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## Introduction

On March 18, 1865, Sallie Thurman wrote a letter to her husband not unlike the many she had written in the three years he had been away in the Confederate Army. In it, she reflected extensively on her relationship before the war, her fears for the future, and pondered what a stranger might think if her words were read by someone other than her husband. “And then I shall be laughed at as a weak, sensitive woman (just what I am) for I was born to look up to, cling to the oak for support,” she mused. “But now my support is temporarily removed and I sink into utter insignificance.”<sup>1</sup>

Sallie’s description of her role as a woman within her marriage fits within the broader social structure that permeated the nineteenth-century South. Men and women occupied decidedly separate and hierarchical roles within the home and in broader society. Women were expected to be submissive, moral creatures. “This marvelous creation,” pioneering women’s historian Anne Firor Scott has remarked, “was described as a submissive wife whose reason for being was to love, honor, obey, and occasionally amuse her husband, to bring up his children and manage his household. Physically weak, and ‘formed for the less laborious occupations,’ she depended upon male protection.”<sup>2</sup> As historian George Rable has argued, these women lacked both power and opportunity to challenge social assumptions about the proper female role. Women, according to Rable, generally embraced ideas of female purity and therefore preferred “to serve as guardians of the home and the humane values that supposedly flourished there than

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<sup>1</sup> Sallie to John Thurman, March 18, 1865, folder 17, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970), 4.

to enter an evil world that showed little respect for female virtue.”<sup>3</sup> Women’s fondness for the stereotype of feminine virtue, combined with their limited access to the masculine sphere, served to keep women in subordination. Few women even considered challenging assumptions of femininity, which speaks to the pervasive nature of the South’s paternalistic structure. Female submission, however, was not one-sided. Antebellum gender relations involved a reciprocal obligation between the sexes. Women accepted a subordinate role within society in exchange for male protection. As historian Drew Gilpin Faust has pointed out, “the ‘helpless woman’ held an implicit power of requisition within her very assumption of helplessness.”<sup>4</sup> If prevailing norms required women to position themselves as needing protection, they also needed a protector.

In the reciprocal relationship of the sexes, men felt obligated to protect their own wives and mothers as well as the domesticity they symbolized. The main reason southerners supported the Confederacy in the Civil War was to protect slavery. Though historians have argued that the South possessed no distinct sense of nationality, the fear of a Southern future without slavery or white supremacy served to unite whites in the eleven states that seceded from the Union.<sup>5</sup> The practice of distancing the Confederate cause from slavery is a post-war phenomenon, led by southerners themselves.<sup>6</sup> More broadly, the war can be conceived as an attempt by southerners to protect their way of life from northern aggression. Everything from the economy to class to gender relations relied on the existence of slavery in the antebellum South. In this paternalistic social structure, every person’s place in society was determined by his or her relationship to

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<sup>3</sup> George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” *Journal of American History* 76 (March 1990), 1220.

<sup>5</sup> Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still, Jr., *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 69.

<sup>6</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 59.

white masters and to slaves. This explains why individual men fought for various reasons. Some men stressed the need to protect their right to own slaves. Others believed southerners were God's chosen people, or that the war was a continuation of the American quest for independence from despotic rule. Most specifically, however, men fought in protection of women.<sup>7</sup> The fulfillment of masculine obligations to protect the weaker sex, including the individual women in their lives and the gender as a whole, was reason enough for many men to enlist.

When men left the home front to fight, however, they upended the gender dynamics at home. As Faust put it, "the very foundations of the South's paternalistic social order were necessarily imperiled by the departure of the men who served as its organizing principle."<sup>8</sup> Women were forced to give up the male protection they were accustomed to in order to support the Confederacy and all of its aims. In Confederate rhetoric aimed at garnering female support, female sacrifice for the men in their lives was transformed into sacrifice of those men.<sup>9</sup> Male protection became as distant as the far-off battlefields while female submission and sacrifice became more distinct.

This thesis seeks to examine gender relations and the overall controlling structure of paternalism in the nineteenth-century South through the lens of southern couples' experiences in the Civil War. As Faust has noted, the breakdown in paternalistic social structure during the Civil War forced women to directly consider their place in society.<sup>10</sup> I seek to understand the ways in which women thought about and communicated this change to their husbands. With men gone, women were left to step into male roles that felt entirely foreign. The extent and severity of a woman's wartime responsibility varied considerably across class lines, especially at the

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<sup>7</sup> Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 59.

<sup>8</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 35.

<sup>9</sup> Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice," 1209.

<sup>10</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 6.

beginning of the war. Many women found themselves alone to manage businesses, farms, plantations, and even slaves. Women of the slaveholding class sometimes chose to move in with extended family or remain at home but hire an overseer or invite relatives to live with them.<sup>11</sup> The women who took on these new responsibilities alone faced the biggest breakdown in southern paternalistic structure. They assumed a masculine role that was entirely separate from their prewar experience. At the same time, they were still expected to achieve the ideals of their own gender. Women faced the insurmountable challenge of balancing new masculine roles with incompatible feminine ones.

Individual couples' experiences during the war reflect critical dynamics within nineteenth-century southern gender relations, especially among the wealthy slaveholders who were best able maintain them. The couples analyzed in this thesis lived in the South, were married, and had children before the war. In each case, the husband enlisted in the Confederate Army within the first two years of the war and remained in the army until the last year of the war or his death. Their wives experienced prolonged separation from their promised protector. These women entered the war with the expectation that they would assume the responsibilities of running their farm or plantation, managing slaves, and overseeing the care of their children until their husband returned home. They wrote letters to their husbands, and their husbands wrote back. These letters contain insights into how individuals thought about their place within their marriages and society as a whole. They reveal the problems the social breakdown produced for women as well as the way they interpreted and communicated the problems to their husbands. Most women did not think explicitly about paternalism as a broad social structure. Instead, they thought of it as the natural relationship between husband and wife. Most often, women focused

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<sup>11</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 33.

on the specific relationship within their own marriages. These individual relationships show broader themes that affected paternalistic structures as a whole.

The first chapter deals with the concept of female dependence. I explore the ways wives wrote about their dependence on their husbands. Further, I demonstrate how women's frustrations with their emotional need for their husbands prevented them from acknowledging their diminished need for practical male support. The second chapter examines the way dynamics within the southern household changed when the male patriarch was removed. When men left for war, the power structure of the household broke down and exacerbated existing problems and created new ones for women. These women believed the solution to these problems was a return to antebellum paternalistic gender relations. The final chapter discusses the couples' support for the Confederate cause and the war itself, especially as they changed over time. Women expressed their desire to return to antebellum gender relations by articulating their disillusionment with the war itself, even as they continued to support the Confederacy's goals to protect those gender relations. Overall, I argue that the solutions women believed would solve their wartime problems, which were created and exacerbated by separation, conformed to antebellum gender relations. In the crucible of the Civil War, women preferred the familiar comfort of paternalistic protection.

This thesis considers four slaveholding couples from across the Confederacy. Sallie Ecklin Thurman came from a family of wealthy planters in Western Tennessee. She attended Macon Female Institute before marrying John Thurman in 1858. Also from planter stock, John established his own plantation in Fayette County, Tennessee, where he owned eighteen slaves.<sup>12</sup> Two of the couple's three children were borne before John went to war – Nettie in 1858 and Rojester in 1861. Tennessee, internally divided over the issue of slavery, was the last of the

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<sup>12</sup> 1860 Fayette County, TN Slave Schedule.

eleven southern states to secede from the Union. Pro-Union sentiment dominated in mountainous East Tennessee where there were few plantations. Situated in the southwestern corner of the state, the Thurmans lived in the most secessionist portion of Tennessee. Mirroring the political atmosphere of his state, John Thurman waited to enlist until March, 1862, nine months after Tennessee officially seceded. He joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> TN Cavalry Regiment, leaving his wife Sallie to care for two young children and manage the plantation.<sup>13</sup>

Araminta and William Tripp lived in North Carolina. Married in 1863, the pair already had five of their eventual ten children by the end of 1861. William owned a farm he called Mount Hope in Durham's Creek, located in Beaufort County. There, he oversaw the activities of seventeen slaves.<sup>14</sup> In the 1850s, William served as a member of the Whig party in the Lower House of the North Carolina General Assembly. By the start of the war, however, he was devoting his entire attention to Mount Hope. Durham's Creek was a quiet farming community with a population of only 680 in 1860.<sup>15</sup> William, along with his mother and two cousins, made up about one-fifth of the area's slaveholding population.<sup>16</sup> In spite of Beaufort County's predominantly Union-supporting Whig population in the years leading up to the war, the county provided eleven companies in response to North Carolina Governor John Ellis' call for troops

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<sup>13</sup> National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); *Carded Records Showing Military Service of Soldiers Who Fought in Confederate Organizations, compiled 1903 - 1927, documenting the period 1861 - 1865*; Catalog ID: 586957; Record Group #: 109; Roll #: 14

<sup>14</sup> 1860 Beaufort County, NC Slave Schedule.

<sup>15</sup> 1860 U.S. Census.

<sup>16</sup> 1860 Beaufort County, NC Slave Schedule.

after the state seceded in 1861.<sup>17</sup> Among the volunteers was William Tripp, who was appointed captain of Company B of the 40<sup>th</sup> NC Infantry Regiment.<sup>18</sup>

Theophilus Perry graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1854. He joined his father in Marshall, Texas, located in the eastern part of the state, the following year. After establishing a law office in town, Theophilus received ten slaves and 130 acres of land from his father, who had already established a plantation nearby. Theophilus then began courting Harriet Person, a family acquaintance who lived in Louisburg, North Carolina. Harriet came from a wealthy family owning over thirty slaves.<sup>19</sup> She was educated at the Raleigh Female Classical Institute but agreed to move to Texas with Theophilus after their marriage in 1860. She gave birth to a daughter named Martha whom the couple nicknamed Sugar Lumpy. Cotton plantations dominated Harrison County, which contained more slaves than any other county in Texas by 1860.<sup>20</sup> This fact made the area a hotbed of secession sentiment. Theophilus' brother, several of his cousins, and three of Harriet's brothers served in the Confederate Army.<sup>21</sup> In spite of the rampant secessionism surrounding him, Theophilus waited until May of 1862 to enlist. He joined Company F of the 28<sup>th</sup> TX Cavalry, leaving behind a toddler and a pregnant wife.<sup>22</sup>

The Birds lived in central Georgia. Hailing from a planter family in Georgia, Edgeworth graduated from Georgetown College (now Georgetown University) in 1844. He returned home

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<sup>17</sup> C. Wingate Reed, *Beaufort County: Two Centuries of Its History* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Co., 1962), 177.

<sup>18</sup> National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); *Carded Records Showing Military Service of Soldiers Who Fought in Confederate Organizations, compiled 1903 - 1927, documenting the period 1861 - 1865*; Catalog ID: 586957; Record Group #: 109; Roll #: 301

<sup>19</sup> 1860 Franklin County, NC Slave Schedule.

<sup>20</sup> Handbook of Texas Online, Randolph B. Campbell, "Marshall, TX."

<sup>21</sup> *Widows by the Thousand: The Civil War Letters of Theophilus and Harriet Perry, 1862-1864*, ed. M. Jane Johansson (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), xxiii. While Theophilus' six cousins joined regiments in Texas, the brothers of both Harriet and Theophilus fought in North Carolina regiments.

<sup>22</sup> Johansson, Jane M., *Widows by the Thousand*, 1.



to establish his own plantation. Called Granite Farm, the plantation was located outside of Sparta in Hancock County and boasted twenty-one slaves.<sup>23</sup> He married Sallie Baxter in 1848, with whom he had two children by the end of the decade. Though many in the Birds' social circle were Whigs, Edgeworth believed strongly in secession. He ran unsuccessfully as a secessionist delegate for the state of Georgia in January, 1861. Nevertheless, the delegates voted to secede without his help. In July, 1861, Edgeworth was commissioned as 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant in Company E of the 15<sup>th</sup> GA Infantry Regiment.<sup>24</sup> Edgeworth and Sallie's daughter Saida, and son, Wilson, were twelve and ten respectively when their father enlisted. Both travelled intermittently to school during the war, Wilson to Athens and Saida to the Lucy Cobb Institute in Athens and later the Academy of the Visitation in Washington, DC. Without small children to take care of, Sallie's primary duties at Granite Farm in her husband's absence were to ensure the continued smooth running of the plantation.

Sallie Thurman, Araminta Tripp, Harriet Perry, Sallie Bird, and their husbands participated in the antebellum South's social structure as well as its disruption during the Civil War. Their wartime experiences and the way they wrote about them to their husbands reveals that when confronted with problems created by the breakdown of gender relations, women sought paternalistic solutions that would return them to comfortable antebellum norms.

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<sup>23</sup> 1860 Hancock County, GA Slave Schedule.

<sup>24</sup> National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); *Carded Records Showing Military Service of Soldiers Who Fought in Confederate Organizations, compiled 1903 - 1927, documenting the period 1861 - 1865*; Catalog ID: 586957; Record Group #: 109; Roll #: 290

## Chapter 1

### Perception, Reality, and Discourse: Women's Conception of their Own Dependence

William and Araminta Tripp in Beaufort County, North Carolina, felt apprehensive about the prospect of Araminta assuming control of their farm and sixteen slaves when William volunteered for service in the Confederate Army in the fall of 1861. William sent his anxious wife regular notes of assurance in his early letters, telling her in June of 1862, "you my dear wife must do the best you can without your husband."<sup>1</sup> He acknowledged not only her fears of failing in a traditionally masculine role, but also that they both felt that she needed him as a patriarch to guide her in that new role. William continued to send his wife detailed instructions on how to manage slaves and crops through the beginning of 1863, but by February of that year he began to refer to them as her slaves and her crops. He became confident in her ability to run their farm in his absence, even as her doubts persisted. In a reply to her complaints about her brother-in-laws' insistence on giving her advice, William wrote, "I would far prefer yours and Rhoden [a trusted slave]'s judgment to theirs in the management of my farm stock." If she wished for anyone's advice, he said, she should ask her own father because he "is the proper one to advise with and I am perfectly willing for you to take his advice in managing my or rather *your* affairs ... what is at home is yours and you are mine."<sup>2</sup>

The Tripps' experience serves as a prime example of that of other women in the Confederate slaveholding class who found themselves in situations similar to Araminta's.

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<sup>1</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, June 8, 1861, Folder 3, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

<sup>2</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, February 1863. Folder 6, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers. Rhoden was the Tripps' most trusted slave before and during the war, and William regularly urged Araminta to lean on him for advice when William could not be reached in time. The racial and hierarchal dynamics between Araminta and Rhoden in the absence of William will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Araminta and William's marriage was what marriage historian Stephanie Coontz has described as a "sentimental marriage" founded on love and affection, which became the ideal in the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> For women like Araminta, the physical absence of husbands fighting in the Civil War increased the degree to which the women perceived their dependence on their husbands. Emotional dependence manifested itself in a variety of ways for each woman, but most often it was expressed in the importance of letters and in the physical responses to the stresses and anxieties of separation. The way women talked about these manifestations of emotional dependence reveals the extent to which they felt dependent on their husbands in more practical ways, as well as change over time. This chapter argues that women's frustrations with their emotional need for their husbands prevented them from acknowledging their diminished need for practical male support.

### *Female Discourse in Letter Writing*

For literate women in the nineteenth century, like Araminta Tripp and the other women discussed in this chapter, letter writing was an important and widely discussed practice. Women received instruction from diverse sources throughout their lives, including etiquette manuals and literature, and letter writing played a prominent role.<sup>4</sup> Everything from penmanship to content was thought to reflect a woman's character. A woman's image, especially in the antebellum South, was rigidly defined. "From earliest childhood girls were trained to the ideals of perfection and submission," historian Anne Firor Scott has observed, "by the time they arrived at their teens

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<sup>3</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2005), 146.

<sup>4</sup> Deirdre M. Mahoney, "'More Than an Accomplishment': Advice on Letter Writing for Nineteenth-Century American Women," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66 (2003), 411.

most girls had absorbed the injunctions of the myth.”<sup>5</sup> Letter writing, then, was a way for women to show that they had mastered the ideals of their gender. As in society as a whole, women were reminded to suppress emotion in letters, even to close friends and family. Women were especially discouraged from expressing anger to loved ones. *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, published in 1859, advised women that “an angry letter, especially if the writer be well loved, is so much fiercer than an angry speech, so much more unendurable.” It was preferable that women who wrote an angry letter should “burn it before breakfast.”<sup>6</sup>

During the Civil War, women expressed their thoughts and feelings to their husbands in letters. As other historians have noted, it is tempting to read letters as true representations of their writers’ experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Nonetheless, even intimate, private letters to a spouse must be interpreted in their own context. As historian Regina Kunzel has observed in her own research, “at the same time that these letters shed light onto the experience [of the writers], they draw attention to the inextricability of that experience from its representation.”<sup>7</sup> The truth of what women wrote cannot be disassociated from the fact that they were writing to their husbands. However, as historian Michele Landis Dauber has noted, this does not have to mean that letter writers are untrustworthy narrators of their own lives. Letters, she argues, “certainly do contain empirical statements, most probably true, but not selected and presented in a way likely

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<sup>5</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970), 7.

<sup>6</sup> “Be Careful What You Write,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* (December 1859), 557, quoted in Deirdre M. Mahoney, “‘More Than an Accomplishment’: Advice on Letter Writing for Nineteenth-Century American Women,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66 (2003), 421.

<sup>7</sup> Regina Kunzel, “Pulp Fictions and Problem Girls: Reading and Rewriting Single Pregnancy in the Postwar United States,” *The American Historical Review* 100 (December 1995), 1470. Kunzel discusses the use of letters as a primary source in general, though she specifically uses letters written by single mothers to The Children’s Bureau in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

to produce an unbiased view of reality.”<sup>8</sup> What women chose to include and how they wrote about it matters. Even though Kunzel and Dauber’s research dealt primarily with letters to political groups or public figures, their approach to using letters as a primary source is useful. Keeping in mind the rhetorical strategies employed by wives, whether consciously or not, speaks to the level of importance they placed on certain topics. What women chose to share also reveals some of their goals in writing letters. However, the fact that these women wrote personal letters to their husbands mediates some of the problems of rhetoric by bringing their writing to a more intimate level. Any underlying motives women had were more likely to be personal rather than truly political.

The inevitable separation caused by the husband’s entry into the Civil War created an opportunity for men and women to reflect on their antebellum relationship in an unprecedented way. This new experience, one described by historian Drew Gilpin Faust, “encouraged recognition, acknowledgment, and articulation of emotions that had in peacetime been ignored or taken for granted.”<sup>9</sup> The only practical way for men and women to express this new phenomenon during wartime separation was through letters. Letters replaced the regular every day communications between husbands and wives. Historian George Rable has described the value of wartime letters in revealing the nature of family life. “The worries that surfaced in these letters,” he argues, “not only reflected the stress created by danger to loved ones but also pointed

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<sup>8</sup> Michele Landis Dauber, *The Sympathetic State: Disaster Relief and the Origins of the American Welfare State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 192. Like Kunzel, Dauber discusses the theoretical use of letters in historical research, which she applied to her research on women’s letters to Eleanor Roosevelt during the Great Depression. Both sources are situated in different centuries than this project, but provide a useful framework for approaching letters as a historical source in general.

<sup>9</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 118.

to subtle changes in the character of Southern family life.”<sup>10</sup> As Faust has pointed out, the scarcity and expense of paper for letters likely made them even more emotionally valuable and therefore separation “seemed to encourage a new frankness, a new emotional accessibility, and a new intensity of feeling between husbands and wives.”<sup>11</sup> Although these frank letters cannot be taken as unbiased depictions of reality, they do provide insight into how women felt about their wartime experiences. The discussion of female dependence in letters reveals an attempt by women to balance societal expectations of their femininity with their own feelings that emerged in response to their experiences during the Civil War.

### *The Practical Need for Men*

The roles of men and women within the southern family were almost mutually exclusive before the disruption of the Civil War. Women accepted a subordinate role within the family and society in exchange for an expected amount of male protection.<sup>12</sup> The husband’s role was to provide for and protect the family, while the wife was to contribute moral and emotional care for the family.<sup>13</sup> Each gender was thought to be most naturally suited to its own role, and therefore the exchange of protection for subordination did not seem as unfair as it might to modern eyes. Sallie Bird put it succinctly when she described her husband Edgeworth to their daughter as “him

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<sup>10</sup> George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 55.

<sup>11</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 118.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>13</sup> Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 146. Stephanie Coontz provides a detailed history of the political and economic developments of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that led to the trend she describes of women turning their backs on early calls for equality and the embrace of an ideology of separate spheres for the sexes. Contributing factors include the rise of Enlightenment thinking and the rise of the market economy.

who is nominally and really the head of our home, the chief of our house.”<sup>14</sup> As the Civil War inevitably removed the protection and paternal leadership promised to women by the hierarchal structure of southern society, women began to think more explicitly about the roles of both men and women.

As women began to experience more difficulties in their new roles at home, their perceived need for a male head similarly increased. Most women like Araminta Tripp showed remarkable competence in taking direction from their husbands and even making their own decisions. However, the comfortable structure of male protector over subordinate wife seemed preferable when life at home became particularly difficult. By early 1863, Harriet Perry had become so frustrated with the dynamics of her household without her husband Theophilus that she made the decision to break up the household and move in with her in-laws. She struggled with the decision, knowing that her husband would prefer she remain at home to manage the slaves, crops, and children herself rather than hire an overseer to do it for her. Tying with the idea, she wrote to Theophilus that she was feeling “tired and afraid to stay here alone” and revealed her frustrations with the slaves’ refusal to work for her.<sup>15</sup> She carefully described to him the plan his father had devised in the event Theophilus consented to the move. “I shall endeavor to manage the best I can,” she added in an effort to placate his worries that she would make a drastic decision.<sup>16</sup>

Despite her tentativeness in asking Theophilus to consent to her move, Harriet took more ownership in the ultimate decision when she later described it to her sister Sallie. “I tried living

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<sup>14</sup> Sallie to Saida Bird, December 2, 1861, *The Granite Farm Letters: The Civil War Correspondence of Edgeworth & Sallie Bird*, ed. John Rozier (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1988), 50.

<sup>15</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, February 8, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand: The Civil War Letters of Theophilus and Harriet Perry, 1862-1864*, ed. Jane M. Johansson (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 95.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

alone seven months & became so tired & dissatisfied I concluded it would be best to break up,” she wrote, without any allusion to the many conversations between her, Theophilus, and his father on the topic. Outside the gendered power dynamics between her and her husband, Harriet felt at liberty to tell Sallie how happy she now felt that she had “nothing to do but act out my part.”<sup>17</sup> Her husband’s expectations of both her ability and willingness to take over more responsibilities while he fought in the Confederate Army altered the way she talked to him about her desire to give up some of those responsibilities. However, with those dynamics out of the way, she could tell her sister how happy she was that in her father-in-law’s household, she could return to her “part” as a woman in a household with more traditional gender dynamics. Harriet’s sister echoed her feelings, telling her that she “was very glad indeed that you had broke up housekeeping. I thought so much about your staying there alone.” She told Harriet that by assuming her husband’s role, even temporarily, that she had “done more than I could ever be made to do.”<sup>18</sup>

Not every woman sought to alter her living situation so that it had a new male head to temporarily replace her husband. When they opted to remain at home alone, women, along with their husbands, worried about their ability to do a man’s job. The discrete differences between gender roles in the household made both genders think that women needed more guidance. John Thurman told his wife Sallie of his regret that he would not be able to give her as much guidance as she needed. “No, I can’t advise,” he told her. “You will have to act from the circumstances that surround you which I am afraid will be very trying.”<sup>19</sup> He had left her in charge of their young children and plantation, a new level of responsibility that was concerning for both of

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<sup>17</sup> Harriet Perry to Sallie M. Person, February 18, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 99.

<sup>18</sup> Sallie M. Person to Harriet Perry, May 17, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 111.

<sup>19</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, March 17, 1862, folder 10, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.



them. "I am trying to do the best I can my dear husband," Sallie Thurman wrote back, "and I wish I knew better what to do."<sup>20</sup> Though he attempted to fulfill her petitions for guidance over the course of the war, John had to either gain confidence in his wife or encourage her to trust herself and the opinions of others. In early 1865, he told her, "I don't feel competent to advise you as I can't see what circumstances may turn up." Instead, he told her, "I must trust you and the advice of your friends."<sup>21</sup> Like John, William Tripp felt that he would not be able to advise his wife as much as she needed. "You must do the best you can dear wife," he told Araminta, "as I have no time to plan for you."<sup>22</sup> William saw this as a good thing, however. "But perhaps it is best," he told her later, "and in fact I know it is for you to have some experience about managing affairs before I am dead as in the natural course of nature you will be left a widow if not by the war." He continued, "the little advice I can give you, situated as I am so far off and not being cognizant of the facts personally, can be of little use to you."<sup>23</sup>

In spite of the difficulty of directing from afar, most men still attempted to advise their wives to the best of their ability. Most often, their instructions were accompanied by the suggestion to consult other men. Theophilus Perry gave thorough directions to his wife on when to plant certain crops and how to handle various transactions, but he always told her to consult with his father. He never fully trusted in her discretion. When Harriet did voice her opinion on a business decision, however, Theophilus listened and gave his approval willingly. "You have acted right in not buying land," he told her, "I approve your judgment."<sup>24</sup> Despite this affirmation

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<sup>20</sup> Sallie to John Thurman, May 28, 1862, folder 10, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>21</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, February 20, 1865, folder 16, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>22</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, October 9, 1861, folder 2, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>23</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, February 8, 1863, folder 4, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>24</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, March 13, 1864, *Widows by the Thousand*, 226.

of her decision-making ability, he regularly told her to “consult Papa always.”<sup>25</sup> Edgeworth Bird also hoped his wife would consult with other nearby men. Though he gave very detailed instructions to Sallie about how to manage prices, organize cotton planting, and divide duties between slaves, he still told her she “must talk with father and others and learn what will be best.”<sup>26</sup> Even though his absence made it difficult to give thorough advice, he told Sallie he was still “glad you always tell me of the plantation work,” as it enabled him to guide her from a distance.<sup>27</sup> Asking for and giving advice enabled women and men to retain the gender dynamics they had enjoyed before the war, even though women were performing roles completely outside their traditional sphere.

In spite of advice from their husbands, women never expressed full confidence in their ability to do a man’s job. Araminta Tripp regularly complained about her problems and told William, “I do so need you to lean on.”<sup>28</sup> William, whose confidence in his wife easily lapped her own by the end of the war, reassured his wife that she had proven to be a competent farm manager by 1864. “Be sure your husband will approve of anything you may do,” he told her, “knowing you will always do what you think is best.”<sup>29</sup> Harriet Perry told her sister about her problems at home without her husband. “I reckon I am getting on as well as any one under the circumstances,” Harriet told her, “but it is poor doings where there is no man.”<sup>30</sup> A month later, Harriet was worried about renting her house after she had moved in with her in-laws. “Oh husband. I don’t know what to do,” she told Theophilus, after describing the situation.

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<sup>25</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, January 12, 1864, *Widows by the Thousand*, 195.

<sup>26</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, September 25, 1861, *The Granite Farm Letters*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, February 27, 1863, *The Granite Farm Letters*, 111.

<sup>28</sup> Araminta to William Tripp, September 4, 1864, folder 7, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>29</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, February 11, 1864, folder 6, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>30</sup> Harriet Perry to Mary Temperance Person, January 6, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 79.

“Everything is so unsatisfactory to me without yourself.”<sup>31</sup> Difficulties were attributed to gender; men were better suited to outdoor business, and without real support women were unable to do it as effectively as men could.

Their husbands also expressed this sentiment. However, men were more willing to give their wives credit for their success. Most often, husbands thought their wives succeeded at doing a male job in spite of being women. Edgeworth Bird told his wife, “were I only at home, I know we’d have a greater abundance on the plantation, for it has always been a very peculiar business and one that I love and, of course, I could conduct it more successfully.” He continued, however, “and then we really do very well,” with her in charge.<sup>32</sup> He explained how he understood his wife’s ability to his daughter, Saida. “She has many trials and burdens at home,” he told Saida, “the care of a plantation is a new onus and not properly belonging to her department, but under necessity she assumes it bravely, and right ably and skillfully does she direct.”<sup>33</sup> John Thurman expressed similar sentiments. “I deeply sympathize with you,” he told his wife Sallie, “I know it is hard for a woman to meet ... what you will be compelled to until I am free from the duties of a soldier.”<sup>34</sup> William Tripp, in spite of his confidence in Araminta’s ability to step into a male role, admitted that doing so was difficult for her as a woman. “I do wish from my heart I could be with you love to take all the trouble of the outdoor business off of your hands.”<sup>35</sup> In the meantime, however, she “must do the best you can without me for some time.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, February 8, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 98.

<sup>32</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, July 17, 1864, *The Granite Farm Letters*, 174.

<sup>33</sup> Edgeworth to Saida Bird, August 10, 1864, *The Granite Farm Letters*, 184.

<sup>34</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, June 22, 1864, folder 14, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>35</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, January 21, 1863, folder 5, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>36</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, April 5, 1862, folder 3, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

In spite of their relative husband's willingness to congratulate their success, women continued to ask for advice and express uneasiness at their new roles throughout the end of the war. The decision to write about such feelings in letters to their husbands reveals several things. Principally, it serves as evidence of women's actual belief in their ineptitude at doing male work. They found their new roles difficult, especially in contrast to their distinctly different female duties before the war. Their discussion of their problems also reveals their efforts to remain loyal to patriarchal structures. Asking for advice, even after their husbands had assured them that they trusted their opinion, was a way for women to cling to the gender relations to which they were accustomed. Women were able to complain about problems the war created in a way that did not deviate from gendered expectations of their sex.

### *The Emotional Need for Men*

Choosing a spouse based on love became a social ideal in the United States by the end of the eighteenth century. As men and women's roles in society became decidedly more distinct, home life and marriage became a place of refuge for individuals of both sexes.<sup>37</sup> In love-based marriages, the concept of emotional necessity was freely discussed. Edgeworth Bird expressed this idea to his wife Sallie when he wrote in 1861, "precious, I know I am necessary to you. I feel that I form a portion in you that if taken away could not be replaced. Every letter you send me breathes it in every line and my heart tells me of its truth, you precious darling of my soul."<sup>38</sup> Wives articulated similar feelings. Though women were aware that they depended on their husbands emotionally before the war, their need for emotional support became more pronounced as the war prolonged marital separation. As she considered her wartime feelings, Harriet Perry

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<sup>37</sup> Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 146.

<sup>38</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, September 25, 1861, *The Granite Farm Letters*, 34.

reflected on her antebellum relationship to her husband. “I think I shall be as happy as I desire so you shall have a better wife than you ever had before,” she wrote him, adding that once they were reunited, “I shall know how to appreciate you.”<sup>39</sup> Harriet felt more aware of the emotional support Theophilus had given her before the war once it was taken away.

When discussing their emotional need for their husbands, women often spoke about letters themselves. Many women transferred the dependence they had placed on their husbands before the war onto the letters they received from them after war removed them physically. Without the physical presence of their male counterparts, women leaned heavily on letters as the only concrete form of news, affection, and emotional reassurance available to them. As the war progressed and the reality of the war’s length became more apparent, women increasingly began to express their reliance on letters and their husbands for emotional support. As Faust has pointed out, “the emotional lives of Confederate couples separated by war did in fact depend heavily on the mundane inadequacies of the new national postal service.”<sup>40</sup> Without their husbands, women turned to the next best thing: their words.

Many women spent a considerable portion of the limited space of their letters telling their husbands how emotionally important letters were to them. For many, these letters served the simple purpose of cheering themselves up. “Do my own precious husband write as often as you can,” Araminta wrote William, “for your letters are inexpressibly dear to me. They cheer me for days after receiving one.”<sup>41</sup> Harriet Perry wrote to her husband Theophilus in September of 1862 to tell him: “*do write often*, for all the pleasure I have depends on it – Your letters are almost the only sources of joy & comfort I have.” She continued, “But for them & our little

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<sup>39</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, September 15, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 31.

<sup>40</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 115.

<sup>41</sup> Araminta to William Tripp, December 5, 1862, folder 3, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

darling, life would be a blank to my poor heart.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in describing his letters Sallie Thurman told her husband that “next to your dear, sweet self I had rather be visited by one of them than anything else.”<sup>43</sup> Telling their husbands how much they appreciated and enjoyed their letters served as encouragement for them to write more often. After describing the difficulties women were having in their new roles at home, women expressed to their husbands that the simple act of sending a letter was a way for men to ease their wives’ burdens.

The decision of what to include in a letter was important. During the Civil War, post was unreliable and writing supplies became scarce, especially among soldiers. Soldiers carried paper, pens, and stamps with them and regularly requested such items from home. Stamps, especially, were highly prized, since by the time of the war prepayment on postage was necessary.<sup>44</sup> According to one account, a single U.S. postage stamp was worth a dollar and fifty cents in the Confederacy, which historian David Henkin has proposed “reflected more than just the depreciation of Southern money.”<sup>45</sup> In addition to scarce supplies, letter writers faced problems with unreliable and infrequent deliveries. Some southerners reported that they did not receive mail for months at a time during the war.<sup>46</sup> The post office confronted practical problems of delivering letters to and from soldiers in camps that were significantly far from home. When letter writers told their correspondents about the obstacles facing mail delivery, they often did so to stress a letter’s value, rather than excuse infrequency.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, September 15, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 27. Emphasis in original.

<sup>43</sup> Sallie to John Thurman, March 18, 1865, folder 17, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>44</sup> David M. Henkin, *Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006). This book offers an history of the nineteenth century U.S. postal service and the tradition of American letter writing in general. For a specific discussion of the Civil War’s effect on post, see pages 137-146.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>46</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 116.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

The appropriate content of wartime letters was widely discussed. Confederate officials worried that sad and depressing letters from home would affect their soldiers' morale. They turned to newspapers in order to tell women "Don't Write Gloomy Letters" in an effort to ensure all news from home was cheerful.<sup>48</sup> Just as they had before the war, women were encouraged to refrain from including negative emotions in their letters. However, not only government officials expressed opinions on what women should or should not include in their letters. Husbands, too, reprimanded their wives for writing despairing letters. "Sallie you must not be despondent," John Thurman wrote to his wife.<sup>49</sup> Letters were comforting to men as well, and they wanted good news from home rather than bad. John wrote to Sallie later, praising a "soul-changing letter" that she had sent.<sup>50</sup>

In spite of warnings not to, women scolded their husbands in letters. Most often they expressed dissatisfaction at poorly written or infrequent letters. "I beg you my beloved absent one forgive my sad theme this evening," Sallie Thurman wrote her husband. "It has been so long since I heard from you, I feel depressed in consequence of it."<sup>51</sup> Araminta Tripp was more forceful when describing her frustrations with her husband's letter writing. She told William in 1863, "not a single word I have heard from you since Rhoden left you at Mr. Winfield's and though I have longed for a letter from you, with the *most intense longing*, not a line has reached me."<sup>52</sup> She expressed frustration that she had not received a letter from him in weeks. "But I cannot will not believe that you neglected me," she informed him, "so here ends the subject."<sup>53</sup> Harriet Perry was equally explicit in her frustrations with her husband's letter writing, scolding

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<sup>48</sup> *Huntsville Democrat*, August 21, 1861, quoted in Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 118.

<sup>49</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, May 24, 1862, folder 10, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Sallie to John Thurman, May 18, 1862, folder 10, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>52</sup> Araminta to William Tripp, September 3, 1865, folder 8, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers. Emphasis in original.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

him after he failed to adequately respond to questions in her last letter: “are you going to do so again? If you do, I shall think Husband is not himself, not like he used to be, that Camp life has made an awful change in him – can’t bear to be treated with indifference & especially by you.”<sup>54</sup>

Harriet knew that her husband disliked letters such as this. She wrote them anyways, telling him:

Husband you *must* write regularly & often - *once a week* any how if not twice - I know you have many good excuses for not writing, & I recon you do the best you can, but I die to hear often[.] I lose *all* interest in everything when one & two weeks pass & I get no letter - I don’t mean to complain darling, only please write if you can & *come too, oh do come how can I do without you*. I don’t mean to urge you too much, but you know how I feel dear husband. Don’t let what I write make you sad.<sup>55</sup>

Harriet carefully concluded her petition for more frequent letters by assuring her husband that she did not meant to complain or urge him too much. She promised that she did not intend to make him sad by going against his wishes. However, several months later her petitions continued. “You do not do my right Husband by delaying and neglecting to write,” she said. “I know you have little time, but you could write a little.”<sup>56</sup> Theophilus, to his credit, attempted to reassure his wife that he was following her orders. “I write you very often,” Theophilus Perry assured his anxious wife, “I fear my letters miscarry. It is said here that letters do not go the other way. They come more faithfully.”<sup>57</sup> Harriet’s willingness to go against her husband’s wishes and chastise him for not writing enough speaks to the importance she placed on his letters. Moreover, she used precious space in unreliable letters to do so.

Husbands also chose to focus on how important positive letters were for their morale, rather than explicitly reprimanding their wives for despondent letters. They encouraged women to write more often in the same way their wives had asked them to do so. William Tripp praised

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<sup>54</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, January 18, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 85.

<sup>55</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, October 26, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 48. Emphasis in original.

<sup>56</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, January 18, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 88.

<sup>57</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, July 12, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 149.



Araminta for a happy letter in January, 1863. “You certainly felt cheerful,” he told her, “for it breathes a spirit of cheerfulness through all its lines.”<sup>58</sup> “You can’t form an idea my darling wife,” John Thurman told Sallie, “of my happiness of the morning of the first to have handed me your dear letter.”<sup>59</sup> Edgeworth Bird told his daughter that his wife’s letters “are an inexpressible comfort and pleasure, by far the greatest experience in this miserable war life.”<sup>60</sup> To his wife, Edgeworth was effusive on the topic. “Last evening the mail man brought me a letter, and *two* two days before, from my heart’s home,” he wrote Sallie. “Oh! Darling, shall I again say how sweet and consoling, or have you learned the oft-told tale by heart?”<sup>61</sup> Theophilus Perry likewise reminded his wife of how important her letters were to him. “Do not neglect to write,” he told her. “My love, my peace demands it.”<sup>62</sup> For both men and women, letters served as a replacement for emotional support they had received from their spouse before the war.

Women also talked about the way they depended on their husbands through discussion of illness. Women regularly complained of anxiety, nervousness, and headaches in their letters to their husbands. They believed these conditions were caused by their wartime situation, and that the only cure was a husband’s safe return home. “Though I do not complain to any *one*,” Harriet Perry wrote her husband, “I have had palpitation of the heart nearly every morning since you left & sometimes so severely if I did not sit or lie down I should fall...I attribute it to my situation.”<sup>63</sup> These physical responses to the anxiety associated with a husband’s absence and the new responsibilities that followed appear to have been chronic for those women who experienced them. Araminta Tripp complained to her husband that her feelings of nervousness and uneasiness

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<sup>58</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, January 5, 1863, folder 4, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>59</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, May 5, 1862, folder 10, John P and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>60</sup> Edgeworth to Saida Bird, August 10, 1864, *Granite Farm Letters*, 184.

<sup>61</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, September 22, 1861, *Granite Farm Letters*, 28-29.

<sup>62</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, July 9, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 149.

<sup>63</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, August 3, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 12.

became exacerbated each time he returned to war after his furloughs. "I was really glad to get a letter from you so soon," he wrote to Araminta soon after a returning from a furlough in July of 1864, "but darling I was extremely sorry to find that parting from me affected you so."<sup>64</sup>

Araminta felt physically ill each time her husband left her for war and held little back in telling him so. "I am feeling much better now and hope to be well soon," she wrote William in 1863, "I am sure that my ill health is caused by anxiety."<sup>65</sup> William came to the same conclusion, and told her, "I do really believe dear if I could be at home with you for a month or so you would recover in a great measure your health and perhaps your spirits."<sup>66</sup> Like Araminta, William believed that his presence would alleviate her symptoms. Not only would he be able to take over some of her new stressful duties, but his physical presence would provide better emotional support than his letters could. "I should feel so happy and at rest if you were with me and could stay," Araminta told William. "Now I feel tired all the time, even thinking wearies me."<sup>67</sup> Men and women associated separation with the physical ailments wives experienced when facing the new challenges male absence created.

The relief wives obtained from letters or furloughs served to reinforce their thoughts on the origin of these maladies as well as the intensity of their dependence on their husbands. Receiving a letter from an absent husband not only provided women with emotional support, but it also physically relieved women of symptoms of stress. Letters themselves were proof of a husband's survival. "I breathed freely once more," Sallie Thurman described to her husband

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<sup>64</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, July 17, 1864, folder 7, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>65</sup> Araminta to William Tripp, September 10, 1863, folder 5, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>66</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, February 11, 1864, folder 6, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>67</sup> Araminta to William Tripp, September 4, 1864, folder 7, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

John after finally receiving a letter from him.<sup>68</sup> Acknowledging the incomplete reliability of mail service, Edgeworth Bird wrote to his wife, “I trust some of my letters have reached you along, sufficient to keep down a full grown anxiety.”<sup>69</sup> Harriet Perry believed her husband’s presence, even in the form of a letter, would improve her condition. “Oh Husband I feel as if I should die here all alone,” she wrote, “I can’t take *any* interest in any thing in the world hardly [except] my baby & I don’t think any thing could arouse me but your presence.” She continued, “I reckon it is low spirits or hysterics – I am all low & when I get your precious letters, nothing cheers me like them.”<sup>70</sup> Her husband’s brief return in a furlough or even physical proof of his survival in the form of a letter served to alleviate fears of the worst even as it served to reinforce women’s ideas of their own emotional dependency. After all, the only cure for a husband’s absence was his safe return.

Women expressed their emotional need for their husbands in their discussion of letters. They expressed their frustration when men did not write often enough. They told men how much letters meant to them. They told them how much joy, comfort, and peace letters brought. Women wrote to their husbands to tell them that their letters had alleviated physical pain. Doing so served to encourage men to write more and more often. It reinforced the idea that women depended on men for practical reasons as well; if separation made women sad and physically ill, then they would be even less able to perform male duties. In writing this way, women communicated to their husbands that they needed them. If men’s physical presence was impossible, then letters would have to suffice. Regardless, this rhetoric reveals the extent to which women believed they needed their husbands, and the length to which they were willing to go in order to convince them of it. Women were able to talk about their frustrations with the war

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<sup>68</sup> Sallie to John Thurman, March 10, 1865, folder 17, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>69</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, October 21, 1863, *The Granite Farm Letters*, 156.

<sup>70</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, September 24, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 41. Emphasis in original.

itself by emphasizing a traditionally female concern, rather than complaining about the war itself.

### *Conclusion*

Women's emotional need for their husbands amplified their conception of how much they needed men for practical support. They stepped outside of their gendered role when their husbands left for war and therefore faced unprecedented new challenges. Husbands, especially those secure in the dynamics of their relationships with their wives, were more willing to express confidence in their wives ability to assume new roles that were outside of their traditional gendered sphere. This confidence may have stemmed out of necessity, both in terms of encouraging their wives to continue on and because they may have had no other choice while they performed their duty to the southern cause. Women successfully demonstrated an ability to perform male roles in their husband's absence, and their husbands were more willing than the women to acknowledge that success.

In their letters, women were unwilling to acknowledge their success to the degree that their husbands were. Instead, they wrote their husbands letters to tell them how much they needed them. They told their husbands that the best solution to their hardship was for men to return home. In using this language, women moved within their prescribed gender role in order to express frustrations with the war. Doing so enabled them to remain patriotic and continue to support their husbands. At the same time, they were able to articulate what they believed would be a solution to their problems: a return to antebellum gender relations, in which their husband was safely at home. As they expressed it to their husbands, women's perception of their practical

need for men was amplified by the emotional support they desired. To them, the best way to obtain this support was through more letters or the return of their husband to the home front.

## Chapter 2

### **Mothers and Mistresses: The Changing Roles of Women Within the Wartime Household**

Harriet Perry was already several months pregnant with her second child when her husband Theophilus volunteered for service in May of 1862. In addition to her pregnancy, she was left with the charge of their daughter Martha (whom they affectionately called Sugar Lumpy) and ten slaves. She dreaded facing labor and childbirth without her husband. “Oh if you were with me,” Harriet wrote Theophilus about the impending birth, “this trying time would be robbed of half its fears and terrors.”<sup>1</sup> In these early months of separation, Harriet also became quite anxious over Martha’s recurrent health problems. She worried about her daughter’s teething difficulties and nearly constant stomach issues. Martha was sick for several days in September, 1862, and Harriet wrote to her husband, “how I missed you. I had all the care of her myself no one to help or sympathise as *you always do*, and as no one else *could* do but your sweet self.”<sup>2</sup> Harriet gave birth to a son, named Theophilus Jr., on Christmas Eve 1862 and gained another person to worry about. Though Theophilus did not engage in combat until May of 1864, Harriet faced unprecedented domestic battles at home from the moment her husband left for war.

In this first year of Theophilus’ absence, Harriet’s relationship with her slaves became increasingly difficult. She worried from the beginning they would not respect her new authority. “...The negroes seem to do as well as when you were here so far,” she told her husband in

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<sup>1</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, October 30, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand: The Civil War Letters of Theophilus and Harriet Perry, 1862-1864*, ed. M. Jane Johansson (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 51.

<sup>2</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, September 1, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 27. Emphasis in original.

August, 1862, “I can’t tell how long they will hold out.”<sup>3</sup> Harriet found that the slaves became more disobedient the longer she remained their sole mistress. After Lincoln issued his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September of 1862, Harriet became fearful of her future with the slaves. “I have not been afraid to stay here till now,” she wrote Theophilus after hearing the news, “I feel very uneasy indeed – write often dearest.”<sup>4</sup> By February of 1863, Harriet became so frustrated with recalcitrant slaves and single motherhood that she decided to hire out the slaves and rent their home to a refugee, and she moved with her two young children to her father-in-law’s plantation several miles away.

Harriet’s difficulties with caring for her children and managing slaves stemmed from a breakdown of her household’s social structure. Theophilus’ absence exacerbated her fears over Martha’s health, Theophilus Jr.’s birth, and motherhood in general. The slaves’ refusal to accept her authority in place of her husband’s was a direct result of his absence. Harriet’s predicament reached a point where she had to make a decision on how to alleviate her problems. For her, the solution was to seek out a new living arrangement that more accurately mirrored the one she had been accustomed to before the war. Her father-in-law became first a temporary patriarch and then a permanent one when Theophilus was mortally wounded in April of 1864.

Harriet Perry’s experience with wartime motherhood and slaveholding raises questions about the problems other women in her situation might have faced. Were the adversities she encountered with sick children, childbirth, and unmanageable slaves universal? Or was her particular situation especially bad? What problems did other women face which Harriet did not? Evaluating the circumstances surrounding each woman’s wartime experience sheds light on the way the war affected the dynamics at home between women, children, and slaves. Why did

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<sup>3</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, August 4, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, October 26, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 50.

Harriet choose to break up her household when other women did not? Did other women in her situation seek out similar solutions in a different way?

Multiple factors affected the types of problems women faced and the extent to which they experienced them in their husbands' absence. Challenges a woman could face as a mother varied depending on how many children she had, her children's health, whether she became pregnant during the war, and her husband's degree of involvement as a father before the war. The number of slaves the family owned, the type of labor they performed, and the relationship women had with their household's slaves could similarly impact the types of challenges they faced as the slaves' sole mistress during the war. The changes in intra-household dynamics were varied because each woman's antebellum situation was so diverse. However, Southern patriarchal social structure and its clearly defined gender roles served as the underlying factor that connected the experiences of all the women in this group. The pervasive nature of Southern patriarchy exacerbated the problems women faced at home during the war, however varied those problems were. In search of a solution, women reached for the familiarity of patriarchy in ways as varied as the problems themselves.

### *Mothers and Children in the Antebellum South*

The southern household, especially the elite slaveholding one, served as a microcosm of greater southern society. Harriet Perry and her husband, along with the Birds, Thurmans, and Tripps, participated in this southern social structure. The structure of individual household dynamics reveals the pervasiveness of patriarchal ideology that has been well documented by historians. A deep divide in societal gender roles determined the discrete roles men and women played at home. Historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese characterized these domestic divisions by



arguing that “men represented those families and households in the larger worlds of politics and warfare, or, to reverse matters, women belonged within families and household under the governance and protection of their men.”<sup>5</sup> It was in these families and households that the ideal southern woman would thrive. This woman was “gracious, fragile, and deferential to the men upon whose protection she depended.”<sup>6</sup> Additionally, virtue and morality were “intrinsic to the female identity.”<sup>7</sup> This conception of gender remained rooted in biology in the South through the middle of the nineteenth century and served to reinforce the legitimacy of the patriarchal ideology. And, as historian Anne Firor Scott points out, the ideal of the southern woman was not an implicit expectation, but one that was spoken and written about in novels, literary journals, sermons, and even by women themselves.<sup>8</sup> There existed simultaneously a belief that women were more naturally suited to be society’s moral authority and an expectation that they should be. The southern household was the woman’s domain where her inherent virtue could thrive and privately guide the future members of society. Her influence at home was seen as essential to the preservation and perpetuation of southern social structure.

Motherhood, then, lay at the center of the nineteenth-century woman’s experience. Incredible social pressure to embody true southern womanhood made motherhood the optimal means to achieve that goal. In becoming a mother, women were given the opportunity to influence young minds and contribute to the overall improvement of society. They could express their virtue by raising sons who would effectively participate in wider society and daughters who would go on to raise even more respectable citizens. The ideal woman became the ideal mother.

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 195.

<sup>6</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 109.

<sup>7</sup> V. Lynn Kennedy, *Born Southern: Childbirth, Motherhood, and Social Networks in the Old South* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970), 4.

Though antebellum southerners did not invent the glorification of motherhood, as Lynn Kennedy argues, the nineteenth century saw its intensification.<sup>9</sup> Women gained more influence while society increasingly came to understand children's character to be more malleable, further justifying the importance of motherhood.

Despite motherhood's status as the ultimate female goal, women feared pregnancy in the nineteenth-century South. The discourse surrounding pregnancy equated it to an illness. In talking about pregnancy in such terms, women not only referenced its side effects like nausea or an upset stomach, but the state of being pregnant in and of itself. Everything about antebellum doctors' approach to pregnancy, Sally McMillen has argued, supports the idea that childbirth was an illness and that pregnant women were invalids.<sup>10</sup> The very real threat that childbirth posed to a woman's life contributed to this discourse. In 1850, white women in the South died at twice the rate of those in New England and the Middle Atlantic states.<sup>11</sup> Childbirth, by modern standards, was dangerous throughout the United States in this period. However, the South's unhealthy climate combined with the fact that southern women became pregnant more often than women in the North increased the likelihood that they would die in childbirth.<sup>12</sup> The risk of childbirth was widely known and feared. Pregnancy's association with illness and death contributed to the practice of limiting a woman's activity while she was pregnant. Additionally, gradual recovery was expected for new mothers, in keeping with the ideal of female delicacy.<sup>13</sup> While women feared pregnancy and childbirth, gender norms allowed them to devote significant

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<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 106.

<sup>11</sup> McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 81.

<sup>12</sup> McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 81

<sup>13</sup> Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 75.

time to preparing for and recovering from it, to the extent the needs of her other children would allow.

Aside from their role as moral educators, mothers were responsible for the health and nurture of their children. Breastfeeding marked the first occasion of a mother's physical and symbolic nurturing of her child.<sup>14</sup> The most effective way for Southern women to keep their infants healthy was through breastfeeding, especially given the relative unsafe nature of bottle-feeding at a time before pasteurization.<sup>15</sup> Child illness was a major concern due to its prevalence, and a vast majority of families experienced the death of an infant.<sup>16</sup> When dealing with child illness, women were preoccupied with teething and bowel health. Teething was believed to be the source of most childhood illnesses given that it occurred during children's most vulnerable early years.<sup>17</sup> A constant source of anxiety for mothers was their child's health, especially since children's well-being was their primary responsibility.

As in broader Southern society, men and women played decidedly different roles in parenting their children. Men's involvement in childrearing varied significantly more than women's did. In keeping with the contemporary concept of masculinity, men most often saw their parental role as commanders and providers for their children.<sup>18</sup> While women managed the day-to-day care for their children's health and well-being, men more often stepped back and instead provided advice and support. They gave their wives advice on topics ranging from weaning to education. As the ultimate authority figure of the Southern household, they generally expected their wives to take their advice. They gave their wives instruction on how best to raise daughters and sons, the content of which often differed. When their children were ill, men were

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<sup>14</sup> McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 100.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>18</sup> Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 130.

more likely to act as a medical consultant or a means of emotional support for their exhausted wives than to participate in the actual childcare.<sup>19</sup> Men's participation in childcare most often reflected their role in society as a whole, just as motherhood embodied the Southern feminine ideal.

### *Mothers and Children in the Civil War*

Each of the women examined in this project confronted unique domestic challenges after their husbands left for war. All were married and had children by 1861, though the number of children, their ages, and how long the couples had been married varied. Both Harriet Perry and Araminta Tripp were pregnant during the war. While Harriet was already several months pregnant when her husband enlisted, Araminta became pregnant in June of 1864 when her husband William returned on furlough.<sup>20</sup> In addition to Harriet and Araminta, Sallie Thurman had multiple children under the age of three at the start of the war. Sallie Bird, on the other hand, had older children whose ages were eleven and thirteen. Araminta had five of her eventual ten children by 1861, while Harriet had only one. The length of the couples' marriages ranged from one year to well over ten, not accounting for years of courtship. Though their familial situations varied, each woman was impacted by the pervasive societal expectations of motherhood in the nineteenth-century South as members of the slaveholding class. These expectations similarly influenced the new problems each woman faced in her husband's absence.

Already something to be dreaded, pregnancy became especially burdensome in the context of war and a husband's absence. Harriet Perry, with a self-described weak disposition and the experience of only one pregnancy, was particularly fearful of being pregnant in general,

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<sup>19</sup> McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 140.

<sup>20</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, November 20, 1864, folder 7, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Tripp papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

and especially without her husband Theophilus. “I feel very anxious and concerned about myself being here alone at this time,” she wrote him in October, “I cannot sleep at night.”<sup>21</sup> Araminta Tripp’s fears originated more from her concern that her pregnancy would interfere with the management of her farm, which she had to do to a greater extent than Harriet. After learning of her pregnancy, William wrote to Araminta, “Had I the power to do so I would undo the evil that I caused you while at home in June.”<sup>22</sup> He acknowledged that she “had more than enough on your shoulders before this occurred.”<sup>23</sup> Unlike Harriet’s frequent laments over her pregnancy, the Tripp correspondence in the months leading up to their sixth child’s birth continued to deal substantially more with the other children’s health, the success of the crops, the activities of the slaves, and updates on William. Araminta’s pregnancy was an added burden that made her ill and impeded her efforts to act in William’s absence. Pregnancy had no place in the life of a woman attempting to fully assume a patriarch’s role.

Both women desired that their husbands prioritize the birth of their children over their duties in the war effort. Harriet resolutely dreaded childbirth: “I experience daily & nightly all the horrors of giving birth to an infant in mind,” she wrote Theophilus, “I dread it much more, for I know now how bad it is.”<sup>24</sup> She told him how much easier the event would be if he could be with her but refrained from going so far as to expect him “for fear of being disappointed.”<sup>25</sup> Three months later, she wrote, “I have looked & wished for you till I am worn out and heart-sick.”<sup>26</sup> Harriet repeatedly declared how much comfort her husband’s presence would provide. In

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<sup>21</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, October 30, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 51.

<sup>22</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, October 29, 1864, folder 7, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Tripp papers.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, October 30, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 51.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, December 3, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 65.

doing so, she revealed how much she wished he would find a way to be with her during the birth. She wanted her husband to prioritize the problems she was facing at home in his absence.

Pregnant in 1864, Araminta likely knew William's presence during her delivery was more probable. William had been writing about wanting to resign from service for some time and began to discuss it seriously by September.<sup>27</sup> Araminta's uneasiness with delivering a child without William probably contributed to his resolution on the matter. By December, he told her of his plans to resign in January and promised to "make a big effort" to be with her when she gave birth.<sup>28</sup> Convinced the war had been lost, William resigned by mid-January of 1865.<sup>29</sup> He returned home in order to relieve his wife of the burdens he had left her with, including her pregnancy. Indeed, William's return allowed Araminta to resume a degree of normalcy that she had enjoyed when she gave birth to her older children before the war. A friend from Crawfordsville wrote to her in early March requesting that she visit with the baby. "You have no excuse now," she said, "as Capt. Tripp is home."<sup>30</sup>

Harriet Perry was exceptionally open about breastfeeding in her letters to her husband. This willingness to talk about a deeply female and therefore private matter likely came out of the impulse Drew Gilpin Faust has observed in the way letters encouraged unprecedented openness for couples during the war.<sup>31</sup> "I give the greatest quantity of milk as much again as I did before," Harriet wrote to her husband after Theophilus, Jr. was born in December, 1862. "He nurses a great deal & my breasts are *always* full, often painful," she continued in an example of her

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<sup>27</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, September 4, 1864, folder 7, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Tripp papers.

<sup>28</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, December 29, 1864, folder 7, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Tripp papers.

<sup>29</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, January 24, 1865, folder 8, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Tripp papers.

<sup>30</sup> Sidine to Araminta Tripp, March 4, 1865, folder 8, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Tripp papers.

<sup>31</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 118.

uncommon openness.<sup>32</sup> Even more, the degree to which her discussion of the matter involved expressing worry and asking for advice reveals the extent to which breastfeeding and, conversely, weaning troubled them in their husband's absence.

Harriet's difficulty with breastfeeding came primarily from being overwhelmed by the prospect of nursing two children at once. Theophilus' aunt stayed with Harriet after the birth of her son. "When Aunt Betsy goes home, I shall have my hands full nursing two babies," Harriet wrote her husband, "I don't know how I shall do."<sup>33</sup> Harriet had experienced problems breastfeeding her daughter Martha, and the thought of managing two nursing children was daunting, even though Theophilus, Jr. had proven more adept than his sister from the beginning. After Aunt Betsy left, Harriet would be left entirely alone again with the sole responsibility of two young children. Harriet moved in with her in-laws a month later. In her new household, she wrote more favorably about breastfeeding. "Theophilus is so good he will go to sleep with any one after he sucks enough," Harriet told her husband.<sup>34</sup> That other people were nearby to rock the baby to sleep while Harriet nursed her more finicky daughter quelled the uneasiness she had when faced with breastfeeding both children completely on her own.

Women constantly updated their husbands on the health of their children. The expectation that men should serve as providers of advice and support while women cared for sick children made handling illness during the war more difficult. The delay and diminution of paternal support caused by distance left women predominantly on their own when making medical decisions for their children. Araminta Tripp, tasked with taking care of five children in addition to her other farm duties, constantly dealt with various child illnesses. William asked for updates of his children's health in nearly every letter, and Araminta complied faithfully. "This

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<sup>32</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, January 18, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 86. Emphasis in original.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>34</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, undated, *Widows by the Thousand*, 116.

letter is written so disjointedly Willie that I fear you will never be able to understand it, but you must really excuse it, as I have to stop so often that I scarcely know what I am writing about,” she wrote him in 1863. “I got up just now to give Bennie some medicine, but he threw it up and with it some bile.”<sup>35</sup> Araminta made sure her husband was aware of the their children’s bouts of sickness as well as how overwhelming it was to manage it all. Compounding her problems, Araminta was often sick at the same time as her children. Recovering from diphtheria, she told William about waiting until she was done nursing Bennie back to health before she could fully focus on herself. “I haven’t rode on horse back now in nearly two weeks, but as soon as Bennie gets well, I will commence it again, as it makes me feel a great deal better.”<sup>36</sup> Though her husband was unable to provide immediate support or advice, Araminta continued to update him on all aspects of their children’s health and her efforts to make them well again. Likewise, William continued to ask for more updates. Even though Araminta was alone to manage the care of sick children on top of her other responsibilities, the pair continued to ask for and offer updates and advice in an effort to preserve antebellum gender dynamics.

Harriet Perry had real cause for concern in regard to the health of her daughter. Martha experienced waves of illness that Harriet attributed to teething. She updated her husband consistently of the details of their daughter’s health. “I shall use every precaution and take all care of her, as *all* good Mothers would do,” she assured him.<sup>37</sup> This pledge was a response to Theophilus’ distrust of Harriet’s ability to make decisions about Martha’s health. “I have sometimes accused you of thinking no one could take care of the baby like yourself,” she

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<sup>35</sup> Araminta to William Tripp, September 30, 1863, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, September 15, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 28. Emphasis in original.



admitted to him.<sup>38</sup> Harriet constantly agonized over Martha's ill health. On several occasions, especially following news of other infant deaths, she confided to Theophilus, "I do not think I shall ever raise her."<sup>39</sup> To these worries, Theophilus responded, "We ought always to advise ourselves to cheerfulness on that subject, and not be trouble[d] with gloomy feelings."<sup>40</sup>

In addition to Harriet's fears of failing to live up to Theophilus' expectations, Martha's constant sickness amplified Harriet's loneliness. She cried after visitors returned home in 1862, telling Theophilus, "I had not been alone in five weeks and my baby's being sick made it seem more lonely."<sup>41</sup> Moving in with her in-laws initially quelled some of Harriet's anxieties, especially as Martha's health seemed to improve. However, a sudden downturn in the summer of 1863 and Theophilus' continued absence took its toll on Harriet. "I know you are depressed with anxiety," Theophilus wrote her. "How willingly would I share your tasks, and sit watching by the little children."<sup>42</sup> Harriet's fears for her inadequacy and her desire for Theophilus' leadership and presence only worsened her anxiety over Martha's health. When Martha died in August of 1863, Harriet turned to religion as the only available solace for her grief.<sup>43</sup>

The distinction of having a father fighting for the Confederacy created a new pressure for women to raise children worthy of such an honor. This pressure came especially from fathers themselves. Edgeworth and Sallie Bird's children were eleven and thirteen at the start of the war. As a father of older children, Edgeworth became deeply invested in the development of their character rather than simply concerning himself with their health. After three years in the army experiencing exposure to "the guile of this world," Edgeworth felt passionately that his children

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<sup>38</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, September 15, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 28

<sup>39</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, January 18, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 86.

<sup>40</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, March 4, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 106.

<sup>41</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, September 15, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 29.

<sup>42</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, July 29, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 158.

<sup>43</sup> Harriet Perry to Mary Temperance Person, October 18, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 166.

should become educated and honorable members of society worthy of his own participation in the war.<sup>44</sup> Sallie received detailed instructions on the education of her children. Their son Bud's affinity for jockeying was an acceptable supplement to his education, but Edgeworth told Sallie to "let other aspirations now seize his mind."<sup>45</sup> Likewise, Edgeworth thought his daughter Saida had "a fine, capable mind, and I wish it thoroughly developed and cultivated."<sup>46</sup> Edgeworth was able to participate in the cultivation of his children's character and education through letter correspondence, simulating to a smaller degree the level of involvement he would have had before the war. However, in his absence he placed immense pressure on his wife to cooperate with his demands and demonstrate her success in raising children worthy of his military service.

For parents of younger children, the idea of a Confederate legacy was less concrete. Speculating on the likelihood that he would not survive the war, John Thurman told his wife, "You must prepare yourself for the worst and let my presence live in the person of my children."<sup>47</sup> Even more than ensuring their children's health, John expected that Sallie would raise children worthy of the honor of a father's sacrifice. He celebrated news that his children took after him. "I often wonder if any man ever loved his wife and children as I do mine," he told her, "and my warlike boy is so like me!"<sup>48</sup> Women felt pressure to raise children their husbands could be proud of. Men's participation in the Civil War left women responsible not only for raising the next generation, but a generation that would be worthy of the sacrifices made by their fathers.

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<sup>44</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, July 18, 1864, *The Granite Farm Letters*, ed. John Rozier, (Athens: The University of Georgia press, 1988), 178.

<sup>45</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, August 28, 1863, *The Granite Farm Letters*, 143.

<sup>46</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, August 28, 1864, *The Granite Farm Letters*, 192.

<sup>47</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, May 5, 1862, folder 9, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

<sup>48</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, May 25, 1862, folder 10, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman Papers.

*Women and Slaves in the Antebellum South*

Just as southern patriarchal structure informed the way women interacted with children, it colored the dynamics they encountered with slaves. The hierarchical structure of the southern farm or plantation embodied that of southern paternalism as a whole.<sup>49</sup> Men commonly employed the metaphor “our family white and black” to describe their understanding of the complex community of the southern slaveholding household.<sup>50</sup> In spite of this concept of community, historian Thavolia Glymph has observed that white southerners “measured themselves partly in the distance that separated them from enslaved (and free) black people.”<sup>51</sup> It was through the hierarchy of the household then, with men placed firmly at the top as fathers and masters, that women understood their place in the larger world. It is important to examine the antebellum expectations of women’s relationship with slaves in order to understand how the changes they experienced during the war deviated from the pre-war norm.

Women and men’s roles as mistress and master revealed the same gendered patterns that emerged in their roles as parents. Women’s authority as mistresses lay primarily within the domestic sphere. Here, their relationship to slaves was perhaps more complex than men’s. Women were primarily in charge of the production and distribution of slave clothing and food, which unavoidably meant assigning specific tasks to slaves.<sup>52</sup> In this way, a woman’s role as mistress required the mutual dependence on the slaves she directly interacted with. The two subverted groups depended on each other for the successful functioning of the household.

A woman’s role as mistress was complicated by the fact that she most often oversaw female slaves. As historian Thavolia Glymph has pointed out, the household served as the

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<sup>49</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 32.

<sup>50</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 100.

<sup>51</sup> Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 74.

<sup>52</sup> Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 88.

primary location for the construction of southern white womanhood, which made the relationship between white mistresses and black female slaves even more important.<sup>53</sup> Mistresses most commonly interacted with the enslaved black women against whom they defined themselves as elite white women. These race and class divisions, argues Fox-Genovese, encouraged mistresses to interpret “any sign of independence as impudence, impertinence, obstinacy.”<sup>54</sup> Slave women resisted their bondage in different ways than male slaves, predominantly in the form of quiet subversion and intentional inefficiency while men were more likely to rebel or run away.<sup>55</sup> White women, therefore, most often understood their role as mistresses within the larger slaveholding household in terms of their complex relationship to female slaves.

Men held the ultimate authority over the household’s slaves. However, most preferred not to intervene in the mistress’ domestic sphere, in keeping with the stark divide of gender roles in the Old South’s social structure. They were more likely to tell their wives to “do as they saw fit” when petitioned for advice on matters regarding household slaves.<sup>56</sup> However, white women’s domestic authority was still checked by her husband’s patriarchal sovereignty because even if he did not tend to intervene, he could at any time.<sup>57</sup> Though women managed household activities quite independently, they generally lacked experience in bookkeeping and interacting with field hands. The hierarchical divide between the roles of master and mistress therefore guaranteed that women lacked the necessary tools for the overall management of the slaveholding household. That power remained solely in the hands of men.

Many women defended the institution of slavery. Others, like some men of the time, saw it as a necessary evil while more actively disliked it. The structure of the southern household

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<sup>53</sup> Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 65.

<sup>54</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 140.

<sup>55</sup> Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 70.

<sup>56</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 140.

<sup>57</sup> Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 88.

depended on the survival of slavery, and the ideal of the southern lady itself required the existence of slaves to allow her to be free of the farm chores of a yeoman's wife. However, tensions between mistress and household slave, which likely were born out of their uniquely complex relationship, often frustrated white women. It was within the domestic sphere that tensions between women and slaves most often reached a breaking point.<sup>58</sup> Sometimes frustrations with slaves themselves combined with commiseration for the enslaved's condition when women complained of their household responsibilities. Anne Firor Scott has noted a trend in female rhetoric that compared the experience of being a southern woman with that of a slave.<sup>59</sup> It was likely a combination of these sentiments that contributed to unease over slavery among southern slaveholding women before the war, though such sentiment was not universal and was more likely to be kept private.<sup>60</sup>

### *Women and Slaves in the Civil War*

Every couple examined in this thesis belonged to an elite class of slaveholding white southerners. All were farmers, though Theophilus was also trained as an attorney. John Thurman and Edgeworth Bird were planters. The size of each farm or plantation, the number of slaves, and the slaveholder's pre-war relationship to them impacted the way women were able to assume authority during the war. Different degrees of trust in these relationships resulted in different expectations for the mistress' new role. In spite of this potential for diversity across couples, each pair participated in the institution of slavery and actively fought to preserve it. As such, each household engaged in an antebellum hierarchical structure that reflected broader southern

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<sup>58</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 134.

<sup>59</sup> Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 50.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

culture. The breakdown of this hierarchy through the man's removal to the battlefield inevitably altered women's interactions with slaves at home.

From the start of their husbands' military service, Araminta Tripp, Sallie Thurman, and Harriet Perry assumed total control of their households. Araminta's husband left her in charge of sixteen slaves with the expectation that she could depend on Rhoden, William's most trusted slave, for advice. Neither Sallie Thurman nor Harriet Perry benefitted from such a relationship. All three, however, were expected to manage the production of crops and the activities of slaves. On the Bird plantation, Sallie was expected to coordinate household servants as she had done before the war in addition to the new task of working with the plantation's overseer.<sup>61</sup> The women's new responsibilities as sole mistresses of their slaveholding household interacted with the degree to which their households mirrored the ideal of southern hierarchy before the war. This interaction informed the type and intensity of problems women encountered with slaves during the war.

Araminta Tripp and Sallie Bird experienced relatively little difficulty in assuming authority over slaves. Before the war, Araminta had participated in the domestic activities expected of slaveholding women. She sewed clothes for slaves and organized their household tasks.<sup>62</sup> William trusted his slaves in general, but held one in particularly high regard. Soon after leaving Araminta to her new task, he told her, "You must do the best you can dear wife as I have no time to plan for you. I think you can rely a great deal on Rhoden's judgment at least I do."<sup>63</sup> Throughout his absence, William gave most of his instructions to his wife in the form of "tell Rhoden," demonstrating his deep trust in Rhoden's abilities and trustworthiness. When Araminta

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<sup>61</sup> John Rozier, *The Granite Farm Letters*, xxviii.

<sup>62</sup> Diary of Araminta Tripp, April 8, 1857, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>63</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, October 9, 1861, folder 2, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Tripp papers.

became overwhelmed, William advised her to “let Rhoden do most of the management of the farm and stock” while she focused on the household duties she was used to.<sup>64</sup> Araminta’s ability to cooperate with Rhoden and rely on his help allowed their relationship to remain harmonious throughout the war. As the deliverer of William’s orders, Araminta was able to exert authority over Rhoden and the other slaves without fully stepping outside of her sphere; she was only communicating orders, not producing them. By the time William gained confidence in his wife’s ability to make decisions without his constant oversight, Araminta and Rhoden had forged a working relationship much like the one William and Rhoden had.

Sallie Bird had to deal with four times as many slaves in her husband’s absence as Araminta had. Though she had the help of a male overseer to somewhat imitate the gendered hierarchy of her pre-war household situation, Sallie still had to exert new authority over slaves not in her domestic sphere. In order to ease his wife into her new role, Edgeworth advised her to “take pains to gain the affection of the negroes. You can attach them to you and govern them through their hearts better than any overseer can through fear.”<sup>65</sup> Sallie took her husband’s advice. In letters home to her daughter while visiting Edgeworth in Richmond in March, 1862, Sallie wrote greetings to slaves by name, and told her daughter to “give my love to them.”<sup>66</sup> In this way, Sallie effectively balanced her new authority with affection that was appropriate to her sphere. Edgeworth’s foresight also provides an understanding of his style of exerting authority over slaves. The precedent of a relatively positive relationship between master and slave likely enabled Sallie to exert new authority with limited backlash. Sallie’s ability to do so encouraged Edgeworth to acknowledge to his daughter that in spite of her gender, “right ably and skillfully

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<sup>64</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, April 7, 1864, folder 6, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Tripp papers.

<sup>65</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, November 21, 1861, *The Granite Farm Letters*, 45.

<sup>66</sup> Sallie to Sallie (Saida) Bird, March 15, 1862, *The Granite Farm Letters*, 77.

does she direct.”<sup>67</sup> Araminta and Sallie knowingly and cautiously stepped out of their domestic sphere to exert more authority than most mistresses were expected to. However, their husband’s pre-war relationships with slaves enabled the transition to move as smoothly as one could reasonably expect.

Harriet Perry and Sallie Thurman’s transitions were not quite as straightforward. From nearly the beginning of her husband’s absence, Harriet was uncertain that slaves would accept the authority of a woman. Unlike Araminta, who developed a good relationship with Rhoden, Harriet did not trust her slaves. Theophilus brought a slave named Norflet to camp with him in August of 1862. Harriet advised Theophilus not to share shoes or clothes with the slave. “Don’t give your clothes to Norflet,” she told him, “keep them yourself, he will be running off with the Yankees the first chance he gets & will not thank you.”<sup>68</sup> When Norflet did run away from Theophilus’ camp and returned to the Perry’s home in Texas, Harriet felt vindicated in her distrust. After repeating Norflet’s explanation for how he returned home, Harriet told Theophilus, “This is his story – we know not what to believe.” She continued, “I knew he would have a good tale made up.”<sup>69</sup>

This level of distrust relates to the difficulty Harriet experienced when attempting to exert authority over slaves at home. She viewed her femininity as the source of her problems. “It is the worst thing in the world to live as I do,” Harriet told her sister when describing her interactions with slaves as a woman.<sup>70</sup> “I cannot have any thing done at all,” she told Theophilus in February, 1863.<sup>71</sup> Harriet’s ultimate decision to hire out her slaves and rent her house stemmed directly from her belief that slaves could not accept the authority of a white mistress.

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<sup>67</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie (Saida) Bird, August 10, 1864, *The Granite Farm Letters*, 184.

<sup>68</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, February 8, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 94.

<sup>69</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, December 18, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 184.

<sup>70</sup> Harriet Perry to Mary Temperance Person, January 6, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 79.

<sup>71</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, February 8, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 95.



She chose to move to a plantation with even more slaves, though in this case a white master exerted overall power. In this traditional hierarchy, Harriet felt safer than she had alone at home.

Sallie Thurman faced similar problems in exerting authority over slaves. Like Theophilus Perry, Sallie's husband John waited until the spring of 1862 to enlist. When he finally did, he left his twenty-two year old wife in the charge of the operations of his entire plantation. Sallie's attitude remained more positive toward her new role than Harriet's had. In May of 1862, after two months of John's absence, Sallie began to experience the first instances of her slaves' unwillingness to accept her authority. "Some of the negroes are rather refracting," she wrote John, "but I talked to them yesterday and hope they will do better in future." Following that conversation, a slave named Jim told her to tell John "that he feels like a house without a top. Says when he saw you walking about the yard he always felt easy but is now lost."<sup>72</sup> Sallie interpreted this sentiment as an expression of Jim's faithfulness as a servant. Her optimism for the future, however, did not last. By 1864, she wrote John, "I do not see how I can live without you another year. It seems impossible." Like Harriet, she interpreted part of her problems as one of gender. "We get along very badly without someone to superintend," she told him, adding, "and Lincoln's free labor system is having a very bad effect upon the negroes."<sup>73</sup>

As Sallie noted, the problems women experienced in attempting to assume total authority over slaves during the war did not originate entirely in gendered expectations. Slaves, like all southerners, understood that the war was being fought to protect the institution of slavery. Faust highlights the fact that the war encouraged slaves to assert a desire for freedom in unprecedented ways, placing women in charge of increasingly rebellious slaves.<sup>74</sup> Both Sallie Thurman and Harriet Perry noticed that their slaves' awareness of impending freedom made them more likely

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<sup>72</sup> Sallie to John Thurman, May 18, 1862, folder 10, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman Papers.

<sup>73</sup> Sallie to John Thurman, October 23, 1864, folder 15, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman Papers.

<sup>74</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 54.

to reject authority. Lincoln's preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 frightened Harriet. By the time General John Magruder "called for all the negro men on every plantation except one," Harriet was terrified. "The farmers say no crops will be made," she told Theophilus, "for the women will not support themselves and the prediction of the Federals to starve us will be true."<sup>75</sup> Harriet's understanding of the potential for slave insurrection lay at the intersection of slave rebellion and noncompliance with a female master.

In the face of the difficulty in exerting authority over slaves outside of their domestic sphere, women had several options. They could, like Harriet Perry, have chosen to find a male replacement to maintain control of their slaves and household while simultaneously finding another patriarchal household in which they could seek refuge. Sallie Thurman remained at home with her recalcitrant slaves until the end of the war. However, as she became less able to exert power over slaves, her patience faded and she began to petition more forcefully for her husband's return. "If I could have you with me," she told him in March of 1865, "I could bear the calamities and privations of this war in meekness."<sup>76</sup> Even the lucky women who enjoyed relatively amenable relationships with slaves during the war sought a reprieve from their added responsibilities. To the end of the war, Araminta expressed doubt in her ability to run her farm even as her husband conveyed his confidence in her. Her solution to her problems was William. "O! how I do want the war to end," she told him near the war's close, "and my dear husband restored to me!"<sup>77</sup> She desired to return to the roles she and her husband had played in the household before war disrupted them.

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<sup>75</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, January 18, 1864, *Widows by the Thousand*, 195.

<sup>76</sup> Sallie to John Thurman, March 16, 1865, folder 17, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman Papers.

<sup>77</sup> Araminta to William Tripp, undated fragment, 1865 or before, folder 8, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Tripp papers.

## *Conclusion*

The antebellum southern social structure was pervasive. Every aspect of the slaveholding woman's life was touched by the hierarchy between master, mistress, slave, and child. Gender lines dictated how women should act as mothers as well as mistresses. Men's ultimate authority over the way their children and slaves should be attended to placed them firmly at the top of southern social structure. Men's physical removal by the call to war inevitably shattered that hierarchy within the households they left behind. Women remained to pick up the pieces and configure a new social dynamic while they waited for their husbands to return from war.

Even without men's physical presence, women could not escape the expectations of womanhood that had influenced nearly every aspect of their upbringing. Their understanding of what it meant to be a woman in the antebellum South affected their approach to their new responsibilities as single mothers and mistresses. These paternalistic expectations of womanhood exacerbated the problems women faced in the absence of their husbands. They feared pregnancy and childbirth to a greater degree; they worried about their ability to make difficult medical decisions when their children became ill; and they faced new pressures to raise children worthy of the fathers who left to fight for the Confederacy. As newly empowered mistresses, they interacted with slaves who were unwilling to accept female authority and who were more willing to subvert that authority as the reality of freedom became clearer.

Women yearned to return to the paternalistic structure that had exacerbated these wartime problems to begin with. They sought new patriarchs in the form of in-laws, overseers, and hirers. They petitioned their husbands to return home and prioritize their families and farms over the war effort. A return to the hierarchical patriarchy would be a return to normalcy in which women clearly understood their place in the household and the world at large. The best solution to their

heightened problems in such a deeply paternalistic society, in the eyes of most slaveholding women, would be a return to paternalism itself.

### Chapter 3

#### Complex Patriotism: Gendered Support of the Confederate Cause Over Time

Support for the Confederacy required sacrifices from both men and women. Men sacrificed their lives, both by leaving home to fight and by risking death. Women, as we have seen, sacrificed the men in their lives as well as the male support they depended on before the war. Drew Gilpin Faust has observed that the Confederacy utilized the pre-existing gendered expectation of female sacrifice and altered it to meet wartime needs. For women in 1861, their “self-sacrifice for personally significant others – husbands, brothers, sons, family – was transformed into sacrifice *of* those individuals to an abstract and intangible ‘Cause.’”<sup>1</sup> Women temporarily forfeited familiar gender relations within their marriages in order to support a government that, in victory, intended to restore them indefinitely.

The Confederacy’s aim in winning the Civil War was to protect the southern social structure and the institution at its core, slavery. Men and women throughout the South supported the Confederate cause in order to protect the aspects of this social structure that they held most dear. As it became more apparent that the war would not end quickly, women and men were forced to consider whether the sacrifices they were making for the Confederate cause were worthwhile. Their specific experiences, as well as those of their spouse, impacted the way they thought about their own sacrifice. As this chapter will illustrate, men became disillusioned with the war over time when they began to believe that the Confederacy was failing to protect their families and their way of life. Over time, women removed their support for the war itself while

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<sup>1</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” *Journal of American History* 76 (March 1990), 1209.

continuing to identify with the Confederate cause. In doing so, they revealed their desire to return to antebellum gender relations.

### *Off to War*

Men and women differed in the extent of their Confederate patriotism. Family situation, age, location within the Confederacy, commitment to slavery, and countless other factors contributed to the subtle variations of their early support of the war. Nonetheless, each man considered in this thesis ultimately made the decision to enlist and fight for the Confederate cause, whatever that cause meant to him. Their wives, by default, went to war as well.

Once committed to the war, men and women saw service as a patriotic duty. They considered the Confederacy's aims of preserving their way of life to be sanctioned by God, and therefore believed their duty to the Confederacy similarly had Providence's approval. For those seeking more tangible reasons for fighting, family itself served as a reason. Men envisioned Northern aggression as extending to the home front and resolved to fight in protection of their own wives and children. Before the reality of war set in, they were able to weigh their own sense of duty against abstract conceptions of sacrifice. Wives, at the beginning of the war, largely understood their own sacrifice in terms of what their husbands thought. However, the reality of female wartime sacrifice became more immediately apparent than it did for most soldiers because it came as a direct result of separation.

Edgeworth Bird was perhaps the most enthusiastic patriot, having run unsuccessfully as a secessionist delegate in January 1861 when Georgia's governor called for a convention to determine the state's loyalties.<sup>2</sup> He enlisted as a lieutenant in the 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment GA Infantry,

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<sup>2</sup> *The Granite Farm Letters: The Civil War Correspondence of Edgeworth and Sallie Bird*, ed. John Rozier (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1988), 2.

Company E on July 15, 1861 just three months after the initial shots were fired at Fort Sumter. After a brief spell in Atlanta, he was sent to various camps across Virginia. First and foremost, Edgeworth saw his service as a patriotic duty performed for the good of the Confederacy. He envisioned his duty as a struggle for freedom and likened it to an early experience he had in camp. He told his wife Sallie the story of being caught in the rain on the way back to camp one day. He compared the effort of pushing through the mud to holding “two flamed lights on the altar of patriotism” and facing “fatiguing forced march for our country’s good.”<sup>3</sup> In this conception of duty, Edgeworth optimistically anticipated wartime hardship that could be overcome as easily as sloughing through mud.

Edgeworth’s optimism endured in his belief in God’s support of the war, his depictions of camp life, and his outlook on the war in general. In spite of any shortcomings he or the Confederacy had, he believed that God would supply the necessary means for success. Early Confederate victories reaffirmed this belief. After the First Battle of Manassas, he told his wife Sallie, “I honestly believe, as I’ve written before that Providence gave us that battle.”<sup>4</sup> Away from the battlefield, Edgeworth painted a happy picture of camp life. He discussed drills by describing the marching band. “There was one of the finest bands I ever listened to, to the music of which we did all our marching,” he related to Sallie in September. “To a looker on, it must have been a splendid spectacle.”<sup>5</sup> Even the illnesses, which he faithfully included in his descriptions of camp life, were downplayed: “I think we’ve been very fortunate, considering the number of the sick.”<sup>6</sup> He felt similarly optimistic about the dangers he faced, assuring his wife

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<sup>3</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, September 22, 1861, *Granite Farm Letters*, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, September 25, 1861, *Granite Farm Letters*, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Edgeworth Bird to Sallie Bird, September 2, 1861, *The Granite Farm Letters*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

that he saw “no prospect” of battle.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of his service, Edgeworth was able to adhere to his preconceived notions of patriotism because his sacrifice did not yet seem unbearable.

William Tripp, who also enlisted in the first year of the war, had a more realistic view of what he also saw as his patriotic sacrifice. He volunteered for service in September, 1861, and became captain of Company B in the 40<sup>th</sup> NC Regiment, stationed at Fort Fisher in Wilmington for most of his service. Though less optimistic than Edgeworth as to the righteousness of the cause, William still believed Confederate service was his duty. He told his wife Araminta after a month apart to “try and keep in good spirits and remember that your husband is trying to do his duty to his country and family.”<sup>8</sup> Less convinced of God’s support of the war, he told Araminta later that he had “always opposed the damnable doctrine of secession.” Still, he felt a duty to support the Confederacy’s goals, especially those that would protect his own family.<sup>9</sup> Even if his role at Fort Fisher became exceedingly difficult, he resolved to “try hard and do my best” because that was what his family and country needed him to do.<sup>10</sup>

Theophilus Perry waited to enlist until May 1862, joining Company F of the 28<sup>th</sup> Texas Cavalry. He brought with him a slave named Norflet and settled into camp in Lewisville, Arkansas, for the summer. By July, he began acting as his regiment’s replacement quartermaster. Theophilus’ time as a wartime civilian gave him more time to consider the war’s purpose and the merits of sacrifice. In his early letters, he discussed more explicitly than William or Edgeworth the value of sacrifice for the cause. For Theophilus, his service was less about his duty to his

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<sup>7</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, September 25, 1861, *Granite Farm Letters*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, October 9, 1861, folder 2, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers, 1801-1910, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

<sup>9</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, May 12, 1862, folder 3, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>10</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, October 9, 1861, folder 2, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.



country and more about protecting the Confederacy's aims. The cause, to him, was sanctioned by God. However, "I do not believe the great purpose of this war as the dispensation of Providence will be accomplished simply by the victory of either Party," he told Harriet. Rather, the people must begin to acknowledge the importance of the Law again, which the "spirit of democracy" had all but made them forget.<sup>11</sup> Theophilus' training as a lawyer likely contributed to this belief. To Theophilus, secession itself was too chaotic. In order for the Confederacy to implement its goals, southerners must win the war but also return to order. Theophilus, therefore, resolved to fight in order to protect those goals. He desired but did not expect an early victory. In spite of his commitment to the cause, his main goal was to remain healthy and return to his family. "Without you," he told his wife Harriet, "wealth fame and glory would be worthless and indeed misery."<sup>12</sup> Theophilus' priority was his family, but at this point he felt he had to do what he could to protect what was right, which ultimately would benefit his wife and child.

John Thurman volunteered for service with the 3<sup>rd</sup> TN Cavalry Regiment in March, 1862. By then, he believed firmly in the necessity of sacrifice. "You must be reconciled to your fate as it is the lot of many to make the same sacrifice and in the peril of any thing we hold dear as a free people," he told his wife Sallie. "It becomes the duty of every patriot to make any sacrifice that our country demands."<sup>13</sup> For John, both he and his wife had to undergo unique sacrifices for their country. A soldier's life was horrid, he acknowledged, and he would have preferred to be with his family than in camps. However, he told Sallie that "I owe my country an endorsement of my principles as a free man."<sup>14</sup> He believed he not only owed sacrifices to his country, but to his family as well. In early April, 1862, he wrote that when he thought of the enemy at his doorstep,

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<sup>11</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, November 4, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, July 17, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, March 17, 1862, folder 8, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

<sup>14</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, March 26, 1862, folder 8, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

threatening his wife and children, he imagined that he would “unsheathe my saber or spring the trigger of my trusty gun.”<sup>15</sup> John’s sense of duty strengthened as he faced the reality of battle within the first few months of service. He fought in the Battle of Shiloh on April 6 and 7, a Union victory with the highest casualty rate of any Civil War battle to that date.<sup>16</sup> In spite of the battle’s bloodshed, John felt grateful that only ten or fifteen men from his regiment had been killed and that he was “still spared to give what aid I can in freeing my country.”<sup>17</sup> He incorporated honor into his reason for fighting after this experience. He spoke of God’s “wisdom and goodness” in sparing his life and the immense pride he took in acting honorably in battle.<sup>18</sup> The real risk of participating in combat made it more difficult to assign duty as the main reason to fight. He augmented duty with honor as a response to his heightened perception of wartime sacrifice.

In the early stage of the war, women’s opinions on the war tended to reflect their husband’s degree of optimism. Similarly, they accepted their husband’s decision to enlist as a duty to their country. However, women tended to be more realistic about how difficult their own sacrifices would be. In spite of her husband Edgeworth’s optimism, Sallie Bird worried about how she would handle separation. She visited him in Atlanta shortly after he enlisted, feeling that doing so would ease the burden of being apart. Sallie agreed with Edgeworth that God supported the Confederacy. She relied on faith to appease her fears, unlike Edgeworth who used religion to justify victories. She saw hardships as God’s way of making the South stronger by teaching southerners to deal with adversity by turning to religion. Sallie told her daughter that she “may

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<sup>15</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, April 3, 1862, folder 9, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>16</sup> William L. Barney, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Civil War*, (USA: Oxford University Press, 2011), 289.

<sup>17</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, April 9, 1862, folder 9, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>18</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, April 15, 1862, folder 9, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

learn lessons of self-denial and self-control” by helping her mother bear the trials of separation.<sup>19</sup> God, she believed, “*can* enable us to bear our burdens.”<sup>20</sup> Sallie opted to put her total faith in God and her husband’s goodness in order to manage her anxieties. Despite this faith, she prayed desperately for peace from the beginning of the war. Edgeworth assured her that God would grant that her “ideas about peace may soon be realized.”<sup>21</sup> While Sallie accepted her sacrifice as a duty, she sought divine assurances in order to ease the accompanying burdens.

Araminta Tripp had anxieties about her and her husband’s sacrifices from the beginning. Anticipating problems at home and a painful separation, she asked William to try to obtain a furlough as early as one month into his service. “Col McMillan says I cannot furlough any one of my men or go myself,” he responded to her petitions, “as we may expect to be attacked at any time.”<sup>22</sup> The initial pain of separation made Araminta realize how difficult her sacrifice would be, especially if the war lasted or William was killed. And, unlike Sallie Bird, Araminta’s husband remained constantly alert to the prospect of battle. In fact, it was Edgeworth Bird who saw combat first.<sup>23</sup> In spite of William’s sense of duty to his country and family, Araminta worried that the sacrifices they were making were too great. However, at this early stage of the war, she did not yet wonder if the sacrifices were worthwhile.

Harriet Perry was acutely aware of the sacrifices she and her husband would make when he enlisted. By the middle of 1862 when her husband enlisted, both of her brothers, Theophilus’ brother, and several of his cousins had already volunteered for service. She had spent nearly a year hearing about the war’s extensive casualties. Though Harriet supported the Confederacy as

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<sup>19</sup> Sallie to Saida Bird, December 25, 1861, *Granite Farm Letters*, 50.

<sup>20</sup> Sallie to Saida Bird, December 25, 1861, *Granite Farm Letters*, 50.

<sup>21</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, September 2, 1861, *Granite Farm Letters*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, October 11, 1861, folder 2, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>23</sup> Edgeworth first saw combat in the Second Battle of Manassas in August 1862, while William did not participate in any fighting until his company helped defend Charleston and Savannah at the end of 1864.

well as Theophilus' sense of duty, her pragmatism caused her to seriously fear that her husband would make the ultimate sacrifice for his country. Rather than prevent him from taking that risk, she took steps to avoid it. She prayed that God would spare him and return him to her. If God would not, she prayed that he would "take you to Heaven when you die" so that they could at least be together in death.<sup>24</sup> She urged Theophilus to care for himself for the sake of his wife and daughter. As an added precaution, she implored him to avoid temptation and live morally so "that if we meet no more on earth, we may meet around his Throne in Heaven."<sup>25</sup> Even though she supported the idea that sacrifice was a patriotic duty, Harriet's deep understanding of how difficult sacrifice could be led her to encourage her husband to be a cautious patriot who prioritized his safety and therefore his family.

John Thurman gave his wife Sallie explicit instructions concerning her own wartime sacrifice. Soon after enlisting, he told her he hoped she was as "sunny and happy as is possible for a soldier's wife to be."<sup>26</sup> He told her could not ease her problems by giving her advice because he was busy making his sacrifice to his country. Similarly, he cautioned her that she must resign herself to imperfect happiness while making her own sacrifices for victory. While Sallie accepted that she was doing her patriotic duty, she found it difficult to comply with John's wishes that she do so without complaint. Sallie wrote her husband several long, sad letters in the early months of their separation. She reflected on antebellum days, and worried that "deep, dark oblivion has buried them so deep that they can never be resurrected."<sup>27</sup> Even their opinions on battles differed. John saw his survival in the Battle of Shiloh as evidence of God's approval for his service and honorable actions in battle. Sallie, frustrated at home, interpreted battles as

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<sup>24</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, August 3, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, September 15, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 31.

<sup>26</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, March 17, 1862, folder 8, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>27</sup> Sallie to John Thurman, May 18, 1862, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

evidence of God's displeasure. "God will not always be angry, he will not always chastise us," she told John, "we will get down in the very dust of humility, acknowledge our inequities and as a tender parent he will have mercy and forgive his erring children."<sup>28</sup> Though Sallie attempted to fulfill her duty to her country, she became frustrated more quickly than her husband.

### *Uncertainty, 1862-1863*

For much of 1862 and 1863, neither the Union nor the Confederacy appeared to be approaching a clear victory. This uncertainty in the war's outcome presented the opportunity for couples to contemplate the sacrifices they had now been making for a number of years. As the war stalled, men and women's sacrifices became more difficult. Men faced real combat and were exposed to problems within the Confederacy itself. John Thurman and Edgeworth Bird participated in important battles of 1862. Following the Battle of Shiloh in April, John Thurman's regiment attempted an attack on Yankee soldiers near Corinth in May. Edgeworth fought in the Second Battle of Manassas and was severely wounded in the leg.<sup>29</sup> In 1863, Theophilus served in the reserve army at the Battle of Milliken's Bend, part of the Vicksburg campaign, though he saw no actual combat. Edgeworth recovered from his injuries and fought in the Battle of Chickamauga in September, 1863, a Confederate victory despite heavy casualties. Women's problems at home escalated and they became increasingly afraid their husbands would be killed or wounded. In response to these changes, men and women continued to reassess what they were giving up for their government.

Anticipating, witnessing, and participating in battles allowed men to confront the reality of their sacrifices. While the war's outcome remained uncertain, men's belief in their duty

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<sup>28</sup> Sallie to John Thurman, May 18, 1862, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers

<sup>29</sup> *Granite Farm Letters*, ed. John Rozier, 66.

became stronger. John Thurman's sense of duty became more pronounced after experiencing combat. Following an attempted attack in May, 1862, he told his wife Sallie, "I have a high duty to perform here and if need be must sacrifice every other consideration." He owed God, his wife, his country, and his children "to give even my life as a ransom to redeem our country from disgrace and insult." He added that "as a people we must discharge our duty before we have a right to claim any thing from a higher power."<sup>30</sup> No matter how hard it was to be away from his family or to fight in battle, John felt he had a duty to his country. He was willing to give his life on behalf of southern independence. "I yield to it as a necessity," he explained to Sallie, "and without a murmur will do or die."<sup>31</sup> John's willingness to perform his duty stemmed from his belief in 1862 that the war itself was supported by God. He advised his wife to bear her sacrifices "like a Christian, a patriot's wife, and mother" and assured her that he was "satisfied the result will be a blessing."<sup>32</sup> Commitment to sacrifice was worthwhile as long as God showed his support of the war, even when that sacrifice became more severe.

Edgeworth Bird, too, felt that his difficult sacrifice was necessary during the middle part of the war. Like John, he believed that the war continued to be righteous. Looking toward an anticipated battle, he told his daughter, "By God's blessing, we'll beat them again."<sup>33</sup> His faith gave him optimism for southern victory. "One or more signal victories will so disgust the North with abolition rule," he believed, "that a peace party, and one willing to grant our demands, may spring up there and this cruel war have an end." Edgeworth's faith that the South would win helped him to justify his sacrifice. Separation from Sallie had grown tiresome. Camp conditions were less than ideal. "We are all heartily tired of this hateful war," he said, "but must fight it out

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<sup>30</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, May 24, 1862, folder 10, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Edgeworth to Saida Bird, July 29, 1862, *Granite Farm Letters*, 93.

nonetheless.”<sup>34</sup> In spite of his increasingly onerous sacrifices, Edgeworth continued to feel a strong sense of duty to a cause that he believed was just in the eyes of God. If God supported it, then his sacrifice was worthwhile.

Theophilus continued to believe that the war’s purpose, more than the war itself, was supported by God. This difference caused him to be less optimistic than John or Edgeworth. However, he also considered his sacrifice to be necessary. “I am very tired of the army,” he told Harriet, “but I know too well that I must prepare my mind to bear up against trials or die prematurely with trouble and vexation of spirit.”<sup>35</sup> He felt he had a duty to support the war, even if he did not believe winning the war would entirely achieve the Confederacy’s goals. Once the army succeeded, “then the people will learn the necessity of recognizing, and obeying law, which they have long forgotten.”<sup>36</sup> As long as the outcome of the war remained uncertain, his sacrifice was worthwhile. Theophilus knew that he could not easily get out of service, and resigned himself to helping the South even if he did not fully agree with its strategy.

William Tripp also disagreed with many of the Confederacy’s policies, but continued to believe that his sacrifice was necessary. At the beginning of 1862, he told his wife Araminta that he believed that “the government of the family depends on this war to end.”<sup>37</sup> He explained his complex support of the war effort as it stood in May. “I have always opposed the damnable doctrine of secession as I do still and ever shall,” he told his wife. “But I also acknowledge the right of any people to rebel when they are oppressed and it is on that principle that I am in the army and expect to remain in it until we have as I am confident we will gain an acknowledgment

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<sup>34</sup> Edgeworth to Saida Bird, July 29, 1862, *Granite Farm Letters*, 93.

<sup>35</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, December 14, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 72.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>37</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, January 12, 1862, folder 3, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

of our independence.”<sup>38</sup> Even though he believed that secession itself, as disloyalty to the government, was wrong, seeking independence from oppressive rule warranted the sacrifice of being separated from the family William wished to protect. Like Theophilus, William believed his sacrifice was necessary because the Confederacy’s aims were just. It did not matter that he disagreed with its methods.

Even as these men became more certain that they were doing their duty, they simultaneously grew frustrated with others within the Confederacy who did not. Edgeworth told Sallie after the fall of Vicksburg that he feared that the war would become even more protracted. He longed to go home but felt it was his duty, now more than ever, to stay and fight. “But there are so many within our circle,” he complained, “who have never raised a finger in defense of home and family, who have never borne for an hour or a second the heat and burden of the day.”<sup>39</sup> As being away from his family became more difficult, his frustration with men who had not made the same sacrifice deepened. John Thurman felt especially disgusted by able men who refused to fight. “I say,” he told Sallie, “a man at home able to bear arms no matter what pretext is a traitor to his country a coward and deserves the condemnation of every man woman and child in the Southern confederacy.”<sup>40</sup> In order for the South to have a chance of winning the war, other men had to be willing to make the same necessary sacrifice that he made. “If I ever live to get back,” John declared, “I will preach it on the housetops.”<sup>41</sup>

Theophilus became similarly frustrated with able-bodied men who refused to fight. He professed an “insufferable hatred” for the “demagogue and hypocrits” who remained at home.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, May 12, 1862, folder 3, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>39</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, August 15, 1863, *Granite Farm Letters*, 135.

<sup>40</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, July 17, 1862, folder 11, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>41</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, July 17, 1862, folder 11, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>42</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, June 20, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 143.



Though he hated the deficient sense of duty among Confederate men that necessitated the draft, he felt satisfaction when such men who were drafted. He became disgusted at those who benefitted equally from the sacrifices of a few men. He described them as men who “accumulated fortunes out of the sacrifice of those that have bared their bosoms to the bayonet, and yet skulk away from danger themselves.”<sup>43</sup> William Tripp also became frustrated with men who supported the Confederacy yet refused to make the same sacrifices for it. By October, 1863, he was angered by rumors that his patriotism was in question in spite of his service. “Men who are and have been in the army from the first and periling their health and lives have their patriotism doubted even now,” he complained, “by persons out of the army who think they have done enough when they brought on the war.” Even worse, “there are young men near home who are staying in the Yankee lines to keep out of the army who were hot secessionist and mighty afraid the war would be over before they could have a chance to strike one blow at the Yankees.”<sup>44</sup> Why, thought William, should he be making difficult sacrifices instead of these men? The answer lay in honor: “they have nothing to keep them out of the army except cowardice.”<sup>45</sup>

As the war progressed, the men began to criticize the Confederate government’s management of the war. Though John Thurman believed the Confederate cause was worth his sacrifice, his experience in battle made him question fellow soldiers as well as the army itself. “I don’t want to make a public matter of a misfortune of ours,” he told Sallie, “but I will tell you that the Confederate army here is in the worst imaginable disorder.” He continued, “If it is to be taken as a sample of our ability to win our independence it is exceedingly doubtful I assure

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<sup>43</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, June 20, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 148.

<sup>44</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, October 31, 1863, folder 5, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

you.”<sup>46</sup> He was especially concerned with the lack of honor shown by men making the same sacrifice as he was. “I could tell you things that I saw upon the battlefield that I consider a burning shame to southern honor and chivalry.”<sup>47</sup> However, he continued to believe that God supported the southern cause. If this were true, then God would help the army succeed in spite of the failures of its soldiers. “I can but hope our cause must be just and if it is God will help us,” he assured Sallie.<sup>48</sup>

While John found problems with soldiers, Theophilus Perry became frustrated with their leaders. Though he hoped for victories, he did not feel confident in the army’s military strategy. In fact, he worried that Trans-Mississippi Confederate generals did not have a strategy at all. “Our Generals it seems to me, are confused,” he wrote Harriet. “It may be strategy but it looks to me like confusion, and uncertainty that makes them so undecided. The Enemy will come upon us with heavier columns this winter by far than he ever has, and the very soil of the South will shake with their tread.”<sup>49</sup> He worried that incompetent leadership would prevent the Confederacy from achieving its goals. “I believe that other designs of Providence will not be accomplish[ed] nor the war likely cease, until some Genius arises that will fix the administration and insure the respect of the whole people,” he declared.<sup>50</sup> Again, Theophilus became frustrated with the way the Confederacy sought to achieve the goals he also desired. Even though God supported the war, the army’s leadership was not fulfilling its duty.

William became the most frustrated with the Confederate army in the middle part of the war. Never a radical secessionist, he began in 1863 to express frustrations with the leadership of the Confederacy. “I suppose our government intends us to keep us from ever seeing our families

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<sup>46</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, April 16, 1862, folder 9, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, May 5, 1862, folder 10, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>49</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, December 14, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 72.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

again and starve us in the mean time,” he complained.<sup>51</sup> By the end of October, he was thinking seriously about resigning. His frustrations with being separated from Araminta combined with annoyance at men who chose not to fight. Unlike the young secessionists at home, he had “a wife that I love and children who are given to me to take care of and if either of us are to remain out of the army I think I should be the one.”<sup>52</sup> Though his sense of duty and honor kept him in the army, by December he was growing disgusted with the Confederate government. He heard rumors of plans to expand conscription laws. Enraged, he claimed that if the laws passed, “all freedom is gone from our land and in its stead we shall have a complete military despotism.”<sup>53</sup> Unlike Edgeworth, John, and Theophilus, William’s frustration with men who refused to fight did not outweigh his disgust at conscription. Above all, William saw the draft as tyrannical. The freedom from despotism that William had enlisted to protect no longer seemed certain. William began to question the worth of his sacrifice when the government itself could not live up to its promises.

While their husbands balanced their sense of duty against their frustrations with the Confederate government, the women continued to think about their own sacrifices. As discussed in the previous two chapters, women’s problems with motherhood and slave management worsened over the course of the war, which they attributed to wartime separation from their husbands. In spite of their difficulties, in the middle part of the war women tried and failed to mirror their husband’s optimism. Though the Birds faced the most concrete consequences of wartime sacrifice in the first part of this period, they remained the most optimistic. In the latter

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<sup>51</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, January 19, 1863, folder 4, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>52</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, October 31, 1863, folder 5, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>53</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, December 28, 1863, folder 5, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

half of 1862, Sallie left responsibilities on the plantation in the hands of an overseer and went to Richmond to be closer to Edgeworth. She volunteered at a hospital in Richmond and became more acutely aware of the dangers Edgeworth faced in August's anticipated battle. Like Edgeworth's faith in Confederate generals, her trust in "our glorious Stonewall" soothed her worries to a degree.<sup>54</sup> Though she worried that she would not be able to care for Edgeworth were he to be wounded, she had faith in his optimism.

Araminta Tripp similarly acquiesced to her husband's opinion of their situation and the war as a whole. In spite of persistent sickness among her five children and uneasiness over her new duties, she found that "we have managed to get along this far and I hope that we shall continue to do so."<sup>55</sup> Her many responsibilities at home occupied her mind, though the pain of separation remained constant and she continued to urge William to visit. Fearing she would seem childish or silly, she told William that she wanted him to come home to care for her and kiss her. "O! don't I wish you could come home darling and stay with your little wife all the time," she told William. "You do not know how much she needs you, but must try and bear your absence the best that she may."<sup>56</sup> She resigned herself to continue to prioritize her and her husband's wartime duties over personal desires. As long as William continued to feel that his duty to his country was worthwhile, Araminta accepted that she must feel the same way about her own sacrifice.

Though she tried to remain optimistic, Araminta tended to be cautious before believing positive wartime rumors. Receiving news of Confederate victory at Chickamauga in September, 1863, Araminta told William, "I don't really know whether to believe any of it or not, but hope

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<sup>54</sup> Sallie to Saida Bird, August 10, 1862, *Granite Farm Letters*, 99.

<sup>55</sup> Araminta to William Tripp, August 5, 1862, folder 3, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

that it is true.”<sup>57</sup> The news, to Araminta’s credit, was accompanied by false rumors that England was urging France to recognize the Confederate government, and that the Confederate dollar now equaled the Union’s. In reality, inflation in 1863 was eight times its rate at the war’s conception.<sup>58</sup> Araminta also found negative news hard to accept. She had difficulty believing that Vicksburg had indeed fallen. “If this is all true, in Heaven’s name will become of the Confederacy? It almost makes me sick to think of it,” she worried.<sup>59</sup> Regardless of the type of the rumors and reports, Araminta’s careful optimism while considering them reveals the way she was analyzing the worth of her family’s wartime sacrifice. Confederate victory would assure her that her anxieties over running the farm and William’s absence were worthwhile. Not certain that this was entirely true, Araminta hesitated to believe news that could serve as confirmation of what she wanted to believe.

Harriet Perry was even less willing to believe positive news. Though Theophilus’ own efforts at optimism kept Harriet from becoming totally despondent, her problems at home cemented her pessimism. Theophilus encouraged her to “try and be cheerful and hopeful also, and look forward for happy and prosperous times.”<sup>60</sup> Though Harriet tried, she failed to stay positive. Her acquaintances interpreted war news differently and “think they see a prospect of peace, but I do not understand how they can.”<sup>61</sup> Harriet preferred to assume the worst and by April, 1863, was convinced that “truth is seldom uttered in these days of wickedness and sin.”<sup>62</sup> Good news was not to be trusted. Before an account Gettysburg reached her, Harriet learned that

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<sup>57</sup> Araminta to William Tripp, September 30, 1863, folder 5, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>58</sup> Barney, *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Civil War*, 175.

<sup>59</sup> Araminta to William Tripp, July 22, 1863, folder 5, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>60</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, November 22, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 61.

<sup>61</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, February 8, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 97.

<sup>62</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, April 5, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 119.

General Lee was having success in Maryland and Pennsylvania. Hesitant to believe it when reporting to her husband, Harriet added, “But I do not know how true – how awful times, I am almost miserable.”<sup>63</sup> Despite her tendency to disbelieve positive reports, she resolved to believe negative ones. As she lamented in December, 1863, “all our bad news general turns out true.”<sup>64</sup> By the mid-point of the war, Harriet was convinced that the war effort was failing. She was more pessimistic than the women whose husbands felt certain that the South had a chance of winning the war. However, the hesitance and refusal to believe news of Confederate success reflected both the difficult realities women had faced at home and their waning faith in the cause’s ability to solve their problems. If the Confederacy could fail, why should women continue to make these difficult sacrifices?

#### *Defeat, January 1864 – April 1865*

By the spring of 1864, the Confederacy’s prospects seemed bleak. In May, Union General William Tecumseh Sherman began his Atlanta campaign, and the city fell by September. Lincoln’s reelection in November confirmed the North’s growing confidence that victory was in sight. All of the men were engaged in combat in 1864. In March, Theophilus Perry fought in Louisiana during the Union’s Red River Campaign. He was mortally wounded in March, 1864. William Tripp had avoided combat in the relative safety of Fort Fisher through the end of 1863 and then transferred to Fort Holmes for most of 1864. In November and December, he finally engaged in combat during the defense of Savannah and Charleston. Edgeworth Bird fought in the Battle of Wilderness in May, 1864. John Thurman participated in several

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<sup>63</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, July 20, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 152.

<sup>64</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, December 18, 1863, *Widows by the Thousand*, 184.

skirmishes throughout Mississippi. As defeat seemed imminent, men and women began to consider the worth of their sacrifices more than ever.

Sallie Bird spent the last months of the war in Richmond with her husband. In doing so, she was able to seek out the comforts of antebellum married life during the war. The Birds were able to do this because they trusted their overseer and had older children in school who did not need constant parental guidance. Edgeworth's optimism persisted up to the end of the war. Sallie described letters she had recently received from Edgeworth to her cousin and asserted that he had "unbounded faith in our success."<sup>65</sup> Edgeworth's confidence in the South's ability to win the war came from his confidence in Confederate generals and political leadership. His respect for General Joseph E. Johnston had contributed to his unbounded faith. "We all here," he told Sallie from camp in June, 1864, "imbibe the confidence of the Georgians and believe everything there safe in Joe Johnston's hands."<sup>66</sup> Even as peace talks began in early 1865, Edgeworth blamed the Confederacy's failure to follow Vice President Alexander Stephens' policy for the gloomy affairs of the day. Stephens had publicly criticized Confederate wartime policies, including conscription and martial law, which he believed violated many of the principles the Confederacy was founded on.<sup>67</sup> "I think Mr. Stephens has indicated a wiser policy during the whole war than anyone else," Edgeworth told his father, "and had his course been followed our situation would now be different."<sup>68</sup> Above all else, however, the relative stability of the Bird's situation helped to ensure their continued optimism. "Indeed," Sallie told her daughter, "with all the trials this war brings, we have much to be grateful for."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Sallie Bird to Elizabeth Harris, July 16, 1864, *Granite Farm Letters*, 172.

<sup>66</sup> Edgeworth to Sallie Bird, June 1, 1864, *Granite Farm Letters*, 169.

<sup>67</sup> Barney, *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Civil War*, 305.

<sup>68</sup> Edgeworth Bird to Wilson Bird, January 17, 1865, *Granite Farm Letters*, 237.

<sup>69</sup> Sallie to Saida Bird, January 20, 1865, *Granite Farm Letters*, 238.

The other couples who were not able to fix the problem of their separation as easily were less optimistic. As they began to believe defeat was imminent, men prioritized their families. By 1864, William was more convinced that he must resign. In addition to frustrations with men who refused to fight, the inevitable end of slavery contributed to his decision. He put it plainly in August: "In my judgment slavery is dead as last year's caught herring." <sup>70</sup> He wanted to resign as soon as possible in order "to get my plantation in ample order so that we can live comfortable before emancipation comes." <sup>70</sup> He had felt that slavery was the main reason for the refusal of foreign nations to recognize the Confederacy; in order to win, "it looks to me that Mr. Davis is about preparing the army to remove that bar." <sup>71</sup> If this were true, William had all the more reason to resign. Only honor could prevent him from tendering his resignation in August. Soon after writing that letter, he was sent to defend Charleston and Savannah and did not want to appear cowardly for resigning in the face of battle. On January 14, 1865, he told Araminta that "I intended to have sent in my resignation today but as they are attacking here I can't think of doing it as it would be said I done it from fear." He continued, "true I do not want to fight but I do not wish to be called a coward." <sup>72</sup> Though he remained in the army longer than he wanted to, William ultimately resigned by the end of the month. He privileged his family's interests over a war that he believed was failing.

Theophilus also believed the end of slavery was inevitable. "The beginning of the end of African Slavery has come, though it may exist for some few years yet," he told Harriet. <sup>73</sup> In preparation for when this happened, he wanted to liquidate his slave property. It was important to

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<sup>70</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, August 5, 1864, folder 7, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> William to Araminta Tripp, January 14, 1865, folder 8, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>73</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, January 18, 1864, *Widows by the Thousand*, 198.



Theophilus that he plan for his family's financial future. Unlike William, however, Theophilus had no hopes of resignation. He could not go home to protect his family. Instead, he decided to fight with them in mind. In March 1864, Theophilus reflected on an impending battle: "I shall fight like I was standing at the threshold of my door fighting against robbers and scourgers for the defense of my wife and family."<sup>74</sup> Rather than a duty to his country, Theophilus' service was now a duty to his wife and child.

John Thurman returned home on furlough in December, 1864. While there, he witnessed the problems his wife had been describing in her letters. He returned to the front renewed with the goal of protecting his wife and children. "If I could feel that my family could live without my presence and assistance I would still do a willing service," he told Sallie soon after returning to camp.<sup>75</sup> Though he continued to find the Confederate government incapable, he would fulfill his duty if doing so did not directly interfere with his more important responsibility, his family. "I am perfectly disgusted, Sallie," he told her, "sick and worn out with all the miserable patchwork of government and would be willing to take you and my dear little ones and relinquish all else in trust to my once dear country and turn my back on it forever."<sup>76</sup> He felt that the Confederacy had failed to keep its promises. In spite of his disillusionment with the government, he continued to have faith in the South. "We can never be subjugated," he told Sallie. "My spirit, even after for years hardships blood and ruin prompted me that I never will be, though the Confederacy may."<sup>77</sup> The government had failed to protect the South, but John continued to believe in the Confederate cause.

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<sup>74</sup> Theophilus to Harriet Perry, March 23, 1864, *Widows by the Thousand*, 233.

<sup>75</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, January 8, 1865, folder 16, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>76</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, March 6, 1865, folder 17, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>77</sup> John to Sallie Thurman, March 13, 1865, folder 17, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

Women's optimism waned with their husband's. By the end of the war, wives' constant wish for their husbands became a need. William's presence, Araminta told him, would provide her with rest and joy. "Now I feel tired all the time, even thinking wearies me," she told him, "I do so need you to lean on."<sup>78</sup> Even though she had managed to raise children and manage a farm in his absence, the assumption of a role outside of her gendered sphere was difficult. She was exhausted, and saw his return as the solution. Sallie Thurman told her husband, "I do not see how I can live without you another year. It seems impossible."<sup>79</sup> The sacrifice of their antebellum lives compounded with loneliness and years of distressing news from the front had made them tired. Harriet wrote that her "most fervent petitions are offered to High Heaven in behalf of my dear good Husband."<sup>80</sup> Prayers for peace and a husband's safe return began to outstrip those for victory. If she could just have her husband home, Araminta declared, "then the rest of the world, with a few exceptions, may be angry with us, and I should not care a straw for it."<sup>81</sup> As the need for support grew, women began to actively prioritize their families over the war effort in a move contrary to the cause's initial expectations of women. However, the sentiment fit within the female sphere that the cause itself sought to protect. By March 1865, Sallie announced that, "I cannot give up the idea of having you at home this year without anguish of hearts." She continued, "Your view of the state of our country echoes my sentiments. I do not deem our government worthy of the sacrifices which are being made to sustain it."<sup>82</sup> If they could not trust

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<sup>78</sup> Araminta to William Tripp, September 4, 1864, folder 7, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>79</sup> Sallie to John Thurman, October 23, 1864, folder 15, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

<sup>80</sup> Harriet to Theophilus Perry, March 27, 1864, *Widows by the Thousand*, 236.

<sup>81</sup> Araminta to William Tripp, Undated letter January-March 1865, folder 8, William Henry Tripp and Araminta Guilford Tripp papers.

<sup>82</sup> Sallie to John Thurman, March 10, 1865, folder 17, John P. Thurman and Sallie Ecklin Thurman papers.

the Confederate government to fulfill its promise to protect their families and livelihood, they would have to do it themselves.

### *Conclusion*

In spite of the issues they had with the war itself, women and men continued to support the Confederate cause. To them, Yankees remained invaders bent on destroying the Southern way of life. Men and women continued to identify themselves as Confederates and hope for victory, even when victory seemed futile. These couples' continued identification with the cause and therefore the goals of the war reveals that their ideologies had not changed significantly since 1861. Instead, they had become disillusioned with the war itself and the sacrifices they were required to make for it. The war had required men and women to make distinct and gendered sacrifices. Men gave their time and sometimes their lives. Women gave up their husbands and their husbands' support, which felt especially necessary as they took on new and terrifying responsibilities outside of their traditional female sphere. These sacrifices were originally considered necessary in order to protect their families and southern lifestyle, including antebellum gender roles. However, men became frustrated with the way government leaders and generals had handled the war and they came to believe that the government had failed to keep its promises. Women became frustrated with problems at home. They attributed these problems to separation from their husbands, and believed the solution was for men to return home and for gender relations to return to how they had been before the war. The very reason many decided to join the war effort became the reason they lost support for the war itself.

As southerners began to see the war as a failure, they began to search for another way to achieve the war's purpose. Women asked their husbands to return home quickly and safely. Men

either prioritized their wives and children over their military duty, or decided to fight solely in protection of their families if they could not avoid service. Rather than support a losing war, they chose to prioritize their individual families and attempt to maintain the gender relations within their marriages that had existed before the war. Even though the war had been fought to preserve their southern lifestyle, the sacrifices it asked these men and women to make became too great. Instead, they abandoned their support of the war and attempted to return to the traditional family structure that the war intended, and failed, to protect.

## Conclusion

Paternalism pervaded antebellum southern social structure, exacerbating existing problems and creating new ones for women during the Civil War. Men's physical absence while fighting in the war necessitated a female entrance into the masculine roles they left behind. Women tentatively stepped into the roles of master, plantation manager, and single parent. Not convinced they belonged in the masculine sphere (or that they even wanted to occupy it), many women faced unprecedented problems. They missed their husbands, became frustrated by their inability to make decisions, felt overwhelmed by childcare, and faced recalcitrant slaves. Over the course of the war, women began to question if all of their difficult sacrifices had been worthwhile. In the absence of the support they had been accustomed to and had even taken for granted before the war, women began to consider their relationship to men in unprecedented ways.

Despite the fact that extensive paternalistic norms had been the underlying source of their wartime problems, women looked for solutions that would conform to the gender relations they were accustomed to before the war. The war's outcome appeared increasingly gloomy while situations at home continued to worsen. Women reminisced about the past and yearned for a future that even somewhat resembled it. A united family would restore order, provide emotional as well as practical support, and would put end to the constant fears of battle and death. Women refused to acknowledge either to themselves or their husbands that they could succeed in a man's role. They looked for patriarchal replacements to solve their problems with childrearing and slave management. While some sought another man or the return of their own husband as a solution, others relied on constant streams of advice in letters that at least mimicked the support they might have received if their husband were home.

By the end of the war, women were disillusioned with the war itself. They continued to support what the war stood for: a defense of southern culture, which embraced paternalism at its core. However, they came to prioritize their marriages, which served as microcosms of antebellum gender relations. The war had removed the support of their husbands and would threaten to do so permanently as long as it lasted. Women's problems, created by the physical absence of their husbands, could best be solved by the man's return. Women sought an overall solution to their wartime problems by attempting to return to the comfortable and familiar gender dynamics of the antebellum South.

Historians have shown that women tended to hold onto paternalistic ideals in the postbellum South. When considering this trend, most historians have chosen to focus on the implications of emancipation for class relations. Even the wealthiest planters found themselves in precarious economic situations. Property had been destroyed by battle, looters, and neglect. War widows faced the prospect of supporting children and earning money entirely alone. After the war, the South industrialized slowly, and most jobs went to lower-class women who were more accustomed or prepared to step entirely out of the domestic sphere out of necessity.<sup>1</sup> Rather than embracing the growing feminist movements in the North demanding female suffrage, southern women tended to remain politically isolated and rarely organized.<sup>2</sup>

In the face of widespread poverty and emancipation, the adherence to antebellum gender expectations served as a reassertion of hierarchical dominance for upper class women.<sup>3</sup> Former

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<sup>1</sup> George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Champaign: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 285.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 286. As Rable points out, this remains true until the establishment of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in the 1880s.

<sup>3</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, George C. Rable, and Anne Firor Scott are among the historians who have expounded on this topic. Faust and Rable, in particular, make the argument for the importance of economic class in the return to paternalistic gender relations in the postbellum South, especially among the former slaveholding class.

slaveholders threw parties and balls that attempted to demonstrate their antebellum wealth. In 1894, women founded the United Daughters of the Confederacy in an effort, according to historians like Karen L. Cox, to vindicate the Confederate generation. In memorializing the Old South, the organization “sought to instill in white children a reverence for the political, social, and cultural traditions of the former Confederacy.”<sup>4</sup> By clinging to the past, former slaveholders attempted to create distinctions between themselves and lower class whites when slave ownership could not longer serve that purpose.

This class-based interpretation of postbellum gender relations has merit. However, I argue that anxieties over class are not the only explanation for this trend. While such aspects surely had an effect, the exceptional hardships women faced during the war and the causes women attributed to them also played an important role. Women made direct links between the absence of their husbands and the problems they faced at home. In seeking paternalistic solutions, women expressed their frustrations with the upheaval of gender relations and their desire, above all, for normalcy. In the chaotic economic and racial atmosphere of the late nineteenth-century South, it follows that women would yearn for the comfort of their former paternal protection. For women, paternalism was deeply personal. Rather than an overarching social structure as we see it today, it was seen primarily as a relationship between individuals. Women’s devotion to paternalism reflects the uncertainty they felt about the New South they were entering as much as it reveals the emergent tensions within class and race.

The topic of marriage and gender relations in the Civil War deserves more research. The war tested prevailing norms and revealed aspects of expansive social structures that continue to exist today. This thesis deals only with four couples that were extraordinary in that they left

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<sup>4</sup> Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 2.

extensive records of their wartime experiences. Class and race must be considered for a better picture of the paternalistic structures that touched the lives of all members of societies. A larger sample of women could cement patterns that have already been observed or bring new ones to light. Women's wartime experiences varied based on innumerable factors. Age, number of children, location within the Confederacy, relationship to slaves, relationship to husband, proximity of relatives, political atmosphere of the home front, and husband's proximity to danger in battle all contributed to how women interpreted their experiences and thought about their role in society as a whole. The removal of the patriarch provides a unique and productive location on which to center a study on gender relations. The Civil War did just that, and in doing so forced women to reckon with the paternalism that had pervaded their antebellum lives.



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