

centuries, that we find an ethos of spiritual marriage as a well-developed and self-confident phenomenon. Elliott's book sets out to describe the evolution of spiritual marriage over 1,500 years, but the evidence educed seems to indicate that it was in fact a development of the high and later Middle Ages which turned as a matter of course to the religious traditions of its society for validation and precedent.

Elliott makes the convincing argument that spiritual marriage in all periods was a multi-layered phenomenon which truly offered women some of the independence the Church feared. Despite the ambivalence of theologians, these spiritual wives attracted the admiration of a wide circle, both lay and clerical. Though Frankish kings could manipulate claims of religiously inspired chastity to repudiate inconvenient wives, by the fourteenth century spiritual marriage had become a choice for women, one which could establish both their individuality as well as spiritual superiority to a weaker, coarser spouse.

We cannot know how many women chose this path, or how many couples sought monastic piety in the world, in contravention of high theology's divisions of the social order. Then, too, the evidence which survives is skewed heavily to the upper end of the social scale. Did peasants, too, adopt this practice? Was it ever an option for any but spiritual virtuosos? Despite these remaining questions, Elliott's book, in examining what was certainly a minority practice, points up some of the most important features of popular piety and of a sturdy movement of spiritual self-determination that flourished in the last centuries of medieval Christendom. It would perhaps be useful to see a fuller examination of the social and possibly the economic factors involved, but Elliott's focus lies far more with the religious bases of spiritual marriage. For our twentieth-century society, however, which is ready to see St. Frances as a hospital volunteer but cringes from mentioning the celibacy which was central to her being and to her social role, this book is a valuable corrective. *Spiritual Marriage* is a contribution to our exploration, not only of celibacy in marriage, but of the intricacies of late-medieval spirituality and mentality.

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Alice Clark — *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (with new introduction by Amy Louise Erickson). London: Routledge, 1992. Pp. vii, 126.

Alice Clark's *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* was originally published in 1919. It was republished in 1968 and again in 1982. This edition, prefaced by an excellent introduction by Amy Louise Erickson, is the fourth.

Why reprint a 1919 monograph? In this particular case, one reason is the unusual group of women to which Alice Clark belonged. She was one of several female historians associated with the London School of Economics, founded in 1895. Clark attended the LSE in 1913, thanks to a Shaw research fellowship. At the time, almost a quarter of the LSE faculty was female, a proportion greater than at any

time since. Clark's research advisor was a woman, Lilian Knowles, author of *Industrial and Commercial Revolution in Great Britain in the Nineteenth Century* (published in 1921). Female historians were also very active in the Economic History Society, founded in 1926, which published the *Economic History Review*. Eileen Power, the renowned medieval historian, was its secretary and driving force between 1926 and 1940.

A significant number of those female historians chose to write about women. Some, like Annie Abram, Ellen McArthur, and Marian Dale, were primarily interested in issues not specific to women. They nonetheless devoted articles to the place of women in economic life. Others, like Eileen Power, Ivy Pinchbeck, and Alice Clark, wrote mostly or exclusively about women.

Those female historians differed from today's in important ways. Frances Collier became secretary of her department at the University of Manchester after writing *The Family Economy of the Working Class in the Cotton Industry, 1784–1833* as an MA thesis (published in 1921), but many of the early twentieth-century female British historians were not "professionals" — that is, academics. Alice Clark was in this sense "amateur". She was the daughter of a Quaker manufacturing family which believed in educating girls. One daughter became a teacher, another a physician; at the age of 30, Alice became one of the five directors of the family firm when it was reorganized as a private limited company. Tuberculosis forced her to interrupt her business career. After a long convalescence, she moved to London, became involved in the women suffrage movement, and attended the LSE. When war broke out, she trained as a midwife, intending to join her sister in France and work in a refugee maternity hospital. Ill health again thwarted her plans, and she resumed her activities at the C. and J. Clark shoe company instead.

Academics or "amateurs", medievalists or students of the nineteenth century, these women took a lively interest in contemporary politics. Many were active in the Suffrage Movement, and in the post-war Peace Movement. They were also very concerned with social issues, especially those affecting women. Their approach to history and economics tended to be utilitarian: the past was worth knowing because activists who understood the roots of contemporary social problems were more effective at solving them.

Those female historians, by their sheer numbers, were therefore part of women's history as much as contributors to the field. Their work merits more than documentary interest, however. On the whole, it has aged well. Ellen McArthur's article on "Women Petitioners and the Long Parliament" (*English Historical Review*, vol. 24, 1909), for example, remains the only treatment of the topic and an unavoidable entry in bibliographies on either women and politics or women in revolutionary movements in Western Europe. Power, Pinchbeck, Collier, and Clark have all been republished. Power's and Pinchbeck's books have been joined, and partly superseded, by a large body of books and articles on the topics they covered. This is not the case with Clark's work. The working lives of seventeenth-century English women have attracted minimal attention. Clark's book remains the most comprehensive treatment of the subject.

Clark was very critical of the role women of her period played in the economy.

Working-class women were paid below-subsistence wages and confined to unskilled occupations. Middle-class women were supposed to be supported by their fathers or husbands. Women of all classes, perceived as dependent upon a male for their support, seldom received an education which would have allowed them to be self-supporting. As a consequence, women felt inferior and were viewed as such, and this hindered the beneficial influence that, as wives and mothers, Clark believed they should have been able to exert over men and indirectly over society. In Clark's mind, "the character of men's development is determined in some sort by the development which is achieved by women" (p. 1).

Women had not always been perceived as "naturally" dependent upon the men of their family. Alice Clark reminded her readers that "in the seventeenth century, the idea is seldom encountered that a man supports his wife; husband and wife were then mutually dependent and together supported their children" (p. 12). Alice Clark blamed capitalism, whose emergence she dated to the seventeenth century, for the decline in women's economic role. Although capitalism provided young unmarried females with opportunities to earn a living outside the family, it deprived their married sisters of the possibilities of contributing to the household economy as they had in the past. Increases in the standard of living made it possible for more and more families to do without the labour of their womenfolk. Snobbery encouraged them to take advantage of this possibility: yeomen's and merchants' wives began to act like ladies. Among the wage earners, the separation of home and workplace made the wife's participation in the husband's activities increasingly difficult. Women whose families needed an extra income were forced into "women's jobs", occupations whose wages were too low to support them.

One can of course find faults with Clark. No historian today would adopt an evolutionary model this linear. Elizabeth Pleck, among others, has convincingly argued that the separation of home and workplace is too simplistic an explanation for the changes which affected women's economic activities. Clark's vision of the place of women in pre-capitalist family economy is excessively rosy. Her contempt for "parasitic" middle-class women kept by their husbands is probably too sweeping.

Clark's picture of the working life of women is too black and white, but not fundamentally inaccurate. Clark was a thorough researcher and could marshal an impressive body of evidence to support her claims. Nor have late twentieth-century historians really challenged her overall picture. Women's economic position did deteriorate in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as they were pushed out of crafts, health care, and even some retail trades. The transformations in agriculture which turned many smallholders into landless labourers did deprive the women of this class of their cows, gardens, and poultry. Only well-to-do women may have benefitted. They escaped the drudgery of work, and the increasing use of marriage settlement protected their assets from grasping or profligate husbands. Their lives became less strenuous. We in the twentieth century tend to believe it also became more narrow and circumscribed. They may have thought otherwise, though.

Despite its 85 years, Clark's work is still well worth reading. Little else has been written on women and work in the seventeenth century. Although historians have

demonstrated that the evolution of women's work was more complex than Clark thought, her overall thesis has not been seriously undermined. This is no mean achievement, and the book deserves to be called a classic.

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Sheldon Rothblatt and Björn Wittrock, eds. — *The European and American University Since 1800: Historical and Sociological Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Pp. vii, 370.

The study of higher education has been so subject to simplistic polemicizing over the past decade that an academic book promising to explore the "complexity" of university life is a welcome corrective. Allen Bloom's 1987 bestseller, *The Closing of the American Mind*, spawned a school of copy-cat publications, most of which denounced the quality and politics of the contemporary university and, without actually seriously studying the past, harkened back to a supposed golden age of higher learning.

This book, arising out of a 1987 conference in Sweden, takes history very seriously and is the sworn enemy of oversimplified assessments of university development, past and present. Its analysis ranges from insightful and original to turgid and puzzling. Given the obscurity of some of the topics and the length of the articles, which averages almost 40 pages, it is safe to assume that the book will not be a bestseller. Still, it merits careful attention.

The book is divided into four main sections, the first of which probes the meaning of liberal education. Sheldon Rothblatt traces the numerous iterations of this concept from antiquity to the present, demonstrating how universities have clung to this academic ideal, or at least elements of it, in a world otherwise consumed by change. By redefining liberal education to meet new circumstances, universities have proven to be both creative and opportunistic. (Sven-Eric Leidman's subsequent discussion of general education in nineteenth-century Germany and Sweden provides two case studies of this process.) Those who would impose on students an unchanging core curriculum have read their university history selectively, something Rothblatt's lengthy essay seeks to avoid. Though his own conclusion and prescription are curiously ambiguous — mostly sidestepping the "political correctness" debates — he wisely notes that "there is no subject that cannot be taught illiberally, no subject that cannot be taught liberally" (p. 64).

The book's second section examines professional education in Europe and the United States. Rolf Torstendahl assesses the ways in which changing market conditions in Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, and France influenced the professionalization of engineering in the nineteenth century. He analyzes the impact of history, politics, and local conditions on the particular forms that this training took, though his schematic "minimal demands ... optimal norms" (p. 110) model of organizational behaviour obscures more than it illuminates of the professionalization process.