country? In fact, as Mr. Harries-Jenkins shows, correctly if at excessive length in Chapter 2, most British officers came from "the landed interest"; but this section of the population was certainly not "the English ruling class" during a reign at whose start every "£ 10 house-holder" had the vote in urban constituencies and which saw manhood suffrage achieved long before its end — a fact so unmistakably demonstrated both by the crushing defeat of the landed interest in the Corn Law controversy of 1846 and thereafter by the failure of the Tory party to win a majority in Parliament until Disraeli gained much working-class support in 1874.

After postulating his stereotype of the British officer as coming from the huntin', shootin' and fishin', not the reading, writing and thinking, classes, Mr. Harries-Jenkins alleges that except for the works of Pasley and three authors admirably discussed in Luvaas' *Education of an Army*, Burgoyne, Napier and Mitchell, little was "published during the early years of the Victorian army which contributed to the development of an underlying body of theory" (p. 109). A glance at any competent military bibliography should refute that statement. This was the period when innumerable memoirs were published by Peninsular veterans; such memoirs had the inestimable value of being books on war by men who had experienced war; between them they had seen all phases of it. They included excommissaries like Henegan and George Head, medical men like Guthrie and McGrigor, the Judge Advocate, Francis Larpent, J.T. Jones, the author of a first-rate three volume work on siege warfare, and most instructive of all, Col. Gurwood's frequently reprinted volumes of Wellington's despatches. Besides these books by veterans there were the important works on Cavalry by Beamish and Nolan. One cannot suppose that soldiers did not buy and read, as well as write, these books, and certainly the *United Services Magazine* was not kept going, under various names, from 1829 to the present day by civilian contributors. So there is a sad neglect of evidence here, but it pales beside Mr. Harries-Jenkins' astonishing reference to "Prussia's expansion in Denmark and Italy" [*sic*] (p. 131)!

If space permitted, one might go on and on and on, but to what purpose? Indeed, this seems an occasion on which a reviewer's criticism should extend to the publisher as well as the author.

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MARTHA VICINUS, ed. — *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1977, Pp. xix, 326.

This new volume of articles on women in the Victorian period is a worthy successor to *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (1972), which was also edited by Martha Vicinus. Taken individually, all of the articles in this new collection are good, and some of them are of major importance. Taken together, especially when considered in conjunction with the articles of the first volume, they offer a framework for the history of middle-class women in Victorian England.

The titles of the two collections suggest the framework which is enunciated in the introduction that Vicinus wrote for *Suffer and Be Still*, and is more fully developed in her introduction to *A Widening Sphere*. The unifying theme of *Suffer and Be Still* is an analysis of the constraints that surrounded Victorian

women. These constraints, it is believed, were imposed by an ideology of domesticity that limited women's activities in all spheres, from the narrowly political to the sexual. In contrast, the unifying theme of *A Widening Sphere* is an analysis of the way in which the narrow role prescribed for women by Victorian ideology was, in reality, widened, especially in the later part of the period.

The difference in theme between the two volumes lies not solely in the fact that they emphasise different aspects of Victorian women's history; it also represents an historiographical development. Whereas most of the authors who contributed essays to *Suffer and Be Still* were convinced that the ideology of domesticity had a pervasive effect on the lives of Victorian women, a major contribution of this new volume is to demonstrate that historians are now questioning the reality of the pervasiveness of that ideology. As Vicinus says:

> The passivity, frigidity, and uselessness of the female model idealized during the Victorian era ... has come under attack for its extreme simplicity. Indeed, research is now frequently concerned with the relationship ... between the prescribed ideal of womanhood and the actual reality. We no longer generalize so readily about the Victorian woman. (p. xi)

Vicinus suggests, then, that the essays in *A Widening Sphere* reflect an awareness first, that interpreting the life of the Victorian woman is a more complex problem than historians used to suppose, and second, that in the late-Victorian period opportunities for women were expanding. While the first point is fully substantiated in these essays, many of the essays themselves reveal conceptual problems related to the concept of widening spheres. While it can be demonstrated that women's social, economic and political position improved in the Victorian period, did this improvement represent a genuine change in the dominant conception of women, or did it represent a limited expansion within still narrow confines?

The optimism suggested by the theme of widening spheres is contradicted in different ways by Rita McWilliams-Tullberg's article on women at Cambridge, and by Judith Walkowitz's article on prostitutes. McWilliams-Tullberg clearly demonstrates that the Cambridge establishment's resistance to granting degrees to women did not spring primarily from an objection to educated women, but was, rather, based on fears of the power that women would obtain as full members of the university. McWilliams-Tullberg concludes her essay by pointing out that higher education for women did not achieve the goals of its advocates, because it did not challenge women's traditional role, but merely "modernized" it:

> Better education for middle-class girls followed by a 'nice' career in teaching ... has become the kind of accepted pastime that *petit point* was previously. It is an extension of women's traditional role and requires no sacrifices on the part of men. (p. 145)

Walkowitz's article is one of the few in the book that deals with working-class women. This study of attitudes towards prostitutes in two Contagious Diseases Acts towns demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between social class and gender in the Victorian period, and illustrates the contradictory effects of some of the improvements in women's position. Walkowitz convincingly argues that in the late 1860s prostitutes were generally accepted by their communities, and were surrounded by a supportive women's network. However, by the 1880s, prostitutes had become isolated from the community. Two main forces brought about this transformation: first, middle-class sexual mores penetrated the working-class community. Paradoxically, this penetration was partly the result of the activities of social purity advocates, many of whom were middle-class women, participating in the wider sphere of social service work. Second,

the economic situation of the casual labouring poor improved, making prostitution a less common option. While this economic improvement may have benefited women in some ways, Walkowitz maintains that female autonomy and female supportiveness decreased as higher wages "made men more viable as supporters of the family" (p. 92), thus isolating women in the home, and as the new values of respectability had a divisive effect on women's sense of community.

A Widening Sphere will certainly have a major influence on the study of Victorian women. The questions that can be raised about the editor's framework could be said to enhance, rather than limit, the value of the book. Like its predecessor, *Suffer and Be Still,* the questions that this volume raises will stimulate historians to investigate more fully many of the still unexplored aspects of Victorian women's history.

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Nancy F. COTT. — *The Bonds of Womanhood. "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977. Pp. 225.

In *The Bonds of Womanhood* Nancy F. Cott has set herself several purposes: to explain why a feminist of the 1830s would see womanhood as both constraint and opportunity, both bondage and bonding; to relate the cult of true womanhood to women's actual experience and consciousness; to evolve an interpretive framework for a future social history; and to examine "the social derivation of a concept of womanhood rooted in the experience of Yankee middle class mothers but applied to the female sex as a whole" (p. 17). In pursuit of these purposes Cott is consistently sensitive to the dual aspects of woman's role, as prescribed and as played, concluding that in the United States the cult of domesticity produced both the supportive doctrine of a separate "woman's sphere" and the equalitarian ideology of feminism. Her argument is impressive for its frequent and highly interesting suggestions about the historical experience of New England woman; but the generalizations often outrun the evidence presented, and are in part derived from a much simplified view of American society as a whole.

The diaries and correspondence of one hundred New England women, together with contemporary writings for or about women by ministers of religion, form the basis for Cott's argument. The diarists, white, middle-class, Protestant, of English descent but American birth, from both rural and urban backgrounds, and notably active rather than leisured, reveal an experience importantly conditioned by the rapid economic change of the years 1780-1835. That change broke down the earlier deferential social order with its varied ranges of superordination and subordination, replacing it by a society in which the only acceptable class definitions were the primary ones of sex, race, and acquired wealth. To the subordinate sex as its appropriate preserve was assigned the sphere of domestic activities, with their pre-industrial work patterns; and as men were drawn away into the new industrial marketplace, women became for the first time dominant within their own sphere. Their new responsibility, especially in the social training of children, elevated their role and justified a new education to prepare them for it; their concern for republican virtue in a changing world