

Capitalizing on Mother: John S.C. Abbott and Self-Interested Motherhood

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She who was first in the transgression, must yet be the principal earthly instrument in the restoration. . . . Oh mothers! reflect upon the power your Maker has placed in your hands. There is no earthly influence to be compared with yours. . . . God has constituted you the guardians and the controllers of the human family.

John S.C. Abbott¹

IN THE EARLY nineteenth century, middle-class Americans rushed to rehabilitate the image of women. New England's Puritans had castigated women as the daughters of Eve, responsible for the introduction of sin into the world and the damnation of humankind.² But Americans of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries stood this analysis upon its head:

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1. John S.C. Abbott, *The Mother at Home; Or, the Principles of Maternal Duty* (Boston, 1833), 148–49. *The Mother at Home* sold more than a quarter of a million copies and went through numerous editions and printings.

2. See, for example, Mary Maples Dunn, 'Saints and Sisters: Congregational and Quaker Women in the Early Colonial Period,' in Janet Wilson James, ed., *Women in American Religion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980): 27–46; Lonna M. Malmshheimer, 'Daughters of Zion: New England Roots of American Feminism,' *New England Quarterly* 50 (September 1977): 484–504; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 'Vertuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668–1735,' in James, ed., *Women in American Religion*, 67–87; Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of A Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1987); Mary Potter, 'Gender Equality and Gender Hierarchy in Calvin's Theology,' *Signs* 11 (1986): 725–39.

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in their role as mothers, women had the power to save not only themselves but all others. Largely the creation of women, the Republican Mother served equally her family and her nation by bringing up her sons to be virtuous citizens and her daughters to be patriotic mothers like herself. But if Republican Motherhood permitted some women to lay claim to civic incorporation, historians argue, it also delayed the debate over what other roles they might play. It was an article of faith in the early republic that politics was inherently corrosive of virtue and mothers must guard their purity, and thus that of the new nation, by remaining aloof from the rough and tumble of politics.³ At the same time, the family itself became less hierarchical, more affectionate, and centered around the mother. Maternal love kept the new middle-class family together even while the burden of child rearing fell to the women. Antebellum motherhood was thus an honorable role. But it was not an altogether appealing one. Indeed, what women

3. For Republican Motherhood, see Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1850* (Boston: Little-Brown, 1980); Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Ruth H. Bloch, 'American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815,' *Feminist Studies* 4 (1978): 101-26; Ruth H. Bloch, 'The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America,' *Signs* 13 (Autumn 1987): 37-58; Elaine Forman Crane, 'Religion and Rebellion: Women of Faith in the American War for Independence,' in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Religion in a Revolutionary Age* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 52-86; Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 57-59; Jan Lewis, 'Mother's Love: The Construction of an Emotion in Nineteenth-Century America,' in Andrew E. Barnes and Peter N. Stearns, eds., *Social History and Issues in Human Consciousness* (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 209-29; Jan Lewis, 'The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (1987): 689-721; Rosemarie Zagarri, 'Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother,' *American Quarterly* 44 (1992): 192-215; Rosemarie Zagarri, 'The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 55 (1998): 203-30. Margaret Nash offers a dissenting interpretation in 'Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (1997): 171-91.

Recent studies have begun to explore the extent to which women did, in fact, play a role in antebellum politics even without the ballot; see, for example, Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, 'Whig Women, Politics, and Culture in the Campaign of 1840: Three Perspectives from Massachusetts,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (1997): 277-315.

themselves gained from the new maternalism is unclear. Motherhood was 'time-consuming and exhausting,' historians assert, a 'dead-end' occupation that demanded that a woman sacrifice her own hopes and ambitions, and sometimes even her life, for the greater good of society and so that her family would not have to.⁴

Analysis of the Reverend John S.C. Abbott's best-selling advice books *The Mother at Home* (1833) and *The Child at Home* (1834), when viewed in the context of the community in which they were written, suggests a rather different interpretation of antebellum motherhood. For Abbott, pastor of the orthodox Congregational Calvinist Church of Worcester, Massachusetts, from 1830 to 1835, the good mother was a formidable woman, capable of commanding reverence and compelling obedience to her will. Abbott did not intend to revise gender roles, but under the influence of the mothers of his congregation his works directly addressed the changing circumstances that confronted this generation of

4. For early work on women and the family, see, for example, Keith E. Melder, *The Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1800-1850* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977); Carl Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). For motherhood, see, for example, Catherine M. Scholten, *Childbearing in American Society, 1650-1850* (New York: New York University Press, 1985), 80-81; Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing About Domesticity, 1830 to 1860* (New York: Institute for Research in History and Naworth Press, 1982), 57-58; Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 14-16.

For changes in the family, see Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, 45-56; Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), especially 145-85; Mary P. Ryan, 'A Woman's Awakening: Evangelical Religion and the Families of Utica, New York, 1800-1840,' in James, ed., *Women in American Religion*, 89-110; Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), especially 63-100; Richard A. Meckel, 'Educating a Ministry of Mothers: Evangelical Maternal Associations, 1815-1860,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (1982): 403-23; Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Lewis, 'Mother's Love,' 223-24; Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Elaine Tyler May, *Barren in the Promised Land: Childless Americans and the Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 36-59. For analysis of the social and political tensions of this model of marriage, see Norma Basch, 'Marriage, Morals, and Politics in the Election of 1828,' *Journal of American History* 80 (1993): 890-918.

Quotations from Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, 46; Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 220; Lewis, 'Mother's Love,' 220-21.

women. Abbott's view, for example, placed a premium upon a woman's participation in her community, and assumed her proximity to institutions such as churches and schools. The mothers of antebellum Worcester were not rearing their children in isolated suburbs, but were part of a large community of women engaged in similar work.⁵

Most important, Abbott's works addressed the ways in which women themselves stood to benefit from good mothering. The mother-child relationship is, after all, an economic as well as an emotional and physical bond. In the early nineteenth century this economic tie took on new significance when the developing market economy undermined traditional social safety nets. Women's labor, although vital to the work force, was greatly undervalued, and women's economic opportunities were severely limited. In contrast, motherhood held out the promise of social security in old age. Abbott's self-consciously evangelical portrayal of motherhood was positive, even empowering: the rational, imperial, empirical mother, the mother as domestic Napoleon. Defining good mothering not as self-negation but as self-protection was a central theme for the Reverend Mr. Abbott.⁶

5. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, v. The exaltation of the self-denying mother did serve in the long term to undermine some of the legal advantages of fathers, but this shift seemed to derive more from a judicial concern with determining a child's best interests than from a commitment to women's equality before the law; see Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) and *A Judgment for Solomon: The d'Hauteville Case and Legal Experience in Antebellum America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, 56.

By modern standards, Worcester's middle-class neighborhoods were densely populated and as they were only a short block or two off busy Main Street, the physical isolation associated with middle-class motherhood was not characteristic of the antebellum era. For the layout of the city, see *Atlas of the City of Worcester* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, Company, 1971); Elliott B. Knowlton, ed., *Worcester's Best: A Guide to the City's Architectural Heritage* (Worcester, Mass.: Worcester Heritage Preservation Society, 1984); see also Worcester city directories.

6. Claudia Goldin, 'The Gender Gap in Historical Perspective,' in Peter Kilby, ed., *Quantity & Quiddity: Essays in U.S. Economic History* (Middletown, Conn.: University Press of New England, 1987), 135-70, especially 143-48; for New England, see especially Thomas Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

ABBOTT AND THE CALVINIST CHURCH OF WORCESTER

Abbott's portrayal of motherhood was shaped both by his Calvinist beliefs and by his work as a minister to a congregation dominated by women (fig. 1). Indeed, in the preface to *The Mother at Home*, Abbott acknowledged his intellectual debt to 'the mothers who attend my ministry.' In 1829, prior to Abbott's arrival in their pulpit, the women had begun to examine their social role by forming a maternal association. In the 'Constitution of the Maternal Association of the Calvinist Church in Worcester' they declared themselves to be 'deeply impressed with the importance of bringing up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' Together they created a formal network of mothers to assist one another in 'devising and adopting such measures as may seem best calculated to assist us in the right performance of this duty.' The 'sister members' also promised to act as surrogate mothers to the children of any woman 'removed by death.' The group subscribed to relevant periodicals, such as *The Mother's Magazine*, using it as a forum to publish its annual report for the benefit of its other readers. All women in the Calvinist Church 'sustaining the maternal relation' were eligible for membership, and mothers from other Protestant churches were also welcome. When the Association met on the last Wednesday of each month, it was to discuss the current literature on child rearing as well as to offer advice and share insights culled from the members' own domestic dilemmas. The regular monthly meeting time was reserved for the women, but they did agree that children 'of a suitable age' should be invited to attend the occasional meetings devoted to 'exercises . . . calculated to interest [their] feelings and instruct [their] minds. . . .' At these meetings the children were treated as junior members of the Association, thus training up the next generation in the ways of their mothers.⁷

7. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, vi; 'Constitution of the Maternal Association of the Calvinist Church in Worcester,' Worcester, Mass., Central Church Records (hereafter cited CCR), Folio Vol. 10, AAS; Meckel notes that Abbott's 'interaction with [the Calvinist Church's]

It was in this environment of maternal organization and experimentation that John S.C. Abbott began his ministerial career in January 1830. Born in Maine in 1805, Abbott studied at Bowdoin College and at the orthodox Andover Seminary, graduating in 1829. He immediately accepted the call from Worcester's Calvinist Church, which had voted unanimously to hire him upon the resignation of its first minister, Loammi Hoadley. Replacing Hoadley, a quiet and a sickly man, the youthful Abbott brought to the church an invigorating energy. Abbott's installation was a grand public spectacle, involving complicated arrangements to provide sufficient seating and entertainment for the throng of spectators. For more than five years, Abbott was a highly visible minister about town who nudged his congregation in new directions. He persuaded the parish to raise money for a Sunday School and helped to build its library, organized a Singing Committee to bring harmony to worship services, and led his flock into the field of social reform by actively encouraging a temperance campaign. The minister also geared up the church's machinery of discipline, which had been largely ignored by his predecessor, and demanded that the congregation integrate their religious beliefs into their daily lives.⁸

maternal association members played a significant role in the preparation of his widely read *Mother at Home*, in 'Educating a Ministry of Mothers,' 414, n. 29. See also U. Waldo Cutler, *The First Hundred Years of the Central Church in Worcester, 1820-1920* (Worcester, Mass., 1920), 39-40. The phrasing of the constitution of the Worcester Maternal Association seems to have been fairly standard; see Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*, 150, n. 41.

When Abbott arrived in Worcester in 1830, women comprised approximately 60 percent of full church members; however, women's presence in the church was greater still because, as the membership list shows, not all congregants were full church members. [*Manual of the Calvinist Church, Worcester, Massachusetts* (Worcester, Mass., 1877), 9-11.] Unfortunately, the extant Maternal Association records do not include membership lists. However, a likely profile of Maternal Association members may be extrapolated from the membership of the group's parent organization, the Calvinist Church, which was overwhelmingly middle and lower-middle class. See the church tax lists for 1827 and 1832, Worcester Collection, CCR, Folio Vol. 4, AAS, and church membership lists in *Manual of the Calvinist Church*.

8. *Manual of the Calvinist Church*, 4-5; *Addresses at the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Organization of the Central Church* (Worcester, Mass., 1896), 8; CCR Folio Vol. 1, January 27, 1830; *Addresses at the Commemoration*, 20; CCR, Box 5, Folder 1, April 19, 1834; John S.C. Abbott, *Lecture on the License Law* (Boston, 1838); see also Ian Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1860*

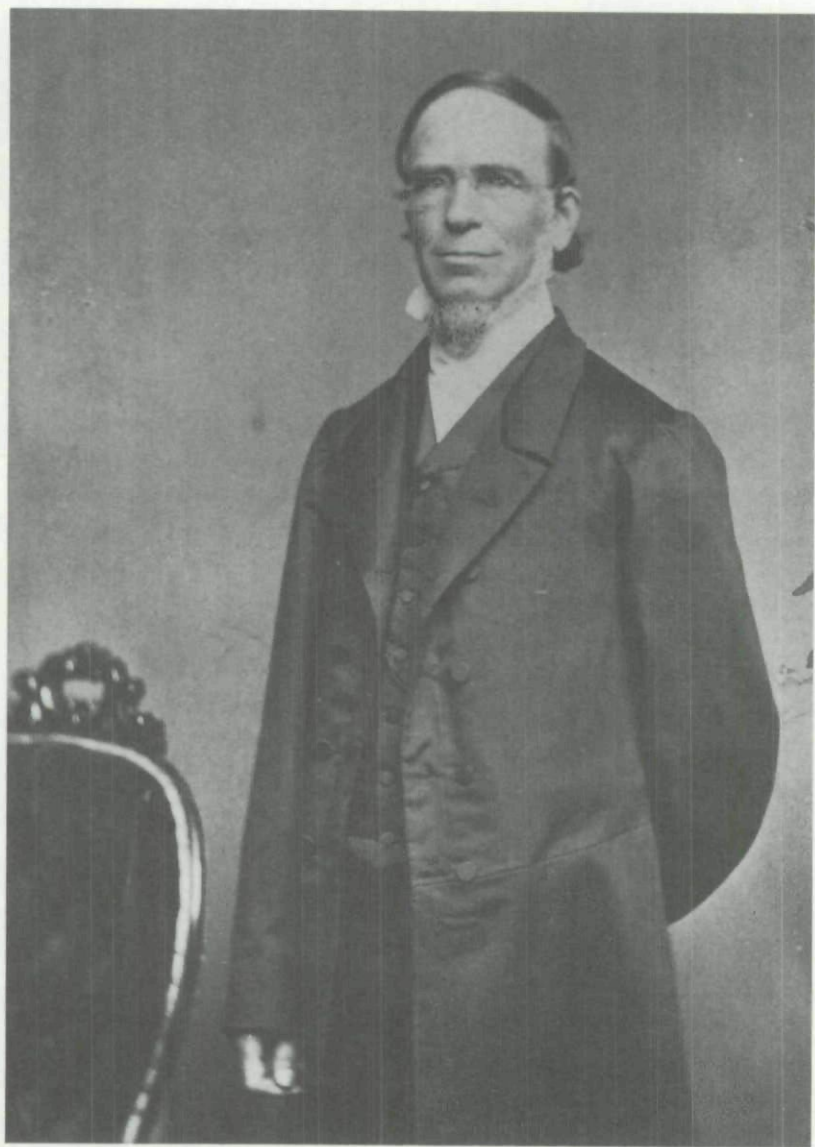


Fig. 1. The Reverend John S.C. Abbott (1805-77). Carte de visite, February. Central Church Records, American Antiquarian Society manuscript collections.

Abbott was also in step with the theological reforms of his day. Within a year of his arrival the new minister had convinced the eleven-year-old congregation to reform its founding creed and covenant, halving the number of articles of faith and shortening and simplifying the wording. The church had initially intended the creed to remain substantially the same but to be less forbidding and more easily understood. Under Abbott's leadership, however, the reformed creed went much further, jettisoning the Calvinist tenets of predestination and visible sainthood and exhibiting a decidedly more liberal tone. Where the old creed was harsh and legalistic and spoke primarily of sin and suffering, the new creed was gentler, emphasizing God's love and forgiveness and Christ's sacrifice. More telling still was a shift in emphasis from original sin to original rectitude. In 1820 church members had confessed 'We believe that every individual of the human race is, by federal connexion with the first man, and in consequence of his apostasy, natively dead. . . .' But under Abbott's influence members confessed instead 'That mankind are fallen from their original rectitude—and are, while in a state of nature, wholly destitute of that holiness which is required by the divine law.' This confessional change—from being natively dead to being in a state of nature from which one could be redeemed through belief in Christ—reflected Abbott's evangelical understanding of orthodox Congregationalism, which tempered a distrust of human nature with divine forgiveness and a commitment to inclusiveness. At his urging and with only two dissenting votes, the church adopted the more liberal creed. Abbott's approach was also well received in Worcester generally, and the membership of the Calvinist Church soared, nearly tripling during his five-year ministry.⁹

(Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979). In 1833 the Calvinist Church denounced alcohol as 'an immorality' and required members to swear 'to abstain entirely from the use of Ardent Spirits . . . & also from traffic in them.' CCR, Octavo Vol. 8, February 28, 1833.

9. CCR, Octavo Vol. 8, October 27, November 13, 21, 1831; 'Articles of Faith and Covenant,' CCR, Octavo Vol. 5, 1820; Octavo Vol. 8, October 27, 1831 and November 13, 1831; see also Cutler, *First Hundred Years*, 33–36. During Hoadley's ministry, 81 persons joined the Calvinist Church; Abbott added 216, an increase of 266 percent. *Historical*

Abbott was also an ambitious man who understood well that Worcester's position at a transportation crossroads connecting metropolitan Boston to the West offered enormous potential for growth. In an 1832 letter to Daniel Waldo, Jr., the church's wealthy benefactor, Abbott noted that 'the town is now very rapidly increasing in population & in influence' and expressed his conviction that 'if the friends of Christ make suitable exertions' the Calvinist Church could become a leader in the cause of religion, both locally and statewide. Alarmed that competition from other churches might 'deprive us of our share of influence,' Abbott sought Waldo's backing to enlarge the society's cramped meetinghouse. Abbott reminded his patron that 'life is at all times uncertain' and hinted broadly that it would be best for all if the elderly Waldo's affairs—such as his will—were in order.¹⁰

Even as he devised plans to expand the influence and prosperity of the Calvinist Church, and by extension that of the minister

Sketch of the Central Church in Worcester with Its Charter, By-Laws and Members (Worcester, Mass., 1880), 9–17.

For the evolution of American theology, see Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630–1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

10. John S.C. Abbott to Daniel Waldo, July 18, 1832, Waldo Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 4, AAS. Abbott's assessment of the city's potential was on the mark. As a county seat, Worcester was a regional center of law, politics, finance, and commerce. With the building of several railroad lines in the 1830s, the town entered a period of sustained economic and demographic expansion. Between 1820 and 1830, Worcester's population increased by 70 percent, and another 62 percent between 1830 and 1835. By the 1840s and 1850s Worcester was an established center of political and social reform, and the host of numerous conventions, including the first and second national women's rights conventions in 1850 and 1851. For the town's growth, see Robert Doherty, *Society and Power: Five New England Towns, 1800–1860* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), 24–25, 33; William Lincoln, *History of Worcester, Massachusetts* (Worcester, Mass., 1837), 261. For discussion of the women's rights conventions in Worcester, see Nancy H. Burkett, *Abby Kelley Foster and Stephen S. Foster* (Worcester, Mass.: Worcester Bicentennial Commission, 1976); Jean V. Matthews, *Women's Struggle for Equality: The First Phase, 1828–1876* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997); Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 2 vols. (New York, 1881; repr. Arno Press, 1969), 1:215–46 and Appendix, 820–26; Carolyn J. Lawes, *Women and Reform in a New England Community, 1815–1860* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

who presided over it, Abbott embarked upon a second career as a writer. In 1833 and 1834, Abbott published his initial literary successes, *The Mother at Home* and *The Child at Home*. Already something of a local celebrity, Abbott's reputation grew. Historians have recognized Abbott's contemporary influence and point to him as a proponent of the self-denying mother. To be sure, the theme of self-denial is present in his work, but Abbott was not chiefly concerned with convincing women to sacrifice themselves on the altar of maternalism. Rather, his message was fundamentally pragmatic. Abbott urged mothers that they should actively demand the obedience and respect of their children and of society. A good mother exerted her God-given power to take control of her life and thereby guarantee that her later years would be secure and comfortable. The conversion of her children was a means to this end, the orthodox preacher argued, because only religious children could be relied upon not to shirk their filial duty to care for an aged mother. The conversion of children also offered solace in an era of high fertility and high infant mortality. Merging a focus on salvation with the more pragmatic worries of the Maternal Association, Abbott's works emphasized alike the spiritual and social benefits that accrued to good mothers. In sum, peace of mind and social security—both of considerable value to women whose rapidly changing society offered them little in the way of structural or institutional support—were the goals of Abbott's good mother.¹¹

11. Abbott, for example, addressed Boston's United Maternal Association in 1840; cited in Meckel, 'Educating a Ministry of Mothers,' 422; John S.C. Abbott, *The Child at Home: Or, the Principles of Filial Duty Familiarly Illustrated* (Boston, 1834); Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*, 85, 150; Ryan, 'Empire of Mothers,' 47; Lewis, 'Mother's Love,' 211, 216; Meckel, 'Educating a Ministry of Mothers,' 401-2. Catherine Scholten argued that Abbott stressed maternal power but concluded that motherhood 'bound [women] more firmly to their homes,' *Childbearing in American Society*, 96. Abbott's emphasis upon special providence made *The Child at Home* unacceptable to Horace Mann for use in the public schools, see Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of An American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 55.

THE MINISTERIAL MOTHER

The Mother at Home describes a strong and commanding woman. She had to be, for her impact was mighty. In concert with his contemporaries, Abbott held that a mother's influence was worldwide and eternal: 'The influence you are now exerting will go on, unchecked by the grave or the judgment, and will extend onwards through those ages to which there is no end.' Abbott outlined two sources for this maternal power, one physical, the other divine. A woman properly exercised her physical advantage to discipline her small children so as to compel their immediate compliance to her wishes. Thus, maternal power—literally the strength of mother's arms—preceded maternal moral authority. Maternal power was necessary to inculcate Abbott's cardinal filial virtue: not love *per se*, but loving obedience to mother. '*Obedience is absolutely essential to proper family government,*' Abbott emphasized, for without it 'all other efforts will be in vain.' Abbott warned women to refrain from being a 'fond and foolish, but cruel' parent who shied from conflict when a child's persistent disobedience warranted punishment. To this end, he spun melancholy tales of children dying from curable diseases because a soft-hearted mother could not bring herself to force an unpalatable draft of medicine down her reluctant child's throat. The moral of these stories: for the good of all, a mother's will must be done.¹²

Even as the good mother habituated her children to defer to her authority, she developed her own taste and talent for command. A mother's orders were to be carried out swiftly and with glad hearts; whenever possible, the good child anticipated its mother's needs and desires, so thoroughly had she or he imbibed the lessons of childhood. In the manner of a wise military commander, the good mother learned never to issue an order without being prepared to insist upon its being carried out, for she did not

12. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 41; 26; 27 (emphasis in original); 28–29. Abbott emphasized that physical punishment was to be a last resort and that a parent should 'punish . . . in sorrow, but never in anger' because a mother who punishes her children by hitting them teaches them that hitting is acceptable, *Mother at Home*, 61, 64.

shrink from unpleasant confrontations. A child's failure to obey warranted a gentle reprimand; continued obstinence would be followed swiftly by punishment. Abbott's ideal mother thus implanted in her children a respect for her authority based at least in part upon her willingness to exercise her superior physical strength.¹³

Because a woman's physical advantage inevitably waned as her children grew, Abbott proposed a second, more ethereal source of maternal authority. A good mother spoke not for herself, the orthodox minister decreed, but for God. And what God had delegated to mothers was neither influence nor authority, but *power*: 'God has thus given [the mother] all the power, that she may govern and guide [her children] as she pleases. . . . God has given every mother the *power*. . . . What more *power* can a parent ask for, than God has already given? And if we fail to use this power . . . the sin is ours. . . .'¹⁴ In so stating, Abbott keyed into a larger cultural shift away from the formal power of the pulpit and toward the cultural power of women's spirituality. A joke making the rounds in 1851 highlighted women's centrality in sanctioning a minister's local prominence:

A Minister was walking out one day and passed two little boys, one of whom made a bow. As he turned back he heard the following amusing conversation:

'Why, John, didn't you know that was Parson M.?'

'Yes, of course I did.'

'Why did you not make a bow to him?'

'Why, my mother don't belong to his church.'¹⁵

In the 1830s, in common with his peers in the clergy, Abbott was faced with the complications brought about in part by the disestablishment of congregationalism in Massachusetts, which altered the tenor of the relationship between a minister and a congregation. Clergymen were increasingly viewed as employees of

13. Abbott, *Child at Home*, 73; *Mother at Home*, 31, 40.

14. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 40 (emphasis in original).

15. *National Aegis* (Worcester), October 27, 1851.

the congregation, and lifetime tenure in a pulpit, once commonplace, became rarer. As Christopher Columbus Baldwin of Worcester reflected in his diary in 1835, 'Formerly the settling of a minister was a permanent life-matter, and parishes took their pastors as men take their wives. . . . But now ministers are settled for a year or so, and some work by the month, and I have known some who job'd it by the single Sunday, and glad to work so. There is a great change in public opinion in relation to the clergy. They are treated, as a body, with much less respect than formerly.' At the same time, a minister's success was gauged by his ability to attract and to retain his (mostly female) congregants in an era of vigorous denominational competition. Antebellum northern women, disestablished by gender, and the clergy, disestablished by disestablishment, joined forces to produce a more feminized Protestant church and a more sentimental American popular culture that trumpeted the values associated with domesticity. Middle-class, educated women, albeit barred from the pulpit, gained the most from this symbiotic relationship and assumed greater spiritual authority over their families, their communities, and their culture.¹⁶

16. May 25, 1835, Christopher Columbus Baldwin, *Diary of Christopher Columbus Baldwin* (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1901), 351. Disestablishment was finalized in 1833; see McLoughlin, *New England Dissent*; William G. McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty: The Baptists' Struggle in New England, 1630-1833* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1991).

The literature on the feminization of the Protestant churches in the antebellum North is extensive; see, for example, Barbara Welter, 'The Feminization of American Religion, 1800-1860,' in Mary Hartman and Lois Banner, eds., *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1973): 137-57; Nancy F. Cott, 'Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England,' *Feminist Studies* 3 (1975): 15-29; Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*, 126-59; Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Carolyn J. Lawes, 'Trifling with Holy Time: Women and the Formation of the Calvinist Church of Worcester, Massachusetts, 1815-1820,' *Religion and American Culture* 8 (1998): 117-44; Genevieve McCoy, 'The Women of the ABCFM Oregon Mission and the Conflicted Language of Calvinism,' *Church History* 64 (1995): 62-82; Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 83-104; Richard D. Shields, 'The Feminization of American Congregationalism, 1730-1835,' *American Quarterly* 33 (1981): 46-62; Harry S. Stout and Catherine A. Brekus, 'Declension, Gender, and the "New Religious History,"' in Philip R. VanderMeer and Robert P. Swierenga, eds., *Belief and Behavior: Essays in New Religious History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991): 15-37.

The Mother at Home and *The Child at Home* were part of this paradigm shift. As he commenced his writing career, Abbott exploited his relations with the Maternal Association of the Calvinist Church to lend credence to his work. Drawing upon the members' lives for his examples and their imprimatur for his preface, Abbott created a career for himself as their spokesman. In his popular advice books Abbott brought together two cultural forces: the traditional (but declining) authority of the educated Protestant clergy and the novel (but growing) authority of an educated feminine spirituality. The trend may be seen in the work of Harriet Beecher Stowe, a daughter of Lyman Beecher, the renowned Congregational minister, who had presided at the dedication of the Calvinist Church's first meetinghouse. In 1859 Stowe published *The Minister's Wooing*, a tale of love and marriage whose central character, Mary Scudder, not only effects the posthumous salvation of her true love James Mervyn (erroneously believed to be lost at sea), but convinces her intended, the doctrinaire theologian Dr. Hopkins (recalling perhaps the conservative theologian, the Reverend Samuel Hopkins?), of the spiritual coldness of his rigid beliefs. So persuasive is Scudder that Hopkins ultimately releases her from their betrothal that she may wed a resurrected Mervyn. Stowe's theme of woman-as-savior in *The Minister's Wooing* is so explicit, that the reader finishes the story wondering just who was the minister and who was doing the wooing. By accepting and encouraging women in the role of primary spiritual advisor, Abbott rode the crest of a wave that not only rendered his ministry obsolete but fostered the growth of an independent women's fiction.¹⁷

17. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Minister's Wooing* (repr. Ridgewood, N.J.: Gregg Press, 1968). For Stowe, see Joan D. Hedrick, "Peacable Fruits": The Ministry of Harriet Beecher Stowe, *American Quarterly* 40 (1988): 307-32. For other women who made careers writing about ministers: Ann-Janine Morey, 'The Reverend Idol and Other Parsonage Secrets: Women Write Romances about Ministers, 1880-1950,' *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 6 (1990): 87-103; Douglas, *Feminization of American Culture*; Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

The ministerial mother was therefore the principal actor in Abbott's work. A mother's efforts to civilize and socialize her children were stamped 'with God's ordinary blessing,' Abbott explained, because she made possible their eventual salvation. Sunday Schools, an increasingly popular innovation, were a pale substitute for the daily religious instruction that a mother could offer 'her little flock' in the course of a day. A thunderstorm or the death of a playmate offered an alert mother unparalleled opportunities to instruct her child in Christian beliefs. Indeed, the ministerial mother replaced the God-son dyad of orthodox Congregationalism with the mother-child dyad for, Abbott argued, only through maternal love might one comprehend God's commitment to a willful and wayward humanity. If a mother's grief at the loss of her child is profound, the orthodox preacher asserted, just imagine God's grief at the loss of a one of *his*: 'Oh, if a mother can feel so much what must be the feelings of our Father in heaven[?]' Faith in God and in God's loving salvation, the cornerstone of personal and social morality, thus began at home, with mother.¹⁸

The evangelical mother was, however, more than a religious teacher. The good mother functioned more as a priest, who interceded with God to ask forgiveness for an errant child—or did not. Abbott illustrated the priestly nature of evangelical maternalism in the parable of little Mary. When Mary flouted a maternal order not to play with the family Bible, her mother informed Mary that such defiance offended not simply her mother but God as well. Mary would be saved from God's wrath only if her mother intervened: 'Well, Mary, I will forgive you, so far as I can, but God is displeased; you have disobeyed Him, as well as me. Do you wish me to ask God to forgive you?' Little Mary, frightened at the

18. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 16, 105–18; *Child at Home*, 106. Abbott warned that being too zealous might frighten children away from religion; *Mother at Home*, 123. For the importance of mothers in the work of childhood salvation, see Lewis, 'Mother's Love,' 213; for the relations between ministers and women, see Douglas, *Feminization of American Culture*, 17–117; for the rise of Sunday Schools, see Boylan, *Sunday School*.

prospect of hell, readily agreed and the two knelt in prayer while the mother summoned God's pardon for her daughter.¹⁹

Abbott's saga also suggests a darker side to ministerial motherhood. For if a mother had the power to save her child, she logically also had the power to condemn her. Evangelicals believed that Christ would save the repentant sinner, one who acknowledged personal sin and accepted Christ's sovereignty, and eternally damn the unrepentant sinner, one who persisted in sin and refused to accept Christ's authority. Abbott's parables of the saving grace of the good mother implied that she shared Christ's power to save or to condemn. The story of a little girl on her way to school who was tempted by some green apples that her mother had told her not to touch illustrates the good mother's authority. When the child gave in to the teasing of her schoolmates and 'in disobedience to her mother's command . . . ate the forbidden fruit,' she fell ill but stubbornly denied her disobedience. After a physician prescribed an emetic, the child was confronted with the evidence of the '*half chewed fragments of green apples. . .*' Thus shamed, she 'could only cover her face with her hands' as her mother looked on in sorrow. Forbidden fruit, the tree of learning, buckling under peer pressure, disobedience to authority, physical pain and embarrassment—the tale blatantly evokes Original Sin and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. But in Abbott's version, it was in disobedience to the mother that innocence ended, and sin and suffering commenced. Woe unto that child who appeared on Judgment Day without first having obtained a pardon for its sins against the good mother.²⁰

The good mother's seemingly obsessive concern for her child's spiritual standing was in part a response to the era's mortality rates. Because death could arrive at any time, sudden and unforeseen, antebellum parents had always to brace themselves for the unexpected. Already high by modern standards, the death rates for children actually increased in the decades before the Civil

19. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 33–35.

20. Abbott, *Child at Home*, 48–49 (emphasis in original).

War. As many as one in four American infants died in the first year of life, while the deaths of those less than five years old may have accounted for as much as 40 percent of all deaths. In Worcester, the situation was better, but still grim: in 1827 children less than five years of age composed fully 24 percent of the deaths in town; the following year, children less than one year old constituted 20 percent of all deaths, while those under five accounted for fully one-third. When the city's population boomed, so did its death rate and, by 1848, children less than twelve months old comprised 27 percent of all deaths while those less than five years of age accounted for nearly half.²¹

Mortality rates were especially high among the impoverished, but even among the prosperous the death of a child was a common and dreaded occurrence. Martha Waldo Lincoln of Worcester was thinking about the uncertainties inherent in the relationship between a mother and her newborn when she wrote to her daughter who had just given birth. Lincoln enjoyed a privileged life. Born into a wealthy Boston family, she married a member of Thomas Jefferson's cabinet, and among her brood of seven were two future governors. The birth of a granddaughter in 1815 prompted the reminder to her daughter, Martha Lincoln Parker, to 'cherish this little blessing which heaven has loan'd not given, and remember it is a blossom; from its constitution feeble—and in its nature frail. . . .'²² This advice would have been useful for

21. Sylvia D. Hoffert, "A Very Peculiar Sorrow": Attitudes toward Infant Death in the Urban Northeast, 1800-1860, *American Quarterly* 39 (1987): 601-16, data: 601; Nancy Schrom Dye and Daniel Blake Smith, 'Mother Love and Infant Death, 1750-1920,' *Journal of American History* 73 (1986): 329-53, data: 330; Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 30-31. Local statistics were reported in the *Spy* (Worcester), January 3, 1827, and January 7, 1829; 'Record of Deaths in Worcester, Mass., May 10, 1842-December 30, 1849,' Worcester, Mass., Collection Folio Vol. 7, AAS; 'Sexton's Report for 1848,' *Spy*, January 3, 1849. In Worcester in 1848, the death rate for children under five was 46.7 percent, which includes the deaths of those less than one year old.

22. Martha Waldo Lincoln (Worcester) to Leonard Moody Parker (Charlestown, Mass.), August 7, 1815, Leonard Moody Parker Papers, Misc. Manuscript Boxes 'P,' AAS. For similar sentiments expressed upon the birth of Parker's next child see the letter from Martha Waldo Lincoln to Leonard Moody Parker, May 10, 1817. Martha Lincoln Parker died in 1822; her mother lived another six years.

Nancy Avery White, a comfortable farm wife in the Worcester county town of Westborough, who chronicled her life in a series of diaries. For most of her adult life White made terse and un-sentimental entries focused on her numerous housekeeping activities, although at the end of the volume that ultimately extended to 1820, she jumped to the end sheet and wrote 'Princess Charlotte Died November 1817' decorating the initial C and two other letters in this apparently random note.²³ When in December 1826, White noted briefly 'I had a daughter born' and chose Charlotte as her name, it was one that apparently had special resonance for her, although she seldom used it in references to this infant. 'The babe' appears chiefly as the object of White's labor for she notes, 'Thursday 22 [February 1827]. I put in the Cradle quilt. . . . Friday 23. I finished the Cradle quilt.' But when five-year-old Charlotte died suddenly after a brief illness, White recorded the event in a rare emotional entry: 'Wednesday 21 [December 1831]. Our dear little Charlotte died at two in the morning O that the Lord would sanctify this bereavement to us all for our everlasting good—.'²⁴ Struggling to make sense of her loss, White turned for comfort to her religion.

The ubiquity of childhood death did not diminish its impact. In 1845 Martha Waldo Lincoln's other daughter, Rebecca Lincoln Newton, married to a wealthy Worcester attorney and financier, wrote to her own daughter to relate the local news. Newton explained that a friend's baby was sick 'with what I considered a very heavy cold or lung fever but could not wonder that her Mother was alarmed as there had been so many sudden deaths among children two in their immediate neighborhood.' In January 1834, twelve-year-old Louisa Jane Trumbull, daughter of the cashier of

23. Diary of Nancy Avery White, 1809-20, White-Forbes Family Diaries, Octavo Volume 2, AAS. Inscription on the final leaf. Princess Charlotte (1796-1817) was the daughter of George, Prince of Wales (later George III), and his wife Caroline, who married Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg in 1816 and died in childbirth on November 19, 1817.

24. Diary of Nancy Avery White, 1822-27, White-Forbes Family Diaries, Folio Volume 4, AAS.

Worcester's Central Bank, paused to reflect, 'Another year has gone and we are entering upon a new year. During this last year there have sixteen of our parish been laid in the grave. . . . Ten of those out of the sixteen were young children and one was my sweet brother, John.' The life histories of the women who in the late 1840s would found the Worcester Children's Friend Society (CFS), an orphanage and adoption agency, reveal that more than one in three of their own children died before reaching adulthood. As with Nancy Avery White, Martha Waldo Lincoln, and Rebecca Lincoln Newton, these were children of middle-class and upper-middle-class families, well nourished, well clothed, and well housed. Yet the death rate remained high. Moreover, although fertility rates declined gradually in the nineteenth century, in the antebellum period a northern, native-born, white woman could anticipate bearing from five to seven children. Such high fertility rates, when combined with the high incidence of childhood death, meant that it was a rare woman in Worcester who did not know what it was to bury her child.²⁵

Confronting life-threatening illnesses for which there were neither preventives nor cures was thus an inevitable part of motherhood. Worcester's physicians often recorded little upon the

25. Rebecca Lincoln Newton (Worcester) to Hester Newton (Boston), March 15, 1845, Newton Family Papers, Box 2 Folder 3, AAS; Louisa Jane Trumbull Diary, entry for January 5, 1834, Octavo Vol. 13, AAS. Of the sixty-four married women who belonged to the Worcester Children's Friend Society from its founding in 1849 to 1860, at least fifty-five, or 86 percent, gave birth; 35 percent of the known children died before age twenty-one. Because many of these women moved to Worcester after their primary childbearing years, and because data are unavailable for some, this mortality rate is likely too low. Biographical data on CFS women were developed from the society's annual reports, city directories, local histories, church records, family records, and the Collection of Worcester Vital Statistics, Worcester Room, Worcester Public Library.

For discussion of fertility rates, see Daniel Scott Smith, 'Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America,' in Hartman and Banner, eds., *Clio's Consciousness Raised*, 119-36, data from Table 3, 123; Daniel Scott Smith, "'Early' Fertility Decline in America: A Problem in Family History," *Journal of Family History* 12 (1978): 73-84, the statement of five to seven live births appears 73-74. Judith Walzer Leavitt points out that this range implies many more pregnancies that did not come to term, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America, 1750 to 1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 14. Elaine Tyler May estimates that in the nineteenth century married women experienced low rates of childlessness; those born in the 1830s and 1840s had a childless rate of only 9 percent, *Barren in the Promised Land*, 11.

death of an infant other than to note its 'extreme youth,' suggesting their understanding that, for infants, birth was the leading cause of death. Mothers sought to ward off disease in their ailing offspring with various remedies, often of dubious medicinal value. Stephen Salisbury III, who would become one of Worcester's benefactors at the end of the century, began life with a head start. This scion of a wealthy Worcester family weighed eight-and-a-half pounds at birth, but appeared to have lost that advantage by the age of five. 'Steevie' suffered from recurring bouts of severe stomach pain, and Rebekah Dean Salisbury, his worried mother, tried a number of concoctions to effect a cure. In the space of a few months, she dosed him with cayenne pepper, laudanum, brandy, and antimony, even as a physician blistered the child's stomach. In spite of these harsh ministrations, Steevie eventually recovered.²⁶

Even with maternal vigilance, daily life in antebellum America posed continual hazards to a child's health. Infants died from dehydration, known as *cholera infantum*; toddlers stumbled into open fires or tumbled down stairwells; children of all ages ingested spoiled food and contaminated water, contracted childhood diseases for which there were neither cures nor preventives, and succumbed to bacterial infections from otherwise minor bumps and scrapes. Intensifying maternal grief was the seemingly random nature of death and the occasionally grotesque circumstances under which a child died. Local newspapers heightened the perception of risk with numerous stories of freak accidents to children. In 1833 two-year-old Henrietta Burpee of Sterling, near Worcester, described as 'an interesting child,' was scalded to death when she fell into a vat of bubbling applesauce; another child, left

26. 'Record of Deaths in Worcester, Mass., May 10, 1842–December 30, 1849,' Worcester, Mass., Collection, Folio Vol. 7, AAS; Rebekah Dean Salisbury (Worcester) to Catherine Dean Flint (Boston), October 26, 1840; March 9, 1840, September 24, 1840; September 27, 1840, Waldo Flint Papers, Box 6 Folder 9, AAS; Louisa Jane Trumbull Diary, entry for April 2, 1835, Octavo Vol. 13, AAS. For medicine in the antebellum period, see, for example, J. Worth Estes and David M. Goodman, *The Changing Humors of Portsmouth: The Medical Biography of an American Town, 1623–1983* (Boston: Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, 1986) and Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*.

tied to a chair while the mother fetched a bucket of water, died when a hog wandered in, 'upset the chair, and threw the child into the fire, where it was so shockingly burnt, that it survived only a few hours.' Noxious applesauce and homicidal pigs—what parent could foresee all such dangers? With so many of the children of Worcester dying before their fifth birthday, it is little wonder that a devout mother might dwell upon the state of her child's soul. It was apt to be the only aspect of its well-being she felt she could control.²⁷

THE IMPERIAL MOTHER

Blessed with a strong arm and a direct line to God, the good mother was a formidable woman who offset her 'natural' womanly weaknesses with the more desirable habits of command. Indeed, Abbott insisted that a woman who did not or could not exact from her children instant compliance to her will, who permitted them to do as *they* fancied rather than as *she* wished—in other words, a mother who denied herself rather than denying others—would inevitably fail in her duty by teaching her children the efficacy of disobedience. Abbott therefore offered his readers a crash course in effective leadership, a practical guide in government rivaling Machiavelli. Abbott reminded his readers (if they needed reminding) that a tired or fretful child was often irrational, and capable of summoning impressive displays of energy to resist a simple request. A good mother learned to judge when a child's misbehavior warranted punishment and to calculate the appropriate penalty; a too-rigorous exercise of maternal authority would lead to injustice, Abbott warned, since a child was helpless in the face of maternal tyranny.²⁸

It was because of this imbalance of power between mother and child, and not out of a commitment to maternal self-negation, that Abbott dwelled upon the necessity of a woman becoming the

27. *Spy*, July 1, 1829; December 5, 1827. Knowing that their children had been saved enabled parents to 'smile through their tears.' Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 117.

28. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 33; 46-47, quot., 33; 53-54.

mistress of her emotions. 'A mother must have great control over her feelings,' he urged, 'a calmness and composure of spirit, not easily disturbed, or she will be occasionally provoked to acts of injustice, by the misfortunes of which her children are the innocent cause.' Abbott acknowledged that achieving self-control was not easy, for by their very youth and ignorance children encountered countless opportunities to try the patience of their parents. Yet because the provocation was great but the offenders were small, a mother learned to control herself, to 'waive the strife,' so as not to cause harm to others. The good mother thus offered to an increasingly fractious and heterogeneous American society an object lesson in prudent and productive leadership.²⁹

A mother's opportunities to mold her child were infinite, but because the time she had to do so was finite, a good mother got an early start. From birth to ages eight or ten children were 'creatures of sympathy,' Abbott argued, their characters and destinies shaped by their environment, especially their mothers. One of Abbott's sources, likely a member of his congregation, had brought up her many children to respectability. It was her practice, she informed the minister, 'to obey her children for the first year of their life, but ever after, she expected them to obey her.' Abbott suggested that women also find exemplary characteristics in Napoleon Bonaparte, who remained a figure of keen contemporary interest. As one antebellum tourist remarked, 'One sees more Buonapartes than Washingtons' on the walls of American homes. The citizens of Worcester shared in the Napoleonic enthusiasm following his fortunes closely in the local press and reading his many biographies available at the town's book clubs, bookstores, and private libraries. Napoleon's canny insight into human nature, Abbott argued, led him to punish rebellion quickly so as to avoid the worse consequences of revolution. The lesson of these two experienced commanders—one a mother, the other an emperor—was simple: 'Real benevolence prompts to decisive

29. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 54, 63-65; see also 38-39, 55, 61.

measures.' The good mother, like the Emperor Napoleon, balanced authority and indulgence, command and caring.³⁰

The choice of Napoleon as an avatar for motherhood is striking; still more so when we consider those whom Abbott did not suggest. The Bible included many possible models for motherhood. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was an obvious maternal ideal, and in a later work Abbott described Mary as an 'anxious, care-taking mother' who understood Jesus better than anybody. Martha was dedicated to domesticity (Luke 10:40); Hannah was a devoted mother (I Samuel 1:20-2:19); Elizabeth was humble (Luke 1:43); Deborah was courageous (Judges 4:4). The Reverend Mr. Abbott did not advise the pious mothers of his congregation to emulate any of these familiar Biblical figures. Instead, he suggested that they imitate Napoleon and seize control of their own personal empires.³¹

The good mother was not only imperial; she was empirical. Mothering required a woman to exercise her brain, Abbott explained, thus 'accustoming her own mind to independent investigation and thought.' She watched her children carefully, took stock of their characters, and observed the effects of her governance. A wise mother adjusted her child-rearing techniques as needed, calibrating her application of rewards and punishments so as to achieve the results she desired. To this end, Abbott offered the example of

30. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 60, 14, 101, 59, 49, 50-53, 38-39; Caroline Gilman, *The Poetry of Travelling in the United States* (New York, 1838), 98; Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 70-71. For local references to Napoleon, see, for example, *National Aegis*, January 25, 1814, April 26, 1815, May 3, 1815, May 10, 1815, October 18, 1815, December 20, 1815; *Spy*, May 12, 1827, September 5, 1827, December 5, 1827, March 19, 1828, April 2, 1828, November 19, 1828, January 1, 1833. The Worcester Odd Fellows Library added *Memoirs and Campaigns of Bonaparte* to its collection in 1826, and the next year acquired Scott's *Life of Bonaparte*, which had been excerpted in the *Spy* that spring; Worcester, Mass., Fraternity of Odd Fellows Library Records, 1824-1827, Octavo Vol. AAS; *Spy*, September 12, 1827, September 19, 1827, and September 26, 1827.

Abbott was familiar with Scott's *Life of Bonaparte* and eventually wrote several histories of Napoleon and his family. See the letter from Gorham Gilman to the Rev. Julius A. Ward, John S.C. Abbott Papers, Miscellaneous Manuscript Boxes 'A,' AAS. Noted Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing published lengthy 'Remarks on the Life and Character of Napoleon Bonaparte, 1827-8,' in his *Discourses, Reviews, and Miscellanies* (Boston, 1830): 69-163.

31. Abbott, *History of Christianity*, 27.

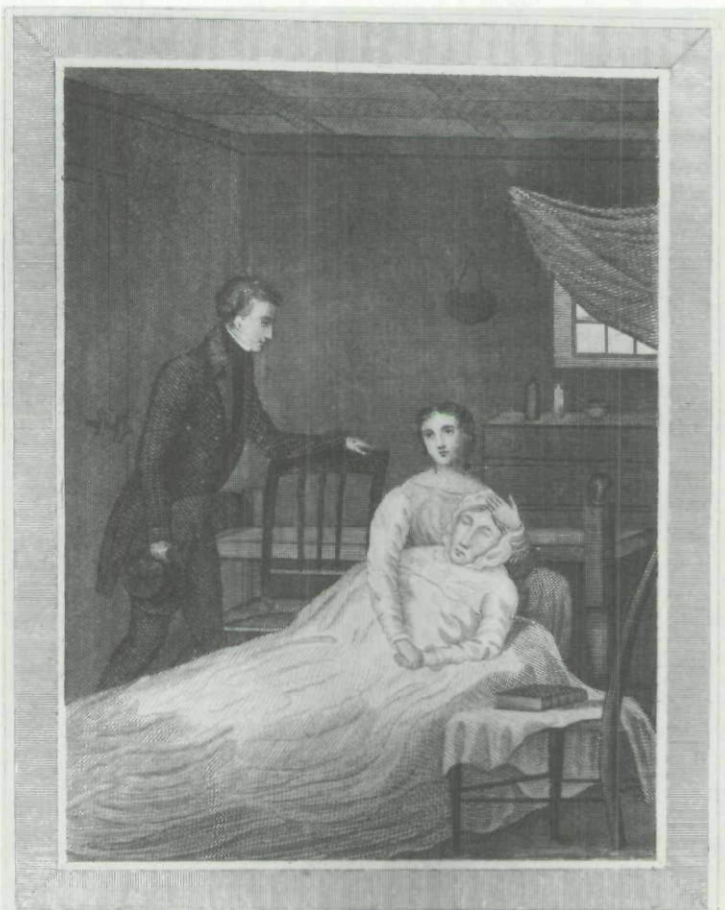
a woman who kept a journal in which she recorded and analyzed the efficacy of her maternal tactics. 'There are fundamental principles in operating upon the human mind, as well as in any other science,' Abbott maintained. As the foremost practitioners of child psychology, mothers belonged among the ranks of scientists.³²

To succeed at motherhood therefore required an education. Such an emphasis is perhaps not surprising since Abbott made money selling books to literate women. Still, his approach was an important divergence from the more sentimental image of motherhood, which stressed that mothering was instinctual, a reflection of women's essential irrationality. In the evangelical Abbott's view, becoming a mother might be instinctual but becoming a *good* mother was fundamentally intellectual. Indeed, Abbott's books, while not difficult to read, presumed a literary dexterity most common among the middle and upper classes, although he stated that *Mother at Home* was written 'for mothers in the common walks of life' and an illustration in *The Child at Home* portrays an impoverished widow's abode. In this home the walls are bare, a sheet is draped across the window, and the furniture is spare and plain, but at the woman's left hand, placed prominently in the foreground, lies a book. By tying good mothering—defined in part as an act of national utility—to a woman's level of and access to education, Abbott bolstered contemporary arguments in favor of women's education.³³

Cool, dispassionate, assessing, insightful, caring, intellectual—these were the traits of Abbott's good mother. Yet if a happy, well-regulated household supported a more general social morality, its

32. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 105, 163, 155, 153, 50–53; see also Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*, 88.

33. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 154; Lewis, 'Mother's Love,' 213–16; Bloch, 'American Feminine Ideals in Transition,' 118–19; Abbott, *Mother at Home*, v; see the illustration between pages 74 and 75 in Abbott, *Child at Home*. Abbott implied that becoming a mother was the result of instinctual drives but did not elaborate. For women's education, see Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Stansell discusses laboring women's attempts to educate themselves in Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 121, 134.



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One morning as I entered the room, I saw the mother lying upon the bed on the floor, with her head in the lap of her daughter.

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Fig. 2. An illustration taken from *The Child at Home* in which the daughter's comforting presence during her mother's last hours repays her mother for her own good work. The mattress (bed) has been removed from the bedstead to the floor of the sparsely furnished room. The American Antiquarian Society copy is inscribed: 'Mrs. Salisbury with the affectionate regards of John S.C. Abbott.' The Society's collection also includes Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury's copy of *The Mother at Home*, inscribed to her by Abbott.

chief beneficiary was the woman, the mother. Abbott stressed repeatedly that a home in which children did as they pleased, defied their mother, and interrupted her plans was not a domestic haven but a woman's prison. A woman's happiness depended upon her assertion of authority, Abbott argued, and thus self-interest, not self-sacrifice, was a mother's primary motivation. To illustrate, Abbott compared the methods of two devoted mothers. One was run ragged satisfying the ceaseless demands of her spoiled offspring and was unable to accomplish any work of her own. The other was 'a judiciously kind' mother who pleased herself and completed her tasks by insisting upon obedience. 'Now which mother has *the most time?* and which mother has the *happiest time?*' Abbott quizzed his readers. A pleasant, orderly household was within the reach of anyone, Abbott insisted, because what most influenced a woman's life was not money, nor servants, nor the size of the home, but her ability to dominate and to command. 'The principle of government is simple and plain,' Abbott summed up, 'A mother's word is never to be disregarded. . . .' For her own happiness, a woman must rule.³⁴

Maternal authority was also the best guarantor of social harmony. The family was the basic unit of society, Abbott reasoned, and the man was the head of the household. But the woman was its soul. Expressing an essentially Platonic view of the material world, Abbott argued that 'home' existed only 'in the bosom of the [maternal] parent.' A home was a reflection of that intangible ideal and was thus a woman's creation. Abbott turned on its head the popular assumption that because domesticity involved 'attention to *little things*' it was unworthy of serious discussion. Instead, he argued, little things formed the foundation upon which society's grander edifices rested, so that to frustrate the authority of mothers risked a communal catastrophe. Scorning maternal authority commenced a downward spiral of antisocial behavior that ultimately led to crime, death, or insanity. What was good for the mother, Abbott argued to his readership of mothers, was good for

34. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 36-38 (emphasis in original), 38-39, 31, 32.

society and not the other way around. Repeatedly, Abbott struck the same note. If in the grand sweep of history much was uncertain, at least one principle could be depended upon: disdain for the good mother was the surest path to hell, for an individual or an entire society.³⁵

THE SELF-INTERESTED MOTHER

Abbott emphasized the exercise of maternal authority because of its potential to render a woman's child-rearing years more agreeable and imbue her labors with social purpose. At the same time, her performance as a young mother was an investment in comfort in her old age. In antebellum America, as in most developing societies, a woman's children were her social security and the faithful execution of her maternal duties was her surest guarantee of comfort and support. Abbott addressed this issue bluntly when he reminded his readers, 'Your future happiness is in the hands of your children.' One scholar has interpreted this statement as an example of sentimental tugging upon 'the strings of mother love.' But it was not sentimentalism as much as realism that lay at the heart of Abbott's analysis. The increase in population, urbanization, and geographic mobility so characteristic of the early American republic had sundered traditional communal safety nets without providing adequate replacements, and this social dislocation struck women with particular severity. Through his ministerial duties, which included visiting the sick and the needy, Abbott would have become especially well aware of the harsh realities of poverty and of the dismal future of indigence that awaited many women. It was simply a fact of nineteenth-century life that elderly women without adult children to depend upon for assistance with food, shelter, and nursing could end their days receiving poor relief.³⁶

35. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 64, v; *Child at Home*, 54; *Mother at Home*, 39 (emphasis in original).

36. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 21; Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, 47. The town of Worcester traditionally supported its poor population through cash and in-kind donations, as well as

As a result of this rude reality, the theme of motherhood as social security is central to Abbott's work. An illustration in *The Child at Home* shows a weeping widow walking down a country road, a sleeping infant strapped to her back, an older boy of six or seven a few paces ahead of her. She peers upward, as if searching for divine guidance as she begins a new and perilous journey without her husband who has recently been killed in battle. All the new widow has left are her two children—and her skill as a

by indenture to the lowest bidder; local churches also contributed to the material comfort of their members. By 1815, this system was strained to the breaking point; in 1817 the town built an almshouse, and in the mid-1850s it erected a larger almshouse. Whenever possible the poor avoided this kind of warehousing, noted for its minimal levels of comfort and care, in preference of outdoor relief, which was often arranged. For support of the poor in Worcester, see Charles Nutt, *History of Worcester and Its People*, 4 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1919), 1:459–60; Franklin P. Rice, ed., *Worcester Town Records, 1801–1816* (Worcester, 1891), 282, 303, 329, 354; Franklin P. Rice, ed., *Worcester Town Records, 1817–1832* (Worcester, 1893), 31, 43, 262; Franklin P. Rice, ed., *Worcester Town Records, 1833–1848* (Worcester, 1895), 16, 282, 325, 383; *Report of the Overseers of the Poor of the Town of Worcester, April 1, 1839* (Worcester, 1839); *Reports of the Municipal Officers: Submitted to the Town of Worcester, May, 1840* (Worcester, 1840); *Reports Submitted to the Town of Worcester, at the Annual March Meeting, 1843* (Worcester, 1843); *Reports Submitted to the Town of Worcester, at the Annual March Meeting, 1845: and the By-Laws of the Town* (Worcester, 1845). For church poor relief, see, for example, CCR, Folio Vol. 9, Treasurer's Accounts for October 7, 1833; December 20, 1834; March 3, 1838; December 28, 1838; January–December, 1829. In the antebellum era, churches continued to assist the poor of the parish but did not accept full responsibility for their welfare. The church records for the years of Abbott's ministry detail numerous examples of charity; almost all recipients were women. See, for example, CCR, Octavo Vol. 9, Treasurer's Accounts for October 7, 1833, and December 20, 1834, AAS.

In the nineteenth century, adult women outnumbered adult men by a ratio of at least two to one in their reliance on some form of public assistance; moreover, poverty in general was on the rise as market conditions, urbanization, and immigration increased the demand for assistance that taxpayers were reluctant to supply. For women and public assistance, see, for example, Priscilla Ferguson Clement, 'Nineteenth-Century Welfare Policy, Programs, and Poor Women: Philadelphia as a Case Study,' *Feminist Studies* 1 (1992): 35–58; Stansell, *City of Women*, 3–18. For the rise in poverty, see L. Lynne Kiesling and Robert A. Margo, 'Explaining the Rise in Antebellum Pauperism, 1850–1860: New Evidence,' *Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance* 37 (1997): 405–13. For institutional responses to poverty, see David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (New York: Little, Brown, 1971), 155–205; Glenn C. Altschuler and Jan M. Saltzgaber, 'Clearinghouse for Paupers: The Poor Farm of Seneca County, New York, 1830–1860,' *Journal of Social History* (1974): 573–600 and 'The Limits of Responsibility: Social Welfare and Local Government in Seneca County, New York, 1860–1875,' *Journal of Social History* 21 (1978): 515–37. Studies of nineteenth-century family patterns reveal that most elderly lived in multi-generational families; see, for example, Steven Ruggles, 'The Transformation of American Family Structure,' *American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 103–28, esp. 120–24.

mother. The text explains that the woman 'will work night and day, while [her son] is young, to supply him with clothes and with food.' The boy, shown carrying his father's sword, looks not to heaven but to his mother, saying, 'Dear Mother, do not cry; if ever I grow up to be a man, you shall never want, if I can help it.' As the son has shouldered his father's sword, the traditional symbol of manhood, so too will he one day shoulder the responsibility of caring for his aged mother. The son will do this, Abbott emphasizes, not simply because it is the moral thing to do but because this is what a son *owes* to his mother.³⁷

It was thus in no small measure to pursue her own happiness that a shrewd mother cultivated her children. Indeed, Abbott explained, men who had benefitted from a lifetime of maternal devotion were contractually bound—in the eyes of God if no longer in the eyes of the law—to 'give her the warmest seat by his fire-side, and the choicest food upon his table.' Daughters were not expected to be in a position to contribute much economically, but they too had important responsibilities toward their mother, chiefly in the form of nursing her through the infirmities of age. Children who refused to honor their debts to their mother, Abbott warned, incurred God's enmity and earned a special place in hell set aside for such ungrateful 'vipers.' Punishment for breaking this social contract would come in the temporal world as well, Abbott insisted, for 'God has, in almost every case, connected suffering with sin. And there are related many cases, in which he has in this world, most signally punished ungrateful children.'³⁸

37. Abbott, *Child at Home*, illustration between pages 60 and 61, quotes from page 61. See also Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 24.

38. Abbott, *Child at Home*, 77–78; 75. As early as 1719, English law relieved married women of the legal responsibility to care for their aged parents, David Thomson, "I am not my father's keeper": Families and the Elderly in Nineteenth Century England,' *Law and History Review* 2 (1984): 264–86, esp. 267–68. In most of the antebellum United States, children were still legally bound to support their indigent parents but this was often unenforced.

To drive the point home further, the illustrations in Abbott's books offer a revised Christian iconography that he claimed was based on his own experience. While the Pietà traditionally portrays Mary grieving over the broken body of her dead son Jesus, who is draped across her lap, the roles are reversed in Abbott's version. A poor but pious widow lies on the floor of her meager home, dying in the arms of a devoted daughter. In this scene, the young woman's left hand cradles her mother's head while her right hand clasps the mother tightly (fig. 2). Their bodies are swathed angelically in clouds of billowing fabric; their eyes are cast aloft, anticipating the mother's imminent ascension to heaven. This good mother has, despite suffering and poverty, persisted in her maternal duty and expires in the arms of a beloved child whose youthful body covers and protects her like a shroud. The woman dies comforted by her daughter's love and by the knowledge that they will eventually be reunited, for she has given her child the one thing needful, the legacy of 'a glorious immortality.'³⁹

Abbott's emphasis upon the reciprocity of motherhood underscores the ways in which religious beliefs reinforced women's secular attempts to invest in their future by investing in their children. In another vignette, an angry child decides to run away from home but halts at the door when her mother inquires, 'Is there not an account to be settled before you leave?' The mother calculates that, at two dollars a week for ten years, her daughter owes her at least \$1,040, and reminds the child that debtors' prisons exist for those who fail to honor their debts. The mother then settles upon a twenty-year repayment schedule, which includes an annual interest payment of sixty dollars, or roughly 6 percent of the principal.⁴⁰

39. Abbott claimed that this deathbed scene was drawn from his own experience, and the engraving includes the figure of a man, presumably Abbott, hurrying to comfort the dying woman; Abbott, *Child at Home*, 147.

40. Abbott, *Child at Home*, 80. The imprisonment of women for debt had been abolished in Massachusetts in 1831; see Jeanne Ellen Whitney, "An Art That Requires Capital": Agriculture and Mortgages in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1790-1850' (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1991), 63.

This fictional mother's decision to charge interest on her investment in her child reflects a relatively new phenomenon that was intimately linked to the emergence of the market economy. Traditionally in New England, a 'Lawful Interest' of 6 percent was assessed when money was borrowed, but not for account-book balances (debts recorded in account books that were calculated in dollars but transacted in kind). In the new market economy of the early republic, all this changed: account balances were now also subject to interest, and the rate of interest began to rise to facilitate the development of capital markets. Indeed, so common did interest charges become that nineteenth-century almanacs, frequently used as day planners and pocket diaries, included reference tables of simple interest calculated at 6 percent. In Abbott's tale a good mother viewed her contributions to her child's welfare in dollar equivalents and considered her efforts a long-term loan not a self-denying gift. She expected that loan to be repaid with interest. Abbott's expressed purpose in this story was to remind children of all that their parents do for them. Since he intended parents to read the book alongside the child, it likely also reminded them that their children owed them the equivalent of a pension.⁴¹

In this way the good mother could participate in the market culture of the early nineteenth century. Rather than being newly isolated from the market, as some have suggested, middle-class women might take a direct part by raising their children to honor their economic obligations to others—especially to their aging mothers. One bit of doggerel published in a Worcester newspaper in the 1820s made explicit the connection between the lure of

41. Abbott, *Child at Home*, iii; see, for example, *Brown's Almanac, Pocket Memorandum and Account Book*, 1846 (Concord, N.H.: John F. Brown, 1846). For the economy, see Winifred B. Rothenberg, 'The Emergence of a Capital Market in Rural Massachusetts, 1730-1838,' *Journal of Economic History* 45 (1985): 781-808 and 'The Emergence of Farm Labor Markets and the Transformation of the Rural Economy: Massachusetts, 1750-1855,' *Journal of Economic History* 48 (1988): 537-66; see also François Weil, 'Capitalism and Industrialization in New England, 1815-1845,' *Journal of American History* 84 (March 1998): 1334-54. Jeanne Whitney argues that after the panic of 1837, attitudes toward debt became 'more pervasive, more noticeable, and more formal,' in 'An Art That Requires Capital,' 53, 58.

the market and the good mother's lifelong influence upon her child:

Man's lot—'dominion o'er the earth'— / Maketh his sinews strong;
 And that proud lot will lead thee forth, / All ardent mid the throng.
 Life's onward path is wrap'd in night, / And dangers are its Fame;—
 Ambition holds an eagle flight / And spurns a Quiet's name;—
 And Pleasure's syren songs entice,
 And flowers conceal the precipice.

O, wilt thou wander, then, my boy? / Away, ye idle fears!
 Why hide our sun of present joy / In clouds of future years?
 There's ONE will watch thee, tho' I sleep, / Where morning never
 shone;
 There's ONE thy faltering steps can keep; / Would'st thou HIS
 voice were known?
 Then list, amidst the world's wild din,
 The still small voice thy heart within.⁴²

In a similar vein, an article on maternal influence asserted the power of the good mother: "When I was a little child," said a good man, "my mother used to bid me kneel beside her, and place her hand upon my head while she prayed. . . . Like others, I was inclined to evil passions, but often felt myself checked, as it were, drawn back by the soft hand upon my head." The approach of Abbott's good mother thus paralleled that of the market entrepreneur. The invisible guiding hand of the mother clasped the invisible hand of the market in agreement that self-interest and the general good could properly coexist. The goal was profit and personal comfort, but attaining that goal (at least in theory) was the result of an individual's superior worth and high moral character.

42. 'The Mother to Her Child,' *Spy*, December 19, 1827. Much of the literature on the market revolution relegates middle-class women to a passive and usually victimized role; see, for example, Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 205, 226, 227, 231, 236; Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, especially 186-229. For a different perspective see Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Nancy Folbre and Barnet Wagman, 'Counting Housework: New Estimates of Real Product in the United States, 1800-1860,' *Journal of Economic History* 53 (1993): 275-88.

Like a *good* businessman, a *good* mother should expect her efforts to be rewarded.⁴³

As a counterpoint to the admirable end of the good mother, Abbott offered the sad example of the bad mother: a woman who, through weakness, wickedness, or even a dreadfully misguided kindness, failed to command the respect of her offspring and incurred the personal and economic consequences. Such an 'unfaithful' mother almost surely damned her children's souls; at the very least, she ruined their chances for success and respectability. Worst of all, though, a bad mother brought disaster upon herself. *The Child at Home*, for example, opens not with a child at home but with a child at Police Court. A poor woman, 'her eyes . . . red with weeping, and . . . borne down with sorrow' stands before a judge to turn over to the state a daughter who had threatened to kill her. Similarly, Abbott stated bluntly that men who abandoned their families (read: their aged mothers) were once disobedient sons and he illustrated this assertion with a story of a mother who could not bring herself to discipline her young son. Unlettered in the fundamentals of self-control, the boy grew tall and strong, his only desire to appease his ever more dissolute appetites. The tender-hearted mother, increasingly enfeebled, found herself 'doubly widowed . . . worse than childless' because of the anguish inflicted by her selfish, loutish son: 'Self-willed, turbulent and revengeful, he was his mother's bitterest curse. His paroxysms of rage at times amounted almost to madness. One day, infuriated with his mother, he set fire to her house, and it was burned to the ground, with all its contents, and she was left in the extremest state of poverty.'⁴⁴

It is tempting to dismiss Abbott's morality play as pure melodrama, a staple of the antebellum theater and the gothic novel. But the abuse described was not as melodramatic as it might at first appear. Historians are increasingly exploring the extent to

43. *Spy*, March 5, 1828, excerpted from the *American Journal of Education*. I am especially grateful to Elizabeth Alice White for emphasizing this point.

44. Abbott, *Child at Home*, 2-31, 68; *Mother at Home*, 24.

which antebellum families were afflicted by some form of domestic violence. Current interpretations of the causes of abuse point to the role of learned behavior and to the significance of social stress and dislocation; changes in the social position of women and children are considered especially crucial. The nineteenth century was a period of dramatic geographic and economic dislocation, a time in which women and children increasingly undermined the traditional privileges of patriarchy. Thus, it would seem likely that America experienced a rise in the incidence of and general awareness of domestic violence, and this conclusion is richly borne out by a growing number of historical studies.⁴⁵

45. See, for example, Leroy Ashby, *Endangered Children: Dependency, Neglect, and Abuse in American History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), especially 17–54; Wini Breines and Linda Gordon, 'The New Scholarship on Family Violence,' *Signs* 8 (1983): 490–531; Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston, 1880–1900* (New York: Viking, 1988); Daniel A. Cohen, 'Homicidal Compulsion and the Conditions of Freedom: The Social and Psychological Origins of Familicide in America's Early Republic,' *Journal of Social History* 28 (1995): 725–64; David Peterson del Mar, *What Trouble I Have Seen: A History of Violence against Wives* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); Myra C. Glenn, *Campaigns against Corporal Punishment: Prisoners, Sailors, Women, and Children in Antebellum America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), especially 63–83; Linda Gordon, 'Family Violence, Feminism, and Social Control,' *Feminist Studies* 12 (1986): 453–78; Robert L. Griswold, 'Law, Sex, Cruelty, and Divorce in Victorian America, 1840–1900,' *American Quarterly* 38 (1986): 721–45; Pamela Haag, 'The "Ill-Use of a Wife": Patterns of Working-Class Violence in Domestic and Public New York City, 1860–1880,' *Journal of Social History* 25 (1992): 447–77; Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 135–71; Edward Hatton, 'Domestic Assassins: Spousal and Intimate Homicide in Antebellum America' (Ph.D. Diss., Temple University, 1997); C. Kirk Hutson, "'Whackety Whack, Don't Talk Back': The Glorification of Violence Against Females and the Subjugation of Women in Nineteenth-Century Southern Folk Music,' *Journal of Women's History* 8 (1996): 114–42; Brenda McDonald, 'Domestic Violence in Colonial Massachusetts,' *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 14 (1986): 53–64; Jerome Nadelhaft, 'Wife Torture: A Known Phenomenon in Nineteenth-Century America,' *Journal of American Culture* 10 (1987): 39–59; Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Stansell, *City of Women*, 77–101.

Roger Lane estimates that the nineteenth century witnessed a decrease in serious crime (homicide, rape, robbery, and arson) but an increase in lesser crime (drunkenness and other misdemeanors), that he attributes to a new intolerance for social disorder, in 'Crime and Criminal Statistics in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts,' *Journal of Social History* 2 (1968): 156–63. Another study, however, suggests that arrests for rape were on the rise; Theodore Ferdinand, 'The Criminal Patterns of Boston since 1849,' *American Journal of Sociology* 73 (1973): 84–99. Elizabeth B. Clark argues that the abolitionist critique of violence as inhering in the master-slave relationship stimulated a more general critique of violence in other power relationships, in "'The Sacred Rights of the Weak": Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America,' *Journal of American History* 82 (1995): 463–93, especially 488–90.

The evidence of domestic violence in antebellum Worcester is largely impressionistic: crime statistics were collected only after mid-century, when the town was incorporated as a city and established a regular police force. Even then, domestic abuse was classified as assault and battery; it was not a separate category. But the evidence is considerable. Police court notices, trial records, and numerous newspaper articles indicate that at least by the 1820s family violence was a familiar topic, and that its victims were chiefly women and children. Reports from distant cities reprinted in the local press revealed that domestic violence was also a national problem. The Worcester *Spy* covered the trial of Michael M'Garvy of Philadelphia 'for the murder of his wife, Margaret M'Garvy, *with a cart whip!*' and reported that a man in Dover, New Hampshire, known to abuse his wife, attempted to hang their child. A few accounts suggest that family violence could masquerade as accidents, as in the improbable case of George Love of Barre, New York. Love was chopping wood to boil maple sugar when his wife, 'dodging from the flame which a gust of wind blew in her face,' purportedly 'threw her head under her husband's axe' and was decapitated. Overwhelmed, Love lost 'his perfect senses' and wandered off. One hundred concerned neighbors searched 'in every direction' but failed to find him, although a more skeptical reader might conclude that Love had made good his escape.⁴⁶

Other reports brought the issue of domestic violence closer to home. In 1826 the Worcester courts charged an unnamed man with 'a most aggravated assault and battery on the body of *his own wife*.' The local paper noted that 'some of the blows were inflicted by the foot, some by the fist, and some of them by a pair of tongs.' Two months later, Andrew Davis of Smithfield, Massachusetts, after failing to reconcile with his estranged wife, went hunting for

46. Herbert M. Sawyer, *History of the Department of Police Service of Worcester, Mass., from 1675 to 1900* (Worcester, Mass.: Worcester Police Relief Association, 1900); *Spy*, December 17, 1828, November 7, 1827, April 30, 1828. Stories of domestic abuse appeared frequently in the Worcester press, as in the back-to-back tales in the *Spy*, October 10, 1827.

her determined 'to either take his wife home with him, or to put an end to her life.' He decided on the latter; stabbed his wife to death; and then turned his knife on a man who had tried to intervene. The scene of the crime, the paper reported, 'was drenched with blood, and . . . the room exhibited the appearance of a slaughter-house.' In Worcester that same month, Daniel Stone was convicted in the shooting death of his twenty-three-year-old son, Moses. The outrage that initially greeted the news of the crime—Stone was darkly described as 'coarse and grum [i.e., surly]'—ebbed when neighbors testified that Moses had abused his elderly father for years. A sympathetic judge and jury convicted Stone but sentenced him to only six months in jail. In another episode that took place the following year, in Westfield, Massachusetts, Robert Bush crowned years of physical violence toward his wife by blowing her brains out with a pistol at the home of friends from whom she had sought refuge. Bush was less successful in killing himself with an opium overdose. Two years later, in 1829, Ezra Holmes of Dudley, near Worcester, attacked his wife with an andiron, breaking it and killing her, then turned on his son 'of whom, he said, he was going to make a burnt offering.' Suspected of religious mania, Holmes was eventually released. By 1833, reports in the Worcester press of women murdered by their husbands were so common that one story was simply headlined 'Another Wife Killed.'⁴⁷

The *Spy* took up the issue of domestic violence in an 1828 editorial entitled 'Intemperance—Divorce.' Noting that spousal brutality and abandonment 'prevails to a most alarming extent' among the intemperate, the editorial argued that a man who abandoned or mistreated his family when inebriated met the legal standard of 'gross, wanton, and cruel neglect' requisite for a woman to sue for divorce. The *Spy's* editor, Samuel H. Colton, a Quaker, thus anticipated the liberalization of Massachusetts di-

47. *Spy*, August 9, 1826, October 4, 1826, November 2, 1825, October 11, 1826, October 10, 1827, September 30, 1829, October 7, 1829, and April 10, 1833. See also Jerome Nadelhaft's discussion of popular images of domestic abuse in 'Wife Torture.'

orce laws and the subsequent increase in divorce rates. It is revealing, however, that the focus of the editorial was not domestic abuse *per se*; rather, Colton's emphasis was on possible solutions to family violence. The editor could apparently take it for granted that his readers were sufficiently familiar with domestic violence to understand the need for some kind of reform.⁴⁸

Still, throughout the antebellum era first-offense spousal abuse was not severely punished. If men were convicted of assaulting and battering their wives, the courts of Worcester County levied a fine of ten dollars plus the costs of prosecution and required them to give bonds for good behavior in the coming year. William Scranton was thus ordered to post a bond of \$500 'to keep the peace toward his wife, Mary Scranton,' and a similar bond was demanded of Edward Dillon, who had threatened to beat his wife, Julia Dillon. Only if they violated the sureties with a second offense within the probationary year were violent husbands sent to jail, usually for twelve months, as was John Flagg, Jr. in 1835. In comparison, a Worcester man convicted that year of 'lewd and lascivious cohabitation' was immediately sentenced to twelve months in jail. The bottom line of these bonds for good behavior—unacknowledged and likely unrecognized—was that the community had set the price of abusing a woman at \$500.⁴⁹

Although editorials and published reports sought to link abuse of wives with abuse of alcohol, women also blamed the unequal distribution of power within marriage. In a letter to her daughter, Mary Saltonstall of Boston, Elizabeth Elkins Sanders of Salem expressed her views on myriad topics, ranging from her disapproval of the Indian policies of General Winfield Scott, to the necessity of women holding property in their own names. It was vital, Sanders stressed to her daughter, that women own property so as

48. *Spy*, May 7, 1828 and October 10, 1849. See also Martin Schultz, 'Divorce Patterns in Nineteenth-Century New England,' *Journal of Family History* 15 (1990): 101-15; Griswold, 'Law, Sex, Cruelty, and Divorce,' especially 722-23. Editor Samuel H. Colton was an outspoken supporter of temperance and abolitionism; his wife, Ann King Colton, was an abolitionist, a social reformer, and a supporter of the women's rights movement.

49. *National Aegis*, February 12, 1851; *Spy*, October 21, 1835.

to shield their families from bankruptcy and to protect themselves from their husbands. Sanders's reflections had been prompted by the problems of a friend, Mrs. George Brown, 'whose life appeared extremely disconsolate' and who 'lamented in strong termes [*sic*] the slavery to which women were subjected, who like her, were condemned to live with an abandoned husband [i.e., a husband who had abandoned morality], & even jeopardized their lives in defence of their children.' Brown was worried about her physical safety, and Sanders was worried for her, explaining to her daughter:

The case of Mrs. Brown is truly sad. She complains that she is compelled by our laws to bear the most injurious treatment from her husband, & that for a long time she endeavoured to keep it secret until his violence made it public, yet no protection is afforded by our laws; such a code would disgrace nations the most savage, & affords ample illustration of the position I have taken [in favor of women holding property separately from their husbands]. . . .

She acknowledged that not one month had passed after her marriage when he treated her very ill, although she had done all in her power to conceal it. He not only gave way to violent passions, but appears to have possessed no talents for business, for he has become a bankrupt. . . . It is wonderful [i.e., to be wondered at] that people of sense & feeling, should by indulgence of wayward passions not only subject themselves & their offspring to poverty & disgrace, but destroy the peace & comfort of their best friends.⁵⁰

Observant girls who listened carefully to the talk of their elders, such as twelve-year-old Louisa Jane Trumbull of Worcester, were quick to pick up on the dynamics of unhappy marriages and the reality of emotional abuse. In 1836 Trumbull recorded in her diary that a neighbor, Susan MacFarland, only twenty-six years old, 'is failing rapidly—She can not live much longer—.' Trumbull noted that MacFarland's minister, the Reverend Alonzo Hill of the town's Unitarian church, reported her to be 'perfectly resigned'

50. Elizabeth Elkins Sanders to Mary Saltonstall, March 10 and 11, 1842, in Robert E. Moody, ed., *The Papers of Leverett Saltonstall, 1816-1845*, 5 vols. (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1991), 4:54-58, quotations from 57, 58. Spelling original.

to her fate and that MacFarland had claimed, 'I should be disappointed should I recover.' This last, elicited by the minister as an object lesson in accepting God's will, had a different meaning for Trumbull. To her young mind, MacFarland's yearning for death was understandable since it was rumored that her husband had been cheating on her: 'Her husband seems to care no more for her than for his dog and sometimes I am inclined to think not so much. People say a week ago he called on Arethusa Chamberlin—This I cannot think is true however—I hope it is not.' When MacFarland died two weeks later, her husband asked the congregation to pray 'that the death of his wife may tend to the improvement of his spiritual nature.' The minister obliged, praying that MacFarland 'might not sink under this afflicting event.' The more cynical neighbors, however, muttered amongst themselves that the prayer should properly have been 'that [MacFarland] might not sink under the remembrance of his behavior to his wife.' Girls such as Louisa Jane Trumbull might one day grow up to be women like feminist Elizabeth Oakes Smith, who wrote 'I remember, when a child, having a confused idea that to be murdered was one of the possible contingencies of marriage; and this impression was created solely by reading in public prints the many atrocious catalogues of the kind.'⁵¹

As these examples illustrate, when Abbott wrote his book on motherhood in the early 1830s, awareness of domestic violence was widespread, and was recognized primarily as a crime that men committed against women and children. In an appalling instance of life imitating art, an intemperate George Hunnenwell of Boston was sentenced to death for burning down his mother's house and killing his brother, the culmination of years of what a local paper described as 'the most cruel and dastardly attacks upon his mother's honor and peace.' Americans were inclined

51. Louisa Jane Trumbull Diary, entries for May 6 and 21, 1836. Susan MacFarland's mother defended her son-in-law and ascribed his late nights to business demands. Trumbull Family Papers, Octavo Vol. 13; Elizabeth Oakes Smith, *The Sanctity of Marriage: Women's Rights Tracts No. 5* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Lathro's Print, n.d.).

publicly to link violence and disorderly conduct to intemperance, though privately some at least singled out the abuse of patriarchal power. But the best solution many could offer was divorce or a financial disincentive against further violence.⁵²

Thus when Abbott wrote that a woman's life could be made a hell on earth by the very people upon whom she needed to depend for comfort and security, he was *not* metaphorical. It was within a woman's power to decide her own fate: an old age of poverty and neglect—or, worse, of poverty and emotional and physical abuse—or an old age of filial reverence and financial and emotional support. Such a message would have made particular sense in 1830s Worcester in light of the execution of Horace Carter for rape just a few years earlier. Ruth Ainsworth, a seventy-eight-year-old widow, was a pauper sharing a room with two other elderly women, Martha Richardson and Lydia Potter, at the Brookfield, Massachusetts, poor farm. One night in early February 1825, a stranger claiming to be an overseer of the poor knocked on their door, demanding entry. When Ainsworth refused, the man forced his way in and attacked her, knocking out two of her teeth then sexually assaulting her. From their beds Richardson and Potter looked on in horror but, as Richardson testified in court, 'being decrepit could render no assistance.' The three women later picked Carter out of a lineup of twenty men.

52. *Spy*, February 1, 1848. Newspaper reports of domestic violence were typically linked to intemperance; see, for example, *Spy*, August 9, 1826, October 10 and November 7, 1827.

Domestic abuse also seems to have been part of a larger pattern of rampant, non-lethal violence in the antebellum era. In 1853, for example, more people were arrested in Worcester for assault and battery (26 percent of arrests) than for any other crime, including public drunkenness (25 percent). See the records of the criminal court published in the *Spy*, June 27, 1849, October 10, 1849, June 11, 1851, July 16, 1851; *City Document, No. 8., Inaugural Address of Hon. John S.C. Knowlton . . . with the Annual Reports of the Several City Officers, for the Municipal Year Ending Jan. 2, 1854* (Worcester, 1854), 16–17. Corporal punishment was also commonplace in antebellum America; see Glenn, *Campaigns against Corporal*; Stansell, *City of Women*, 76–101.

Historians have argued that new definitions of masculinity in the antebellum era placed a premium upon violent behavior; see Elliott J. Gorn, "'Good-Bye Boys, I Die a True American': Homicide, Nativism, and Working-Class Culture in Antebellum New York City,' *Journal of American History* 74 (1987): 388–410; Michael Kaplan, 'New York City Tavern Violence and the Creation of a Working-Class Male Identity,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (1995): 591–617.

At the trial in the Worcester County court prosecutors introduced supporting evidence, such as Carter's distinctive way of wearing his hat 'farther back upon his head than men usually do,' as well as the fact that his horse had been spotted in the vicinity just prior to the assault. The jury reached a guilty verdict after deliberating only one hour. When Carter was hanged in December 1825, it was Worcester's first public execution in the nineteenth century.⁵³

Contemporary interpretations of Carter's crime and punishment reveal popular acceptance of the importance of early childhood as the time for moral education. A pamphlet by the Reverend Jonathan Going of Worcester's Baptist Church argued that Carter 'was trained from his infancy to immoral and unlawful deeds, and this too, however abhorrent the idea, by a MOTHER!' who had taught him to steal. Lacking both morals and an education, the illiterate Carter was destined for evil. He consorted with 'base women,' gambled, stole, and drank. Carter insisted that not only had he not planned the deed but 'I cannot tell whether I did actually commit the crime or not.' Indeed, so confused was Carter, Going observed, that at the moment of his execution the condemned man 'beat time to the music of the band, with his foot.' According to Going, Carter's crime demonstrated clearly that 'if a woman of seventy, helpless and feeble, be liable to such an assault, what female can be safe?' Similarly, an editorial in the *Spy* attributed Carter's actions to a 'want of education' in virtue compounded by intemperance. Local reaction to the rape and Carter's execution in 1825 thus linked the two themes Abbott would stress just a few years later: the necessity of

53. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 25. The details of *Commonwealth v. Horace Carter* are drawn from the trial transcript printed in the *Spy*, October 12, 1825. As a county seat, Worcester was the site for criminal trials and punishment. Prior to Carter's execution in 1825, the most recent had been in 1793; the next was not until 1845, when Thomas Barrett was privately executed for the murder of an elderly Ruth Houghton. Lincoln, *History of Worcester*, 311; Sawyer, *History of the Department of Police Service of Worcester*, 30-31; see also *A Brief Sketch of the Life of Horace Carter* (Worcester, 1825). For capital punishment, see Louis Masur, *Rites of Execution: Capital Punishment and the Transformation of American Culture, 1776-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

maternal lessons in morality and the vulnerability of elderly women. Act now, while your children are still utterly in your power, Abbott urged his readers, for in very practical ways, 'your earthly happiness is at the disposal of your child. His character is now in your hands, and you are to form it for good or for evil.'⁵⁴

Compared to his lengthy disquisition on motherhood, Abbott's discussion of fatherhood was brief, although not because he considered child rearing exclusively a female occupation. Abbott addressed his advice to both parents and insisted that there was 'much—very much' for fathers to contribute to the bringing up of children. He chided men for shirking a 'full share of the responsibility' for child rearing and for mistaking their priorities. Speaking frankly of his own experience, Abbott conceded that it was all too easy for men like him, 'overwhelmed with public cares, to neglect their domestic duties.' But by this path lay ruin and dishonor: 'It is better to be a poor man, and it is better to be a humble man, than to be disgraced in life by the profligacy of those who call us father, and to have a dying pillow planted with thorns by our children's hands.' Worldly success and the esteem of society, Abbott insisted, were of less importance to a Christian than the demands of fatherhood.⁵⁵

But in general Abbott dwelled lightly upon his prescription for fathers. No doubt he was aware that such advice ran counter to other currents in antebellum America, which measured a man not by the character of his progeny but by the size of his personal fortune. The shift in the primary responsibility for parenting from father to mother had devalued men's domestic contributions even as it inflated women's. Although Abbott's writing pushed men to the margins of the family to be valued chiefly as economic support, he remained a social conservative who insisted that the husband was properly the titular head of the household. It was to be hoped, he remarked, that couples agreed on the methods and goals of parenting. Yet in the event of 'a want of harmony between

54. *A Brief Sketch of the Life of Horace Carter*, 4, 5, 15–16, quotations from 9, 10, 12, respectively; *Spy*, December 7, 1825; Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 25–26.

55. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 150–52.

parents,' or even when a husband was 'most brutally intemperate,' society and the wife had to respect a man's patriarchal authority. Whether a woman was married to a drunkard, or to an often absent entrepreneur, Abbott insisted that she not openly challenge his role as the head of the household.⁵⁶

That being said, Abbott proceeded to describe how to violate the spirit of patriarchy. At a minimum, a woman had the right to expect her husband to support her maternal authority, Abbott asserted, pointing to the Biblical injunction that children honor their mother as well as their father. But Abbott also suggested that during her husband's absence at work during the day, a woman should teach her children to obey her without question, binding them to herself with ties of love and affection 'from which they never would be able or desirous to break.' By such means, Abbott showed how an unhappy wife might secure her own future by engaging her children in a domestic conspiracy that led not to open rebellion but to the father's gradual exclusion from the family. In spite of having made a poor choice for a marriage partner, a woman might yet enjoy a serene and comfortable old age surrounded by happy and successful offspring anxious to repay her numerous efforts on their behalf.⁵⁷

The good mother did not, however, seek independence from the family, and nowhere did Abbott suggest that women take up any role other than that of wife and mother. Indeed, in Abbott's formulation a woman exchanged a future of dependence upon her husband for one of dependence upon her children. However, the dynamics of her dependency had been revised: rather than being subordinate to her husband and the recipient of his patriarchal largesse, a woman would retire on the proceeds of her children's discharged debt. In other words, the good mother received not charity but a well-earned pension.⁵⁸

56. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 75-79.

57. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 152; 77; 76-80.

58. Abbott assumed that only widows were free to use their educations professionally and in his short story 'Woman's Lot,' he describes a widow bereft of any option except teaching—including, curiously, remarriage—to support herself and her children. *National Aegis*, April 17, 1850.

To be sure, it is unlikely that an antebellum woman either viewed motherhood chiefly as an investment opportunity or gazed upon her infant's face with the speculative eye of a venture capitalist, but the enormous popularity of Abbott's advice books emphasizes the ways that American women in the 1820s and 1830s were searching for their place in a rapidly changing world. Concerned for the future of their families and for themselves, literate women attempted to redefine their traditional social role to meet the new circumstances of a market economy and the breakdown of communal social welfare. *The Mother at Home* and *The Child at Home* offered an implicit critique of, and challenge to, patriarchal power relations within marriage and the family. If Abbott's work did not advocate a public role for women, the evangelical ideology of maternalism did reassure women that their daily labors at home were a vital contribution to themselves as well as to society, even while it armed them with tactics for imposing their will upon others.

But did Abbott's advice actually influence the people of Worcester? While it is never possible to know the extent to which a reading public embraced an author's words, anecdotal evidence establishes that many in Worcester approved of the writings of their most famous minister and author. The town's book stores carried his work and at least one local paper reviewed *The Child at Home* upon publication. (The reviewer criticized the book's 'hasty composition' but praised its sentiments.) Abbott's tracts were a favorite of the town's sewing circles, whose members took pleasure in listening to his works read aloud as they plied their needles. Abbott's books were also available on the shelves of the Worcester Public Library. Even after Abbott left their pulpit to become a writer, the townspeople remembered him with pride. They enjoyed dropping his increasingly famous name, and one even took the credit for some of Abbott's ideas. Worcester newspapers printed his numerous articles, while Sarah Waldo, one of the

founders of the Calvinist Church, bequeathed one thousand dollars to Abbott's son.⁵⁹

Moreover, the maternal ideals that Abbott expressed were reflected in the life of at least one influential member of his parish. In February 1830, at Abbott's urging, Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury officially transferred both her membership and her considerable financial support from a Boston church to the Calvinist Church. A recruitment coup for the recently installed minister, Salisbury's membership in Abbott's congregation developed into a cordial and supportive relationship. An early Abbott booster—Salisbury wrote approvingly to her son that 'Mr. Abbot [*sic*] is very industrious & much engaged. There is considerable attention to Religion in the Society'—Salisbury's life also embodied many of the themes of motherhood Abbott would shortly articulate.⁶⁰ Moreover, her personal library contained copies, in which she inscribed her name, of both *The Mother at Home* and *The Child at Home*.⁶¹

59. *Palladium* (Worcester), January 15, 1834; CCR, Octavo Vol. 23, AAS, December 19, 1839 and May 8, 1840; Worcester Free Public Library, *Catalogue of the Circulating Department. Worcester 1861*. (Worcester, 1861), 7; *National Aegis*, April 17, 1850; *Spy*, April 9, 1851. In his memoirs, the Reverend George Allen of Worcester, brother of the better-known abolitionist and Free Soiler Charles Allen, wrote that Abbott was 'not, I think, a person of acute, philosophical or logical mind; but was quick to comprehend, and would at least see all the surface of a thing.' Allen insisted that it was he who had convinced Abbott that Napoleon was a great soldier and statesman, leading Abbott to write a famous biography of Napoleon as well as numerous largely fictional short stories; *Reminiscences of the Reverend George Allen*, ed. Franklin P. Rice (Worcester, 1882), 82, 83.

60. Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, May 24, 1830, Salisbury Family Papers (hereafter cited SFP), Box 24 Folder 1, AAS. Elizabeth Salisbury was one of three wealthy female dissenters who, during a dispute over a new minister and women's right to criticize the clergy, separated from the town's First (Congregational) Church to form the Calvinist Church in the early 1820s. Salisbury did not, however, formally join the Calvinist Church until 1830. For a discussion of the First Church schism, see Lawes, 'Trifling with Holy Time.'

61. Elizabeth Salisbury's copies of *The Mother at Home* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1833) was inscribed, 'Mrs. Salisbury from her affectionate friend, John S.C. Abbott.' A second copy in the AAS collection was similarly inscribed to Mrs. Howland. Salisbury's copy of *The Child at Home* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1834) offered the author's 'affectionate regards.'

The early 1830s were difficult for Elizabeth Salisbury. The recent death of her much older husband, combined with the departure of her only surviving child, Stephen Salisbury II, for a lengthy tour of Europe, left Salisbury feeling alone and friendless. Her numerous letters to her son reveal a woman who, despite her considerable privilege, depended upon him for emotional and financial support—and fiercely resented his absence. Salisbury's correspondence expressed an understandable concern for Stephen's safety, as well as a dread that she would never see him again. She anxiously warned him away from steamboats because 'there is so continuously dreadful accidents happening, for which they cannot account,' sternly instructed him to '*Dress warm,*' and imagined him near: 'Stephen, I wonder if you look as well at this moment as your Portrait does—it looks very pleasant on me as I look up from my pen.'⁶²

Yet Salisbury's letters to her son also focused on *her* well-being, and her letters repeatedly emphasize the deleterious effects of his travel upon her comfort and peace of mind. She wrote, 'My dear son, do not forget your Mother, who never forgets you!' and 'Do not forget your mother, who is at present the being *on Earth* who is most deeply interested in your welfare, & who is in weal & woe your vary [*sic*] affectionate Mother.' Indeed, in her diary Salisbury noted with satisfaction that Stephen 'does not write in very good

62. For the relationship between Abbott and Salisbury, see, for example, John S.C. Abbott to Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury, July 6, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 1; Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, July 12, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 1; John S.C. Abbott to Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury, July 28, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 1; Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, August 11, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 2; Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, October 8, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 2; Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, October 24, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 3; 'Memorandum Book, Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury, 1829,' entry for February 16, 1830, SFP Box 63, Volume 3.

For Elizabeth Salisbury's concern for her son, see Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, May 6, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 1; Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, September 7, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 2 (emphasis in original); Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, May 24, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 1.

spirits, seems anxious about me.' Alternating between worry over her son's welfare and resentment at his prolonged absence, Salisbury assumed that a son's proper place was with his mother: 'Do you know, my dear Stephen, that in three weeks, a year will have passed since you left me—alone? A year of my *now* short life?'⁶³

Salisbury's emotional tie to her son was clear, but so too was her reliance upon him for more practical concerns, and she used the forum of her letters to keep him abreast of her daily affairs. After firing a troublesome manservant, Salisbury sought Stephen's reassurance, even scripting his response: '*You did right Mother.*' A woman of considerable means, who enjoyed an extensive circle of relatives, friends, and acquaintances, Salisbury nonetheless insisted that she would not travel until Stephen could accompany her: 'Well, when you come home to wait on me I hope to take a journey,' she wrote as she detailed her loneliness and boredom, and later, 'when you come home to take me on a grand excursion to Niagara, etc. I shall regain my health.' Although she managed her extensive household accounts herself, and was ably assisted with her investments by a local lawyer and financier as well as by her brother, Edward Tuckerman of Boston, Salisbury considered her finances to be, first and foremost, her *son's* responsibility: 'I wish you would come home & take care of them [her stocks]—they are very bothersome to me and I am often so much puzzled to know what I ought to do.' Indeed, to Salisbury's mind even routine household maintenance was Stephen's bailiwick, and her letters to him conjure an image of the elegant Salisbury mansion gradually falling into disrepair during his absence: 'I shall want you to do a great deal for me [when you return]—when any thing important in repairs or alterations are spoken of I say when

63. Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, April 24, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 1; Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, July 23, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 1 (emphasis in original); 'Memorandum Book, Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury, 1829,' entry for March 22, 1830, SFP Box 63, Volume 3; Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, September 7, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 2 (emphasis in original).

Mr. Salisbury comes home—we will have it done.’ And, by implication, not a moment sooner.⁶⁴

But it was not just the house that projected an air of abandonment. By the spring of 1831, eighteen months into her son’s grand tour, Salisbury’s patience had worn thin. ‘Do, I entreat you, be explicit[;] if you intend to pass your life abroad, let me know it for I must get somebody to take care of me. I cannot live so another year,’ she demanded querulously. ‘I felt indeed greatly disappointed that you seem’d to feel so little for my lonely situation . . . left with only servants for months. . . .’ Salisbury concluded her epistle by reminding Stephen yet again of a son’s lifelong obligation to care for his mother: ‘You may think perhaps that “mother may as well learn to do without me—I shall have my own family & my own concerns to attend to—” I hope you will my dear but that you will take care of mine, too. . . .’ Unlike most antebellum women, the wealthy Elizabeth Salisbury could rely upon paid financial advisors as well as other family members to manage her considerable resources. Yet she, too, considered her welfare to be the primary responsibility of her adult son. Even among the most privileged, mothers turned to their children to secure their peace of mind.⁶⁵

Nor was the Reverend Mr. Abbott’s approach to evangelical parenting forgotten after he had left Worcester. In 1836 his successor in the pulpit, the Reverend David Peabody, suggested the formation of a Fathers’ Meeting explicitly patterned upon the Maternal Association, and distributed a list of questions to be discussed at the inaugural meeting. Peabody hoped that the fathers of his church would meet regularly ‘in a social way’ to ‘ascertain,

64. Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, July 23, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 1 (emphasis in original); Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, September 7, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 2; Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, November 9, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 3; ‘Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury’s Household Notes, 1828–51,’ SFP Box 63, Volume 1; Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, October 25, 1830, SFP Box 24, Folder 3; Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, March 17, 1831, SFP Box 24, Folder 6.

65. Elizabeth Tuckerman Salisbury to Stephen Salisbury II, March 17, 1831, SFP Box 24, Folder 6.

and put in practice the best methods to train [their children] up in the way they should go.' The men were to focus upon how to attain 'perfect family government' by analyzing the modes and utility of punishment, as well as the efficacy of rewards. Peabody was also concerned that fathers 'URGE' their children 'to seek religion personally.' A father should prepare his children for religious conversion, Peabody argued, by outlining 'the implied conditions on which the fulfillment of the divine promises in the Covenant rests.' The group would also discuss methods for encouraging the good in their children and for stamping out the bad, for it was a father's duty to protect his children from evil while teaching them of its existence. Peabody's agenda was a starting point; the men presumably would raise other issues as they discussed their successes and failures as fathers.⁶⁶

The Fathers' Meeting shared with the Maternal Association an emphasis upon practical solutions to family problems and a concern for bringing up devout children. But Peabody's proposal suggests that the evangelical fathers approached parenting differently than did the mothers. Peabody did not seem concerned that men master techniques for asserting their authority, as had been the case in Abbott's work intended for women. Nowhere in Peabody's list of questions did he indicate that controlling their children was an issue for fathers. If some men did need to learn how to assert themselves—and surely there were some—this want was not publicly acknowledged. Indeed, in their quest for orderly families, the Maternal Association and the Fathers' Meeting worked at cross-purposes. Antebellum law and custom assumed that a woman properly exercised domestic authority only in the absence of her spouse. If a woman wished to run her household according to her will, as Abbott and her own ambitions advised, if she sought to establish herself as empress of the hearth, then a husband's interference in domestic affairs was counterproductive.

66. 'Meeting of Fathers' and 'Questions for Discussion in the Fathers' Meeting,' Worcester Churches Collection, Box 5, AAS. The records indicate that the men had begun meeting informally, and that Peabody proposed to organize them.

Peabody's good fathers thus threatened the autonomy and the authority of Abbott's good mothers. Moreover, the organization of concerned parents into sex-segregated associations, each with its own agenda, signifies that evangelical parenting was not a truly collaborative undertaking. Because of the legal and cultural presumptions that the husband, in his role of patriarch, ultimately ruled the household, husbands and wives had divergent and potentially conflicting domestic interests.⁶⁷

The responses of the men of the Calvinist Church to Peabody's proposal for a Fathers' Meeting were not recorded. It is possible that the meetings were a success; however, there were no further references to it in the church records. One may only speculate why the men might have been less interested than their wives in identifying and organizing themselves as parents. Perhaps the women of the parish, recognizing the implied threat to their domestic authority, did not encourage their men to attend the meetings. Or perhaps the men believed other demands upon their time were more pressing. For antebellum men, fatherhood was one social role among many, while for women motherhood was—or could be—their primary reason for being, as well as a role that conveyed social status and security. Indeed, for men the demands of fatherhood might detract from their opportunities to achieve financial security, a perspective Abbott acknowledged when he categorized fathers as either poor-but-devoted or successful-but-distant, implicitly accepting the difficulty of a man's being both a devoted parent and a successful businessman. The attempt to organize a Fathers' Meeting to complement the Maternal Association did, however, testify to the faith of religious parents in the efficacy of self-improvement.⁶⁸

67. In *Mother at Home*, Abbott briefly describes the troubles of a father unable to control his offspring, calling him 'the worst *father* in town' (emphasis in original), 33.

68. Abbott, *Mother at Home*, 152.

CONCLUSION

In January 17, 1835, citing 'a constantly increasing sensitiveness in the organs of speech,' John S.C. Abbott abruptly resigned from the Calvinist Church pulpit and became a full-time writer.⁶⁹ He published prodigiously over the next forty years, composing popular histories, biographies, and feature articles. No longer an active minister, Abbott the author turned away from advice books to focus on delineating the ways history exemplified God's grand design for the redemption of humankind.⁷⁰ But the maternal ideology of *The Mother at Home* and *The Child at Home* remained a potent social force in antebellum America. Historians have tended to locate Maternal Associations at the conservative end of the spectrum of social reform because 'their concern was directed inward rather than outward,' that is, toward saving their children rather than toward saving society. Antebellum Americans, another scholar agrees, believed that while female morality would eventually triumph, the females themselves should stay at home, focus their efforts on their own little corner of the world, and leave the rest to the men. By this perspective, the emergence of motherhood as an ideology was socially and politically conserva-

69. In his letter Abbott conceded that his resignation would come as a surprise and claimed to have no idea what he would do next, holding out the possibility that he might one day return. He then asked to be dismissed 'as soon as convenient.' John S.C. Abbott to the members of the Calvinist Church, January 17, 1835. *Proceedings of the Worcester Society of Antiquity* (1912), 25.

70. A partial list of Abbott's subsequent works and the variety of publishers that issued them, include: *South and North; Or, Impressions Received during a Trip to Cuba and the South* (New York: Abbey and Abbot, 1860); *Christopher Carson: Familiarly Known as Kit Carson* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1874); *David Crockett: His Life and Adventures* (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1874); *Miles Standish: The Puritan Captain* (Boston: B. B. Russell, 1875); *Benjamin Franklin: A Picture of the Struggles of Our Infant Nation* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1876); *Daniel Boone, Pioneer of Kentucky* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1898). Abbott's continuing interest in Napoleon and the lives of the French monarchs resulted in a number of books, among them *Kings and Queens; Or, Life in the Palace* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1848); *History of Josephine* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1851); *History of Napoleon Bonaparte* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1855); *Confidential Correspondence of the Emperor Napoleon and the Empress Josephine* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1856); *History of Louis Philippe, King of the French* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1871); *History of Napoleon III* (Boston: B. B. Russell, 1873); *Maria Antoinette* (New York: Harpers, 1904).

tive, both because it reinforced the separation of society into gendered spheres of public (male) and private (female), and because it slowed—may even have prevented—an effective campaign for women's legal and political equality.⁷¹

Whether a commitment to motherhood erected barriers to the development of a feminist consciousness is an argument that remains to be concretely demonstrated. Mothers were well represented in the antebellum feminist movement—two of its national conventions took place in Worcester in the 1850s—that also held that women had the right, indeed the obligation, to demand justice for others especially for other mothers and their children. Just as importantly, the good mother contributed to the reform spirit of her age by reassessing her economic and social interests and by asserting herself to defend them. Abbott's ideal mother was strong, thoughtful, and perceptive, a woman not easily vanquished by opposition. She was skilled in the techniques of managing others and sought to improve her understanding of human nature through reflection and education. She would not—*must* not—permit her children, her husband, or her society to frustrate her will, for God was on her side. The Reverend Mr. Abbott's vi-

71. Historians have traditionally emphasized the religious roots of the onslaught of reform activism in the first half of the nineteenth century; the 'burned-over district' of New York, then in the throes of economic boom and religious revival, appears to have been particularly fertile ground for social reform. Newly energized by an evangelical appreciation of the individual's responsibility for sin, and faithful to the possibility of personal and social perfectionism, women—most often from the emerging middle class—increasingly protested the traditions and structures that upheld or condoned immorality. Antebellum women thus formed Female Moral Reform Societies, joined temperance campaigns, and protested the existence of southern slavery. The classic statement of this approach is Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950); see also Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*; Judith Wellman, 'Women and Radical Reform in Antebellum Upstate New York: A Profile of Grassroots Female Abolitionists,' in Mabel E. Deutrich and Virginia C. Purdy, eds., *Clio Was A Woman: Studies in the History of American Women* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1980): 113-27.

Meckel, 'Educating a Ministry of Mothers,' 412; Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 230-46. For a related analysis, see Paula Baker, 'The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,' *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 627-32.

sion of the good mother was so positive and assertive because it was derived from his consultations with the women of his congregation as well as from the particular circumstances of American life in the 1820s and 1830s. Abbott's books on evangelical motherhood thus developed themes frankly subversive of a social order dependent upon a passive and private social role for women. This may also explain why they became best sellers.

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