11	6	9
Hosiery	31	5	14	3	9	5	7	9
Lace	39	6	13	5	12	8	7	1
Carpet	26	7	13	8	9	6	7	9
Hemp	25	4	10	11	8	6	7	1
Smallwares	26	6	11	5	7	9	6	4
Flock and Shoddy	23	9	12	3	11	8	8	9
Elastic Web	30	3	11	8	10	8	6	6
Hair	21	3	9	4	7	5	7	0
Other Textile	25	8	13	7	9	6	7	1
Fustian and Cord Cutting	24	1	10	10	9	10	8	2
Bleaching, Printing, etc.	27	8	12	4	10	10	8	3
All the above	28	1	15	5	11	4	9	7

^aExclusive of Half-timers

each trade, the difference in rates should be construed once again as different pay for different work.

Evidence of the wage differential between adult men and women in trades not covered by the Board of Trade's survey is found in the *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*.³¹ From its investigations, the Committee concluded that prior to the war the money wages of women domestic servants of like age and after like experience was about half that of men's. In the distributive trades women received for their work but two-thirds to three-quarters of the wages men received for theirs. The least difference, though not an inconsiderable one, was found in the wages of educated men and women.

These official estimates received further corroboration from the statements of those whose own investigations or special circumstances placed them in a position to form authoritative judgments on the subject. In 1885 Emily Petersen, founder of the Women's Trade Union League, reported before the Industrial Remuneration Conference that twelve to fifteen shillings a week was considered good payment for women even in skilled trades.³² Ten years later Professor William Smart, in his book *Studies in Economics* maintained that twenty shillings per week was a low average for a man of any degree of skill while ten shillings per week was an average wage in textile for women he considered "somewhat highly skilled".³³ In his article "The Remuneration of the Woman Wage Earner", George H. Wood estimated the full-time wage of the unskilled woman worker to be about ten shillings for a full week's work and that of the unskilled male labourer to be twenty shillings. The corresponding figures for skilled labour he placed at from fifteen to seventeen shillings for women and thirty-three to thirty-eight shillings for men. He thereby concluded that "skill for skill and strength for strength" a man received about twice as much as a woman.³⁴ In 1912 Sidney Webb considered the average full-time earnings of adult manual workers per week to be twenty-eight shillings and

War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit., p. 13.

³¹*Op. cit.*, pp. 60 ff. Further evidence is found in S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 65 ff.

³²*The Times*, Jan. 30, 1885.

³³*Op. cit.* p. 108.

³⁴*Englishwoman*, vol. 8, no. 22, Nov. 1910, p. 30.

Table 7.2: Average Weekly Earnings of Workpeople in the Clothing Trades of the United Kingdom Who Worked *Full Time* in the Last Pay-Week of September, 1906.

Branch	Men		Women		Lads and Boys ^a		Girls ^a	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Dress, Millinery, etc. (Workshop) ^b	50	11	13	10	8	1	3	9
Dress, Millinery, etc. (Factory)	31	8	15	5	9	11	6	4
Shirt, Blouse, Under-clothing, etc.	29	10	13	4	8	11	6	9
Tailoring (Bespoke) ^c	33	6	14	2	6	11	5	5
Tailoring (Ready made)	31	11	12	11	9	9	6	6
Boot and Shoe (Ready made)	28	8	13	1	10	6	6	10
Boot, Shoe, and Clog-making (Bespoke) and Repairing	27	3	12	6	8	3	6	11
Silk and Felt Hat	34	3	16	4	12	7	7	10
Leather Glove	29	7	12	1	7	7	5	11
Corset (Factory)	28	11	12	2	10	4	6	3
Fur	35	7	16	7	10	6	7	2
Straw Hat and Bonnet ^d	36	7	19	10	10	1	11	2
Other Clothing	30	3	12	11	11	4	6	2
Dyeing and Cleaning	29	6	13	10	10	7	7	2
Laundry (Factory) ^e	26	2	12	10	8	9	6	6
Laundry (Workshop)	22	6	12	9	9	6	6	8
All the above	30	2	13	6	9	8	5	9

^aExclusive of Half-timers

^bExclusive of all unpaid apprentices or learners and of workpeople receiving board and lodging or partial board in addition to cash wages.

^cAverage hours for a full week (exclusive of mealtimes and overtime) were 54.9 for all men, 53.7 for all lads and boys, and 52.4 for all women and girls (see II, 92-93) so apparently men earned on the average 7.3 pence per hour; lads and boys, 1.5 pence per hour; and women and girls, 3.2 and 1.2 pence per hour respectively.

^dFor the Straw Hat and Bonnet industry the earnings stated are for a representative week in the season.

^eAverage hours for a full week (exclusive of mealtimes and overtime) were 57.5 for all males and 54.3 for all females (see II, 211) so apparently men earned about 5.5 pence per hour; lads and boys, 1.8 pence per hour; women, 2.8 pence per hour and girls, 1.4 pence per hour.

four pence for males and eleven shillings and four pence for females. The comparable figures for non-adult males and females he listed as ten shillings and seven shillings and six pence respectively.³⁵ Beatrice Webb observed that prior to the First World War it was rare to find any woman however competent—outside of cotton weavers, a few waistcoat makers, embroiderers, and other specialized needleworkers—in any industrial occupation at which she could earn more than the lowest grade of unskilled male labourer.³⁶ The Women’s Service Bureau, an organization especially cognizant of the financial situation of women in the “brain trades”, claimed that with the exception of the stage and the medical profession, women had no foothold in the trades which offered “the highest prizes”.³⁷

The general presence of an earnings differential received further corroboration from this study’s own detailed investigation of the sex division. Of all the manifold activities carried on by the nation’s work force, apart from domestic industries organized on a “family wage” basis, this study found references to the differential being less than clear-cut in the three occupations of cotton weaver, medical doctor and National Health Insurance Commissioner—where some women earned for their

³⁵Fabian society, *The War, Women and Unemployment*. Fabian Tract No. 178, London, 1915, p. 5.

³⁶*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, op. cit.*, p. 265.

³⁷*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry. Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc.*, p. 37.

Table 7.3: Average Weekly Earnings of Workpeople in the Metal Trades of the United Kingdom Who Worked *Full Time* in the Last Pay-Week of September, 1906.

Branch	Men		Women		Lads and Boys		Girls	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Pig Iron	34	4	—	—	12	11	—	—
Iron and Steel	39	1	—	—	13	0	—	—
Tinplate ^a	42	0	14	9	12	4	8	10
Engineering and Boilermaking	32	5	13	1	9	7	8	2
Ship and Boat Building and Repairing	35	11	14	8	11	10	7	4
Railway Carriage and Wagon Building	30	9	14	9	11	3	8	4
Light Iron Castings, Stoves, Grates, etc.	31	4	10	0	10	8	7	5
Electrical, Telegraphy, etc., Apparatus	34	7	14	1	10	7	8	9
Wire Drawing and Working	35	7	13	2	11	5	7	3
Brass and Allied Metal Wares	31	9	12	0	10	3	7	0
Gold, Silver, Electro- Plate, etc., Wares	36	6	13	1	8	7	5	9
Jewellery	38	0	13	6	9	8	6	10
Edge Tools, Spades, Files, etc.	31	2	11	7	9	8	6	10
Smelting, Rolling, etc., of Metals other than Iron	31	5	14	1	11	4	8	3
Cycle Making and Repairing	34	4	14	4	10	0	9	1
Tubes	28	3	11	0	10	8	7	1
Nails, Screws, Nuts, etc.	31	0	11	2	10	8	7	6
Bedsteads	36	3	15	11	12	5	7	4
Farriery and General Smiths' Work	27	9	—	—	8	2	—	—
Scientific Instruments	36	10	12	8	9	6	6	9
Needles, Fish-Hooks and Fishing Tackle	31	9	12	10	9	6	7	1
Chains, Anchors, etc. ^b	35	4	9	6	11	11	6	0
Locks, Latches, Keys, etc.	28	0	9	6	9	7	6	4
Watch and Clock Making and Repairing	32	7	10	10	7	6	6	2
Typefounding	33	3	10	11	9	3	7	7
Other Metal	32	5	11	7	10	1	6	11
All the above	33	11	12	8	10	4	7	4

^aAverage hours for a full week (exclusive of mealtimes and overtime) were 47.3 for all males and 51.9 for all females (see VI, 58) so apparently men earned about 10.7 pence per hour; lads and boys, 3.1 pence per hour; women, 3.4 pence per hour; and girls, 2.0 pence per hour.

^bRelates in the case of chain manufacture, mainly to the production of large chains.

Table 7.4: Average Weekly Earnings of Workpeople in the Building and Woodworking Trades of the United Kingdom Who Worked *Full Time* in an Ordinary Week of 1906.

Branch	Men		Women		Lads and Boys		Girls	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Building	33	0	—	—	9	7	—	—
Construction of Harbors, etc.	31	10	—	—	13	6	—	—
Saw Milling, Machine Joinery, Wood Box and Packing Case Trades	27	4	12	5	9	8	8	4
Cabinet Making, etc.	33	0	13	1	8	7	6	2
All the above	32	0	12	11	9	6	6	10

Table 7.5: Average Weekly Earnings of Workpeople in the Paper and Printing Trades of the United Kingdom Who Worked *Full Time* in the Last Pay-Week of September, 1906.

Branch	Men		Women		Lads and Boys		Girls	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Paper Manufacture	29	0	11	11	10	8	7	6
Printing	36	10	12	3	8	7	6	4
Bookbinding	34	1	12	10	8	8	6	0
Paper Stationery Manufacture	31	4	11	11	8	6	6	6
Cardboard, Canvas, etc. Box Manufacture	28	10	12	3	10	3	6	1
Wallpaper, etc., Manufacture	32	11	13	2	10	2	7	9
Process Block making	45	9	18	9	9	7	9	5
All the above	34	4	12	2	8	11	6	4

Table 7.6: Average Weekly Earnings of Workpeople in the Pottery, Brick, Glass, and Chemical Trades of the United Kingdom Who Worked *Full Time* in an Ordinary Week of 1906.

Branch	Men		Women		Lads and Boys		Girls	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Porcelain, China and Earthenware	32	4	11	11	11	2	6	2
Glass Bottle	38	4	8	9	12	1	7	1
Brick, Tile, Pipe, etc.	26	7	11	5	11	6	9	4
Chemical Manufacture	29	1	10	8	10	3	7	4
Explosives	31	6	13	1	15	5	8	1
Lime and Cement	28	4	13	1	11	9	—	—
Soap and Candle	29	2	12	5	11	0	8	6
White Salt	29	0	10	1	9	8	6	11
Other Glass	31	10	10	6	9	1	6	11
Other Chemicals	26	10	11	8	10	5	6	9
All the Above	29	2	11	10	11	6	7	0

Table 7.7: Average Weekly Earnings of Workpeople in the Food, Drink and Tobacco Trades of the United Kingdom Who Worked *Full Time* in an Ordinary Week of 1906.

Branch	Men		Women		Lads and Boys		Girls	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Grain Milling	22	9	10	1	11	0	5	5
Baking and Confectionery	28	11	12	8	9	6	6	5
Malting and Brewing	26	3	9	4	10	5	7	5
Cocoa, Chocolate, and Sugar Confectionery	30	9	11	9	9	8	6	7
Preserved Food, Jam, Pickle, Sauce, etc.	28	7	10	11	10	4	6	7
Biscuit	27	5	10	10	9	10	7	1
Sugar Refining	28	3	10	6	12	3	7	7
Aerated Water, etc., Manufacture and General Bottling	24	7	9	7	9	6	7	4
Spirit Distilling	22	11	10	2	12	3	7	6
Other Food and Drink	26	4	11	9	11	2	7	5
Tobacco, Cigar, Cigarette, and Snuff	30	6	12	0	9	9	6	2
All the Above	26	4	11	5	10	0	6	6

full-time work an amount in keeping with the full-time earnings of some men in the occupation³⁸—and in isolated cases of manual work involving Jewish workmen and youths—where some men earned for their full-time work as little as some women earned for theirs.³⁹ Even so, the over-all earnings picture in each of these instances was still one in which the average man in the occupation received more than the average woman. Only in regard to persons of superior intellectual or artistic talent did there appear to be no correlation between the sex of the worker and the level of earnings⁴⁰ and theirs was a case of the market, in effect, paying for a unique personality, incomparable and thus irreplaceable by another of the same or even of the opposite sex.

Thus it would seem that of all the likely factors examined, none demarcated women's from men's work in as clear-cut a manner as earnings. This exceptionally close correlation of the sex division with the amount a job paid suggests that they were related in some way but what that relationship might be is not readily apparent.

Accordingly this thesis probes deeper and asks whether the supply of and demand for female labour possessed any peculiar characteristics which would throw light on the sex division and its exceptionally close correlation with the amount a job paid.

Peculiarities are found which point to the principal factors involved in the determination of what was men's and what was women's work—the distinctive characteristics of female labour, the employment practices of employers which operated to divide the work for which women were wanted from the work for which men were wanted, and the regulations on the demand for female labour

³⁸As this is a study of women's employment, not of women's wages, it does not ask why women were paid what they were either normally or exceptionally in relation to what men were paid in the same occupation or in a corresponding grade. It limits itself to asking how the relative pay of the sexes affected, if at all, the sex division. Nevertheless, exceptional circumstances associated with each of the three occupations referred to above have been described elsewhere in this study and can be found in the case of cotton weavers, on pp. 38-39, 73, 87-87, 100, and 152; in the case of medical doctors, on pp. 21, 166; and in the case of National Health Insurance Commissioners, on pp. 31, 155-156. As for the exceptional circumstances associated with men receiving "women's wages" see below pp. 131 ff.

³⁹For example, see above pp. 42, 46.

⁴⁰See W. Smart, *op. cit.* p. 114. S. and B. Webb, *Problems of Modern Industry*, London: Longmans, Green, 1898, pp. 74-75.

Table 7.8: Average Weekly Earnings of Workpeople in the Miscellaneous Trades of the United Kingdom Who Worked *Full Time* in an Ordinary Week of 1906.

Branch	Men		Women		Lads and Boys		Girls	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Leather Tanning and Dressing, Fellmongering, etc.	28	11	12	11	11	0	9	2
Coach, Carriage, Van, Cart, etc., Building	29	2	—	—	8	3	—	—
Brush and Broom Manufacture	30	1	10	6	9	11	6	7
Oil-Seed Crushing and Oil-Cake Manufacture	25	10	10	8	13	8	—	—
Harbour and Dock Service	28	10	—	—	10	9	—	—
Canal Service	23	0	—	—	9	11	—	—
Carting and General Carrying	23	5	—	—	9	9	—	—
India Rubber, Gutta Percha, etc.	26	9	12	8	9	11	7	9
Linoleum, Oil Cloth, etc. Manufacture	26	0	12	9	10	5	7	2
Saddlery, Harness and Whip Manufacture	29	5	10	7	7	5	5	5
Portmanteau, Bag, Purse and Miscellaneous Leather Manufacture	30	1	12	8	10	5	6	6
Musical Instrument Manufacture	37	3	15	9	9	2	8	3
Umbrella, Parasol and Stick Making	32	4	15	7	10	7	6	11
Coopering	32	4	—	—	9	6	—	—
Coal Storing and Carting	24	8	—	—	10	1	—	—
Other Miscellaneous	28	7	12	5	10	7	6	9
All the Above	27	11	12	4	10	1	6	9

Table 7.9: General Minimum Hourly Time Rates for Males and Females Fixed by the Trade Boards (Great Britain), 1914.

Trade Board	Males	Females
Chain ^a	<u>pence</u>	<u>pence</u>
Hand-hammered Chain up to 11/32"	—	2.75
For certain sizes of dollied, etc.	5.5 to 7.7	—
Paper Box	6	3
Tailoring	6	3.25

^aAlthough rates fixed according to size of chain manufactured, in practice women made the lighter chains and received the lower wages.

imposed by the law and by employed men. But these factors, while making understandable not only the exceptionally close correlation of the sex division with the amount a job paid but also of its looser correlation with the nature of the work and the conditions under which it was carried on, do not in themselves explain why sex as such appears as a differentiating factor. For that a wider framework of analysis is needed and is provided by extending the analysis back on the supply side to the source of the particular distinctions noted between male and female labour, the respective upbringings of the sexes whereby qualitatively distinct masculine and feminine persons were created. On the demand side the analysis is similarly extended by not only describing the relevant employment practices of employers and the restrictions on the demand for female labour imposed by the law and by employed men but also showing why they were correlated with sex.

Accordingly, the following chapter (Chapter 8) shows the effect of feminine as contrasted with masculine upbringing on a person's occupational potentials and financial outlook. These findings in turn become the means of explaining in Chapter 9 the distinctive supply characteristics of female labour. Its distinctive demand characteristics are described and explained in Chapters 10 and 11. The analysis of the sex division concludes by incorporating the foregoing findings into an explanation of women's presence in and men's absence from women's work (Chapter 12).

Chapter 8

The Feminine Upbringing

The special characteristics of women as workers cannot be understood apart from their distinctive upbringing as women. The key to that upbringing lies in the prevailing views that not only prescribed thought and behaviour proper to a feminine as distinct from a masculine person but also justified it by reference to what was believed to be the peculiar characteristics innate to each. For a person becomes feminine or masculine, not by being born female or male, but by fulfilling social expectations regarding what is proper thought and behaviours for his or her sex.¹ To show, therefore, how upbringing differentiated female from male labour, this chapter begins by determining the contemporary view of woman in relation to man. Essentially it embraced her nature, her role and her status relative to other members of her sex. These are discussed in turn with special reference to their occupational ramifications.

8.1 Nature of Woman

To contemporaries it seemed but natural that women's activities should take a different turn from men's since in physique, mentality and temperament the sexes were believed to be inherently dissimilar. As the outstanding housing reformer Octavia Hill aptly summed up the prevailing sentiment, "men and women help one another because they are different, have different gifts and different spheres, one is the complement of the other".²

Women were considered "naturally more delicate",³ being not only physically weaker but also much more susceptible to cold and changes of temperature. Standing was supposed to be especially detrimental because of the possibility of womb displacement and varicose veins. Their reserve energy was also thought to be less, thereby causing them to fatigue sooner. Having a further debilitating effect was the so-called menstrual unwellness to which they were allegedly subject two to three days each month. Moreover, by thirty a woman was supposedly past her physical prime. Beliefs of this sort led contemporaries to assert that women were less capable than men of operations requiring considerable physical strength or powers of endurance⁴

¹That the sexes think and act in socially prescribed ways is to be expected. By a system of rewards and punishments society incorporates "correct" thinking and behaving among its members. Where the process is most successful, society's ends and means become the individual's. Where it is less successful, behaviour, if not thought, conform. Only the rare individual, for assorted reasons impervious to society's rewards and punishments, deviates to any marked extent. For elaborations of what sociologists and social psychologists correctly term the "socialization process" see R. Bierstedt, *The Social Order*, 2nd ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963, chaps. 7, 8 and 9. K. Davis, *Human Society*, New York: Macmillan, Reprint 1964, pt. ii. W. Ogburn and M. Nimkoff, *Sociology* 4th ed., New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1964, chaps. 9, 10 and 11. T. Parsons, *The Social System*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Reprint 1964, chaps. 6 and 7.

²As quoted in E. Bell, *Octavia Hill*, London: Constable, 1942, p. 270.

³W. Smart, *Studies in Economics*, London: Macmillan, 1895, p. 116.

⁴For some representative views of the relative weakness of woman see Dr. J. Campbell, "The Health of Women in Industry," in the *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, pp. 218 ff.; Medical and welfare

Mentally women were considered incapable of turning knowledge into achievement. The price paid by those who went against their “nature” and attempted such a feat was said to be a loss of beauty, fertility, grace, and charm. So pervading was the view that girls became ill if they took examinations that a survey was made of girls’ schools regarding the matter⁵ in an attempt to dislodge from the public mind the belief that women can only safely learn what comes naturally to them—that is by way of their “unreasoned intuitions”, versatility and resourcefulness.⁶

But not only was a woman’s mind alleged to lack the so-called masculine qualities of “scientific and reasoned accuracy, of correct deduction, of sound memory and wide outlook and comprehension”⁷ but the limited powers with which a woman was credited were alleged to atrophy by the time she was thirty-five, thereby rendering her unfit for serious responsibility once “middle-age” was reached.⁸

The laws of their respective natures were also held to give the sexes different temperaments. Men, it was maintained, were prone to command while women were prone to self-devotion. Thus endowed, woman was thought best able to satisfy her nature by serving man as wife and mother. But if no home duty called, then a woman’s peculiar religious and moral intuition was believed to direct her to do good in such other “out of sight silent” ways as guardian of the poor, teacher, nurse, or visitor.⁹

The contemporary English law gave witness to the belief that man, not woman, was by nature the dominant sex. According to its doctrine of coverture, the legal personality of the wife merged in that of her husband, thereby acknowledging him as the fitter of the two to provide for and govern the family. Its outcome was a body of law that placed the responsibility of citizenship, parentage and support with the husband and which expected him to effect the welfare of his dependent and legally irresponsible wife and children. As one writer noted, this practice placed married women on a legal par with infants,¹⁰ a practice which received biological confirmation in one of the foremost contemporary studies of sex differences, Havelock Ellis’ *Man and Woman*. Designed to ascertain to what extent these differences were artificial, the result of tradition and environment, and to what extent innate, the study concluded that “Nature has made women more like children” so that women could “better understand” and care for them.¹¹

So ingrained were the prevailing beliefs as to women’s inherited physical, emotional and intellectual nature that the question was frequently raised whether it was even possible for this “undeveloped man”,¹² this “natural invalid”¹³ this “subordinate being”¹⁴ to compete with men in the industrial world even if given the opportunity. Many shared the views of Herbert Spencer to the effect that women could only be a channel through which the higher gifts of the race might pass but never inhere.¹⁵

evidence in the *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc.*, app. III; 1919 Cmd. 167, xxxi. Although opinion varied among the many experts giving evidence, the difference was one of degree not of kind.

⁵E. Pfeiffer, *Women and Work*, London: Trubner, 1888, pp. 109 ff.

⁶M. Bird, *Woman at Work*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1911, p. 188.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁸For some representative views of the relative mental inferiority of woman see B. Hollander, *Woman: Her Brain, Mental Capacity and Character*, London: Ethnological Society, 1908, p. 6. J. Taylor, *The Nature of Woman*, London: Fifield, 1912, pp. 142-145. C. Collet, *Educated Working Women*, London: King, 1902, p. 91. Report of Professor Humphrey’s Cambridge lecture “Man: Pre-historic, Present, Future,” in *Englishwoman’s Review*, vol. 11, new series, no. 87, July, 1880, p. 334. E. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁹Octavia Hill as quoted in E. Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

¹⁰(Mrs.) H. Swanwick, *Some Points of English Law Affecting Working Women as Wives and Mothers*, London: Women’s Co-operative Guild, 1914, p. 8.

¹¹4th ed., London: Scott, 1904, p. 450.

¹²Herbert Spencer as cited in H. Ellis, *ibid.*, p. 445.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 283.

¹⁴Alfred Marshall as cited in B. Webb, *My Apprenticeship*, London: Longman’s, Green, 1926, p. 350.

¹⁵As cited in E. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81.

8.2 Role of Woman

Homemaking was women's designated role in life. Whether as matron or matron-to-be, she was expected to devote her thoughts and energy to the details of daily family existence. So prevalent was the belief that a woman, "whether pet or drudge", was exclusively a domestic animal,¹⁶ that even if gainfully employed she expected and was expected to labour domestically in her home after the day's work was over. Thus wrote a popular vocational guidance writer:

A perfect woman may be a most inefficient factory hand or shop assistant. But if she has no art to make her home a place of health and comfort and happiness for her husband or her dependents, she is not perfect as woman, though she may serve an employer to his profit, or earn for herself a liberal income.¹⁷

In sharp contrast to woman's role was man's. He was left free from domestic concerns. To him fell the responsibility of family support. Its fulfillment not only absorbed the major portion of his waking hours but also gave him the feeling of a lord and master who "by right" was the person in the family deserving most consideration¹⁸ and who had the right to dictate and control the life of his wife".¹⁹ Thus the prototype for the labour market sex division was the family itself where a firm demarcation line existed between the functions and authority of husband and wife.²⁰

Idealistically woman as homemaker was depicted as queen of the hearth. Except for the relatively few so-called grand ladies who spent their hours "organising the household, managing the servants, and performing the solemnly named "social duties",²¹ this portrayal of the homemaker's role was in many respects euphemistic as in reality it entailed acting the part of a domestic servant who served the family as child and sick nurse, cook and waitress, housekeeper and laundress, needlewoman and charwoman.

But homemaking, at whatever level in the social structure, did not come "naturally" enough to women. Women had to be trained to show "a mind at leisure from itself, to notice everyone's needs, desires and feelings".²² They had to be trained to cook and sew and nurse even if that training was no more than traditional knowledge passed on from mother to daughter.

Thus, to be "properly" brought up, a girl was given training in "habits of neatness, punctuality, self-reliance and such practical power and forethought" as would make her useful in her home. Beyond this, she was to learn her place and function in society by serving others. So maintained Octavia Hill when still a teacher of young girls.²³ Characteristic of her times, she thought of each one of her pupils solely in relation to a family, an attitude solidified by long tradition. For as Adam Smith had astutely noted two hundred years before, there was

... nothing useless, absurd, or fantastical in the common course of their [girls'] education. They are taught what their parents or guardians judge is necessary or useful for them to learn; and they are taught nothing else. Every part of their education tends evidently to some useful purpose; either to improve the natural attractions of their persons, or to form their mind to reserve, to modesty, to chastity, and to economy; to render them both likely to become the mistresses of a family, and to behave properly when they have become such.²⁴

¹⁶J. Tawney, "Women and Unemployment", *Economic Journal*, vol. 21, no. 81, Mar., 1911, p. 131.

¹⁷M. Bird, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

¹⁸A. Allen, *Sophy Sanger*, Glasgow: University Press, 1958, p. 5.

¹⁹M. Davies, *The Women's Co-operative Guild, 1883-1904*, Kirkby Lonsdale: Women's Cooperative Guild, 1904, p. 159.

²⁰Aptly reflecting contemporary views of the respective family roles of men and women is H. Bosanquet's *The Family*, London: Macmillan, 1906, chaps. 11 and 12.

²¹A. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

²²Eleanor Rathbone as quoted in M. Stocks, *A Hundred Years of District Nursing*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1960, p. 17.

²³As quoted in E. Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

²⁴*The Wealth of Nations*, as edited by E. Canaan. 4th ed., London: Methuen, 1925, II, 266.

Even among the well-to-do, where cost was no educational obstacle, this view prevailed. Governesses were thought “adequate for girls up to the age of sixteen when a boarding school would give the final polish before they emerged into society as young ladies not too highly educated for a good marriage”.²⁵

And the state, believing that “little girls could not be too early pressed into a narrow mould”,²⁶ encouraged domestic specialization for them at the primary school level. Whereas drawing was compulsory for boys to enable them to develop their powers of observation, it was not for girls. Instead their obligatory subject was sewing and at eleven years of age it was usual for them also to take up cookery, housewifery and laundry work. Inspectors, it was alleged, were instructed to accept a lower standard of arithmetic from girls than boys because of the encroachment on their lesson time of cooking and sewing; in many cases girls spent four or five hours weekly upon sewing alone.²⁷

That the homemaker-oriented training of women left them with a general education inferior to men’s and served habitually to limit their lives mattered little in a period when exactly this outcome was considered the crowning achievement of long years spent in transforming the plastic female infant into a full-fledged matron.

So far only woman’s prime role of homemaker has been discussed. In it, as already mentioned, she was legally entitled to maintenance at her husband’s expense.²⁸ But as homemaker she also had an auxiliary role of varying importance depending on the family’s individual circumstances and customary expectations. This pertained to her breadwinning function in the family. Although the responsibility for breadwinning was not hers directly, she, as her husband’s helpmate, was expected to assist. The extent of her obligation depended on whether she had entered upon a marriage where marriage itself was considered a business partnership or upon one in which she was expected to contribute gainfully only if misfortune befell the “natural” breadwinner.

The two concepts of women’s auxiliary role as homemaker were really two in time. The belief that marriage was a business partnership prevailed prior to the Industrial Revolution. However, in its course the concept of the family as the economic unit receded and in its place came one in which the husband alone was considered the family’s breadwinner. By the nineties the latter view prevailed. Yet since the two views coexisted in the years under review, it is necessary to consider them both if the occupational impact of prevailing views is to be shown in its entirety.

The pattern of shared breadwinning continued to survive in the pockets of domestic-centred industries that had not yet been superseded by more modern methods of production and among tradition-bound families still operating on the assumption that the wage-earning unit was the family. Thus throughout the 1891-1914 period there were wives who were customarily expected to contribute towards the family’s support and were considered lazy if they did not.

The most conspicuous examples of joint productive effort by husband and wife were those of the small tradesmen and farmers. Accordingly, it was by no means uncommon for the wife to continue the business after the husband’s death. Occupied wives and widows were especially in evidence among small neighbourhood retailers such as cheesemongers, grocers, butchers, fishmongers, and greengrocers. Even in trades normally considered the sole province of men this pattern persisted. In the Census of 1911, the first in which occupations of the widowed were separately indicated, the few women running businesses such as bricklaying and plumbing were mainly widows.

Among many small domestic producers, working on their own account and possessing hardly any capital, wives and children were an important source of labour. An instance of this form of family production was found among the Luton straw hatmakers who were able to undersell factory employers only because of the unpaid assistance they received from their wives and children. But though such pockets of domestic industry persisted, they formed an ever-dwindling sector of the economy, their outmoded methods little able to withstand the competition of modern corporate

²⁵A. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

²⁶C. Bremner, *Education of Girls and Women in Great Britain*, London: Sonnenschein, 1897, p. 49.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 47, 49.

²⁸See above p. 84.

ones.

It was in cotton, the first industry to be industrially revolutionized, that the family operating on the principle of the "family wage", other than as a consequence of a home-centred trade, existed in one of its purest forms. At the time the industry underwent mechanization, the economic contribution of wives and children to family income was the accepted way of life and that traditional attitude persisted right up to modern times, particularly among the cotton weavers who, in the main, lived in geographically isolated one-industry towns.

The circumstances of weavers' wives and children working were aptly described by a contemporary student of industrial women's affairs, Miss B. Hutchins. In her *Women in Modern Industry* she revealed how the earnings of the male weavers could not unaided maintain a family at the level expected, which in Lancashire was a high one. On the other hand, the wives of weavers were not content to see their next-door neighbours, whose husbands might be higher paid spinners or machine-makers, dress their children better or have better window curtains. Thus the wife, usually a weaver herself, would continue to work at her own trade until temporarily prevented by the birth of her baby. After an interval of some months she would return to the mill, the pattern being repeated with the second child, while a grandmother or paid neighbour looked after the young children. With the third child the wife usually "retired" and it was then that the economic position of the weaver's family became a "difficult and troubled" one, remaining so until the children were old enough to work and thereby add to the father's limited income²⁹

So customary was the idea of the "family wage" among the Lancashire cotton weaving community that in Blackburn, the largest cotton weaving town in the world, it was reported a man would not even look at a girl, much less consider her for a wife, unless she was a four-loom weaver, earning, that is, perhaps twenty or twenty-five shillings a week.³⁰ And it was the Lancashire and Yorkshire branches of the Women's Co-operative Guild, consisting for the most part of wives who themselves or their husbands were cotton and wool operatives, which took exception to the Central Committee and the majority of the Guild's branches by voting against raising the legal age at which children should be permitted to enter factories as half-timers.³¹ Conditioned as these women were to the "family wage" principle, they viewed it as only right and proper that children should start contributing to family income as early as possible.

But though families existed in the Britain of 1891-1914 in which the wife's gainful employment was the accepted practice, on the whole most families were organized on the principle that the wife's place was in the home as mother and housekeeper and that breadwinning was essentially a masculine affair with only the children assisting. That most married women at any given time were not productively employed testifies to the strength of this belief. Thus in 1911, ninety percent of all married women were unoccupied.³² Even among the poorest of East London, the wife did not as a rule go to the factory or engage in homework for the first years of marriage as long as the husband earned regular wages, no matter how small.

The gradual supersession of the business partnership conception of the wife's role by the more modern one occurred at a time when industry was transferring from home to factory, workshop and office,³³ thereby rendering the role of a gainfully occupied wife largely incompatible with that of a homemaker. For it must be remembered that gainful employment during the period under review

²⁹London: Bell, 1914, pp. 60-61.

³⁰H. Ellis, *Women and Marriage: or Evolution in Sex*, (a revised reprint of article in *Westminster Review*, under the title "The Changing Status of Women", Oct. 1888, London: Reeves, c.1891. p.9 n.

³¹M. Davies, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-129. The hand nail and chain makers operating under the domestic system had a similar outlook. See *Report as to the Condition of Nail Makers and Small Chain Makers in South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire*, p. 11; 1888(385) xci.

³²Computed from *Census of England and Wales 1911*, X, i, Table 8; 1913 Cd. 7018, lxxviii. *Census of Scotland 1911*, II, Table xxx; 1913 Cd. 6896, lxxx.

³³By 1871 the factory was the characteristic form of organization in cotton, wool, and the metal trades. The extension of the factory system to the lesser industries took place in the following generation. The occupational enumeration of 1901 showed the final triumph of the factory. The enumeration distinguished persons working in factories and at home. The clothing trades were the least dominated by the factory but even in that group 70 per cent of all the workers were employed in factories. In all the other groups only a small residue were still employed at home. See A. Usher. *An Introduction to the Industrial History of England*, London: Harrap, 1921, pp. 362-363.

entailed a woman's absence from home of rarely less than twelve to fourteen hours a day. During the same period there also developed a growing public awareness of the importance of the mother in the home for family welfare.³⁴ Together these movements evoked a sentiment against wives working while the increased earnings of the manual classes during the latter half of the nineteenth century³⁵ made for the first time an unoccupied wife economically possible for large sections of the population.

Thus to an Assistant Lady Commissioner for the Royal Commission on Labour, the employment in factories and workshops of married women whose husbands were well able to support them seemed the worst feature of Birmingham's industrial life.³⁶ The women surveyed in the printing trade were cited as showing "strongly the sense of feminine respectability" by opposing their fellow workwomen working after marriage.³⁷ In the study *Married Women's Work* the editor noted that wives who worked not for their own or their children's bread but rather for butter to it were regarded as at least somewhat blameworthy, the underlying implication being that a wife and mother who worked must be withdrawing time and attention needed for the care of her home and of children.³⁸ This attitude was forcefully stated before the 1899 meeting of the International Council of Women by one of its speakers. Though favouring women's trade union organization, she emphasized that this did not mean the "recognition or acceptance of *married* women's labour as a normal, or even tolerable, feature of our social life". Characteristic of her times, she maintained that for the wife to take her place as wage-earner beside her husband too often meant physical and moral ruination of the family.³⁹

The complementary concept to that of the "unoccupied" wife was that of man as the "natural" breadwinner. As work left the hearthside, making domestic duties incompatible with productive labour, the belief evolved that "a man's wage should be such as to enable him to keep his wife at home".⁴⁰ It came to be "unmanly" for a man to depend on his wife's earnings. "Let my wife stay at home and wash my moleskin trousers" was an attitude cited as typical among many working men.⁴¹ Men's duty, according to Henry Broadhurst, Secretary of the Trade Union Congress' Parliamentary Committee, was "to bring about a condition of things, where their wives should be in their proper sphere at home, instead of being dragged into competition for livelihood against the great and strong men of the world."⁴²

The consequence of this new economic concept of marriage was a sharpening of the division between the functions of the sexes. Home as women's proper place now meant that women were almost completely cut off from all economic endeavour. Moreover, with breadwinning as men's entire responsibility and with gainful employment now entailing absence from home, domestic cares, by necessity, fell almost entirely to women.

But practice fell short of the "unoccupied wife" ideal. Not all wives were "fortunate" in their husbands. Some husbands died, some became disabled by accident or illness, some were not sufficiently "industrious, thrifty, honest, sober and dutiful"⁴³. And for the wives of such men as these the contemporary situation offered no respectable means of support other than their own labour market entry.

³⁴See below pp. 135 ff.

³⁵According to Professor A. Bowley, the adult male manual worker of 1860 received in real wages but 50 to 59 per cent of that received by his 1900 counterpart. *Wages and Income in the United Kingdom Since 1860*, Cambridge: University Press, 1937, pp. 34-35.

³⁶Royal Commission on Labour, *The Employment of Women*, p. 53; 1893-94 C. 6894, xxxvii, pt. I.

³⁷(Mrs.) J. MacDonald (ed.), *Women in the Printing Trades*, London: King, 1904, p. 102.

³⁸C. Black (ed.), London: Bell, 1915, p. 1.

³⁹*Report of Transactions of the Second Quinquennial Meeting Held in London, July 1899*, London: Unwin, 1900, VI, 164.

⁴⁰Evidence from the Secretary of the Woolcombing Employers' Federation, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁴¹M. Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁴²As quoted in B. Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, London: Labour Research Dept. and Allen and Unwin, 1920, p. 16.

⁴³B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

First of all the age had largely passed when the unpaid labour of the woman in the home could effectively help to maintain it. The highly urbanized Britain of the 1891-1914 period⁴⁴ meant that most women were divorced from the soil and thus of the means to feed and clothe their families and themselves. Even when these means existed, it was not always profitable to utilize them as in many cases it was more economical for a woman to work for wages and buy what she needed.

Secondly, though it was almost a maxim of English Poor Law that every destitute person had a right to maintenance at public expense, the social stigma attached to aid of this kind plus its meagerness rendered the Poor Law a reluctant last recourse after all other attempts at support had been tried and failed. The government, believing dependency of persons upon the rates destroyed the will to work and inevitably lowered the earnings of the independent poor by leading to a rate in aid of wages, countenanced public relief only for the physically and mentally impotent. To restrict pauperism to this bare minimum it conditioned eligibility with disenfranchisement and, for the able-bodied, with detention in a workhouse. The government hoped by thus stigmatizing poor relief none but the legitimate destitute would apply. To discourage applicants further, any relief to the wife or child was deemed relief to the head of the family. The effect of such a stringent policy was to restrict the number of women eligible for outdoor relief and to provide an inadequate dole for those considered eligible.⁴⁵

Thirdly, the prospect of assistance from voluntary charity was almost as discouraging as that from the Poor Law. Designed for the starving poor, charity might seem an especially suitable means of dealing with the “unfortunate” wife’s problem of support, arising as it did not so much from her own misdeeds but from an “unlucky” marriage.

The charitable world, however, looked disfavouredly upon any handouts to women, no matter how deserving. According to one of its leading exponents, Helen Bosanquet, “no woman should be dependent upon charitable efforts to rescue her from misfortune. She should be armed beforehand to meet it when it comes”.⁴⁶ Behind this attitude lay a philosophy which placed the highest value on personal independence. True charity, according to this philosophy, was not dole-giving with its consequent injury to character, but the fostering of self-dependence by means of self-support. Consequently, however undesirable it was for married women to work, it was considered even more undesirable for them to become charges upon charitable or public funds. Not only was their moral welfare at stake but also that of their husbands who, it was alleged, would shirk their responsibility for family support once others assumed it.⁴⁷

With this the policy of organized charity, with a Poor Law one of equal stringency, and with domestic production for use of limited application, the female destitute were forced into the labour market, first the daughters and then, if family need persisted, the wives and mothers. Since generally family ties prevented the married and very young from working elsewhere, these women were particularly dependent on the local labour market for their job opportunities. If casual domestic work was available they could engage in that; if industrial homework, they could work in their homes. If by chance they lived in one of the great female-employed centres, such as Lancashire, their employment prospects were very good; if in a mining, engineering or seaport community their prospects were slight or non-existent. The very absence of industrial employment for women was noted by the Poor Law Commission as one of the contributing factors to female pauperism. In areas where there were few opportunities for destitute wives and widows to work, they lived on the poor rates. In places like Bristol, on the other hand, where married women could easily secure employment, it was usual for the wife to work as a means of keeping the household off the rates.⁴⁸ The depauperisation policy of the Poor Law had not decreased destitution. Instead it had transferred much of the burden of

⁴⁴In England and Wales, 72.0 per cent of the population lived in “urban districts” in 1891, 77.0 per cent in 1901, and 78.1 per cent in 1911. *Census of England and Wales, 1911: Summary Tables*, Table 8; 1914-16 CD. 7929, lxxxii.

⁴⁵See S. and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History—Part II: The Last Hundred Years*, London: Longmans, Green, 1929, II, 477 ff.

⁴⁶*The Standard of Life*, 2nd ed., London: Macmillan, 1906, p. 320

⁴⁷For elaboration of this viewpoint see B. Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 194 ff. C. Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society, 1869-1913*, London: Methuen, 1961.

⁴⁸Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, *Reports on the Relation of Industrial and Sanitary Conditions to Pauperism*, pp. 121, 182; 1909 Cd. 4653, xliii.

family support from the “natural” breadwinner to the wife and children. As one investigator for the Poor Law Commission viewed the situation, the wife was the able-bodied man’s form of out-relief.⁴⁹

8.3 Status of Woman

So far in speaking of the prevailing conceptions of woman’s nature and role, all women were viewed as equals. In fact, however, the social respect accorded a woman did not depend on these two factors alone. Socially certain types of women were ranked over others and attention is now turned to this social ranking as it too possessed important occupational implications.

The amount of respect a woman enjoyed depended on her station in life. The highest was that of “lady”, proportionate respect being allotted to those lower down the social scale according to how successful they were in adopting the facade of a lady. Her attributes, therefore, were the criteria for assessing the worth of any woman. These attributes were essentially four. First of all, a lady was characterized by her leisure. Whereas a man’s rank was generally determined by his calling, a woman’s was by her “idleness”. This did not mean that she had nothing to do. Her leisure might be nominal only, complicated by the need of the unmarried to attend personally upon elderly parents or the need of the married to care for children and to manage a large household. In either case it might be masked by a busy preoccupation with trivial pursuits. Furthermore, if surplus time and energy existed after family obligations and social duties were fulfilled it was expected that she, *à la* Lady Bountiful, engage in some unpaid charitable work. The leisure of a lady referred only to her freedom from the “degrading” pursuits of manual housework and gainful employment. The former was thought fit work only for women of low social standing. As for the latter, although it was generally conceded that women “without means of their own...were under the distressing obligation to support themselves”,⁵⁰ for women to adopt voluntarily a vocation whose fathers and husbands were well able to provide them with ample comforts was deemed a loss of station, not only for the women involved, but also for their families.

Another requirement of a lady was that she be morally pure. Marriage was her only socially approved outlet for sexual expression. Therefore, any taint on a woman’s reputation automatically disqualified her from ladyhood. To protect their daughters’ good name, families would not permit their daughters mixing promiscuously with the opposite sex. Chaperonage of daughters was normal in the best of families right up to the outbreak of the First World War. And to protect their daughters’ minds, girlhood was surrounded by the so-called Victorian conspiracy of silence in which sex itself was a taboo subject.

“Delicate nurture”, the outcome of gracious living, educational opportunity and a sheltered environment, was another mark of ladyhood. Women so raised were “fragile” in body and refined in tastes and manners. As a result of their upbringing they were repelled by all forms of “vulgarity”, whether found in the noise, dirt and ugliness of physical surroundings, in the thought, word or deed of social intercourse, or in the physical demands of manual activities.

Next, a lady had to look the part as well as act it. Therefore, it was important that she dress well. With marriage their only respectable means of “earning” a livelihood and with men, in choosing a wife, placing great weight on a woman’s external attractiveness, women had a strong incentive to conform on this matter of dress.

From the attributes listed so far—leisured, sheltered, delicate and well-dressed—it is evident that only rich women could afford to be ladies. Thus it would appear that the only occupational consequence of the lady ideal was to keep a very small proportion of women out of the labour market since but an estimated ten per cent of the nation’s families numbered among the leisured.⁵¹

⁴⁹Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, *Reports on the effect of Outdoor Relief on Wages and Conditions of Employment in Certain Unions in England*, p. 240; 1909 Cd. 4690, xliii.

⁵⁰A. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁵¹C. Collet, *Women in Industry*, London: Women’s Printing Society, 1911, p. 5. Her estimate was based on the following reasoning. First of all she excluded from the so-called leisured classes all families not waited on by domestic servants. Then given that in the 1911 Census there were 18 female indoor domestics for every 100 families or occupiers,

In filtering down to social strata which lacked the financial means to implement it, however, this ideal produced two occupational effects of consequence: 1) it created a class of “pocket-money” earners, that is women who, figuratively speaking, worked not for their bread but for the butter to put upon it, and 2) it made their availability for employment highly conditional.

8.3.1 Need for “Pocket Money”

Originally a “lady” was a woman of noble or gentle birth. But with the social changes following upon the Industrial Revolution came a diffusion of wealth, new standards of luxury and new ideas of refinement. A status that had been originally ascribed by birth alone could now be acquired by any woman who wished to “improve” her station in life and who had the means to make such an advancement possible. That this democratizing of ladyhood was of very modern origin can be inferred from the fact that not until the 1860s was the term “lady” used to mean a woman whose manners, habits and sentiments had the refinement characteristic of the higher ranks of society in addition to its older meaning of a woman “gentle” by birth.⁵²

Once ladyhood was no longer limited to those born into gentility, it could only be identified by standards of behaviour which readily differentiated the “ladylike” from those less so. Thus, for aspiring ladies, conformity to all the codes of behaviour that differentiated them from those lower down the social scale became a necessity. Only in this way could their superior position be readily identified and so receive its proper deference. For the especially ambitious, the practices of those socially above them were adopted in the hope that they could now pass for one of their “betters”. Since dress was one of the most accessible ways for women to “improve” their station, the amount a woman could afford to spend on dress “very largely determined” her social outlook.⁵³ This “egotistic passion for refinement”⁵⁴ produced in the typical woman an attitude of snobbishness to those lower down the social scale, an attitude of deference to those above, and a rigid conformity to the standards of behaviour defined as “respectable” by those she considered her peers.

But the problem faced by most aspiring ladies was that the breadwinner’s income was not sufficient to provide the “extras” necessary for them to realize their self-imposed standards of decency. To them, feminine respectability hinged more on displaying a given standard of consumption than on remaining “leisured” in the home without the material accompaniments which gave social acknowledgement to their station in life. Thus women from the comfortable and lower middle classes were found in the contemporary labour force. Need was their prime motivator as it was that of their “unfortunate” sisters but it was for so-called luxuries rather than for necessities.

This need for “extras” was especially strong among the marriage-oriented daughters. Their concern to marry well in a period when social position was an important element in the choice of marital partner made them anxious to be identified as a member of the class in which they hoped to find a spouse. The married women in these social classes were less inclined to work for “extras”. Not only was their right to support given priority over that of their daughters of working age but also public opinion was less tolerant of married women’s employment.⁵⁵ Thus the risk of losing esteem by working was much greater in theirs than in their daughters’ cases. Moreover, these married women shared the social prejudices of those around them. Strongly imbued with the feeling that the husband was the natural breadwinner, they were for the most part reluctant to enter gainful employment. Consequently, few married women from the more comfortably situated families were found in the labour market.

However, for some there was the irresistible temptation to earn, particularly if work could be done at home and so enable them to retain a semblance of respectability. Even though they were

and assuming that three-fifths of the families keeping servants had only one servant, one-fifth had two servants and one-fifth had an average of four servants, then ten families or occupiers in every 100 or ten per cent were waited upon by servants and so by definition were of the leisured classes.

⁵² *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908, VI, 22.

⁵³ C. Collet, *Educated Working Women*, London: King, 1902, p. 73

⁵⁴ B. Hutchins, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

⁵⁵ See above pp. 87-88.

classified as comfortably situated, for many the conception of comfort was a meagre one at best. As the Webb's indicated, even in the "relatively well-paid trades, in times of comparative prosperity, the ordinary income of a skilled mechanic" was "below the amount necessary for the development in himself, his wife, and his children the highest efficiency" of which they were capable.⁵⁶

Besides the paucity of their husbands' earnings, there was the additional factor of its division to induce married women of the comfortable classes to earn. The Women's Co-operative Guild placed insufficient housekeeping money on a par with cruelty as responsible for most of the sufferings of working class wives.⁵⁷ So general was this grievance that George Lansbury, a leading socialist, felt obliged to admonish his comrades for not practising within their homes the economic equality that they preached in public. As he maintained, "a man considers that he has done his duty when he has allotted to his wife a paltry pound or twenty-two shillings out of a possible thirty or thirty-five". What he wanted was "men to deny themselves such luxuries, so called, as tobacco and beer, until their money" ran to as "decent clothes for their wives" as they expected for themselves.⁵⁸

Though both the daughters of the comfortable working and lower middle classes were pocket-money earners, they differed in their approach to work. The former, not ashamed of working though mindful of social proprieties, were most anxious to emphasize that they were pursuing a trade by choice and not because of necessity. With the latter, there persisted an element of shame in that they were working at all. So close in status to the esteemed "ladies of leisure", they aspired to be like them if not actually of them. Those who were especially status-conscious tried to hide the fact that they worked by only accepting employment that could be done in their own home.

8.3.2 Conditional Availability

In short, pocket-money earners were ladies at heart, whose "ruling motive" was to keep themselves respectable.⁵⁹ Despite their need to earn so as to satisfy their status ambitions, they still clung to the accepted norms for a lady and gave expression to them by conditioning their entrance into the labour market. They would only accept work which they deemed suitable, the higher their social position, the more rigid and exacting their definition of suitability. If no "suitable" work was available, they chose not to enter the labour market at all rather than to be degradingly employed. Since no so-called stern necessity forced them to work they could afford to be highly selective in their choice of employments.

The ladyhood ideal not only made women's availability for work highly conditional but it also provided the standards by which job suitability was assessed and choice of job made. The more closely a job's aspects conformed to the ideals of feminine gentility, the more respectable it became. Therefore, in an age when to be a lady meant to be leisured, delicate, well-dressed, and sheltered, those particular trades which most permitted a woman to be ladylike in the course of her employment were ranked highest, the remainder falling into place below them according to how closely their conditions simulated the "genteel" employments. Thus, superimposed upon the world of work was the very hierarchy of values by which a woman herself was accorded social esteem.

What particular types of jobs and conditions satisfied the requirements of ladyhood in the period under review? That of shop assistant was placed high on the list. "No wonder", wrote one vocational guidance writer, "every kind of girl, drawn from every class and strata of society, is found behind the counters of the modern emporium", for "in all essential features the work of distribution is light, clean, easy and pleasant". No woman, she asserted, liked having her hands "distorted, the nails blackened and broken and the flesh discoloured". Whereas most factory work spoiled the hands, "shop assisting allowed them to remain "clean and soft". Another attractive feature of the work was the "neat and even stylish dress" of the shop assistant. Only the "plainest and strongest material" could withstand the wear of factory work in contrast to the "good black stuff" which could be worn

⁵⁶ *Industrial Democracy*, 1902 ed., London: Longmans, Green, p. 793.

⁵⁷ (Mrs.) H. Swanwick, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁵⁸ "Our Wives", *Woman Worker*, vol. 1, no. 7, Mar. 1908, p. 133.

⁵⁹ M. Bird, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

in the shop for months without showing signs of wear. Furthermore, for those living apart from their families, the occupation, by its living-in system, offered the added inducement of a “home” away from home.⁶⁰

Millinery and dressmaking were preferred employments as women could go to them “‘nicely dressed and had not such a hard time’”.⁶¹ The cleanliness and almost invariably good working conditions of clerical work made it highly attractive as well. Women, as alleged, liked the prospect of “sitting in a well-lighted, warmed, aired and furnished office;...of dressing neatly and smartly in linen or flannel blouse and tweed skirt” of their own choosing.⁶²

There was also great competition for warehouse work, “the goal of every factory girl with ambitions and refinement”.⁶³ The work was light and clean and carried with it a good social standing. Employments offering supervision by women were also favourably viewed. One of the reasons given for the popularity of teashop waiting was that it offered the “inestimable privilege” of working under the immediate supervision of another woman.⁶⁴

The dining and lavatory arrangements also influenced job choice. The higher a woman’s social position the more she insisted that she have a decent place to eat and facilities to tidy herself before going home.⁶⁵ Pocket-Money earners were likewise favourably disposed to employments that could be done at home. Writing was one, photographic retouching and waistcoat-sewing were others.

Employments which provided opportunities for meeting marriageable young men from a woman’s own class or preferably from a higher one also proved attractive. Such was the modern barmaid calling. To women with a “love...for adventure”, the work, despite many parents objecting to a trade which allegedly exposed their daughters to the temptations of drink and immorality, appeared highly romantic.⁶⁶ As one critical of such work for women caustically commented, barmaids picture themselves “as standing all day in smart attire” with “handsome gentlemen paying [them] highflown compliments across the counters”.⁶⁷

But there was still one job consideration that towered over all the others mentioned so far. Jobs with requirements precluding women from a lower social rank were especially popular. No matter how appealing a particular employment was in all other respects, if it entailed a better class girl working beside one considered to be of an “inferior stamp”,⁶⁸ that condition alone was sufficient to discredit the trade in the eyes of the more respectable. For not only were their behavior and dress indices of their social position but also the class of persons with whom they associated. Therefore, to gain and to keep the respect of their peers they could not afford to tarnish their reputations by associating with those whose standards were lower than their own.

In consequence very rigid class distinctions prevailed in the feminine occupational world. The workers of one factory would refuse to recognize those of another in the same street. Warehouse girls would ignore those in the factory proper, and within the factory the women in one workroom would not associate with those in another where the work was dirtier or heavier. This situation was dramatically illustrated in a contemporary study of women in the printing trades. According to its findings:

‘Folding and sewing girls look down on the machine girls tremendously, and would not sit at the same table with them for anything’....Then again, a folder, despised herself by those above her, is reported to ‘look down upon the litho and bronzing girls. They are of the very lowest class....with hardly a shoe on their feet. They are on quite a different floor and have nothing to do with the folders’.⁶⁹

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-65.

⁶¹ *Factory Report, 1907*, p. 147; 1908 Cd. 4166, xii.

⁶² M. Bird, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶⁴ B. Drake, “The Tea-Shop Girl”, *Women’s Industrial News*, vol. 17, new series, no. 61, Apr. 1913, p. 126.

⁶⁵ See S. and B. Webb, *Industrial Democracy*, 1902 ed., London: Longman’s, Green, p. 698 n.

⁶⁶ B. Drake, “The Barmaid”, *Women’s Industrial News*. vol. 18, new series, no. 65, Apr. 1914, p. 222.

⁶⁷ M. Bird, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁹ (Mrs.) J. MacDonald (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 67.

Among domestic servants, especially in large households, similar feelings prevailed. A cook would lose status if she went for a walk with a second footman, or a lady's maid if she made friends with the third housemaid.⁷⁰

Nor was this snobbish attitude confined solely to the manual grades. It was this same concern with status that made women sanitary inspectors deplore the fact that some of the members of their profession were being called "Health Visitors", a title previously assigned by a private society in Manchester to women of an inferior class whom it had employed for health visiting work.⁷¹ And in the teaching profession, to cite yet another example, secondary school teachers refused to mix with their elementary school counterparts on the grounds that the latter were not "ladies."⁷²

Given the high social ranking of "exclusive" jobs, of what did their requirements consist so as to bar the entrance of lower class women? Generally any employments demanding labour of above average health, education, manners, or appearance automatically disqualified women of inferior rank. This was because the quality of life enjoyed by women in this period depended almost entirely on the resources of the family breadwinner.

The responsibility of the state to make good the difference in opportunity that a paternal system of family support entailed had yet to be recognized.⁷³ Thus all the particular qualities mentioned above were virtually dependent on the breadwinner's ability to finance them. The poorer the home from which a woman came, the less chance she had to qualify for work demanding such qualities.

In no way was the system of family-created opportunity more effective in controlling a woman's employment prospects than by the education it provided for her. Education was the principal doorway to the more highly esteemed jobs. Yet educational advantage, because privately purchased, was a concomitant of class position.⁷⁴ Consequently jobs requiring more than an elementary school training were normally restricted to those born into comfortable homes.

Jobs in which skill was acquired through a formal or informal apprenticeship also tended to be the province of those well above the poverty line. Few poor families could afford to have their daughters work without pay or for a token sum during the months and even years of training, much less pay any premium that on occasion was demanded. For the poor, unskilled work, because it provided an immediate chance to earn, held the greatest attraction.

In all branches of women's employment the element of "exclusiveness" confused the economic issue, even to the extent of a trade's desirability being enhanced the lower the starting wage. As poor girls could not afford to work for "pocket money", such a wage policy assured that one's co-workers would be from a higher social class. So prevalent was the tendency of women to evaluate jobs according to the class of those who filled them that certain employers, anxious to secure high-grade female labour, deliberately made the conditions of employment such that it would be impossible for lower class girls to accept. Thus there were cases of employers who purposely made the training period fairly long,⁷⁵ or who, some hospitals for example, deliberately lowered salaries.⁷⁶

Though, as shown, the standards of ladyhood determined job popularity, they also operated in reverse and made certain work highly unpopular. Respectable women would not permit their daughters to go into hearth rug manufacture because it entailed handling dirty tailors' clippings. These standards made women "particular" about cleaning litho-rollers⁷⁷ or working in contact with men. Respectable girls refused to work at the collieries, not only because the work of screening coal was both dirty and heavy but also because it required their association with men alleged to have no respect for womanhood.

⁷⁰See C. Butler, *Domestic Service*, London: Bell, 1916, p. 107.

⁷¹E. Morley (ed.), *Women Workers in Seven Professions*, London: Routledge, 1914, p. 228.

⁷²International Congress of Women, *Report of Transactions of the Second Quinquennial Meeting Held in London, July 1899*, London: Unwin, 1900, II, 184.

⁷³See below p. 137.

⁷⁴Prior to the Education Acts of 1902-1903, higher education was on the whole the province of private enterprise.

⁷⁵(Mrs.) J. MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁷⁶E. Cadbury *et al.*, *Women's Work and Wages*, 2nd ed., London: Unwin, 1908, p. 110.

⁷⁷(Mrs.) J. MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

Prejudices against business among the upper classes were strong enough to give the impression that some women “would rather starve” than trade.⁷⁸ It was believed that “a certain coarseness of fibre” was needed to be a good business woman,⁷⁹ thereby making the work unfit for women of education and refinement.

Pocket-money earners were extremely adverse to accepting any rough work that either exposed them to the elements or involved them in heavy labouring. “Of all the uses to put a woman to”, so the argument ran, “that of beast of burden is one of the most repugnant and inhuman”.⁸⁰ They also frowned upon such unpleasant trades as herring curing, refuse sorting and catgut manufacture. And those who largely connected the idea of a sanitary inspector with the inspection of drains were shocked that a woman should take up such work.

Another low-ranking trade was laundry work. Even though men were absent from the workroom and the work in general was clean, much of it was heavy and performed under unpleasant and unhealthy working conditions. Moreover, the “almost universal idea” that laundry workers were “a particularly low class”⁸¹ added to its unpopularity. “Respectable” women did not want to be identified with those reputed to be heavy drinkers and lacking in character, an opinion supported by the common practice in the hand branch of the trade of giving beer in part payment for wages. This general prejudice against laundry work, however, did not extend to the sorting room. Despite the need to handle dirty linen, employment there was highly reputable. Sorters were addressed as “Miss”, not as in the other laundry departments by their Christian name. The higher educational level the work demanded placed it beyond the competition of low class women and so, by reason of its exclusiveness, a ladylike pursuit.

Midwifery, although responsible work providing “exceptional” opportunity to influence the so-called lower orders in “decency, order, and temperance”,⁸² was another calling in which it was difficult to attract the “well-bred”. The typical midwife, of the same social class as servants, “spoiled” the trade for the more educated. The same held true for certain branches of the nursing profession. “Ladies” were adverse to entering mental, infirmary or cottage nursing because women of low status were normally employed.

Affording no better testimony to the prevalence of the ladyhood ideal in assessing job worth was the fact that those women with the greatest bargaining power—possessing both the least need to earn and the highest personal attributes as workers, namely education, health, appearance, and manners—were found in the most “genteel” employments. Those with the least, occupied employments considered most unsuitable for women.

For the “delicately nurtured”, professional endeavours were their special province. They were found as secondary school teachers and as hospital-trained nurses. A few of them also entered the ranks of the better class dressmakers, shop assistants and clerks.

Lower middle class women usually became elementary school teachers, shop assistants in the West End of London and richer suburbs, and Civil Service clerks. Those who were wives of small farmers and tradesmen often assisted in their husbands’ businesses. Women of this class also provided a certain number of the nation’s waitresses and dressmakers.

The daughters of the comfortable artisan class formed the majority of domestic servants and of skilled workers, such as dressmakers and milliners. These women were also warehouse workers who performed the clean and light operations entailed in finishing and preparing goods for sale. Teashop waitresses, in whom a relatively high standard of health and manners was required, were to some extent recruited from this class. So were the lower-grade shop assistants and clerks, and a number of elementary school teachers. Wives of artisans, if they worked at all, were generally found engaged in industrial home work.

The daughters and wives of labourers constituted the mainstay of those engaged in the most

⁷⁸ *The Women’s National Co-operative Self-Help Society*, London: New Parcel Post Publishing Co., 1894, p. 11.

⁷⁹ M. Bird, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁸⁰ B. Hutchins, “Gaps in our Factory Legislation”, *Economic Journal*, vol. 18, no. 70, June 1908, p. 228.

⁸¹ Central Bureau for the Employment of Women, *The Fingerpost*, London: 1906, p. 151.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

unladylike work. They were the unskilled and the “beasts of burden” of the female labour force. They worked under conditions alleged to brutalize any woman exposed to them such as amidst dirt and among men without proper supervision. Because the more respectable refused to work on those terms, “rough work”, by default, became the province of the most degraded and helpless, many of whom were married but in destitute circumstances.

Conscious of the stigma attached to their work, these women, whenever more lady-like alternatives appeared, availed themselves of the opportunity to improve their occupational status. Thus it became difficult to find women to do milking, to labour in the field, to work at the tin streams. Commenting on the scarcity of farm servants prior to the war, one government report observed that girls “‘all want to be genteel, to wear slippers instead of clogs, and those who do not go away to work in shops aspire to become dressmakers’”.⁸³

Though on the whole the upper classes did “lady’s work”, the lowest classes the “rough work”, and the in-between classes the work that remained, overlapping of classes in given grades of work existed to some extent. On occasion special opportunities not usual to a particular class enabled women to qualify for a higher grade job. Indicative of such an occurrence was the complaint that board school girls were trying to “capture” the lady’s work of clerk, secretary and typist.⁸⁴ Or if an area afforded very few opportunities for female employment, a better class of woman might be found at work which in another area, offering a greater choice of employment, would be mainly staffed by an inferior class. This was exemplified by the hollowware trade. In the Stourbridge districts because little else was available, a better grade of labour was found in this work than in London where the trade was the reserve of those who failed to obtain any better employment. Finally, because of the special significance of home work in the lives of working women, industrial homeworkers were found in every social grade, from the dock labourer’s wife burdened with domestic duties to the destitute gentlewoman who believed she would lose caste if she carried on work anywhere but in her home. The one noticeable exception was the tradesmen class where the wife and daughters could with propriety profitably assist in the shop.

⁸³ *Report of Sub-Committee Appointed to Consider the Employment of Women in Agriculture in England and Wales*, p. 38, 1919 Non-Parl. Board of Agriculture and Fisheries.

⁸⁴ E. Cadbury *et.al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

Chapter 9

The Female Labour Supply

What special qualities were, then, imparted to the female labour supply by the social conditions determining feminine upbringing?

In the first place they limited substantially the number of women available for gainful work. Though slightly outnumbering men in the population, women constituted less than one-third of the nation's work force. This was not simply because there were no more openings for them and that the unoccupied two-thirds reluctantly but necessarily stayed at home. Instead most of them, given the prevailing labour market situation, had little desire to work. Their self-respect was tied to the ideal of being, at least, a homemaker, at best, a lady of leisure, but in no case a career woman.¹ Thus, no matter how much an employer might wish to recruit staff from among the unoccupied, he was unlikely to succeed unless he was prepared to offer them "powerful" inducements in the form of convenient and pleasant working arrangements and a wage attractive enough to make employment "worth their while". Yet measures such as these would generally make the cost of their employment prohibitive. Moreover, in surpassing the "going rate" with these marginal women, the employer in all likelihood would be forced to increase similarly the rates paid to his current female staff. Otherwise they, considering themselves of a comparable grade, would protest receiving a lower rate for what appeared to them as equal work.²

Characteristics special to female labour did not end with these women weakly committed to employment *per se*. Even among the strongly committed marked traits were in evidence. In the first place, the relatively few women available for work were not available for all of the jobs that men of their class were. Women's desire to be feminine dissuaded those with any alternative from accepting work deemed "unfeminine" for women of their social position and at every level in the occupational hierarchy there existed work which was considered respectable employment for a man but not for a woman. Thus women with the requisite qualifications could not be attracted into such work, as a rule, unless the employer made a special effort to convince these women that they could do the work and still be "feminine" or else to transform the work situation into one more in keeping with conventional views regarding proper employment for a woman.

Next, since it was the occupation of the male head of the family that normally determined where wives and daughters lived, an employer had difficulty in recruiting staff of the requisite number and quality if the locally available female supply was deficient in either of these respects. Accordingly, special inducements were needed to attract women resident elsewhere. In keeping with women's sheltered upbringing, an offer of "living-in" accommodations, as was commonly associated with

¹The circumstances of women's lives made the ideal of female domesticity most realizable among the married, less so among the widowed and least of all among the unmarried although even among them nearly half of those old enough to work in 1911 were not in the labour market as compared to nine-tenths of the married and seven-tenths of the widowed. Computed from *Census of England and Wales 1911*, X, i, Table 8; 1913 Cd. 7018, lxxviii. *Census of Scotland 1911*, II, Tables xxx, xxxii, xxviii; 1913 Cd. 6896, lxxx.

²For references to the wartime problem of paying women working together unequal rates for similar work see below p. 195 and n. 41 on p. 197.

private domestic service and shop assisting—two occupations which relied heavily on out-of-town female labour—was one of the foremost.

Then, the general practice of retirement on marriage meant that the female labour force was in a constant state of flux. But as short-term as single working women were, they were at least in the labour market until marriage. In contrast, working wives entered and left, not so much in accord with the demand for their particular services as of that of their husband's. When their husbands were out of work they entered the labour market and when their husbands were earning again they left it. At times this pattern proved highly inconvenient to the employer. In the London laundry trade, washerwomen were often wives of building labourers whose busy employment period came in the summer. Since this was also the busy laundry season, the trade found itself short of workers when it needed them most. The hosiery trade in the Nottingham district was faced with a similar situation. When the collieries in the area were slack there was much competition among wives of the coal miners for home work. But when the collieries were busy the men objected to their wives' employment and, in consequence, the local supply of female labour dwindled. The availability of widows was also largely unconnected with the state of the labour market. Their entry usually followed in the wake of the husband's death and, among the younger ones, might last only until their children were old enough to earn and so relieve them of the breadwinning responsibility.

So far the effect of feminine upbringing on the female labour supply has been viewed in only quantitative terms, but it had qualitative consequences as well. First, the belief that women were "naturally more delicate" acted to deprive growing girls of the opportunities for physical exercise accorded their brothers as a matter of course. Sedentary activities were considered most in keeping with the female physique with the result that those women whose family circumstances permitted them to lead the "ideal" feminine life were deficient in muscular development. Moreover, because the average woman's frame was smaller and less robust than the average man's, its needs for body-building foods was also thought to be less and in the poorer homes, where means were lacking to feed all members equally well, the practice was to feed the men better than the women. This lack of exercise among the upper class women and an adequate diet among the lower resulted in women who as a whole, even apart from the question of their natural physical endowment, were for productive purposes but "inferior editions of men".³

Also characterizing female labour was its comparative docility. Given the broken term of their industrial life and the fact that many were not wholly dependent on their work for support, women tended to attach much less importance than men to safeguarding and improving their employment conditions. Moreover, if they became discontented, women were less likely than men to engage in concerted action to remedy matters because, among other reasons,⁴ it would be "unwomanly" and "unladylike"—"unwomanly" because it was the part of a woman to perform "conscientiously" her duties to those in authority over her and "to look with disfavour" on activities which seemed to have material progress as an end,⁵ and "unladylike" because it was the part of a lady to be "exclusive and inconspicuous".⁶ Thus feminine upbringing made women much less susceptible than men to the appeals of trade unionism and this was reflected in their comparative rates of organization. Whereas only about six out of every one hundred occupied women in the United Kingdom were organized in 1911, about twenty out of every one hundred occupied men were organized.⁷ Moreover, of the

³Evidence from Professor Cannan, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc.*, p. 174; 1919 Cmd. 167, xxxi.

⁴For some of these other reasons see B. Webb (ed.), *The Case for the Factory Acts*, London: Richards, 1901, pp. 73-74. B. Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, London: Labour Research Dept. and Allen and Unwin, 1920, pp. 199-202.

⁵Royal Commission on Labour, *The Employment of Women*, p. 14; 1892-93 C. 6894, xxxvii, pt. I.

⁶B. Drake, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

⁷Separate figures for Great Britain are unavailable, the difference would be slight.

women organized, over half were accounted for by the cotton industry alone.⁸ Thus it can be said that, outside of cotton, the female trade unionist was a very rare figure indeed.

Again, the available women did not represent a cross section of the female population as a whole. Instead, in respect to both age and class, they constituted an undue proportion of its least productive members. Since most working women retired upon marriage, the female labour supply consisted to an exceptional degree of the young, yet-to-be married daughters of the population.⁹ As a result, all the occupational disabilities associated with youth—lack of judgment, frivolity of purpose, nascent ability—were super-imposed upon those associated with female labour as such.

Furthermore, those matrons found in the labour market did little to counter-balance this negative feature of the female labour supply. Usually entering the labour market as temporary workers or late in life, when the breadwinner's disability or death gave them no other alternative, they were little prepared for wage-earning. They offered themselves for work, neither trained nor experienced, and having lost whatever skills they possessed prior to marriage. And often physically worn out, they had not even the asset of youthful vigour to give value to their labour. Thus an employer contemplating the employment of women, had to think mainly of how he could use inexperienced young girls and untrained older women burdened with domestic responsibilities, often physically inept and often available on a short-term basis only.

The female labour force was also, relative to men's, composed of a higher proportion coming from the lower classes. Since better off as well as poor men worked, the male labour force represented more of a cross section of all classes found in the community. This was not true with women. The higher the class, the less likely it was for a woman to be found in the labour market. Also, the higher the class, the later was her entry into gainful employment and the more permanent her withdrawal upon marriage. The lower a woman's class, the earlier was her entry and the greater her likelihood of becoming an "unfortunate" matron, and so returning in later years. Since in the period under review class position largely determined a person's quality of health, education, manners, and appearance, in short all that adds value to labour, the female labour force was markedly deficient in high grade labour. Thus an employer interested in hiring women had mainly to ask himself how he could usefully employ lower class women, that is women with but an elementary school education and possibly with a low vitality level due to poor feeding and constant exposure to disease-producing conditions.

Furthermore, because few working women could escape some share in home duties, whatever natural physical disabilities they had relative to men were further exaggerated. Men did not have domestic responsibilities to absorb their after-work hours and energy and thereby deprive them, as was the case with occupied women, of rest and relaxation. On account of women's "double work" the Principal Lady Factory Inspector considered job fatigue "obviously more serious for the average

	Occupied ^a 1911 (000's)	Union Members ^{b,c} 1911 (000's)
Women	5,852	335
Men	14,319	2,804

^aCensus of England and Wales, *General Report*, 9(Appx. C); 1917-18 Cd. 8491, xxxv.

^bExclusive of professional organizations.

^c*Ministry of Labour Gazette*, Oct. 1937.

⁸*Eighteenth Abstract of Labour Statistics*, pp. 178-179; 1926 Cmd. 2740, xxix.

⁹Age distribution of all occupied persons in Great Britain, 1911, per thousand occupied:

	Males	Females
Under 16	52	77
16-18	54	98
18-25	183	320
25-45	443	342
45-65	228	137
65 and over	40	26

Source: A. Bowley, *Wages and Income in the United Kingdom Since 1860*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937. Compiled from table on p. 40

woman than the average man".¹⁰

Feminine upbringing not only served to overweight the female labour force with the young and the underprivileged, and sap its energies by exacting from working women additional unpaid domestic labour, but it also affected women's vocational qualifications by affecting their vocational ambition and training opportunities. Conditioned from early girlhood to think marriage their only career, working women evidenced a general lack of industrial ambition. Many, indifferent to training, did their work unintelligently and mechanically. They contemplated at the most a working life of from ten to fifteen years, after which marriage would release them from the need to earn. This "meanwhile" attitude towards work discouraged the acquiring of proficiency with its prerequisite sacrifices of time, effort and earning power. Though women were aware that some would remain unwed or be "unfortunate" in their husbands, this little influenced their vocational outlook since it was never a certainty who would be the marriage market's "unlucky" ones. The result of women's general lack of career-mindedness was that when marriage failed to live up to expectations and, as an adult, a woman had to earn, she was ill-prepared to do any but the most mediocre types of work.

Women's aspiration level was further affected by their generally unquestioning acceptance of the occupational dividing line. As reported in the study *Women in the Printing Trades*, an investigator was met with "cutting reproofs" from forewomen and others in the bookbinding houses when she tried to find out "why they did not turn their hands to simple and easy processes" which were being done by men. "'Why, that is man's work, and we shouldn't think of doing it!'" was the reply.¹¹ Furthermore, with all the wider subjects of thought and action considered as men's business, women were also strongly imbued with feelings of inferiority. "'I could never reach that'" was a typical reaction of women to men's jobs higher up the occupational ladder.¹² Thus in an address outlining woman's employment opportunities given before the Headmistresses' Association in 1886 the speaker, a principal of a girls' college, was careful to qualify her remarks about possible administrative openings for women with "but I am not about to suggest lady cabinet ministers, judges, or members of Parliament".¹³

Nor did the fact that a large number of women considered ignorance, "real or pretended",¹⁴ a marriage market asset encourage them to qualify themselves vocationally. The attitude that manual labour was degrading also made so-called self-respecting girls reluctant to enter courses of industrial training.

In contrast to women's generally disinterested approach to vocational preparation was men's. A much higher proportion of men were concerned with attaining vocational competence as with them it was a long-term investment, accruing interest throughout the major part of their forty to fifty years of working life.

The closest female approximation to the male's career-mindedness was found in the Lancashire cotton textile industry where exceptional conditions tended to develop in the women industrial ambition. As the Board of Trade's Labour Correspondent, Clara Collet, reported, industrial employment for them was not a means of livelihood for the short period preceding marriage but "as their occupation in life far more than domestic management".¹⁵ However, Miss Collet was careful to emphasize at another time that no other county was less typical of the industrial history of England than Lancashire. It was only the aggregation of cotton textile women workers in large factories and in special localities that attracted undue attention to them.¹⁶ Yet even though more ambitious than most, few ventured to acquire the highest skills of their trade such as setting the loom. The career-mindedness of the cotton workers found little counterpart elsewhere in Britain except among the

¹⁰ *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 204.

¹¹ As quoted in (Mrs.) J. MacDonald (ed.), *Women in the Printing Trades*, London: King, 1904, p. 65.

¹² M. Bird, *Woman at Work*. Chapman and Hall, 1911, p. 88.

¹³ S. Hadland, *Occupations of Women Other Than Teaching*, London: Published for Headmistresses Association by Alexander and Shephard, 1886, p. 4.

¹⁴ C. Bremner, *Education of Girls and Women in Great Britain*, London: Sonnenschein, 1897, p. 222.

¹⁵ *Report on the Statistics of Employment of Women and Girls*, pp. 28-29; 1894 C. 7564, lxxxi, pt. II.

¹⁶ See C. Collet, *Educated Working Women*, London: King, 1902, pp. 49-50.

proportionally few educated working women whose approach to work, in the period under review, was changing from an amateurish to a professional one.¹⁷

The “meanwhile” attitude of women towards work was reinforced by the provision they found for their training. In the first place, prevailing practice was for parents to allocate more money for the higher education of sons than of daughters. It was seldom thought desirable to give a girl a long and expensive training which might be interrupted by marriage or one necessary to fit her for a trade or profession when her parents could afford to keep her at home. Moreover, lacking assistance from their parents, women had far fewer possibilities of scholarship award than men. For example, in 1914 the number of scholarships for girls to Oxford and Cambridge was thirty-four against four hundred and forty for boys.¹⁸

Even in those exceptional cases when a girl had “wrung her expensive Art or Medical education from her reluctant parents”, as a contemporary vocational guidance writer recounted, “she still finds that deeply rooted, and to her most aggravating, idea that she may at any moment throw up her career to keep house for some mythical young man, will prevent their finding the income necessary to keep her till she is qualified in all branches of her work and able to support herself comfortably; in this no doubt seeing a painful contrast to their more liberal treatment of her brothers, who were given allowances as a matter of course and are not met with the crushing retort “‘You can come and live at home and I will keep you!’”¹⁹ In an age when education beyond the primary level was essentially a family responsibility, the parental practice of educating sons in preference to daughters proved a serious vocational handicap to women.

Apart from the question of funds was that of women’s vocational facilities themselves. As one government report described them, they were “few in quantity, and often inferior in quality, while such as existed were organised on no general system whatever”.²⁰ For example, though prior to the First World War considerable attention had been given to adjusting the curriculum and methods of teaching in public secondary schools to fit pupils for clerical work, almost nothing had been done to prepare women for the higher commercial positions. Nor had many local authorities established commercial schools or courses in technical institutes. Whatever instruction existed was mostly in the hands of innumerable private preparatory clerical colleges and schools of commerce. This not only meant that such instruction had to be financed by the pupil or her family but also that its quality varied since there was no accepted standard for women’s clerical work.

The provision of technical vocational training for women was also “lamentably inadequate”.²¹ The only provision for girls was a small number of day technical schools providing courses in domestic economy and a still smaller number of day trade schools and of evening trade classes. The day trade schools, though considered excellent, were too few to have any appreciable impact on the quality of women’s labour. Thus London had seven such schools prior to the war. Combined they could only accommodate one thousand girls for courses lasting two years. Part-time day courses for women apprentices also existed but on an experimental basis only. As for evening class instruction, the long hours of women’s employment and their reluctance to leave home in the evening militated against its success. Furthermore, the existing trade schools were designed for elementary school leavers. No higher trade or technical schools existed for girls with a good secondary education.

In consequence of their over-all deficiency in vocational preparation, whether due to lack of ambition or opportunity, women entered the labour market with little more to qualify them than their upbringing and general education. Their training as girls, however, gave them domestic skills but no others and the “habitual limitation of their lives”²² left them ignorant of business affairs and other matters of general knowledge. It was this result which led one of the rare woman indexers to com-

¹⁷See below pp. 138 ff.

¹⁸Evidence from the Association of Head Mistresses, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices, Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁹M. Bird, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

²⁰*Report of the Women’s Employment Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction*, p. 47; 1918 Cd. 9329. xiv.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 46.

²²Mrs. Sheldon Amos, vestrywoman, as quoted in M. Bateson, *Professional Women upon their Professions*, London: Cox, 1895, p. 58.

ment, "I have found women, however industrious, lack the general knowledge which is required for a good indexer".²³ Women's upbringing had also left them almost completely ignorant of mechanics. As for their general education, it was, on the whole, of a lower standard than men's. Arithmetic, in particular, was often poorly taught in girls' schools,²⁴ and university education was much rarer among women than men.

As a result women were almost entirely dependent upon on-the-job training for acquiring vocational skills. But in this respect they were at a particular disadvantage. With the employer largely assuming the expense of those trained on his premises, the fact that so many women left work upon marriage deterred many employers from offering women the opportunity to train. They maintained that they could not face the expense of so many not continuing. As a rule, therefore, most women simply "picked up" the trade after they were hired. Even in the more skilled trades, the only teaching a learner usually received was from a more experienced fellow worker to whom she acted as an assistant. In consequence of women's generally haphazard training, "scamped, inadequate results"²⁵ followed, imparting to working women as a whole a reputation of comparative incompetence.

Then in yet another important respect feminine upbringing handicapped women as workers. Men, as head of the household, not only earned the money but controlled the family income. As a result, few women of the period had the opportunity to accrue any capital. Furthermore, living in an environment that did not take women's work seriously, women found it almost impossible to raise capital from outside sources. Thus women's business opportunities tended to be limited to those businesses which did not require much capital outlay. Since in the period under review, businesses satisfying that criteria were diminishing in number, the average woman interested in a business career was faced with a decreasing scope for her talents.

Finally, feminine upbringing imparted to female labour a distinctive financial outlook. Whereas women willingly accepted wages that were not sufficient for self-support, many a man, observed Professor W. Smart, would rather become a tramp or go to the workhouse than accept a wage that failed to cover not only his physical needs but also his conventional ones such as tobacco and beer.²⁶

The sex difference in established expectations was especially noticeable in the latter stages of adolescence. A boy, as he entered manhood set "a value on himself"²⁷ which precluded his working for anything but a "man's wage", while a woman allowed herself to be "sweated". It was this difference in self-evaluation which gave women at times an advantage over young boys in the labour market. Whereas it was maintained boys grew up and revolted, women were content with their low remuneration. Even when women did not marry, they usually struggled on, "attempting to meet the larger wants of a woman out of the small wages of a girl". In contrast when the low scale of wages prevailing in the trade prevented a boy from working "out a career" for himself, he generally would seek more remunerative employment elsewhere.²⁸

Women's partial support from men, their modest demands from life and what the principal Lady Factory Inspector termed their "acute sense of industrial inferiority"²⁹ had the combined effect of rendering women of a given grade willing to work for wages which, to a man of a corresponding grade, would appear as an outrageous sum. First of all, the accepted custom of husbands maintaining their wives and of fathers, if not in a position to support entirely their unmarried daughters, at least contributing to their support, made the question of a "living wage" a matter of indifference among most working women. Admittedly the practice was for employed daughters to pay their mothers a weekly sum for board and lodging. In reality, however, this sum bore no relation to the cost of their maintenance. What a daughter received for her money depended on the family's standard of life,

²³Nancy Bailey, indexer of Parliamentary Debates, as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 118.

²⁴See evidence from The Women's Service Bureau, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 37. S. Hadland, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²⁵M. Bird, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

²⁶*Studies in Economics*, London: Macmillan, 1895, p. 115.

²⁷T. Blandford, *Co-operative Workshops in Great Britain*, London: Labour Association for Promoting Co-operative Production Based on the Co-Partnership of the Workers, 1898, p. 39.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁹A. Anderson, *Women in the Factory*, London: Murray, 1922, p. 24.

not on the amount of her contribution. In effect, these daughters were partially subsidized workers. The same was true of most working wives. Moreover, even when circumstances left women no other choice but to be self-supporting, financial assistance from male friends if not prostitution itself at times afforded a supplementary source of income. Thus inasmuch as subsidization in one form or another was such an accepted way of life among working women, they did not have to earn as much as men to “live” and so could be content with less.

In the village Colne near Halstead five shillings per week was considered a good wage by daughters of casual agricultural labourers.³⁰ Millinery assistants accepted it as a matter of course that their parents would keep them during the trade’s slack times. In contrast, skilled seasonal workers among men, such as building craftsmen, insisted on a rate of wages sufficiently high to maintain them when seasonally unemployed. Even among the low paid factory girls of East London, the cheapness of boarding at home enabled them to work irregularly as a matter of custom without the resulting loss of earnings causing them any undue hardship.³¹

Another psychological peculiarity of working women which was only made possible by the prevailing practice of male support was their viewing a low money wage as a sign of prestige, an indication to others that they came from self-respecting homes in which the family head was well able to support them. Also a woman could still appear ladylike, though gainfully employed, by demonstrating by the level of wages she received that work to her was essentially a vocation and not a source of livelihood. This attitude was especially prevalent among hospital trained nurses. The same effect could be achieved among women who could show by their choice of employment that ladylike working conditions, not wages, were the primary consideration.

Nor did the fact that women customarily worked without pay in the home help them psychologically to reject low paying employment. For it imbued them with “the habit of submissive industry”,³² in which they asked nothing for themselves. It was the prevalence of this habit which led one contemporary to comment that the wife is the cheapest help of all, and being so, widowers with children are advised to marry again as it will cost less than hiring a housekeeper.³³

Women’s traditional upbringing also worked to their disadvantage. Both in physical and mental needs, it prescribed a standard of life inferior to men’s. As a result the wage a woman considered she needed to be self-supporting was much lower than what a man from the same social stratum considered he needed. Therefore, even among working women independent of family support, there was not the same pressure behind their wage demands as behind those of single men.

Finally, women’s “mute sense of industrial inferiority” led to their expecting less than a man. The general belief in the inferior status of woman relative to man, a belief fostered by such laws as these relating to franchise, inheritance, guardianship, marriage, and nationality, readily transferred itself to the occupational scene. There women were found who accepted as axiomatic that their work relative to men’s was only of small value.

As a result of their upbringing, women did not expect a “man’s wage” but were content to earn one which represented the needs of the moment. As a rule they kept “no vigilant eye upon wages”³⁴ nor did they ask for rises. As some employers reported, this contentment with the established “woman’s wage” was so deep-seated among their female employees that they, once they attained their modicum on piece work, relaxed their efforts instead of trying to earn more³⁵ and so decrease the gap between theirs and men’s wages.

Not that this contentment with “women’s wages” meant, that at their accustomed levels of exertion, women would have refused a “man’s wage”. The fact is very few were offered one. Whatever

³⁰See *Women’s Trades’ Union Review*, no. 28, Jan. 1898, p. 14.

³¹See C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People*, 1st ed., London: Williams and Norgate, 1889, I, 473.

³²International Council of Women, *Report of Transactions of the Second Quinquennial Meeting Held in London*, July 1899, London: Unwin, 1900, VI, 202.

³³*Woman Worker*, vol. 1, no. 8, Apr. 1908, p. 146.

³⁴(Mrs.) J. MacDonald (ed.), *Women in the Printing Trades*, London: King, 1904, p. 105.

³⁵See M. Bulkley, *The Establishment of Legal Minimum Wages in the Boxmaking Industry under the Trade Boards Act of 1909*, London: Bell, 1915, p. 50. *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

the reasons for this,³⁶ the point being made here is that working women, because of their low aspiration level, were willing to accept work that paid only a “woman’s wage” if it meant they would otherwise fail to find employment.

³⁶For some explanations offered see *Report of the Royal Commission on Equal Pay 1944-1946*, chap. 8, pp. 187-193, app. xi; 1945-46 Cmd. 6937, xi and Appendices IX and X, 1946 Non-Parl. *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, pp. 69-75, 257-272; app. II; 1919 Cmd. 135 and Cmd. 167; xxxi. E. Cannan, *Wealth*, 3rd ed., London: King, 1928, pp. 210-216. G. Cassel, *The Theory of Social Economy*, London: Unwin, 1923, I, 314-316. M. Dobb, *Wages*, Cambridge: University Press, 1960, pp. 149-155. J. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, 8th ed., London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1878, I, 489-491. A. Pigou, *The Economics of Welfare*, 3rd ed., London: Macmillan, 1929, pp. 506-507, 563-570. K. Rothschild, *The Theory of Wages*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1960, pp. 79-82. W. Smart, *Studies in Economics*, London: Macmillan, 1895, chap. 4. F. Taussig, *Principles of Economics*, 3rd ed., rev., New York: Macmillan, 1929, II, 149-152. F. Walker, *The Wages Question*, London: Macmillan, 1886, pp. 372-384. P. Florence, “A Statistical Contribution to the Theory of Women’s Wages”, *Economic Journal*, vol. 41, no. 161, Mar. 1931, pp. 19-37.

Chapter 10

Limitations on the Demand for Female Labour

Qualities special to female labour characterized not only its supply but also its demand. As a general rule the work for which female labour was in demand differed from the work for which male labour was in demand. Two sets of factors combined to explain this: those that limited the demand for female labour to do men's work will be considered in this chapter, and the other, those that promoted a demand for female labour to do women's work, will be considered in the following chapter.

Practices originating with the law, employed men and employers confined the demand for female labour to women's side of the dividing line. But though the three limiting factors had a common effect, they differed in character. The first two—legislation and employed men—were fundamentally coercive, limiting the employer's freedom to employ women for men's work. The third was essentially a question of employer volition as to which sex to employ.

Major responsibility for the absence of demand for women to do men's work lay with the employers themselves. Admittedly the restrictions imposed by the state and by employed men played a part but at best it was a minor one. To show this, the restrictions imposed by the law and by employed men are examined first. Once these are known, it is possible to infer to what extent employers were free to use women for men's work and so to what extent the absence of any such demand was attributable to their own attitudes.

10.1 Legal Restrictions

The examination of the legal restrictions that follows is not meant to encompass all legislation that directly or indirectly restricted women's employment. It is not concerned with legislation that applied equally to men and women. Neither is it concerned with legislation that was essentially a means used by men already in an occupation to exclude women, nor with legal rulings that were invoked by the government in its capacity as an employer. In the first case, such an inclusion would add nothing to the discussion as to the absence of demand for women to do men's work, and as the second and third, such practices are best considered in the chapters dealing with those of employed men and of employers respectively. The legislation which is germane relates to those protective labour provisions in force during the 1891-1914 period which applied exclusively to working women.

Prior to 1842 protective labour legislation had applied to persons under eighteen irrespective of sex. However, with the Report of the Children's Employment Commission on Mines and Collieries in 1842 the government became convinced of the need to extend its protection to adult women as well. Contained in this Report were descriptions of how working women, too weak in their bargaining position to safeguard their own physical and moral well-being, were harnessed to trucks which they

dragged on all fours and were otherwise exposed to conditions of dirt, heat and alleged indecency.¹

Furthermore, the government was shown the futility of expecting the colliers to defend the interests of their wives and daughters. Working under the system of family labour, the colliers depended on the earnings of the women and children to supplement their own. As an old collier was quoted as saying, he was obliged to get a woman early to avoid paying away all his profits. The same Report mentioned how some coal owners refrained from abolishing women's work because they feared the loss of some of their best workmen who insisted on their right to employ their wives and children as they saw fit.²

Thus the state, concerned with the harmful effects of such employment on the women themselves and even more on their offspring, decided to act. In 1842 not only juvenile but adult women's employment below ground in mines was legally prohibited. Considered by some as "the most high-handed interference with industry enacted by the State in the nineteenth century",³ this Act provided the precedent for the inclusion of adult women in the much milder Factory Act of 1844. With its passage, adult women were subjected to the same protective labour provisions as were the fourteen to eighteen year olds of either sex, the legally defined "young persons".

In its protection of adult women, the state was but formalizing community sentiment that woman's highest value lay in her motherhood and not in her individuality as a person. From the nation's point of view, the soundness of mind and body of the future generations was of more importance than the right of women, as adult persons, to be self-determining. This attitude was in sharp contrast to that held about working men. Not only was it considered that they were in less need of the state's protection but also that their freedom to pursue their self-interest was so inviolable that any legal interference with their labour contract should be limited to securing the barest minimum of health and safety provisions.

From 1844 onwards further restrictions were imposed on the use of adult female labour until by 1891 its use was restricted in these essential respects.⁴ Women were prevented from working at night—usually between 9.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m.—and, with an unimportant exception, on Sundays or the recognized public holidays. Their working week was limited in the case of non-textile factories and workshops to sixty hours, and the working day to a maximum of ten and one-half hours except on Saturday when the legal maximum was seven and one-half hours. Spells without meal interruptions were limited to five hours. In the textile factories the limits were fifty-six and one-half hours for the week, ten for the weekday, five and one-half for Saturday and four for spells. Moreover, the permitted hours of work each day had to take place within a prescribed twelve-hour period. As for mealtimes, not only did they have to be a certain minimum length but also to be taken at the same time by all "protected" women within an establishment. Only in workshops employing adult women exclusively was a certain latitude permitted in regard to a few of these matters.

No overtime was permitted in textile firms. In non-textile ones, it was permitted provided one or more of the following conditions were met: 1) the material processed would otherwise be spoiled by the weather, 2) the business was liable to a press of work arising either at certain recurring seasons of the year or from unforeseen events, 3) perishable articles would otherwise spoil, or 4) a factory driven by water power was liable to have its power cut off by drought or flood. Even when permitted, the overtime allowance in the majority of cases was limited to two hours, including one-half hour for meals, on any one date, to five evenings in any one week, and to forty-eight evenings a year. In the processing of specified perishables—fruit processing, fish curing, milk condensing—only women, not "young persons", could be employed overtime but then in the manner outlined above for ninety-six evenings a year.

In addition to the hours' restrictions there were those altogether prohibiting the employment of women. Thus no woman could be legally employed to clean machines in motion or work between

¹As cited in B. Hutchins and A. Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation*, 3rd ed., London: King, 1926, p. 82.

²As cited in I. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850*, London: Routledge, 1930, p. 264.

³B. Hutchins and A. Harrison, *op. cit.*, 3rd ed., p. 82.

⁴For restrictions in detail see *Factory and Workshop Act, 1878*; 41 and 42 Vict., c. 16. *Coal Mines Regulation Act, 1887*; 50 and 51 Vict., c. 58.

fixed and traversing parts of a self-acting machine while it was in motion.

So far the discussion of legal restrictions has centred on those applicable to adult women since as a general rule both sexes, as “children” and “young persons”, were subject to the same regulations. In certain cases, however, male juveniles were permitted to work under conditions and during hours deemed illegal for girls of a corresponding age, thereby further restricting female employment opportunities. One such case was coal mining where males, but not females, between the ages of twelve and eighteen were permitted to work underground. Exception was also made for male young persons in the melting or annealing of glass. Moreover, whereas no girl under sixteen years of age was allowed to make or finish non-ornamental tiles, bricks or salt, boys could engage in this work beginning at fourteen years of age.

Special exemptions for night work were also permitted male juveniles while denied to their female counterparts. Male young persons over sixteen were permitted to work in connection with lace machines between 4.00 a.m. and 10.00 p.m., and in connection with bread baking between 5.00 a.m. and 9.00 p.m. Again, males above fourteen were allowed under certain conditions to work nights in blast furnaces, iron mills, letter-press printing, paper mills, and glass works.

Between 1891 and 1914 further legislative and administrative changes of consequence to women were made.⁵ On the whole, these changes imposed additional restrictions. The maximum weekly hours for textile women were reduced from 56 1/2 to 55 1/2. In non-textile factories and workshops “young persons” were no longer permitted to work overtime while permissible overtime for adult women was reduced in those trades subject to press of work, seasonality or weather exigencies from five days a week to three and from a total of forty-eight days per year to thirty days. Women’s overtime on perishable articles was limited to three days per week for fifty times a year. Workshops employing adult women exclusively were required to employ them within a specified twelve hour period on weekdays and eight hours on Saturday whereas previously these workshops had not been subject to the “normal day” rule. Flax scutch mills where only adult women were employed were no longer exempt from the hours’ restrictions of the Acts. As for the coal mine regulations, the permission for women to be employed after eight hours between the end of work on Friday and the beginning of work on Saturday was repealed and twelve hours, the minimum period permitted for weekdays, was substituted. Laundries were subject to hours’ regulation for the first time in 1895. Initially allowing Sunday and night work as well as liberal overtime provisions, the law by 1914 prohibited women’s night work and considerably restricted the overtime allowances.

As for prohibited work, no employer was allowed to employ “knowingly” any woman in a factory or workshop within four weeks after giving birth. Lead processes which exposed the worker to the danger of lead poisoning were specifically proscribed. In addition to their exclusion from certain lead processes in the pottery industry, no women were permitted to carry the “saggars” when full of ware.⁶ It also became obligatory for factory and workshop employers not subject to any local sanitary authority ruling on the matter to provide separate sanitary accommodation for the sexes and for shop employers to provide one seat to every three women shop assistants in their employ.

But not all changes occurring in the nation’s protective legislation further restricted women’s employment. Certain liberalizing provisions were also introduced. The emergency processing of fruit in fruit preserving establishments so as to prevent spoilage was made entirely exempt from all hours’ restrictions of “young persons” and adult women during the months of June, July, August, and September. Processes in the preserving and curing of fish which had to be carried on immediately to prevent spoilage were similarly exempted, but in their case, not for the summer months alone but for the entire year. The Secretary of State was empowered to vary the mealtimes and the beginning and the end of the daily period of employment for women creamery workers. He could also allow their employment for a maximum of three hours on Sunday and holidays. In addition, the original

⁵For legislative prescriptions see *Factory and Workshop Act, 1891*; 54 and 55 Vict., c. 75. *Factory and Workshop Act, 1895*; 58 and 59 Vict., c. 37. *Factory and Workshop Act, 1901*; 1 Edw. 7, c. 22. *Employment of Women Act, 1907*; 7 Edw. 7, c. 10. *Factory and Workshop Act, 1907*; 7 Edw. 7, c. 39. *Shops Act, 1912*; 2 Geo. 5 c. 3. For prescriptions arising out of administrative order see A. Anderson, *Women in the Factory*, London: Murray, 1922, App. I. For Sanitary Accommodation Order see *Factory Report, 1902*. i, xxix-xxx; 1903 Cd. 1610, xii.

⁶A saggarr was a box made of fire clay in which delicate pieces of pottery were fired.

provision exempting Crown establishments from the Acts in cases of public emergency was made applicable to establishments doing work under contract on behalf of the Crown.

Next to consider is the extent to which the legal restrictions on women's labour limited the demand for women. At the very most, the total exclusion of women from underground work in coal mines denied them access to five per cent of the nation's work in 1911. However, though no women were so engaged in the period under review, their absence from this work cannot be entirely attributed to the Coal Mines Regulation Act. The indications are strong that not many women would have been employed below ground even if there had been no legal restrictions. Women's original use in coal mining had been connected with the contract system of labour under which wives and children worked as assistants to the male head of the family and not as workers hired on their own account. Since this system of labour no longer prevailed, the demand for women from this proven source was also obsolete. Furthermore, even prior to 1842 the trend was already underway among "enlightened" employers to eliminate women from the coal mines.⁷ In addition, despite the relatively mild restrictions imposed on women's labour for mine surface work, hardly any women in the period under review were so employed. Finally, in the intervening years between the passage of the first restrictions on women's labour in mines and 1891, new ideals of feminine refinement had permeated every sector of the nation.⁸ As a result whenever they had a choice in the matter, women were disinclined to enter so-called rough occupations like coal mining. The relatively good wages of miners gave their wives and daughters such a choice. Generally not even the single women in mining communities worked to any extent, nor alternatively did they, as the daughters of the much poorer agricultural labourers tended to do, leave their homes for work as private domestic servants elsewhere.

Because of their scope, the Factory Acts presented a much greater potential threat to women's employment opportunities than the Coal Mines Regulation Act. But in all probability most of the work from which the Acts excluded woman would have gone to men regardless. For according to the findings of two of the foremost studies undertaken to ascertain the economic effect of legislation regulating women's labour for the years under review, the Factory Acts had had very little influence. Both the 1903 report of the investigating committee appointed by the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Home Office's report on the factors operating between 1890 and 1929 to determine the distribution of women in industry concluded that except in a few isolated cases the use of men or women in industry was determined by factors quite independent of the legal restrictions on women's employment.⁹ Contemporary studies made of women's labour in Liverpool, Birmingham, paper mills, and the printing trades corroborated this view.¹⁰

Mainly responsible for the over-all ineffectiveness of the Acts as a restrictive device was their irrelevance to the employer. In most cases the work at hand was either being carried on under conditions above the legal minimum standards or else women's labour had been sufficiently preferred to induce the employer to adjust his positions to those prescribed by law, especially since the same regulations applied to his competitors as to himself.

For example, there were many industries in which, the normal working hours were less than the

⁷See I. Pinchbeck, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

⁸See above p. 96.

⁹See "Third and Final Report of the Committee appointed to investigate the Economic Effect of Legislation regulating Women's Labour" in *Report of the Seventy-Third Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1903*, London: Murray, 1904, p. 341. The Committee included E. Brabrook, A. Bowley, Miss A. Anderson, Miss H. Blackburn, C. Booth, Professors S. Chapman, F. Edgeworth and W. Smart, Miss C. Collet, Mrs. J. MacDonald, L. Price, Dr. G. Smith, Mrs. H. Tennant. Associate Members were Mrs. H. Bosanquet and Miss A. Heather-Bigg. *A Study of the Factors which have operated in the past and those which are operating now to Determine the Distribution of Women in Industry*, p. 28; 1930 Cmd. 3508, xvii.

¹⁰See respectively A. Harrison, *Women's Industries in Liverpool: An Enquiry into the Economic Effects of Legislation Regulating the Labour of Women*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1904, pp. 43 ff. E. Cadbury *et al.*, *Women's Work and Wages*, 2nd ed., London: Unwin, 1908, p. 39. B. Hutchins, "The Employment of Women in Paper Mills", *Economic Journal*, vol. 14, no. 54, June 1904, pp. 247-248. L. Bradley and A. Black, "Women Compositors and the Factory Acts", *Economic Journal*, vol. 9, no. 34, June 1899, p. 264. (Mrs.) J. MacDonald (ed.), *Women in the Printing Trades*, London: King, 1904, pp. 73 ff. Also see S. and B. Webb, *Problems of Modern Industry*, London: Longmans, Green, 1898, pp. 93 ff.

maximum specified by the Factory Acts—fifty-five and one-half hours per week in textile factories and sixty hours per week in non-textile factories and workshops. One woman Assistant Commissioner for the Royal Commission on Labour found fifty to fifty-four hours a week the general rule for the women's industries she investigated.¹¹ An investigation of women's work in Liverpool found only the textile factories working the full legal day,¹² while a study made in 1906 of women's work and wages in Birmingham reported the majority of women working fifty-two and one-half hours or less a week.¹³ Those assorted impressions received official confirmation in the Board of Trade's inquiry of 1906 into the earnings and hours of labour. According to its findings, the average hours in a full week for persons employed on the employers' premises in various industries were as follows:¹⁴

Building and Woodworking Trades	53.4
Metal, Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades	53.2
Textile Trades	55.3
Clothing Trades	52.7
Public Utility Services	54.7
Paper, Printing, etc. Trades	52.5
Pottery, Brick, Glass, and Chemical Trades	53.7
Food, Drink and Tobacco Trades	54.1
Miscellaneous Trades	53.7

Furthermore, the law was so designed as to allow numerous exceptions to the hours' regulations if the nature of the trade demanded it. As previously noted, in fish curing for the entire year, and in fruit preserving during the summer months, women engaged in so-called emergency processes were exempt from any legal restrictions on their hours. In recognized seasonal trades women were permitted to work a certain amount of overtime, as they were in businesses liable to a sudden press of orders arising from unforeseen events and in establishments where the materials processed were liable to spoilage. The Secretary of State was empowered to modify the half-holiday on Saturdays in places where on the same premises manufacturing was carried on in connection with a retail shop. Or where a firm was so organized that one process necessarily had to precede another, women's work was allowed to commence and finish at different times in the same factory or workshop. Even among those industries granted exceptions, the need for exceptional treatment was often more a question of managerial skill than of trade necessity. Thus in trades where overtime was permitted, practice varied among the different firms as to the extent they made use of it.

Whether it paid an industry to adjust to the legal hours permitted women depended a great deal on the relative importance of rent, machinery and labour as factors in an industry's cost of production. In those industries, such as textile, where it did pay to adjust rather than alternatively to use the more costly labour of men for the extra-legal hours, women's hours were found to determine men's as well since it was not practicable to organize production otherwise. Since female labour could only be used for a specified period each day, the major adjustment made by factories and workshops interested in using it was to schedule their work more uniformly over the weeks, months and years. It was this regularizing effect on industry rather than women's exclusion which appeared to the British Association's Committee as perhaps the most important consequence of the Acts' restrictions.¹⁵

There were some industries or jobs, however, which necessitated working hours deemed absolutely illegal for women, thereby precluding any chance of adjusting the working day and week to the standards specified. Such were the nation's continuous industries operating both day and night, often on a seven day basis. Such was the job of maintenance mechanic who would often have to oil machinery in motion or work during mealtimes or before and after the legal period of employment

¹¹Royal Commission on Labour, *The Employment of Women*, p. 85; 1893-94 C. 6894, xxxvii, pt. I.

¹²A. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 25

¹³E. Cadbury *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 2nd ed., p. 38.

¹⁴As cited in the *Report of the Women's Employment Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction*, p. 92; 1918 Cd. 9239, xiv

¹⁵"Third and Final Report of the Committee appointed to investigate the Economic Effect of Legislation regulating Women's Labour", *op. cit.*, p. 319.

prescribed for women. But in the first place, such industries and jobs were exceptional. Therefore even if the Factory Acts were responsible for women's exclusion from night shift and Saturday afternoon and Sunday operations or from jobs requiring irregular day hours, the total impact of such restrictions on the demand for women's labour would be relatively insignificant. Secondly, legal considerations apart, it is questionable whether women would have been employed in the majority of these instances in any case. For whereas women were legally permitted to work days, in most continuous day and night operations, such as those entailed in the manufacture of iron and steel, heavy chemicals, gas and electricity, alcoholic beverages, sugar, cement, or in newspaper composing, they were not used for the day shift.

However, it would appear that the Factory Acts somewhat restricted the demand for women's labour in those instances, such as cotton doubling and gassing, wool combing, and lace bobbin winding, where women's work in the day was done by men at night. Yet even here it is difficult to attribute women's nighttime exclusion totally to the Acts since a strong public opinion existed against the employment of women at night throughout the period under review.¹⁶ It would also seem that women lost some opportunities for overtime when, under pressure of work, recognized women's work was done by men in aerated water works, printing, watch manufacture and in textile manufacture for such processes as reeling, winding and weaving.¹⁷ In all likelihood some Sunday work would have also been performed by women but for the Acts. In milk sterilizing and bottling factories, for example, women were permitted to work a limited number of hours on Sunday. Nevertheless, a certain number of men were substituted for them.¹⁸

The want of elasticity in the law was perhaps the greatest deterrent to women's employment which could be directly attributed to the Factory Acts. Although overtime was permitted a certain number of times each year, whenever one workwoman or young person worked overtime, this was counted as one day's permitted overtime for the entire staff. Especially among small firms with little room for extra hands were the Acts in times of pressure considered a restrictive force. Such was the case with a printing employer who maintained he would have employed women for feeding his printing machine were it not for the limitation of their hours which made it impossible to use them when there was a press of work.¹⁹ Jewish sewing machine operators were cited as being preferred in small shops where their larger output, partially helped by no fixed hours of employment, was valued on account of the limited amount of space at the occupier's disposal.²⁰ However, not even among these small firms was the need for exceptional output always met by hiring men. Labour-saving machinery, which might or might not be operated by women, was increasingly introduced to render overtime unnecessary.

The outright prohibition of women from alleged unhealthy or dangerous processes, though absolutely preventing women from being so employed, had little effect on the total demand for their labour. As the Home Office study found, there was "little evidence" that such prohibitions prevented any appreciable number of women from obtaining employment who might otherwise have been employed.²¹ The same could be said for the requirement that there be separate lavatory facilities. Mainly among the smaller firms was this factor of some importance in assigning work to men rather than to women.

So far the effectiveness of the Factory Acts in limiting the demand for female labour has been discussed in terms of their content alone. But no assessment of their effectiveness is complete without mentioning the question of their enforcement. For regardless of how stringent the restrictions, if not enforced they could have had but little practicable effect.

First of all, so few were the factory inspectors relative to the establishments covered that in the

¹⁶See below p. 121.

¹⁷See "Third and Final Report of the Committee appointed to investigate the Economic Effect of Legislation regulating Women's Labour", *op. cit.*, pp. 326-327. *A Study of the Factors ... to Determine the Distribution of Women in Industry*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 27. (Mrs.) J. MacDonald (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹⁸*A Study of the Factors ... to Determine the Distribution of Women in Industry*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁹(Mrs.) J. MacDonald (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 89.

²⁰*A Study of the Factors ... to Determine the Distribution of Women in Industry*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 28.

opinion of one authority on women's work the wonder was that the regulations were respected as much as they were, not that they were frequently disregarded.²² Moreover, the only systematic area of inspection covered by the lady factory inspectors was the West London Special District and here each workplace was inspected on the average of only once every two years. In other areas, once in twenty-five years was considered impossible.²³ Thus the enforcement of the law depended largely on the workpeople reporting violations. Though the establishment of the lady factory inspectorate had increased the number of complaints received from women from almost nil to over two thousand a year by the outbreak of the war,²⁴ still on the whole either through ignorance, apathy or fear, women failed to instigate action against employers violating the law.

The law itself was difficult to know and working women had neither the leisure to master the confused system nor the legal habit of mind which would make the system easy to comprehend. Furthermore, little understanding the reasons for the regulations imposed on their behalf, working women, even when aware of a violation, showed little interest in seeing that the regulations were enforced. As one woman trade union organizer noted, deceiving the inspector was an experience all too many women thoroughly enjoyed. In her experience, the employer appeared to working women as a "thieving tyrant" but the inspector appeared even worse in that he was considered an "interloper" as well.²⁵ Also, the law sometimes was viewed as a restriction on a woman's own self-interest. For example, there were women who, anxious for the extra earnings consequent upon working illegal overtime, readily conspired with employers in disregarding the Acts.

Fear of intimidation by the employer further inhibited working women calling attention to the law's violation. So serious a problem was this fear thought to be that an Industrial Law Indemnity Fund was formed in 1898 by persons interested in promoting the Acts' enforcement. The Fund's express purpose was to help women whose testimony had led to their dismissal. However, the helplessness of many workers as witnesses in their own defense continued to be a major problem of Factory Act enforcement right up to the outbreak of the war.

10.2 Restrictions by Employed Men²⁶

The restrictions on female labour imposed by employed men were mainly a means of safeguarding their occupational position. For in their experience the systematic introduction of women into men's work usually meant for men unemployment, or a reduction in the standard rate, or a job assignment containing a higher proportion of difficult, unpleasant or dangerous tasks. This outcome, as one would expect from the qualitative differences between male and female labour, was seldom the result of any direct substitution of women for men. Instead women would be introduced on alternative processes at lower rates of pay. Or their introduction to men's work proper would be accompanied by an alteration in process or rearrangement of tasks. Reinforcing their economic case for restricting women's employment were the attitudes they, as members of society, held towards women in general. It was this element which distinguished their reaction to the "unfair" competition of female as opposed to male labour. Convinced that women's long term interests as wives and mothers were most served by the occupational claims of men as breadwinners taking priority, many employed men viewed women as betraying their own best interests whenever they failed to accept the dictum that no man should be displaced by a woman or no man in a given occupational category should be in a lower paying job than a woman belonging to that same category.

This view that men by right should be the occupationally favoured was exemplified in 1908 by the Chemical Society. Although gladly admitting women chemists to its meetings, many of its members opposed their entrance as fellows. They deemed it inexpedient publicly to encourage women

²²Clara Collet in C. Booth, *Labour and Life of the People*, 1st ed., London: Williams and Norgate, 1889, I, 465.

²³"The Need for More Women Factory Inspectors", *Women's Industrial News*, vol. 16, new series, no. 59, Oct. 1912, p. 73.

²⁴See *Factory Report*, 1896, p. 58; 1897 C. 8561, xvii. *Factory Report*, 1913, p. 73; 1914 Cd. 7491, xxix.

²⁵I. Ford, *Industrial Women and How to Help Them*, London: Humanitarian League, 1903, p. 6.

²⁶The term "employed men" as used here also embraces the self-employed such as doctors, lawyers and the like.

to become professional chemists since, so they alleged, that would “tempt them into a career” in which they might ultimately not find employment “in view of the already overcrowded state of the profession”.²⁷ The outlook of the London bookbinders was comparable. As the historians of the Society of London Bookbinders noted, complaints in the minutes against female labour provoked extreme hostile reactions towards women. There was “more than a hint that members took satisfaction in hounding presumptuous ‘females’” out of the men’s preserves. Behind this resentment was detected the “Victorian conception that females were an inferior race, fit only for unskilled work or, preferably, household drudgery”.²⁸

Given the conception that woman’s rightful occupational place was as man’s inferior, men were found resenting women’s entrance to their trade even if it involved no change in the “price for the job”. Generally men disliked seeing women paid as much as a man. As one cotton trade union secretary was alleged to have said, women “should not be allowed to be ‘drawers in’ because the 36s. earned at this work” was “‘too good money for a woman’”.²⁹ The more money a woman gets the more likely she is to stay in the trade was another characteristic reason given why women should not be in jobs earning a man’s rate. Others maintained that high wages only tempted women to leave home for industry and so “were none too good for their morals”.³⁰ Again, men did not generally approve of women in positions of authority over them. Sidney Webb was of the opinion, for example, that the probable reason the overlookers in cotton weaving departments were exclusively men was because the “male operatives would not accept a woman supervisor”.³¹

Chivalrous ideas as to what work was decent and proper for women to perform also influenced the attitudes of employed men towards working women. The strong feeling prevailing among so-called respectable artisans that any “promiscuous mixing” of the sexes was wrong³² provided a moral basis to many men’s distaste for women in their workplace. Nor did “respectable” men approve of women doing work which allegedly impaired their health and refinement. Thus to an official of The Workers Union, it appeared “a good thing” to exclude women entirely from heavy work such as brewing, chemicals and some classes of agriculture.³³ Nor in the considered opinion of yet another trade union leader should women be employed in “coal mining, dock work, foundries”, construction or in certain machine shops where there was “excessive speed and noise of machinery”.³⁴

In striving to protect their vested interest in a trade or in giving vent to their views about the proper occupational sphere for each sex, men were not much different from working women. For example, some women’s opposition to co-education was not always disinterested. Experience had convinced them that the top posts in co-educational institutions usually went to men. In contrast, women had a chance at the “highest prizes” in all-girl schools where administration as well as teaching was normally a feminine sphere. Accordingly, co-education was viewed as a threat to women’s vested interest and was opposed on that ground. Also, it was not unknown for women to protest against a cheaper grade of labour supplanting theirs. Certified women teachers complained that they were without work while the cheaper uncertified teachers were employed in their stead. And women generally believed that their occupational claims should have preference to those of girls, an attitude which received formal recognition in a union contract of the Independent National Union of Boot and Shoe Women Workers. According to one of its clauses, no woman was to be kept waiting or sent home while girls were doing recognized women’s work and furthermore no woman was to be displaced by girls.³⁵ In the female preserve of nursing, women neither afforded men the same opportunities to train nor to join the professional association. Again “respectable” women evinced a strong preference to work under female supervision and in all-female departments.

²⁷ *Woman Worker*, new series, no. 5, July 3, 1908, p. 139.

²⁸ E. Howe and J. Child, *The Society of London Bookbinders, 1780-1941*, London: Sylvan Press, 1952, pp. 208-209.

²⁹ As quoted in E. Gore-Booth, “Women and the Nation”, *Englishwoman*, vol. 1, no. 5, June 1909, pp. 509-510.

³⁰ B. Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, London: Labour Research Dept. and Allen and Unwin, 1920, p. 63.

³¹ S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

³² S. and B. Webb, *Industrial Democracy*, 1902 ed., London: Longmans, Green, pp. 496-497.

³³ *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc.*, p. 42; 1919 Cmd. 167, xxxi.

³⁴ Evidence from the General Secretary of The General Federation of Trades Unions, *ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

³⁵ As cited in B. Drake, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

Though working men and women each had their own point of view as to what work was proper for their sex to perform and how it should be rewarded, organized and allocated among their respective members, the main difference between them was that men were much more able to enforce their views on the employer. They were not only much better organized³⁶ but also more skilled and so more apt to be key employees whose views could not be ignored altogether if the work was to proceed at all.

Because of women's relatively weak bargaining position, only in isolated instances could employed women be considered a restrictive force on the employer's ability to hire men. Whenever a clash of occupational interest occurred between the sexes, women's chance of success depended almost entirely on how much the employer identified his interest with theirs and then on the strength of his bargaining position. But this was not true for employed men whose power position did at times enable them to limit women's use. To what extent did they constitute a restrictive force?

On the whole, most working men were not concerned with the threat of women's entrance into their trade. As already shown, nine-tenths of all working men were in "men's industries" which on the average accorded women but a negligible share.³⁷ In consequence of this division the Webbs estimated that nine-tenths of the trade unionists had never had occasion to exclude women from their organizations. In all-male industries, according to them, it had "never occurred to the most economical employer to substitute women for men", and in those employing both men and women, the work of the sexes in the "vast majority of cases" was not competitive but "mutually complementary".³⁸

Nor did women's expanding occupational scope in the years under review necessarily bring them into conflict with men as the main extension of their week occurred in new areas of employment such as typing or in old ones which men had never occupied such as sick nursing.³⁹ Furthermore, men's lack of concern was not grounded in their uninvolvedness alone. They preferred to see women in some occupations. For example, the Typographical Association favoured them as "layers on" in the printing trade. Whereas unapprenticed boys picked up the trade and competed with the journeymen, women, as "meantime" workers, did not.

The cheapness of female labour also held attractions for employed men. In trades organized on the principle of working journeymen directly employing their own assistants, men often found it economically advantageous to use women. Such was the case among journeymen tailors in the London West End District who habitually employed journeywomen tailoresses to finish for them. Despite an old craftsmen rule that any tailor employing another would be expelled from the union, it was never enforced in the case of women. Journeymen potters in the Staffordshire pottery trade, operating under the "butty system" whereby they hired their own assistants, provide yet another example. Domestic industries also afforded the head of the household with a strong incentive to use his wife and daughters as assistants since he not only drew their earnings but also had no need to pay them a fixed wage.

Who then were the men concerned with the problem of women's "invasion" into their occupational preserves? The competition between the sexes, as previously noted, was not so much between the sexes as such as between different grades of labour differently valued. In the dynamic economy of the 1891-1914 period, the marginal division between the more costly processes requiring a man's average strength and skill and the cheaper ones within the capacity of women's generally less skilled and less robust labour was continually shifting. In that grey area where skilled work shaded off into unskilled and heavy work into light lay the frictional points of contact between the sexes as no definite principle but only the relative bargaining strength of employers and employed men determined how such marginal work should be divided.

³⁶See S. and B. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, new ed., London: Longmans, Green, 1920, pp. 472-474.

³⁷See above p. 66.

³⁸S. and B. Webb, *Industrial Democracy*, 1902 ed., London: Longmans, Green, pp. 495-496. For a comparable viewpoint see Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, "On the Extent to which Female and Juvenile Labour has Displaced Adult Labour in the Last Twenty Years" in *Appendix. IX*, 700-701; 1910 Cd. 5068, xlix. E. Cadbury *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 2nd ed., p. 130.

³⁹See below p. 148.

In male trades encompassing types of work so light and easily learned that women's grade of labour could suffice, men were particularly antagonistic to women. The Typographical Association, for example, struggled constantly with employers over the question of employing not only female labour but that of apprentices and unskilled men for work claimed as the preserve of journeymen printers. Bookmakers likewise suffered from women's constant encroachment. Though the mechanical preparatory operations were recognized as women's work and bookbinding proper as men's, women were making continual inroads into men's sphere. In 1903 the Wages Committee of the London Society of Journeymen Bookbinders reported that the right of women in gold laying-on had been awarded against the Union notwithstanding that no part of the proceedings had been more strenuously opposed. As the committee maintained, its hands were weakened by the fact that the practice already existed: in some cases having "crept in" and in others having been "extended unawares".⁴⁰

The existence of marginal operations in the hand chain and nail trades similarly produced strong male resentment to the "invasion" of cheap female labour. Nail makers even went so far as to implore Parliament to restrict women to "their own size of nail", though the size at which nail-making became "'unwomanly'" remained undetermined owing to variations in local practice.⁴¹

Female labour also appeared as a problem in trades experiencing an influx of women in the wake of contemporary organizational and technological changes. Thus strong feelings of hostility against women were found among male nut and bolt makers and brass workers. The mechanization of nut and bolt manufacture beginning in the seventies and the substitution of stamping or pressing for casting in brass manufacture in the late seventies and early eighties had brought the "unfair competition" of women into trades formerly the sole province of skilled craftsmen.

The same tendency for men's antagonism to be most overt in those occupational spheres most threatened by women's competition was observable in the professional world. The most bitter opposition to the woman doctor, according to E. Moberley Bell's account of her rise, came from the obstetric department of medicine because, in the words of J. B. Mansfield, "those practitioners who have devoted themselves to the special treatment of the diseases of women and to the practice of midwifery, more than others, tremble for their monopoly".⁴²

Moreover, male concern over displacement was not limited to women's competition within the occupation. As the female process of ring spinning began to encroach on the male one of mule spinning, the men, belatedly, became concerned about the unorganized state of the women whose wages were about half of theirs. And among male doctors, there were those who disapproved of nursing and midwifery becoming recognized professions. To them the highly trained nurse and midwife were potential competitors whose cheaper services would be employed for the simpler cases in preference to the doctor's.

Men's reaction to women's competition was also affected by the local labour market situation. The fewer the employment alternatives locally available the greater was the concern of employed men to preserve as many jobs as possible for their sex. Accordingly, in the hoisery town of Hinckley, men claimed as their own certain warehouse operations which were recognized as women's work elsewhere.⁴³

Whether female labour appeared as a problem also depended on the rate of displacement. If a rapid one, the impact on men's vested position was strongly felt and, consequently, strongly opposed. But if the process was a gradual one, then men's displacement little affected the vested interest of those still in the trade. Instead its main result was simply to afford no openings to young men who might otherwise have entered the trade.

In these last two respects the sex replacement of weavers occurring in the woollen trade in the late seventies and eighties produced a strong resentment against the women who, by "badly" underselling

⁴⁰As quoted in (Mrs.) J. MacDonald (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45 n.

⁴¹B. Drake, *Women in Engineering Trades*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1917, p. 7.

⁴²As quoted in *Storming the Citadel*, London: Constable, 1953, p. 141.

⁴³See *A Study of the Factors ... to Determine the Distribution of Women in Industry*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

men,⁴⁴ appeared to be taking men's jobs. In blanket and flannel manufacture, for example, within the decade between 1881 and 1891, women's share in England and Wales rose from forty-eight to fifty-six per cent, while in the previous decade women's share in woollen cloth manufacture had risen from forty-four to fifty per cent.⁴⁵ Since the woollen industry was both a highly concentrated and a declining one, the transfer of work from men to women was considered to create a great social problem. With no other work for men in the district, wives had to be breadwinners as well as mothers and homemakers.⁴⁶

Employed men, when faced with the competitive threat of female labour aimed initially to prohibit its use altogether. Failing that, they tried to restrict women to certain types of work.⁴⁷ The means they adopted to impress their views on the employer were essentially five: economic sanctions, denying women the opportunity to qualify, organizing women, pressuring Parliament, and appealing to public opinion. The strength of their bargaining position largely determined their choice of means.

Provided their bargaining position was sufficiently strong and provided women had not yet established themselves in a trade or industry, employed men usually relied on economic sanctions alone to gain their point. In keeping with this method, they would refuse to work beside women or work on any materials in which women's labour entered. They would not consent to working conditions which would facilitate women's entrance such as sub-division of labour or home work. Or men would insist on equal pay, thereby striking at the primary reason behind many an employer's wish to use women. Again, they would not permit the employer to pay adult women probationary rates during any needed training period or less than the standard rates on the ground of additional costs incurred in adapting the work situation to female labour. Or, to cite yet another way in which they discouraged a demand for women, employed men would insist that women, if employed on men's work, be segregated from them.

Failing to check the demand for women at its source, employed men tried less direct approaches. One was to deny women the opportunity to qualify for the work. In those cases where membership in a trade or professional organization was a condition of employment, men, by not admitting women to membership, were able to forestall their competition. Also where men controlled the training, either through a formal system of apprenticeship or schooling or, informally, through on-the-job instruction, they effectively closed their trade to women by refusing to train them. This was because women had so few alternative ways of acquiring the necessary skills. As already noted, hardly any government or commercial establishments existed to give them a technical training, while employers, as a rule, left the job of instructing newcomers to their more experienced workpeople.⁴⁸

Even in cases where women managed to circumvent the training impediments, men, by denying them access to the trade workplaces, successfully prevented their gaining the necessary practical experience. Furthermore, with the entrance to increasing numbers of occupations conditional upon the possession of specific qualifications, any organization of employed men in charge of examining candidates was in a key position to close the occupation to women by refusing to examine them. In this way the legal profession was closed to women right up to the war.

In occupations where women were already established, employed men usually found it a more realistic policy to aim to restrict women to certain work rather than to try to exclude them altogether. Accordingly, the National Union of Printing and Paper Workers made a definite distinction between women working in the trade in unorganized districts and those introduced for the first time in "union shops". In the latter case, women were not only refused membership but support was given to the skilled men to resist women's "encroachment".

⁴⁴ *Women's Trades' Union Review*, no. 13, Apr. 1894, p. 13.

⁴⁵ See *Census of England and Wales, 1891: General Report*, IV, 51; 1893-94 C. 7222, cvi.

⁴⁶ See comments of the Women's Trades Union League Organizer in International Council of Women, *Report of Transactions of the Second Quinquennial Meeting Held in London, July 1899*, London: Unwin, 1900, VI, 180-181.

⁴⁷ For restrictions on female labour imposed by some of the principal trade unions of the period see Appendix B. For analysis and criticism of contemporary trade union attitudes and policies towards female labour see S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, 1902 ed., pp. 495 ff.

⁴⁸ See above pp. 101-102.

By establishing a clear distinction between men's and women's work, employed men found it possible to maintain their standard rate despite women's competition. For as long as certain work was recognized as men's it was still possible to obtain a man's customary rate for it. Therefore, men strove to have employers accept certain criteria for distinguishing their work from women's. In some cases the basis of demarcation was whether a process was wet or dry, in other cases, whether performed in the night or day. Specified weights, sizes, machines, and departments afforded yet other easily distinguishable bases for classifying work as men's or women's.

In establishing their demarcation criteria, employed men often gave questions of women's capability and suitability for the work only a secondary consideration. As one contemporary authority on women's employment observed, all too often the men were mainly concerned with keeping the best paid jobs and the employers, with reducing their wages bill.⁴⁹ Thus women were found "recognized" in the comparatively heavy operation of opening plates in the tinsplate industry of South Wales, while the London Society of Journeymen Bookbinders agreed that as long as all skilled operations were reserved to journeymen and apprentices it would not make it a grievance if women, among other unskilled operations, carried loads about the workshop. When a representative of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives was asked if the Union would insist on male rates even if women were found able to work a new machine he replied, "Such a position has never arisen, because if the machine is in either one of the male departments, it is taken for granted" that it will be operated by men.⁵⁰

Given women in their trade, employed men found at times that organizing woman was their most effective means of confining them to certain branches or districts. By thus assuring that women's labour would not be available at "sweated" prices, they reduced whatever temptation existed for employers to transfer their demand from men to women. This organizing of women was a comparatively new development.⁵¹ Prior to the mid-eighties, apart from the cotton unions, the Huddersfield and District Woollen Weavers and the Leicester Hosiery Amalgamation, men's unions had made little effort to organize women. But with the mid-eighties the movement among textile workers became more generalized while at the same time the initial entrance of women to non-textile unions occurred, beginning with the Boot and Shoe Operatives and the Society of Journeymen Felt Hatters.

During the nineties the problem of female labour spread to other men's trades newly undergoing mechanization and sub-division of process. The more progressive of the men's societies affected, as they also came to realize that female labour was less to be feared the more it was organized, abandoned their traditional policy of exclusion and began to make strenuous efforts to organize their female competitors. In the nineties the following unions opened their doors to women or formed allied women's societies:

Amalgamated Society of Tailors
 Amalgamated Union of Clothiers' Operatives
 London Society of Compositors
 National Union of Printers' Warehousemen and Cutters
 Various societies of Pottery Workers
 London Society of Cigar Makers
 British Steel Smelters
 Tin and Sheet Millmen
 Chain Country Workers
 Sheffield Hand File Cutters
 Cumberland Miners' Union

The black-coated and general labour unions formed about this time included women from the start.

⁴⁹B. Hutchins, *Women in Industry After the War*, London: Athenaeum, 1917, p. 13.

⁵⁰*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, p. 279 n; 1919 Cmd. 135, xxxi.

⁵¹The account that follows is based mainly on B. Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, London: Labour Research Dept. and Allen and Unwin, 1920, pp. 29-31.

Usually men were indifferent to the cause of trade unionism among women unless personally involved. The ultimatum received by the Women's Trade Union League to the effect "Please send an organizer at once, for our Amalgamated Society has decided that if the women of this town cannot be organized, they must be exterminated."⁵² all too often characterized men's attitude towards women's unionization. At times men struck to compel women to join. The National Union of Printing and Paper Workers, as hitherto noted, only accepted women as members where the men's organization was too weak to keep them out. Furthermore, any claims women made once they were members were not always taken seriously. As the historian of the Boot and Shoe Operatives observed, the claims were treated in a manner not dissimilar from that extended by the old craft unionists to the struggles of the semi-skilled "new unionists" of 1889, namely in "faint contempt and lofty condescension".⁵³ Even in unions including women on equal terms with men from the start, the sacrifice of women's interests was not unknown. For example, the 1908 Wages Committee of the Shop Assistants Union recommended a dual standard of payment for the sexes, among other reasons, so as not to prejudice the higher claims of men.⁵⁴

But employed men were not always powerful enough to achieve their ends without the help of others. In such instances they sometimes resorted to political action, hoping to gain by legislative decree what they were not strong enough to gain on their own. The Fair Wages Resolution of the House of Commons was a case in point. According to it, all government contractors were enjoined to pay rates of wages not less favourable than the recognized union rates of the district for a given class of work. Its practical application was to exclude women from a certain amount of government contract work. As an official of a printing firm explained, since the "Government insists upon the men's Union price being paid, the work is being done by men, although in the ordinary way it would have been done by women".⁵⁵ Largely responsible for the government's "insistence" was employed men's political pressure. Though employers rarely wished to use women for all of recognized men's work, this was not true for parts of it. By insisting that contractors were obliged to pay women for their "diluted" work the same rates as men received for doing the work throughout, employed men deliberately aimed to discourage women's use.

Furthermore, by law or by administrative action grounded in law or by the practices of professional associations upheld by the Courts, women were excluded from all branches of the legal profession, from the religious ministry and from civil and mechanical engineering.

When aware that their own bargaining position was too weak, women's unionization a failure, and their legal case for restricting women's employment on grounds of the public interest unconvincing, employed men, as a last recourse, resorted to social persuasion. Nearly half a century of unsuccessful opposition to women in the Birmingham brass trades finally led the Amalgamated Brassworkers Union to issue appeals of the following nature as a means of dissuading women from accepting "men's work":

TO EVERYBODY!

Trade Unionists especially.

at REDUCED wages females are doing DIRTY, UNHEALTHY cycle polishing at one of the leading Cycle Manufactories in Coventry.

Parents and friends of females should persuade them not to do this dirty and unhealthy work, as they sacrifice their health, their lives will be shortened, and they will receive no more than they would obtain in a cleaner and healthier trade.

FEMALES!

If you agree with Miss McArthur that females SHOULD do men's work – chimney sweeping, etc.,

DO IT!

⁵²As quoted in B. Drake, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁵³A. Fox, *A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, 1874-1957*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1958, p. 309.

⁵⁴See B. Drake, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-166.

⁵⁵As quoted in (Mrs.) J. MacDonald (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 47 n.

but not without you have the same price for your labour as is paid to men.⁵⁶

Another example of social persuasion was that provided by the pottery industry. In an arbitration case a union representative hoped to convince the arbitrator that flat-pressing should be men's work by labelling it as "unwomanly". According to him it was "neither good for the living female nor the future offspring".⁵⁷ With the Amalgamated Society of Dyers and Finishers, the fact that the arms of workers engaged in the wet processes of cotton warp and hank finishing "get eaten into with big festering sores" from the use of bichromatised soda was given as reason why the work should remain a male preserve.⁵⁸ As for the foundry trade, the National Federation of Foundry Unions declared the work to be "physically, mentally, morally, and sexually" unsuitable. In support of its claim, the Federation cited how moulders' lives were shorter by five years on an average than those of their wives.⁵⁹

So far employed men as a restricting factor has been assessed from the viewpoint of the proportion concerned with preventing women's access to men's work. Even though it has been shown how relatively few were, the discussion left at that point still overestimates their importance. For yet to be considered is the effectiveness of their restrictive policies. An attempt at restriction provided no guarantee that it would succeed. Male clerks, despite their protests, were unable to prevent women from underselling them. The Society of Male and Female Pottery Workers was unable to enforce any definite lines of demarcation for cup-jolliers, bowl-makers, plate and saucer makers, dippers, and casters. The National Union of Journeymen Felt Hatters was unable even by strike action to prevent women's use as felting department workers in the Warwickshire area. The National Union of Brass Workers had for nearly half a century unsuccessfully opposed women's employment in the Birmingham brass trades. In short, men's actual role in limiting the demand for women was even less than would appear if the proportion of men affected by women's competition alone was considered.

Furthermore, even where employed men were successful in checking the employer's power to use female labour, their victory was not necessarily a lasting one. Under such circumstances the tendency was for the industry to move to unorganized districts where, free from union restraints, women could be used at will. Or all the industry's energy of development and expansion would go into the cheaper women's branches and processes at the expense of men's. In effect, employed men's coercion, whether directed towards women's total exclusion or simply to their restriction to certain spheres, largely served to stimulate employers to seek less direct ways of using female labour other than to discourage its use altogether. Thus, though employed men might delay women's introduction into their work, rarely could they prevent it on a long term basis if the employers were intent on substitution.⁶⁰

10.3 Employment Practices of Employers

Having shown how little the restrictions imposed by the state and by employed men impeded the demand for female labour, it now remains to ascertain why employers, to so large an extent free to choose women for men's work, chose men instead. It would seem that the apparent cheapness of female labour would be an irresistible inducement to employ it. Yet in actual practice this was not the case. Most employers wanted only men for men's work even though the price of their labour was higher.

As much products of a sex differentiated upbringing as women themselves, employers conceived of men and women as stereotyped beings possessing not only different capacities and sensibilities but also different urgencies to work. In the conceptualizing process, individualities were overlooked.

⁵⁶An advertisement appearing in a local Coventry labour paper as reprinted in *Woman Worker*, new series, no. 20, Oct. 16, 1908, p. 511.

⁵⁷As quoted in B. Drake, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁵⁸*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in industry, op. cit.*, p. 284 n.

⁵⁹*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence etc., op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁶⁰See S. and . Webb, *op. cit.*, 1902 ed., pp. 498-500.

Whether a given job could be performed as efficiently or be filled as decorously by a particular woman or whether her need to work was as pressing as some men's were questions that rarely entered most employers' minds. To them, women were automatically precluded from men's work, if not on grounds of sheer capability or of worthwhileness then on those of propriety.

Preconceived notions of female fitness dissuaded many employers from using any woman at all in certain capacities. The positions of authority and responsibility were almost always reserved for men. Only the "stern authority of a man"⁶¹ was thought able to maintain discipline among employees and to command obedience from the public. As for posts entailing the exercise of considerable judgment, women's limited training and experience combined with their feminine mentality made their labour appear highly suspect. Consequently, their scope in the occupational world of authority and responsibility, apart from all female departments, firms and institutions, was largely limited to that of an "intelligent subordinate".⁶²

Employers exhibited little faith in women's mathematical ability with the result that "accomplished women book-keepers" sought "fruitlessly for work up to the level of their powers".⁶³ And although the important position of secretary in cotton weaving unions was in theory open to either sex, in practice it was closed to women. They were said to lack the necessary degree of technical qualification for a post which included the duties of rate-fixer.

Nor did employers have much confidence in women's mechanical sense. As the Chairman of the Machine Tool and Engineering Association testified, "It is well to face the true facts; owing to fundamental differences in mentality it is perfectly certain that, save in the most exceptional instances, women cannot become skilled mechanics".⁶⁴ Employers in the lace trade claimed that their machines were too highly skilled for women to operate. Their alleged mechanical ineptitude led to their exclusion from certain work because of the accident risk. In the boot and shoe trade, for example, the operation of machines where an accident might occur through a momentary lack of attention was not considered fit work for women because they were considered incapable of long-term concentration.

Much of the work employers allocated to men was thought too heavy for women. Some in the clothing trade believed that hand pressing, which required the use of irons weighing between nine and sixteen pounds, was beyond the average woman's strength. In the sanitary pipe trade fifty-two pounds was the limit recommended for women, while some employers in the cotton trade placed a forty-five pound limit on the "laps" with which women could successfully deal.⁶⁵

The belief that women were "naturally more delicate" dissuaded some employers from using them under conditions, such as heat, dust, and damp, which were thought to induce fatigue unduly. As one brickyard manager contended, women become exhausted far sooner than men if they are required to work in a very hot place.⁶⁶ And underlying the opposition of an Admiralty official to women in shipbuilding was that they could not be expected to work in bad weather.⁶⁷

But the question of women's "fitness" for men's work did not end with considerations of sheer capability. It also embraced ones of worthwhileness. Generally it was considered that the cheapness of female labour did not compensate for its lower productivity. Especially did this characterize the outlook of firms where rent was a major expense item. To substitute women for men meant having a larger workplace in proportion to the numbers employed and, consequently, "ruinous rents".⁶⁸ Men were preferred as cutters in the garment trade because, among other reasons, they were thought to be able to cut out a larger number of garments at a time. Brewery employers preferred male

⁶¹ *Factory Report, 1879*, p. 98; 1880 C. 2489, xiv.

⁶² A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *British Labour*, London: Pitman, 1921, p. 79.

⁶³ M. Bird, *op.cit.*, p. 132.

⁶⁴ *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op.cit.*, p. 54.

⁶⁵ See *Substitution of Women for Men during the War*, pp. 44, 112, 6 respectively; 1919 Non-Parl. Home Office.

⁶⁶ Royal Commission on Labour, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

⁶⁷ Evidence from the Assistant Director of the Admiralty Labour Department, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence. etc., op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁶⁸ (Mrs.) J. MacDonald (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 51 n.

labourers because stack heights could be higher and so lessen the need for ground space. And in the printing trade, men at times were preferred because “given a certain area of floor space” they produced about one and a half times as much.⁶⁹

Even in jobs not apparently requiring physical strength, such as compositor, employers often found the labour of men more productive because more versatile. Unlike women’s labour, theirs could be used for any heavy or overtime work which on occasion might be required. Nor did an admission that women were as productive on the light unskilled operations necessarily lead to their employment. If there was not enough of this type of work in a given firm to keep a woman employed full-time, her “cheap” labour would prove in practice costly. This was the situation among certain small dairies.

Also, to many employers, the training of women so that they could perform to the standards expected did not appear as a paying proposition. They reasoned that if they tried to make women skilled in the more complicated work they would leave before the employer received the same return for his trouble as he received from men. Moreover, even in those instances where women’s training was on a par with men’s, employers still found reason to prefer men as women’s relative lack of experience was alleged to make them less resourceful in an emergency.

Apart from considerations of women’s absolute and relative capability, employers’ beliefs as to what work could be suitably performed by women also restricted their occupational scope. Whole areas of work, foremost among them the military and merchant marine services, were barred to women because thought to be incompatible with their maternal function or to “brutalize” their sense of feminine refinement.

At its most general level, this concern with suitability produced the attitude that women had no right to be in gainful employment at all. Work was essentially men’s business, a viewpoint most clearly revealed by the common practice of completely denying married women the opportunity to work. Arguing that the responsibilities of married life were incompatible with gainful employment or that husbands should support their wives or that married women took jobs from these who needed them more, employers of strong moral convictions, the national government among them, not only refused to hire married women but, in addition, required their single women employees to “retire” on marriage. As a result jobs demanding long-term preparation and experience were often closed to women simply because the employer maintained that it was not right for them, the vast majority of whom eventually married, to have careers apart from homemaking.

Furthermore, believing as they did that gainful work was essentially a masculine affair, employers were at times concerned with the “fairness” of using women for work otherwise deemed suitable if by so doing men were detrimentally affected. Deliberately the number of women telegraphists on the day shift was depressed so as not to overload the men with night duties. Certain processes in the soap trade, which under ordinary circumstances would have gone to women, were reserved for men to prevent the industry being a “blind alley” for them. Or if it were a question of employment itself, the view at times prevailed that if either sex was to be short of employment it had better be the women.

But those were not the only occupational consequence of the belief that work itself was not woman’s proper sphere. Of far more importance to women was the impact of this belief on job content and conditions. Since employers generally assumed that their jobs would be performed by men they designed them in terms of the average male’s strength, sensibilities and labour market orientation, thereby automatically disqualifying the average female worker.

The very idea of adapting conditions to suit women’s labour—decent and separate lavatory accommodation, messrooms, rest rooms, cloakrooms, even the machinery itself to women’s physique—was foreign to the majority of the nation’s employers. As Professor G.D.H. Cole observed, the factory, except perhaps in the textile industry, was on the whole a man-made institution, made not only by but also for men, the factory buildings, machines, rules and regulations, hours and conditions

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51 n.

of labour having been designed mainly with male labour in view.⁷⁰ For example, the working hours little recognized women's domestic responsibilities. "One difficulty about women's industrial work", maintained Professor S.J. Chapman and H. Hallsworth, was that women usually had to choose between working longer and harder each day than they wished or being entirely without work.⁷¹ To laundry women, the exceptional freedom they had, compared to most other employments, to come and go as they pleased seemed one of their work's greatest attributes. Willingly they put up with bad conditions as long as their hours could be self-determined. And when women were experimentally employed as carriage cleaners on the railroads they chose to work nine hours instead of the men's regular ten-hour shift. Given the choice denied to most other working women, they preferred an extra hour of leisure to an extra hour of pay.

Superimposed on the employers' general belief as to the unsuitability of gainful employment for women were more specific ones relative to job suitability. Where the job requirements would lead to the intermixing of the sexes without proper supervision, such work was usually considered improper for women. For this reason street selling or errand work was usually allocated to men. In Cambridge and Oxford it was rare to find any women working in the men's colleges as domestic servants. Operations necessitating the isolation of solitary workers in remote sections of the works, such as were common to shale oil and cement manufacture, were invariably performed by men.

Among the more morally scrupulous employers, it was not considered proper for women even to come into contact with male co-workers or the public. One of the reasons given why there were not more women railway clerks was that the work entailed "direct contact with all sorts of people and ... situations".⁷² Especially prevalent among paternalistic firms was the practice of segregating the sexes. With Huntley and Palmer, for example, it "was a tradition of the founders that it be undesirable that the two sexes should work together, and separate hours were arranged for their coming in and going out".⁷³

There were employers who opposed night work for women "because of the insult and temptation to which they are exposed in going home".⁷⁴ Thus even without the Factory Acts, employer opinion as to the suitability of night work for women in all likelihood would have largely precluded them from it. Such was the case with the Post Office. Though exempt from the legal requirements of the Acts, still on its own volition it arranged to have men perform all necessary night duties.

Nor were women to any degree considered for work that had to be performed in an "indecent" position. Because cotton dry taping and winding on entailed constant reaching over and stooping, they were not considered suitable for women. Neither was the posture required for wet grinding since the grinder normally worked seated astride a horse. Women compositors did not correct on "stone" as, among other reasons, the work required leaning over in a doubled position. Nor, as a matter of decency, was work entailing ladder climbing usually assigned to women. Jobs requiring exceptional exposure to heat also tended to be considered men's work not only for physical but also for moral reasons. When men worked under such conditions they often stripped to the waist. Consequently it was considered improper for women to be employed among them.

Furthermore, there was the factor of the employers' "instinctive resistance to changes in established routine"⁷⁵ to discourage any widespread use of women on recognized men's work. This inertia of employers tended to make men's work self-perpetuating. Because men had always performed given operations was thought sufficient reason for them to continue to do so. Much of the opposition to women in the ministry stemmed from such a conservative outlook. So did that to women in the legal profession and in the higher ranks of the civil service.

⁷⁰*Trade Unionism and Munitions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923, p. 216. Also see evidence from the Principal Lady Factory Inspector, South Metropolitan Gas Company, Railway Executive Committee, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, pp. 204, 129, 132.

⁷¹S. Chapman and H. Hallsworth, *Unemployment*, Manchester: University Press, 1909, p. 86.

⁷²Evidence from The Railway Clerks Association, *War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁷³Evidence from Huntley and Palmer, *ibid.*, p. 110.

⁷⁴(Mrs.) J. MacDonald (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁷⁵G. Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

Combined, these negative attitudes towards women's labour, whether on grounds of fitness, worthwhileness, propriety, or inertia, produced a general reluctance on the part of employers to use women for men's work.

Chapter 11

The Demand for Female Labour

Although women, for reasons already discussed, were not in demand for men's work, they were in demand for women's work. Why? Both positive and negative considerations influenced the choice of employers. On the positive side, women were preferred for jobs that employers considered only women could or should fill or that female labour could fill more profitably than male labour. On the negative side, women were wanted as substitutes for a more desired class of labour which for various reasons employers were unable to procure. The preferred demand accounted for the bulk of women's employment opportunities in the period under review and is examined first.

11.1 Preferred Demand

Women were preferred for those jobs which by definition or implication only a member of the female sex could fill. Biological, moral, ideological, and historical factors largely explained the instance of such a sex-restricted demand. In the entertainment world, for example, to be a female was considered an essential qualification for certain acting, singing and dancing roles. And it was largely women's innate power to attract the opposite sex that demarcated the demand for barmaids from that of barmen. With barroom drinking essentially a male activity, the barmaid functioned not only as a waitress, but also, by reason of her sex, as a decoy for attracting customers.

Contemporary concepts of social morality, in their stress on purity in women and on man as breadwinner, also resulted in posts reserved solely for women. The Post Office affords one such example. Mindful of social proprieties, it placed the direct supervision of its women employees in female hands. So did like-minded private firms such as Cadbury's. The occasional practice of employers to place women, as a moral safeguard, in self-contained departments also made work women's by definition. For in so doing, the employers so organized the work that it could be done by women throughout. Women were further removed from all competition with men by the popular view that it was more proper for girls to be taught and women of all ages to be personally cared for by members of their own sex. Women also had an assured position in the retail and medical worlds where their sex's characteristic modesty made many women reluctant to purchase certain items from men or to use male doctors, especially for obstetrical and gynecological care, if competent midwives and women doctors were readily available.

The prevailing view of men as breadwinner at times rendered work women's which by reason of its content or conditions failed to provide "prospects" or "interests". Especially among the more socially conscious employers the attitude prevailed that it was exploiting a man to use him in any capacity that ignored his long-term commitment to the labour market and his breadwinning responsibilities. Thus, as a matter of principle, some firms refused to hire boys for jobs offering no hope of advancement to any paying a "man's rate", though in all other respects their labour

was suitable. Such work was conceived by these firms as intrinsically women's.¹ A similar attitude prevailed with work of a monotonous nature. Provided there was no other reason preventing women's use, certain employers, hoping to relieve men from the drudgery of routine and to give them more scope for development in the higher branches of their trade, tended to define monotonous work as women's.

The growing acceptance of the principle espoused by the "woman's rights" movement that women could best represent and serve the interests of their own sex² explained still other facets of the demand special to women. Among firms making extensive use of female labour there was a growing tendency to hire women whose sole function was to look after the welfare of the firms' female employees. The rare woman in a man's profession derived most of her business from a feminine clientele, while the *raison d'être* of lady government inspectors was to enable government departments to carry out more effectively their responsibilities in connection with women and children. Furthermore, those to whom feminism was an article of faith made every effort to use women's labour in preference to men's. The Women's Printing Society, for example, established for the expressed purpose of offering women the opportunity, unavailable elsewhere in London, to train and work as compositors, received the bulk of its orders from groups interested in promoting the employment of women.

Finally, in explaining the exclusive demand for women's labour, there is the historical aspect to consider. Given the segregated occupational tradition of the sexes, work came to be considered intrinsically women's simply by reason of their past association with it. Once work acquired the reputation as women's, the tendency was to think of it as the province of that sex though the earlier conditions responsible for its being allocated to women in the first place might no longer apply.

Nevertheless, the preferred demand for female labour was only to a minor extent explained by jobs calling for women as such. The bulk of it was attributable to their economic advantage to employers. Though women's labour as shaped by feminine upbringing and at the price at which it was available was generally considered a poorer bargain than men's, for certain kinds of work and under certain conditions of industrial organization it was not.

For relatively light and unskilled work female labour was usually judged the better bargain and it was work of this kind which accounted for much of the demand for women in all three sectors of the economy. In manufacturing, for example, industrial developments were producing an expanding demand for what the Poor Law Commission described as "a great mass of unintelligent, if not unskilled machine minders, supervised and guided by a few foremen".³ Generally such work required neither physical strength, mechanical knowledge nor extensive training. Because so much of the work in the textile industry was of this nature not only women but juveniles as well had a preferred position within it.

But the desire to use female labour as the better bargain did not hinge only on the degree of an industry's mechanization. Where the scale of operations permitted, a firm might seek to lower its total labour bill by subdividing its processes so that, instead of men performing the work throughout, woman's cheaper labour could be used for the simpler and lighter tasks. The demand for women in such diverse trades as photography and tailoring, distribution and bookbinding, food and pottery manufacturing were in part explained by such subdivision.

Female labour also appeared as the better bargain for many jobs demanding traditional housewifery skills. Contrary to most jobs, the physical limitations, lack of training, and desire for feminine respectability which characterized female labour were not occupational handicaps. The job content had been designed with woman's physique in view. Their home training had given women a basic familiarity with the processes involved and their upbringing had rendered them willing to enter work at its very least "womanly" and at its very most "ladylike". Sick nursing, teaching of the young, dressmaking, laundering, domestic and social service were all occupations of this type.

¹It was the contemporary agitation against blind alley work for boys which persuaded the Post Office to substitute girl for boy messengers. See M. Meredith, "Women in the Civil Service-I", *Englishwoman*, vol. 11, no. 31, July 1911, p. 36.

²See below p. 155.

³*Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws*, p. 346; 1909 Cd. 4499, xxxvii.

Furthermore, it was from these occupational offshoots of the ordinary housewife's tasks that the bulk of women's managerial opportunities derived. Favouring women's consideration for the more responsible posts was the much higher degree of technical competency they achieved as a matter of course in work of this nature than in any other. Secondly, they were largely spared the competition of men who did not make it a practice to use these housewifery occupations as career outlets.⁴ Thirdly, when the work was organized as a business, the operations were usually on a small scale, following closely the hand pattern set by its non-gainful prototype. As a result neither the need for capital nor managerial skill handicapped women to the extent that it normally did. Finally, with the housewifery occupations largely feminine preserves, management in them almost invariably meant directing other women. Consequently the difficulty arising from having women in positions of authority over men was not encountered in these as compared to most other occupations.

The demand for female labour as the better bargain was further enhanced at times by women's characteristic relegation to the home, "meantime" interest in gainful employment, subsidiary role as help-mates to their husbands, and comparative docility.

The possibility of reducing overhead costs presented itself to every employer able to use home-workers since thereby he was able to shift to them the expenses of lighting, heating, floor space and even machinery which he would otherwise have had to bear. In addition, if his operations were seasonal he was able to escape part of the costs involved in keeping a large factory standing idle. The only question was whether there were sufficiently large numbers of workers willing to work for sufficiently low wages to make the policy both practicable and cheap. Both conditions were met in districts where the casual labour or the low wages of men drove large numbers of wives into the labour market. No matter how low their earnings, these women regarded homework as their panacea since it enabled them to combine the normally incompatible activities of homemaking and wage-earning.

The "meantime" aspect of women's labour appeared an advantage to some employers whose demand was a fluctuating one. Women who had retired on marriage proved an excellent emergency source of labour since neither did they want full-time work nor was the demand of such a nature as to provide it, while their single sisters from comfortable homes proved an excellent seasonal source since in slack times their families willingly maintained them. Men, on the other hand, were rarely available as a reserve supply unless the pay was sufficient to maintain them during the periods of unemployment.

Employers in domestic-centred industries were in an exceptionally good position to reap economic advantage from women's labour. Because of the marriage relationship, they were able to rely on their wives' assistance without having to pay their spouses a fixed wage for their gainful services. Agriculture and distribution were two industries peculiarly adapted to take advantage of female labour in the form of "assisting relatives".

Then to some employers it was women's comparative docility which, in their opinion, gave female labour an economic edge over male labour. Compared to occupied men, proportionally few occupied women were organized in trade unions. Moreover, of these few, over half were accounted for by the cotton trade alone.⁵ Thus female labour tended to be not only less troublesome to manage but also easier to exploit. For without an organization to supervise the quality of their training, women would often receive training that was "purely illusory"⁶ and which really disguised the employment of cheap labour. It was the advantage employers took of women's "docility" that led the Principal Lady Factory Inspector to testify to the peculiar importance of the Truck Acts for women. Their lack of organization, she claimed, left them defenseless against the "capricious and incalculable variations due to deductions and charges".⁷

Women were also much less likely to exert political pressure to achieve their demands. In the first place women, as of the outbreak of the First World War, were still without the parliamentary

⁴See below p. 131.

⁵See above p. 98.

⁶*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, op. cit.*, p. 71.

⁷*Factory Report, 1911*, p. 161; 1912-13 Cd. 6239, xxv.

vote. Secondly, although their wages as much as men's were subject to regulation by the Fair Wages Clause,⁸ its operation was generally less effective in their case. The government relied on the workers to bring to notice infringements, but women, unorganized as they were, tended to be less secure in their employment and therefore more reluctant to make complaints. Also, without unions, women found it difficult to prove what the district rate was.

Though on the whole employers in need of higher grade labour saw no economic advantage in using women's because of the additional expenses involved in rendering job conditions "respectable" or in training such an inconstant supply, there were two groups of employers to whom this rule did not apply. Employers whose operations were normally performed under "genteel" conditions, for example in offices and shops, had establishments which were "naturally" respectable and so did not need to incur any additional expense in order to make use of the required grade of women's rather than men's labour.

The second group of employers were those who did not have to bear the brunt of the training costs. This was the case in occupations such as domestic service and needlework which relied heavily on home training to impart the necessary skills. The expense of training also proved no bar to using women's "meantime" labour whenever the family was willing to invest in its daughter's vocational future. Families anxious to see their daughters enter one of the "genteel" occupations were generally willing, provided the cost was not too great or the training period too long. Clerical work was one of the best contemporary examples of work answering to this description. Any occupation whose training was subsidized by the public-at-large, as was the case with elementary school teaching, was likewise in a favourable position to use women's labour. Furthermore, even if no outside sources could be tapped to pay for its training, employers might still consider women's labour the more economical choice if the training expenses could be paid back in the form of the student's labour. The training of hospital nurses was characteristically achieved in this way.

11.2 Substitute Demand

Up to this point the demand for women has been considered with a view to women's special labour attributes, that of their sex and sex-connected traits. Now it remains to consider the demand for their labour which existed despite these attributes, the demand for them as a substitute form of labour. When women were wanted in this capacity it was because employers were unable to obtain an adequate supply of preferred male or child labour.

Throughout the period under review, legal restrictions in the use of child labour were becoming more stringent. Whereas in 1891 it was legal for ten-year-olds to be employed, by 1914 various Factory and Education Acts had raised the minimum age to twelve. Furthermore, legal authorities had been granted the power to require school attendance up to the age of fourteen years. Some employers reacted to the ban on child labour by demanding women's as it was the next cheapest available. The occupational consequence to women was to enlarge the already existing demand for their labour for low grades of work since children's work was typically simple and light in nature.

The demand for women as substitutes for men had a more varied occupational effect since men's job scope, in contrast to children's, was so much wider. Even so, the men's work for which women were wanted was largely restricted to what could be termed left over jobs. Men having the pick of the occupational field, tended to gravitate to the so-called better jobs, leaving for women's less favourably regarded labour the jobs men were no longer willing to accept.

In men's estimation the "good job" was foremost a well-paying one. Therefore, work at times opened up to women because men, finding more remunerative ways to employ their labour, refused to accept jobs that paid less. Especially liable to a shortage of male labour on this account were enterprises unable to meet the wage competition of more profitable concerns because of sheer inability to pay. Thus women's opportunities as substitutes were usually greatest in marginal firms and in those operating out of fixed income or dependent on tax monies or voluntary contributions.

⁸See above p. 117.

Their greater power of occupational choice also enabled men to shun work which seemed to afford them no chance to develop their skills or to advance to more responsible posts. It likewise made them less inclined to isolate themselves professionally by accepting work in areas far from the centres of training and demand. Nor were they willing to enter trades which offered no future because threatened with technological obsolescence. Some considered working to schedule too strict a discipline and refused work on that count. Others would not submit to any radical reorganization of their trade practices. In short, any job deemed distasteful by men for whatever reason was potentially a woman's once men were in a position to give effect to their preferences.

Since choice was central to there being "left over" men's work for women, local labour market conditions played an important part in determining whether women would be wanted as substitutes and did much to explain local variations in the use of men and women. In those cotton textile districts, for example, where favourable male employment alternatives existed, women were used for work such as piecing and drawing-in which in other districts, offering men little if any occupational scope, were masculine preserves. Even in districts where men had little opportunity to earn a "living wage", the tendency was for boys to seek work elsewhere, leaving to the women, with their greater immobility, the low-paying work which boys as males rejected. The hand nail trade was one such example. As men were forced by the economics of the industry to seek their living elsewhere, hand nail manufacture became increasingly a woman's trade. The same combination of circumstances usually accounted for women in heavy labouring work, work for which men were admitted to be more capable but whose labour price in those instances was set at too high a level for them to be as economical to employ as women.

The demand for women to do work of on "unsuitable" character, such as heavy labouring, might at first appear to contradict the argument developed above to explain the sex division. If it were true that "unsuitable" work was believed to impair the health of women and her offspring and to "brutalize" her sense of feminine refinement, why did not these beliefs operate universally to inhibit employers, as members of society, from offering such employment to women?⁹

First of all, it must be realized that although employers might admit to work being "unsuitable" for female labour, their standards for assessing suitability might differ. Thus one employer might in good conscience employ women in ways deemed "unsuitable" by others. Especially was this liable to be the explanation in tradition-bound communities. In past times, when sedentary and lighter work was virtually non-existent, a "striking feature" of women's employment was the absence of any "appreciable limitation upon it ... on the score that heavy manual labour was unsuitable to wives and mothers".¹⁰ Thus accustomed to seeing women acting as "beasts of burden", and little exposed to the newer ideals of feminine refinement spreading rapidly in more dynamic communities, employers with a traditional outlook saw no incompatibility between their beliefs and employment practices. The pottery industry affords another instance of employers with "blind spots". Contrary to official views which finally culminated in the legal prohibition of women from certain lead processes, there were employers who contended that such employment entailed no special risk to women as such. To them, cases of lead poisoning found among their women employees were sufficiently explained by their lack of personal cleanliness in washing their hands.

Moreover, in an age of employers "competing among themselves to sell with a keenness unknown to any former age",¹¹ the temptation to use "cheap and docile" female labour in admittedly anti-social ways was at times too strong for the less scrupulous employers to resist. It was not that they did not share the prevailing beliefs about women, for in their personal relationships they acted in accord with them, but rather that in the impersonal labour market they were considered not to apply. There women were not viewed as women but as "hands" and "brains" whose purchase and sale were upon the same basis as that for any other commodity. The contemporary spread of company ownership which impersonalized the employment relationship and thereby "legalized irresponsible wealth"¹² left even less scope for individual conscience to prescribe absolute limits to

⁹For why women accepted "unsuitable" work see above p. 96.

¹⁰J. Dunlop and R. Denman *English Apprenticeship and Child Labour*, London: Unwin, 1912, p. 143.

¹¹*Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws. op. cit.*, p. 339.

¹²R. Ensor, *History of England. 1870-1914*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936, p. 112.

women's employment than had hitherto prevailed.

Furthermore, the willingness of the unscrupulous to exploit women had ramifications even for the scrupulous inasmuch as they, in order to survive commercially, were at times forced to adopt similar measures.¹³ Fortunately, from society's viewpoint, the majority of employers with "unsuitable" work believed that their self-interest lay in employing male labour because it constituted the better bargain. Had this not been the case, the nation's code of protective legislation would in all probability have had to be much more elaborate if the health and welfare of working women with their characteristic docility were to be safeguarded.

¹³For an excellent analysis of this process see S. and B. Webb, *Industrial Democracy*, 1902 ed., London: Longmans, Green, iii, chap. 2.

Chapter 12

Women's Employment

This chapter concludes the analysis of the sex division by considering why women were in the work they were and why men were absent from it.

12.1 The Work of Women

To account for women's employment in women's work, the findings of the previous chapter as to why women were wanted for women's work must be integrated with those of the chapter on the female labour supply (Chapter 9). Before attempting a synthesis, however, it is important to emphasize its inherent limitations. At most it can be suggestive rather than definitive as more is involved than simply according to each occupation the supply and demand reasons for women's presence.

The occupational terms themselves raise a conceptual difficulty. Not only does each term embrace a wide variety of sub-occupations, each with its own "reasons" for women's use, but as already shown its definition was by no means precise.¹ Furthermore, there is the problem of individual motivation. Every "use" involved the personal decision of an employer and of a working woman. Why they as individuals decided to offer and to accept employment must forever remain a mute question.

Generalizing about the reasons for women's employment is further complicated by the fact that the total employment situation relative to any given women's occupation was neither consistent in nor stable over time. When such important supply and demand elements as local labour market conditions, relative costs of the factors of production, the quality of women's labour and restrictions on its use were themselves in a state of flux or varied from district to district, different reasons or the same reasons but differently weighted underlay women's use in the same occupation.

Though conceptual imprecision and geographical and chronological variations blur the details, however, and though different people may have had different individual reasons or subconscious motives, the over-all pattern of women's employment throughout the 1891-1914 period is clear. It is this clarity, especially of the marked division from men's work prevailing through time, which renders general statements about women's work plausible. It strongly indicates that the individuals involved had a sufficiently common outlook to perceive and respond to the 1891-1914 labour market situation in a like manner. Had this not been the case it is highly improbable that the pattern of women's work would have shown such an orderly design.

Given its qualifications, what is the explanation for women's presence in women's work? Why were women to such a large extent the nation's textile and cleaning workers, its teachers, nurses and midwives, and above all, its personal servants? And how is women's particular share in the nation's remaining male dominated "industries" and professions to be explained? The descriptions given of the character of the female labour supply and demand, though not in themselves the answer

¹See above p. 6.

sought, do provide valuable insight into the why of women's occupations. Foremost, they have given prominence to the belief in women's relative cheapness for certain kinds of work as the major demand consideration, and that of their upbringing as the major supply one. Consequently the job situation most conducive to women's employment was one satisfying the following criteria: 1) its job content was such that the female type of labour was believed to be the better bargain than the male type, 2) its conditions were such as not to offend the sense of respectability of the grade of female labour required, and 3) the employer was sufficiently free from the restraints imposed by the law and employed men to enable him to use women if he so chose. The women's occupations of the 1891-1914 period all satisfied these criteria to an exceptional degree.

In textile manufacturing, the vast majority of jobs were light, relatively unskilled and performed under conditions deemed "suitable" to the grade of female labour needed. Women, accordingly, constituted an ideal labour supply. Firstly, they were considered more economical to use than men. In fact, the industry's profits were believed to be so dependent on the employment of women's cheaper labour that employers had chosen to reschedule factory working hours so as to comply with those prescribed by the Factory Acts rather than to transfer their demand to the less legally restricted labour of men.² Secondly, women of the required grade found little reason not to accept the work. Its conditions met their standards of respectability, its low pay relative to "men's industries" was in keeping with their financial expectations, and no other work that paid substantially more or had substantially better working conditions was open locally to women of their labour grade.

Women's use in clothing presented a more complicated picture. Though similar supply and demand considerations explained women's presence in most of its branches, a new element influenced women's use for the manufacture of dresses and millinery. In this work, women were employed not only as the more economical supply of low-grade labour but also filled its highest posts. The content and structure of these two occupations followed closely their housewifery prototypes. Therefore, as already explained, feminine upbringing constituted no particular handicap. The nature of the consumer demand, in addition, made costs of production an especially important consideration. Women of the period normally possessed the skills necessary to make their own garments and were prepared to exercise them if the price of ready-made clothes rose much beyond the cost of home-made ones.

All of women's service occupations—personal service, teaching, nursing, midwifery, and the emerging one of social work—had their housewifery prototypes which meant that women's upbringing had not handicapped women for posts of this kind either. These occupations also tended to be of a kind in which the employer's ability to pay was rather limited as they were largely financed out of private fixed incomes, charity contributions or tax monies. Then in private domestic service—women's numerically largest occupation—it was particularly important that wages be "reasonable" since, as with dressmaking, women generally were able to do the work on a non-gainful basis if the price became too high. Since the higher branches of nursing and teaching required additional formal training, the non-gainful competition of women in the home did not provide employers of nurses and teachers with the incentive to seek the cheapest supply of labour possible that it did elsewhere. Yet even without this competition, female labour was favoured to such a degree that despite the need for training, ways were devised to overcome the difficulty women normally had in financing it.

Women's share in "men's industries" was mostly confined to those jobs that were similar in nature to those provided by textiles. However, in distribution and agriculture, the industries were so structured that advantage could be taken of female labour not only for low-grade work but also as "assisting relative". Found in "men's industries" too were women who, as a substitute form of labour, engaged in work of a so-called unsuitable or rough character. On the other hand, virtually

²Other examples of employers modifying employment practices so as to take advantage of female labour's relative cheapness can be found in the Redditch needle and fishing tackle factories where married women were permitted to start a half hour later and stop a half hour earlier and take twenty minutes longer for the dinner hour. A similar accommodation to married women's labour was in evidence in the London cigar trade and in some Birmingham factories and for similar reasons. See respectively *Factory Report, 1911* p. 155, 1912-13 Cd. 6239, xxv. G. Oakeshott, "Women in the Cigar Trade", *Economic Journal*, vol. 10, no. 40, Dec. 1900, p. 570. E. Cadbury *et al.*, *Women's Work and Wages*, 2nd ed., London: Unwin, 1908, pp. 35, 128.

the only scope women had for jobs requiring skill and responsibility were those demanding women to deal with problems peculiar to their sex.

In summary, women were employed in “women’s industries” primarily because their type of labour at the price at which it was available was believed to be a better bargain than men’s. Though the historic association with certain work was a contributing reason, it was by no means as decisive a factor as their economic advantage to employers since the occupational world contained many examples of work which had been women’s in the home becoming men’s once it underwent commercialization. In “men’s industries”, apart from being employed to deal with women’s problems which came to them by reason of their sex, and apart from being employed as “assisting relatives”, which came to them as wives and daughters and not as labour in their own right, women were employed as the more economical supply of low-grade labour principally for the pockets of work which were similar in type to that offered by the textile industry, but also, on occasion, for “rough” work.

12.2 The Absence of Men

Whereas the absence of women from men’s work was attributable primarily to the employment practices of employers and secondly to the restrictions imposed by the law and by workers of the opposite sex, these factors were not of much relevance in excluding men from women’s work. First of all, neither the law nor employed women interfered with the demand for male labour to any extent. Moreover given the attributes of male labour, it seems reasonable to conclude that in many instances where women were employed men would have been preferred if they could have been employed as cheaply. As for men, with their work-oriented outlook, there is little reason to doubt that they would have made whatever effort was necessary to qualify for women’s work if they viewed it to their self-interest to do so. But they did not. With the opportunity to earn more in men’s work, they left women to compete among themselves for the jobs open to their sex.

This is not to claim that economic self-interest alone made men reluctant to enter women’s work. Undeniably there existed a strong sentiment against doing “lassie’s work” because it would be “unmanly”.³ But apparently this reluctance could be overcome provided a “man’s wage” for the job was paid. For the very difference in wages—apart from the difference in conditions and/or content which, although not always readily apparent, characterized a man’s job in a recognized woman’s occupation—made the job a “man’s” in the eyes of the worker and of the public.

Consequently, if special circumstances led to a man being demanded for a class of work for which women’s labour sufficed, he had to be enticed by the offer of a “man’s wage”. It was this price qualification which largely explained men’s presence in such predominantly female occupations as telephonist and teacher and in the women’s processes of wool combing and bookbinding. It also was an important element in explaining men’s presence in cotton weaving even though the “man’s wage” in this particular instance was on the low side. Even in regard to the two major exceptions to this rule—youths and Jewish manual workers in women’s work and receiving “women’s wages”—the extent of their deviation from normal male behaviour was less than might appear from a general consideration of their cases.

The characteristic rise in reserve price of youths entering manhood⁴ meant that a youth’s acceptance of a “woman’s wage” was but a temporary incident in his employment history. The same impermanence was evident among the Jews who were only content to be in a “woman’s job” at a

³This social psychological aspect of the sex division becomes understandable once it is realized that a man asserts his masculinity by choosing “masculine” types of work and acting in a “masculine” way in and at his work. To take on a kind of work that is considered feminine is to raise questions, not only among other men and among women as to whether he is masculine, but to raise the question in a still more fundamental way with himself. See Dr. O. Hall, “Gender and the Division of Labour” in *Report of a Round-Table Conference on the Implications of Traditional Divisions Between Men’s Work and Women’s Work in Our Society, held March 12, 1964*, Women’s Bureau, Department of Labour of Canada, pp. 18 ff.

⁴See above p. 102.

“woman’s wage” if it was in effect an “apprenticeship to better things”.⁵

Moreover, even in cotton weaving, where men and women were to some extent used interchangeably and uniform scales of piecework prices applied, the majority of the men, as the Webbs observed, practically monopolized the heavy trade, priced at higher rates per yard and resulting in larger weekly earnings. Despite it being a matter of indifference to the employer whether he used a man or a woman, the “ordinary man” did not offer himself for the “woman’s job” because it did not pay an amount sufficient for him to “permanently maintain himself”.⁶

Nevertheless, it might still be asked why there were isolated cases of Jewish manual workers and youths, unlike other men, accepting “women’s wages”, even temporarily, if a man’s expectations were, as claimed, higher than a woman’s. Why did not their masculine level of expectations operate to make them available for “men’s jobs” only? Moreover, it might be asked, why did not that same masculine level of expectations eventually make it impossible to recruit male cotton weavers since men of that grade could earn more in almost any other predominately male industry?

The answer appears to lie in the fact that these men could find no better employment openings in their locality. Yet when other men found themselves in the same predicament they usually remained unemployed or moved elsewhere in search of better employment prospects. Why did these youths, Jewish workmen and cotton weavers not do likewise?

With youths it was a case of “youth’s” and “women’s wages” overlapping at a certain point along the established rising scale for youths. What appears as a deviation from normal male practice, therefore, is not a deviation at all, but simply the manifestations of a man’s aspiration level at its earlier stages of development before a wage sufficient for self-support was expected.

With the Jewish manual workers, it was a case of a different standard of life. Most of them lived in self-contained Jewish immigrant communities where the accepted minimum standard was lower than that of the Gentile world about them.⁷ Thus for the sake of being employed at all, these Jews were prepared to accept “starvation” wages. At the same time, prospects were poor of these Jewish men improving their lot by moving elsewhere. Most were recent arrivals from Russia and Poland who were little qualified for the nation’s better paying work. Moreover, they were additionally handicapped by the discriminatory employment practices of employers and by the antagonism of English workmen who saw their established standards threatened by the competition of Jews who were willing to work for less. Confronted with such employment barriers, these Jewish workmen still sought, as other men did, to improve their economic position but chose the more fruitful course of confining their efforts to within rather than to outside the Jewish community.

As for male cotton weavers, they lived in geographically isolated towns in which the traditional view of marriage as a business partnership prevailed. The family and not the male head was viewed as the breadwinning unit. Consequently, even though male cotton weavers shared the same “instinctive standard of life”⁸ as other Englishmen of their class, they did not expect to be the sole contributor but assumed the earnings of wives and children as well. Therefore, they were prepared to accept a level of remuneration which would do “violence” to the feelings⁹ of other men operating on the assumption that family support was their entire responsibility. That male cotton weavers did accept rates lower than those earned by men of corresponding grade elsewhere was due to there being no better employment openings locally. To secure the going “man’s wage” they would have to migrate to other areas. Yet already enjoying the fruits of such a wage, they had little incentive to make so drastic a change. Accordingly, their transfer to work paying a wage more in keeping with that paid men of a corresponding grade elsewhere depended upon work of this kind developing in or near the cotton weaving towns.

⁵C. Booth *Life and Labour of the People*, 1st ed., London: Williams and Norgate, 1889, I, 234.

⁶S. and B. Webb, *Industrial Democracy*, 1902 ed., London: Longmans, Green, pp. 501, 507.

⁷The way of life of these Jews is aptly described in C. Booth, *op. cit.*, 1st ed., I, iii, chap. 3. Also see ii, chap. 3 for its occupational expression in the London tailoring trade.

⁸S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 698.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 694.

Part III

**TRENDS IN WOMEN'S
EMPLOYMENT: 1891-1914**

In the preceding analysis of women's employment, the period 1891 to 1914 has been viewed as a whole. Though a useful device for picturing the over-all situation, such a static view fails to show the changes occurring within it. Was the sex division becoming more or less marked with the passing years? Was the scope of women's work enlarging or contracting? No study of women's employment for the years under review is complete without considering these questions. For though mostly in their formative stages, definite trends were under way which were imparting to the female labor supply and demand a somewhat different cast than the one hitherto described. What those trends were, the circumstances producing them, and the effect they had on women's occupational position form the subject matter of Part Three.

Chapter 13

Supply Trends

In 1914 as in 1891 the female relative to the male labour force differed markedly in quantity and quality. But whereas the quantitative gap was increasing with time¹ the qualitative one was decreasing. Although producing opposite effects, the factors responsible for both trends were the same. Partly they were the outcome of the contemporary rise in the school-leaving age which was not only reducing the number of women available for employment but was also eliminating from the labour market some of its less efficient female members. It is true that this measure was as applicable to boys as to girls and so would not at first appear capable of changing the relative position of working men and women. Yet in effect it did because of the higher proportion the very young constituted of the female than of the male labour force.²

The changes noted in the female labour supply also followed upon a change in emphasis regarding the place of work in the lives of matrons in the first instance and in the lives of “ladies” in the second. The practical policies emanating from these changing notions favourably affected women’s labour in three important respects, namely by eliminating from the female labour force some of its most vocationally handicapped members, by encouraging the entrance of women highly qualified for gainful endeavour, and by raising the vocational qualifications of working women in general. Because so vitally affecting the female as distinct from the male labour supply, these changing notions now become an analytical focal point. What were these changing notions? Why were they gaining acceptance? How were they responsible for the improving quality of female labour?

13.1 Departure of the Least Fit

Underlying the tendency for the least fit to leave the ranks of the occupied was the growing public conviction that it was wrong to expect wives to work when the “natural” breadwinner failed to provide for his family’s needs. This changing conception of the wife’s subsidiary role of helpmate grew out of a greater public awareness not only of the harm done to family and national welfare when a mother combined the offices of childbearer and breadwinner, especially if this entailed her daily absence from the home,³ but also of the extent of the need of married women⁴ to assume such

¹In 1891 women constituted 31.31 per cent of the total work force; in 1901 29.88 per cent; in 1911, 29.56 per cent.

²See above n. 9 on p. 99.

³Concerning the question of home work, contemporaries were divided as to whether it was best for family life to encourage it under sanitary conditions or to abolish it altogether. For cross section of views see “The Home as Workshop” in the International Council of Women, *Report of Transactions of the Second Quinquennial Meeting Held in London, July 1899*, London: Unwin, 1900, VI, 45 ff.

⁴Prior to 1901 not even the Census distinguished occupied women by marital status and then only as either unmarried or married-widowed. The Census of 1911 was the first to classify occupied women as either unmarried, married, or widowed.

“extraordinarily heavy burdens”.⁵ In consequence a movement to reduce the need of “unfortunate” matrons to work gained increasing momentum as the 1891-1914 period drew to a close.

The nineteenth century rise in infant mortality rates first focused public attention on the apparent connection between married women working and high infant death rates. It was in the textile districts, where factory employment of married women was most common, that the infant death rates were among the nation’s highest. Though scientific proof of a direct causal relationship was wanting and though a number of contemporary investigators stressed that infant death rates were “disproportionately high” among mining districts where married women rarely worked,⁶ considerations of this nature did not inhibit the public from attributing the wastage of infant life to the “inevitable neglect”⁷ that stemmed from the working mother’s absence from the home. According to general opinion, “feeble, bottle-fed babies and premature births”⁸ were only to be expected when, as was the case in many textile mills, a mother was at work from six in the morning until five-thirty at night. Thus to those concerned with the problem of infant mortality, a mother’s employment away from home appeared, in the words of the President of the 1906 National Conference on Infant Mortality, “in every respect ... an individual mistake, a social tragedy, a communal blunder”.⁹

In 1891 this view already prevailed sufficiently to make illegal the factory or workshop employment of a woman within four weeks of her giving birth to a child. Though for various reasons the measure proved impossible to enforce,¹⁰ it indirectly served to promote the cause of infant welfare. As a byproduct of its administration by the lady factory inspectors came the first serious attempts to analyze and assess the relative importance of the reasons for mothers going out to work, not only so soon after childbirth, but out to work at all. Whereas up until the advent of the lady inspectors the public could understand and actually approve of a mother accepting home work to tide the family over periods of breadwinner misfortune, it could neither understand nor condone married women working away from their homes as a general practice. Thus in such textile towns as Blackburn, Burnley and Preston, where in the nineties it was estimated that “half the women” of child-bearing age (between twenty and forty-five) worked “away from home”,¹¹ it seemed but irresponsible behaviour on the part of the many married among them to accept gainful employment. Surely, concluded the public, not all could be in “dire necessity”. It was alleged for example, that women such as these missed the “cheerful society”¹² of the factory once they were married and so returned, ignorant or heedless of the resultant harm done to their families.

But as the findings of the lady inspectors showed,¹³ preference for factory over domestic work was the least significant reason why mothers worked in factories. Poverty drove them to earn as it did most of their homeworking sisters, but in their case no homework was locally available. As for the reasons for their poverty, apart from personal misfortune such as the death or desertion of the husband, the lady factory inspectors stressed the economic and social factors which lay behind much of married women’s need to work. Particularly did these considerations apply in districts offering only women’s work. The resultant scarcity of work for men placed married women in the “sad position” of being “torn between their natural duty and the demands of an unnatural and short-sighted system”, that is one which would “substitute the mother for the father as the breadwinner

⁵Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, *Report on the Condition of the Children who are in receipt of the various forms of Poor Law Relief in England and Wales*, p. 61; 1910 Cd. 5037, lii.

⁶E.g., see C. Collet, “The Collection and Utilisation of Official Statistics bearing on the Extent and Effects of the Industrial Employment of Women”, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, vol. 61, pt. ii, June 1898, pp. 230-240. H. Ashby, *Infant Mortality*, Cambridge: University Press, 1915, p. 20.

⁷*Census of England and Wales, 1901: General Report*, p. 81; 1904 Cd. 2174, cviii.

⁸Medical Officer of Health for Fenton as quoted in *Factory Report, 1906*, p. 235; 1907 Cd. 3586, x.

⁹As quoted in M. Hewitt, *Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry*, London: Rockcliff, 1958, p. 195.

¹⁰The difficulties encountered are conveniently compiled in “References in Annual Reports of Chief Inspector of Factories to S. 61” in the *Report of the Women’s Employment Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction*, app. VIII; 1918 Cd. 9239, xiv.

¹¹*Report on the Statistics of Employment of Women and Girls*, p. 27; 1894 C. 7564, lxxxii, pt. II

¹²Royal Commission on Labour, *The Employment of Women*, p. 53; 1893-94 C. 6894, xxxvii, pt. I.

¹³See “Memorandum by Miss A. M. Anderson on the Employment of Mothers in Factories and Workshops” in the *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration*, app. V, esp. pp. 125-127; 1904 Cd. 2175, xxxii.

of the family".¹⁴

These findings received corroboration from various private enquiries¹⁵ as well as from the growing number of women health visitors and sanitary inspectors appointed largely in connection with infant welfare schemes. Combined they produced a greater appreciation of the part defective breadwinning played in creating a supply of mothers available for work outside the home. As a result those interested in reducing the nation's infant mortality no longer viewed the problem as essentially one of working women's faulty orientation to be remedied by such measures as better domestic training in the schools. To protect infant life they became convinced of the need of the state either to secure the father's ability to provide for mother and offspring or else to assume that responsibility itself when the father failed to do so.

While the concern with the problem of infant mortality was producing one stream of opinion favourable to reducing the economic need of mothers to work, the contemporary concern with the problem of poverty itself was indirectly producing another.

With the publication in the nineties of Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London* came the first general awareness of the extent to which the breadwinner ideal of family support fell short of realization. According to Booth, one-third of London's population lived at or below the level of bare subsistence.¹⁶ In order to understand why such poverty prevailed numerous enquiries, both public and private, ensued. The most comprehensive was that of the Poor Law Commission which collected evidence from 1905 to 1909, which incorporated its findings in forty-seven folio volumes of appendices, and whose membership consisted of such authorities on the poverty question as Beatrice Webb, Octavia Hill and Charles Booth.

Whereas down to the last decade of the nineteenth century inadequate breadwinning was viewed mainly as a personal problem, whether of accidental misfortune such as death or illness or of character shortcoming such as inebriety or indolence, Booth's investigations and those that followed stressed the hitherto ignored social aspect of the problem. For example, it was revealed that the contemporary Poor Law policy which aimed to restrict medical treatment at the expense of public funds was in part responsible for the extent of illness found among the breadwinning population. The fact that no case of urgent sickness could be treated without the penalties and stigma of pauperism made the poor, even in cases of extreme necessity, reluctant to enter a workhouse or workhouse infirmary for treatment. Or it was shown that no matter how industrious certain men might be in the prime of life, their level of wages was such as to make it virtually impossible for them to provide for their old age.¹⁷

But revelations as to the social as well as the individual source of many a breadwinner's physical or moral incapacity to provide for his family, educational as they were to the public, did not explain all of the existing poverty. As the enquiries showed, the poverty-stricken included not only the dregs of society from a productive point of view but also masses of the nation's able and willing workers. How was their presence to be explained?

The modern economic system, it was emphasized, was not providing these destitute able-bodied with the opportunity to earn a livelihood. Over extended periods of time many could find no demand for their services or at best only a partial one while others in employment were unable to earn a "living wage". As a result the ranks of the poor were swelled by the "unemployed", the "under-employed", and the "under-paid",—accidental sufferers of an impersonal economic system.¹⁸

In the wake of the public's growing awareness of the dimensions of the poverty problem, the reasons for its existence, and the harm caused to infant and child life to treat inadequate breadwinning

¹⁴ *Factory Report, 1906, op. cit.*, p. 233.

¹⁵ E.g., see E. Cadbury *et al.*, *Women's Work and Wages*, 2nd ed., London: Unwin, 1908, p. 219. V. De Vesselitsky, *The Homeworker and Her Outlook*, London: Bell, 1916, p. 14.

¹⁶ C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 1st ed., London: Macmillan, 1897, IX, 427.

¹⁷ See *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour*, "Majority Report", iv, chap.10; 1909 Cd. 4499, xxxvii. S. and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History - Part II: The Last Hundred Years*, London: Longmans, Green, 1929, II, pp. 517-521.

¹⁸ See *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, op. cit.*, "Majority Report", vi; S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 631 ff.

as a family's private concern, a public movement developed to rectify the poverty situation. By 1914 it had resulted in such social security measures as old age pensions and sickness, maternity and unemployment insurance, and in such social service ones as school feeding, school health programmes and infant welfare schemes largely, if not entirely, at public expense.¹⁹ The significance of these new developments lay not so much in their results, for as yet they were neither adequate in their provisions nor comprehensive in their coverage, but rather in the public attitude towards poverty which they reflected. Henceforth, defective breadwinning was to be treated increasingly as a public rather than as an individual problem.

From the standpoint of women's employment, this change in social policy forecast the eventual elimination from the female labour market of the "unfortunate" matron, typically a woman ill-prepared for wage-earning—burdened with domestic responsibilities, physically worn out, immobile—but who, nevertheless, was forced to earn once her breadwinner proved wanting. New governmental action was gradually relieving her of her breadwinning responsibility. With every new social security or social service provision, her need to work lessened. As the numbers of these "unfortunate" women in the labour market declined so the over-all quality of the female labour force rose. Since such a species of worker was unknown in the male labour force, her eventual disappearance meant a narrowing of the sex difference in labour quality.

13.2 Growth of Career-Mindedness

The elimination of the least fit was but one reason why the composition of the female labour force was improving in quality. A second important reason was the contemporary growth of career-mindedness among the nation's most privileged class of women, its ladies of leisure. This new outlook had a twofold effect on the quality of women's "hands" and "brains". First of all, by inducing a certain number of the more "modern" ladies to enter the labour market, it made available for sale what had been hitherto unpurchasable, the labour of the most occupationally qualified members of the female sex from the standpoint of education, health, appearance, and manners. Secondly, it produced among those imbued with the new ideals, whether themselves gainfully employed or not, a movement to improve not only the vocational qualifications of women of their own class but of women in general. Thus as practically expressed, career-mindedness was rendering the female labour supply more fit to cope with the higher grades of work. What motivated these women of the upper classes to adopt careerism? What means did they employ to promote their cause? How effective were they in realizing their aims by the outbreak of the First World War?

These "new women" were variously motivated. What prompted some was the plight of the destitute gentlewomen in their midst. These were typically spinster daughters who had been maintained at home but for whom no provision had been made for their continuing support after their father's death. Paternal hopes of their marrying had placed all the father's spare cash at the disposal of their brother's intellectual and technical training while they themselves had taken no interest in improving their vocational qualifications because of never having realized a need to do so. Consequently, "in the helplessness and confusion of ignorance"²⁰ they entered the labour market. Aware of the days when to be governess or companion was the only genteel occupation for ladies, and realizing that more was required of the modern governess than they could supply, they sought "positions of trust" such as companion or housekeeper. Knowing themselves to be honourable women they felt they were certainly capable of work of this order. But their qualifications for the genteel occupations were out of date. Training and not trust had become the prime prerequisites for "ladies' work". It was for this reason that the fate of these destitute middle-aged gentlewomen was considered "saddest of all"²¹ by their class contemporaries. The need of these gentlewomen to work was almost if not as urgent as that of their destitute counterparts in the lower orders but their "delicate nurture" excluded their

¹⁹For full account of contemporary social security provisions see M. Bruce, *The Coming of the Welfare State*, London: Batsford, 1961, esp. chap. 5.

²⁰E. Pfeiffer, *Women and Work*, London: Trubner, 1888, p. 136.

²¹Central Bureau for the Employment of Women, *The Fingerpost*, London: 1906, p. 240.

doing the work for which they were mainly fitted: light, unskilled manual labour.

To prevent this situation arising in the future, advanced women of the leisured class began to stress the importance of daughters being prepared for self-sufficiency in later life. If parents were not going to provide their daughters with an annuity, then they should consider it a duty, as they already did in the case of their sons, to provide them with a profession.

Among other women, career-mindedness arose as a reaction to a diminished field of domestic usefulness for women of their position. The great increase in wealth that had accompanied the Industrial Revolution had increased the number of men able to support their womenfolk in leisure. Servants now performed the tasks formerly reserved for wives and daughters in a less prosperous age.

Besides the horizontal extension of leisure there was also the vertical one, affecting both the married and the unmarried. The prevalence of spinsterhood in these classes²² meant a body of women who would never have the marital concerns of home, husband and children to occupy their hours. As for the married, the reduction in family size proved to be an important factor contributing to their new leisure. As noted by R. C. K. Ensor, "Members of the professional and business classes marrying within the nineteenth century had normally been brought up in large families, seven or eight being usual numbers, and only higher ones attracting attention. But from about 1890 they did not themselves, as a rule, intend to have more than two, or at most three children".²³ The spread of contraceptive knowledge in the 1870s had made possible the separation of sex from procreation and the educated classes were the first to learn and to make use of it. Nevertheless, though less occupied with children than their mothers, they still were unwilling to engage in remunerative employment because they believed it would damage the quality of their family life.

But for the spinster who desired to live a purposeful life, her leisure seemed an idleness which refused to be sugar-coated by class norms that permitted her to "do good" as a Lady Bountiful. Especially among the educated, the desire to be usefully employed was becoming so strong and employment opportunities so few that some would give their services for a year to people as well off as themselves "in return for a sum of money barely sufficient to take them abroad for a month or to keep them supplied with gloves, lace, hats, and other necessary trifles".²⁴

As the spirit of utility prompted one group of these women to work, the spirit of integrity prompted another. These were the women who found a life of economic dependency on a father or husband detrimental to their self-respect. Theirs was a protest against the existing state of affairs where all too often it was "not the amount of sex affection, passion, and attraction, but the extraneous question of the material possessions of the male" which determined whether a daughter's suitor would be acceptable to the father.²⁵

To promote marriage for love, they argued, it was essential that women be capable of self-support. Relying as they and their parents did on marriage to provide a girl's livelihood in later life, many women of marriageable age felt they had little choice but to accept the proposal of the suitor best able to maintain them. At the price of their personal integrity they, in effect, sold themselves to the highest bidder. To the "new women" that was thought too high a price for their sex to pay for economic security. Their answer to this "degrading" feature of the marriage market was work for women as an accepted way of life. Such a changed outlook, they reasoned, would enable women to be economically independent and so would preclude from the marriage contract all elements of economic coercion. Only then would choice of mate be "truly" free.

Those desirous of seeing women regain their self-respect by gainful employment had mainly single women in mind. However, the most "advanced" thinkers among them saw no reason to exclude married women. They seriously questioned whether the typical absolute control by the husband of

²²See C. Collet, *Educated Working Women*, London: King, 1902, pp. 27 ff. B. Hutchins, "Statistics of Women's Life and Employment", *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, vol. 72, pt. ii, June 1909, pp. 205-210. Fabian Society, *The Economic Foundations of the Women's Movement*, Fabian Tract No. 175, June 1914, pp. 9-11.

²³*History of England, 1870-1914*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936, p. 272.

²⁴C. Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

²⁵O. Schreiner, *Woman and Labour*, London: Unwin, 1911, p. 241.

the family income was as conducive to domestic happiness and social good as was generally believed. What if a wife disagreed with her husband as to how the family income should be spent? Under the present system she had little recourse but to accept her husband's decision. But if breadwinning were to be a joint instead of solely a male endeavour, such an unequal power relationship could no longer exist. This, according to one of the leaders of the "new women", Ada Heather Bigg, was the ideal at which to aim.²⁶ Her proposal, however, appealed to very few married women no matter how strongly they believed a "schilling of your own is worth two that *he* gives you".²⁷ The idea that their place was anywhere but in the home was still too revolutionary for most. Though wanting an independent income, they were unwilling to earn it. Proposals to the effect that wives who worked solely at domestic duties be paid for their services, as an example be endowed with a legal claim to a fixed proportion of the family income, appealed to them much more.²⁸ Thus the growing desire for economic independence among women brought very few of the married into the labour market. Its main effect was to encourage the entrance of single ladies of leisure.

Though seemingly rejecting the traditional concept of the female role by going out to work, the women of the utility and integrity schools of thought continued to be conservative in their beliefs. They were not rejecting the homemaker role as such. They worked either because they considered the ideal career of marital domesticity closed to them or to assure an ideal marriage. The true female revolutionaries of the upper classes were the "small, much despised and even more ridiculed"²⁹ minority of women inspired by the principle of sex equality. Imbued with the advanced ideas of the eighteenth century enlightenment which had their revival in the Britain of the 1860s, they concluded that women were individuals foremost and as such had the same right to self-determination as men in their society. Theirs was a reaction against the inferior status accorded them as women and an idolization of masculine freedom, privilege and endeavour.³⁰ Their claim for equality struck at the roots of traditional beliefs about woman's nature, role and status. Though most of their energies centred on the issue of the suffrage, they did not neglect the industrial field.

Economic equality held for them the promise of self-esteem, self-reliance and self-realization—all essential components of the "individual" for whom they sought expression and recognition. Job competition would enable them to demonstrate their worth against masculine standards, paid employment would enable them to finance lives of their own choosing, and the work itself would enable them to express talents and interests hitherto unexpressed because of women's relegation to the home. Furthermore, in a society that saved its "prizes" for masculine accomplishment, considering female endeavour in the home as vital but not as noteworthy as men's outside it, economic equality opened a channel through which women, too, could gain social honours. Moreover, since principle and not pragmatic considerations underlay their thinking, they saw no reason to qualify it for the married. If work was desirable for women before marriage it was just as desirable for them afterwards.

The upshot of this ferment in thought was the rise of the career-minded woman but, as such women soon discovered, the break with conventional views was only the first step to satisfying their occupational ambitions. As women they were unable to escape the employment handicaps to which their sex was subject. In contrast to men's, they found both their job qualifications and opportunities wanting. Only by overcoming such serious employment impediments could they hope to become full-fledged members of the labour market. However, prevailing opinion was hostile to their cause. If their opportunity to carve out careers was to be equal to men's they would have to assume the role of social reformers and by design bring about women's occupational emancipation. Such a programme demanded concerted effort and women met that need through organization.

Throughout the period under review the number of groups established by women for the pro-

²⁶ "The Wife's Contribution to Family Income", *Economic Journal*, vol. 4, no. 13, Mar. 1894, p. 58.

²⁷ C. Black (ed.), *Married Women's Work*, London: Bell, 1915, p. 4.

²⁸ See International Council of Women, *op. cit.*, VI, 191-194.

²⁹ V. Klein, *The Feminine Character*, London: Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1946, p. 24.

³⁰ Indicatively, no evidence has been found of their suggesting that men should have the right to choose between breadwinning and homemaking yet they desired such a freedom of choice for themselves. Have the men earn good wages, then leave the decision to the wife whether to work or not typified their viewpoint. See C. Black (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

motion of woman's "rights" multiplied.³¹ As for the careers-for-women campaign, their forerunners had already achieved two major victories, namely the legal right of wives to control their earnings and property, and the opening of the universities to women.³² They also had promoted the cause of women's employment more directly by sponsoring such projects as employment bureaux, loan training funds and the subsidized migration of "surplus" women on the British labour market to the colonies where job prospects were better. But by 1891 the freeing of their sex from what appeared to the careerists as its occupational bondage was still far from an accomplished fact. Much remained to be done before women, as a matter of course, would enter the labour market trained to their highest capacities and be accorded full opportunity to employ them. Therefore, both improving women's qualifications as workers and removing the impediments to the demand for their labour continued as major concerns of the "woman's rights" movement throughout the 1891-1914 period. Its part in effecting the latter is considered in the analysis of the contemporary demand trends.³³ Germane to the present discussion are its activities in regard to the former.

The "new women" attacked the problem of women's labour quality on two fronts, that of attitude and that of facilities. Without a change of "heart" on the part of women, any men's work the "new women" might succeed in opening to their sex could be expected to remain, if not largely unfilled, indifferently performed. And if vocational information and training remained in their present deficient states, women would find whatever desire they had to become qualified workers largely frustrated.

As for attitude towards work, the "new women" carried on an active propaganda campaign to win converts to their cause. Organs of feminine opinion such as *The Englishwoman*³⁴ consistently aired their views, books such as Olive Schreiner's *Woman and Labour*³⁵ and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics*³⁶ popularized them, organizations such as the Fabian Women's Group³⁷ provided supporting evidence and women's meetings such as that of the International Council of Women held in London in 1899 promoted their public discussion.

But these propaganda activities not only aimed to reorient women as to the place of work in their lives but also attempted to persuade them to discard notions of feminine respectability which, by restricting their mobility and narrowing the range of employments acceptable to them, tended to make their labour less fluid than men's. For example, to the "new women" the attitude prevalent among upper class ladies that it was preferable to starve than to trade was a "baseless idea".³⁸ They strove to dispel it from the minds of their more conservative sisters by pointing out how many professional men's daughters, "well-educated and highly intelligent", were already "pursuing mercantile vocations".³⁹

Given the convert to careerism, the next step was to see that she was vocationally informed and guided. To render such women knowledgeable about the ways of the occupational world and so more responsive to its demands, the "new women" of 1891-1914 continued and expanded the work begun by their counterparts of earlier years. They collected and published information about the different types of employment open to women and their entrance requirements. For example, the Women's

³¹E.g., witness the formation in 1895 of The National Union of Women Workers of Great Britain and Ireland, an association of upper and middle class women interested in social and philanthropic work; in 1897 of The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies; in 1903 of The Association of Women Clerks; in 1906 of the National Federation of Women Workers; and in 1909 of The National Federation of Women Teachers.

³²See respectively. E. Halevy. *History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed., rev., London: Benn, 1952, VI, Book II, 494-496. C. Bremner, *Education of Girls and Women in Great Britain*, London: Sonnenschein, 1897, i, secs. 3, 4 (England and Wales); ii, secs. 3, 4 (Scotland).

³³See below pp. 151 ff.

³⁴First published in 1909, it aimed to present the case for the enfranchisement of women.

³⁵*Op. cit.* Termed the "Bible of the Woman's Movement". See V. Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, London: Gollancz, 1933, p. 41.

³⁶5th ed., London: Putnam's, 1906.

³⁷Formed in 1908, it aimed to promote the cause of women's economic emancipation by providing a sound factual base for constructing policies and programmes.

³⁸M. Bird, *Woman at Work*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1911, p. 93.

³⁹See S. Hadland, *Occupations of Women Other Than Teaching*, London: Published for the Headmistresses Association by Alexander and Shephard, c. 1886, p.13.

Industrial Council sponsored numerous special enquiries of this nature, ranging from “pharmacy” to “fur-pulling”, and “cigar-making” to “sanitary inspecting”.⁴⁰ Moreover, comprehensive guides to women’s employment were issued by such organizations as The Central Bureau for the Employment of Women and The Women’s Institute.⁴¹

To promote women’s employment still further, especially that of “gentlewomen’s”, various women’s groups operated employment bureaux. And as a means of acquainting women with the existence of these as well as other accredited employment agencies, *The Englishwoman’s Year Book* annually published a complete list.

Though by the nineties it could be said that in regard to secondary and university education the gap between the educational advantages and facilities for study given to women in comparison with those offered to men, was becoming narrower, this was not the case with technical training. Despite the Customs and Excise Act of 1890 making available to local authorities certain duties for technical education purposes, women benefited very little from the Act. As a survey made by the Women’s Local Government Society in 1895 revealed, out of 124 County Borough Councils the large majority offered girls instruction only in domestic economy, nursing and dairy work. Some did not offer even that and only eighteen gave girls the same educational advantages that they provided for boys.⁴²

This lack of provision for the technical education of girls appeared as a serious employment impediment. If craftsmanship was to characterize female labour to the same degree as male labour, reasoned the “new women”, girls needed the opportunity to learn their trades thoroughly and to develop the craftsman’s sense of pride in his work. Under the current system of training women on the job, this chance was rarely present. Consequently, in seeking a solution to the dearth of craftswomen, these “new women” viewed technical local training as the answer. No longer would women be handicapped in acquiring skills because of the reluctance on the part of employers to train “meantime” workers. Furthermore, they argued, there was no place like a school or college to impress the factory girl with the dignity of labour, to instil her with ambition “to take a place among the front rank of workers” and to encourage her to approach work as an art and not merely as a means of money-making.⁴³

A campaign was begun to improve women’s opportunities for technical training. The Women’s Local Government Society, for example, urged that women be made members of local technical instruction committees as it believed this was the way to assure that the claims of women were voiced and acted upon.⁴⁴ The Women’s Industrial Council, on the other hand, used a more direct approach. It urged the provision of day school courses for girls in such trades as waistcoat making and laundering, its efforts towards this end culminating in the establishment of the London Day Trade School for Girls in 1908.

To what extent had the “woman’s rights” movement succeeded in converting their sex to careerism by the outbreak of the First World War? Whether the criterion used for judging its success is the proportion of the hitherto “unoccupied” induced to enter the labour market or of the “occupied” persuaded to regard work as more central to their lives, the movement had made very little headway. As revealed by the 1911 Census, nearly one-half of the women most free to act in accord with the new occupational ideals, the single, were still “unoccupied”.⁴⁵ And indicative of the lack of response among the “occupied” was the “new women’s” constant complaint that working women continued to be much too content with the poorly-paid routine posts characteristically performed by their sex for careerism to take root.

⁴⁰Formed in 1894, it aimed to promote the welfare of manual working women. For an account of its activities see L. Papworth, “The Women’s Industrial Council: A Survey”, *Women’s Industrial News*, vol. 18, new series, no. 64, Jan. 1914, pp. 204-211.

⁴¹E.g., the Bureau’s *The Fingerpost*, London: 1906. Mrs. Philipps *et. al.*, *A Dictionary of Employments Open to Women*, London: Women’s Institute, 1898.

⁴²C. Bremner, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-217. The Society aimed to promote the eligibility of women to elect and to serve on all local governing bodies.

⁴³G. Oakeshott, “Artificial Flowermaking”, *Economic Journal*, vol. 13, no. 49, Mar. 1903, p. 130.

⁴⁴C. Bremner, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-217.

⁴⁵See above p. 97.

However, to admit that the movement had no appreciable impact on the 1891-1914 supply of female labour is not to say that it was of little occupational consequence to women. Although not causing any great change in the behaviour and attitude of those already out of school, it was making a deep impression on the minds of the rising generation of schoolgirls, especially those at the secondary and university levels. Already by the turn of the century, one leading authority on women's education could write of the need to check in the minds of upper class girls the notion that no work was worthy of the name unless it was paid work.⁴⁶ In their unconventional conviction that work and not leisure was the honourable pursuit of a "lady", these daughters of the well-to-do were largely influenced by their secondary school teachers, who themselves were the nation's first college bred women. Their teachers' stress on careers came as a reaction to the all-absorbing domestic interests normal to women of their generation. Homemaking to them was tantamount to intellectual narrowness. Thus they felt that girls destined for college were too good for "mere domestic life".⁴⁷ Accordingly they encouraged their pupils to choose professions and to train for them as their brothers did and, in the process, they served the cause of women's employment. By instilling their young charges with a more masculine orientation towards work they were creating a body of women possessed of the highest labour attributes—ambitious, trained, mobile, long-term—whose beneficial influence on the over-all quality of the female labour supply, if not yet substantial, would tend to become so as increasing numbers of these career girls left school and became available for paid employment.

Furthermore, there were signs that the new ideals were spreading to classes lower down the social scale. For example, when the Women's Co-operative Guild was first established in 1883, women "imitating or competing with men, pushing themselves into positions which have hitherto been held by men, speaking on platforms, or thrusting themselves on to Management Committees" were expressly deprecated.⁴⁸ Its founders conceived of the Guild as a type of mothers' union wherein working class wives could meet together and discuss how they could further the cause of cooperation. But by 1914 the Guild's conception of its role had radically altered. Its members were now encouraged to take their places beside the men co-operators on an equal footing; and replacing its original concern with such matters as shop prices, children's classes and social outings were questions of social reform relating to woman's status as worker, wife, mother, and citizen. Among the measures it began to advocate, for example, were a "living wage" for women cooperative store employees and the payment of the National Insurance Act's maternity benefit directly to the wife instead of to the husband to use on his wife's behalf.⁴⁹

In contrast to its gains in winning converts to its ideals, the "woman's rights" movement was much less successful in its attempts to improve women's training opportunities. As of 1914 the "new women" had been unable to establish in law the principle of sex equality in the allocation of endowments and parliamentary grants for educational purposes.⁵⁰ Nor were they able to secure the passage of a bill which would have made the practice of sex discrimination illegal in educational institutions "deriving money or authority from the State".⁵¹

Lacking parliamentary political power in their own right, the "new women" resorted alternatively to persuasion. But their case for enhancing the training opportunities accorded women both in their recognized areas of employment and in men's proved, on the whole, unconvincing to those in policy positions. First of all was it not a waste of public money to invest in the vocational education of women who for the most part would retire from their jobs upon marriage? Furthermore, why should the public subsidize women's training for "men's work" when no demand existed for their services? The same line of reasoning also deferred many private educational bodies from acknowledging the training claims of women. As a result, facilities for women's higher and technical training, though

⁴⁶A. Zimmern, *The Renaissance of Girls' Education in England*, London: Innes, 1898, p. 248.

⁴⁷E. Morley (ed.), *Women Workers in Seven Professions*, London: Routledge, 1914, p. 65.

⁴⁸M. Davies, *The Women's Co-operative Guild, 1883-1904*, Kirkby Lonsdale: Women's Cooperative Guild, 1904, p. 11.

⁴⁹For the record of this change see The Central Committee of the Women's Co-operative Guild, *The Women's Co-operative Guild, 1895-1916*, 1916.

⁵⁰*Education (Girls) Bill*, sec. 3; 1910 (70) i, 1911 (153) i and 1912-13 (70) i.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, sec. 2.

existing, were much fewer than those available for men.

But their efforts on behalf of women's vocational training were not a total loss during the period under review. Some tangible progress had been made, notably in improving their sex's preparation for women's work. One of their foremost achievements was the London Day Trade School for Girls. In addition, largely due to the initiative of "new women", private schools were either opened or expanded for the training of women for such occupations as nursery maid, physical training teacher and clerk.⁵² Also their agitation to improve women's training opportunities was not without its educational effect on the public. In its wake came a greater awareness of the extent to which training facilities were lacking and a greater understanding of why the prevailing situation needed to be remedied.

Furthermore, not to be overlooked was the part played by women's organizations themselves in training their sex for the nation's more responsible posts. They afforded women opportunities, rarely present in mixed organizations, to gain experience as public speakers, administrators, investigators, organizers, editors and the like, and in the process they served not only to build up women's self-confidence in their abilities and potentialities but also, by the examples they provided of women in these positions, to inspire the younger generation. As one contemporary noted, girls were far more encouraged by what women were doing than by what men had done.⁵³ In addition, by accustoming men to seeing women active in public life, they helped to break down conventional male antagonism to wives and daughters having interests beyond the "narrow household boundary".⁵⁴

13.3 Technological and Ethical Developments

Up to this point the "improvement" noted in the female labour supply between 1891 and 1914 has been accounted for in terms of changing attitudes as they affected governmental policy and women's conception of their role and status. But this inquiry into the trends shaping women's labour would not be complete if it ignored certain technological and ethical developments which, though applying equally to both sexes, had a much greater impact on the quality of women's labour than on men's.

The contemporary growth of cheap and rapid means of urban transport—the bicycle, the tram, the underground, and the motor bus—was one such development. By continually enlarging the area within daily commuting distance of the family home, these new facilities were rendering women's greater immobility relative to men's less of an occupational handicap than hitherto.

The "new women" were especially affected by this technological factor. While not prompting their entrance into the labour market, it certainly facilitated it. As members of the upper classes they tended to be suburban dwellers. Yet as "ladies" they tended to be available only for the "genteel" occupations, the demand for which was largely concentrated in the urban centres. The developments occurring in local transport made it possible for these women both to remain respectably resident at home and to engage in such "suitable" employment as clerk or shop assistant. In contrast, manual workers tended to live much closer to the jobs they were willing to accept and therefore improved transportation facilities were less decisive in affecting their availability for work than for their more well-to-do sisters.

The technological development of far greater consequence to the woman manual worker was the spreading use of electricity. Although not lessening her immobility it tended to neutralize its handicapping effect by making possible the dispersion of industry to areas hitherto rejected because an economic supply of power had not been available. Thus the immobility of the women resident in these areas no longer signified their wholesale exclusion from gainful employment.

The other major development having special implications for women's labour was the contem-

⁵²E.g., The Norland Institute for the training of children's nurses founded in 1892, the Hampstead Physical Training College for the training of women in the Swedish system founded in 1885, the School of Business Training for Gentlewomen founded in 1893.

⁵³C. Bremner, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁵⁴*Women's Trades' Union Review*, no. 26, July 1897, p. 6.

porary movement to establish the “living wage” as the right of every gainfully occupied person. “New unionism” and “anti-sweating” were the movement’s rallying calls which by 1914 had been sufficiently heeded to start affecting wage practice. In so far as women were concerned, the campaign for a “living wage” manifested itself in the legal minimums set in certain “sweated” industries where women’s labour abounded;⁵⁵ in the seventeen-shilling-a-week standard rate set for adult women co-operative store employees;⁵⁶ and in the growing number of union agreements setting a floor under women’s wages in the years just prior to the outbreak of the First World War.⁵⁷

Underlying these measures was a revolutionary concept of what constituted a fair wage for women. For the first time a “single woman living alone with reasonable frugality” was being taken as its proper measure rather than a woman living in partial dependence at home. Though a self-sufficient wage was not always possible to achieve in practice, the principle had been established. This development signified a time when those working women independent of family help would no longer have to skimp on food in order to make ends meet. Instead their receipt of a “fair wage” would put them on a par with single men who even in the lowest paid trades tended to earn enough to provide themselves with a nourishing diet.⁵⁸ Whatever the natural difference between the sexes in strength and endurance, it would not be further increased, as it was in the present, by the inability of many self-supporting women to afford a wholesome diet.⁵⁹ Thus the growing acceptance of the “living wage” as a guide to action was serving to improve the physical capacity of women to work and so to render their labour more like men’s than had been the case previously.

⁵⁵Under authority of the Trades Boards Act of 1909 and the Trades Board Provisional Orders Confirmation Act of 1913, eight trade boards were established between 1909 and the outbreak of the First World War to fix rates of wages that would secure at least a minimum standard of life in the following trades: 1) ready-made and wholesale tailoring, 2) paper and cardboard box making, 3) machine-made lace and net finishing, 4) light chain making, 5) sugar confectionary and food preserving, 6) shirtmaking, 7) wrought hollowware and tin box making, and 8) linen and cotton (hand) embroidery.

⁵⁶See the Central Committee of the Women’s Co-operative Guild, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁵⁷See B. Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, London: Labour Research Dept. and Allen and Unwin, c. 1920, pp. 51 ff.

⁵⁸See J. Mallon, “Women’s Wages in the Wage Census of 1906” in B. Hutchins, *Women in Modern Industry*, London: Bell, 1915, p.234.

⁵⁹See *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, pp. 74, 250; 1919 Cmd. 135, xxxi.

Chapter 14

Demand Trends

Between 1891 and 1911 women's employment relative to female labour force growth expanded at an exceptional rate in some "industries" and declined, if not absolutely, then relatively in others. This was the net outcome of changing opportunities and of women's response to them. This chapter asks in what "industries" were women's opportunities changing? How much? Why? What did these changes signify for women's long-term employment prospects? What effect, if any, did they have on men's employment opportunities? In the next chapter on employment trends, why women responded as they did to their changing opportunities will be considered.

Before showing where and how much women's opportunities were changing it should be made clear that no measure of opportunity as distinct from employment exists. "Industrial" growth rates are indicative, provided account is taken of their being a more precise measure of expanding than of declining opportunities. Opportunities at an occupation's prevailing rates and conditions might remain constant and yet employment in it decline if the growth of other more attractive openings reduces its available supply of labour. Even so, if sufficient information is available to distinguish "decline" occurring for reasons of supply from that occurring for reasons of demand, "industrial" growth rates, as indices of opportunity change, need not be wrongly interpreted. Part One of this thesis, in its descriptive accounts of women's work, enables such a distinction to be made. What then, it may be asked, do the "industrial" rates of growth reveal about women's changing opportunities?

The figures show that every service "industry" other than Personal Service and National Defence experienced an exceptional influx of women; every primary "industry", an exceptional efflux. The pattern among the manufacturing "industries" was less regular. Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc.; Metals; Paper; Skins and Leather; Food, Drink and Tobacco; and Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass were relatively expanding "industries" for women while Clothing, Textiles, Miscellaneous Manufacture, and Construction were relatively, if not absolutely, declining ones for them. National Defence continued, as in 1891, to be an all-male "industry" while Food grew only at an "average" rate, that is at the rate of the female labour force growth.

How are these different growth rates to be explained? As Table 14.1 shows, an "industry's" expansion or contraction as such was no guarantee that women's employment within it would follow a similar course or, even if it did, that it would expand or contract to a like degree.

14.1 Industrial Developments

Part One supplies an important key. In its "industry" by "industry" account of women's work in relation to men's, it shows how, in the wake of certain technological, organizational and product market developments, the labour needs of "industries" changed both quantitatively and qualitatively. In those "industries" where such developments were producing at an "exceptional" rate an increasing number of jobs highly suitable for the feminine form of labour, women's employment expanded and

Table 14.1: Per Cent Increase or Decrease of Workers in Great Britain Between 1891 and 1911 by “Industry” and by Sex, and Females as a Per Cent of All Workers in 1891 and 1911 by “Industry”.

“Industry”	Per Cent Increase or Decrease 1891-1911			Per Cent Females of All Workers	
	Females	Males	All	1891	1911
Exceptional Expansion for Women:					
Public Utilities	644.44	123.88	124.00	.02	.08
Commerce	550.61	70.14	95.34	5.25	17.47
Public Administration	195.32	85.98	97.31	10.36	15.51
Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc.	166.74	93.87	108.24	19.72	25.25
Metals	107.21	57.08	69.61	4.85	6.30
Transportation and Communication	93.24	43.24	44.12	1.76	2.36
Paper	91.23	40.10	55.54	30.21	37.14
Distribution	58.50	58.44	58.46	29.99	29.99
Skins and Leather	49.78	2.89	12.34	20.15	26.87
Professional Service	45.12	37.78	41.21	46.80	48.10
Food, Drink and Tobacco	35.80	4.68	12.20	24.17	29.25
Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass	27.51	20.83	22.21	20.66	21.56
Exceptional Decline for Women:					
Mining	13.08	64.17	63.79	.74	.51
Personal Service	8.51	60.92	15.28	87.08	81.97
Clothing	3.81	-9.69	-.89	65.21	68.30
Textiles	3.52	3.34	3.45	59.40	59.44
Agriculture and Fishing	-14.03	1.49	.08	9.11	7.83
Miscellaneous Manufacture	-56.02	-44.03	-44.37	2.83	2.24
Construction	-72.73	26.56	26.26	.30	.06
Stable for Women:					
Wood	18.66	26.51	25.65	10.98	10.37
National Defence	-	65.07	65.07	-	-
Total All Workers	18.89	29.14	25.93	31.31	29.56

where the reverse was the case it contracted.

No new principle was involved in having changes in the female labour demand to so great an extent dependent upon the nature of industrial developments. All indications are that it was as responsible for fluctuations in an industry’s demand for female labour in the decades immediately prior to 1891 as it was in the decades immediately following it. Nevertheless it was of more than routine interest in the period under review. For industrial developments were evolving an occupational structure considerably more conducive to female employment outside the home than had been the case hitherto.

Foremost among such developments was the expanding practice of job sub-division whereby the lighter and less-skilled aspects of the work were separated from those requiring considerable strength, training and experience. The concomitant mechanization of certain processes also simplified and lightened work that previously had been skilled or laborious or both. The industrial application of the sewing machine and the press were cases in point. As these machines were adapted to the manufacture of an increasing variety of articles, so the demand for female labour arose in branches of industries where previously there had existed little, if any, such demand.

To some extent the impetus behind such work reorganization came from the advancing “scientific management” movement which, in Britain, first gathered momentum in the nineties.¹ Its adherents sought to increase output by devising more efficient work methods. Efficiency, many found, lay

¹See L. Urwick and E. Brech, *The Making of Scientific Management*, II, London: Pitman, reprint 1964, chap. 7.

in strength-saving and skill-saving techniques and devices. Accordingly, as these solutions were implemented, the prospects of employing women's characteristically weaker and less skilled labour improved.

But "scientific management" by itself did not account for the contemporary expansion of subdivision practices. Without mass orders for a standardized product such practices would have been uneconomical. What was making them more feasible was the developing demand of an expanding population for standardized mass-produced articles as contrasted with craftsman-made or home-made ones.²

Concurrently, the office and distributive sides of the business world were undergoing specialization and mechanization with similar occupational effects.³ For example, the operation of both the telephone and typewriter were light, and quickly learned processes which women could perform with ease. Moreover, these machines transmitted or transcribed the ideas of others, not of the operators. Therefore, to qualify as a telephone operator or typist meant possessing, apart from a general education, little more than simple mechanical skills. Changing retail practices were also simplifying much of the work of the shop assistant. In the case of distribution, however, as women advanced in its newer sectors, they declined as "assisting female relative". Accordingly the full advance was not yet reflected statistically although it gave promise of becoming so once the "industry's" transitional phase had passed.

Not only were industrial developments creating a flourishing demand for manual operatives and for low-grade clerical and distributive workers but also for professional workers engaged in services which women in the home had traditionally performed. This was of special significance to women because in work of this kind, unlike in most others, women's upbringing tended to be an asset rather than a handicap.⁴

The newly developing profession of social welfare work was one such example. Acts of charity had long been recognized as "unoccupied" women's work. When a demand for such services began to appear in the labour market of the eighties and nineties women proved an especially attractive source of supply—capable,⁵ willing and cheaper than men. The contemporary development of infant and maternity preventive health services for similar reasons enlarged women's employment opportunities. But above all it was the growing demand for sick nurses—an occupational offshoot of the contemporary growth of scientific medicine—and the growing demand for teachers—an occupational offshoot of a public compulsory education policy for an expanding population—that accounted for women's advancing position in the professional world. In "men's professions", even though many among them were also expanding, women's opportunities, other than as auxiliary workers, continued to be very limited.

A regrouping of "industries" in which women's opportunities expanded at an exceptional rate highlights the underlying industrial developments mentioned above. The economy's expanding need for low-grade clerical and distributive workers underlay women's expansion in Distribution, in Commerce, in Transportation and Communication, and in Public Administration; for manual operatives in Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc., in Metals, in Paper, in Skins and Leather, in Food, Drink and Tobacco, and in Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass; and for sick nurses and teachers in Professional Service. Moreover, even though clothing did not number among the expanding "industries", women's rising share in it stemmed, in the main, from its changing nature. As the major male-employing trades of tailoring and shoe-making underwent mechanization and process simplification the number of women in the former increased between 1891 and 1911 by forty-six per cent while the number of men remained virtually unchanged; and in the latter, declined by but five per cent as compared to the seventeen per cent decline of men.

As for women's exceptional decline, declining opportunity explained but a part of it. In Construc-

²For example, see above pp. 44-46, 54-55, 61, and 62.

³See above pp. 24, 25 and 27-28.

⁴See above pp. 124-125.

⁵That there were capable women available for such employment was itself an outgrowth of the developing "woman's rights" movement. See above pp. 138 ff.

tion and Miscellaneous Manufacture changing statistical procedures were an important contributor. Occupational headings which in 1891 included most female construction workers had been assigned by subsequent Censuses to the Metals Order. And as greater precision characterized the occupational returns of each successive Census, fewer women numbered among the occupationally “undefined”.⁶

In Mining, in Personal Service and in Agriculture and Fishing, on the other hand, women’s relative or absolute decline was to some extent attributable to women’s rejection of older opportunities as newer, more attractive ones developed. Because of their inter-relatedness, the “push” and “pull” elements in women’s employment picture are more intelligible considered as a unit. Therefore, all discussion of the “push” aspects, which is germane to this chapter as opportunity trends, is postponed until the following chapter on employment trends.⁷

As for the stable “industries” of Wood and National Defence, they were largely unaffected by the “industrial” developments that explain women’s exceptional expansion and in part their exceptional decline in other “industries”. Accordingly, Wood expanded at a rate simply in keeping with the female labour force growth while National Defence continued, as in 1891, to offer opportunities to males only.

What effect did women’s changing opportunities have on men’s? Table 14.2 shows a considerable rate of male displacement in Commerce. Per hundred persons so occupied, twelve more were women in 1911 than in 1891. Ranking next, but following considerably behind Commerce, were the service “industry” of Public Administration and the manufacturing ones of Paper, of Skins and Leather, of Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc., and of Food, Drink and Tobacco. To a yet smaller extent women advanced their share in Clothing, in Metals, in Professional Service, in Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass, and in Transportation and Communication.

Nevertheless, despite women’s advance at men’s expense in some one-half of the nation’s “industries”, this did not mean unemployment of the “displaced” men. “Displacement” in the sense that women by 1911 were usurping places that had been men’s in 1891 was the exception. In all the service “industries” where women’s share advanced—Commerce, Public Administration, Professional Service, and Transposition and Communication—men’s employment was expanding at a rate faster than the male labour force. Similarly, men’s manufacturing opportunities evidenced exceptional growth in the women-advancing “industries” of Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc., and of Metals. Thus what advanced women’s share in these “industries” was not the taking of jobs from men but the expansion of women’s opportunities at a faster rate than men’s. (see Table 14.1.)

Real “displacement” centred in Skins and Leather, in Food, Drink and Tobacco, in Clothing, and in Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass. In these “industries”, industrial developments were offering women exceptional opportunities but not men. Even so, men’s over-all employment opportunities did not diminish. Partly this was due to “new” work opening up for men in fields virtually untouched by female labour. Foremost among them were National Defence and Mining. Whereas the male labour force had grown by twenty-nine per cent between 1891 and 1911, the number of men in the military and in the mines had grown by over sixty per cent. In addition the big male-employing construction “industry” continued to keep pace with the male labour force growth and employed in 1911 one-fourth as many workers again over its 1891 figure. Moreover, men’s opportunities were expanding at an exceptional rate, as contrasted with women’s, in Personal Service and in keeping with women’s exceptional expansion in Distribution.

Thus what the changing shares indicate is that underlying industrial developments, by affecting male and female labour the same way but in differing degrees in some instances and in opposite ways in others, were producing an “industrial” realignment of men and women and not the advance of one at the expense of the other’s employment.

⁶Although this meant that to some extent the 1891 count of female construction workers was inflated and the 1891 count of female workers in each “industry” was deflated, the resulting statistical distortion is of little consequence because of the small numbers involved.

⁷See below pp. 158ff.

Table 14.2: Number of Females Displacing Males or Displaced by Males Per Hundred Persons Employed in Great Britain Between 1891 and 1911 by “Industry”.

“Industry”	Displacement Rate Per Hundred Persons Employed 1891-1911
<hr/> Females Displacing Males	
Service “Industries”:	
Commerce	12.22
Public Administration	5.15
Professional Service	1.30
Transportation and Communication	.60
Manufacturing “Industries”:	
Paper	6.93
Skins and Leather	6.72
Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc.	5.53
Food, Drink and Tobacco	5.08
Clothing	3.09
Metals	1.45
Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass	.90
<hr/> Females Displaced by Males	
Service “Industries”	
Personal Service	5.11
Manufacturing “Industries”	
Wood	.61
Primary “Industries”:	
Agriculture and Fishing	1.28
Mining	.23
<hr/> No or Virtually No Displacement	
Distribution ^a	–
National Defence	–
Textiles	.04 ^b
Public Utilities	.06 ^b
Construction ^c	.24 ^d
Miscellaneous Manufacture ^c	.59 ^d

^aLack of displacement accounted for by statistical adjustments made for purposes of comparability. See above p. 24

^bFemales displacing males.

^cBecause the displacement of females by males was largely statistical, the “industry” is grouped more accurately within the “no displacement” than within the “displaced by males” category.

^dFemales displaced by males.

14.2 "Better" Jobs for Women

Although industrial developments were extending women's opportunities in certain "industries" that extension was more illusory than real. It did not mean using female labour in new ways but rather a growth in the number of jobs of a kind conventionally performed by women.

The genuinely new uses to which women's labour was being put followed upon the demand for it to fill more of the nation's skilled and responsible positions. The emerging woman's rights movements was largely responsible for this development. As part of its campaign to raise women's occupational status it not only produced women capable of qualifying for such work⁸ but also fostered a demand for their services. This it did by 1) diminishing discriminatory practices and 2) promoting the professionalization of recognized women's work. What motivated these policies and how effective were they by the outbreak of the First World War?

The movement's interest in diminishing discrimination involved considerations of principle, expediency and sex-representation. First of all, that women by reason of their sex should be barred from jobs they were otherwise qualified to perform appeared highly unjust to a movement seeking a "fairer" deal for women. Therefore, it strove to abolish what it considered artificial limits to the demand for women's labour. Secondly, it found its attempts to achieve women's economic emancipation frustrated by a labour market situation in which women were accorded a less than living wage. To raise women's wages to a level of self-sufficiency, it was considered imperative to enlarge the demand for women's services. Thus the movement had a second incentive for pursuing its anti-discrimination policy. The third was rooted in its concern to assure that women's special interests and needs were adequately expressed and recognized. So long as the life experiences of men and women radically differed, it was thought impossible for a man to understand a woman's point of view, much less know how best to deal with her problems. Only women representing women could achieve this end. On these grounds the movement sought to have women in charge of women as workers and of women and children, as consumers of services.

Lacking the necessary political and economic power in their own right to realize their ends, these "new women" sought to persuade those possessing that power, namely male legislators, male employers and employed men of the justice of their claims. "We ... take all labour for our province",⁹ was the keynote of their propaganda campaign. They supported their position with arguments that aimed to have women accepted as full-fledged members of the labour market and not as weak, meantime and subsidized workers fit only for women's conventional type of work.

Thus when work was denied to women because its requirements were alleged to be incompatible with the female nature, the "new women" asked for proof. Until conjecture gave way to trial, they argued, the exclusion of half the human race from work it might wish to perform was insupportable. Furthermore, they maintained that once women were given the chance to demonstrate what they could and could not do there would be no need to restrict their employment artificially as women's own organic incapacity, if such existed, would prove the most powerful barrier of all to their use for "unsuitable" work.¹⁰

To the more extreme-minded, even the fact that certain work or its attendant conditions might cause women harm was an irrelevant ground for excluding only their sex from it. Provided the woman was an adult, expressing free choice of occupation and causing no harm to others by her action, they thought her right to self-determination ought to be as much respected as a man's.¹¹ Thus to them, if the public house bar was unfit for women to work in, it was equally unfit for men. Or if, as claimed, women were more liable to lead poisoning than men, they advocated that the lead process in question be "swept away" rather than hamper women in getting work by legally banning their employment in it.¹²

⁸See above pp. 141 ff.

⁹O. Schreiner, *Woman and Labour*, London: Unwin, 1911, p. 195.

¹⁰See O. Schreiner, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

¹¹This viewpoint is well represented in J. Boucherett. H. Blackburn *et al.*, *The Condition of Working Women and the Factory Acts*, London: Stock, 1896.

¹²International Council of Women, *Report of the Second Quinquennial Meeting Held in London, July 1899*, London:

To strengthen their case against natural incapacity, the “new women” denied its converse, namely that there was an inherent connection between the work women did and the “ovarian sex function”. Instead of proving any such organic relationship, maintained one of their leading spokeswoman, Miss Olive Schreiner, it only showed “that in the cramped, walled-in, and bound conditions surrounding woman” these were the lines along which action was most possible to her.¹³

As for woman’s role in society, the “new women” were critical of beliefs that considered women’s real work homemaking and gainful employment only an incidental phase in their lives. They pointed to those women who never married. Instead of relegating them, as women, to the most mediocre jobs the economy had to offer, these spinsters, they argued, should be entitled to the most interesting since their need for self-fulfilment through work was far greater than the average man’s. Whereas men were almost invariably husbands and so had strong family interests to sustain them when work proved monotonous, these women as a rule did not.

As for married women, they claimed it was wrong to think of them all as natural mothers and housekeepers. Some just did not fit into the prescribed housewife role but preferred to be earners. This did not mean that working wives were necessarily inferior homemakers and mothers and they offered as proof the “facts” that high infant mortality rates were far more closely associated with poverty and overcrowding than with mothers working and that contrary to popular opinion, married women cotton weavers were competent mothers and housekeepers who used their earnings to further the welfare of their families in such ways as holiday outings, additional schooling and domestic assistance.

But more was to be learned from the example of these weavers than that women could work without detriment to their family life. Of even greater moment was the evidence the weavers afforded of women successfully combining, not just work as such, but actually careers with their marriages. Therefore, they concluded, there was no justification to prohibit categorically married women from working if they so desired. They urged the abolition of such employer practices as not hiring married women, dismissing women on marriage, or not promoting single women in anticipation of their retirement upon marriage.

The “new women” also questioned the truth of the generally held conviction that women did not really need to work and so it was only fair to relegate them to the low-paying jobs which constituted women’s work while saving the “plums” for men who had families to support. They stressed the hardship caused by this practice since there were women who were obliged to be self-supporting or even had the financial responsibility for dependents. As one authority on working women noted, “self-dependence is a necessity” for many women “even at the age when and in the class where marriage reaches its highest point of frequency”. Marriage at best, she argued, provided for about “three-fourths of women but for twenty years only, between 35 and 55”. After that time they could no longer rely on their husbands for support. This was because women as a sex tended to live longer than men and, furthermore, were usually younger than their husbands. Thus most women had to face the problem of self-support, if not during their girlhood and prime of life, then in their later years as widow.¹⁴

Apart from the question of dependents, there was the one of the lower physical and mental needs of women to justify their exclusion from the nation’s better-paying work. This assertion, the “new women” claimed, lacked any factual foundation. That women at present managed on less did not, in their minds, prove that they needed less but that they could not afford to satisfy their needs to the same extent as a man.

Besides showing to what extent women “needed” to work and how much they “needed” to live, the “new women” also attacked the system that placed women in economic dependence. Although admitting that some working women, despite the low level of their wages, were well-nourished and well-dressed because members of families in comfortable circumstances, the “new women” argued

Unwin, 1900, VI, 57.

¹³O. Schreiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-159.

¹⁴B. Hutchins, “Statistics of Women’s Life and Employment”, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, vol. 72, pt. ii, June 1909, pp. 213, 217.

that "no normal woman should be compelled by economic exigencies to live with persons towards whom she" had "not voluntarily undertaken responsibilities".¹⁵ Viewing economic independence as a right to which every working woman was entitled, they maintained women should have as free access as men to jobs that paid a "living wage".

For those audiences to whom the argument against women's economic dependence was too revolutionary to be acceptable, the "new women" used another. They stressed what a "vicious principle" it was to have working girls "dependent on men for all their pleasures"¹⁶ as obviously the greater a woman's "difficulty in earning money honestly", the greater would be her "temptation" to earn it immorally.¹⁷ If, on the other hand, the value of women's labour could be raised by removing restrictions on its demand, then one very "fruitful source of sin"¹⁸ would no longer exist.

Next, the "new women" tried to show how poorly qualified men were to deal with matters concerning the opposite sex. They pointed to the solvency of all societies composed of married women under the original National Health Insurance Act. Had women been consulted from the first, they alleged, the error of assuming that women's incidence of illness would be less than men's could have been avoided. They also deplored the "callous" way in which man-made restrictions on women's labour were imposed. For example, when Parliament made factory or workshop employment of women, within four weeks of their confinement illegal, no account was taken of what would happen to those women affected by the Act. The same lack of concern was noted when women's employment in certain lead processes was prohibited.

Supplementing the "new women's" general propaganda campaign were specific offensive and defensive measures. As a part of their offensive campaign the "new women" appealed the decision of the Benchers of Gray's Inn against allowing a woman to become a Bar student and that of the Law Society against admitting four women applicants to its examinations.¹⁹ They persuaded sympathetic members of Parliament to introduce Bills making it a legal offense to deny women entrance to certain work by reason of their sex or marriage.²⁰ They testified before the Royal Commission on Labour why only women could get at the truth about the conditions of women's labour. Women, they argued, were reluctant to tell their views to men while men were too obtuse to realize that working men's views were not necessarily shared by working women. In corroboration one witness testified that throughout all her years of factory employment she never heard a factory inspector ask any question of a woman. So that her sex might have a mouthpiece she urged the appointment of women factory inspectors.²¹ Once such appointments were made, these inspectors added the weight of their official comments to those made unofficially. For example, they discovered in their visits to factories the practice of employers setting men to control the daily use of women's conveniences and reported it as "intolerable in civilised opinion".²²

To frustrate attempts to exclude women from jobs they already had, the "new women" adopted yet other measures. They showed by their investigations that claims that particular work was "unfit" for women, whether because of its "demoralising, brutalising effect" such as gut-scraping or its detrimental effect on their health such as compositing, were statements without foundation in fact. They organized protest meetings such as that of the women florists who claimed their jobs would go to men if the Factory Acts' overtime restrictions were rigidly applied to their trade. Instead of excluding women from certain pottery processes because of their sex's alleged greater

¹⁵B. Hutchins, *Women in Modern Industry*, London: Bell, 1915, p. 233.

¹⁶Evidence from the Women's Industrial Council and Fabian Women's Group, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc.*, p. 17; 1919 Cmd. 167, xxxi.

¹⁷Evidence from Mrs. J. Ramsay MacDonald, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws: Appendix, VIII*, 230; 1910 Cd. 5066, xlvi.

¹⁸(Lady) L. Ridding, *The Woman's League: Its Aims and Objects*, 1889, p. 14.

¹⁹For an account of women's attempt to enter the legal profession, which was contemporary to the period under review, see E. Lang, *British Women in the Twentieth Century*, London: Laurie, 1929, pp. 145 ff.

²⁰See *Legal Profession (Admission of Women) Bill*; 1912-13 (196) iii. *Solicitors (Qualification of Women) Bill*; 1914 (100) vi. *Civil Service (Women) Bill*; 1910 (77) i, 1911 (152) i, 1912-13 (71) i. *Education (Girls) Bill*; 1910 (70) i, 1911 (153) i, 1912-13 (70) i.

²¹Royal Commission on Labour, *Minutes of Evidence taken before Group "C"*, I, Qu. 8112, 8114; 1892 C. 6708, xxxv.

²²*Factory Report, 1912*, p. xv; 1913 Cd. 6852, xxiii.

susceptibility to lead poisoning, they proposed that only leadless glaze be used or that restrictions be placed on individuals showing special susceptibility and not on women as such. They threatened the organized miners with a test case in court at the “first sign of any attempt to prevent the [pit brow] women from carrying on their work”.²³ And they attempted to discredit publicly the motives of other working men concerned with legally restricting women’s employment by insisting that the purpose behind their proposals was to drive women out of the labour market and not as claimed to promote the general welfare.

The anti-discrimination campaign of the “new women”, however, was greatly weakened by internal dissension. Although they as a body were critical of any grounds used to exclude women from work which did not also apply to men, they differed as individuals in their views as to which were and were not acceptable grounds. The varied reaction to the proposal to exclude women by law from serving behind the bar was typical.²⁴

Even among those most in favour of temperance reform and among those who granted the objections to the barmaid’s life, there were many who adhered to the view that it was “injurious to women’s interests to withdraw any opportunities of gaining an honest livelihood” so long as their sex was “debarred by law and public opinion from many fields of useful and lucrative labour”.²⁵

But those overly-concerned with the moral dangers of the calling argued back that the true way of helping struggling women was “not to keep open for them in mistaken kindness the most dangerous unskilled trade of all, which adds to the economic evils common to all of them the terrible evils peculiar to itself, which cannot be fully explained to young girls ... but rather to make the skilled trades which are open to them better known and where necessary to effectively aid them to enter one or other”.²⁶

The more suffrage-centred claimed that no women should be legally debarred from any employment so long as women had no voice in making such a law. To others the issue of individual freedom appeared uppermost and they joined with such leaders of the laissez-faire school of thought as Lady Frances Balfour and Lord Wemyss in opposing any restrictions on female labour.

The barmaid question even split the two top leaders of the women’s trade union movement, Mary MacArthur and Margaret Bondfield. In the pages of *The Woman Worker*, the official organ of the National Federation of Women Workers, their opposing views were aired. Mary MacArthur was against abolishing the barmaid, not because she was in sympathy with the “freedom-to-be-a-slave attitude of mind” but because she thought the moral issue a false one. “If those who are so keen to safeguard our morals”, she maintained, “would turn their attention from the abolition of the barmaids to the securing of a minimum wage for all women workers they would be doing something really practical and more likely to secure their avowed, and very laudable object”.²⁷ To Margaret Bondfield, on the other hand, the sexual excitement fostered by excessive drinking could not be disassociated from the barmaid’s calling. On the ground that “the individual must be subservient to the good of the race”, she took the contrary view.²⁸

Though weakened by internal dissension, the “new women’s” campaign to improve their sex’s employment opportunities was showing some tangible results by 1914. By favourably influencing legislative thinking it rendered, first of all, the employer’s freedom to make use of women’s labour larger than it otherwise would have been. Though unable to abolish protective legislation for women altogether, the campaign had won sufficient converts in Parliament to retard the enactment of further restraining measures.

As the period drew to a close Parliament became increasingly hesitant to impose legal restrictions on women’s labour that were not imposed on men’s. This did not mean that it was any less

²³ *Women’s Industrial News*, new series, no. 56, Jan. 1912, p. 22.

²⁴ See above pp. 17-18.

²⁵ Mrs. Philipps *et al.*, *A Dictionary of Employments Open to Women*, London: Women’s Institute, 1898, p. 16.

²⁶ Joint Committee on the Employment of Barmaids, *Women as Barmaids*, London: Published for the Joint Committee on the Employment of Barmaids by King, 1905, pp. 53-54.

²⁷ *Woman Worker*, new series, no. 7, July 17, 1908, p. 189.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, new series, no. 8, July 24, 1908, p. 239.

concerned with assuring the welfare of working women in 1914 than in 1891 but it did indicate a new respect for women as persons and as workers, namely, that their job choice should be as free as men's and that their labour should not be competitively handicapped by artificial restrictions. As the initial chivalrous attitude of the state towards women gave way to a more equalitarian one, the means employed to safeguard their health at work changed. Instead of preventing women's employment in ways deemed harmful, the government's approach was increasingly to render an occupation or its conditions "suitable" for women. And when under the existing circumstances such an approach seemed unattainable and restrictions of some sort appeared necessary, the government was increasingly careful not only to obtain but also to incorporate the views of the working women to be affected and of women authorities on female employment.

The change noted in Parliament's approach to protective labour legislation for women was also making it more difficult for employed men to protect their vested interest in their trade by means of legal restraints on women's use. This meant that if an employer was powerful enough to resist his male employees' economic coercions the possibility of being legally denied the use of women's labour because of the political influence employed men were able to wield became increasingly remote. So in yet a second way the "new women's anti-discrimination campaign could be credited with according employers more power to hire women than would have been the case had no such campaign occurred in the 1891-1914 period.

But it was not the stemming of restrictions *per se* that constituted the campaign's most significant achievement. First of all, no matter how great those victories, their actual effect on women's employment opportunities would necessarily be minor since, as a factor contributing to the limited demand for female labour, the employer's inability to hire women was not of major consequence.²⁹ Secondly, even what the campaign was able to achieve along these lines did little to open up men's work to women. At most it preserved as women's, work which was in danger of being taken from them by law. For neither by legal decree nor by the strength of their own bargaining position were they able to release the employer from the coercive power exerted by employed men to bar women from male occupations.

From the standpoint of opening male occupational strongholds to women, the greatest victories of the "new women" were on the employer front. By focusing public attention on the validity and desirability of beliefs impinging upon women's employment and by their own organizational activities, which not only demonstrated what women were capable of but also accustomed men to seeing women in skilled and responsible posts, the "new women" were successful in converting a small but growing number of employers to their way of thinking. These "new men", unlike their counterparts among legislators and officials of employed men's associations, were in a key position to give effect to their views as they exercised the power to hire.

They were most moved by the women-for-women argument with the result that women's first opportunities to do work of a responsible or skilled character in a recognized male sphere came in the form of their acting as specialists in matters pertaining to their sex. These same opportunities also provided women with their widest inroad into men's type of upper-grade work as few were the contemporary employers sufficiently "advanced" to consider women for such posts other than as a sex representative.

Thus James Stansfeld, the so-called Victorian champion of sex equality, as President of the newly established Local Government Board, "took the daring step" of appointing in 1873 the first woman government inspector to investigate the pauper school education of girls. Henry Fawcett, husband of one of the leaders of the suffragist movement and himself a strong advocate of "woman's rights", as Postmaster-General created in 1883 the first medical post for women in the Civil Service, that of medical superintendent of the female post office clerks. Sir Robert Morant, "A great believer in utilizing the services of women in work relating to women", upon becoming Permanent Secretary to the Board of Education in 1903 "set himself to develop a real woman inspectorate".³⁰ Moreover, some

²⁹See above Chap. 10.

³⁰See respectively A. Martindale, *Women Servants of the State, 1870-1938*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1938, pp. 30, 39-40; E. Bell, *Storming the Citadel*, London: Constable, 1953, pp. 178-179.

of these “new employers” were such ardent supporters of the woman’s rights movement that they even went so far as to offer “equal pay” for what they considered to be “equal work”. In the newly established National Health Insurance Commission of 1911, unbounded by tradition in recruiting and framing its salary scale, and under the administration of such “new men” as Sir Robert Morant, women were not only included from the start, thereby making it the first government department to do so, but it also paid its women Commissioners an “equal” and consequently a “fantastic salary for a woman”, of £1,000 a year.³¹ Moreover, the salaries of its men and women inspectors and health insurance officers were “more nearly approximate to equality than in any previous appointments”.³²

But to the “new women” even their most noteworthy gain into men’s sphere of work did not appear as much of a victory. . Admittedly the principle that only women could effectively represent women’s interests was much more widely accepted in 1914 than in 1891 when even the need for lady factory inspectors was a debatable issue. Admittedly some higher grade posts had been opened to women as a result of their agitation. Nevertheless, they maintained the number of such openings was insignificant relative to the need and so they persisted in their efforts to have more women employed in such capacities as park attendants, factory supervisors and probation officers.

Diminishing discriminatory practices was but one of the means adopted by the “new women” to improve their employment opportunities. The other was the professionalization of recognized women’s work. In contrast to the limited achievement of the former by 1914, the latter had made substantial strides. As the “new women” discovered, it was easier for them to affect a work situation in which women were already indisputably entrenched than to pursue the far more revolutionary policy of forcing women’s entrance into male occupational strongholds.

In their efforts to professionalize women’s work, the “new women” acted principally as opportunists rather than as innovators. For professionalization, as a movement, was occurring for reasons independent of their own existence and affecting both men’s and women’s occupations indiscriminately.³³ Formerly, when women’s occupational outlook and opportunities were much more modest, any work of theirs which underwent professionalization was lost to their sex. But in the period under review, largely because of the “new women’s” initiative, the professionalization of women’s work served to elevate rather than destroy the demand for their labour.

The “new women” saw the professionalization of women’s work as a means of enhancing women’s occupational status. In the raising of the standards of service and in the requiring of thorough training from those rendering it, they saw not simply the elimination of incompetence but the chance “to place the stamp of dignity”³⁴ upon women’s work and thus upon those performing it. Out of this increased respect, certain material benefits were to flow, namely a higher monetary valuation and better working conditions.

It was the growing professionalization of housewifery skills which gave the “new women” their opportunity to translate their theory into practice. The housewifery knowledge that had been transmitted by generations of mothers to generations of daughters no longer sufficed. More efficient ways of performing the duties of wife and mother were now known. Already sick nursing and teaching were recognized professions. The previously held assumption that all women could nurse and teach by instinct³⁵ had had to give way slowly as the accumulated data of scientific discoveries were incorporated into the care of the sick and the instruction of the young. Other facets of housewifery, such as infant care, nutrition, hygiene and household management were similarly undergoing scientific scrutiny with like results.

Throughout the period under review the “new women” joined forces with those persuaded by the merits of the case in promoting the professionalization of midwifery, sick nursing and teaching. With domestic service, however, they played a more independent role and tried to force the pace before

³¹H. Martindale, *op. cit.*, p. 64. “Equal pay” was also offered on principle by Henry Fawcett in the instance cited. See E. Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

³²E. Morley (ed.), *Women Workers in Seven Professions*, London: Routledge, 1914, p. 251.

³³See A. Carr-Saunders and P. Wilson, *The Professions*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933, esp. pt. ii.

³⁴Central Bureau for the Employment of Women, *The Fingerpost*, London: 1906, p. 224.

³⁵See International Council of Women, *Report of Transactions of the Second Quinquennial Meeting Held in London, July 1899* London: Unwin, 1900, III, 14 and V, 69.

there was much public demand. Behind this urgency was their desire to make it a "fit" occupation for destitute ladies whose lack of intellect or inability to finance long training prevented their entry into a recognized profession which would enable them to earn their living in a manner befitting their social station.³⁶

Along with their propaganda activities to show the need both for a higher level of performance from those engaged in women's service occupations and for restricting entrance to the "qualified", the "new women", sometimes on their own initiative and sometimes in cooperation with interested parties, devised training schemes and qualifying examinations to enable women to attain professional status. In addition they promoted measures to facilitate women taking advantage of these opportunities. To overcome the financial obstacle, they campaigned for subsidized training, whether the source of aid be the family, the public, or private loan training funds. Or, as with nursing, they so organized the system of training that women could pay for it by work rather than in cash.

Fortunately for the "new women", the public had been sufficiently aroused about the consequences of incompetence among its midwives and elementary school teachers so that by 1914 official systems of certification were in operation. The professional standing of the nation's sick nurses was less well established. Though a section of them were agitating for a similar legal closing of their occupation to the "unqualified", the most they were able to achieve by the outbreak of the First World War was an informal recognition of the professional status of those nurses who had been trained and accredited by any one of the famous London teaching hospitals, each of which, in curriculum and examination, operated as a law unto itself. The reputation of other private training agencies, such as those for kindergarten, physical training and domestic science teachers, for nursery nurses, and for social workers was also imparting to their graduates a certain professional status in the eyes of the public. However, these occupations were still too weakly organized as professions to limit the choice of the employer to just those who had been trained in a prescribed way.

As for the "new women's" own pet professionalization project, that of private domestic service, it had made little headway by 1914. Though admittedly the lady servants were credited with having done something to raise the status of the occupation, it was "not yet very much."³⁷ Recruits were difficult to obtain as few ladies in need could be convinced of the respectability of such work for women of their rank. Even those that did train were often unwilling to serve under an English mistress. Instead they used their training to teach the domestic arts or to qualify for a job in the Colonies. Despite propaganda to the contrary, they clung to the idea that it was more genteel to teach or to emigrate than to become a servant in Britain. Nor did ladylike attitudes that prevailed among those who actually became servants, such as an unwillingness to do menial work or a reluctance to take their meals in the kitchen, promote a demand for lady servants. Thus for both supply and demand reasons, attempts to professionalize domestic service proved unrewarding.

On the whole the problem of incompetence in women's work persisted throughout the 1891-1914 period. Though of smaller dimensions than formerly, it was still sizeable enough to impede the attempt by the "new women" to raise their sex's occupational status by professionalizing work already recognized as women's.

³⁶For description of plan by its promoter, Mrs. Rose Mary Crawshay, see her *Domestic Service for Gentlewomen*, 1876.

³⁷C. Butler, *Domestic Service*, London: Bell, 1916, p. 40.

Chapter 15

Employment Trends

How did women's changing "industrial" opportunities on the one hand and female labour's improving quality on the other affect the pattern of women's employment? And what did these changes signify for the sex division?

15.1 "Industrial" Shift

Whereas four-fifths of all working women in 1891 were either manufacturing textiles or clothing or performing teaching, personal or nursing and midwifery services, the proportion by 1911 had dropped to three-fourths. Concomitant with the declining importance to women of these standard employment outlets, considered as a whole, was the rising importance of clerical¹ and distributive services and to a lesser extent of metals, of paper, of chemicals, etc., of food, drink and tobacco, of skins and leather, and of brick, cement, etc. manufacture as well as men's branches of professional service. Only fifteen per cent of working women were in this work in 1891 but by 1911 about one in every four were.

Stated in another way, out of every two hundred working women, fourteen fewer were in women's standard employments in 1911 than in 1891, while eleven more were engaged in office and retail work, four more in the manufacture of metals, of paper and of chemicals, etc., one more in the manufacture of food, drink and tobacco, of skins and leather, and of brick, cement, etc., and one more in men's branches of professional service. On the other hand, two fewer women per every two hundred employed were in agriculture in 1911 compared to 1891, and one fewer per every two hundred employed was in construction, in mining and in miscellaneous manufacture combined.²

Now this shift could be accounted for in either of two ways. Contraction of their traditional openings could be forcing women into the new or the attraction of the new could be causing them to reject the old. An analysis of the nation's "industrial" growth rates would seem to support the "contraction" theory. Compared to labour force growth, Personal Service and Textiles were relatively declining "industries" and Clothing was an absolutely declining one. On the other hand Professional Service was an expanding "industry" and so was women's professional work. (See Table 14.1)

With Textiles and Clothing, contraction explained much of women's outflow from them. Even a slight rise in women's share in Textiles and a more substantial rise in Clothing were not able to compensate for the reduced employment opportunities that declining markets and the spread of labour-saving techniques occasioned. Moreover, with Personal Service, even apart from the relative decline of the "industry" as a whole, was the fact of men's displacement of women to reduce further women's opportunities within it. Between 1891 and 1911 men's share rose from thirteen to eighteen

¹Includes not only Commerce but Public Administration and Transportation and Communication since women's employment in them was also largely clerical in nature.

²The decline in Construction and Miscellaneous Manufacture was on the whole statistical in source.

Table 15.1: Change in Per Cent Distribution of Occupied Females in Great Britain by "Men's" and "Women's" 'Industries' and Professional Services' Between 1891 and 1911.

"Industry"	1891		1911		Difference ^a 1891-1911	
<hr/>						
"Women's": With Increase						
Teaching, Nursing and Midwifery	4.74		5.55		.81	
		4.74		5.55		.81
<hr/>						
"Women's": With Decrease						
Personal Service	43.04		39.28		-3.76	
Clothing	16.59		14.48		-2.11	
Textiles	16.29	75.92	14.19	67.95	-2.10	-7.97
<hr/>						
Total "Women's 'Industries' and Professional Services"		80.66		73.50		-7.16
<hr/>						
"Men's": With Increase						
Commerce	.53		2.89		2.36	
Distribution	6.94		9.25		2.31	
Metals	1.26		2.19		.93	
Paper	1.34		2.15		.81	
Public Administration	.37		.92		.55	
Professional Services ^b	1.05		1.51		.46	
Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc.	.31		.70		.39	
Transportation and Communication	.44		.71		.27	
Food, Drink and Tobacco	1.49		1.70		.21	
Skins and Leather	.44		.56		.12	
Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass	.66	14.83	.70	23.28	.04	8.45
<hr/>						
"Men's": With Decrease						
Agriculture and Fishing	3.27		2.37		-.90	
Construction	.06		.01		-.05	
Mining	.12		.11		-.01	
Miscellaneous	.56	4.01	.21	2.70	-.35	-1.31
<hr/>						
"Men's": Without Change						
Wood	.53		.53		-	
Public Utilities	-		-		-	
National Defence	-	.53	-	.53	-	-
<hr/>						
Total "Men's 'Industries' and Professional Services"		19.37		26.51		7.14
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^aDifference of .02 per cent between decrease in "Women's" and increase in "Men's" is due to rounding of figures.

^bOther than Teaching, Nursing and Midwifery.

per cent. Even so, as Part One reveals, opportunities at prevailing rates and conditions were present which were not fully utilized.³ Vacancies existed for resident domestic servants above the numbers recorded as so occupied by the 1911 Census. How numerous such vacancies were is difficult to know. But if it is assumed that as least the same number of openings, filled and unfilled, relative to total population existed in 1911 as did filled ones in 1891 a rough estimate can be made, namely that seven more working women out of every one hundred could have become private domestic servants at prevailing rates and conditions than actually did.

Furthermore, the relative decline in the demand for women in Personal Service and Clothing might not have been as great had there existed no growing number of alternative openings more attractive to women. As the period drew to a close more employers remarked of a shortage of labour in the hand sections of the laundry and dressmaking trades. One answer to the shortage was to adopt labour saving methods such as specialization and mechanization which not only reduced the need for female labour of the requisite skills and strength but also produced a small demand for men that had been virtually non-existent before.

Based on the above findings it would appear that for every two hundred women employed at most eight out of the fourteen in work different from that constituting the backbone of women's employment in 1891 could be considered as "forced" because of a shortage of jobs to seek work elsewhere. What was the attraction of the "new" demand? Why was not Personal Service able to hold its own in the competition for female labour?

Although changing job contents were rendering women's labour a practical proposition in the "men's industries" evidencing a marked increase in the use of women, that factor alone did not explain their presence. If at the same time those "industries" failed to offer working conditions satisfying the "suitability" standards of the grade of female labour they hoped to attract, their labour demand would have remained largely unfilled. The commercial and distributive "industries" were especially vulnerable on this point. Though they had jobs which made no great demands on the strength or skill of the worker, they did require workers who were well-mannered, of good appearance and who had a reasonable command of the written and spoken word and of arithmetic. In the period under review, women with such attributes were to be found almost exclusively among the more respectable classes to whom ladylike conditions of work were of paramount importance. Fortunately, from the point of view of the two industries, a genteel atmosphere was an automatic by-product of their use of offices and shops as workplaces. Since few other industries capable of utilizing female labour could match, without additional cost to themselves, the refined working conditions that came "naturally" to commerce and distribution, they had a decided advantage over their competitors for the grade of female labour they demanded and never suffered from a dearth of able applicants for their highly-esteemed jobs.

Though the factory as a place to work lagged far behind the office and the shop in women's estimation, rising factory standards as well as new technological and architectural developments were tending to lessen the existing gap. For example, a quieter and healthier factory atmosphere came in the wake of electricity's growing use for light and power. The dust removal and whitewashing requirements of the Factory Acts were producing a cleaner work environment, while producing a more "decent" one was the government's insistence by 1903 on separate lavatory accommodation for the sexes in factories and workshops not subject to any local sanitary ruling on the matter. As the idea of welfare supervision of women workers spread, so the stigma attached to factory employment on moral grounds declined. Especially benefiting from such modern developments in factory accommodation were the newly developing branches of industry and the ones undergoing radical transformation in their methods so as to require a complete overhauling of their former ways and facilities. Since it was these same branches of manufacture which were also providing the backbone of the new factory demand for women's labour, they encountered little difficulty in attracting workers.

No discussion of the changes occurring in women's employment can be understood without focusing special attention on private domestic service. Its exceptional decline had little to do with a

³See above pp. 14-15.

contraction in the trade's demand for workers at prevailing rates of pay and conditions. This unmet demand was partly the outcome of rising educational standards which had deprived the servant ranks of the useful labours of the ten to fourteen year olds. But it was even more the reluctance of women to enter such work as alternative ways of earning a living presented themselves.

This reluctance was especially noteworthy considering that this was the work thought most ideal for working class women because it prepared them for their future married life. As one contemporary occupational guidebook commented:

Whether as cook she has learned to cater economically and to serve simple things temptingly for her husband, whether as housemaid she has learned to scrub and sweep and clean her home, whether as nursemaid she has learned the delicate art of caring for the babies that are now her own, she has become a more efficient wife and mother. And if as "general" she has learned all sides of home keeping and can cook and clean and sew and mother the babies all at once, she is a priceless possession for a working man.⁴

Like its content, its remuneration was also not a cause of complaint. Domestic service was considered a lucrative and in many ways a luxurious trade, especially to the poor. As one servant girl commented. "For poor people—very poor—it seems the one great thing to have your lodging, washing and bed, practically free".⁵ Many parents were anxious for their girls to enter service not only because of its good living but because of the opportunities it gave to save. As recorded in Charles Booth's study, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, there "can be little doubt that from a monetary point of view the advantages of a servant's life are great". He noted that it was by no means uncommon to find girls, disliking the restraints and suffering much from homesickness, willingly enduring the work for a long time in order to send home the help which its remuneration enabled them to spare.⁶ Why then was domestic service so unpopular among working women?

Some were deterred by its alleged lack of marriage opportunities. Supposedly, "living-in" did not provide the same opportunity for meeting men as factory or shop employment. This isolation was often intensified by the "no followers" rule enforced in some houses. Others were dissuaded by its material conditions. At times the work exacted, especially in the worst class of situations, was such as to cause a servant's physical break-down. And as one employer well-versed in the problems of domestic servants had to admit, the living quarters provided were "sometimes disgraceful in their darkness, lack of ventilation and sanitary conveniences".⁷

But bad as the job situation might be in individual instances, this was not a prime reason for the existing prejudice against private domestic service. Of far greater importance was the lack of personal freedom associated with a servant's life. As already noted, normally a servant was liable for duty between 6.30 a.m. and 10.00 p.m. and "free time" was limited to half a Sunday and one evening per week. Furthermore, the use made of this "free time" was on occasion subject to regulation by the employer. Accordingly, with the growth of reasonably good job prospects which permitted evenings and nights at home, a definite half holiday per week and all of Sunday, girls became less content than formerly to being "on call" all day.

But the dual meanings assigned by common usage to the word "menial"—1) a synonym for servant and the services performed by them and 2) low, mean—provides a valuable clue to what was perhaps the strongest reason for the widespread unpopularity of private domestic service. Though other branches of work shared many of its short-comings, such as lack of marriage opportunities and long hours, none shared to the same extent its universally acknowledged stigma of servility.

Status, in this respect, was less an issue in the country districts and in small towns partly because there were so few alternative occupations open. Nor was it a great problem when domestic service was performed in a working-class household where the servant was considered more as an addition to the family than a person of inferior station. It was in the fashionable suburbs of large towns and in

⁴M. Bird, *Woman at Work*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1911, pp. 106-107.

⁵As quoted in C. Butler, *Domestic Service*, London: Bell, 1916, p. 28.

⁶1st. ed., London: Macmillan, 1896, VIII, 224.

⁷Lady Willoughby de Broke, "An Employer's Conclusions" in C. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

the industrial districts that the issue of status was most pronounced. In the former, domestic service reached its fruition as a system of homemaking in which household work was ordinarily performed by members of a lower social class, while in the latter, the good alternative prospects for employment permitted women to give practical expression to their prejudices against domestic service.

The employers showed their superior attitude by referring to servants, except the highest ranking ones, by their Christian names. Other classes of labour expressed their feelings of superiority by such acts as remaining aloof when circumstances brought them into the company of servants or by stigmatizing them with the term "slavey". Tradespeople, for example, were reported as refusing to associate with servants present at a dance.⁸ Not even the Young Women's Christian Association could overcome this prejudice among its members. Some of its branches were forced to segregate domestic servants from shopworkers and dressmakers because they looked down on servants and refused to mix with them.⁹ To factory women the servant's customary cap appeared as a "trademark of modern slavery".¹⁰ Thus when one factory inspector inquired of a woman why she was not wearing the prescribed protective head covering he was told because in addition to hiding her "hair and fringe" it made her "look like a servant".¹¹ Perhaps most difficult of all for the servant to bear was the attitude held by some men of her own class that servants were too socially inferior to be considered for marriage partners.

Though the crux of the status problem lay in the superior-inferior personal relation of mistress and maid in an increasingly democratically conscious society, few proposals for attracting more women in the trade aimed to remedy this, one of the trade's most essential drawbacks. When it was proposed by some that well-to-do mothers should make all their children take some share in household work and that they and their daughters should have the "moral courage" at least occasionally to face the servants and cooks in their own kitchens, the aim was not to make an initial wedge in the status system of household labour but rather to find out, among other matters, what was "fair to expect maids to do".¹² When it was deplored that not nearly enough secondary schools contrived to include domestic subjects in their crowded curricula "whereas this should be universal",¹³ the implication was not that upper class girls should receive the form of domestic instruction meted out in the state elementary schools which was designed for those who would be doing their own housework. Instead it was to train girls to be more efficient mistresses in the normal eight to twenty room middle class household with its expected contingent of servants, ranging in number from one to a dozen.¹⁴

Numerically domestic service was so important to women as an occupational outlet¹⁵ that had it been a popular one, the new demand for female labour, in all likelihood, could not have been filled without offering women more than they had been receiving as domestic servants. But because of the general unpopularity of private domestic service there was little need to entice women away from it by monetary inducements. In fact so attractive were the new openings to women that instead of having at least to match if not surpass what mistresses in the home normally paid, some of the new employers found they could offer less and still suffer no shortage of applicants. Thus it was the "mistresses" and not the employers offering the new, more ladylike work who, in the competition for female labour, had to raise their bids for it.

Because the new labour market developments were largely urban-centred, urban women benefited much more from them than rural women. The new entrants to the labour market also benefited much more than those who had made their debut at an earlier period for, unlike the latter, their labour was still occupationally fluid. This is reflected in women's "industrial" influx and efflux figures which show but four per cent of the influx into "industries" between 1891 and 1911 as accounted for by

⁸C. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

⁹International Council of Women, *Report of Transactions of the Second Quinquennial Meeting Held in London, July 1899*, London: Unwin, 1900 VI, 110.

¹⁰C. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹¹*Factory Report, 1893*, p. 61; 1894 C.7368, xxi.

¹²C. Butler, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁴See E. Morley (ed), *Women Workers in Seven Professions*, London: Routledge, 1914, p. 74.

¹⁵In 1891, thirty-two per cent of all working women were private domestic servants; in 1901, twenty-nine per cent; in 1911, twenty-six per cent.

the efflux from other “industries”; the rest, by additions to the labour force which came in the wake of an expanding population.¹⁶

Until now women’s changing employment pattern has been viewed from an “industrial” standpoint. Though such a view reveals the major direction in which women’s work was changing, it does not reveal the entire picture. If the character of women’s work becomes the analytical point of departure then the end of the 1891-1914 period witnessed a higher proportion of women in lighter, more skilled and more responsible work than at its beginning.

The tendency for women to do less laborious work was the joint product of a changing technology requiring less physical strength *per se* and the spread of ideals of feminine refinement from the upper to the lower classes. The decline of women in agriculture was the foremost example of this type of employment shift but it was also evident in mining where women’s employment declined relatively. A change in the type of farming carried on in Britain as well as in agricultural methods rendered women’s unskilled hand labour of dwindling use to the farmer while women’s increasing reluctance to engage in such “rough” work diminished the available supply. Operating together these factors accounted for one less working woman in Agriculture out of every one hundred persons employed in 1911 than 1891. As already examined above, the decline in Miscellaneous Manufacture and in Construction was largely statistical and so needs no further comment.

But whether one looks at the shift in women’s employment from an “industrial” or characteristic viewpoint, the nature of the shift was the same. It was a movement from the less to the more genteel occupations, the combined product of women’s new openings being more “genteel” than the old and of working women’s obsessive desire to be “ladies”.

15.2 Sex Division Remains

Despite women’s “industrial” realignment between 1891 and 1911, the sex division remained a constant feature of the contemporary labour market. First of all, the bulk of it involved no sex displacement in “industry’s” demand for workers considered as a whole. This can be shown statistically by solving the equation a plus b equals c for each “industry” wherein:

- a equals change in number of women between 1891 and 1911 attributable to their changing share,
- b equals change in number of women between 1891 and 1911 attributable to factors other than their changing share,
- c equals change in number of women between 1891 and 1911,

and then totaling the results.

Finding “ c ” requires no more than finding the difference between the actual 1891 and 1911 numbers of women. Finding “ a ” is more complicated but is still obtainable. by computing for each “industry” the number of women it would have had in 1911 if its 1891 proportion of females was still applicable and then recording the difference between the actual and computed figures, only that change remains which is attributable to a change in the relative demand for the sexes. This leaves “ b ” as the only unknown. By adding or subtracting “ a ” and “ c ”, as mathematically indicated, “ b ” is found.

Taking “industry” as a whole, but twelve per cent of the net female influx was attributable to women’s changing share or, in other words, to the crossing of the 1891 dividing line. Most of women’s additional opportunities were the result of “industrial” expansion which simply meant, figuratively speaking, that as the “industrial” pie became bigger so did women’s particular portion of it.

Moreover, even when the dividing line was crossed this did not mean that at least one out of every ten additional female entrants had come into “industry” at men’s expense. Although she had

¹⁶Computed from Table 15.3, p. 165.

Table 15.2: Difference Between the Actual Number of Female Workers in Great Britain in 1911 and the Computed Number of Female Workers if Their Share of Each “Industry” were the Same in 1911 as it was in 1891.

“Industry”	Female Workers			
	Actual Number 1911	Number if 1911 Share Same as 1891 Share	Difference	
			Increase	Decrease
Commerce	156,778	47,104	109,674	
Clothing	785,489	749,940	35,549	
Metals	118,931	91,591	27,340	
Paper	116,492	94,768	21,724	
Public Administration	49,814	33,276	16,538	
Food, Drink and Tobacco	92,146	76,130	16,016	
Professional Service	383,005	372,667	10,338	
Transportation and Communication	38,390	28,586	9,804	
Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc.	38,199	29,481	8,273	
Skins and Leather	30,166	22,626	7,540	
Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass	37,754	36,611	1,588	
Textiles	769,379	768,799	580	
Distribution ^a	501,747	501,585	162	
Public utilities	67	17	50	
National Defence	—	—	—	—
Wood	28,630	30,326		1,696
Mining	6,035	8,691		2,656
Construction	729	3,417		2,688
Miscellaneous Manufacture	11,273	14,238		2,965
Agriculture and Fishing	128,365	149,419		21,054
Personal Service	2,130,555	2,268,333		132,778
Total	5,423,944	5,322,802	265,176	163,837
Net difference			101,339	

^aSimilarity of actual and computed figures accounted for by statistical adjustments made for comparability purposes. See above p. 24.

taken a man’s place she had not taken a man’s job. Instead her presence indicated a change in the position of the dividing line following upon a change in an “industry’s” proportion of work of a kind conventionally assigned to women.¹⁷

Not even women’s growing entry into the nation’s more skilled and responsible work furthered the interchangeability of the sexes. First of all, women’s more skilled work was not the outcome of systematic advances into recognized male spheres but of developments occurring within the confines of conventional women’s work.¹⁸ Secondly, the increase in women’s responsible posts went to women by reason of their sex and not in spite of it¹⁹ and thus had the effect of creating islands of women’s work in what continued to be essentially male occupations. Finally, women’s withdrawal from the nation’s “rough work”, far from reducing the sex division, made it even sharper. Because the concurrent growth of mechanization was at the same time de-emphasizing the need for sheer physical strength, that sharpening was of less consequence than it might appear initially

But though the observed labour market gave virtually no indication of sex becoming a less decisive factor in job allocation, this impression was only a surface one. Inherent in the changing pattern of women’s work and the changing outlook regarding women’s occupational role was the promise of a less divided use of the sexes.

¹⁷See above pp. 146 ff.

¹⁸See above pp. 156 ff.

¹⁹See above p. 155.

Table 15.3: Difference in Number of Female Workers in Great Britain Between 1891 and 1911 by “Industry” and Amount of That Difference Respectively Attributable to Their Changing Share and to Factors Other Than Their Changing Share.

“Industry”	Female Workers			Difference Attributable to		
	1891	1911	Additions	Subtractions	Changing Shares	Other Factors
Distribution	316,564	501,747	185,183		162	185,021
Personal Service	1,963,449	2,130,555	167,106		-132,778	299,884
Commerce	24,097	156,778	132,681		109,674	23,007
Professional Service	263,926	383,005	119,079		10,338	108,741
Metals	57,396	118,931	61,535		27,340	34,195
Paper	60,918	116,492	55,574		21,724	33,850
Public Administration	16,868	49,814	32,946		16,538	16,408
Clothing	756,688	785,489	28,801		35,549	-6,748
Textiles	743,202	769,379	24,177		580	25,597
Food, Drink and Tobacco	67,852	92,146	24,294		16,016	8,278
Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc.	14,154	37,754	23,600		8,273	15,327
Transportation and Communication	19,866	38,390	18,524		9,804	8,720
Skins and Leather	20,140	30,166	10,026		7,540	2,486
Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass	29,957	38,199	8,242		1,588	6,654
Wood	24,128	28,630	4,502		-1,696	6,198
Mining	5,337	6,035	698		-2,656	3,354
Public Utilities	9	67	58		50	8
National Defence	-	-	-		-	-
Construction	2,673	729		1,944	-2,688	744
Miscellaneous Manufacture	25,630	11,273		14,357	-2,965	-11,392
Agriculture and Fishing	149,316	128,365		20,951	-21,054	103
Total	4,562,170	5,423,944	899,026	37,252		
Net Difference			861,774		101,339	760,435

Despite women’s shift to “men’s industries” occurring on a sex segregated basis, it did provide women with their first opportunities to be considered on their individual merits for posts normally filled by men. Thus the positions of responsibility and authority that became theirs as sex representatives gave women the opportunity not only to demonstrate their capacity for such work but also to gain the prerequisite experience necessary for filling positions of this nature.

Even the “industrial” extension of women’s work on the lower levels did not mean merely more of the same type of work women already performed in “women’s industries”. Their entrance enhanced their opportunities to rise to the male upper job echelons. In the first place, it familiarized them with the hitherto foreign atmosphere, surroundings, customs and even the special nomenclature of these “men’s industries”, thereby making their labour more amenable to training. Secondly, it offered individual women the chance to demonstrate their potentialities for the more skilled and responsible posts, an opportunity denied to them as long as their sex as such was excluded from the industry or branches of it.

Of all women’s new industrial opportunities, none offered them as much scope to be considered on their individual merits for men’s work as commerce. The growing use of women as shorthand-typists gave them their initial wedge into many firms whose staff was otherwise entirely male. From these menial positions, the exceptional woman was able to rise to become, to cite just a few examples, administrative assistant, bookkeeper, editor.

Apart from the extension of women's employment into "men's industries", the changing conception of women's occupational place was also serving to blur the line of demarcation. This was effected, not as in the former instance, by breaking down barriers to women's employment but by making it less "necessary" for men to leave any occupation that women entered.

In contrast to the early years of the period here under review, those approaching the First World War witnessed growing numbers of the more revolutionary "new women" demanding not just the "living wage" of their more conservative sisters but an equal wage. The claim in itself was not new to the industrial scene. Medical women had been demanding it for many years previously and were already noted as "scrupulously" abiding by the "customary scale of fees" in the early nineties.²⁰ Nevertheless, they constituted a most exceptional body of working women in that they were in the forefront of the early feminist movement and considered it not only unjust but also "an admission of inferiority"²¹ to receive a lower salary than a man for similar work.

Again, working men had been associated with past campaigns for "equal pay". But significant differences marked the men's from the contemporary women's campaign. Men had used "equal pay" as a means of blocking women's use in their trade. The assumption was that no employer would hire a woman for a man's job if he had to pay her as much as a man. Secondly, whether or not women would receive equal pay depended entirely on the power of working men to enforce their views on the employer. Working men could not rely on women, apart from medical women, refusing work on any but equal terms because of their low aspiration level and of their fear of losing work to men. But with the passing of years both women's reserve price and their confidence in themselves as workers began to rise and finally culminated in the years just prior to the war in their first general demands for equal pay as a matter of justice with women teachers, civil servants and shop assistants in the vanguard of the movement. As the cause became their own, women presented less of a threat than formerly to working men's wages. Though women's equal pay campaign was only in its initial stages when the war began, it seemed to presage a time when men would feel less compelled to leave a branch of work just because women were entering it.

²⁰M. Bateson, *Professional Women upon their Professions*, London: Cox, 1895, p. 74.

²¹E. Bell, *Storming the Citadel*, London: Constable, 1953, p. 179.

Part IV

THE WAR: 1914-1918

The war created a large-scale demand for women as substitutes for male labour. The basis of that demand, the process by which it was made effective and its occupational consequence for women form the subject matter of Part Four.

Chapter 16

The Need for Substitutes

16.1 Wartime Employment Changes

On August 4, 1914 Great Britain passed from a nation at peace to a nation at war. By the time the Armistice was signed four years later, women's peacetime employment pattern had noticeably altered in both size and scope. Though no figures comparable to those used in Part One exist to measure the extent of these changes, those gathered by the Board of Trade to reveal the state of employment in the United Kingdom for the war and immediate post-war period function as a useful though somewhat limited barometer.¹

After four years of war, the proportion of women ten years of age and over gainfully employed in the United Kingdom had risen from thirty-two to thirty-seven per cent.

Furthermore, virtually every "male industry" covered by the Board of Trade's survey experienced a marked influx of women, in net total, over one and a half million by the time of the Armistice. Moreover, in both these and "women's industries", women constituted almost without exception a higher proportion of the work force in 1918 than in 1914. Their greater share was most marked in the service industries where it rose from one- to two-fifths between 1914 and 1918. In the manufacturing group, four out of every ten workers were women by the time of the Armistice compared to the pre-war figure of three. The sex composition of the nation's primary industries was least affected by the existence of war. Nevertheless even among them there was some slight advance in women's relative position.

Change on such a scale cannot be attributed to the trends already in operation at the outbreak of the war. At most they would lead one to expect the 1918 pattern of women's employment to differ from its 1914 counterpart in but minor respects. Had there been no war the likelihood is strong that women would have made further slight inroads into a selected number of industries: among the manufacturing ones—paper; skins and leather; chemicals, oil, grease, etc.; food, drink and tobacco; clothing; metals; and brick, cement, pottery, and glass; and, among the service ones—commerce; public administration; professional service; and transportation and communication. Moreover, one could expect women's share in distribution to show some slight rise as the industry's transitional stage from the older family to the newer company basis of organization progressed. In the primary industries of agriculture and of mining all pre-war indications would have pointed to a reduced share as women continued to leave "rough" for more ladylike work and as the nature of these industries continued to change in favour of the male form of labour,²

Predictions based on the pre-war trends would likewise lead one astray in regard to women's labour market participation. On the whole they would attest to a slightly diminishing proportion

¹The figures for July 1914, for Nov. 1918 and for July 1920 were published in A. Kirkaldv (ed.), *British Labour*, London: Pitman, 1921 and are listed and evaluated from the viewpoint of this study in Appendix C.

²See above Table 16.1, p. 366.

Table 16.1: Number of Females Working on Own Account or as Employers, and as Employees by Industry in the United Kingdom, July 1914 and July 1918 and the Difference in Number Between July 1914 and July 1918.

Type of Employment	July 1914	July 1918	Difference July 1914- July 1918
Working on own account or as employers	430,000	470,000	40,000
In Industry proper ^a	2,178,600	2,970,600	792,000
In Domestic Service ^b	1,658,000	1,258,000	-400,000
In Commerce, etc.	505,500	934,500	429,000
In National and Local Government, including Education	262,200	460,200	198,000
In Agriculture	190,000	228,000	38,000
In Hotels, Public Houses, Theatres, etc.	181,000	220,000	39,000
In Transport	18,200	117,200	99,000
In other, including Professional employment and as home workers	542,500	652,500	110,000
Total occupied	5,966,000	7,311,000	1,345,000
Total unoccupied ten years of age and over ^c	12,946,000	12,496,000	-450,000
Total ten years of age and over	18,912,000	19,807,000	

^aIncludes Gas, Water and Electricity.

^bFigures include an insignificant number of women employed in very small dressmaking workshops.

^cIncludes those engaged in domestic work at home and other unpaid work except V.A.D. nurses who, with the various naval, military and air organized corps of women, are comprised in the total for "other, including Professional employment".

Compiled from table based upon Board of Trade figures in *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, p. 80; 1919 Cmd. 135, xxxi.

since the growing entrance of the "new women" was being more than counter-balanced by the withdrawal of the very young as educational standards continued to rise, and of the destitute married, widowed and aged as social security measures gained in comprehensiveness and in liberality.³

Given the pre-war obstacles to women's entry into the labour market to such an extent in the first place and into men's industrial spheres in the second, how are these wartime innovations in women's employment—all the more remarkable considering the speed of their achievement—to be explained?

16.2 Background Situation

The novelty of women's wartime employment remains unintelligible until seen against the background of the labour needs of a state compelled to throw the whole of its resources into the conduct of war. This is what the "Great War" ultimately demanded of Great Britain. Because of the scale at which it was waged, and the variety and urgency of its productive demands, the war rendered the "normal" labour supply barely adequate for satisfying the nation's basic non-combatant needs, that of equipping the Forces, providing the essentials for the civilian population, and producing the exports required to reduce the wartime strain on the country's financial resources. When, as was actually the case, the military forces of the United Kingdom eventually absorbed nearly 5,500,000

³In 1891 34.93 per cent of females ten years of age and over were gainfully employed; in 1901, 32.85 per cent; in 1911, 32.31 per cent. Computed from Appendix Table A.1

Table 16.2: Increase or Decrease in the Number of Females Employed in the United Kingdom by Industry Between July 1914 and November 1918.

Industry	Increase Thousands	Decrease Thousands
Service Industries:		
Commerce	384	
Public Administration	183	
Transport	97	
Banking and Finance	66	
Hospitals (Civil and Military)	47	
Hotels, Public Houses, Cinemas, Theatres, etc.	41	
Other Professions ^a	22	
Gas, Water and Electricity (Private and Public)	14	
Teachers under Local Authorities	12	
Net Change	866	
Manufacturing Industries:		
Metals	672	
Chemicals ^b	63	
Wood	39	
Food, Drink and Tobacco	35	
Building	24	
Leather	20	
Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass	10	
Miscellaneous Industries	22	
Paper and Printing		7
Textiles		45
Clothing		56
Net Change	777	
Primary Industries:		
Agriculture in Great Britain ^c	15	
Mines and Quarries	6	
Net Change	21	
Total Net Change	1,663 ^d	

^aPersons employed by accountants, solicitors, etc., mainly clerks.

^bPersons employed in firms under private ownership. Those employed in firms under public ownership were classified by the Board of Trade to "Government Establishments", which for the purposes of this study has been included under "Metals".

^cPermanent labour only.

^dSee N. B. of Table 19.1.

Compiled from Board of Trade figures as published in A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *op. cit.* See Appendix C for figures and page references.

Table 16.3: Females as a Per Cent of Total Work Force in the United Kingdom by Industry, July 1914 and November 1918, and the Number of Males Replaced by Females Per Hundred Persons Employed Between July 1914 and November 1918.

Industry	Females as a Per Cent of Total Work Force		Number of Males Replaced by Females per Hundred Persons Employed July 1914–Nov. 1918.
	July 1914	Nov. 1918	
Service Industries:			
Banking and Finance	5.12	42.86	38
Public Administration	17.49	43.10	26
Commerce	28.82	54.12	25
Other Professions ^a	12.41	36.70	24
Hotels, Public Houses, Cinemas, Theatres, etc.	47.63	65.68	18
Transport	1.54	11.85	10
Gas, Water & Electricity	.68	10.64	10
Teachers under Local Authorities	72.82	82.35	10
Hospitals (Civil and Military) ^b	–	–	–
All Service Industries	21.80	43.49	22
Manufacturing Industries:			
Leather	20.24	43.53	23
Metals	9.14	28.16	19
Chemicals ^c	20.10	39.02	19
Wood	14.57	32.53	18
Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass	18.06	35.94	18
Food, Drink & Tobacco	35.25	48.33	13
Paper and Printing	36.19	47.16	11
Textiles	58.00	66.72	9
Clothing	68.08	75.44	7
Building	.76	6.61	6
Miscellaneous Industries	35.63	56.38	21
All Manufacturing Industries	30.75	41.84	11
Primary Industries:			
Agriculture in Great Britain ^d	9.09	14.12	5
Mines and Quarries	.55	1.24	1
All Primary Industries	4.04	6.26	2
All Industries	23.60	37.70	14

^aSee n. (a) of Table 16.2.

^bNo figures for males employed were given because of their insignificant numbers.

^cSee n. (b) of Table 16.2.

^dSee n. (c) of Table 16.2.

Computed from Board of Trade figures as published in *ibid.* See Appendix C for figures and page references.

men in the prime of their productive life out of an estimated total occupied male population of 14,350,000 in July 1914,⁴ it is not difficult to realize how great the strain was upon the remaining population if the nation's ability to wage war was not to be seriously impaired. In modern warfare it was no longer possible for a nation to consider its problem of manpower solved when it had secured the men it needed to fight. It had to be equally concerned with replacing the productive power lost in the process of converting these men into combatants. From where were such replacements to come?

When all possible sources of male labour had been tapped, including refugees, specially recruited workers from the Dominions, and men released from the Colours, there still remained some 2,450,000 places to fill if no more than the industries covered to the Board of Trade returns were to make good their losses to the Armed Services.⁵ Since about one-fourth of the occupied male population lay outside the scope of the Board of Trade's inquiry,⁶ the shortage of male labour was even larger than the amount noted above.

A shortage of this dimension left the state little choice but to overcome it with women's labour. Considering that normally close to seventy per cent of the women of working age in the United Kingdom were "unoccupied", and that of those occupied, twenty-eight per cent were engaged in the non-essential work of private domestic service,⁷ women represented to the state a labour supply of almost unlimited extent. The labour problem, therefore, largely resolved itself into the question of how to translate into an effective demand the nation's urgent need for women to substitute for men.

As will be shown, to substitute women for men in the labour market was no simple matter. No mere declaration of war could abolish the circumstances that prior to the war underlay women's wholesale exclusion from recognized men's work.⁸ Yet within a span of a little over four years the "impossible" of peacetime had to a large extent become the accomplished fact of wartime. By November 1918 hundreds of thousands of women were filling "industrial" places which, by reason of their sex, they automatically would have been excluded from four years earlier.

Underlying such a revolutionary departure from pre-war practice were two fundamental changes in the labour market situation wrought by the war itself. First of all, the war introduced the element of patriotism, the willingness to subordinate private convenience to national needs. Minds ordinarily resistant to change were rendered pliable by the desire to serve the war effort. Secondly, it introduced the element of extensive government controls. To secure the great quantities of specialized services and goods that the war demanded, the government soon learned that reliance on private initiative was too slow and too wasteful a method to achieve its ends. Therefore, on an ever-increasing scale, the government began to direct the economy until by 1918 full mobilization for the purposes of war had been achieved.⁹ This meant that added to the patriotic fervor of the populace, which rendered it willing to accept change, were the governmental controls to ensure that the change would take the form and occur at the rate deemed necessary.

Therefore, when its analysis of the labour problem led the government to conclude that women's labour must be substituted for men's, it generally could rely on those whose cooperation was needed to implement such a programme being in a receptive frame of mind. The same proposal made in peacetime would have made little headway. But attuned as the nation was to change and to the need to submit to governmental direction in regard to that change, the systematic substitution of women for men entered the realm of the feasible for the first time.

Nevertheless, even with this governmental motive force behind it the process of converting what

⁴H. Wolfe. *Labour Supply and Regulation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923, pp. 2, 72. In the 1911 Census, only 221,290 men in Great Britain were returned as in national defence, and but an estimated 143,000 more were in the Army and Navy abroad (A. Bowley, "Numbers Occupied in the Industries of England and Wales, 1911 and 1921", Special Memorandum No. 17a, *London and Cambridge Economic Service*, Dec. 1926, p. 3).

⁵See H. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, pp. 72, 96.

⁶See *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁷See Table 16.1, p. 170.

⁸See above Chap. 10.

⁹For a record of this development see N. Dearle, *An Economic Chronicle of the Great War for Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-1919*, London: Oxford University Press, 1929.

had been a demand for men into one for women was very tedious, involving, as it ultimately did, not only much agitation by private individuals but also considerable propaganda, organization and negotiations by the government. Moreover, even in the production of munitions, where the need for female substitutes proved to be most acute, resort finally had to be made to legislation before the substitution process could make any substantial headway.

Before a demand for women to fill men's places could take concrete form, employers had to become individually reconciled to both the need for and the possibility of substitution. Therefore, to understand the actual conversion process it is necessary to consider first the manifestation of the need and, secondly, once the need was conceded, how substitution came to appear as a practicable proposition.

16.3 Manifestation of the Need

The need for women substitutes was, in effect, an employer's way of stating that he had failed to secure the men necessary to carry on his business according to customary sex division practices. Generally, not until men had been drawn "from every possible source to fill the places of recruits"¹⁰ and other means of adjusting to a shortage of male labour had been explored were employers ready to consider solving their labour difficulties with women's labour.

British agriculture was a case in point. Having lost to the Colours by the first six months of the war 15.6 per cent of its January 1914 work force and having been able to replace only one in five of those who had joined,¹¹ it adjusted to the situation by using the remaining workmen more economically. Less essential work was left undone, mechanization was more widely introduced and crops requiring a minimum of labour were planted. The initial reaction of the railways to losing about 60,000 out of some 600,000 employed¹² was to appeal to the War Office to put pressure on railwaymen not to enlist. In the engineering trades, where a shortage of skilled men to produce munitions became acute as early as November 1914, a plan was devised whereby engineers who had previously enlisted could be returned to their former place of employ. Early closing was a device adopted by some commercial establishments to reduce their need for men. Other employers found they could overcome their labour difficulties by resorting to overtime.

This reluctance to substitute was easiest to detect in the days before conscription had had much impact upon industrial life. Employers paid little heed despite the government's appeal that:

- No man who is eligible for Military Service should be retained in civil employment if his place can be temporarily filled by a woman or by a man who is ineligible for Military Service.
- No man who is ineligible for Military Service should be retained on work which can be performed by a woman (for the duration of the War) if the man himself can be utilized to release to the Colours one who is eligible for Military Service and who cannot be satisfactorily replaced by a woman.¹³

In the English grocery trade, for example, employers, disagreeing with a government committee's report that outside of the actual moving of heavy goods, very few men needed to be retained in distribution,¹⁴ contended that their work "was entirely unsuitable for women, because of the strength and experience needed" for its performance.¹⁵ As the British Association's 1915-16 report on labour

¹⁰ *Report on the State of Employment in the United Kingdom in February, 1915*, p. 10; 1914-16 Cd. 7850, xxi.

¹¹ See *ibid.*, p. 11.

¹² *Report on the State of Employment in the United Kingdom in December, 1914*, p. 10, 1914-16 Cd. 7755, xxi.

¹³ *Women's War Work in Maintaining the Industries and Export Trade of the United Kingdom*, p. 6; 1916 Non-Parl. War Office.

¹⁴ *Report of the "Shops Committee" (War Organisation)*, pp. 6-7, 1914-16 Cd. 8113, xxxv.

¹⁵ Evidence from The Amalgamated Union of Co-operative and Commercial Employees and Allied Workers, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc.*, p. 149; 1919 Cmd. 167, xxxi.

replacement summed up the general situation, women replacing men in large numbers in industry is “due to the employer’s necessity, and is not his choice”.¹⁶ This observation was corroborated by the Principal Lady Factory Inspector when, in the Factory Report of 1916, she noted that “so long as men’s labour can be got, few employers will experiment with women’s”.¹⁷

Consequently, during the first year of war, when 2,200,000 men were drawn into the Forces from the industries covered by the Board of Trade’s State of Employment enquiry less than 400,000 additional women entered them. If women had been substituted to any extent at this time, this should have been reflected in the number of additional entrants since, on the whole, the women normally occupied as of the outbreak of the war continued attached to their regular trade, or if they did make any transfers it was to other women’s work.¹⁸ Only after the reserve supplies of male labour and been absorbed were women given the opportunity to substitute for men. This period was reached by the second year of war and it was then that the swiftest expansion of the female labour force occurred. Though less than half the number of men entered the Forces in 1915-16 than in the previous year, a record number of additional women, 563,000 in all, had “replaced” them.¹⁹

Given the general unwillingness of employers to experiment with female labour as long as male labour was obtainable, the use of women as substitutes depended, in the first instance, on how many men would be available for civilian employment. This in turn depended upon governmental recruiting policy. How many men would be taken into combatant service? At what rate and in what order?

During the course of the war governmental recruiting policy underwent continual change. Because it profoundly affected women’s substitution opportunities, a short account of the various courses adopted in regard to recruitment is necessary at this point.²⁰

16.3.1 Governmental Recruiting Policy

When war was declared, neither the War Office nor the public in general had more than a faint conception of the nature of modern war, of the demands it would make on every citizen and of the price to be paid for victory. Even as late as the spring of 1915, one contemporary observed that the population was confident that the war “could not possibly last for more than another year”.²¹

Consequently, Great Britain, with its traditionally small land force, entered the war depending upon only a small expeditionary force and upon her fleet. Any reinforcements needed were to be obtained through a system of voluntary enlistment. At the time the government had little reason to doubt the efficacy of such a policy. When the appeals for the first one hundred thousand enlistees were made, the difficulty was not to find that many men but to choose the most suitable. Men from every class and from all types of industry offered their services. The nation as a whole “set a gigantic seal of approval”²² upon the action of the government.

With relatively few recruits wanted at the outset of the war, most employers had little difficulty filling the places of their enlistees with other male labour. Apart from the possibility of recruiting

¹⁶A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *Labour, Finance, and the War*, London: Pitman, 1916, p. 80.

¹⁷*Factory Report, 1916*, p. 6; 1917-18 Cd. 8570, xiv.

¹⁸See below pp. 197-198.

¹⁹

Year	Industries Covered by Board of Trade State of Employment Enquiry	
	Men Recruited into the Forces	Additional Women Employed
July 1914-15	2,200,000	382,000
" 1915-16	1,014,000	563,000
" 1916-17	1,046,000	511,000
" 1917-18	636,000	203,000

Source: H. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, pp. 169, 171.

²⁰Unless otherwise indicated, based on accounts given in H. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, chaps. 3, 4. M. Hammond, *British Labor Conditions and Legislation during the War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1919, chap. 6.

²¹V. Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, London: Gollancz, 1933, p. 146.

²²H. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

staff from among the existing employed and unoccupied who were either ineligible for or unwilling to enter military service, there existed the possibility of recruiting staff from among the redundant of industries suffering from war-induced contraction of their markets. For the sudden snapping of all commercial bonds at the outset of the war had brought in its wake a sharp rise in unemployment.²³ Under these circumstances it is understandable that even as late as July 1915, Scottish tradesmen, when answering a government questionnaire on how they proposed to adjust to any further loss of male labour through enlistment, showed by their replies that they were confident of being able to find male replacements in the future just as they had done in the past.²⁴

As for women's part in the war effort, aside from the demand for nurses, women were noted "to be at a discount except as the appendages of soldiers".²⁵ No other major problem appeared in connection with their labour than of alleviating the distress caused by redundancy. The initial wartime unemployment had fallen with even greater severity upon women than upon men because most of the industries which did not soon recover their pre-war prosperity—namely cotton, linen, silk, lace, bespoke tailoring, dressmaking, millinery, hat, tin plate, brick and pottery manufacturing, and fishing—were those in which women were largely employed. Not only had the initial commercial upset produced this effect but also the reduced spending power of the people. Increased taxation and economies voluntarily adopted had lessened the demand for luxuries. Dressmakers, milliners, silk weavers, collar workers, tailoresses, and lacemakers found their services dispensed with. House and hotel servants were dismissed in many cases. Factories making sweets and stationery closed their doors or ran on short time. In some towns even the laundry workers felt the effect of short work.²⁶

To help alleviate the distress caused by this mass unemployment, the government, shortly after war was declared, appointed a Central Committee on Women's Employment to devise "schemes for the provision of work for women and girls unemployed on account of the war".²⁷ Indeed so obscure was the situation regarding women's eventual contribution to the war effort that when the deficiency of equipment for the new armies was beginning to become patent, the idea of giving contracts for shirts to the Central Committee's workrooms was seen in no other terms than mitigating unemployment.

Not until after eight months of war did women's employment reach its pre-war levels.²⁸ Subsequently their numbers swiftly rose. Instead of unemployment, the major problem connected with female labour had become one of substitution. It was the nation's belated realization of the true dimensions of the national emergency which had produced such a profound change.

Such events as the defeats of Mons and Charleroi, the retreat on Paris, and the engagements on the Aisne had finally persuaded Britain that its conception of itself as an island power was in need of drastic revision. "Her frontiers were no longer, as her sea-captains in other wars had declared, her enemy's coast-line, but a land-line ... in the heart of the country of her nearest Ally. Great Britain, that had thought of armies in thousands, had suddenly not only to think of, but to constitute, them in hundreds of thousands".²⁹ The system of voluntary enlistment, prevailing until then, could not satisfy the army's demand for "more men and yet more men".³⁰ And so the nation superseded its system of voluntarism by one of compulsion.

On January 27, 1916, after eighteen months of war, the first Military Service Act was passed. For the period of the war it made liable for military service every unmarried man between the ages of 18 and 40 inclusive. The Amendment Act of May 25, 1916 made conscription applicable, within the ages mentioned, to the married as well. Both Acts, however, provided for the granting

²³The Trade Union percentage of unemployment in August was 7.3 per cent, and the Insured Trades percentage was 6.2 per cent. The corresponding July figures were 2.8 per cent and 3.6 per cent. See N. Dearle, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²⁴*Government Committee on War Organisation in the Distributing Trades of Scotland: Second Report*, p. 3; 1916 Cd. 8220, xv.

²⁵V. Brittain, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

²⁶See *Labour Gazette*, vol. 22, no. 11, Nov. 1914, p. 395.

²⁷*Central Committee on Women's Employment: Interim Report*, p. 4; 1914-16 Cd. 7848, xxxvii.

²⁸See *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

²⁹H. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

³⁰Lord Kitchener as quoted in the *Report of the "Shops Committee" (War Organisation)*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

of exemptions. How much need there would be for women substitutes depended, therefore, not only upon the age limits designated for conscriptees but also upon the extent to which men would be allowed exemption from military service.

As specified in the Acts, exemptions might be granted to any man on grounds of ill health, infirmity, conscientious objection to military service, exceptional financial or business obligations or domestic position, or on the ground that it was expedient in the national interests that he should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work in which he was habitually engaged or, if he was being educated or trained for any work, that he should continue to be so educated or trained. Exemptions might also be granted by any government department, after consultation with the army council, to men who were employed or qualified for employment in any work which was certified by the department to be work of national importance and whose exemption came within the sphere of the department.

Armed with the powers of military conscription, the government was now in a measure free to dispose of the services of its male population of military age in whatever way it saw fit, whether in the Forces or in civilian employment. For the major part of 1916 the need of men for the war industries was felt fully as keenly as the need for fighting men and a liberal policy of exemptions was followed. As a rule munitions workers were exempted in bulk. So were dock and wharf labourers and maintenance workers.

By the beginning of the last quarter of 1916, however, the need for soldiers had become so urgent that it was deemed necessary to release for military service certain men previously exempted on the ground that their work was of national importance. Accordingly all medically fit unskilled and semi-skilled men of military age engaged on munition work for whom substitutes could be found had their exemptions withdrawn.

That the shortage of civilian male labour had not yet reached its full dimensions can be inferred from the fact that the places of these unskilled and semi-skilled workers were to be filled, not by women, but by other men drawn from the ranks of the following:

- Men in the Army unfit for general service and surplus to military requirements;
- Men granted exemption by Tribunals on condition of taking up work of national importance;
- Men called up by Recruiting Officers and not required for the Army because of their medical category.³¹

Nevertheless, the time was fast approaching when the supply of men from these categories would fall far short of the need for them as substitutes. Already in December 1916 the government had announced that tribunals could no longer grant exemption "on grounds of business or employment", except for highly exceptional reasons, to any man under 26 years of age, since any such man "who is fit for general service is of more value to the country with the forces than he would be in civil employment".³² In the following month the same rule was laid down for men under thirty-one years of age.

About this time, also, the government put into effect a universal national service scheme. Its object was to obtain men from the less essential industries to serve as substitutes for the able-bodied in essential ones. In accordance with this plan industries and occupations were scheduled according to their essential utility in wartime and workers were invited to enroll for war work.³³ To render this plan effective the Minister of Munitions subsequently issued an order under the authority of the Defence of the Realm Regulation 8A whereby men between the ages of eighteen and sixty-one were not allowed to enter any one of a long list of occupations contained in a schedule accompanying the order, except with the consent of the Director General of National Service, given on the ground

³¹ *Labour Gazette*, vol. 25, no. 2, Feb. 1917, p. 56.

³² *British Industrial Experience during the War*. I, 723-724; U.S. Senate Document No. 114, 65th Cong., 1st Sess. as quoted in M. Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

³³ For the government's list of "Trades and Occupations of Primary Importance" see *Labour Gazette*, vol. 25, no. 3, Mar. 1917, pp. 91-92.

that the employment was either expedient for the purpose of executing a government contract or of national importance. These occupations included the manufacture, distribution and sale of a large number of commodities, either luxuries or what was generally considered not essential in wartime.³⁴ Also proscribed was work performed by a shop assistant, clerk, domestic servant (private or public) or an employee in a theatre, music hall or cinema.

The short-term effect of this order was not to cause any immediate cessation of these industries or occupations, but to arrest their expansion unless it could be secured by the employment of women, boys or old men. In the long run, however, the effect on these trades was much more devastating. By forbidding the employment of male labour between the ages of eighteen and sixty-one to fill any vacancies while, at the same time, steadily withdrawing for military service all of these trades' able-bodied, the government forced employers engaged in less-essential work to decrease their output or to substitute women.

As 1917 progressed, the demands of the Army coupled with the declining supply of potential recruits made it imperative that inroads be made upon the skilled munition workers to a much greater degree than previously contemplated.³⁵ In May 1917 all exemptions previously granted munition workers by administrative action were cancelled.³⁶ Henceforth, only men specifically designated by the Ministry of Munitions as "indispensable for the fulfilment of the varying programmes of ship construction, munitions and other essential Government work"³⁷ were to be exempted and then only provisionally. For the army's need at some later time might prove overriding or experience might show that operations performed by exempted men could be undertaken by women or by disabled men released from the army.

At this stage of wartime labour policy, women's labour finally came into its own. Munition employers were warned by the government that the army's need for men was too urgent to permit any longer the practice of delaying an employee's call-up until a substitute was found. They were also told that the supply of male substitutes was likely to prove unequal to the demand. Consequently, they were strongly urged to employ women wherever possible, even if this meant they had to be trained for the work.

As a reaction to the critical military situation created by the German offensive of March 1918, the government, in the following month, passed the Military Service (No. 2) Act which raised the age for compulsory service to fifty-one. This change brought in its wake the need to revise the government's list of protected occupations which had been prepared as a guide to military tribunals. New occupations were added and a reservation for "all other classes of workmen", which had been exceptional in earlier lists, was inserted for almost all industries. These additions were made necessary by the extension of the military age to fifty-one, as without some such protection, many businesses which had hitherto managed with a minimum staff, in the anticipation of being able to keep their men over forty-one, would have had to be brought to a standstill. It was for this reason also that specific reservations for directing heads of businesses and for managers and departmental managers were added to the general reservations, as a very large proportion of men occupying responsible positions such as these were between the ages of forty-one and fifty-one. Even so, had the war continued, the overwhelming demand of the military for men to fight in the spring campaign in all likelihood would have forced the government to reduce considerably the size of this expanded list by early 1919.

Against this background of men being continuously drawn into the Armed Services or concentrated into work of national importance, the need for women substitutes manifested itself. In heavy

³⁴E.g., household articles and furnishings, cigars, brushes, beer, biscuits. For complete list see *ibid.*, p. 91.

³⁵Indicative of the growing seriousness of the military situation was the passage of the *Military Service (Review of Exemptions Act)* in April 1917 (7 Geo. 5, c. 12) which gave the government power to re-examine both men previously rejected for military service and certain categories of men discharged from the Forces as disabled.

³⁶Subsequently, the *Military Service Act of February, 1918* (7 & 8 Geo. 5, c. 66) enabled the government to cancel exemption certificates granted by Tribunals on occupational grounds, thereby placing men holding Tribunal exemptions on the same footing as those protected by administrative action. See *War Cabinet Report of 1918*, p. 130; 1919 Cmd. 325, xxx.

³⁷*Schedule of Protected Occupations for Men Employed on Admiralty, War Office or Munitions Work, or in Railway Workshops*, (M.M. 130 - 28th Apr. 1917), p. 4; 1917 Non Parl. Ministry of Munitions.

tanning, for example, there was virtually no demand for women until the withdrawal of men for military service became general. Not until the 1918 call-up produced an exodus of boys from the glass industry to the higher-paying adjacent coal mines were women considered for glass house work. Whereas in the early stages of the war it was not thought suitable to use women for army clerical duties on the continent, by the latter part of 1917, 10,000 recruits a month were wanted.³⁸ When a group of medical women offered their services to the War Office in 1914, they were told, according to one contemporary account, “that all that was required of women was to go home and keep quiet”.³⁹ Nevertheless, as the male labour shortage became more acute, the War Office reversed its original outlook and invited women doctors to volunteer for service with the Forces.

The grocery trade provides yet another illustration. Before the Military Service Acts came into force, employers in the grocery trade maintained that the work was entirely unsuitable for women because of the strength and experience needed. Recruiting was heavy from these trades, however, and the government’s insistence that the distributive trades were especially appropriate for women’s labour led the military tribunals to show scant consideration to appeals. Even before the later National Service Scheme completed the process by taking the older men for work of national importance, the whole of the grocery trade, except the management of large shops was opened to women.

16.3.2 Progressive Need for Substitutes

A large-scale need for women substitutes was first experienced in the clerical and commercial occupations. The rate of enlistment had been high in them⁴⁰ where so large a proportion of the male work force was of military age.⁴¹ Admittedly the rate of enlistment had been about as high in many other industries⁴² but the important distinction between commercial and clerical employments and the others lay in the size of their reserve supplies of male labour. Whereas there was no lack of semi-skilled and unskilled manual labour before conscription,⁴³ this was not the case with the so-called brain labour that shop and office work so largely demanded. In the first instance, among those qualified for such work, few were unemployed or casually employed so as to constitute a reserve from which replacements for the enlistees could be drawn. But of far greater moment, from the viewpoint of women’s substitution, was the fact that the ordinary unskilled and semi-skilled manual labourer who was available for substitution lacked the educational and social background necessary to qualify for most office and shop posts. If the vacant posts of enlistees were to be filled at all they would have to be filled by the only source of competent substitutes available, namely the women members of the more respectable classes.

Thus, from government departments, local authorities, bank and insurance offices, as well as from ordinary business houses and commercial establishments, came a call for women substitutes. At first the demand was confined almost entirely to jobs of an elementary character. But as the women gained experience and the male shortage increased, openings developed in the higher-grade positions. In shops, for example, opportunities for women to enter managerial, buying and commercial traveling

³⁸See I. Andrews and M. Hobbs, *The Economic Effects of the War Upon Woman and Children in Great Britain*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1918, p. 3.

³⁹V. Brittain, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

⁴⁰As of February 1915, the enlistment rate (July 1914 = 100) among shop assistants was over 16 per cent; among bank and insurance workers, between 20 and 25 per cent; and among those in government service, about 20 per cent. See *Report on the State of Employment in the United Kingdom in February, 1915, op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

⁴¹The Government Committee on War Organisation in the Distributing Trades in Scotland estimated that normally one-half of all males engaged in Scottish distribution were of military age. See its *Second Report, op. cit.*, p. 5. “Of the male clerks between the ages of 15 and 65 no fewer than 72 per cent. were under 35 years of age, against only 54 per cent. in all occupations”. *Census of England and Wales, 1911*, X, i, xxxiv.

⁴²E.g., as of February 1915, the enlistment rate (July 1914 = 100) in coal was 17.2 per cent; in chemicals and explosives, 17.4 per cent; in cycle, motor, etc., 16.9 per cent; in engineering, 16.1 per cent; in tramways under local authorities. 21.6 per cent. See *Report on the State of Employment in the United Kingdom in February, 1915, op. cit.*, pp. 6, 13.

⁴³See “Interim Report of the Conference to Investigate into Outlets for Labour after the War” in the *Report of the Eighty-Fifth Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1915*, London: Murray, 1916, p. 508.

jobs unfolded in the later stages of the war.

Employers engaged in munition manufacture were next to experience a large-scale need for women substitutes. Unlike the situation in the clerical and commercial fields, however, it was not originally one of replacing male labour but of reinforcing the existing male staff. In wartime, the industry expanded to an unprecedented degree. New factories were built and jobs which under normal circumstances would have been designed with men in view were from the start rendered suitable for women's type of labour. During the first eighteen months of the war, women were wanted mainly for repetitive work of a kind which their sex normally performed in the engineering industry. Nevertheless, as a shortage of men developed, and replacements as well as reinforcements became needed, boys who had already received some training were upgraded to men's work and women were employed to fill the places left by these boys.

The continued withdrawal of men for military service combined with the need for more munitions soon left munition manufacturers with little alternative but to make more extensive use of female labour. By the end of the war women were in demand for work requiring several months' training, strength previously thought beyond them, and exposure to conditions generally considered "unsuitable" for women as such.

On a much smaller scale this pattern of progressive substitution repeated itself in other manual and service trades. Especially was it in evidence during the last two years of the war when the male labour shortage reached its peak. To the women clerks, car cleaners and ticket collectors added to railroad staffs during the first months of the war were now added shop labourers, engine cleaners and porters. The original use of women as tramway conductors was extended in certain districts to include tram driving as well. Whereas women initially entered the South Metropolitan Gas Company as meter readers, they were later brought into the gas works proper "to do the general labouring and cleaning up work, and from there into the stove repairing shops, and eventually into the retort houses to do the stoking".⁴⁴

Belatedly, industries which until conscription had largely escaped the need for female labour because unskilled and semi-skilled men were still available, now, in the third year of war, began to place their orders for women substitutes. From munition manufacturing the demand spread to numerous staple industries less directly connected with the war such as grain milling, sugar refining, brewing, and sawmilling. Agriculture too evidenced marked demand for women by the summer of 1916. Furthermore, the acuteness of the military situation finally persuaded the army to use women behind the lines in France as replacements for soldiers hitherto serving as clerks, cooks, cleaners, chauffeurs, and mechanics.

Generally speaking, employer opposition to the idea of substituting women disintegrated before the need for their services, but not all employers faced with a shortage of men thought to solve their labour difficulties with women. Many employers continued to be sceptical of such a possibility and resigned themselves to a reduced scale of operations or to going out of business. When this attitude produced such consequences in less essential work the government was content to let the matter rest. But when essential war production or army recruitment was at stake, it could not afford to let pass unchallenged views such as those held by some managers of general engineering works who refused to employ women because there was no repetition work in their shop.⁴⁵

Confronted with the employers' lack of confidence in women's labour potentialities, the government assumed the role of propagandist in those instances where it was considered vital that the employer think otherwise. With regard to munitions production, for example, the government prepared and widely distributed among manufacturers a booklet containing photographs and descriptions of engineering processes on which women were already employed in some establishments.⁴⁶ An exhibition of work performed by women was shown in important munition-producing centres. And the government devised a scheme whereby expert women "demonstrator-operatives" could be

⁴⁴Evidence from The South Metropolitan Gas Company, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices, Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁴⁵See A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *British Labour*, London: Pitman, 1921, p. 27.

⁴⁶*Notes on the Employment of Women on Munitions of War; 1916*, Non-Parl Ministry of Munitions.

Table 16.4: Number of Males and Females Employed in Agriculture in Great Britain, July 1914 and July 1918.

	Males ^a		Females	
	July 1914	July 1918	July 1914	July 1918
Permanent	800,000	589,000	80,000	113,000
Casual	120,000	70,000	50,000	65,000
Total	920,000	659,000	130,000	178,000

^aNot including soldiers, prisoners of war.

Based upon A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *British Labour*, London: Pitman, 1921, Table VII, p. 67.

sent into the shop to prove, by practical demonstration, women's capacity for such work.

Though helpful, such propaganda measures were found to yield results too slowly. The scepticism of certain engineering employers was so inveterate that persuasion was of little avail. In consequence, the government adopted a more coercive policy. Beginning in March 1917 contracts for the smaller-sized shells, which the government considered women eminently qualified to produce, were let only on condition that they constitute eighty per cent of the work force. As for the larger-sized shells, contractors were obliged to use women to the extent recommended by the Ministry of Munitions.⁴⁷

Agriculture was another essential industry in which the government saw great possibilities of replacing men with women, but the farmers were of a different mind. As a means of promoting women's use on the land, the government began in the spring of 1915 to instigate, on a county basis, women's war agricultural committees. One of their objects was to convince the local farmers that female labour could be used to advantage. Nevertheless, agricultural tradition remained relatively obdurate. "In agriculture", explained the British Association's Report for 1916-17, "custom controls action and is difficult to evade. In the most conservative of all industries, there are many who do not 'hold with women'".⁴⁸ Accordingly, in an industry which was "by no means unsuited to women",⁴⁹ which had suffered no wartime decline in the demand for its products, and which in Great Britain had 261,000 fewer men in 1918 than in 1914 to cope with the peak workload of summer, only 48,000 more women were employed in July 1918 than in July 1914.

This poor numerical showing, despite government propaganda, was to a large extent attributable to the industry's structure which contained almost as many employers as permanent employees. As the British Association's labour displacement report for 1916-17 explained, the difficulty of inducing a farmer to adopt women's labour was at least as great as that of inducing a works manager to do so, yet, because of the small numbers employed by the average farmer, the achievement was of far less numerical consequence. In many cases the direct result was only the placing of one woman.⁵⁰

In the face of the magnitude of the task and its inevitable slowness, the government found it more expedient to divert the labour of soldiers and prisoners of war to the nation's farms than to wait until women would be in widespread demand. It pursued this policy to such an extent that soldiers, rather than women, eventually became the most important single source of non-casual substitute labour.

⁴⁷See I. Andrews and M. Hobbs, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁴⁸A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *Industry and Finance*, London: Pitman, 1917, p. 152.

⁴⁹H. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁵⁰A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *Industry and Finance, op. cit.*, p. 147.

Chapter 17

The Substitution Process

Though an acknowledged need for female labour was the first step to women's substitution, one did not automatically follow from the other. The practical objections to women's use as substitutes for men still had to be surmounted. It must be remembered that men's work, both in content and conditions, had been designed for a type of labour in many essential respects different from that represented by the female labour supply. Thus not only did questions of its competency arise but also that of its profitability and availability. Furthermore, apart from these questions, there was also the one of the employer's power to substitute women. In certain instances, restrictions imposed by law and by employed men had to be overcome before an employer was even in a position to demand women substitutes. Since logically the existence of an effective right to hire has to precede any exercise of it, the extent to which the restrictions on the demand for female labour were relaxed to permit of its substitution will be considered first. This will be followed by an analysis of the steps taken to overcome the practical objections of employers. In reality, however, no such orderly weakening of the defenses against women's substitution for men occurred. Co-existing side by side and interacting one upon the other were assorted measures directed against all of them simultaneously.

17.1 Relaxation of Legal Restrictions

Of all the demand impediments, those stemming from the law were the easiest to overcome. First of all, the issue was not a controversial one. The public was prepared to see its protective legislation subordinated to the more urgent purposes of winning the war. Secondly, the government was prime mover in this situation. Forearmed with the general consent, all it had to do was will the relaxation of the Factory Acts and the deed was as good as accomplished. There was not even a legislative delay. Even before the outbreak of the war, the Secretary of State was empowered in cases of public emergency to exempt from the Acts "to the extent and during the period named by him" any factory or workshop performing government work.¹

In 1915 the authority to suspend the Acts was extended by Clause 6A of the Defense of the Realm Regulations to any factory or workshop in which, because of circumstances arising out of the war, exemption was necessary so as not to impede essential work. By the end of 1915 this wide category included, or could be held to include, almost every factory and workshop in the country.

In the early stages of the war, restrictions on hours of employment and overtime were widely relaxed to permit firms to cope with the heavy pressure of government orders emanating from the need to outfit and equip the new army. The policy of the Home Office was to make, whenever possible, a General Order for an industry. Generally those Orders legalized night and Sunday work for women and permitted those over sixteen years of age to work overtime two hours a day for five

¹*Factory and Workshop Act, 1901, sec. 150 (i); 1 Edw. 7, c. 22.*

days a week.²

Not only was there a relaxation in women's hours but also in their use on dangerous or unsuitable processes. To cope with their war orders, manufacturers of lead paint, for example, were permitted to use women on the actual manufacturing process, manufacturers of pottery on the "prohibited process" of glost-placing, and manufacturers of glass were given permission to employ girls under eighteen in the "glass house". This last concession was granted even though adult women's labour had never been legally denied to the industry. Nevertheless, because the "boys' work" for which women were wanted required considerable agility only young adult women could satisfy the demand. Yet, with higher paying munition work available in the area, young women were difficult to procure. Consequently, young girls were permitted to work in an environment normally thought highly detrimental to their well-being. Apparently there were few limits to the elasticity of the law when production vital to the war effort was at stake.

As a means of mitigating the ill-effects to health and morals that were expected to follow in the wake of these relaxed restrictions, exemptions were mainly granted only on condition that certain welfare measures be adopted. For example, no woman was permitted to work at night without female supervision and women employed in the previously forbidden process of "dipping" in the pottery trade were examined monthly. But compared to the scale of restrictions normally in effect, those imposed in wartime were but minor annoyances to the employer. Consequently, they were never so burdensome as to preclude women's use altogether in work for which, until then, only men could be legally employed.

17.2 Relaxation of Restrictions by Employed Men

In contrast to legal restrictions those imposed by employed men now became more crucial. On the one hand the war greatly enhanced the power of skilled craftsmen in essential munitions work to exclude women from male preserves while, on the other, it made women's admission a question of national survival.

It was the nation's unmet need for munitions, eventually involving the greater part of the engineering and a large part of the woodworking and chemical industries for its satisfaction, which first brought to the forefront the issue of employed men's restrictive practices.³ Although it was not until the spring of 1915 that the loss of life in the Battle of Neuve Chapelle forcibly brought the shell shortage to public attention, months before that the difficulties arising from a general deficiency of munitions had been causing the government much concern. As early as the autumn of 1914 it had become obvious to the government that the supply of munitions would have to be multiplied far beyond all original estimates. Yet, the entire munitions-producing capacity of the country consisted in the main of no more than "about half a dozen great armament firms", a few great explosives-producing ones, Woolwich Arsenal, and the Enfield Small Arms Factory.⁴ Further aggravating the problem was the fact that many of the skilled men whose labour was essential for munitions production had volunteered for the Forces during the early months of the war when a system of indiscriminate recruiting, from an occupational standpoint, prevailed. Consequently, the government was faced not only with a serious shortage of manufacturing capacity but also of skilled labour as it attempted to expand the nation's output of munitions.

Ultimately the government decided that with the type of labour available the demand for munitions could be satisfied only by re-organizing the customary manufacturing methods so that a larger proportion of semi-skilled and unskilled workers could be used. Measures to increase the existing supply of skilled men had had to be ruled out when, for example, it normally took six years to train a skilled engineer or seven years to train a craftsman in the metal nickeling and electro-plating indus-

²For legal restrictions normally in effect see above pp. 106-107

³The account of the munitions problem and the measures taken to solve it is based mainly on H. Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923, pp. 17-18 and chap. 9. M. Hammond, *British Labor Conditions and Legislation during the War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1919, chap. 4 and pp. 141-144, 180-184.

⁴H. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

tries. In its urgent need to “dilute” the existing supply of munition labour, however, the government collided with the restrictive trade practices of various unions. Until the removal of such practices as those specifying the ratio of skilled to unskilled, the methods of work, and the qualifications needed to engage in certain classes of work—for example, apprenticeship to the trade, approved experience, trade union membership—the introduction of women into work structured in accordance with these practices could not proceed.

But removal was not enough. The exigencies of war demanded that this removal be at once sweeping and swift. Only then could “dilution”, the term used to denote the policy of introducing a larger proportion of less-skilled workers into skilled trades, proceed at the scale and rate deemed necessary. The government, accordingly, could not wait for patriotic impulse or shortage of the “qualified” to modify, in a slow and unsystematic fashion, the traditional outlook of unionists engaged on war production.⁵

Nor could the government be content with employers gaining by force the relaxation in union practices which they were unable to obtain through voluntary agreement. Such a policy, by fostering strikes and lock-outs, would bring to a halt the very industries in which production was essential and at most would only succeed in opening up work to women in areas and firms where union strength was weak. But since the war served to strengthen the bargaining position of organized labour in key industries, even the chance of advancing substitution on the fringes of union power tended to diminish as the shortage of male labour developed.

The gravity of the munitions situation soon left the government no other choice but to seek the active cooperation of the unions, particularly the craft ones, whose members were involved in munitions production. For the success of dilution pivoted upon the skilled man’s willingness to instruct, supervise and set the tools for the less-skilled reinforcements. What made the government’s task so difficult was that it had so little to offer the unionists as compensation for the sacrifices it was asking of them in the name of patriotism. It must be remembered that each of the union practices represented the culmination of years of struggle and privation. Now, when their exceptionally favourable bargaining position enabled the unions to resist effectively any movement on the part of employers to change these practices, they were being asked to relinquish them voluntarily.

This the unions were reluctant to do. They feared that the entrance of the less-skilled, whether men or women, into work claimed as their own would lower the skilled man’s wage standard. Furthermore, they reasoned, even if the “dilutees” were given rates that would not prejudice the position of the skilled men in the present, there was no guarantee that their position would not be endangered once the war had ceased. To them the long-term effect of placing unskilled and semi-skilled workers on machines formerly the monopoly of the skilled would be the creation of a surplus of trained workers competing in the post-war labour market for a very restricted number of skilled jobs. As a result, the policy of limitation, on which their rates depended, would no longer be efficacious.⁶

To convert them to its point of view, the government found, first of all, that it had to convince the unions involved that victory demanded their sacrifice. Secondly, it had to offer them tangible assurance that the privileged position of their members would not be affected detrimentally, either during the war or in the immediate post-war period, by the relaxation of the very practices which made that position possible. Thirdly, the government had to demonstrate that employers would also make a sacrifice of like proportion.

The first major step taken by the government to win union converts to the cause of dilution

⁵For example, negotiations proved fruitless when engineering employers in Dec. 1914 first requested the Amalgamated Engineering Union to give up its rules during the war. The Union was not convinced that the shortage of men could not be solved by such measures as spread of contracts, transfer of workers on short time to war work, government subsistence allowances to men working away from home, importation of skilled engineers from the colonies, and the withdrawal of skilled engineers from the army. See G. Cole, *Labour in War Time*, London: Bell, 1915, pp. 171-172.

⁶This attitude was not confined to men. The admission of semi-trained Red Cross probationers into military and auxiliary hospitals and temporary women clerks into government offices evoked similar fears of undercutting among qualified nurses and permanent women civil servants. See B. Abel-Smith, *A History of the Nursing Profession*, London: Heinemann, 1960, pp. 86-87. “Interim Report of the Conference to investigate into Outlets for Labour After the War” in the *Report of the Eighty-Fifth Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, London: Murray, 1916, p. 544.

occurred in March 1915 when a conference of all the major unions directly concerned with the output of munitions and other supplies for the military was called. By the conclusion of the three-day meeting, the union representatives had become convinced of the government's sincerity in regard to both its appeal that trade practices be relaxed and its promise that, if the appeal was heeded, the position of their members would not be prejudiced during or after the war.

The so-called Treasury Agreement followed whereby almost all the union representatives present agreed, provided the government met certain conditions, to recommend to their members that they "take into favourable consideration such changes in working conditions or trade customs" as might be necessary to accelerate essential war output. The government's side of the bargain was to require from its contractors and subcontractors an undertaking to the effect that 1) all wartime departures from customary trade practices would cease with the war, 2) workmen in their employ at the beginning of the war who were still with them or who had gone into Service would receive prior claim to employment after the war, 3) the rates paid to semi-skilled men introduced to work hitherto considered skilled would be "the usual rates of the district for that class of work", and 4) in cases where the earnings of skilled men were affected adversely by the relaxation of trade practices, adjustments would be made so as to allow them to maintain their previous level of earnings.⁷

The Amalgamated Society of Engineers took exception to the Agreement in its initial form on the grounds that the position of its members was not sufficiently safeguarded by the guarantees relating to restoration and wages and that the question of employer sacrifice had not been explicitly resolved.

The government, highly dependent on the good will of the engineers for effecting its dilution policy, conceded to the Union's demands and on March 25, 1915 concluded a separate agreement with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. The additional safeguards included within it provided that any relaxation of trade practices related "solely to work done for war purposes"; that the government would use its influence to secure the restoration of previous conditions after the war; and that the class of workmen to be employed on work non-existent prior to the war would be determined according to the pre-war practice prevailing in the case of the class of work most nearly analogous. Apart from these provisions, there was one specifically declaring it to be the intention of the government to limit the profits of firms engaged wholly or mainly upon engineering and shipbuilding work so that financial benefits resulting from the relaxation of trade practices would accrue to the state⁸. On the whole, however, neither this nor the initial agreement had much effect in changing existing practices.

Consequently, the government resorted to compulsion. The Munitions of War Act was passed in July 1915 empowering the government to enforce dilution in "controlled" munitions establishments⁹ and, at the same time, giving legal sanction to the guarantees incorporated in the Treasury Agreements. No longer could the individual workman be so easily persuaded that he was abandoning his privileges for the private benefit of his employer or that, if he did surrender them, there was no guarantee that their restoration would be enforced.

Nevertheless unofficial trade union opposition, particularly that of the engineers, to the policy of dilution continued to embarrass the government in executing its policy. For example, when dilution was first attempted in the Clyde area, the workers threatened to strike. So serious was the opposition that Lloyd George appealed to the men personally. Subsequently the government formed a Clyde

⁷ *The Treasury Agreement (19th March 1915)*, pars. 4 and 5, in H. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, app. 9.

⁸ *The Treasury Agreement (25th March 1915)*, pars. 1-3 and 5, in *ibid.*, app. 10.

⁹ A "controlled" establishment was one declared by the Minister of Munitions to be subject to the special provisions of the Act relating to limitation of employers' profits, control of persons employed, wage regulation, etc., in the interests of the successful prosecution of the war. Initially 134 firms were designated "controlled". Ultimately the number of such establishments exceeded 6,000. See H. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, p. 157. Whereas the original scope of the Act was limited to firms engaged in "the manufacture or repair of arms, ammunition, ships, vehicles, aircraft, or any other articles required for use in war, or of the metals, machines, or tools required for that manufacture or repair" (sec. 3; 5 and 6 Geo. 5, c. 54), as amended in January 1916, its scope was widened to include any articles intended or adapted for use in war, any metals, machines, tools, or materials required for their manufacture or repair, any construction or repair of buildings for military purposes and even the erection of houses intended for munition workers, and the supply of heat, light, water, power, and tramways for munitions work. See sec. 9; 5 and 6 Geo. 5, c. 99.

Dilution Commission to persuade the men of the necessity of dilution. Despite adopting an elaborate system of consultation with the men involved, the Commission was unable to avert a short strike when dilution was finally attempted. In March 1916 the dilution issue produced a far more serious strike which ended only with the deportation of its leaders.

Part of the men's dissatisfaction stemmed from the failure of employers to pay dilutees the "rates customary for the job". Though in October 1915 the government issued a circular¹⁰ advising what the wages of women dilutees should be, employers on the whole paid little attention to it. Recommendations which specified one pound as the standard weekly time rate for women on men's non-skilled work, which prescribed men's piece rates if such work was normally paid by the piece, and which insisted that women on skilled men's work be paid the skilled man's rate, whether a time or piece one, were too much in variance with customary conceptions of women's relative worth to be acceptable. Experience soon showed that such recommendations would only be adopted by employers under compulsion. Accordingly, the government made the provisions of its circular obligatory, hoping thereby to mitigate some of the unofficial opposition to dilution. Even so violations of the government's wage orders, especially in the smaller firms, continued to be sufficiently common to require the government to substitute a more stringent enforcement policy for the initial one of relying mainly on the workers to report offenses.

But the statutory issuance of Circular L.2., as the initial circular relating to women's wages was called, brought the government into direct conflict with the unions over its interpretation. The greatest difficulty arose over the question of what was meant by "fully-skilled" work. The introduction of automatic machines and other methods of sub-division had, in many cases, split up the job of a fully-skilled man. Even where this did not occur the question still arose. For women on skilled men's work, unlike the skilled man, normally did not set up their own machines. Were the women entitled to the full rate even under these circumstances? Secondly, was the inexperienced women, newly introduced upon fully skilled work to have a period of probation, and if so, what period?

The difficulty in regard to both these issues arose acutely in February 1916 at a works in Paisley, and culminated in a strike. Negotiations finally resulted in a settlement which stipulated that even where women did only a part of a skilled man's job, they should, starting from one pound a week, reach the full tradesman's rate by the end of the thirteenth week.

An even greater difficulty arose in 1917 regarding women's right to share in men's war advances. The government's view was that it had only pledged to maintain the so-called standard rates. The unions disagreed. Consequently, the government's refusal to extend to women engaged on men's work the twelve and a half per cent bonus extended to all male munition workers was strongly denounced by labour opinion as a breach of the pledge. As the volume of the protests grew, the government finally appointed in September 1918 the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry to investigate and report on, among other matters, the validity of the union allegations.

Besides the discontent arising from the alleged failure of the government to implement its pledges there was also that arising from the uncertainty as to how far restoration of pre-war conditions was feasible. Week by week fundamental changes were taking place in the factory and workshop which the workmen believed could not be undone no matter how solemn the pledge of the government that the old conditions would be restored.

Nevertheless, the government was persistent in its dilution policy and by its generally accommodating attitude towards the men's demands was able to break down the original resistance of the rank and file until by the end of the war the dimensions of the problem had greatly receded.

Outside of munitions the issue of union restrictions was much less noteworthy. From the government's viewpoint, the need to substitute women in these industries was less urgent and therefore it was prepared to wait until an acknowledged shortage of male labour combined with a desire to assist the war effort produced agreements between the unions and management concerning women's

¹⁰Issued by the Ministry of Munitions and known as Circular L.2. A copy is in *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence. etc.*, p. 216; 1919 Cmd. 167, xxxi.

entry into men's work. In its expectations that such agreements would voluntarily develop, the government was not mistaken. Generally, as a shortage of male labour became evident within a trade, the unions involved relaxed their restrictions and women were admitted to men's work under conditions designed to safeguard the position of the union members.

Even so, the government's role in respect to these agreements was not altogether a passive one. In the early stages of the war, when the government was dependent on voluntary enlistment, it instigated conferences between employers and employees to convince them of the need to release as many men as possible for military service and to show them how this could be done without unduly endangering production or the union's position.

During 1915 government-inspired substitution agreements were made in the following trades: cotton, hosiery, leather, woollen and worsted, silk and felt hat, textile printing and bleaching and dyeing, woodworking, biscuit and pastry baking, wholesale clothing, boot making, and earthenware and china. During 1916 further agreements were made in some of these trades and there was an extension of the trades conferences to lace making, hosiery finishing, printing, silverplate and cutlery, and brush making.

Typically these agreements contained promises that women would be employed on men's work during the war period only, that the men who had left these trades to undertake military service would have their places kept open for them on their return, and that women would be paid the same rates of wages as had been paid to men performing similar work. Some agreements further specified that women were to be employed only on work which they were physically fit to perform. As a result of these agreements, to cite just a few examples, official union opposition to women as "piecers" in cotton mule spinning, as "placers" in pottery manufacture and as night machine operators in wool combing temporarily ceased.¹¹

As the war continued, the need to have more men released for military service impelled the government to take a more active role in regard to women's substitution in non-essential work. With this end in view it prepared, early in 1917, to amend the Munitions of War Acts so that it could require dilution in private work. Trade union opposition was so strong, however, that the government was forced to adopt a less direct approach. By forbidding employers in the "restricted trades" from hiring men between the ages of eighteen and sixty-one to fill any vacancies while at the same time withdrawing from these trades men eligible for military service,¹² it accelerated the process whereby a conceded shortage of male labour would induce the unions to consent to women's entry.

17.3 Revision of Employer Employment Practices

Armed now with absolute power to substitute women for men in the unregulated occupations, and with as much power as the government and unions deemed necessary for winning the war in the ones subject to their respective regulations, the employers were finally in a position to cope with the practical problems of translating a male work situation into a female one. Until means were discovered whereby women's labour could be rendered first of all, competent, secondly, profitable and thirdly, numerically sufficient, its substitution for men's labour was hardly feasible.

17.3.1 Problem of Competency

To assist employers in overcoming the drawbacks connected with using women's comparatively incompetent labour, the government offered them the expert advisory services of its factory inspectors and labour exchange officers. Furthermore, it created advisory services special to munitions manufacture and agriculture to cope with the particularly pressing questions attending women's substitution

¹¹For wartime relaxations in restrictions on female labour normally imposed by some principal trade unions see Appendix B.

¹²See above pp. 177-178.

in these two industries.

Not all employers had need of such assistance. With some the question of women's incompetence dissolved with the war. By the very act of adjusting to the changed consumer demand induced by the war, they transformed previous men's work into a type well within the performance powers of women. This adjustment, largely unconnected with the type of labour available, meant that in all likelihood it would still have taken place even if there had been no acute shortage of men.

Shell manufacture was one of the foremost examples of this form of "automatic" adjustment. Whereas in pre-war days orders for shells had been given in hundreds, in the last years of the war they were being produced on semi-automatic machines by the thousands per week. "It is probable", stated the Ministry of Munitions' *Dilution of Labour Bulletin* of March, 1918, "that since the war began more fuses and shells have been turned out of the engineering workshop, all practically to one pattern, than of any other complex appliances since engineering workshops began to exist. Their numbers, indeed, are comparable with those of typical repetition parts such as bolts, nuts, split pins, screws, etc."¹³

The same revolutionary growth in the scale of production of a standardized product occurred in the manufacture of such items as aeroplanes, scientific instruments, wooden ammunition boxes, razors and army uniforms with similar occupational consequences. In effect the war demand was imparting to new sectors of British industry characteristics comparable to those long established in textile manufacture, namely sub-division and specialization of process.

Besides diluting the need for the craftsman's all-round skill, the notable expansion occurring in certain sectors of the economy inadvertently favoured the cause of women's substitution in yet another way. With much of the work new to the economy, many new premises had to be built to accommodate it. Consequently, from the first, they could be adjusted to the reception of women workers. Such was the case with the newly constructed national filling, ordnance, projectile and explosive factories which came into existence in 1916. All were fitted entirely with new machinery expressly designed to economize not only human skill but also human strength. Likewise, in the new scientific instrument factories, plant suitable for repetition work was introduced from the start.

Furthermore, even when the wartime demand produced a change no more radical than an establishment undertaking additional work, the introduction of women was thereby facilitated. Experience showed that it was usually easier to introduce a new type of labour into work new to a firm undertaking it than to attempt to change any of a firm's established hiring practices.

Another way the changed market conditions of wartime promoted women's substitution was by shifting the demand from a man's to a woman's branch or process of an industry. Such shifting occurred in the Huddersfield worsted trade. Normally it produced the finest men's suiting, its weaving requiring considerable skill, but with the war the demand for it subsided. Where firms were able to adapt themselves to the less "high class" demand of wartime, they experienced no serious difficulty in conforming to the practice of other worsted manufacturing districts by employing a high proportion of women weavers. The tailoring trade affords yet another example. Whereas under wartime conditions the demand declined for high grade tailoring work which employed mainly men, the demand for military clothing, affecting the medium branches of the trade in which female labour normally predominated, greatly expanded.

In paper manufacture, the "automatic" transformation of a male into a female labour demand was the outcome of an acute shortage of wood pulp. As a means of overcoming it, the paper trade resorted to the use of rags and waste paper. Whereas women figured little in the processing of wood pulp, this was not the case in rag paper manufacture where the sorting of rags and paper was a recognized woman's process. And so, despite a wartime contraction in the size of the industry, the relative proportion of women rose.

The issue of woman's competency, however, could not be dismissed so lightly in those job situations where no other factor than that men were unavailable urged women's use. Generally, under these circumstances, the employer was left with little alternative but to change some of his estab-

¹³P. 85, as quoted in M. Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 156 n.

lished ways so that female labour could be integrated effectively within his business organization.

Concern over women's capacity for men's work was easiest to overcome in those jobs already within the average woman's performance powers but for one reason or another performed by men. For example, any department organized on an all-male basis usually contained jobs that demanded little by way of skill or strength. Nevertheless, given the sex composition of the department, not women but boys or old men would generally be found in posts of this kind. Such was the situation with the all-male cutting room of the tailoring industry. Employers encountered little difficulty in putting women on the formerly boys' work of bundling and dividing. In all-male engineering work places a similar pattern prevailed. Women replaced youths on automatic machines while the youths were upgraded to work of a higher quality. Other good substitution possibilities existed as a by-product of employers varying in their established practices regarding choice of sex for a given type of work.¹⁴ It was easier for factory inspectors and labour exchange officers to persuade employers to experiment with female labour when proof of its sufficiency already existed than when such proof was lacking and substitution, in consequence, could only proceed on faith. On the basis of women's successful employment record, the woollen and worsted process of perching, which prior to the war was a woman's process in some areas and a man's in others, now became more universally woman's work. The demand for women to do routine clerical and shop assisting work was similarly extended during the course of the war.

The number of pre-existing job situations in which women could be substituted without involving major alterations in content and conditions was necessarily limited. The bulk of men's work was designed for adult men and accordingly demanded skills of a kind and strength to a degree generally lacking in women's type of labour. Limited too was the amount of men's work which the changed output of wartime could be relied upon to transform into women's "automatically". To effect substitution at the scale and speed required, measures needed to be implemented to compensate for the typical working woman's deficiencies in skill and strength. Two courses were open to employers. They could either downgrade the content of their jobs so that female labour "as is" could be advantageously employed or strive to make it more like men's. In practice both methods were adopted but downgrading proved the more popular. With skilled men's work, it had the advantage of making the general run of working women rapidly productive and with labouring men's work, of making them at all productive.

The adaptation of men's skilled work to women's unskilled labour proceeded along two lines. In some cases the skilled elements were separated from the unskilled out of which jobs for women were devised. This type of adaptation meant that women performed only a part of the original man's job. Whereas a skilled man would set up his own work and tools and be free from detailed supervision, the opposite was true of the unskilled woman. In tailoring, for example, the fitting up and marking performed by women substitutes, unlike the men they replaced, were done under expert male supervision. Women crane drivers in the South Wales tin plate industry required extra assistance and supervision. Women scientific instrument makers did not set up their own machines, nor did most women in engineering works.

Women's entrance into banks, to cite yet another example, was accompanied by a process of regrading in which women were allocated the more simple and mechanical parts of the man's job. Even where women appeared to do the whole of the man's job, as in tramway conducting, railway ticket collecting and boys' work in the tailoring cutting room, closer inspection reveals the same sub-division principle in operation. On one tramway system, the old rule that conductors after six months of service had to do the more skilled work of driving was suspended for women conductors. On another, women conductors did not move the overhead trolleys, yet male conductors normally did.¹⁵ In tailoring cutting rooms, women were kept on a single process whereas the boys they

¹⁴It must be remembered that employer opinion differed in the pre-war period as to whether the degree of skill or strength required for a given job lay within women's powers. Also, the relative terms upon which female labour could be purchased varied from district to district. Again, the district application of certain union rules had the effect of making work men's which in non-union districts might be allocated to women.

¹⁵See respectively. A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *Labour. Finance and the War*, London: Pitman, 1916, p. 197. A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *Industry and Finance*, London: Pitman, 1917, p. 133.

replaced were used more flexibly.

The second means of adapting skilled men's work to women's labour was to mechanize each of the job's component parts by the use of specialized machines and then to introduce all sorts of stops, jigs and appliances so that unskilled workers could operate them. Because this method entailed heavy initial capital outlay, however, it was practicable only as a substitution device where articles were mass produced. Fortunately, from the point of view of women's substitution, specialization of this kind was made feasible in several branches of industry by the very nature of the war demand.¹⁶

To overcome the physical weakness associated with female labour, employers had several alternatives. They could introduce labour saving devices, sub-divide the work according to the strength required to perform its various parts, or use more than one woman to replace one man. To lessen the need for strength, employers made extensive use of mechanical appliances. Magnetic chucks were used to hold work in place. Shells were mechanically lifted to position and sacks of flour were automatically weighed. Lifting tackle, trolleys, and runways for bogies enabled women to handle the heaviest packing cases. Lighter equipment also helped to overcome women's inferior strength. Lighter pressing machinery was installed in clothing factories, lighter barrows made women efficient brickyard labourers, and lighter tools and appliances made women useful workers in railway yards, gas works and breweries.

The method of sub-division was widely employed in heavy chemical manufacture where women were given the lighter and men the heavier parts of the work. The man's job of "placing" in pottery manufacture, normally entailing both placing the articles in saggars and carrying the saggars into the ovens, was sub-divided so that women did only the actual placing while men carried not only their own but the women's share as well. In those branches of distribution where physical strength was an important consideration, such as ironmongery, furnishings, certain departments of drapery and grocery trades, nuclei of men were used for the heavy lifting while women performed the lighter aspects of selling.

"Group substitution"—the use of a group of women to do the work of a smaller number of men—was often used in provision stores. In "keeping a forge charged", six women were employed by a firm in Glasgow "in the place of one man".¹⁷ Another form this type of substitution took was the converting of the man's workload into smaller units. Smaller skips in bobbin carrying were introduced to reduce the weight of the loads. Women gas meter readers were restricted to sixty houses per day, whereas a man's quota was ninety.¹⁸ Flour was packed into 140 instead of the usual 260 pound sacks¹⁹ and the thickness of the "lays" of cloth was reduced when women substitutes did cloth cutting. Useful as downgrading was as a substitution device, it had its limitations. Job reorganization to the extent necessary to make women's type of labour productive was not always practicable. Among the less essential industries, unlike the more essential ones, it was usually impossible under wartime conditions to secure the labour-saving devices, automatic machinery, new plant and so forth that were needed to transform men's work into women's. Also where the war either reduced or did not change the scale of production, downgrading with the sub-division of processes that it implied often had too little scope to be successfully employed. Furthermore, as the war progressed, military recruitment, making increasing inroads into the ranks of the skilled, extended the need for women substitutes to the higher occupational levels. In the production of certain articles for war purposes, moreover, the government could not afford the drop in production necessarily entailed if women's labour was substituted without enhancing its quality. For reasons such as these, means also had to be found to improve its performance.

The first step was to implement a policy of careful selection aimed at recruiting women whose labour qualities, unlike those of the mass of women workers, already tended to approximate men's. Then, given the exceptional woman, the next step was usually to give her a short period of on-the-job or formal training or both.

¹⁶See above pp. 187-188.

¹⁷A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *Industry and Finance (Supplementary Volume)*, London: Pitman, 1920, p. 13.

¹⁸Evidence from The South Metropolitan Gas Company, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 129.

¹⁹*Substitution of Women for Men during the War*, p. 128; 1919 Non-Parl., Home Office.

The selection process involved first of all choosing those women who, having proved themselves particularly able on women's work, gave promise of undertaking men's work successfully. Thus professional women, such as teachers, government inspectors and doctors, whose work prior to the war was largely restricted to serving young children and members of their own sex, now extended their scope to the men's side of their respective professions. Especially in teaching were employers ready to take advantage of women's separate but comparable experience. By the time of the Armistice, it was estimated that in the majority of secondary day schools and grammar schools, and also of preparatory schools, one or more mistresses had been substituted.²⁰ In the factory inspectorate, the lady inspectors were assigned factories which had hitherto been inspected only by men. As for women doctors, their most exceptional wartime use was in the Army Medical Corps which staffed one of its army hospitals entirely with medical women.²¹

In the manual trades firms made it a practice of recruiting able substitutes from among an industry's pool of experienced women. Preference was given to those presently or formerly in their employ. With such women already resident in the area there was no problem of attracting labour from elsewhere. Also, having already worked within the plant, they needed no orientation to the ways of the firm. In chocolate manufacturing concerns women were transferred from the slack woman's fancy chocolate department to the relatively active men's cocoa and chocolate making ones. In the boot and shoe trade, adult women were transferred from women's to men's departments while the women's places were filled by girls. The same form of up-grading occurred at the managerial levels of steam laundries and clothing factories where the high levels of responsibility women had obtained before the war made substitution comparatively easy.

But the selection of those of demonstrated ability could not answer the entire need for higher grade substitutes. In the first place not all women could be spared from their regular jobs. Certain kinds of women's work was as essential to the war effort as men's. This was particularly true in those textile and clothing branches activated by the military demand. In some localities, their labour requirements were so great that even all their openings for essential women's work could not be filled. Especially did the one-industry textile towns suffer from a shortage of female labour in the wake of the war boom. Since most of the available supply was already at work in the mills, there was little chance to increase it with "unoccupied" young girls and retired women. Furthermore, even when young girls could be recruited, employers were not always anxious to substitute them on adult women's work. Generally their output, unlike that of the returning married women who were back into the routine in a day or two, was much inferior to that of the women they replaced.

Secondly, sole dependence on a policy of recruiting qualified substitutes from among those already in the industry was not feasible because of the inverse relationship existing between their absolute numbers and their substitution opportunities. Where the potential supply was most plentiful, in the women's industries of textile and clothing, the number of substitutes needed was necessarily small because relatively few men were normally employed. Furthermore, as wartime experience soon showed, the processes of these industries had already been sub-divided and specialized to such an extent that what remained as men's work could not be easily accommodated to female labour. Only in a few isolated branches, such as boot and shoe manufacture, did these two considerations not apply.

On the other hand, industries employing a high proportion of men, thereby affording much greater scope for substitution, employed relatively few women. For them to rely only on women already in the trade was out of the question once the demand for substitutes reached any sizeable dimensions. Trades such as transport, leather and banking, for example, had so few women in their employ prior to the war that if they were to have substitutes they necessarily had to come from outside the industry.

The possibility of using transferees was also impeded by the attitude of women themselves. Often as conservative as employers, they objected to leaving their accustomed work and venturing into

²⁰A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *British Labour*, London: Pitman, 1921, pp. 83-84.

²¹For a short account of medical women's novel wartime work at home and abroad see B. McLaren, *Women of the War*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917, chaps. 1, 5.

jobs which were not only new but, when paid by the piece, financially uncertain.

To satisfy their need for qualified substitutes, many employers, therefore, were forced to search beyond the bounds of their own industry. The next best alternative to selecting women of proven ability was to select those whose background or appearance gave strong indication that they would make successful substitutes. Usually the policy adopted was to recruit, if not actual relatives, at least women from the same class background as the men normally used for the work. Experience showed that such men and women generally shared many traits in common. For example, many wives of unskilled labourers were recruited to fill men's places in heavy outdoor manual work. A lifetime of hard physical labour in the home had to some extent prepared them for such work.

To obtain substitutes of "intelligence and education",²² shop and office employers resorted to the friends and relatives of their existing staffs. Despite a general lack of occupational experience, they nevertheless represented a quality of labour superior to that of the average manual woman worker. Thus in the early stages of the war, when women from the manual classes were suffering heavy unemployment, these employers began to recruit substitutes not from among the "unemployed" but from among the "unoccupied".

To enlarge their source of supply, shop and office employers also relied upon the Headmistresses Association which by the close of the war had provided from among girls leaving secondary schools a considerable number of candidates to fill temporary government staff positions of a routine nature. From among the ranks of university women qualified substitutes were found to fill junior administrative posts left vacant by permanent civil service officers.

In recruiting the more educated woman, shop and office employers were simply following peace-time practice but on a much larger scale. It was when employers of manufacturing concerns began to do the same to fill their more skilled and responsible posts that innovation took place. Whereas so-called Board School girls could operate "fool-proof" machines with no difficulty, this was not the case when the work demanded judgment, adaptability and initiative. Therefore, factory employers also found themselves faced with a need for women of education. In scientific instrument making women with university training or holding a technical college diploma in optics and physics were wanted for the higher grade work of testing and experimenting. Women with a good standard education were much in demand for training as sheet metal workers, aeroplane woodworkers and acetylene welders. Those from Scottish, non-industrial districts were especially sought for some of the more skilled heavy engineering jobs since they usually possessed the rare combination of good education combined with the habit of hard physical work.

Educated women were also highly favoured for factory supervisory posts since they, unlike their less educated sisters, tended to possess both the ability for and willingness to undertake responsibility. Even agriculture sought women of a higher calibre. Those who normally engaged in its work were as a rule incapable of doing the men's more skilled tasks such as motor ploughing or of organizing and directing women in field work.

Because class membership was only a rough guide to a woman's potentialities as a worker, the need to pursue a more selective policy arose with jobs requiring qualities not general to a class. Tram companies found they could get satisfactory substitutes if they were careful to select women strong in "nerve" as well as muscle. "Nerve" was also a consideration in choosing women for the men's work of guillotine and band knife operating in the clothing industry. And only medically fit women were admitted into the Women's Land Army or sent by the labour exchanges to war jobs in distant areas.

On the whole, the vast majority of women learned their new tasks entirely in the work place. A small proportion, however, received some training on more systematic lines.²³ A number of trades, among them bookmaking, hosiery, saddlery and optical instrument, provided special courses for women substitutes. The voluntary women's groups organized training in acetylene welding, agriculture, forestry, motor driving, canteen cooking, clerical, and waitressing work. The London

²² *Report of the Clerical and Commercial Employments Committee*, p. 4; 1914-16 Cd. 8110. xiii.

²³ For a brief survey of women's vocational training in wartime see *Report of the Women's Employment Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction*, pp. 47-48: 1918 Cd. 9239, xiv.

County Council and other local authorities organized emergency courses to prepare women for such work as retail grocery selling and office work. Individual employers also gave some formal instruction. Women bus conductors in London were instructed for several weeks by the company before beginning work, and some manufacturers of light leather goods, tin boxes and chemicals did likewise.

The most extensive development of systematic training occurred in the munitions industry under the auspices of the Ministry of Munitions. Whether such instruction was given in local education authority technical schools, the Ministry's own instructional factories, or in the munition works, the government and not the employer or trainee usually assumed the cost of both training and maintenance.

Early in the war any munition training offered women was directed to the manufacture of shells and trench materials which required little skill for their production. As the scarcity of fully skilled men and the need for women to replace them increased, opportunities developed for women to train in the more skilled branches of munitions work. This training, however, did not fit them to do the work of a craftsman. Instead, women were rendered capable of performing one or two repetitive processes requiring a high degree of skill. Because the work was specialized, the necessary skill could be acquired in a few weeks but such training fitted the women only for the operations taught and no others. In addition to process work, a few women were also instructed in tool room work, fitting, viewing, aeroplane work, and acetylene welding. The attempt was also made to train forewomen. The Ministry, appreciating the difficulty of employers who, because of the shortage of technically trained women, had either to employ a man supervisor or a woman unable to give technical assistance, instituted courses of technical training especially designed for women supervisors.

Thus apart from munitions manufacture the status of women's vocational training was little if at all improved by the war, and even in munitions no more than 45,000²⁴ of the 844,000 women engaged in metal manufacture by the time of the Armistice had passed through munitions training centres sponsored by the Ministry of Munitions. For the most part employers prevailed in their pre-war attitude. Not knowing how long the war would last and anticipating women's retirement on marriage, they generally were unwilling to offer women any long or expensive training. Had the government not assumed the costs of training, it is doubtful if even manufacturers of munitions would have trained women to the limited extent that they did.

Much more important than formal training for raising women's performance level was the experience women gained on the job itself. Though women entered men's work mainly at the lower levels, performing it over a period of time had an educative effect. In munitions manufacture, for example, every year marked a qualitative extension in the work women performed. Supervision by skilled men became less necessary. In repetition work women learned to set and grind their own tools and put their machine in order and in non-repetition work they gradually acquired sufficient skill to use their machines in all possible ways. Among the clerical trades, to cite another example, women who initially entered government offices as junior clerks were later promoted to work of a higher grade. And on tramways, women who began as conductors were, by the last year of the war, in inspector posts.

Another method used by employers to better qualify women for men's work was that of instituting welfare measures. Its use was greatly stimulated by the appointment of a Health of Munion Workers Committee in September 1915. Although expressly appointed to deal with questions affecting the health and efficiency of munion workers, most of its recommendations and investigations were applicable to all kinds of industry.

According to its findings, the maximum output women were capable of could only be secured and maintained if the following conditions were observed: 1) short hours of work with suitable shifts, pauses and intervals; 2) adequate and suitable medical supervision, including the provision of rest rooms, surgeries and first aid appliances, properly staffed; 3) careful selection of women for work within their capacity and the heavier work allocated to the younger women; 4) good and sufficient food obtainable at convenient times, and always before commencing work in the morning;

²⁴Evidence from the Director of Training of Munion Workers, Ministry of Munitions, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, op. cit.*, p. 5.

5) a factory environment containing effective ventilation, sanitary accommodation and convenient washing facilities; 6) sympathetic management and tactful supervision.²⁵

Once the inquiries of the Health of Munition Workers Committee established the folly of long hours from a production standpoint, the Home Office began to reimpose the Factory Act restrictions which had been relaxed in the early stages of the war. In the new General Order of September 1916 the hours permitted women were reduced from sixty-seven and one-half to sixty a week. Night work was prohibited to girls under sixteen and very sparingly permitted to those between sixteen and eighteen. Moreover, in the course of the next eighteen months, the number of special concessions granted in regard to the above rulings were considerably reduced.²⁶

As a means of overcoming the poor timekeeping commonly associated with female labour, some employers voluntarily undertook to shorten the work day in the hope of reducing absenteeism due to fatigue and illness. In the light clothing industry, the hours of women guillotine cutters were restricted to compensate for the severe nervous strain the work entailed. In wool combing women were placed on a night shift of ten and one-half hours, compared to the men's normal eleven and three-quarter hours.²⁷ And a firm operating a two-shift system instituted a three-shift one for those women operating the heavy machines for rough turning and boring.²⁸

The welfare movement was given added impetus with the passage of the Police, Factories, etc. (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act in August 1916. It obliged factory and workshop employers to provide for the welfare of their employees whenever, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, "the conditions and circumstances of employment or the nature of the processes carried on"²⁹ demanded it. Among other welfare provisions, the Secretary of State was authorized to require accommodation for clothing and facilities for washing and for preparing and eating meals.

Having more immediate impact on industrial practices than this Act, under which no Orders were issued until October 1917, was the welfare programme implemented by the Ministry of Munitions. In the interests of output it introduced special measures for women's safety, health and comfort in the establishments subject to its control. Thus as munition works made increasing use of women who had migrated into the area and of married women and young girls, the Ministry of Munitions actively encouraged the engagement of women welfare supervisors and made their employment compulsory in all TNT factories. It also gave special attention to the well-being of munition workers outside the factories, and dealt with such problems as transit, recreation, sickness, day nurseries, and the care of maternity cases.

Testifying to the effectiveness of welfare measures in increasing women's productivity were contemporary observations such as these: "The time lost [on munitions work] was reduced by considerably more than one-half upon an exchange from a 12 hour to an 8 hour shift" and the "supply of good food in various canteens and clubs, and the inducing of women to eat it as their wages rose, did much to increase their strength and vigour".³⁰

17.3.2 Problem of Profitability

No matter how much incompetency could be mitigated by job reorganization, careful selection, training, and welfare measures, they stood little chance of being implemented until the question of whether women could be profitably employed on such a basis was settled. The experience of the heavy chemical industry well-exemplified the cost problem. The industry estimated that the substitution of women had increased its manufacturing costs between ten and twenty per cent. Initially as many as five women were required to replace one man. In addition there were the extra

²⁵See *Health of Munition Workers Committee: Final Report*, p. 28; 1918 Cd. 9065, xii.

²⁶See *ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

²⁷*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

²⁸A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *Industry and Finance*, London: Pitman, 1917, p. 60.

²⁹See 7(1); 6 and 7 Geo. 5, c. 31.

³⁰*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, *op. cit.*, p. 84. A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *British Labour*, London: Pitman, 1921, p. 11.

costs of providing not only special supervision by forewomen and welfare supervisors but also nurses, cooks, canteen and bath attendants, and protective clothing.³¹

Employers substituting adult women for youths provided yet another example. Some clothing manufacturers maintained it was too expensive to employ women on processes which boys in the course of learning the trade were content to do more cheaply. And in the words of a Liverpool engineering employer, “women would want a living wage straight away; the boys are satisfied with 7s. 6d. a week”.³²

Further aggravating the cost problem were the high rates the unions forced employers to pay women substitutes. Foremost was this a problem in controlled munitions establishments where to pay less than a “man’s rate” for work customarily done by men was made an illegal offense. Thus at a time when adult women’s labour could be had for sixteen shillings a week, Midland engineering firms were required to pay female substitutes a pound a week.³³

This requirement in turn produced other anomalies such as the one cited by an official of the Ministry of Munitions. According to his testimony, “Sometimes where there had been a small range of machines in shops fully-rated men had worked on machines usually manned by boys under 18; where this had been the case and additional repetitional machines had been brought in and worked by women, it might happen that ... fully skilled men’s rates were being paid to women though admittedly on boys’ work”.³⁴

Moreover, employers complained that paying women substitutes “in excess of their economic value”³⁵ brought in its wake demands for wage increases from their female employees on recognized women’s work. No longer were they content to receive a “woman’s rate” when they worked beside substitute women who were paid more but often were much less experienced and did work no more difficult or arduous than theirs.

So far as government action was concerned, the overriding of the economic objections to women’s substitution in firms engaged on private work, was mainly limited to lowering the legal standards in respect to separate sanitary accommodation. In 1915 the Local Government Board recommended to local authorities that during the present emergency they accept any temporary arrangements shops might make to accommodate female labour, such as the use of a neighbouring house or a nearby public convenience. A similar policy of *ad hoc* solutions was followed by the Home Office regarding factories and workshops pioneering in the use of women.

Also helping to lower the price of women substitutes was the narrow interpretation given by some unions to the claim for “equal pay for equal work”. Thus some were satisfied if the pay was “equal” on piecework in contrast to others who insisted that it embraced time work and wartime bonuses as well.³⁶ Then the unions had difficulty in enforcing their claim. The entrance of women almost invariably involved a redistribution of duties so that neither the remaining men nor the substituted women were doing work “equal” to that of the men they replaced. Consequently, the “equal pay” issue proved a bogus one, and the real issue became one of adjusting the standard union rates to changed methods of production. The bargaining engendered by this lack of a clear-cut case of equal work resulted in almost any variation of payment being found despite the “equal pay” stipulation in union agreements.

Thus in the tramway industry, the “equal pay” of substitute women tram conductors resulted in some receiving exactly the same basic rate of wages as men and also the men’s war advances, others receiving exactly the same basic rate but not the same war advances, others receiving the

³¹See evidence from The Chemical Employers’ Federation, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 68.

³²As quoted in A. Kirkaldy, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 100.

³³See *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

³⁴Evidence from the Technical Officer attached to the Wages Section of the Labour Regulation Department, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 5.

³⁵Evidence from the Chairman of The Machine Tool and Engineering Association, *ibid.*, p. 55. Also see G. Cole, *Trade Unionism and Munitions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923, p. 218.

³⁶See evidence from the Chief Industrial Commissioner of the Ministry of Labour, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 12.

minimum basic rates but neither the customary grade advances for periods of service nor the same war advances, and still others receiving the basic rate of wages and the men's war advances but, unlike the men, in quarterly increments.³⁷ The organized shop assistants afford another example. On the grounds that a few men nearly always had to be retained for the heavy lifting, the union was satisfied if women substitutes received four-fifths of the man's rate. Nevertheless, in many cases it was not strong enough to secure even that amount.³⁸

On government, in contrast to private work, women's additional cost was of far less consequence. Regardless of cost the government had to have those items and services which it deemed essential for winning the war. Under such circumstances the relative worth of female labour as a factor in dissuading its use tended to disappear. Some war supplies, for example, were so incalculable in cost that to the last the government was compelled to place contracts on a cost plus percentage basis. In the later stages of the war, moreover, any extra cost entailed by an advance in wages was directly assumed by the government contracting departments. Furthermore, owners of controlled munition establishments were allowed to deduct the cost of special welfare provisions for women from what would have otherwise been taken by the excess profit tax. Even the training of women for more skilled munitions work was assumed by the government rather than, as would normally be the case, by the employer. That this changed approach to production was an important element in women's substitution can be judged from the fact that forty-four per cent of the additional female recruits to the industries covered by the Board of Trade's State of Employment enquiry were in metals and chemicals in which the pricing standards of the competitive market had largely disappeared by the time of the Armistice.

But however easy it was for the government to shoulder the additional costs involved in substituting women's labour, it could not pursue this policy indiscriminately. It had to consider the predicament of employers still subject to the pricing standards of a competitive product market. They, unlike those whose entire output went to the government, could not pay women "in excess of fair economic value" and remain in business. Yet, unless they did, they would not be able to keep their female work force from transferring to higher-paid war work or to secure new recruits as the number of such openings grew.

To avoid disrupting the economy at a time when it was almost as important that essential civilian wants and export market requirements be satisfied as those of the military, the government was unwilling to enforce the unions' interpretations of the provisions of the Munitions of War Acts pertaining to women's rates on men's work.³⁹ It used the same loophole of "equal work" to justify its position as private employers did in regard to their agreements with the unions. Accordingly, though established by law that women employed on work customarily done by fully skilled tradesmen should in all cases be paid tradesmen rates, the government's position was that this provision did not apply to women doing only part of a skilled man's job. To meet the employers' objection that unskilled women could not be paid the same wage as skilled men, the Ministry of Munitions allowed a probationary period and permitted, where additional costs were shown to have been incurred, a deduction of up to ten per cent in the skilled man's rate. Girls under eighteen on a part of a skilled man's job were not even entitled to that but were paid according to a lower scale.

The government also met the objection of employers in its interpretation of what constituted skilled man's work. The Ministry of Munitions, accepting the claim of employers that owing to new methods of mass production women aircraft workers were employed not on skilled but on new work, did not insist that these women be paid the rates of a skilled man.

Furthermore, the government did not insist that its wage policy prescribed for substituted women in controlled munition establishments be adopted by government departments engaged in war production. These departments were free to make their own policy. Thus in the H. M. Dockyards and Naval Establishments, according to an Admiralty representative:

³⁷Evidence from The National Transport Workers' Federation, *ibid.*, p. 142.

³⁸See I. Andrews and M. Hobbs *Economic Effects of the War Upon Woman and Children in Great Britain*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1918, p. 103.

³⁹For the development of government policy in regulating women's wages see *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, *op. cit.*, pp. 109 ff.

It has been considered impracticable and inconsistent with the regulation of wages according to relative value of services to apply the Ministry of Munitions Orders respecting the wages of women employed on work customarily performed by fully skilled tradesmen. Women doing portions of fully skilled men's work are not paid the fully skilled man's rate of wages but a rate according to the special qualifications or skill required, which will vary between the prescribed rate for women and the peace time rate for fully skilled workmen plus women's war advances.⁴⁰

But perhaps the most telling instance of the government's attempt to hold substituted women's wages in check was its attitude in regard to war advances. Believing it would be impossible to give only women on men's work the men's war advance,⁴¹ the government claimed that the advances were not additions to men's rates but separate cost-of-living bonuses.⁴²

As a result of the government's wage programme, substitution in munitions was much less costly to employers than it would have been if strict adherence had been given to the unions' interpretation of the Munitions of War Act wage provisions. As it was, observed G. D. H. Cole in his study *Trade Unionism and Munitions*, women were, as a rule, "paid considerably less than men ... even on identical jobs, and were often paid less for identical amounts of work on systems of 'payment by results'".⁴³ In consequence women substitutes, no matter how much they as women improved their financial position, never reached a "plane of economic equality with the men whom they replaced".⁴⁴

17.3.3 Problem of Availability.

Serviceable solutions to the substitution problems of competency and profitability would be of little avail unless women could be recruited in sufficient numbers to satisfy the nation's need. Operating against this recruitment were several factors. First of all, the war reduced to some extent the normal supply of available women. With the families of military recruits receiving government separation allowances scaled according to the number of dependents,⁴⁵ and with the men left in the civilian work force receiving higher earnings,⁴⁶ the need of some women to work to supplement the inadequate income of their breadwinners disappeared and they withdrew from the labour market

The Labour Gazette recorded how difficult it was to persuade women thrown out of work at the beginning of the war in certain colliery districts to learn a new trade or to move to districts where their labour was needed. The enhanced earning power of the male members of their families had made them indifferent to fresh employment.⁴⁷ The same withdrawal from the labour market was noted in the Dundee jute industry, which normally relied a great deal on the labour of "unfortunate" wives. Here it was not so much the earnings of men but the receipt of government separation allowances that reduced the desire of married women to work.

The reluctance of women to engage in farm work was also in part traced to the changed financial position of the family in wartime. As a government committee noted, the receipt of separation

⁴⁰Evidence from the head of the Labour Branch of the Admiralty, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁴¹As maintained by the Assistant Controller of the Labour Regulation Department of the Ministry of Munitions: "A difference of 14s. 6d. (instead of, as now, 2s.) a week between women on various classes of work often requiring no marked difference of skill would be impossible to maintain, and a rate of 45s. 6d. for women on women's work might cripple private industry. Such a sudden increase must do serious injury to output". *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴²See above p. 186.

⁴³G. Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 218. For a full account of the sex difference in the government's wage regulation programme see H. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, chaps. 13, 14.

⁴⁴I. Andrews and M. Hobbs, *Economic Effects of the War Upon Women and Children in Great Britain*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1918, p. 110.

⁴⁵Before the war ended, "half of all the families of the United Kingdom were receiving incomes determined according to the number and ages of the persons to be maintained" under the Separation Allowance Scheme. Beatrice Webb in *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, op. cit.*, p. 264. Eleanor Rathbone described the Scheme as "the largest experiment in the State endowment of maternity that the world has ever seen". V. Gollancz (ed.), *The Making of Women*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1917, p. 101.

⁴⁶E.g., because of greater regularity of employment, overtime pay, transference to higher-paid work.

⁴⁷*Labour Gazette*, vol. 23, no. 3, Mar. 1915, p. 79.

allowances in Norfolk made it unnecessary for women to work on the land as had been their custom. In Warwickshire, on the other hand, it was the large wages earned by miners and munitions workers that made it “almost impossible to persuade their wives to do any sort of work on the land” as they were “too well off to make it worth their while”.⁴⁸

Secondly, apart from the contraction in the regular supply of female labour, there was the question of the occupational mobility of those remaining. Those engaged in women’s major occupational outlets of textile and clothing manufacture were difficult to procure because much of their work was expanding to meet the war demand for khaki cloth and uniforms. But even in the branches of those trades most severely hit by unemployment at the outbreak of the war, cotton and dressmaking, there was a general reluctance to find a livelihood in other directions. In cotton, this inertia was due to a specialized factory skill and a relatively high wage level which meant that the skill possessed was either of little value in other types of work or, if of value, not as well-remunerated. In dressmaking, craft skill and inveterate social tradition impaired occupational mobility. Admittedly the inertia in both cases might have been overcome to some extent if unemployment had persisted. But before long cotton began to revive and dressmakers were able to transfer to the companion needletrades of wholesale tailoring and shirtmaking, when locally present, which were undergoing a war boom.

Thus under the prevailing circumstances, textile and clothing manufacture represented a poor source of substitute labour. This is well borne out by the fact that textiles concluded the war with only 45,000 or five per cent fewer women than it had at its beginning, and clothing with only 56,000 or nine per cent fewer.⁴⁹

Nor, despite its non-essential character, did private domestic service, the other major occupational outlet for women, offer employers the prospect of an immediate supply of substitutes. The uncertainty as to how long the war would last discouraged many servants from making a change. Then even if they were so inclined, opportunities were not necessarily apparent to them. Many were resident in places where there existed little demand for women substitutes, namely rural districts, residential suburban districts of the larger cities and resort areas. With domestic servants, too, there was the element of personal loyalties to retain them in their present position, a bond which was less usual in other types of work. Furthermore, as competition for servants grew with the decline in the number of new entrants and the transfer of some of the old to other employments,⁵⁰ conditions improved,⁵¹ thereby giving those remaining less cause to leave. Therefore, it is not altogether surprising that by the end of the war domestic servants added to the force of substituted labour no more than some 400,000 though they numbered in all 1,658,000 at the outbreak of the war.⁵²

This tendency towards occupational inertia was not found solely among the “employed”. Because of the characteristic immobility of female labour it was also in evidence among the redundant of trades permanently depressed by the war, such as the luxury ones of silk and lace and those in which the war made it difficult to procure the required materials such as linen manufacture, fish curing and fruit preserving. Only if the demand happened to exist in the same locality were these redundant women readily available for men’s work.

In addition to presenting quantitative difficulties, exclusive reliance on the regular supply of female labour also presented qualitative ones. Especially was this apparent in shop and office employment which, on the whole, could utilize only the higher grades of labour. Even if all the women engaged in shop and office work at the outbreak of the war were used to replace male staff, their numbers would be insufficient to satisfy the shop and office demand for female substitutes of their labour grade.

Therefore, if employers were to have both the numbers and the grades of substitutes required, it

⁴⁸*Report of Sub-Committee appointed to consider the Employment of Women in Agriculture in England and Wales*, pp. 40-41; 1919 Non-Parl. Board of Agriculture and Fisheries.

⁴⁹See Appendix Table C.2.

⁵⁰See below p. 201.

⁵¹See evidence from The Girls’ Friendly Society, The Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, pp. 144-145.

⁵²See Table 16.1, p. 170.

was essential that recruitment take place from among those previously “unoccupied”. To stimulate the flow, the government instituted various propaganda measures. One of its earliest was to issue a patriotic appeal to women in March 1915, urging them to place their names on the Board of Trade’s register of women for war service: “‘any woman’”, maintained the government, “‘who by working helps to release a man or to equip a man for fighting does national war service’”. Within six months close to 111,000 women had registered for war work.⁵³

To secure women for work on the land, the government in the spring of 1915 formed women’s county war agricultural committees. Under their auspices meetings were held to arouse enthusiasm and to explain to the women the need for their services. These meetings were followed by house to house canvasses and the names of women willing to work whole or part-time were entered on a village register. About 140,000 registered for agricultural service under this scheme.⁵⁴

The government also assumed an active role in recruiting for the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps. When rumours of immoral conduct among members of the Corps working in France reached such lengths as to diminish the supply of “respectable” women willing to enroll, the government appointed a Commission of Enquiry, composed of five distinguished women to report on these allegations. Fortunately, for the government’s recruiting campaign, the Commission’s report refuted what it termed to be no more than “current slanders”.⁵⁵

As a means of overcoming women’s “natural” reluctance to work away from home, the labour exchanges not only conducted special recruiting campaigns in areas offering women few employment opportunities but also took unusual precaution to see that proper arrangements were made for their transportation, reception, board, lodging, and general welfare. For those who lacked transportation money, the labour exchanges were empowered to advance it in the form of railway warrants. By the winter of 1917, five thousand women a month were being sent to distant work.⁵⁶

With the war making married women’s employment a question of national importance, the government, in contrast to its pre-war position, made a special effort to draw them into the labour market. It now became a matter to deplore if, as was the case with many village women, they continued to think that their place was in the home. “That idea”, claimed a government representative addressing the Women’s Land Army in 1916, “must be met and combated”.⁵⁷

A less direct approach, but furthering the cause of married women’s employment nevertheless, were the government’s attempts to overcome employer prejudice to the use of married women’s labour. The Shop Committee for Scotland, for example, urged employers to seek substitutes from among their former staff who had retired on marriage. As it pointed out, the skill and experience that these women had acquired before marriage would enable them to do “good work themselves, and also to instruct the less efficient”.⁵⁸

The government’s Commercial and Clerical Employment Committee was especially emphatic about married women’s employment. It advocated that if a wife of a recruit was able and willing to undertake clerical duties, “her claim to a preference in employment” should “not be denied”.⁵⁹ The government also furthered the cause of married women’s employment by its own example. During the war the Civil Service rule of retirement on marriage was not applied to the large number of temporary women clerks.

To describe some of the ways in which women were encouraged to enter the labour market is not to answer why they responded to the call for their services. Why were women, hitherto unoccupied, and for the most part confident in their belief that it was proper that they be so, willing to take up gainful employment?

⁵³M. Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁵⁵*Report of the Commission to enquire into the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps in France*, p. 3; 1918 Non-Parl. Ministry of Labour.

⁵⁶I Andrews and M. Hobbs, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁵⁷Walter Long as quoted in V. Brittain, *Lady into Woman*, London: Dakers, 1953, p. 187.

⁵⁸*Government Committee on War Organisation in the Distributing Trades in Scotland: First Report*, p 7; 1914-16 Cd. 7987, xxxvii.

⁵⁹*Report of the Commercial and Clerical Employments Committee, op. cit.*, p. 11.

Though the war reduced the need of some women to work, with others it produced a need where none had previously existed. Such was the case with soldiers' wives who found the separation allowance insufficient. As for enlisted clerks, the government's Commercial and Clerical Employment Committee openly attested to its inadequacy by admitting the allowance "will go but a little way towards maintaining the man's family in the position to which they have been accustomed".⁶⁰ With other women it was the rising cost of living that made work an economic necessity. Despite a rapid rise in wages, prices tended to advance even more rapidly so that by the summer of 1916, according to the government's index, the retail food price of all the items "ordinarily entering into the working class family budget" had risen to fifty per cent above the pre-war level and, by the summer of 1918, to 110 per cent above it.⁶¹

Patriotism, too, was a decided factor in inducing women to work who under normal circumstances would not have entered the labour market between 1914 and 1918. Particularly did work appear as a patriotic gesture to young ladies of leisure who were determined "to play some active part in the glorious Allied fight against militarism".⁶² Women university students left for war service. Shell-making became "the latest Society craze".⁶³ Middle class town dwellers volunteered for work on the land.

The factors pushing women into the labour market, however, were of less consequence than those pulling them in, namely the existence of an unprecedented number of attractive job openings. It was this more than the compulsion of need or patriotism which precipitated the entry of the young who ordinarily would have remained at home or in school, encouraged the re-entry of the retired, and retained at work those who normally would have retired on marriage. This same factor also underlay the patriotic woman's transfer to the status of the occupied. Without the ready availability of "respectable" work, her contribution to the war effort would probably never have extended beyond the voluntary level. As for the needy, the significance of having men's work available meant that for the first time in the history of modern woman's employment the demand for their services was not limited in the main to women's most poorly paid work but encompassed some relatively well-paying jobs such as gas works labourer, railway porter and tanner.⁶⁴

The particular features of men's work which made it especially attractive to the normally unoccupied varied with the class membership of the women substitutes. Among the more well-to-do, the ladylike openings were the uppermost consideration. Accordingly they did not hesitate to enter offices and shops. Their more progressive sisters had been doing this before the war. But openings of this nature, though expanding, were still comparatively rare at that time. The exceptional wartime demand for their services as clerks and shop assistants now facilitated the entry of the more conservative. Instead of actively having to seek work, the work, so to speak, sought them. Moreover, their privileged background gave them access to the higher grade positions in the less-esteemed manufacturing and agricultural industries. Thereby placed above and apart from the ordinary type of woman worker found in these industries, they were able to accept work in factories and on farms without suffering any loss in status. For as shown elsewhere, it was not only the nature of the work but also the class of person with whom one worked that demarcated the less from the more respectable occupations.⁶⁵

For the normally unoccupied working class woman, the ready availability of work which was both "well worth her while" and close to home was of greatest moment. According to the testimony of a former official of the National Federation of Women Workers before the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, women "seemed to rush" into munitions work at the outbreak of the war" without any question as to whether they were taking a man's job or reducing his rate; £1 per week seemed to them a wonderful rate, and they were glad to get it".⁶⁶ Those who entered transport,

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11. Also see G. Stone (ed.), *Women War Workers* London: Harrap, 1917, pp. 90-91.

⁶¹ *Labour Gazette*, vol. 25, no. 9, Sept. 1918, p. 346.

⁶² V. Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, London: Gollancz, 1933, p. 147.

⁶³ E. (Sylvia) Pankhurst, *The Home Front*, London: Hutchinson, 1932, p. 207.

⁶⁴ For comparative rates paid women in various classes of work by 1918 see *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁶⁵ See above pp. 93-95.

⁶⁶ *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc.*, *op.*

gas, and skilled engineering as substitutes received even more.

In addition to these general features, there were those which appealed particularly to the married now that the war “almost overnight” had changed their wage earning “from a disregarded or shameful business into a heroism.”⁶⁷ First of all, whereas in pre-war days many employers restricted their demand for women to the single, in wartime there was generally no such distinction. As a result married women wishing to work had much wider occupational choice. Furthermore, because of the need for their services, both industry and the community were willing to recognize the married woman’s domestic responsibilities and adjust the work situation accordingly. The Ministry of Munitions promoted this movement both within and without the plant. Besides encouraging the employment of women supervisors to deal with, among other problems, the many stemming from married women working, it also made special grants in aid for the establishment and maintenance of nurseries for the children of munition workers.

Inadvertently, too, the Ministry of Munitions promoted married women’s employment. So great was the demand for munitions that many factories went into continuous operation as a means of meeting their production quotas. As a result women were wanted not only for day-shift but night-shift work as well. The opportunity to work nights appealed especially to married women, who saw it as a way of combining both wage-earning and homemaking, with the result that in some factories the majority of the female night staff consisted of married women.⁶⁸

Of particular application to the single working class girl were those aspects of the demand for substituted labour which facilitated her mobility. Though her domestic ties were weaker than married women’s, her mobility before the war had been impeded by the low wages which made self-support away from home difficult if not impossible, by the lack of a compelling motive strong enough to counteract her “homing instinct”, and by a lack of information as to where her labour could be advantageously employed.

Wartime developments in munition manufacture, however, made women less adverse to working away from home. A “living wage” was now obtainable and special provisions existed to secure women’s welfare both within and without the factory. In addition, labour exchange officials came to areas where there were untapped pools of female labour and urged the women, as a national service, to accept munition work. To make the decision of these women even easier, those officials assumed all responsibility for arranging placement, transportation and reception.

Because of the attractive features connected with acting as men’s substitutes—the glory, the pay, the ease of placement, the welfare conditions—there was no general failure at any period of the war in the supply of women willing to substitute.⁶⁹ Not only were there the “unoccupied” to draw upon, but also, as the war progressed, the women working in the less essential branches of women’s work, especially private domestic service. The great contrast between their pay and war workers’, attracting increasing attention as substitution proceeded apace in the second and third years of the war, induced more and more to seek war jobs. Before the war the variation in wages paid to similar grades of female labour had never been substantial enough to produce a shift among women from low- to high-paying work. During the war, however, the situation changed. The employment of women in munitions and in occupations where employers, conceding to the demands of organized men, paid women substitutes “men’s rates”, produced the novel phenomenon of a double standard of wages between like grades of working women.

Providing yet a third source of supply were those women attached to trades permanently depressed by the war. Though initially reluctant to make any radical occupational change, they became more reconciled to the idea as their prospects of returning to their regular jobs dwindled. With employers calling for substitutes on such favourable terms, so many of these women went into men’s

cit., p. 12. The War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry estimated a liberal pre-war average for women in industry proper to be 13s. 6d. per week. See its *Report*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁶⁷R. Strachey (ed.), *Our Freedom and Its Results*, London: Published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, 1936, p. 127.

⁶⁸*Health of Munition Workers Committee: Final Report*, *op. cit.*, p. 28. Also see *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

⁶⁹See H. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

work that by the end of the war the unemployed woman was virtually an unknown figure.⁷⁰

⁷⁰War work was so attractive that even “many Irish women...crossed to Great Britain to take up employment in munition factories, attracted by the prospect of high wages”. A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *Industry and Finance*, London: Pitman, 1917, p. 62.

Chapter 18

The Consequence of Substitution

18.1 Altered Course of Employment

The war altered the normal course of women's employment in three principal respects. It had the effect of hastening certain trends in operation prior to the war, of reversing others and of initiating some of its own.

Foremost the war hastened the normal movement of women into work of a routine character. This was partly due to more of men's work assuming this form under wartime conditions, such as occurred in engineering, woodworking and the civil service. It was also the outcome of women being more widely introduced into work of this description which men normally performed in pre-war days.

A second movement accelerated by the war was that of using women to deal with women. Especially was this in evidence in munitions manufacture which absorbed such large numbers of women. Whereas the woman welfare officer was just making her debut on the industrial scene in the years prior to the war, she now came into her own as a vital link in the munitions production process. Women's supervisory opportunities were also enhanced in consequence of firms employing a larger proportion of women and organizing them in departments apart from men. In munitions manufacture, where this development was most pronounced, women even served as full managers.

In respect to both the woman welfare officer and the woman supervisor, the war merely made their presence more prominent but the police woman was a wartime innovation. In government factories where large numbers of women were employed, police women were used to examine passports, search for contraband articles, deal with complaints of petty offenses, patrol and, when necessary, appear in police courts. Several local police authorities also introduced women as recognized members of their force. In some cases they acted as probation officers but ordinarily their duties included, among others, patrolling, custody and escort of female prisoners, attendance at police court, inspection of common lodging houses, domiciliary visiting and the supervision of music-halls, cinemas and dancing halls.

The war established a counter movement to women's use for so-called rough work. Whereas prior to the war, women in decreasing numbers were found engaged in heavy work or work exposing them to dirt, heat, damp, cold or danger, there was an increase of women during the war in the outdoor industries of agriculture and transport, in the rough occupations connected with gas works, leather tanneries, sugar refineries, shipbuilding and iron and steel manufacture, to cite just a few examples, and in the dangerous ones connected with lead manufacture such as were found in the pottery and lead paint trades. The "men's rates" paid by so many of those jobs and the welfare conditions attached to them did much to overcome women's pre-war reluctance to engage in rough work. For example, in the South Metropolitan Gas Company, where women substitutes were started on the heavier work in July 1915, sixty per cent of the original staff were still with the Company at the time of the Armistice. Though the work was particularly dirty, heavy and at times hot, the

earnings were good. Some earned as much as four to five pounds a week. And great care was taken to assure the women's health, safety and comfort.¹

However, it would be wrong to conclude that the war banished the prejudice against rough work completely. As long as women had the choice, they still sought the more ladylike occupations. The women with more privileged backgrounds consequently filled the positions in shops and offices, and the lighter and cleaner ones in factory and workshop. They also assumed the more responsible positions in industry and agriculture. It was only among the women who normally had no other choice but to accept the rough low-paying women's work or not to work at all that the war induced a change in attitude. Men's rough work offered these women, who came mainly from the unskilled labouring classes, unprecedented opportunities to earn good wages, the prospect of which began to outweigh the advantages of remaining unoccupied in the home. It also created a movement among those of this class already occupied to transfer from women's rough work, with its low standards of wages and welfare, to men's.

That patriotism was not the prime factor inducing these women to accept such work is borne out by the fact that women of this class generally remained reluctant to enter the "patriotic" work of farming. Its "financial unattractiveness"² was a strong deterrent to recruitment. The low-paying rope trade provides another example. Although its output was essential for the war effort, it suffered from a shortage of female substitutes. Women, able to obtain better paid work elsewhere, were generally unwilling to accept work which, in addition to being low-paid, entailed working in an exposed place in cold weather.

The employment development initiated by the war was the entry of women into men's skilled work. This occurred at three levels. First of all, there was a movement of women into men's skilled trades of an apprenticeship or "craft" character. Though few women by the end of the war possessed the general skill, for example, of an engineer, a boilermaker, a carpenter or a scientific instrument maker, a small proportion of women substitutes were being used on skilled processes. Acetylene welding was one such process. Whereas before the war this work was reserved for the fully skilled fitters, boilermakers or coppersmiths, women now entered the field. Their contribution was largely confined, however, to those job situations where the process had been to some degree specialized.

The second movement occurred at the scientific level. Prior to the war women with scientific training found very little use for their services outside of teaching. With the war came the opportunity to engage in industry's scientific work. Concerns manufacturing such assorted products as chemicals, gas, scientific instruments, cement, india rubber, and china and earthenware now opened their laboratories to the woman scientist.

The third point at which women entered men's skilled work occurred at the professional level. Women teachers, doctors and even factory inspectors, who prior to the war were virtually confined to the female side of their professions, now extended their scope into the male side as a shortage of qualified men developed.

18.2 Limits to Substitution

Though there was a definite movement of women into men's work of a routine, rough or skilled character, women by no means entered this work indiscriminately. The amount of substitution varied widely between different trades and even between different firms in the same trades. Such was the case in boot and shoe manufacture where the extent women were employed on the heavier and more dangerous machines varied from factory to factory. Nor was it unusual to find that women had been more widely introduced into occupations like railway trucking, for which they did not appear especially well-fitted, than into such work as electro-plating which might appear more suitable. In short, no understanding of women's substitution in wartime is complete without

¹See evidence from The South Metropolitan Gas Company, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices, Summaries of Evidence, etc.*, pp. 129-130; 1919 Cmd. 167, xxxi.

²A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *Industry and Finance*, London: Pitman, 1917, p. 158.

considering its limits.

When the war ended, men were still performing over sixty per cent of the nation's civil work covered by the Board of Trade's State of Employment returns and virtually all of its military work. Mining, building, transport, agriculture, metal manufacture, and public utilities continued predominantly male industries. Out of the eighteen major industrial categories in which men were in the majority at the outbreak of the war, only three became women's industries by the end of the war, namely Commerce, Miscellaneous Manufacturing, and Hotels, Public Houses, etc.³

Partly explaining the limits to women's substitution was the fact that despite the over-all shortage of male labour, some firms did not experience it and so lacked the incentive to transfer their demand to women. There were employers who were able to manage with the male labour available to them—young boys, the retired, men of military age exempted from military duty, the disabled soldiers. Those engaged in the heavy and skilled branches of munitions manufacture were especially favoured in this respect. The operation of the laws of supply and demand assisted by patriotism and the desire to remain in civilian life induced a voluntary flow of men into firms engaged in such work.⁴ Some employers, less favourably situated in terms of having the government assume their wages bill or of having their work classified as so essential as to justify the military exemption of many of their workers, could still manage with a reduced staff if the war had contracted the demand for their product or had shortened their supply of raw materials as was the case in the printing trade. A more economical use of male power also had the effect of reducing a firm's need for women substitutes. Some retail establishments, for example, found that by closing during lunch hours and earlier in the evening they could manage with fewer men.

Again, some establishments, because of their reputation suffered no shortage of men. The exclusive public schools experienced little difficulty in meeting their staff requirements as the male teachers still in the civilian work force preferred them to others less esteemed. The same transfer of men from lower to higher class work was noted in the catering industry where the first class hotels were able to draw waiters from the second class ones. The need for women substitutes, consequently, was much less pressing in establishments of high repute than in those viewed less favourably.

Even in those cases where the war brought an expanded demand for labour, employers did not necessarily find themselves short of men. In woodwork scientific instrument making, to cite one instance, the places of young joiners and cabinet makers who left for the Service were filled with comparative ease by older men from the high class furniture trade where employment was slack during the war. Under these circumstances, women's chances of being trained and used for the skilled work were virtually nil.

The boundaries to women's substitution, however, were not determined solely by need. Even among employers who admitted to a shortage of male labour, a demand for women substitutes did not automatically follow.

To admit of the possibility of using female labour, conscientious employers first of all had to satisfy themselves that the work situation was or could be made respectable for women. Without this basic conviction, they were unlikely to consider women a possible answer to the male labour shortage. At stake were fundamental views regarding the sexes which could not be easily dismissed. Admittedly, as the shortage of men became more acute and employers were faced with the alternative of reducing their production or using women, there was a tendency to admit them to "unsuitable" work as a wartime expedient.⁵ Nevertheless, there were absolute limits beyond which none was

³See Table 16.3 above, p. 172.

⁴See H. Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923, pp. 72-76. Also see evidence from the Staff Officer of the Ministry of Labour and from the National Union of Millers, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices, Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, pp. 79, 109.

⁵The Home Office listed the "unsuitable" trades women had entered during the war as follows: sawmilling, wood wool manufacture, indiarubber (processes in the manufacture of the raw material), chemicals (heavy), oil and seed crushing (except certain processes), glass manufacture (glasshouse processes), papermaking (certain manufacturing processes), flour and corn milling (except certain processes), sugar refining, gas manufacture, rope and binder twine, heavy edge tools, scythe and sickle industry, wire ropes (heavy), shale oil refining, cement manufacture (except certain processes) fellmongering, malting, linoleum and floor-cloth manufacture (except a few light processes), paints

prepared to go.

Had the war lasted longer or the threat to national survival been greater, even these limits might have been surpassed. But the situation being what it was, the more fundamental conceptions of what work women ought not to do remained intact even if those of a more superficial character were unable to resist the exceptional labour market pressures of wartime. For example, no matter how pressing the military's need for combatants, women were never suggested as suitable for this type of work. Not even the militant suffragette organization, the Women's Social and Political Union, which urged "compulsory national service for men and women alike"⁶ ever suggested that women should defend their country with arms. Nor was there ever a movement to return women to the mines as underground workers. Though there was much boy's work well within the capacity of women to perform, public opinion was unwilling to countenance the use of its womenfolk in such a manner. So in an industry which lost to the Forces nearly twenty-two per cent of its effectives within the first year of the war,⁷ and whose production was vital to the war effort, there was not only a nominal amount of substitution of women for men but all of it occurred in jobs that were performed on the mine's surface. For similar reasons the merchant marine service, also in urgent need of labour, remained impervious to the substitution process.

Apart from moral considerations there were also pragmatic reasons to bar further substitution: the question of the employer's ability to hire women as substitutes and that of the substitute's competency, profitability and availability.

Although legal restrictions on female labour were relaxed in wartime, they were not entirely abandoned. Employers were still subject to various regulations pertaining to the hours of women's but not of men's employment. Thus under certain circumstances, employers had no choice but to resort to men's labour. If a job required excessive overtime no woman could be used. Or, in the case of night work, employers in need of child labour in the later stages of the war could use only boys since the employment of girls between the ages of fourteen and sixteen was forbidden.⁸

The situation in regard to union restrictions was similar. The permission to substitute women for men was not given by the unions in the form of a blank cheque. It was granted only in those instances where the unions were convinced such a concession was necessary to secure the national welfare. If they considered a male shortage in their trade or occupation had not been proven or, if it had, that it caused no serious harm to the war effort, or if they believed that in the long run the national interest was best served by keeping female labour out of work deemed inherently unsuitable for it, they refused to alter their pre-existing trade practices. On the grounds that substitution was unnecessary or undesirable the felt hat makers did not relax their prohibition of female labour from the felting department; the steel smelters, theirs from the smelting processes; the cotton mule spinners, theirs from the occupation of "minder"; or the woolcombers, theirs from the handling of "scheduled" wools or the feeding of the washbowl.⁹

The question of ability was of most consequence in skilled work requiring a period of training and experience longer than the war itself. Such was the case with the higher clerical and administrative positions. Administrative responsibility, according to the Final Report of the British Association's wartime investigation of substitution, was "usually undertaken after many more years of business experience than was represented even by the whole period of the war, while responsible professional duties", for example, "those of an accountant, can as a rule only be undertaken by persons who have spent years in qualifying for admission to the several professions".¹⁰ Similarly, the skilled craftsman's resourcefulness, adaptability, judgment and knowledge could not be duplicated by women within the comparatively short period of the war. Consequently any positions which only a fully qualified person could fill, such as that of chef or tool setter, were automatically closed to women.

and colours, china and earthenware (certain prohibited processes). See *Substitution of Women in Non-Munition Factories during the War*, pp. 16-17; 1919 Non-Parl. Home Office.

⁶As quoted in E. (Sylvia) Parkhurst, *The Home Front*, London: Hutchinson, 1932, p. 198.

⁷See H. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁸See *Health of Munition Workers Committee: Final Report*, p. 33; 1918 Cd. 9065, xii.

⁹See Appendix B.

¹⁰A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *British Labour*, London: Pitman, 1921, p. 78.

Men's work that could not be easily sectionalized offered a further barrier to women's substitution. Thus the difficulty of transforming a man's job into a woman's was virtually insurmountable where a combination of skill and strength was needed to perform the work satisfactorily. Heavy edge tool manufacturing was one such instance as its principal processes required at once training and varied skill, long experience, powerful muscles, and heavy lifting. Shipbuilding was another. Its work was of such a nature as to preclude the large-scale use of automatic machines which helped to revolutionize the engineering industry and to make possible the introduction of women in great numbers.

Even where the question of women's incompetence was by no means proved, the fact that an employer lacked confidence in women's ability to undertake a given operation was a sufficient deterrent to substitution. Thus, to the end, "some employers were found who said that it was impossible for women to work on capstan lathes" even though they were operating such machines in the majority of firms throughout the country.¹¹ Opinion similarly varied among tramway employers. Whereas in some cities women were increasingly employed as tram drivers, in others the companies continued adamant in their belief that women were physically incapable of working the brakes properly and so to use them would mean endangering the public on "steep gradients, in congested traffic, or under emergencies".¹²

Considerations of cost also dissuaded employers from substituting women. In small works where articles over fifty or sixty pounds had to be handled, the cost of the lifting tackle needed to render women competent substitutes was usually considered prohibitive. Then there were the employers who questioned the soundness of training women for men's skilled work. Some were influenced in their thinking by the uncertain length of the war. If it would soon be over, they reasoned, it would be better to wait for the trained men to return from the Forces or from civilian work of "national importance". Others thought of their commitment to the unions to use women only as a wartime expedient. Therefore, to train women who would have to be dismissed at the end of the war seemed a waste of money. And although there was still the probability of further subdividing highly skilled work and introducing women to the simpler processes, certain employers opposed this lest in having to pay the women "men's rates" they would invoke wage claims from the women already in their employ on women's work.¹³

Group substitution—two or more women to replace one man—also presented economic difficulties to the employer. Where female labour was not sufficiently cheap, the cost assumed prohibitive proportions and substitution which was possible on grounds of competency failed to materialize because unable to pass the economic test.

Apart from some employers experiencing no male labour shortage and others who did, not admitting to the possibility of solving it with female labour, there was yet a third limit to women's substitution. Some employers, though anxious to have women substitutes, were unable to give effect to their views.

In the first place, whether active or passive, the resistance of the rank-and-file male worker to the entrance of women to work claimed as his own was at times insurmountable. Though officially unions agreed to women's entrance, this in itself was not always sufficient. If the skilled men who were needed to instruct and supervise the female newcomers opposed the idea of substitution, there was little the employer could do. Yet "in every industrial district, almost without exception", according to the Chairman of the Machine Tool and Engineering Association, "there was continuous opposition to the introduction of women". In some cases it was overt "even to the point of striking"; in others it was "hidden", and took such forms as refusing to instruct women, attempting to restrict the scope of their work, and discrediting their efforts.¹⁴ Thus in the leather glove trade, workmen discouraged the few efforts made to train women as cutters. Scottish lace workers steadily resisted the employment of

¹¹A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹²Evidence from *The Tramways' and Light Railways' Association Appendices: Summaries of Evidence. etc., op. cit.*, p. 136.

¹³See evidence from the Director of the Technical Section, Labour Supply Department, Ministry of Munitions, *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 55.

women. So did electro-plate workers in Sheffield. Furthermore, there were instances of men refusing to accept a sex division which gave them all the so-called donkey work.

The quantitative and qualitative deficiencies in the available female labour supply also constituted a problem. Farmers were not always able to secure the number of women required due to the preference of many village wives to remain unoccupied and of their daughters to enter higher-paying work such as was offered in munition establishments. As for attracting labour from outside the area, housing was a great drawback. The cottages a farmer normally would have had available were in many cases still occupied by the families of his employees who had gone into Service and satisfactory alternative accommodation was difficult to procure. So even apart from the question of wages, there was the one of housing to reduce the number of women available for work on the land. Similar housing difficulties impeded the efforts of employers in major women-employing districts, such as those producing hosiery and woollens, to expand their labour force to meet government contracts. With these districts already employing so high a proportion of the local female population, additional recruits had to come for the most part from outside the area. On the other hand securing lodgings was extremely difficult and so women from a distance were hard to recruit.

Even a local abundance of female labour did not guarantee that the employer would have no difficulty in securing substitutes. With some jobs, only women of an exceptional type could be used. If the local supply was short of women of the requisite kind and this deficiency could not be overcome by recruiting non-resident women, an employer's attempt at substitution would to some extent be frustrated. In boot and shoe manufacture, for example, the extent to which women were employed on the heavier or more dangerous machines was in part dependent on the intelligence and physique of the women operatives locally available. In other instances employers were unable to substitute women in men's more skilled and responsible work because they could not find women who possessed such qualities as ambition, initiative and willingness to assume responsibility.

A final deterrent to substitution was the employer's inability, even apart from the question of employed men's cooperation, to make women competent employees. Many manufacturers, especially those producing goods less vital to the war effort, were unable, under the conditions of wartime, to alter their plant and equipment in ways which would have greatly facilitated the replacement process. Others discovered that by the time they decided to open up their more skilled work to women, the skilled men needed to instruct and supervise them had either been conscripted or had transferred to more essential work. This was the situation faced by a number of furniture manufacturers in the later stages of the war.

18.3 Shift in Dividing Line

The sex division of labour continued, as in peacetime, to be a marked feature of the economy. Though the war brought women into work recognized as men's prior to the war, their entry was not made on a sex interchangeable basis. This was because the entrance of women almost invariably involved either the departure of men or the creation of new "men's jobs" and "women's jobs" out of the duties formerly allocated only to men. As a result the sex division remained. What changed was the line of demarcation. The war had the effect of widening the scope of women's employment while narrowing that of men's. Men's wartime in contrast to their peacetime work was much more highly concentrated. In kind, it increasingly consisted of military service and work in connection with the munition producing industries. In nature, it increasingly consisted of the nation's most militant, responsible, laborious, and skilled work. On the other hand, women now assumed a larger share of virtually all of the nation's civilian industries, essential and non-essential alike. They reinforced the munition producing ones and replaced men in the non-munition ones.

Furthermore, during the war the nature of women's work expanded in all directions. More of the nation's heavier, responsible and skilled work went into their hands as well as its lighter and unskilled work. They were even given a share, though a very small one, of the nation's militant work. The relaxation of the restrictions and the revision of employment practices narrowly circumscribing

women's occupational scope prior to the war had enabled this expansion to take place. but this relaxation does not explain the absence of men from the substitute work women performed in wartime.

First of all it must be remembered that for several million men the freedom to choose their occupations had been either taken from them altogether or severely circumscribed. No matter how willing to respond to an employer's demand, they were not free to do so because of the government's prior claim to their labour. For some this meant that only military service was open. For others of military age exempted from military service this meant they were free only to continue on or transfer to essential work which the government deemed women could not or should not perform. Furthermore, by the time of the Armistice employers themselves were no longer free to hire men between the ages of eighteen and sixty-one for work classified by the government as non-essential or, if essential, as substitute women's work.¹⁵

But it would be wrong to give the impression that compulsion alone prevented men from sharing in women's wartime work.¹⁶ Both those of military age who were not yet conscripted and those who because of age were free to accept whatever employment they chose had little desire to do women's war work when men's paid so much more.¹⁷ Therefore, they were willing to be upgraded from their peacetime posts or to transfer to men's war jobs, leaving their more poorly paid jobs for women substitutes to fill.

Even where the economic motive was not sufficiently strong to induce change, the patriotic one often was. With the government appealing under various schemes for volunteers for men's war work, many men were persuaded as a matter of duty. Some employers even "helped" the less patriotic to see their duty by putting pressure on them to leave their present employment for work of national importance.¹⁸ Where the government was in more direct control of the job situation, such as in its own factories and controlled munition establishments, men were rarely given the chance to remain in work which women could do. In fact it was part of the job of the Ministry of Munition's dilution officers to see that men were only engaged on work for which women's labour was for one reason or another disqualified.¹⁹

There were also the men of military age who, though unmoved by patriotism or economic self-interest, were motivated by the knowledge that their prospects of being exempted from military service, especially in the earlier part of the war, were greatly enhanced if they were engaged in essential war work. Furthermore, there were the men made redundant by the war to whom the question of leaving their present job for a more attractive paying or a more patriotic men's war job was never an issue. Those, quite simply, were the kind of jobs that called out the loudest for men in wartime and it was to them that these unemployed men were understandably drawn.

¹⁵See above pp. 177-178.

¹⁶See above p. 205.

¹⁷The War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry estimated that by the end of the war, women's wages in industry proper were but two-thirds of men's. See its *Report*, pp. 151-152; 1919 Cmd. 135, xxxi. For comparative listing of men's standard wages with substituted women's wages in various industries as of November 1918 see B. Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, London: Labour Research Dept. and Allen and Unwin, 1920, Table II.

¹⁸E.g., see A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *Industry and Finance*, London: Pitman, 1917, p. 132.

¹⁹See H. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

Part V

THE AFTERMATH: 1918-1921

The war, as shown, altered the normal course of women's employment in both the proportion of women occupied and the degree to which they were used as substitutes for men. It now remains to ask what after effects this had, if any. The next two chapters examine women's employment and the reasons behind it in the back-to-normalcy period and judge the impact of the war upon it.

Chapter 19

Displacement and Retention: 1918-1920

The analysis of women's employment position, once the economy was back to normal, proceeds in two stages as the concept of "normalcy" was by no means constant in the immediate post-war period. At first it encompassed a boom economy in which, as stated in the Annual Report of the Factory Department for 1919, "the demand for practically every marketable commodity has probably never been so great".¹ This was soon superseded, however, by a "normalcy" characterized by widespread unemployment. As the general level of employment vitally affected women's post-war employment opportunities, an examination of each phase of the initial normalcy period is necessary if the changes in women's employment relative to its wartime peak are to be depicted in full.

For statistical purposes July 1920 is used as the cut-off date for the full-employment period. By that time the economy was redirected to peacetime ends, the demobilized servicemen were back in the civilian labour market and employment was "very good everywhere".² Though the post-war slump was almost immediately to follow, it had as yet no bearing on women's contemporary employment status. Furthermore, Board of Trade State of Employment figures make possible a statistical comparison of women's changing share in the nation's industries not only between November 1918 and July 1920 but also between July 1914 and July 1920. For showing the extent of changes under conditions of trade recession, June 1921 has been chosen as the cut-off date. This is not because the slump had reached its full ebb by then³ but because in that month the Census was taken and thus a statistical picture of women's employment against a background of economic depression is readily available.

Unfortunately, from the point of view of this study, the occupational tables in the Census of 1921 are not comparable with those of 1911 owing to changes in classification.⁴ Over that period only the industrial tables can be used. Yet even these tables are of limited use for comparative purposes. As the *General Report* of the 1921 Census of England and Wales maintains, any comparison between the two industrial tabulations "must be made with considerable reserve, and without necessarily attributing significance to small variations".⁵ Because of the uncertain comparative value of the

¹ *Factory Report, 1919*, p. 6; 1920 Cmd. 941, xvi.

² A. Pigou, *Aspects of British Economic History, 1918-1925*, London: Macmillan, 1947, p. 38.

³ Instead it was to continue gathering momentum until the end of 1922 after which came the so-called doldrums persisting in its turn until the Wall Street crash of 1929 heralded a second and greater slump.

⁴ A. Bowley in his "Occupational Changes in Great Britain, 1911 and 1921", Special Memorandum No.17, *London and Cambridge Economic Service*, May, 1920, attempted an occupational comparison but so much of it was later considered "hazardous and in some cases definitely erroneous", that it was subsequently withdrawn. A. Bowley, "Numbers Occupied in the Industries of England and Wales, 1911 and 1921", Special Memorandum No. 17a, *London and Cambridge Economic Service*, Dec., 1926, p. 2 n.

⁵ P. 142; 1927 Non-Parl. Registrar General of England and Wales. The reasons given for this lack of comparability are: 1) "in 1911 some discretion was left to employed persons ... as to whether they should or should not state the nature of their employer's business, whereas in 1921 new methods have been adopted for ascertaining this in all cases"

industrial figures and because the Census of 1921 offers comparative figures only for certain selected industries in England and Wales, the 1911 and 1921 industrial tabulations for England and Wales accepted by Professor Bowley as comparable have been used to indicate women's changing share in British industry. His figures which relate to all industries are derived from the Census tabulations and are given on a sex basis.⁶ However limited the Census is for showing changes in women's occupational distribution between 1911 and 1921, it remains a most valuable source for depicting women's changing labour market participation between those two years. First of all, it is possible to combine the figures for England and Wales and for Scotland so as to compare the proportion of women occupied in Great Britain in 1911 and in 1921. Secondly, the Census definition of "occupied", unlike that of "employed" used by the Board of Trade's State of Employment enquiry, includes persons normally attached to an occupation even though not actually at work in it at the time of the Census. Thus the Census for 1921, a depression year, gives a more accurate account of women's availability for gainful employment than would be the case if only women actually in employment were counted.

19.1 Displacement

By July 1920 the female labour force in the United Kingdom contained some 600,000 fewer women than in November 1918.⁷ From around thirty-seven per cent,⁸ the proportion of females ten years of age and over in employment had dropped to some thirty-three per cent.⁹ This great efflux of women from the industrial scene had the effect of reducing their share in virtually every major industry covered by the Board of Trade returns. Out of every one hundred persons employed in the industries covered, there were now ten fewer women than in November 1918.¹⁰ Admittedly the extent of displacement varied widely among the different industries but this was more a variation of degree than of kind. Responsible for it were the circumstances in each industry which accorded the common factors underlying women's displacement a different weight. Consequently, the decline in women's relative share in industry can be understood not through an examination of each industry, which at best can only reveal the particular ramifications of the determining factors, but through an examination of the determining factors themselves.

Women's displacement was in part due to a failure in the supply of women. With the return of the demobilized family breadwinner to civilian employment, the need of many women to work diminished. For those whose breadwinners never returned or who returned disabled, there were

and 2) "the industry tabulation of 1921 has been carried out independently of the occupation tabulation, and not as in 1911, when industry was largely inferred from occupation. Such inference can only be made with safety in certain cases such as coal mining". (p. 142.)

⁶A. Bowley, *op. cit.*, Table III. Professor Bowley deliberately restricted his study to England and Wales because the Scottish figures, gathered on a somewhat different basis, were not strictly comparable.

Number of Women	Increase or Decrease Between Nov. 1918 and July 1920.
Employed in Industries 'Covered by Board of Trade State of Employment Enquiry	-800,000
Demobilised from the Armed Forces	-100,000
Re-entering Domestic Service	300,000
Net Difference	-600,000

Source: A. Pigou, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

⁷See above p. 169.

⁸Computed on the following basis: According to the *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry* (p. 80; 1919 Cmd. 135, xxxi), the female labour force in the United Kingdom numbered 5,966,000 in July 1914. Professor Pigou in his *Aspects of British Economic History 1918-1925*, (*op. cit.*, p. 19) estimated that the net influx of women into gainful employment between July 1914 and November 1918 amounted to 1,350,000 and the net efflux between November 1918 and April 1920 amounted to 600,000. This leaves a total of 6,716,000 occupied females as of April 1920. As for the number of females ten years of age and over in the United Kingdom, the official estimate for June 1920 as given in A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *British Labour*, (London: Pitman, 1921, p. 110) was 20,168,000.

¹⁰In reality there was far more displacement than is revealed by the Board of Trade's figures. They show only the numbers drawn in and disappearing from particular industries and thus provide no indication of the number of women who returned from men's to women's work within the same industry.

Table 19.1: Increase or Decrease in the Number of Females Employed in the United Kingdom by Industry Between November 1918 and July 1920 and Between July 1914 and July 1920.

Industry	Number of Females Employed			
	Nov.1918–July 1920		July 1914–July 1920	
	Increase	Decrease	Increase	Decrease
Service Industries:	Thousands		Thousands	
Commerce		86	298	
Public Administration		108	75	
Transport		69	28	
Banking and Finance		19	47	
Hospitals (Civil and Military)		43	4	
Hotels, Public Houses, Cinemas, Theatres, etc.	19		60	
Other Professions ^a		1	21	
Gas, Water and Electricity (Public and Private)		10	4	
Teachers under Local Authorities		5	7	
Net Change in Service industries		323	543	
Manufacturing Industries:				
Metals		535	137	
Chemicals ^b		33	30	
Wood		19	21	
Food, Drink and Tobacco	11		46	
Building		21	3	
Leather		8	12	
Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass	3		13	
Miscellaneous Industries		4	18	
Paper and Printing	25		18	
Textiles	66		21	
Clothing	13			43
Net change in Manufacturing Industries		502	274	
Primary Industries:				
Agriculture in Great Britain ^c		10	5	
Mines and Quarries		3	3	
Net Change in Primary Industries		13	8	
Net Change in All Industries		838	825	

^aPersons employed by accountants, solicitors, etc., mainly clerks.

^bPersons employed in firms under private ownership. Those employed under public ownership were classified to "Government Establishments" which for the purposes of this study has been included under "Metals"

^cPermanent labour only.

Compiled from Board of Trade figures as published in A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *op. cit.* See Appendix C for figures and page references. Each industry figure is shown to the nearest thousand; as a result the sub-totals and totals computed from the figures as shown in Appendix C are not always equal to the sum of the separate items shown here.

unemployment benefits "on a generous scale"¹¹ to tide the family over until employment was found.¹²

Apart from the question of need, some women had no more desire to work. Foremost among these were the married women who, for the most part, were unwilling to work beyond the duration of the war.¹³ Though public opinion had approved of their working outside the home during the

¹¹H. Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923, p. 301.

¹²The government instituted at the end of the war a scheme for paying out-of-work donations combined with dependent allowances to ex-service men and unemployed civil workers made redundant by the cessation of hostilities. It was designed as an interim measure pending the elaboration of a system of universal contributory unemployment insurance. In 1920 such a system was introduced and in 1921 dependents allowances were made a part of the unemployment benefit.

¹³E.g., "the secretary of the Tramway Union in one large town stated in July 1919 that not a single woman

Table 19.2: Females as a Per Cent of Total Work Force in the United Kingdom by Industry, November 1918 and July 1920, and the Number of Females Displaced by Males Per Hundred Persons Employed Between November 1918 and July 1920.

Industry	Females as Per Cent of Total Work Force		Number of Females Displaced by Males Per Hundred Persons Employed, Nov.1918 - July 1920
	Nov. 1918	July 1920	
Service Industries:			
Public Administration	43.10	23.87	19
Banking and Finance	42.86	26.42	16
Commerce	54.12	41.68	12
Other Professions ^a	36.70	28.06	9
Transport	11.85	3.54	8
Gas, Water and Electricity (Public and Private)	10.64	2.79	8
Teachers under local Authorities	82.35	74.87	7
Hotels, Public Houses, Cinemas, Theatres, etc.	65.68	58.92	7
Hospitals (Civil & Military) ^b	—	—	—
All Service Industries	43.49	30.09	13
Manufacturing Industries:			
Metals	28.16	12.23	16
Chemicals ^c	39.02	26.42	13
Wood	32.53	20.81	12
Leather	43.53	32.95	11
Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass	35.94	25.82	10
Food, Drink and Tobacco	48.33	40.22	8
Paper and Printing	47.16	39.62	8
Textiles	66.72	61.22	6
Building	6.61	1.24	5
Clothing	75.44	70.51	5
Miscellaneous Industries	56.38	43.75	13
All Manufacturing Industries	41.84	32.24	10
Primary Industries:			
Agriculture in Great Britain ^d	14.12	10.49	4
Mines and Quarries	1.24	.72	1
All Primary Industries	6.26	4.42	2
All Industries	37.70	27.50	10

^aSee n. (a) in Table 19.1.

^bThe number of men employed was too insignificant to be recorded.

^cSee n. (b) in Table 19.1.

^dSee n. (c) in Table 19.1.

Computed from Board of Trade figures as published in *ibid.* See Appendix C for figures and page references.

war emergency, this was not generally the case when the economy returned to a peacetime footing. Dormant attitudes regarding women's proper place rapidly reasserted themselves. Even before the war had concluded, the Women's Employment Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction, reflecting popular views, maintained that "the employment of married women outside their homes is not to be encouraged Factory creches in normal times are not approved of".¹⁴

Gainful employment, now no longer a gesture of patriotism, also lost its attraction for numbers of the patriotically inspired, many of them exceptionally qualified for responsible work by education and character. There were also those who as a matter of principle voluntarily yielded their places to the returning men.¹⁵ They had never ceased viewing their wartime employment as men's work to which they had no permanent right.

But not all those departing from industry did so voluntarily. Some, finding no demand for their services, had little choice in the matter. The reimposition of protective labour standards that had been relaxed during the war meant that women could no longer be legally employed for jobs that entailed, for example, working at night or during established mealtimes or on Sundays. In addition, there were now more stringent regulations regarding child labour. With the ending of the war the provisions contained in the Education Act of 1918 which raised the statutory minimum age for starting full-time work to fourteen came into effect. As a result thirteen-year-olds, unlike their wartime counterparts who entered the labour market at an abnormally early age, were prevented from doing likewise.

The cessation of the war also meant the restoration of trade union practices whose relaxation in wartime had allowed employers to use women on certain men's work. To assist the unions in reimposing their practices, Parliament passed the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act in August 1919 which made it a legal offense for an employer to disregard his wartime undertaking to the effect that all departures from established union practices would cease at the end of the war. Although the Act was only in force until October 1920, that was sufficient time to reinstate the men in their own trades and to disperse the women so effectively as to make their re-employment difficult.

The Act further specified that for work new to an establishment the employer was under the obligation to establish those practices prevailing before the war in firms carrying on that type of work "under circumstances most nearly analogous to those of the establishment in question".¹⁶ Accordingly, the trade unions were able to expel women, not only from the old work places of their members, but from new factories or districts to which women had been introduced, or even from new industries, such as general aircraft or aircraft woodwork, which had largely grown up during the war.

The restoration of trade practices was an especially effective device for excluding women from men's skilled draft work. Their use for such work in wartime was an obvious departure from custom not only in regard to sex but also to the length of training expected. Of far more numerical significance to women, however, was their wartime use for work normally the province of semi-skilled and unskilled men. And with these men restrictive trade practices were of much less consequence in limiting an employer's power to use women. Nevertheless, the obligations imposed upon employers to reinstate ex-service men, to give job priority to a firm's male workers, and even in some instances to discharge women as soon as male labour was once more available did much to assure women's dismissal as substitutes for men without a craft.

Aside from their formal agreements, employers were also limited in their ability to continue using women for men's work by the informal opposition of men at the workshop level. Where women's entrance had involved a restructuring of the job so that women had the easier and men the harder parts to do, the men were not always willing to accept this division once the war emergency was over.

had yet been dismissed except when employed on nightwork; the women are said not to stay long enough in this occupation (conductor) to make their dismissal necessary". A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *Industry and Finance (Supplementary Volume)*, London: Pitman, 1920, p. 103.

¹⁴*Report of the Women's Employment Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction*, p. 48; 1918 Cd. 9239, xiv.

¹⁵E.g., see M. Bondfield, *A Life's Work*, London: Hutchinson, 1950, p. 146. *Factory Report, 1919*. p. 8; 1920 Cmd. 941, xvi.

¹⁶Sec. 1 (2); 9 & 10 Geo. 5, ch. 42.

Wherever the men's resentment against having only "donkey work" to do was sufficiently strong, employers were forced to revert to their original sex employment practices.

The reimposition of restrictions on the demand for female labour only partially explains women's involuntary withdrawal from industry. Still to be considered is the part played by employers in bringing it about. Admittedly the war brought an end to the government's swollen demand for much of the military supplies and equipment in the manufacture of which female labour so largely figured. But though many women on this account had to lose their jobs, they did not necessarily have to lose their place in the industrial world. There was nothing to prevent employers of substitute labour who were not bound by hiring restrictions to use women for their peacetime output. Yet many of them transferred their demand to men at the first opportunity. Their wartime experience had done little to alter their established views about the relative labour merits of the sexes."¹⁷ Why was this so?

In the first place any exact comparison between the work of women and men was as a rule impossible owing to changes in the job situation such as the sectionalization of the work, the installation of new machinery or the alteration of the old, the reorganization of the hours of work, the use of different materials, and the manufacture of different articles. Then in a number of processes efficiency could only be reached after considerable experience and training which women as novices lacked. Again, there were the human factors to consider. The success or failure of substitution depended to a large degree on the care taken to select appropriate women for the work required, to instruct and train them, to accustom them gradually to new and heavy work, to adapt the methods and conditions of work to women's needs, and to secure the cooperation of the men who would be working alongside them. With all these impediments to a reliable appraisal of women's performance as substitutes, it is little wonder that the pre-war outlook, in which women who did well were seen as "exceptional" and those who did not, as "examples",¹⁸ prevailed.

To the many employers of this mind, the economic factor alone appeared as sufficient grounds to revert to male labour. This was especially true of those employers who were forced by the unions to pay women substitutes, as a condition of using them, "men's rates". Believing female labour to be less efficient than men's, these employers were prepared to use it only if it were sufficiently low-priced.

Even if certain employers proved strong enough to overcome union pressure against reducing the "occupational rate", they found they were not legally free to do so. As a means of stabilizing the economy, the government, shortly after the Armistice, passed the Wages (Temporary Regulations) Act. It required employers to maintain for a period of six months the minimum wage generally applicable in a district at the time of the Armistice in each trade for each class of worker, including the category "women on men's work", unless varied by arbitration or by agreement. Not until September 1920, after two renewals, did this Act expire, thereby permitting employers a freer hand in fixing women's rates.

The employer's ability to hire women as a cheaper form of labour was more lastingly impinged by the extension of trade boards to new industries in the post-war period. By the Trades Boards Act of 1918 it was now possible to establish a statutory minimum wage in any poorly organized trade paying "unduly low" wages instead of, as hitherto the case, only in trades paying exceptionally low ones relative to other employments. In 1919 eleven new trade boards were established in Great Britain, in 1920 twenty-one, and in 1921 three, a total of thirty-five trade boards as compared to eight before the war.¹⁹

Furthermore, during the war the minimum wage rose in the eight trades for which boards had been established prior to the war. More significant to the employer than the absolute was the relative increase between men's and women's wages. Whereas in 1914 men's rates averaged about

¹⁷See Evidence from Industries in the *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc.*, pp. 47 ff; 1919 Cmd. 167, xxxi.

¹⁸J. Courtney, *Recollected in Tranquillity*, London: Heinemann, 1926, p. 251.

¹⁹For complete list of trade boards established as of 1921 see D. Sells, *The British Trade Boards System*, London: King, 1923, app. I.

twice women's, by 1920, chain-making excepted, men's rates were only fifty to seventy per cent higher.²⁰ Consequently, the employer, after considering all the shortcomings of women's labour, now saw far less economic advantage than previously in substituting women for men.

This narrowing of the differential was an important consideration in industries whose altered character of wartime, enabling them to absorb female labour *en masse*, was no longer practicable. With the coming of peace this immense demand for products of a standardized nature had mainly disappeared and women's labour lost its attraction for employers who now needed workers more skilled than the average woman. Under the circumstances, raising the quality of women's labour to the standards required would have been far more costly than reverting to the pre-war practice of using men.

Even where exceptional women appeared as efficient as the average male worker, economic considerations dissuaded other employers from continuing women in their employ. Unlike wartime when temporary arrangements were acceptable, firms were expected in peacetime to provide separate toilet and washing facilities for the sexes. In order to avoid these additional overhead charges, some employers chose to follow their former practice and employ an all-male staff.

Reinforcing the economic objections to substitute labour were moral ones. As before the war, they centred on questions of respectability and "fair play". "Many employers", observed G. D. H. Cole, continued to be psychologically opposed to the "factory employment of women under any conditions".²¹ The War Office, considering military work unfit for female labour under ordinary circumstances, dispensed with the services of its women auxiliaries once the national emergency had passed. Similar attitudes, economic considerations apart, lost women their wartime opportunities in such work as sawmilling, shale oil refining, and in certain processes in the manufacture of sugar, rubber, gas and cement.

Considerations of "fair play" further reduced women's post-war employment opportunities. There was first of all a strong feeling among not only employers but also women substitutes in favour of the reinstatement of men returning from the field. A government committee on the re-employment of ex-service men testified to the strength of this sentiment among employers when it reported in 1920 that it was "satisfied that employers in general have fulfilled their obligations with regard to the reinstatement of ex-service men formerly in their employment".²²

Aside from reinstatement, many employers were of the opinion that veterans should be given job preference over substitute women. So strongly did the government accept this view that it set up a Committee on the Appointment of Ex-Service Men to Posts in the Civil Service which investigated, among other matters, why so many temporary women were still retained in the civil service after the war.²³

Of particular consequence was the popular view that of all veterans, the disabled should be given most job consideration. Unlike the able-bodied, who on the whole were wanted for jobs which women were poorly qualified to fill and thus were not much of a competitive threat, the disabled were. The fact of their handicap often placed them in the same category as women in regard to physical ability. Therefore in work which the disabled could do women's chances of employment generally diminished. Thus in dental mechanics, for which large numbers of disabled men were trained, there was little if any demand for qualified women.

Whereas the preference given the ex-soldier by employers in general was novel, that for men because of their breadwinning role was of long standing. The war had brought no fundamental change in prevailing views about the respective roles of the sexes. Thus the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, while admitting that the war had opened new and desirable fields of employment to women, was nevertheless unwilling to have women retain these gains if it meant displacing men.²⁴ To it as to the public of pre-war Britain, work was foremost a male function and only conditionally

²⁰See A. Bowley, *Prices and Wages in the United Kingdom, 1914-1920*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921, p.195.

²¹*Trade Unionism and Munitions*, Oxford University Press, 1923, p. 219.

²²*Committee on Re-employment of Ex-Service Men: Interim Report*; p. 4, 1920 Cmd. 951, xix.

²³See *Labour Gazette*, vol. 28, no. 9, Sept., 1920, p. 481.

²⁴See *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, op. cit.*, p. 164.

a female one.

19.2 Retention

Women's departure from industry was but one side of their post-war employment picture. The other concerned their retention. Though women had lost ground after the war, their loss was not total. Virtually every major industrial category covered by the Board of Trade's employment enquiry showed women constituting a higher proportion of the work force in July 1920 than in July 1914. The advance was greatest in those industries of mainly a distributive or clerical character. As a group²⁵ they used twelve more women per hundred persons employed in 1920 than in 1914.

As with women's departure from industry, the industrial variation noted in their detention was not due to different factors operating within each industry but the same factors affecting each industry in varying proportions.

Prior to the war the proportion of women generally increased in industries or branches of industries undergoing subdivision of process and specialization. Whenever, under the post-war market conditions, it remained possible for employers to continue using profitably such wartime methods, women's chances of retention in the industry were increased.

Shop and office employers in private industry were especially anxious to continue their wartime experiment with female labour. For it must be remembered that in such employment women's entrance had proceeded on economic lines from the start. In the first place, though the interested unions tried to maintain men's standards, they were not on the whole strong enough to enforce their claims. Secondly unlike the more essential industries, whose operating costs the government willingly covered, the largely non-essential clerical and commercial employments were still subject to the laws of the competitive market. If they could not profitably run their businesses with female labour they were generally faced with the alternative of continuing on a reduced scale with the male labour available or of going out of business altogether. Thus to be used at all women's labour had to pay. That it did is readily apparent from its greatly extended use in wartime. Particularly was this true with shop assistants. Accordingly, among all groups of employers, those engaged in the distributive trades were cited by the Committee on Re-employment of Ex-Service Men as failing most in their obligations to reinstate ex-service men. Though satisfied that employers in general had met their obligations, the Committee nevertheless noted that in many instances the employment of women shop assistants, initially adopted as a war measure, had been continued to the prejudice of the returning men.²⁶

Nor were shop and office employers, once convinced of the profitability of using female labour, unable to give effect to their demand because of a shortage of qualified applicants. Whereas in pre-war days the supply of women from the more "respectable" classes, whose labour alone satisfied the job requirements, was somewhat restricted, now as a direct consequence of the war the single among them were available in record numbers. For some it was the independent way of life which followed in the wake of their wartime employment which made them anxious to continue working. For others it was less a matter of choice than necessity. The war losses had increased the female excess in the marriageable population (women over twenty either single, widowed or divorced) by some sixty per cent between 1911 and 1921.²⁷ This meant that many women who normally would have been provided for in marriage were now forced to seek their own livelihood.

Also facilitating women's employment was the widespread reduction in hours between 1918 and

²⁵Includes the following industrial categories: Commerce, Banking and Finance, Public Administration, Other Professions.

²⁶*Interim Report, op. cit.*, p. 4.

²⁷See Census of England and Wales, 1921. *op. cit.*, p. 82. Whereas "at ages 20-24 and 25-29, there was an actual deficiency of females in 1911 represented by proportions of 984 and 990 females per 1,000 males", by 1921 these proportions had been "converted into surpluses of 1,043 and 1,154 respectively; at ages 30-34 and 35-44 excesses already considerable in 1911 (1,111 and 1,366 per 1,000 males)" now amounted to "1,470 and 1,683 females per 1,000 males". (p. 82.)

Table 19.3: Females as a Per Cent of Total Work Force in the United Kingdom by Industry, July 1914 and July 1920, and the Number of Males Displaced by Females Per Hundred Persons Employed Between July 1914 and July 1920.

Industry	Females as Per Cent of Total Work Force		Number of Males Displaced by Females Per Hundred Persons Employed, July 1914 - July 1920
	July 1914	July 1920	
Service Industries:			
Banking and Finance	5.12	26.42	21
Other Professions ^a	12.41	28.06	16
Commerce	28.82	41.68	13
Hotels, Public Houses, Cinemas, Theatres, etc.	47.63	58.92	11
Public Administration	17.49	23.87	6
Gas, Water and Electricity (Private and Public)	.68	2.79	2
Teachers under Local Authorities	72.82	74.87	2
Transport	1.54	3.54	2
Hospitals (Civil and Military) ^b	—	—	—
All Service Industries	21.80	30.09	8
Manufacturing Industries:			
Leather	20.24	32.95	13
Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass	18.06	25.82	8
Chemicals ^c	20.10	26.42	6
Wood	14.57	20.81	6
Food, Drink and Tobacco	35.25	40.22	5
Paper and Printing	36.19	39.62	3
Textiles	58.00	61.22	3
Metals	9.14	12.23	3
Clothing	68.08	70.51	2
Building	.76	1.24	—
Miscellaneous Industries	35.63	43.75	8
All Manufacturing Industries	30.75	32.24	1
Primary Industries:			
Agriculture in Great Britain ^d	9.09	10.49	1
Mines and Quarries	.55	.72	—
All Primary Industries	4.04	4.42	—
All Industries	23.60	27.50	4

^aSee n. (a) in Table 19.1.

^bSee n. (b) in Table 16.3.

^cSee n. (b) in Table 19.1.

^dSee n. (c) in Table 19.1.

Computed from Board of Trade figures as published in A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *British Labour*, London: Pitman, 1921. See Appendix C for figures and page references.

1920.²⁸ Not only did this promote the availability of women by making work and domestic duties more compatible but it also made their alleged inferior powers of endurance, as a factor differentiating the labour of the sexes, of less consequence.

Shortening the work week also affected the demand. In some instances, more workers were needed to perform the same amount of work. Thus even after reinstating ex-service men and giving job preference to men already in their employ, some employers still had job openings and these at times were filled by women who had worked for them during the war instead of with new male labour.

The "fruitful tradition"²⁹ about the value of welfare was another carry-over from wartime experience which enhanced the demand for women's labour in firms not yet prepared to absorb it prior to the war. An increasing number of employers, whose standard now included providing for the comfort of their employees, found the introduction of women relatively simple as little if any additional overhead expense was involved in adding them to the staff.

But not all of women's advancing share in industry was attributable to more of the nation's work assuming a character well-adapted to female labour. In some instances, women's retention was due to a local shortage of men. The end of the war did not bring all employers relief from the need to use women substitutes. In a stationery firm, for example, disc ruling continued to be done by women as men were unwilling to return to it.³⁰ The same pattern was noted in the Burnley cotton district where the demobilized men failed to return to their former weaving jobs. In the glass industry, too, female substitutes continued to be used owing to the shortage of boys.

In other instances, it was the ever-gaining conviction that women should deal with women and children that preserved and extended some of women's wartime gains. The wartime innovation of women police carried over to the post-war period. So did the increased opportunities for medical women in public health which followed upon the passage of the Maternity and Child Welfare Act of 1918. To the wartime advances along these lines the post-war period added its own. In the Factory Department the first woman certifying surgeon was appointed in 1920. Among some insurance firms, women agents were appointed to deal with and enlarge the number of women policyholders.

Also not to be overlooked is the part played by the exceptional women in keeping, at least for the time being, work as women's which under normal circumstances would have reverted to men once the war passed. But when these women left for marriage or other reasons they were usually replaced by men and so their effect on women's post-war position was ephemeral.

Finally there was a slight liberalization of Factory Act standards so that women could be employed on work which would have been illegal in pre-war days. Though most of the protective labour standards pertaining to female labour were reimposed after the war, there was one notable exception. As a concession to employers unable to obtain labour to build new plant and to those wishing to reduce their capital charges which would otherwise rise consequent upon the shorter work week, permission was still being granted employers to use women on a two-shift system which meant some women regularly worked until ten o'clock at night. Upon testimony to the effect that the wartime experience afforded no evidence that women had been harmed in consequence,³¹ this last vestige of the temporary suspension of the exclusion of women from night work was given permanent legal sanction under the Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Act of 1920. It permitted women sixteen years of age and upwards to be employed in firms operating on a two-shift system between 6.00 a.m. and 10.00 p.m. provided that they averaged no more than eight hours of work each day. Though few employers took advantage of this provision, those that did contributed to the widened demand for women's services in the post-war world.

None of the factors cited so far as underlying women's post-war retention were without application to their pre-war employment. What differed was the degree to which they now expanded its scope. Nevertheless, the experience of the war was not wholly without an effect of its own. Whereas the

²⁸Between the Armistice and the end of April 1920, "hours of work were reduced on the average by about 10 per cent". A. Pigou, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

²⁹Miss Adelaide Anderson, Principal Lady Factory Inspector, as quoted in A. Kirkaldy (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 115.

³⁰See *ibid.*, p. 57.

³¹See *Factory Report. 1921*, p. 86; I922 Cmd. 1705, vii.

pre-war situation offered women little opportunity to demonstrate their capacity for men's work, the war, to an unprecedented extent, had. The result was a modifying of traditional views which experience seemed to indicate were unsubstantiated by fact.

Some employers, to their surprise, found women who seemed to be "‘natural mechanics’—a quality formerly thought to be entirely lacking in the female sex".³² Railway employers discovered that women made better carriage cleaners than men who, until the war, had almost invariably been used. Engineering employers, who in pre-war days considered work on milling machines too dangerous for women, revised their opinion when no increase in accidents followed from women operating these machines in wartime. The great influx of women into the Civil Service was initially seen as no more than a temporary measure. But within two years women had apparently proved themselves able workers, as in 1916 government departments, most of which had found little if any use for female labour prior to the war, were asked to indicate which of their permanent posts could be suitably staffed by women. In scientific instrument making, foremen who at first were antagonistic to the idea of women substitutes were converted by the actual results so that by the end of the war they spoke "most encouragingly" of their work.³³ Some employers in this trade were so favourably impressed that they began to teach the skilled processes to selected women despite the training period, especially in optical work, being fairly long.

As for women's physical capacity, a representative of the Admiralty testified before the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry that "women threw themselves into war work with the greatest enthusiasm and determination, often accomplishing work calling for physical effort which I frankly confess I should not myself, before the war, have deemed them to be reasonably capable".³⁴ Again, women were noted by a Home Office report on substitution to have done "remarkably well"³⁵ in gasworks' retort house processes which as late as 1917 were still considered too arduous or difficult for women.

Admittedly not all employers forced to experiment with women's labour were so favourably impressed. What is of significance, however, is that some were. By the end of the war there existed a body of employers converted by their wartime experience to the cause of wider occupational opportunity for women. These converts constituted a new element in women's employment picture and were responsible in part for women retaining and even extending some of their wartime advances.³⁶

³²I. Andrews and M. Hobbs. *Economic Effects of the War Upon Women and Children in Great Britain*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1918, p. 108.

³³*Substitution of Women for Men during the War*, p. 59; 1919 Non-Parl. Home Office.

³⁴Evidence from the Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 6.

³⁵*Substitution of Women in Non-Munition Factories during the War*, p. 22; 1919 Non-Parl. Home Office.

³⁶E.g., "only six of the 57 Chief Constables who have had personal experience of their [policewoman's] work express views definitely against their employment, and among advocates of policewomen we have found several Chief Constables who were at first strongly opposed to their appointment". *Report of the Committee on the Employment of Women on Police Duties*, p. 5; 1920 Cmd. 877 xxii.

Chapter 20

The War and Women's Employment: 1921

In the post-war boom, about half the number of women added to the female labour force during the war (apart from those attributable to population growth)¹ continued in employment but this carry-over from wartime did not survive the depression. The slump was not yet a year old when the Census of 1921 was taken. Yet it revealed that the proportion of women occupied in Great Britain had receded to the extent that at 30.8 per cent it was even slightly below the 32.3 per cent figure recorded by the 1911 Census.²

As jobs became scarce, many women whose availability for work depended upon the ease by which jobs "worth their while" could be obtained returned to their pre-war unoccupied status. The voluntary withdrawal of these marginal women mainly accounted for the drop noted in the proportion of women returned as occupied. But still there were cases of involuntary withdrawal. The shrinkage of jobs intensified the moral factors operating to exclude women from men's work in the first phase of the war's aftermath. Above all the depression stimulated the general desire to return men to their old forms of work. This attitude especially affected the married woman worker. The retention of women who had husbands to support them while men with family responsibilities were without work seemed indefensible to employers with a strong social conscience. And so even some of the "exceptional" women of wartime were discharged.

This was also true of women whose retention was largely due to men in the area being in short supply. Now with unemployment widespread the likelihood of not finding sufficient male labour considerably diminished. The need to economize operating costs also reduced women's opportunities as employers were less willing to continue and enlarge programmes with a woman's side to them. The movement to have women police was one of the first affected. The maternal and child welfare movement was another.

When women's employment in 1921 is examined from the viewpoint of work rather than numbers it can be seen that the change of wartime had in fact left some permanent mark. Rough as the industrial comparison of women's share of the nation's work is for showing occupational change,³ it does indicate an advance into male preserves, both in trades where prior to the war there was little if any indication of such a movement, such as Distillers, Sugar Refining, and Floor-cloth Manufacture, and in trades where even before the war female labour was being used to an increasing extent, such

¹See A. Pigou, *Aspects of British Economic History, 1918-1925*, London: Macmillan, 1947, p. 20.

²See A. Bowley, "Numbers Occupied in the Industries of England and Wales, 1911 and 1921", Special Memorandum No. 17a, *London and Cambridge Economic Service*, Dec. 1926, Table I, (Summary Table of all Persons Occupied and their Age Distribution, Great Britain) p. 4.

³As explained above (p. 212) only an industrial comparison of women's share of the nation's work between 1911 and 1921 can be made statistically. But when available on a detailed basis and when integrated with what is already known about the course of women's employment prior to the war and in wartime, it does afford a rough indication of occupational change.

as Chemists, Scientific Apparatus, and Brick, Earthenware and China. On a more general level, taking into account the intercensal occupational change between 1901 and 1911, and discounting the influence upon the figures of those industrially but not occupationally classified to an industry—for example, clerks—it would appear that there were notable advances in Commerce, Dealing and Finance; Chemicals; Skins and Leather; Public Administration and Defence; and Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass; and to a lesser extent in Food, Drink and Tobacco; and in Metals.

What these advances signified was a greater accommodation to women's type of labour by British industry. This movement, already underway prior to the war, had been greatly accelerated by it. Both direct and indirect effects of the war were responsible. As for the direct, some employers who prior to the war had given no thought to using female labour were, as previously mentioned, convinced by the wartime experience of substitution that they could use it to advantage. As for employers who had already introduced women before 1914, the extension of their use in wartime had revealed new ways in which women's labour could be profitably employed. Thus even in the "women's industries" of textiles, clothing and education, where prior to the war accommodation to female labour had proceeded to such a fine point that little scope remained for successful substitution, women's share did not return to what it had been at the outbreak of the war. But it was mainly in those branches of industry which happened to find the post-war economic climate favourable to their prosperity that these employer converts could give most effect to their convictions. In this category, were the expanding consumer goods trades such as cocoa and tinned fruit manufacture, the expanding service industries of distribution and entertainment, and the trades whose expansion was due to the wartime stoppage of foreign sources of supply such as leather and chemical manufacture.

On the other hand the figures suggest women having a novel or enlarged sphere in certain employments in which there was little, if any, wartime accommodation to female labour. That there were now women in occupations requiring more years of training and experience than the war itself, such as professional engineering and architecture, appears at first glance to be unrelated with the events of the war. Certainly it did nothing directly to enlarge the demand for women in fields such as these. But to conclude that the two were unrelated fails to take account of the acceleration given to the "new woman" movement by the war.

This rapid change of attitude is aptly illustrated in the person of Lord Northcliffe. An anti-suffragette before the war, he had been impressed by the Women's Social and Political Union's wartime truce to militancy. In the early days of the war representatives of the organization conferred with him on aspects of women's war work. According to one of its leaders, Lord Northcliffe "liked the brisk, efficient ways and earnest spirit of the Suffragettes whom he now knew for the first time. It was the end of his opposition to votes for women. He promised his support and that of his newspapers when the time of the votes for women settlement should come"⁴ But there is more substantial evidence than verbal expression to show this rapid conversion of opinion. In 1918 the Representation of the People Act gave women over thirty the vote in parliamentary elections while the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act permitted them to sit or vote as a member of the House of Commons.

As a result of the war, "women", in the words of the Ministry of Labour's Chief Industrial Commissioner, "have discovered their capabilities and possible opportunities, and accordingly make a strong claim for equal opportunity with men, elimination of sex differentiation, and man's pay if engaged on classes of work upon which a man was, or would be, employed ordinarily"⁵ The opinion held by the relatively few "new women" in pre-war days had now spread to countless numbers of other women previously untouched by such views. Thus to contemporaries it appeared as if the war had transformed the personality of the average factory woman. "As a class", noted the writers of *Economic Effects of the War Upon Women and Children in Great Britain*, "they have grown more confident, more independent, more interested in impersonal issues. The more varied and responsible positions opened to women, the public's appreciation of their services, their many contacts with the government on account of war legislation also helped bring about the change", which in their

⁴(Dame) C. Pankhurst, *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote*, London: Hutchinson, 1959, p. 290.

⁵*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc.*, p. 12; 1919 Cmd. 167, xxxi.

Table 20.1: Females as a Per Cent of Total Work Force in England and Wales by Industry, 1911 and 1921, and the Intercensal Change in the Number of Females Per Hundred Persons Employed Industrially Between 1911 and 1921 and Occupationally Between 1901 and 1911.

Industry	Females as Per Cent of Total Work Force		Intercensal Change in Number of Females Per Hundred Persons Employed Industrially	Intercensal Change in Number of Females Per Hundred Persons Employed Occupationally
	1911	1921	1911-1921	1901-1911
Commerce, Dealing and Finance	21.96	32.62	10.66	^a
Grocers	21.90	33.82		
Dairymen	18.18	23.33		
Butchers	10.67	13.33		
Fishmongers	17.65	16.67		
Greengrocers	25.30	27.71		
Wine merchants	10.00	21.05		
Tobacconists	41.67	46.15		
Chemists	15.22	35.85		
Oil and Colourmen	7.41	17.14		
Ironmongers	10.41	19.78		
Cloth Merchants, Drapers, Hosiers, Hatters, etc.	42.06	53.94		
Boot Dealers	31.58	40.48		
Furniture Dealers	15.38	21.28		
Auctioneers and House Agents	2.94	16.22		
Advertisers	—	20.00		
Bankers	2.27	26.58		
Insurance	4.90	25.41		
Other Merchants, Financiers and Salesmen	21.65	32.74		
Chemicals	20.25	27.53	7.28	— .24
Chemicals	14.75	20.78		
Candles, Soap	25.00	34.38		
Dyes, Explosives, Oil, Matches, Glue, Size, Varnish	21.57	25.84		

^aBecause of the Census underestimation of assisting female relatives in 1901, no valid comparison can be made of women's occupational share in Commerce, Dealing and Finance between 1901 and 1911.

Industrial figures computed from A. Bowley, *op. cit.*, Table III (see Appendix D); occupational figures computed from *Census of England and Wales, 1911*, X, i., Table 26; 1913 Cd. 7018, lxxviii (see Appendix A).

Industry	Females as Per Cent of Total Work Force		Intercensal Change in Number of Females Per Hundred Persons Employed Industrially 1911-1921	Intercensal Change in Number of Females Per Hundred Persons Employed Occupationally 1901-1911
	1911	1921		
Rubber	25.00	36.96		
Celluloid	50.00	33.33		
Skins and Leather	20.69	27.50	6.81	2.60
Tanners, Furriers	15.91	21.74		
Leather Goods	25.58	35.29		
Public Administration and Defence	10.67	17.45	6.78	1.84
National Govern- ment and Defence	7.97	17.16		
Local Government (excluding Education)	14.43	17.85		
Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass	21.05	27.68	6.63	3.41
Brick, Earthenware, China	24.26	31.78		
Glass	6.67	15.56		
Miscellaneous	–	33.33		
Food, Drink and Tobacco	31.51	36.97	5.46	4.25
Food Preparation:				
Millers	5.41	14.00		
Bakers, Biscuit Makers, Con- fectioners	36.62	35.54		
Sugar Refining	–	9.09		
Jam, Chocolate, etc.	61.40	61.05		
Other Food Industries	40.00	39.29		
Total Food Preparation	36.80	38.89		
Drink manufacture:				
Brewers	3.45	15.46		
Distillers	–	33.33		
Aerated Waters	15.79	35.29		
Total Drink Manufacture	5.56	18.80		

Industry	Females as Per Cent of Total Work Force		Intercensal Change in Number of Females Per Hundred Persons Employed Industrially	Intercensal Change in Number of Females Per Hundred Persons Employed Occupationally
	1911	1921	1911-1921	1901-1911
Tobacco Manufacture	64.52	67.39		
Metals and Allied Products	7.64	11.39	3.75	1.83
Iron and Steel Manufacture	.60	2.93		
Copper	—	—		
Brass	14.63	27.08		
Blacksmiths, Anchor, Chain Manufacture	2.78	4.55		
Tinplate	9.68	10.53		
Wire	12.50	13.04		
Engineering and Shipbuilding	1.26	4.74		
Electrical Apparatus	13.75	23.49		
Railway and Tram Wagons, etc.	2.17	2.74		
Cycles and Motor- Cars	9.09	8.04		
Vehicles - Coach, Carriage	1.92	15.29		
Tools, Cutlery, etc Scissors, Needles, Pins	19.23	25.45		
Nails, Screws, etc.	40.00	37.93		
Other Metal Industries	19.57	23.50		
Precious Metals, Watches, etc.	26.09	32.86		
Scientific Apparatus	20.00	31.03		
Musical Instru- ments	5.26	13.64		
Public Utilities	—	3.07	3.07	—
Gas Works	—	2.91		
Waterworks	—	4.76		
Electricity Supply	—	2.56		
Professions, Enter- tainment and Sport	49.60	52.42	2.82	— .03
Religion	23.61	27.54		
Law	5.08	25.86		

Industry	Females as Per Cent of Total Work Force		Intercensal Change in Number of Females Per Hundred Persons Employed Industrially 1911-1921	Intercensal Change in Number of Females Per Hundred Persons Employed Occupationally 1901-1911
	1911	1921		
Doctors and Nurses	72.55	70.19		
Dentists	11.11	19.05		
Education (Local Authorities or Private)	70.37	70.77		
Engineers and Surveyors	—	6.25		
Artists	25.00	36.36		
Architecture	—	9.09		
Other Professions (Excluding Music)	17.39	22.64		
Theatre, Cinemas, etc.	35.90	42.03		
Other Entertain- ment and Sport	12.50	19.57		
Transportation and Communication	1.77	3.24	1.47	.62
Railways	.88	3.10		
Omnibus	—	6.67		
Trams	2.08	3.95		
Other Road Transport	1.30	2.63		
Shipping	1.39	4.15		
Harbours	—	1.46		
Storage, Messengers etc.	10.20	6.90		
Textiles	55.88	57.27	1.39	1.33
Cotton	59.87	61.74		
Wool	54.94	55.27		
Silk	65.63	60.61		
Linen, Jute, etc.	50.00	51.85		
Hosiery	71.19	75.00		
Lace	61.36	54.17		
Carpets	50.00	52.94		
Bleaching, Dyeing, etc.	13.33	21.57		
Other Textile Industries	65.00	65.38		
Wood	9.50	10.53	1.03	.88
Timber	1.69	5.00		
Furniture	14.00	12.50		
Other Wood Industry	9.64	14.71		

Industry	Females as Per Cent of Total Work Force		Intercensal Change in Number of Females Per Hundred Persons Employed Industrially	Intercensal Change in Number of Females Per Hundred Persons Employed Occupationally
	1911	1921	1911-1921	1901-1911
Paper	34.04	35.00	.96	2.47
Paper Manufacture	25.81	23.26		
Paper Staining	20.00	16.67		
Printing, Stationery, etc.	35.34	36.90		
Construction	.35	1.19	.84	—
Mining	.44	.86	.42	— .15
Miscellaneous and Unclassified Industries	18.60	24.02	5.42	— .25
Floor-cloth	—	22.22		
Other Manufacturing Industries	48.21	51.28		
Unclassified and Miscellaneous Industries	15.14	19.00		
Agriculture and Fishing	7.55	7.47	— .08	— .49
Personal Service	75.74	74.42	— 1.32	— 2.90
Private Domestic Service	82.58	81.57		
Lodging Houses	87.50	90.67		
Restaurants	58.33	63.36		
Inns, etc.	40.14	49.20		
Other Personal Services, etc.	75.11	61.07		
Clothing	66.95	61.72	— 5.23	1.13
Tailors	50.00	56.25		
Dressmakers, Milliners	98.50	96.34		
Hats	53.49	57.14		
Boots	21.10	26.26		
Other Clothing industries	85.71	82.52		
Total of All Occupied	29.67	29.49	— .18	— .22

estimation was one of the most significant of the war.⁶

Also not to be underestimated in effecting this change was the impact on women's thinking of receiving "men's rates". Girls who formerly had earned 9 to 15 shillings per week were in some cases earning from 35 to 60 and over at the time of the Armistice.⁷ Even allowing for the increased cost of living, this had a marked effect in raising their customary standard of life and thereby also their wage expectations. Furthermore, the war had thrown into chaos the traditional wage relationship between male and female labour. For the first time many women came to realize that the conventional gap between the wages of the sexes was not a necessary one.

The degree to which opinion about women's place in the world of work had changed can be gathered from some of the recommendations incorporated in the Majority Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry. Though against married woman working during confinement, it was not against married women as such working. To do so, the Committee reasoned, would "confirm the 'meantime' character of women's work, which ... is already a natural bar to their efficiency, lessening the demand for them and so lowering their wages".⁸ In those circumstances where it was essential to employ men and women of the same quality but where equal pay would not attract the grade of men required, as in teaching, the Committee advocated not paying more to men but paying married men with dependents a children's allowance in addition to the standard salary. The Committee also believed that the question of men having late hours or night work should not complicate the issue of the relative value of the sexes but should be "provided for by an extra allowance to persons undertaking common duties under disagreeable conditions."⁹

Now that women had the vote, the spread of feminist thought among them placed the government, as employer, in a particularly vulnerable position. As one contemporary later observed the "practical revolution" that the war "created in the lives of once-sheltered women gave them a new awareness which enabled them to produce organic social changes by their votes".¹⁰ Responding to the pressure of the "new women", Parliament passed in 1919 the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act. Henceforth it was illegal to disqualify women by reason of their sex or marriage "from the exercise of any public function, or from being appointed to or holding any civil or judicial office or post".¹¹ Thus women were now able, if technically qualified, to hold most judicial and administrative offices.

The Act also provided that sex or marriage should not be a bar to "entering or assuming or carrying on any civil profession or vocation, or for admission to any incorporated society (whether incorporated by Royal Charter or otherwise)".¹² As a result of or in some cases in anticipation of the passing of the Act the following professional societies, among others, admitted duly qualified women to membership: the Inns of Court, the Institute of Chartered Accountants, the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Institute of Bankers, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, and almost all the engineering institutions and societies. Consequently, 1919 marked the "end of a stage in the struggle of women in England to enter the professions governed by statute".¹³ Before that date it was the exception for such professions to be open to women; after that date it was the exception for them to be closed.

In keeping with the principles of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, the house of Commons unanimously passed in 1920 a resolution to the effect that women should have equal pay and equal

⁶I. Andrews and M. Hobbs, New York: Oxford University Press, 1918, pp. 8-9.

⁷See evidence from The Scottish Council for Women's Trades, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: Appendices: Summaries of Evidence, etc., op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁸*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, p.172, 1919 Cmd. 135 xxxi.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

¹⁰V. Brittain, *Lady into Woman*. London: Dakers, 1953, p. 194.

¹¹Sec. 1; 9 & 10 Geo. 5, chap. 71. The Act provided, however, that regulations might be authorised by Order in Council prescribing women's mode of admission and conditions of appointment and reserving to men any foreign and colonial posts (sec. 1(a)). For advantage taken of this qualifying provision see *Regulations for competitions governing the appointment of women to situations in the new (reorganisation) classes in the Home Civil Service*; 1921 Cmd. 1116, xxiii. *Regulations reserving to men certain branches of and posts in the Civil Service in H.M. possessions overseas and in foreign countries*; 1921, Cmd. 1244, xxiii.

¹²*Op. cit.*, sec. 1.

¹³M. Crofts, *Women Under English Law*, 2nd ed., London: Butterworth, 1928, p. 67.

opportunity of employment with men in all branches of the home civil service.¹⁴ That same year saw Civil Service policy liberalized somewhat in respect to married women. Henceforth they would continue in employment if such was held to be in the interest of the public service. The following year the government pledged that after a provisional period of three years every grade in the home civil service would be open to women by the same competitive examination as it was to men.¹⁵

With more career women among the occupied¹⁶ and with more employers willing to put women's capacity to the test, wider occupational opportunity was in the offing. This outcome of the war is perhaps no more dramatically portrayed than by the changing status of the woman factory inspector. As of 1891 the work of administering the nation's protective legislation, designed principally to safeguard the health and safety of working women and children, was still thought unsuitable for women. In 1893 a few women were experimentally employed but only to enforce the law in trades where women were largely employed. By 1921, however, the Chief Inspector, consequent upon the wartime substitution of women on recognized men inspectors' work, envisioned the complete fusion of men's and women's sides of his Department with women, under the new arrangement, eligible for all staff positions.

Moreover, the experience of wartime had in many instances given legislators and employed men a new appreciation of women's dignity and needs¹⁷ and thus a greater reluctance to handicap women in the employment arena. But for them to put their principles into practice required a favourable economic climate. Yet not prosperity but depression was to be Britain's lot for years to come. With not enough jobs for men already in a given occupation and with hundreds of thousands of "unemployed" numbering among the male electorate, self-interest took precedence over principle. A "strengthening, rather than a weakening of masculine prejudice" against giving women equal opportunity followed.¹⁸ Consequently it was in the main the "new" employers who found it most in keeping with their self-interest to make more extensive use of women's cheaper labour. Yet often even with them the more economic policy was to use the already qualified and experienced men in so abundant supply rather than attempt the introduction of women novices. And even though the government pledged in 1921 to open all civil service competitive examinations to women, its pledge had little practical effect because no examinations were held.¹⁹ Again, with some employers the post-war business contraction reduced their demand for labour in total. Therefore, the promise of greater employment opportunity that the wartime substitution of women for men ultimately signified had to remain little more than a promise for the time being.

¹⁴It was importantly qualified, however, by the provision that the claims of the ex-service men were to be first of all considered. See 129 *H. C. Deb.* 5s. 19 May, 1920, col. 1580.

¹⁵The government "having regard to the present financial position of the country", did not include equal pay in its pledge. 145 *H.C. Deb.* 5s. 5 Aug., 1921, col. 1947.

¹⁶Indicatively, the proportion of occupied single women to all single women ten years of age and over in Great Britain rose in the 16-19 year category from 72.6 to 75.2 per cent between 1911 and 1921; in the 20-24 year category, from 77.7 to 80.7 per cent; in the 25-44 year category, from 71.2 to 73.3 per cent; and in the 45-64 year category, from 54.0 to 56.8 per cent. Moreover, the proportion of occupied married women to all married women ten years of age and over rose in the 16-19 year category from 13 to 17 per cent; and in the 20-24 year category from 11.9 to 12.6 per cent. See A. Bowley, *op. cit.*, Table I, p. 4.

¹⁷Some indications are the creation of a Women's Section in the Labour Party in 1918 with four places on the Party's Executive Committee permanently reserved to women, the election of the first woman (Margaret Bondfield) to the Trade Union Congress Parliamentary Committee in 1919, the passing of the Statute of Degrees for Women at Oxford University in 1920, and the amalgamation of the National Federation of Women Workers with the General Workers' Union in 1921.

¹⁸J. Courtney *Recollected in Tranquillity*, London: Heinemann, 1926, p. 274.

¹⁹Not until July 1925 was the first entrance examination in which women competed on equal terms with men held for the administrative class in the Civil Service. As for the clerical and executive grades, the appointment of ex-service men to posts in the former and the excess of male officers in the latter, still precluded the holding of any open competition for both sexes. This disappointing outcome of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act led the Viscountess Rhondda to remark in the summer of 1922 that the word "removal" in the Act's title "had never managed to get outside its brackets". V. Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, London: Gollancz, 1933, p. 582.

Part VI

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:
1891-1921**

Chapter 21

Summary and Conclusion

21.1 Period One: 1891-1914

A most striking feature of women's employment in the Britain of 1891-1914 was its division from men's. Of the twenty-one "industries" into which the nation's occupations were divided, three—Personal Service, Clothing and Textiles—were "women's" in the sense that women constituted the majority sex. Moreover, these three accounted for seven-tenths of all working women. The nation's "men's industries", on the other hand, accounted for nine-tenths of all working men and consisted of the following: in the Primary Sector: 1) Agriculture and Fishing and 2) Mining; in the Manufacturing Sector: 1) Paper, 2) Food, Drink and Tobacco, 3) Skins and Leather, 4) Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc., 5) Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass, 6) Wood, 7) Metals, 8) Construction, and 9) Miscellaneous Manufacture; and in the Service Sector: 1) Professional Service, 2) Distribution, 3) Public Administration, 4) Commerce, 5) Transportation and Communication, 6) Public Utilities, and 7) National Defence.

Although the "industrial" division was the most obvious, the work of the sexes was also divisible according to its nature. Occupations involving physical force such as policing and soldiering were performed by men. So was most of the nation's supervisory work as well as its more skilled and heavier work. Women's work, on the other hand, tended to be simpler and lighter.

Conditions of employment were yet another form of division. Men were generally found in the dirtier and more dangerous jobs, women in the cleaner and safer ones; men in outdoor and underground work, women in indoor and aboveground work. The time of work further served to demarcate the work of the sexes as work done at night tended to be men's. There was also a tendency for the sex of the consumer of a service to correspond with that of the person rendering it.

Finally there was an earnings division. Unexplained by a corresponding hours differential between men's and women's full-time work, earnings for a full-time week in the women's work of an occupational category were generally lower than earnings for a full-time week in the men's work of that occupational category. Or, in the case of one-sex categories, earnings for a full-time week in exclusively female categories were generally lower than earnings for a full-time week in exclusively male categories of a corresponding grade. Moreover, so few exceptions to this pattern were found and so broad was its application that it can be said that of all the forms of division noted, none demarcated the work of the sexes so consistently.

The distinctive character of women's work still left unanswered its explanation. Why were women in the work they were? Why were they not in the work men were in? And why were men absent from women's work?

Both supply and demand factors accounted for the division and the form that it took. Of key importance on the supply side were the peculiar characteristics of female labour and on the demand side both the restrictions on the demand for female labour by the law and by employed men and the

employment practices of employers which, whether intentional or not, operated to divide the work for which women were wanted from the work for which men were wanted.

Underlying the peculiar characteristics of female labour was woman's distinctive upbringing. Determining its content were prevailing views regarding the nature, role and status of women relative to men. These maintained first, that from a productive viewpoint woman's "hands" and "brains" were naturally inferior to man's; second that woman's function in life, unlike man's, was not bread-winning but homemaking; and third, that the esteem accorded any woman depended on the degree to which she acted the part of a "lady of leisure" and not, as normally with a man, the type of work he was in and how successfully he performed it. The labour market ramifications of such an upbringing were a female labour supply that was characterized not only by its comparative physical weakness, inferior training, inexperience, docility, unambitiousness and immobility but also by its modest financial expectations.

From this it does not follow that sex differences in labour attributes would have vanished if upbringing had been occupationally insignificant. Obviously biological differences exist and they might have diverted the labour of men and women into separate channels. All that is being claimed is that the supply distinctions noted for the 1891-1914 period were traceable in the first instance to the different upbringings of men and women. As for the sex-dividing demand factors, the legal restrictions, in keeping with prevailing views about the sexes, were designed to prevent women, as the nation's child bearers and rearers, from working under unhealthy and unwholesome conditions. In contrast to the legal restrictions, those imposed by employed men were in the main inspired by self-interest. As the already occupationally privileged, they sought to protect that position whenever it was threatened by the competition of "cheap" female labour. Because most men were unaffected by this competition, however, and because the relatively few that were were not necessarily successful in averting it, the restrictions of employed men never emerged as a major employment barrier in the 1891-1914 period. Since neither did the legal restrictions, this left the employment practices of employers as mainly responsible for men and women being demanded for different work.

The employment practices of employers were shaped principally by the views that they, as members of society, held about the sexes and by economic considerations. Their views about the sexes led to practices designed to secure the specific sex which, according to accepted opinion, was believed to be if not the only then the more proper sex to employ for the work in question. Economic considerations, on the other hand, led to practices designed to secure that type of labour which was believed to constitute the better bargain. Yet given the distinctive qualities of male and female labour and the different price of each, the economic advantage of employing the one or the other tended to vary over a large range of the nation's occupations. Thus economic as well as social considerations served to sex-differentiate the demand for labour.

Under the particular circumstances of the 1891-1914 period, the supply and demand factors mentioned above operated to concentrate women in the nation's safer, lighter, simpler, pleasanter, and less responsible work and in its work with a housewifery prototype—or viewed another way, in its lower-paying work—and to concentrate men in work of an opposite kind. The "industrial" ramifications of a division of this order was a concentration of women in the "industries" of textiles, clothing and personal service and in the professions of nursing, including midwifery, and teaching and a concentration of men in the nation's remaining "industries" and professions.

Yet, as previously noted, the demarcation according to the nature and attendant conditions of the work was not clear-cut. In the first place it was not universally true that the one or the other sex, as the case might be, was consistently the better bargain for a particular kind of work inasmuch as labour market conditions varied from place to place and over the years. Again, employers were not always in agreement as to which sex was the better bargain for particular types of work. Moreover, employers also differed to the extent that they were influenced by non-economic considerations, considerations which were as likely to favour the employment of the less as of the more economical sex. And finally, some to a greater degree than others were restricted by the law or by employed men or by both.

On the other hand, the demarcation according to the amount a job paid was almost without

exception. This followed from the prevailing sex differences in wage expectations whereby men were not, and women were, willing to accept work paying but a “woman’s wage”. For women to be employed at all, they had no choice but to accept the only work for which they were in demand, women’s work with its “women’s wages”. This was because employing women for men’s work at “men’s wages” in jobs not calling for males as such was generally thought to offer employers no economic advantage since women’s productivity in such work tended to be much lower than men’s or overhead costs tended to be higher or both. But employing men for women’s work at “women’s wages” in jobs not calling for females as such was a different proposition inasmuch as men’s productivity in such work was in many cases superior to women’s or overhead costs tended to be lower or both. Moreover, unlike the situation regarding the use of female labour for men’s work, the law and employed members of the opposite sex did not to any extent prevent employers from using male labour for women’s work whenever they considered it to their advantage to do so.

But men with their higher level of wage expectations did not offer themselves for jobs paying a “woman’s wage”. Thus in the rare cases of men being used, if not interchangeably with women then in work of a kind generally recognized as women’s, there existed either an earnings qualification which gave men for their women’s type of work a “man’s wage” or else the men involved, by exception, had wage expectations below that of other men of their labour grade.

Between 1891 and 1914 the sex division showed little sign of relaxing. As this period heralded no substantial change in the absence of demand for women to do men’s work and in the women’s work of an occupational category being lower paying than its men’s work, this stability was to be expected. This does not mean, however, that women’s employment position remained static throughout those years. Developments affecting both the supply of and demand for female labour were shifting, even if not blurring, the dividing line.

On the supply side developments were improving the quality of female labour and, in the process, reducing its share in the total labour force. The main trends responsible for this were two: the elimination from the female labour force of some of its least efficient members—very young girls and the poverty-stricken wives and widows of the labouring classes—and the entry into it of hitherto unoccupied upper class women whose labour was of a superior type.

The former trend was attributable in the first instance to the contemporary rise in the school-leaving age which had greater qualitative and quantitative consequences for women than for men because the very young constituted a higher proportion of the female labour force. Secondly, and more important because more deep-seated in its effects, was the nation’s developing interest in social security and infant welfare measures. Concerned with the consequences to family life of an impersonal economic system that deprived the homemaker of the opportunity to supplement family income in ways compatible with her domestic responsibilities—namely paid home work or non-gainful production for household use—the nation increasingly instituted programmes such as unemployment insurance, old age pensions and school feeding to enable and assist men and women living under modern industrial conditions to fulfill their family responsibilities. The occupational effect of these programmes was to lessen the need of homemakers to enter gainful employment.

Like the first, the second trend—the entry of “ladies of leisure” into the labour market—represented not so much a break with established views regarding the sexes as an attempt to adjust them to changed circumstances. To prescribe homemaking for the leisured young or the growing number of spinsters among these classes left them either functionless in homes where a rising standard of comfort was supplying ample domestic assistance or destitute in homes where the family breadwinner died without financially securing the future of the spinster daughter. The bid of the “new women” to work stemmed from a desire to surmount the drawbacks associated with their leisured existence. On the whole they did not question it for those who found purpose and security as “daughters at home” but only for those who did not. For these latter, paid careers, providing both an interest in life and an independent income, appeared as an answer. But the “career” was never conceived as supplanting the “home” in the life of a woman but rather as a respectable alternative for those to whom adhering to the lady and homemaker ideals left them insufficiently occupied or supported.

Throughout the period under review “careerism” among the nation’s more privileged women gathered momentum. This had a twofold effect on the quality of women’s “hands” and “brains”. First of all, by persuading a certain number of the more “modern” ladies to enter the labour market, it made available for sale what had hitherto been virtually unpurchasable, the labour of the most occupationally qualified members of the female sex from the standpoint of education, health, appearance, and manners. Secondly, it produced among those imbued with the new ideals, whether themselves gainfully employed or not, a movement to improve not only the vocational qualifications of women of their own class but of women in general.

Thus in its practical expression career-mindedness was rendering the female labour supply more fit and it gave promise of rendering it even more so in years to come. Firstly, although not causing any great change in the behaviour of those already out of school, “careerism” was making a deep impression on the minds of the rising generation of secondary schoolgirls. Next, it was spreading to classes lower down the social scale. And finally, in inspiring efforts to improve women’s training opportunities, it was laying the groundwork for their eventual provision.

From an occupational standpoint, the labour market departure of young girls and of women compelled by need to be both breadwinner and homemaker and the entrance of “career women” served to enhance the over-all quality of the female labour force. Compared to its 1891 counterpart, the female labour force of 1914 was not only capable of performing low-grade work more efficiently but also higher grade work.

With women’s labour improving relative to men’s, borderline grades of work which in 1891 only men’s labour would have been qualified to perform became, with the passage of time, more subject to women’s competition. As women entered such work its price invariably fell. Men were either laid off because employers were unwilling to keep men at their old rates, or they left voluntarily to take advantage of more remunerative work elsewhere, or new recruits ceased to be attracted into such work. Because the reaction to women’s competition took this form the occupational line shifted rather than blurred as women’s over-all qualifications improved.

On the demand side women’s employment opportunities were altering and two developments of the 1891-1914 period were especially responsible. The changing “industrial” structure of the nation was one, the “woman’s rights” movement was the other.

The relevant industrial developments involved organizational, technological and product market developments which were increasing the ability of certain industries to employ female labour profitably. Underlying this changing aspect of the nation’s occupational structure was the growing importance to the economy of low-grade manual work requiring little muscular force, of low-grade clerical and sales work and of the teaching and nursing professions. The exceptional growth rates of women’s employment between 1891 and 1911 in every service “industry” other than Personal Service and National Defence and in the manufacturing ones of Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc., of Metals, of Paper, of Skins and Leather, of Food, Drink and Tobacco, and of Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass mirror these trends. So does women’s rising share in all of the above “industries” other than Distribution and, in addition, in the declining “industry” of Clothing. But this statistical displacement did not mean that women had supplanted men in “men’s jobs”. Women’s larger share was the result in part of new “women’s” and “men’s jobs” being created out of former “men’s jobs”, in part of the introduction of work new to the economy but of a kind suitable to female labour, and in part of the rising importance of an “industry’s” recognized women’s work relative to its recognized men’s work. Accordingly, the line of demarcation was still there. Only its position had changed.

Neither were women’s “industrial” gains made at the expense of men’s employment. In all the service “industries” where women’s share advanced—Commerce, Public Administration, Professional Service, and Transportation and Communication—men’s employment was expanding at a rate faster than the male labour force. Similarly, men’s manufacturing opportunities evidenced exceptional growth in the women advancing “industries” of Chemicals, Oils, Grease, etc. and of Metals. Thus what advanced women’s share in these “industries” was not the taking of jobs from men but the expansion of women’s opportunities at a faster rate than men’s.

Real “displacement” centred in Skins and Leather, in Food Drink and Tobacco, in Clothing, and

in Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass. In these “industries”, industrial developments were offering women exceptional opportunities but not men. Even so, men’s over-all employment opportunities did not diminish. Partly this was due to “new” work opening up for men in fields virtually untouched by female labour. Foremost among them were National Defence and Mining. In addition the big male-employing Construction “industry” continued to keep pace with the male labour force growth. Moreover, men’s opportunities were expanding at an exceptional rate, as contrasted with women’s, in Personal Service and, in keeping with women’s, in Distribution.

Thus what the changing shares indicate is that underlying industrial developments, by affecting male and female labour the same way but in differing degrees in some instances and in opposite ways in others, were producing an “industrial” realignment of men and women and not the advance of one at the expense of the other’s employment.

Not to any extent mirrored statistically but important to women qualitatively was the part played by the “woman’s rights” movement in improving women’s employment opportunities. This it did in two ways: by diminishing discriminatory practices and by promoting the professionalization of recognized women’s work.

The anti-discrimination or, in positive terms, the equal opportunity campaign of the “new women” was motivated by considerations of justice, of economic betterment, and of sex-representation. That women by reason of their sex should be barred from jobs they were otherwise qualified to perform appeared highly unjust to a movement seeking a “fairer” deal for women. Next it found its attempts to achieve women’s economic emancipation frustrated by a labour market situation in which women were accorded a less than living wage. If women’s wages were to be raised to a self-sufficient level, it was considered imperative to enlarge the demand for women’s services. Finally, given the radically different life experiences of men and women, it was thought impossible for a man to understand a woman’s point of view, much less know how best to deal with her problems. Only women representing women could achieve this end. On these grounds the movement sought to have women in charge of women as workers and of women and children as consumers of services.

By focusing public attention on the validity and desirability of beliefs impinging upon women’s employment and by their own organizational activities, which not only demonstrated what women were capable of but also accustomed men to seeing women in skilled and responsible posts, the “new women” were successful in converting a small but growing number of employers, male workers and legislators to their way of thinking. The “new men” among employers, inasmuch as they executed the power to hire, were in an especially key position to translate principle into practice. They were most moved by the women-for-women argument with the result that women’s first opportunities to do responsible or skilled work in male occupational spheres came in the form of specialists in matters pertaining to their sex. These same opportunities also provided women with their widest inroad into recognized male upper-grade work as few were the contemporary employers sufficiently “advanced” to consider women for such posts other than as a sex representative.

In contrast to the limited achievement of the equal opportunity campaign, the campaign to professionalize recognized women’s work met with greater success. As the “new women” discovered, it was easier for them to affect a work situation in which women were already indisputably entrenched than to pursue the more revolutionary policy of forcing women’s entrance into male occupational strongholds and so of arousing the opposition of employed men.

In their efforts to professionalize women’s work, the “new women” acted principally as opportunists rather than as innovators. For professionalization was occurring for reasons independent of their own existence and affecting both men’s and women’s occupations indiscriminately. Formerly, when women’s occupational outlook and opportunities were much more modest, any work of theirs which underwent professionalization was lost to their sex. But in the period under review, largely because of the “new women’s” initiative, the professionalization of women’s work served to elevate rather than to destroy the demand for female labour. It was the growing professionalization of housewifery skills, foremost among them teaching of the young and nursing of the sick, which gave the “new women” their opportunity.

Even though women’s expanding employment opportunities brought no decline in the importance

of sex in job assignment, this is not to say that the movement was of no special significance for women. First of all it broadened the range of women's vocational choice. Whereas in 1891 women's scope was largely confined to the three service occupations of private domestic service, teaching and nursing, including midwifery, and to the two manufacturing Orders of Clothing and Textiles, by 1914 Commerce; Distribution; Public Administration; men's branches of Professional Service; and Transportation and Communication were placing relatively larger bids for women's "brains", and Metals; Paper; Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc.; Food, Drink and Tobacco; Skins and Leather; and Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass for women's "hands". Secondly, women's expanding opportunities were occurring, in the main, in the economy's expanding "industries". Thus one could expect the passage of time to enhance rather than diminish their employment opportunities.

Women used their widening opportunities to escape disesteemed forms of work—such as the "rough" occupations of farm labouring, brick-making and tin mining—which lack of better prospects had forced them to accept in the past. The greatest loser was private domestic service which to many contemporaries appeared to convey at most the status of "slavey". In contrast, the "new" demand encompassed work that went far to satisfy women's social ambition to be "ladies". Its drawing power was especially marked among the young urban girls making their debut into the labour market during the 1891-1914 period. Unencumbered by any previous occupational attachment, they entered the offices, shops, warehouses and better factory premises, all places from which women's new employment opportunities largely emanated.

21.2 Periods Two and Three: 1914-1921

The war changed what had been a gradual and highly selective movement of women into men's "industries" into a rapid and indiscriminate one. Indicative of this change in pace and scope between 1914 and 1918, but by no means a measure of its full extent, was the abnormal rise in the proportion of women employed in nearly all of the nation's major industries.

Women's expanding shares were partly a by-product of wartime production requirements. The unprecedented orders for standardized articles to equip the military had the effect of rendering a higher proportion of the nation's work within the performance powers of women. In this regard women's entry involved no new principle. Already in pre-war days the development of mass demands for standardized products and services was securing women a larger share of certain men's industries. The war only accelerated this development.

But there was also an extension of women into work which under peacetime circumstances would have continued to be men's. The frontiers of women's work were now extended to include a higher proportion of the nation's labouring and skilled work. The former development was a reversal of the pre-war trend of women departing from the "rough" occupations; the latter—the advance of women into men's work of a craft and scientific character and into men's side of the teaching and medical professions—initiated a movement where none had existed before. Furthermore, in the wake of women's industrial advance followed an increase in the number of women supervisors. The war thereby accentuated the pre-war trend of having women supervise women and look after their welfare.

On its face value the fact that women, contrary to expectations, made such advances into men's work seems to contradict the argument of this thesis. If, as claimed, impediments raised by the law, by employed men and by employers prevented such a move, how could it have occurred? In reality this trend testifies not to the non-existence of such impediments but to their strength. This is most tellingly revealed by an examination of the actual substitution process. Essentially it was one of surmounting with considerable difficulty the pre-existing obstacles to women's use for men's work.

Legal restrictions proved the easiest to surmount. First of all, the issue was not a controversial one. The public was prepared to see its protective labour legislation, which had been designed to safeguard the welfare of working youngsters and women, subordinated to the more urgent purposes of winning the war. Secondly, the government was the prime mover in this equation. Forearmed

with the general consent, all it had to do was to relax the Factory Acts. There was not even any legislative delay. Already before the outbreak of the war, the Secretary of State was empowered in cases of public emergency to exempt from the Acts any factory or workshop performing government work. On the basis of these powers and others added during the course of the war, the government permitted employers engaged in war work to use women during hours and on processes which had been prohibited in peacetime.

In contrast to the legal restraints, those imposed by employed men were much more difficult to overcome. Their sudden stringency was due to war conditions as under normal circumstances such restrictions were not a major factor in precluding women from men's work. What made them now of such importance was a combination of two factors. On the one hand the war greatly enhanced the power of skilled craftsmen engaged in essential munitions work to exclude women from their preserves while on the other it made women's admission a question of national survival. The gravity of the situation made it impossible for the government to follow its peacetime practice of permitting the relative bargaining strength of the men and employers to settle the issue. Nor was it able to force women's entry against the will of the men since without their cooperation women's labour could not be put to immediate productive use. It was left with no alternative but to adopt a policy of persuasion and compromise.

To convert the men to its point of view, the government found, first of all, that it had to convince them that victory demanded their sacrifice. Secondly, it had to offer them tangible assurance that their privileged occupational position would not be affected detrimentally either during the war or in the immediate post-war period. Thirdly, it had to show that private employers would be making a sacrifice of like proportion.

Although none of these steps was easy to surmount, the government was persistent in its attempts and succeeded by making compromises with the men's demands. This policy eventually involved it in promises to use its influence to secure the restoration of all customary trade practices once the war ceased and in its requiring of government contractors that labour substituted for skilled men be paid "the usual rates of the district". In this way it was able to break down sufficiently the men's initial resistance to the idea of women's substitution so as to reduce the problem of employed men's restrictions in munitions work to one of minor proportions by the end of the war.

Outside of munitions the issue of restrictions imposed by employed men was not nearly as important. From the government's viewpoint the need to substitute women in these industries was less urgent, and so it could afford to wait until an acknowledged shortage of male labour combined with a desire to assist the war effort produced agreements between the men and management. In its expectations that such agreements would voluntarily ensue, the government was not mistaken. Generally, as a shortage of male labour was proved in one trade after another, the men relaxed their restrictions and women were admitted to men's work under conditions designed to safeguard the position of men. In this respect wartime practice differed little from the peacetime one as the voluntary relaxation of restrictions had not been unknown in pre-war days in districts suffering from a chronic shortage of male labour.

Once unfettered from many of the restraints imposed by the law or by employed men, which, as long as they remained, prevented women's use on men's work, employers were finally in a position to cope with the practical problems of translating a male work situation into a female one, namely those of competency, profitability and availability. The means by which women came to do a larger share of work normally recognized as men's was mainly one of deliberate accommodation to women's type of labour. Herein lay a new element in women's employment situation as few were the measures consciously adopted before the war to overcome the inferiorities associated with female labour.

To compensate for the typical working woman's deficiencies in skill and strength employers now either downgraded the content of their jobs so that female labour could be productively employed or they adopted measures to improve its quality. Downgrading was by far the more popular of the two measures. With skilled men's work it had the advantage of making the general run of working women rapidly productive, while with labouring men's work it was needed to make them at all productive.

The downgrading of men's skilled work to women's unskilled labour proceeded along two lines. In some cases the skilled elements were separated from the unskilled and jobs for women devised out of the latter. This type of adoption meant that women performed only the simpler parts of what was originally a man's job. In other cases women's labour was made serviceable for skilled men's work by subdividing the work and then mechanizing the component parts with the use of automatic machines that could be operated by unskilled or semi-skilled labour.

Useful as downgrading was as a substitution device it had its limitations. Job reorganization to the extent necessary to render women's labour productive was not always practicable. Therefore, means had also to be found to improve its quality. The major method adopted was one of careful selection. The aim here was to recruit the exceptional woman, one whose labour qualities, unlike those represented by the mass of women workers, already tended to approximate those of men. Prior to the war this intra-sex difference among women of the same labour grade had been almost totally overlooked. During the war, however, employers began to reexamine their stereotyped conceptions of women and to view them more as individuals instead of as a class with common attributes. Supplementing this policy of careful selection were other measures, including programmes of training and welfare, to raise women's skill and powers of endurance.

Though women's relative incompetence could be partly overcome by job reorganization, careful selection, training, and welfare, there still remained the problem of whether they could be profitably employed. This problem was aggravated by the employed men's insistence on equal pay as a condition of women's admission to their work. It was solved mainly by removing the output of concerns engaged on essential war work from the pricing standards of the competitive market. To win the war the government was prepared to assume any extra cost that might be involved in replacing men's labour with women's. Comparative efficiency, though never completely obliterated, dwindled in importance as a substitution obstacle. Only the nation's non-essential output continued to be ruled by business considerations. Here substitution continued to hinge largely on the question of whether women's labour could be made to "pay".

There was still one final issue to be resolved before a demand for women substitutes could be made effective. Unless women of the requisite quality could be recruited in sufficient numbers to answer the nation's wartime need, measures to render women's labour both more competent and more economical would be of little avail. To satisfy the demand they had to be recruited from among both the "occupied" and the "unoccupied". This in turn meant overcoming the normal occupational and geographical immobility associated with women's labour and the normal reluctance of the unoccupied to enter gainful employment. Women were urged by the government to enter work as a national war service. In areas offering women few employment openings, the labour exchanges conducted special recruiting campaigns to induce women to leave home for war work elsewhere. To stimulate the flow, special arrangements were made for their transposition, reception, board, lodging, and general welfare. To facilitate married women's employment, the Ministry of Munitions provided grants-in-aid for the establishment and maintenance of nurseries for the children of munition workers. By measures such as these, women who ordinarily would have remained "unoccupied" were attracted into employment. And as the war progressed, the attractive features connected with acting as men's substitutes, particularly the pay, induced women already occupied to transfer to men's work.

From the foregoing account of the substitution process it can now be seen that women's wartime advances were dependent upon an altered labour market situation. Wartime patriotism had rendered minds ordinarily resistant to change pliable by the desire to serve the war effort. Government controls had fostered change in ways deemed necessary for national survival. A by-product of organizing production on a mass scale to satisfy the demand of the military for standardized articles had been a recasting of a substantial amount of men's work into a form women could undertake with comparative ease. The manpower shortage created by military recruiting had supplied employers with a motive to experiment with women's labour. Finally, the exceptional attractiveness of substitution—its glory, pay, ease of placement, welfare conditions—had acted as a powerful inducement and drew women from among both the occupied and unoccupied.

All the same, change on such a scale, involving as it did attitudinal, technological, organizational,

and constructional change, could not take place overnight. Time was needed to overcome the initial inertia of an economy geared to peacetime ends and means. More time was needed to allow the various wartime substitution programmes to gain momentum and bear fruit. The time factor, therefore, must not be overlooked in explaining the wartime substitution process. Had the war lasted only two years instead of four, women's employment pattern would have registered very little change even though change was in the making. On the other hand, had the war lasted longer, even greater changes would have been noted. As it was, four years proved sufficient to recast the economy into its wartime mould.

But women's wartime substitution, although extending the scope of women's work, did not erase the sex dividing line. The division remained as characteristic of the wartime labour market as the peacetime one. There was some interchangeability between men and women, it is true, particularly in the munition, textile and transport trades, but the situation in these instances was a highly unstable one. Women were either entering jobs that men were leaving or what had formerly been men's jobs were being sub-divided into men's and women's work. The entire wartime labour policy of concentrating male employment on essential work deemed unsuitable for women operated towards this end. And men, whether for reasons, among others, of compulsion, of patriotism or of economic self-interest, followed the government's lead.

That the sex division continued was to be expected. Although the war brought many changes which made sex less occupationally handicapping to woman it did not eliminate sex as a factor in job assignment. Women continued to be entirely excluded from actual combatant service, merchant marine service and underground work in the mines though such essential work suffered from a shortage of labour. Any such innovation continued to be ruled out as improper. Moreover, even when women were found in work normally considered improper this did not mean that sex had become less occupationally relevant. In most instances it simply reflected a new order of priorities whereby practices thought less essential for maintaining ideals of femininity intact were temporarily abandoned for the larger purposes of national survival.

Even so the exigencies of war were producing a closer correspondence between work in keeping with a feminine upbringing and women's occupational assignment. Before the war the tendency existed but was imperfectly realized because of the various conventions and pressures which have been described. But in wartime the nation could not afford to have men's labour squandered on non-essential work or on essential work that women might possibly perform. Accordingly assumptions about women's productive powers were more closely scrutinized and those proving to be without foundation in fact were increasingly abandoned.

Yet apparently this experience of employing women in new ways had very little lasting effect. This is well borne out by examining the back-to-normalcy process which at the same time attests to the truth of the claim that it was a changed labour market situation and not any fundamental alteration in views regarding the sexes which explained women's wartime substitution.

By 1921 all the wartime changes in the labour market had disappeared and so had virtually all of women's employment gains. The proportion of women at work was what would have been expected from pre-war trends. So was the occupational distribution of the sexes with but few exceptions. Admittedly 1921 was a depression year. Nevertheless that does not undermine its validity for showing what little lasting effect the innovations of wartime had on women's employment position. The loss of women's wartime gains was already observable in 1920 when the economy was in the midst of a post-war employment boom. What the depression did was to clarify, not distort, the post-war employment picture. For it did much to remove those women substitutes whose employment, rather than indicating a permanent change in employment practices, was no more than a temporary aftermath of the war. As for the process by which these gains were lost, it was characterized by such movements as the reimposition of legal and employed men's restrictions which had been abandoned during the war, the mass withdrawal of married women from the labour market, and the voluntary transfer of demand from substituted women to men now that the latter were once more freely available.

The conclusion that the wartime innovations had little permanent impact on women's employ-

ment does not imply that it had none at all. The 1921 pattern was not exactly what it would have been if no war had occurred. The effect of the war was to accelerate certain pre-war trends which were already operating to make being a woman less of an employment handicap. The war had this effect because it exposed individuals to experiences that they would not have had normally.

Foremost among such trends was the tendency for output to be organized on the basis of subdivision and specialization. With circumstances permitting no other choice, numerous employers were forced to organize their production methods so as to eliminate the need for human skill and strength. That experience convinced some of the value of the new ways and thus in the post-war period, instead of reverting to their pre-war practices, they continued to use those which originally they had adopted only as wartime expedients.

Secondly, the fact that the "welfare" of wartime not only held its own but spread despite the depression meant that the basis for distinguishing between the sexes on grounds of "nature" and "suitability" continued to be undermined. For as the standards of health, safety and comfort for working men rose, as the use of labour-saving devices spread and as the normal work week declined the prospects of introducing women into work situations which in 1891 would have been declared "unsuitable" increased.

Because the effect of these industrial developments was to extend the range of women's work rather than to open up men's work to women, they did not blur the sex dividing line but shifted it. This was not quite the case with the war's effect upon established views about women.

What the war had done was to accelerate the acceptance of "advanced" views by both women and men regarding the propriety of gainful employment for women. Whereas normally the less enterprising and more conventional "ladies of leisure" would not have entered the labour market, in wartime they did as temporary workers. That experience strengthened the desire of some to work and made them unwilling to return to the status of a "daughter at home". Moreover, the war, in considerably increasing the female excess in the marriageable population (women over twenty either single, widowed or divorced) made the question of self-support of vital concern to many women who, had there been no war, would have had husbands to provide for them.

As for its effect in altering men's views, the war, first of all had provided an unprecedented opportunity for women to demonstrate their abilities not only to male employers but also to the population at large. In addition, it had placed men and women in a much closer working relationship than had existed in peacetime. Admittedly not all men seeing or using women in new occupational roles were favourably impressed, but what is important is that some were. The impressions derived from such experiences imbued a minority of men, hitherto untouched by the "woman's rights" movement, with a greater respect for women as workers and as individuals and, on the basis of that higher estimation, with a desire to accord them improved, if not the same, opportunities for employment.

Nevertheless, the accelerated development of "new men" and "new women" apparently did little to blur the dividing line between men's and women's work. This might appear contrary to expectations if, as this thesis maintains, the almost total absence of women from men's work was rooted in the differential upbringing of the sexes in the first instance and in the failure of employers, legislators and employed men to accord women equal job opportunity with men in the second. For as women acquired a more positive occupational outlook, as employers became more willing to put women's capacity to the test, and as legislators and employed men became more mindful of the unjustness of their restrictions special to female labour, the employment at least of the exceptional woman should have noticeably extended to spheres previously reserved to men. Why did it not?

Had there been no depression the likelihood is strong that some extension would have been noted. But the advent of the depression so soon after the war drained the economy of opportunities to experiment with women in new ways. The shortage of jobs evoked a strong sentiment, shared by many women, that what jobs remained should go to men. A strengthening rather than a weakening of masculine prejudice against granting women equal opportunity followed.

On the other hand it is important not to exaggerate the extension that would have occurred if

prosperity, instead of depression, had characterized post-war Britain. The more positive occupational outlook of the “new women” did not mean for the majority a greater willingness to qualify themselves for men’s work either geographically or technically or to continue at work once their families began. The liberalization of views referred to above was one of degree not of kind. What had changed was not the pivotal homemaker-breadwinner distinction between the sexes but rather views as to the compatibility of work with being a lady and, to a lesser extent, a wife—but still not a mother—than was the case before the war. It was the gaining acceptance of what had been but a minority view in pre-war days which accounted for the greater willingness of “young ladies” to enter and of the newly married to remain in the labour market.

Furthermore, the full impact of this greater willingness to work could not be expected to be evident immediately. No matter how “modern” post-war women might be, many among them would no longer be in a position to give practical expression to their views. Some might be too old. Some might lack the necessary training to take advantage of the new opportunities opening up to women. Others might already be absorbed with family and household cares. To trace the full effects of the war this thesis would have to encompass another generation. For where labour supply is concerned, changed views of the kind described above must be given time to be incorporated into upbringing and to be reflected in the educational system for them to affect behavior substantially.

APPENDICES

Of the four appendices of supporting evidence, the first gives in full detail the occupational tables developed from the Census data upon which the statistical analysis of women's employment for 1891-1914 is based. The second lists the contemporary restrictions on female labour imposed by some principal trade unions normally and in wartime. The third contains the statistical tables derived from the Board of Trade's State of Employment figures upon which the statistical analysis of women's employment between 1914 and 1921 is based. It also evaluates the figures for the purposes of this study and reviews the more important of the supplementary sources used. The fourth contains the statistical tables derived from the Census data upon which the statistical analysis of women's employment between 1891 and 1921 is based.

Scanned copies of these appendices are on file with the Oxford Research Archive (ORA) and can be accessed at <http://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:3f61ec5c-260c-44cb-b9ff-60e171068e20>. Because the scanned copies of Appendix A's statistical tables are on the whole unreadable, they may be hand-copied or photographed from the paper deposit copy at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

Appendix A

Number of Females and Males Occupied in England and Wales and in Scotland by Occupational Heading in 1891, 1901, and 1911.

The following tables are compiled from Tables 25-27 in the *Census of England and Wales, 1911*, X, i, 524-557; “Summary of the Occupations of the Inhabitants of Scotland, Distinguishing the Sexes, Under and Above 20 Years of Age”, *Census of Scotland, 1891*, II, ii, 8-9; and Table D1 in the *Census of Scotland, 1911*, II, lxxv-lxxxvi. The sub-orders are not necessarily those of the Census nor are the headings necessarily in the order given them by the Census. Wherever makers and dealers were combined under one heading, the rule followed is to classify the heading according to whether the maker or dealer element is the more important numerically.

“Males” and “Females” are defined as persons ten years of age and over.¹ The Census of England and Wales is referred to as the “Census”.

¹The 1891 Census of Scotland included occupied persons under ten years of age but the numbers involved are so small that their inclusion may be disregarded

Table A.1: Summary Table: Number of Occupied Females and Males in Great Britain by Occupational Order (“Industry”), 1891, 1901, and 1911.

Table A.2: Number of Females and Males in England and Wales and in Scotland Occupied in Personal Service in 1891, 1901, and 1911.

Table A.3: Number of Females and Males in England and Wales and in Scotland Occupied in Professional Service in 1891, 1901, and 1911.

Table A.4: Number of Females and Males in England and Wales and in Scotland Occupied in Distribution in 1891, 1901, and 1911.

Table A.5: Number of Females and Males in England and Wales and in Scotland Occupied in Public Administration, Commerce, Public Utilities, and National Defence in 1891, 1901, and 1911.

Table A.6: Number of Females and Males in England and Wales and in Scotland Occupied in Transportation and Communication in 1891, 1901, and 1911.

Table A.7: Number of Females and Males in England and Wales and in Scotland Occupied in Textiles in 1891, 1901, and 1911.

Table A.8: Number of Females and Males in England and Wales and in Scotland Occupied in Clothing and Paper in 1891, 1901, and 1911.

Table A.9: Number of Females and Males in England and Wales and in Scotland Occupied in Food, Drink and Tobacco; Skins and Leather; and Brick, Cement, Pottery, and Glass in 1891, 1901, and 1911.

Table A.10: Number of Females and Males in England and Wales and in Scotland Occupied in Chemicals, Oil, Grease, etc., and in Wood in 1891, 1901, and 1911.

Table A.11: Number of Females and Males in England and Wales and in Scotland Occupied in Metals in 1891, 1901, and 1911. (Part I)

Table A.12: Number of Females and Males in England and Wales and in Scotland Occupied in Metals in 1891, 1901, and 1911. (Part II)

Table A.13: Number of Females and Males in England and Wales and in Scotland Occupied in Construction and Miscellaneous Manufacturing in 1891, 1901, and 1911.

Table A.14: Number of Females and Males in England and Wales and in Scotland Occupied in Agriculture and Fishing and in Mining in 1891, 1901, and 1911.

Appendix B

Restrictions on Female Labour Imposed by Some Principal Trade Unions Normally and in Wartime.

Table B.1: Restrictions on Female Labour Imposed by Some Principal Trade Unions Normally and in Wartime.¹

¹Compiled from B. Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, London: Labour Research Dept. and Allen and Unwin, 1920, Table II.

Appendix C

Statistics: 1914, 1918, 1920.

From the beginning of the war until November 1920 the Board of Trade, and in the latter stages the newly-formed Ministry of Labour, periodically issued forms, asking for the number of males and females employed as of a particular date or pay-week, to selected employers in the major civilian industries of the country. The results of these enquiries were embodied in what are known as the Z8 reports. Though the reports were never published, the figures in them for July 1914, November 1918 and July 1920 were printed in *British Labour: Replacement and Conciliation, 1914-1921*¹ and are reproduced here as Appendix Tables C.1 and C.2.² Despite their many shortcomings,³ these figures still provide for the purposes of this study the most serviceable framework upon which to build an analysis of women's wartime employment.

Table C.1: Summary Table: Number of Males and Females Employed in the United Kingdom by Industry in July 1914, November 1918, and July 1920, and Females as a Per Cent of Total Work Force.

Table C.2: Summary Table: Number of Males and Females Employed in the United Kingdom in Some Principal Industries by Branch in July 1914, November 1918, and July 1920, and Females as a Per Cent of Total Work Force.

¹A. Kirkaldy (ed.), London: Pitman, 1921, Pt.I.

²For Tables C.1 and C.2 see scanned version of Appendix C at <http://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:3f61ec5c-260c-44cb-b9ff-60e171068e20>.

³For a full discussion of these shortcomings, see pages 549-554 in the scanned version of Appendix C.

Appendix D

Number of Occupied Females and All Occupied Persons in England and Wales by Industry, 1911 and 1921.

Table D.1: Number of Occupied Females and All Occupied Persons in England and Wales by Industry, 1911 and 1921.¹

¹Compiled from A. Bowley, "Numbers Occupied in the Industries of England and Wales, 1911 and 1921", Special Memorandum No. 17a, *London and Cambridge Economic Service*, Dec. 1926, Table III.

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Abbreviations used: B. L. - Bodleian Library
N. S. - New Series

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